



Interview with Jerry Ruhl

by Van Waddy

Jerry Ruhl will be with us for our Jung meeting in May and for our Saturday workshop. Jerry was very well received at his last visit with us and this time should prove even more rewarding. He will explore in depth the meaning of individuation, using a three-thousand-year-old story from India called *The Ramayana* and how this age old story can guide us through the difficult passages of modern life. Then, on Saturday, Jerry will explore active imagination and how this tool, this process, can enrich, guide and energize our attempts to individuate into the full human being we are each called to become. The following is a dialogue with Jerry concerning his upcoming program.

VAN WADDY: Tell me, Jerry, about this three-thousand-year old Indian story, *The Ramayana*, you intend to use at our next meeting to explore the many facets of individuation. What relevance could this have for us today and the complex world in which we live?

JERRY RUHL: One of the great beauties of the East is the manner in which people still respect and enjoy their traditional stories. Myths carry timeless and essential guidance over the centuries, and when such a story is well told, it speaks to our souls as well as our mind. While societies and their particular demands change, what it means to be human does not. *The Ramayana* is an individuation story, no matter what century or society is looking at it. Each of the characters in the story represents a part of the human psyche – all of which must be dealt with in the journey of life. Originally written down in Sanskrit, this story has been translated into dozens of languages. Children throughout much of Asia grow up laughing at the exploits of the monkey god Hanuman or thrilling to the battle scenes in which Rama performs superhuman feats. But one does not have to be Hindu to find parallel situations and precedents to help guide us through life's difficult passages. This story explores what it means to be fully human. It gives instruction for us on how to balance the inner

and outer, the masculine and feminine, the ego and the shadow or unconscious, the eternal and the everyday. In struggling with goals and duties of social life, in any age, how do we also attend to the workings of destiny and the cosmos? Human nature is human nature; whether nurtured here or in another land, it is just the same.

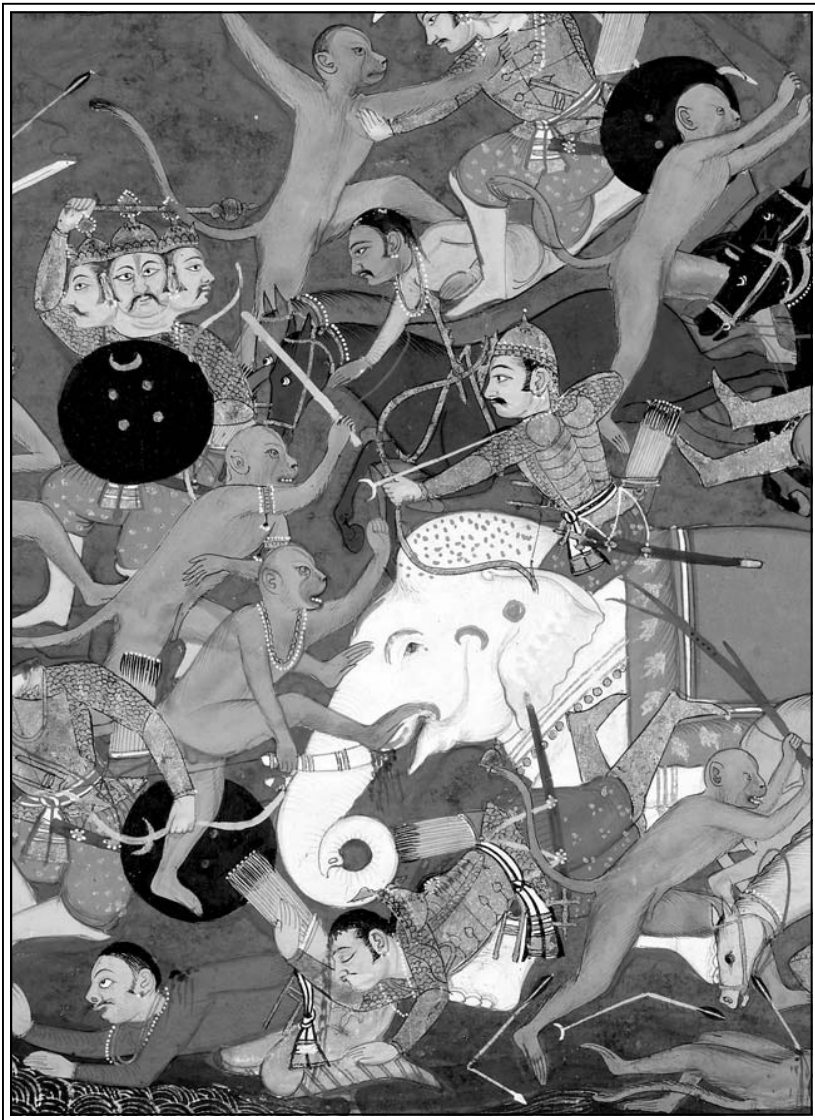
VW: What will you try to teach us about the individuation process?

