

Meeting at the Edge

by Jacqueline Wright, Ed.D.

*To remember
The other world
In this world
Is to live in your
True inheritance.*
—David Whyte

Still feeling moved by what I had just written, I closed the dream journal slowly and thoughtfully and placed it back in its usual place on the table. An unexpected release of tension told me that something had shifted. For weeks, I'd been struggling to understand the confusing dreams, which always seemed to be filled with the number two, such as two choices, two people, or two events that often happened two times.

I knew the number two was symbolically related to polarity and that when it appeared in dreams it meant that the other side of a pair of opposites had arrived at the border between conscious and unconscious. Writing about the dream this morning had given me a clearer picture of the opposites that had arrived at the border in my own psyche.

Before this morning I'd been feeling somewhat like the older brothers in "The Water of Life" fairy tale. Searching for the water of life, they take the wrong path and end up getting caught between two mountains that grow closer and closer until they finally get stuck between them. It is the third and youngest brother, who knows the right path to take, who actually finds the water of life. Last night's dream had left me feeling hopeful that perhaps that third brother, the one with the right attitude and knowledge of the correct path might finally be making his arrival.

The dream, like many of the others that had come before, seemed divided into two parts. In the first part, events moved along smoothly and easily, producing a feeling of well-being. In contrast, the second part was like a woman's camp for overachievers, in which many difficulties and obstacles had to be confronted. Resolutions of the problematic situations never seemed to happen; instead there were only more and more barriers to be overcome.

The feelings generated by the second part of the dream immediately hit home. I knew all about that overachiever's camp, where everything took so much effort. It was that controlling ego that sometimes took over, applying pressure to do more, overseeing every detail and forcing outcomes or decisions that weren't ready to be made. It certainly did get the upper hand sometimes. And it resonated with the way I'd been feeling recently, as though I was swimming upstream against the current. The sensitivity to noise, the desire to withdraw, an indecisive-

ness and inability to focus had all been shouting at me, trying to tell me about this inflated ego that had overstepped its boundaries.

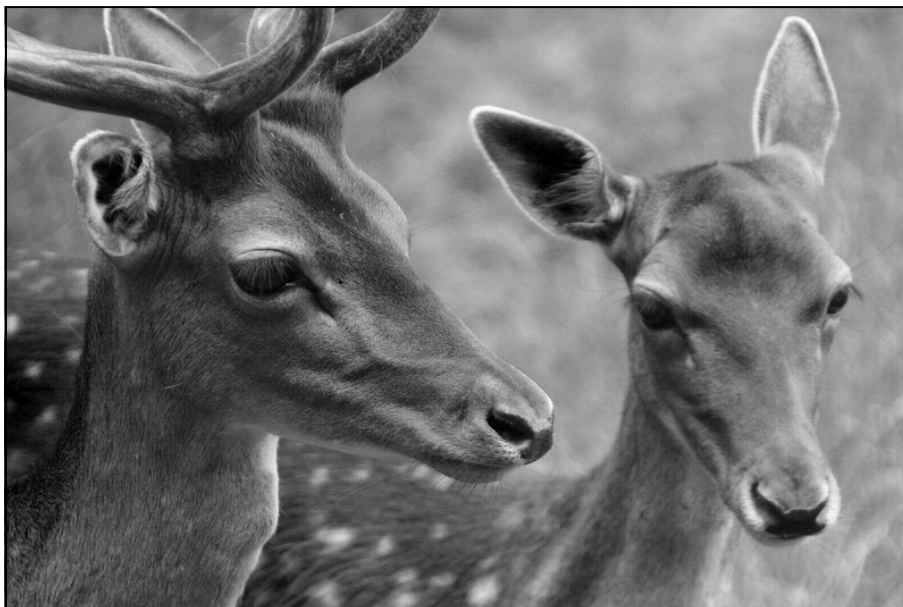
On the other hand, when I engaged with the feelings evoked by the first part of the dream, where everything flowed easily and effortlessly, a sense of calm enveloped me. Muscles relaxed and there was a lightness in my chest. Time, as well as everything around me, seemed to expand, bringing with it an attitude of optimism and a sense of anticipation.

The two attitudes or ways of being depicted in my dream brought to mind that often-repeated theme of many fairy tales in which the main characters (usually three) are confronted with a situation without a solution and immediately go their separate ways to solve it. The older brothers or sisters are usually driven by a certain compulsion to succeed and set out without much forethought to find the treasure. Unaware of their limitations, they often run into many obstacles before they realize they are on the wrong path. The younger brother or sister moves ahead in a more trusting and naïve way. They have a greater faculty for listening, asking and relating than their older siblings. For example, the younger brother in *The Water of Life* stops to consider a dwarf's question, while the older brothers dismiss him and continue in their haste to find their reward. The dwarf's information, which he gives to the younger brother, is actually needed for further advancement. So in the end, it is the younger brother's ability to listen, recognize and respond to what comes across his path that helps him obtain the water of life.

