

God is in the Egg

by Katie Givens Kime

Eggs were never a food I noticed much, until lately. Now, these little domes of Nature's perfect geometry fascinate me. "God is in the egg" is my new favorite quote from Carl Jung's *The Red Book (Liber Novus)*. Why? What meaning might we mine from the odd symbols that pop up in our dreams and our daily lives?

Like so many of us who pick up a Jungian lens through which to peer at ourselves and the world, lately I find surprising truth and healing in working a particular archetypal symbol: the egg. I would be more embarrassed about this oddity, if the experience were not so powerful!

I began this "egg journey" at the October Jung Society meeting when a theater troupe performed "Bluebeard," a powerfully gruesome fairy tale of the maiden-murderer/demon-lover variety. Soon after that, a fellow Jung Society member introduced another Bluebeard-esque tale, Grimm's "Fitcher's Bird." The story goes: a sorcerer named Fitcher enchants several sisters to marry him. Upon arrival at his vast castle, he assures the first woman that she will be happy living with him. Before he leaves on a trip, he forbids her to enter one particular room, and also entrusts her with a special egg, which she must carry everywhere and return to him unblemished. She enters the room, and discovers chopped body parts in a basin of blood, and drops the egg, staining it red. Fitcher returns, and upon seeing the stained egg, punishes the first sister by showing her the same fate as those bodies in the forbidden room. The same sequence of events happens with the second sister. The third sister makes a different choice. When handed the egg, she sets it safely aside, thus when she enters the forbidden room, the egg is not stained with blood. When the third sister returns the clean white egg to Fitcher, the power shifts, and the maiden now steers the story. Google "Fitcher's Bird" to learn how the tale ends!

The "Bluebeard" and "Fitcher's Bird" fairy tales were fascinating, but my egg obsession had yet to emerge. Much later, I considered the egg's role in the tale: what did it mean that Fitcher bothered to give his egg to each of his victims? "Since ancient times, the egg has been a universal symbol of the creation that grows out of it," writes Kathrin Asper about the tale. "In the



C.G. Jung - Red Book

context of individual psyche, the egg represents the self in the sense of one's true nature." So, the fragile yet whole egg could represent Fitcher's Self, or the Self of each of the women. To me, everyone in the story (including Fitcher) is trying to escape the awful trap they have built together, trying to save their Selves from falling into a basin of dismembered body parts, from some variety of self-destruction.

The egg plays a rich and recurring role in Jung's *Red Book*, and here is where I was hooked. At our December lecture, Pamela Cooper-White referred to the "egg sequence" of *The Red Book*. Jung mortally wounds God—here experienced in the form of paradoxically mortal Izdubar—with Science. In order to heal God again, Jung effortlessly squeezes God into an egg and pockets God! This is both miraculous and awful. Jung is elated that "I experienced the miracle of my body losing its heaviness when I burdened myself with the God" but he also despairs: "No one is greater than he...yet I lamed, carried and made him smaller with ease...I hated this pitifulness of the God." Who wants God to be a sorry, sloppy, uncooked egg? It all seems hopeless.

But then, ka-boom, God is born from the egg! Page 64 of *Liber Secundus* is Jung's painting of a gigantic plume of fiery power emerging from the tiny, fragile egg. God is reborn as "completely sun...Divine one!" Now Jung's agony shifts from the disappointment of finding God portable and powerless, to another disappointment, the classic misery of mortals: that our hunger for God is so much bigger than can ever be satisfied.

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Discovering God sends us to highest heights, but then “we are filled with an overwhelming desire to rise with the divine sun and to become a part of its magnificence,” and it hurts to realize, again and again, that we are not God. Indeed, we feel like Jung describes himself at that moment: “powerless and groaning.”

“Powerless and groaning” was my state of being as the holidays approached and encounters with my own primary wounds grew closer. Something about eggs tugged me. One odd and hurting morning in December, after reading the egg sequence of *The Red Book*, I found myself pulling plain eggs from the refrigerator, unearthing some paint markers, and painting eggs. I’m no great artist, the pens were dull, and I felt guilty “wasting” precious weekday morning hours, but no matter: something deeply satisfying was happening within me.

