



Appointment With the Wise Old Dog

review by Jutta von Buchholtz

Often, when I am troubled because I have lost my inner thread, I take this DVD from the shelf and play it. I can always count on it to reconnect me to my deeper inner resources and I feel better again.

“Appointment with the Wise Old Dog” is a documentary about the inner world of David Blum, author and internationally renowned composer/conductor of classical music. Diagnosed with cancer at the age of 52, he discovered that drawing images from his dreams helped him cope with his illness in a profoundly unexpected way. The movie opens with an introduction by world famous cellist Yo Yo Ma, who is moved by his friend’s reliance on his dreams. Although David Blum had never had a painting lesson, painting his dreams helped him cope with cancer. This film documents the miraculous power of the human spirit and demonstrates movingly how in times of serious crisis, when we question our mortality, we can depend on deep inner resources we all have—to listen to and trust them can bring us comfort and even transcendence. Shortly before his death, David decided to share his experience in the hope that others would also be able to connect to their inner gifts.

David Blum, who thought of himself as a pragmatic skeptic, not a mystic, had been attending to his dreams for years. He found that when he made a picture of a dream, he was being led further into the dream, as if the dream had a life of its own and wanted to be continued. “Dreams,” he recalled, “explain me more than I can explain them—they are larger than life. They present images that arise from deep within.” He found that at times of dire crisis, like the recurrence of his cancer, his dreams

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could point to a supportive power far beyond ordinary experience, which helped make it possible for him to cope.

In the course of his inner journey and while he underwent numerous medical procedures, two figures became deeply important in his dreams: Mairi his anima and soul guide and Alfonto, a toy dachshund. Alfonto, a childhood animal, descended from the shelf where he had spent many years and started to make appearances in his dreams. As in fairy tales, animals appear in dreams in order to help the protagonist out of a dangerous moment. David felt similarly guided by Alfonto who embodied for him the deeper wisdom and assurance of a wise old man. David understood, for example, that entering the MRI machine, he did this less so as a medical patient but more as a friend of the wise old dog.

David had started to journal his dreams as a young adult. Early on a soulful woman, Mairi, started to appear in his dreams. She was to accompany him throughout his life and his final illness. After the recurrence of cancer, David’s relationship to this inner figure changed. Eventually he understood that it was his fate to be guided by her and by the power of consolation she could bring him. She was to him the embodiment of the power of the feminine presence, what Johann Wolfgang von Goethe referred to as “the eternal feminine,” what Carl Jung called the anima, what Dante experienced with Beatrice. As medical radiation would infiltrate his body, Mairi’s radiation would infiltrate his mind, which, unlike the former, would remain.

In the course of his illness, the dreams seemed to be ignoring the outer situation and were setting their own agenda. David was simultaneously undertaking two journeys: one medical and the other spiritual. He learned to trust that whether called or not, God would be present and that his dreams were bringing him his own myth with its peculiar cast of characters. His dream figures were not abstract ideas but talked to him, setting him tasks, holding the forces of dark and light in balance, complementing the outer action with an inner one.

While the medical picture became ever more grim, there were many dreams of mother and child that seemed to point to rebirth. In the week of his and his wife Sarah’s tearful and frank acceptance of death, David had three dreams about birth and then a series of dreams about the renewal of life. He understood that he and Sarah had to accept the cycle of nature’s renewal in the larger context of life and death: he had to let go of life while she had to hold on to it.

The most painful realization for David during the last phase of his illness was that he would have to leave his wife Sarah and enter into a marriage with his anima, Mairi. He wondered how his love for Mairi who would soon take him into her arms, could also be his love for Sarah. Alfonto helped with the answer: “Mairi is greater than David. Her love penetrates him and becomes his love for Sarah—thus David and Sarah will always be together.” David grasped the meaning of the sacred marriage: as Mairi permeated him with her spirit, his presence allowed her to enter into the world.

There were also dark and frightening dreams of ominous descent—the terror of the vast autonomous power of death. Then Alfonto, the dachshund, a creature familiar with the world below ground, became once again his wise guide.

The music of Mozart and Beethoven, which he so loved, plays an integral part in David’s journey of self-exploration and transformation and threads like a Leitmotif through the entire film. To order the DVD, send a check for \$29.95 to:

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