JR: Individuation is Jung's term for becoming the person you were put on this earth to become. It is about wholeness, not some indiscriminate wholeness, but *your* individual relationship to the greater whole of life. It's about learning to accept life **WHOLE**. Individuation is the culmination and the meaning of life for all human beings. It is the purpose and goal of every individual existence. It lacks poetry, but if you are searching for meaning in your life, that is individuation. It was Jung's genius to realize that every person is born as unique in his or her personality as in physical structure. The shape and color of your eyes, your thumb print, is unique to you. It should not be a big surprise to find out that every aspect of your psychology, your personality, is equally unique. To discover this, in a personal and experiential way, is the individuation process.

We have many individuation myths in our own culture. It is very interesting to take a tale from far away, from a different culture and a different set of attitudes. First we see similarities, how much it resembles our own path. But we also find out how different it is, which is also instructive.

VW: Give us some cultural background about this mythic story.

JR: Rama, the hero of *The Ramayana*, is a popular deity worshiped to this day by many Hindus. Each year, devout pilgrims trace his journey through India, halting at each of the holy sites along the way. According to Hindu tradition, Rama is an incarnation of the god Vishnu. The main purpose of this incarnation is to demonstrate the righteous path (dharma) for all living creatures on earth. In January of 1987, viewers in India began



tuning in each Sunday morning for a Hindi television serial program based on *The Ramayana*. More than 80 million viewers watched the weekly broadcasts – in a land where most do not own televisions and electricity remains in short supply. They gathered at tea shops and homes of relatives. Villages joined together to rent a television set. The producers created a year's worth of programs and the public demanded more. Sanitation workers went on strike in North India, compelling the government to sponsor more episodes to prevent a major health hazard (This population segment is believed descended from one of the heroes of the epic). People responded to the image of Rama on the screen as an icon in a temple. They bathed before watching and garlanded the TV sets with flowers like a shrine. While many Hindus regard Rama as God come down to earth, the ideal man, the image of Rama

can also be viewed as a symbol. He is a symbol of the search for the highest that humans can strive for through life. Even while in the darkness of the womb, we sense this divinity in us. Images embedded deep within our unconscious guide and direct our lives.

VW: Are you talking about what Jung called the collective unconscious when you speak of these images that are present in us even in the womb?

JR: Yes. Jung believed they are part of the collective unconscious. Hindu thought looks on them as memories which follow us from birth to birth. What is common in the recognition that certain deeply formed patterns come to us in dreams and myths. Whether a god or demon, these characters mirror our conflicting urges. They depict the inner need to heal the splits within us, to attain the excellence which could be at the same time both this and that – the two split forms. We experience with Rama his conflicts, his struggles and his disappointments. On the surface, *The Ramayana* is a tale of a prince struggling to maintain the high standards he has set for himself patterned on the mores of his age. Below the surface, the spirit of Rama can be discerned as man's true inner development. Facets of the human personality are personified as characters of the story.

VW: You mentioned earlier that balancing our masculine and feminine energies is part of the individuation process. Is this also worked out in this myth of Rama?

JR: Yes. Jung believed each person, regardless of gender, had to balance the masculine and feminine energies in their personal psyches. These need to be balanced. For example, when a man is on bad terms with his inner feminine, he falls into a mood, gets discouraged, loses interest in life. Rama's wife in the story, Sita, can be understood as the female counterpart of the Supreme Being, and she certainly is the embodiment of compassion, loyalty, patience and grace. She gets kidnapped in the story, and our hero Rama wakes up one day and finds that the thing he values most is gone. He is alienated and alone, and all his heroic striving can't bring her back. In the West, we call that a midlife crisis.