

The Practice of Dream Healing



*Bringing Ancient Greek Mysteries
Into Modern Medicine*

George Frederic Watts - *Hope*, 1886

Edward Tick, Ph. D. (2001).

The Practice of Dream Healing: Bringing Ancient Greek Mysteries Into Modern Medicine.

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As I began my second reading of Dr. Edward Tick's *The Practice of Dream Healing: Bringing Ancient Greek Mysteries into Modern Medicine*, I could tell by the copious margin notes and underlinings I had made how helpful and enjoyable this book was. I am excited that millennia of Asklepiian healing insights are placed in a fresh new package for the modern clinician.

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Since my student days at the Jung Institute in Zurich in the late 1960s, I have been fascinated by the mystery cult of Asklepios and its relevance to the practice of psychotherapy. I was first introduced to Asklepiian healing by my husband's analyst, C. A. Meier. Meier had been a close associate of C. G. Jung and was the founder of the Jung Institute of Zurich. Naturally, both Meier and Jung were deeply interested in dream interpretation and incubation rituals. C.A. Meier's masterpiece, *Ancient Incubation and Modern Psychotherapy* was first published in English in 1967. However, it had been out of print and inaccessible to those in the healing profession until recently when it was republished in 1989 by Daimon Publishers in Switzerland as *Healing Dream and Ritual: Ancient Incubation and Modern Psychotherapy*. Consequently, when I saw the new book about Asklepiian healing by an American clinician with fresh therapeutical stories I was both thrilled and intrigued. I enthusiastically read it all in one sitting and then reread it later. In a way there are two captivating intertwining approaches in *The Practice of Dream Healing* and I needed to sort the two out. These two motifs intertwine like the modern day caduceus which symbolizes the healing profession, and the medical image of the double helix of the DNA discovered by James Watson and Francis Crick in 1953. In his first motif, Dr. Tick takes us on a modern day journey through the hills and vales of ancient Greece and Turkey to visit the once numinous sites where dream healing was practiced, and in his second motif, he enriches us with the history of the ancient Asklepiian cult practices of dream incubation and interpretation. He breathes life into ancient stories of Asklepiian ritual by sharing modern day case stories of healing.

The Practice of Dream Healing can be read, enjoyed and learned from as a clinical text, but it can also be viewed from the perspective of Ed Tick's personal journey toward wholeness. Dr. Tick has been researching Asklepiian dream healing for well over twenty years and he incarnates the archetype of the wounded healer by making his healing experiences available. He teaches us by sharing experiences rather than proposing esoteric dogmas. Dr. Tick has visited the Asklepiian healing sites several times, leading healing tours, and has been healed himself through dream incubation. Furthermore, he has taken the time to learn the difficult Greek language allowing the cloth woven from the loom of the language to help him warm and wrap himself in the mysteries of his journey.

In *The Practice of Dream Healing*, I had the feeling I was accompanying Dr. Tick through the beautiful terrain and interacting with the people of modern day Greece and Turkey. My imagination and longing was whetted for the adventure; but it is here that I had difficulty following the author on the journey, and I don't think this was Dr. Tick's omission. It was probably the publisher's. The book needs a map! When you read *The Practice of Dream Healing* try to have a map of Greece and Turkey nearby so that you can find Kos, and Epidauros and Pergamum and all the wonderful sites that the author describes.

Who was this human/god healer Asklepios that Dr. Tick writes so beautifully about? Myth has it that Asklepios was born about 600 BCE. He is said to have been the son of the god Apollo and the human Koronis. In one version, Koronis is reported to have



Mask of Asklepios, Greek

been unfaithful to Apollo's love, so Apollo took the child Asklepios from her and handed him over to the centaur/wounded healer Chiron to be reared and educated in the mysteries of healing. Asklepios grew in knowledge and appreciation for the healing practices of the day and went about the countryside healing. A cult following grew out of his practice of dream incubation and interpretation and later he was venerated and elevated to the status of a god.

If you find the concept of being healed through messages in your dreams difficult to comprehend, it might be helpful to understand the linguistic underpinning of the word clinician, and thereby get closer to the original meaning of clinical psychology. The etymology of the word "clinic" comes from the Greek word *kline* (pronounced *cli nay*) which means couch or bed, the place where dreams take place. We hear it in the words: incline, decline, recline. The Asklepiian healers relied on beds and couches for dreams in the healing process. Freud's genius in his use of a couch to explore the patient's dream material in psychotherapy is a well known part of contemporary Asklepiian history.

In addition to the couch, another symbol of Asklepiian healing is something we are all familiar with even though we may not always be conscious of its meaning. It is the image of a snake wound around a staff. We see it wherever medicine is practiced. However, our modern insignia is incorrect, as Tick points out. The original tall Asklepiian staff had one snake, while modern medicine images the staff as short and intertwined with two snakes. Some say this was an error on the part of an artist in the middle ages who confused the caduceus of the god Hermes with the single snaked staff of Asklepios. Over the years a short staff with two overlapping snakes became the erroneous insignia of the healing profession. Tick expresses sadness at this unfortunate misrepresentation, but I see it as a metaphor and a developmental/transformational image of the intermingling of modern scientific medicine

with ancient traditional spiritual healing, almost like the image of the DNA double helix. Felix Culpa (Oh happy fault!). The Practice of Dream Healing is also like the intertwining image of the DNA double helix for it is both Dr. Tick's personal journey and at the same time, it is a thorough explanation of the history of healing traditions. For further amplification of this image of the DNA and healing, I recommend your reading *The Cosmic Serpent: DNA and the Origins of Knowledge* by Jeremy Narby. Tick's work and Narby's work overlap and compliment one another in the field of healing imagery.