The unconscious never stops amazing me. Days passed before I realized what I had done. I had painted eggs red, gold, and left some plain white. I had made a little container to transport them to a meeting I had with a couple colleagues to study a few of *The Red Book* passages together. I was reenacting the fairy tale! How could I not have seen it? Carrying around red “bloody” eggs, golden eggs, whole white eggs. Trying to keep them safe. Trying to preserve my Self! Such is the truth and power of these archetypal patterns in our myths and fairy tales: whether we realize it or not, we live them out, again and again.

I laid one egg aside, nestling it safe in my jewelry box, just like the third sister in Fitcher’s Bird. In the hardest moments of these past holidays, I thought of my egg, and how it was mine, only and safely *mine*. Also, my egg seemed to emanate some sort of big power quite beyond me. It helped. Mostly, I refrained from giving away my own power, from letting myself be dismembered by other people’s pain.

God is in the egg!

When in the throes of crisis, or in the thrall of a God experience, or in the fragile cocoon of healing, it hardly matters that we sort out which archetypal symbol corresponds to which psyche component. In my fragile moments of agony or ecstasy, I just want to know, “Will I survive this? How can I always and finally feel better?”

But now, I find some bit of revelation in exploring the role the egg played for me. Was I like Fitcher and his wives, seeking to protect my Self? Did I catch a blink of that which is not my ego, but rather my center, my totality, the part of me that grasps at the Numinous, that “sense of I-ness that transcends mere ego functioning?” Or like the particular sequence in *The Red Book*, did I actually experience a bit of God appearing to me, embodied Emmanuel (God-with-us)? Did I breathe in a brief breeze of that Tremendous Love that is both universal and particular? Was that a God-image in my egg?

Here we come to a core of discontent between Christianity and depth psychology. Since the emergence of Jungian thought, Christian critics have fearfully cried “heresy!” especially when it comes to the Self archetype: “Jung is trying to say that the Self is God!” To which Jung replied: “I cannot even replace a button with my imagination, so how could I possibly replace God?”

But *imaginally*, apart from what he so fiercely defended as his empirical quest, Jung allowed for all numinous experience to be named, no matter how heretical. Perhaps the egg sequence is one of the fearful embarrassments that kept generations of Jung’s descendants from publishing *The Red Book* until 2009.

Here, Jung wonders if he is saving or slaughtering God by “declaring him a figment of the imagination.” But this is the crucial brilliance of Jung’s discoveries—we need not succumb to our literal-minded era, torturing ourselves with the question, “am I imagining God? Or does God exist?” Instead, Jung holds up a mirror to us all and says in essence, “How is it that you know anything? Only through that psyche of yours! How else do you expect God to reach you?”

Ann Belford Ulanov writes deftly of the Self archetype and our God experiences: “it is hard to tell if God is outside us or inside us or both...the Self, in Jung’s jargon, is not God, but is that within us that knows about God.”

So, did my egg symbolize my Self? Or God? Maybe both! Self-images and God-images are often indistinguishable. Remember, this is not the same as narcissistically seeing ourselves as God—that would be our Ego-images, not our Self-images. And in the end, the best we can ask from our images of God is that they point in God’s direction. Paradoxically, it is precisely when God draws near that our God-images are crushed, broken-through, transcended. No wonder Jung’s egg had to break!

Surely something holy happened to me. In instances like these, deep into the revelations of a single symbol, it is easy to see why Jungians have created entire libraries devoted to the research of individual symbols. The layers are deliciously endless. I daresay that symbols (and accompanying rituals) may be doorways to healing, or (in Christian lingo) to freedom from bondage, to the Good News itself.

One fellow and beloved Jung Society member pointed out recently that indeed, the egg, with all its potency for transformation and its circular containment, is...a mandala. As our Jungian community here in Atlanta enters a season of collectively considering mandalas, perhaps it will add dimension to think of them also as eggs. Truly, God is in the egg...and so are we!

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