Holding all of these thoughts, associations and feelings about the dream, I began my morning walk with a much lighter step. It was really one of those mornings not to be missed, with glorious light, crisp air that reddened the cheeks and a sun that was warm on the back and shoulders. As I headed home at the end of my walk and rounded the curve to go down the hill toward the house, my tensed body registered the sight almost before my eyes did. Standing about half way down the hill and right in the middle of the road were two young deer. They were standing close together, but facing in opposite directions. Posing so perfectly, they just seemed to be waiting for me to turn that corner to see them. Could this be real? Or had I slipped into some fairytale consciousness where the deer had appeared to show me some unseen path? No, this was connected to my dreams, to the dualities I'd been struggling with. How amazing was this! The two deer standing before me were like a perfect manifestation of the message I'd felt my dreams were trying to convey to me.

As my mind raced to take in what was happening and to put the moment into context, a stillness and otherworld quality settled in around us. Meeting the gaze of the deer, which never wavered from me, I continued to walk toward them. As we continued to register each other's presence, their stillness, their alertness became mine as well. As I drew closer and closer I could almost count the white spots on their bellies. Were they were going to let me walk right up and touch them? Not quite, because when I was within a few feet of them, they bolted over

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Lovely Deers © Rainer Schmittchen, Dreamstime.com

to the side of the road in the grass. Their gaze was still on me, however, and with eyes locked, they accompanied me as I continued walking down the hill toward my house. What a thrill it was to feel the companionship of these two unexpected visitors, even for just a short distance. But they had to leave when they came to the edge of a house and could go no further and vanished into the trees.

Feeling giddy and a little disoriented, I tried to make sense of it all. This truly had felt like a visitation. In an area that was normally heavily populated with cars and people, I had met no one and the fact that no cars had passed to scare the deer away was pretty unbelievable. Time had seemed to stand still and there was only that moment, that enchanted moment, when everything looked and felt different and all of my senses had come alive. The expansiveness of the sky, the freshness of the air, the vitality and presence of the flowers and plants around me seemed to register in a more intense way. This, I knew, was that thin place between inner and outer experience.

Meeting two deer on a road is not in itself so unusual, but seeing two deer poised so confidently in the midst of such a congested, busy area was jolting. They were out of place and weren't supposed to be there! But yes, there they were, just as Richard Parker, Pi's ferocious Bengal tiger wasn't supposed to be on a boat in the middle of an ocean. But he was, and Pi was forced over and over again to meet Richard Parker's eyes and acknowledge his presence (*The Life of Pi*, the movie). Other images of surprising meetings jumped to mind. Who could forget that hair-raising moment described in *Moby Dick* when Captain Ahab looked into the eye of the whale? Or the moment in *The Queen* when the normally stoic and proud Queen Elizabeth met the black eyes of the dead buck with such tenderness? All were forced to look into the eyes of something "other", to take into account its presence and its otherness. All depictions pointed to something deep and unexplainable that was exchanged between the two subjects, supposedly changing them forever.

Meeting the soft yet penetrating gaze of the two deer on the road had actually felt more welcoming than challenging. It was such a contrast to those "deer in the headlights" experiences I'd had, which were marked by a paralyzing fear of facing something new. Those events came in many disguises, often in eve-

ryday challenges, such as staring at a blank piece of paper before a writing project or staring into the eyes of a waiting audience before making a presentation. But they always generated anxiety, excitement and an anticipation of something new.

It was the picture of the two deer standing together that had penetrated most deeply, because it resonated with earlier thoughts about how the contrasting energies of ego and Self complement and need each other. Ego helps set priorities, maintain focus and find direction. It works to balance and integrate all of the psychic functions and deal with the complexes and defenses. But its powers are limited without the Self, which contains a much larger pattern and purpose of wholeness and development. The Self's goal is to unify and hold the whole psychic system together. Both have an ordering, unifying function but they need each other, because the Self's influence on the psy-

che is mirrored by the influence of the ego upon consciousness. Like the deer, they are separate entities but together create the whole picture.

The other important gift the meeting brought was an anticipation of something new. The call toward some un-lived life came through loud and clear with the deer's message. Remember this other world and live into it, they said. Trust your instincts, believe in what you know to be true and act accordingly. Find the stillness within yourself and notice how the dualities you experience actually complement and support each other.

My controlling ego, I decided, was definitely getting a back seat assignment—at least for a little while. And I know that whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth, hands clenched in dismay about the never-ending "To Do" list, or whenever it is a damp, drizzly March day in my soul, then it will be the time to remember the soft gaze of the two deer, who will remind me that there is another way to see and be in the world. And if I feel lost, I will try to remember to just stand still and let the forest find me, as David Wagoner suggests:

Lost

by David Wagoner

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you
 Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,
 And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
 Must ask permission to know it and be known.
 The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
 I have made this place around you.
 If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.
 No two trees are the same to Raven.
 No two branches are the same to Wren.
 If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,
 You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
 Where you are. You must let it find you.