The chthonic serpent image is an ancient one, utilized even earlier than Asklepios. Our healing ancestors were less interested in a "Higher Power." The serpent image was used to represent a connection with both the upper world and the underworld. The serpent is a shape shifter and it journeys below the earth's surface (a.k.a. underworld) as well as bathes in the sunlight of the upper world. In feminine goddess spirituality, it also represented the shedding of the uterus during menses. In the Asklepiian tradition it represented the healing and shedding of old skins for new ones. Over the centuries the serpent image got a bad rap being misinterpreted as the "evil one" who tempted Eve and consequently brought humanity out of paradise. It was all the serpent's fault! The relationship of evil with the serpent is a whole other religious and philosophical topic and we cannot spend the time debating that here, but Tick has done a good and important work of explaining the unfortunate misrepresentation of the benevolent serpent. It is always important in dream interpretation to realize that all symbols have both a light and a dark side

I did find Tick's strong statement (p. 143) "The [Christian] church's war against Asklepios took centuries to complete" a bit exaggerated. War? In my reading of religious history I have never seen documentation indicating that the Christian church declared war on the Asklepiian cult. Rather than making war, like the Taoist's assimilative practices in China, the Church assimilated and integrated the cults of Asklepiian healing into its own ritual practices. Tick even mentioned in his book that Asklepiian rituals are often continued and carried out by Greek Orthodox priests and laypersons today. In the Roman Catholic tradition, one of the Seven Sacraments is called Extreme Unction or Healing of the Sick.

Dr. Tick frequently uses Jung and Joseph Campbell as references. There were times when I read references to Jung's theories in Dr. Tick's writing and found that he had made some errors in his interpretation of Jung's concepts. For instance: "Applied in the psychotherapy setting, Carl Jung called the practice of working with myth 'active imagination'" (p. 43). Working with myth is not what Jung meant by active imagination. Active imagination is dialoguing with the Self through writing, drawing, dancing, sandplay, etc. Active Imagination is an activity of the body to connect with the Spirit. Though Jung is not the inventor of the concept and experience of the archetype, he is responsible for integrating a consciousness of archetypal reality into contemporary psychology. The reference to archetypes is very prevalent in modern psychological writing. On page 44 Dr. Tick says, "When we drench ourselves in the archetypal world, the archetypes are invited to awaken in, return to, and answer us in ways that are neither ancient nor modern, but rather eternal." The reality of drenching oneself in the

archetypes is a dangerous act. The archetypes are powerful and, if overwhelmed by them, which one could be if one drenches oneself in them, one could go psychotic! Drenching one's ego in the archetypal world would be like plugging a 110 volt hair-dryer into a 220 socket. Who needs Asklepian or Jungian burn-out or burn up? Jung and his close followers were aware of the danger and dark sides of the unconscious, and I am sure that Dr. Tick is aware of the dark side of the unconscious through his work with Vietnam veterans.

It also seems important to me to say that I am not altogether in agreement with Dr. Tick's idea of "conscious myth-making" which he seems to have borrowed from his friend Steven Larson who was a student of Joseph Campbell. Perhaps I just don't understand how either of them came to the concept of "conscious mythmaking." My understanding of myth and what I have learned from two folklorist's work, that of William Baskim and Joseph Fontenrose, is that: A myth is a traditional story about the dealings of superhuman beings. That definition, though pithy, contains three important elements:

First, this says that something, in order to be a myth, has to be a story. This separates it from any other pieces of religious data. It has to have a beginning, a middle and an ending to be a narrative tale.

Secondly, myth has to be a traditional story. It has to be a production of a community's combined inventiveness. Something that has been transmitted orally over a great deal of time in some sort of traditional or other kind of society. You and I can-



Asklepios

not on this spot create a myth. We can write an interesting story, but as an individual, I cannot write or create my own myth. It has to go through the filtering, the additions and subtractions of a community's life projections on it over decades, sometimes centuries.

Lastly, myth has not only to be a story and not only traditional, but it must contain an account of at least one person who does something supernatural. If you've got a traditional story and someone turns water into wine; or if you've got a traditional story and someone turns into an animal and then the animal turns back into a human; if you've got a traditional story like the story of the Buddha and someone shoots fire and water out of his hands and feet; if you've got a traditional story and someone walks on water, somebody in that story is doing something superhuman and we are going to call it a myth. But we cannot, in the strict sense of the word, create our own myth consciously or unconsciously. That has to be done by the culture over decades or even centuries. My understanding is that mythmaking is the task of a people-in-process not the task of a solitary grandiose ego.

Read *The Practice of Dream Healing* for its insights and history, but read it also to understand that psychotherapy is not a modern day invention. We therapists, we wounded healers, stand on the shoulders of the ancients, and what we do daily in our consultation rooms has an ancient precedent. It is important to know the origins of our work. Dr. Edward Tick does a masterful job of explaining the history and concept of dream healing and he has done us a great favor in spending these many years researching and now sharing his experience in print. We owe him our gratitude.

I have recommended, and will continue to recommend, this book to all of my students and my friends in the medical and psychotherapy professions. It is a necessary read for students who are assiduously studying their codified DSM IV categories but who may, in the process, be missing out on the stories about the ancient origins of spiritual healing. This book can serve as a corpus collosum to unite the right and left brain approaches to the art and science of psychotherapy. As Jung never tired of repeating: "Ars requirit totem hominem!" (Our art demands the whole person!) ■