

## **Learning about Ourselves Through Fairy Tales:**

### **Their Psychological Value**

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Fairy tales, as well as myths, can be viewed as allegories or dramatic representations of complex psychological processes—usually those of transformation and growth. They are marvelous vehicles for gaining insights and learning about ourselves and our basic human tendencies. As allegories, myths and fairy tales carry valuable statements in symbolic form about human nature. Stories can be analyzed in a practical way as a means of developing useful tools that may aid us in reflecting upon things that we observe and do in our daily lives. Several fairy tales are presented to illustrate their allegorical value in understanding human mental processes and to offer solutions to human issues, ultimately leading to transformation and more fulfilling lives.

Some myths and fairy tales concern heroic struggles that may go on within each of us, struggles that involve the ways in which inherent instincts and wisdom can help us follow our unique paths. They can also indicate the potential destructiveness of behaving unconsciously, ego-centeredly, or trying to gain power over others, in contrast to being guided by the eros motive of mutual respect. Stories frequently provide clues as to the basic struggles of human beings. As allegories, myths and fairy tales carry valuable statements, in symbolic form, about human nature. Consequently, fairy tales can help us gain insights into some of our basic human tendencies. The stories can be analyzed in a practical way as a means of developing useful tools that may aid us in reflecting upon things that we observe and do in our daily lives.

#### **Fairy Tales as Basic Patterns**

To understand fairy tales and myths as representative of what goes on inside of us, a basic assumption is that every feature of every story—setting, characters, objects, activities, etc.—corresponds to a factor, principle, or process within the personality. In other words, the approach is similar to analyzing dreams. However, myths and fairy tales can be viewed as collective or universal dreams that can apply to all of us. And, whereas associations with dream contents come from the dreamer, the associations with elements in fairy tales come from a wide variety of collective domains, such as religious symbolism, the field of art, and other human creative products. Jung called these kinds of associations “amplifications.”

The symbolic representations in dreams, myths, fairy tales, fantasies, memories, and perceptual projections provide keys for understanding the workings of the human psyche. By examining the images in stories (or, actually, in any human creative expression) and reflecting on them and their similarities to images elsewhere, we can arrive at an intuitive grasp of the significance of each image—relevant to its particular context—and then apply our understanding to an interpretation. For example, if we dream of a dog, paint a dog, have a fantasy about a dog, write a poem about a dog, see a movie about a dog, or read a fairy tale involving a dog, we can research prior myths and stories, looking for images with comparable functions and contexts. This research enables us to generate a sense of the meaning of the dog in the dream, painting, poem, or other creative expression. For example, the dog is frequently found to be associated with human mortality. Consider how the dead must pass Cerberus (the five-headed dog) as they enter the underworld in Greek mythology, and the role of Anubis (the jackal or dog-headed god) as guide of the dead into the underworld in Egyptian mythology. Native American stories also depict the dog as the primary influence in God's decision to make humans mortal.

I never cease to marvel at the fact that we can communicate and relate to one another! Our ability to communicate means that we have ideas and images in common. Actually, it is

not that we have common ideas; rather, it is as if we all contain the same psychological “organs” with which or through which we apprehend meaning. These organs function by giving rise to images that resonate with symbolic meaning whenever they are brought into play. For example, we might feel and function in motherly and fatherly ways toward a needy child or adult, whereas we might experience the child in ourselves when we are playful, enthusiastic, and lighthearted. Jung's name for the organs of the psyche, as you may know, is “archetypes.” Psychologically, images can be viewed as analogous to physiological sensations. Just as sensations have their origins in parts and organs of the body, images derive from the organs of the psyche—that is, the archetypes. The analogy breaks down in perception, for we usually can observe the physiological organs that lead to sensations, but we cannot observe archetypes directly. The existence and description of archetypes are inferred from the consistent, comparable imagery that humans express over time and across continents.

Jung's concept of the archetype arose out of an experience he recounts in his autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*: A schizophrenic man described to Jung his perception of the sun as having an erect phallus from which the wind originated. The man was moving his head back and forth while looking at the sun, and he exclaimed to Jung how the phallus moved back and forth as he moved his head. Years later, Jung came upon an obscure Mithraic liturgy in which the same image was described. Jung concluded that "it is not a question of a specifically racial heredity, but of a universally human characteristic. Nor is it a question of inherited ideas, but of a functional disposition to produce the same, or very similar, ideas. This disposition I later called the archetype " (C.W 5, par. 154).

I had a similar experience with an Asian schizophrenic woman whose imagery baffled me. I do not feel free to relate the exact nature of the imagery, but suffice it to say that it concerned a profound religious-like experience of the way in which evil coursed through and

affected her body. I was moved by the content and intensity of her experience, but I could make no sense of it. The very evening of our initial meeting, at which she told me of these sources of her suffering, I sat down to read a book I had begun the previous day. After only a few minutes, I turned the page and came upon a description of an ancient oriental religious belief regarding the effects of evil upon the body. It was incredibly similar to the experiences described by my patient. Needless to say, I read the passages to her. The impact was profound. Her immediate relief was obvious, having been released from feelings of isolation, bewilderment, and fear; I suspect the written description also helped strengthen her ego by showing her a connection with deep collective oriental roots. The woman was released from the hospital very shortly after our second meeting.

So, what has all this to do with fairy tales? Well, it seems to me that if there is any meaning in fairy tales, and if we are going to be able to talk about that meaning with one another, we must postulate a common basis for mutual understanding. And that common basis must be inherent in the human condition.

In her book, *Interpretation of Fairy Tales*, Marie-Louise von Franz says that myths and fairy tales "mirror the basic structure of the psyche" (p. 2). My way of saying essentially the same thing is that fairy tales are dramatic representations of basic psychological processes. If we think of the personality as comprised of a very large set of definable parts or principles, which can be represented by images, then fairy tales can be viewed as dramatic and dynamic interactions among combinations of those personality parts or components. *To be attracted to or repelled by a fairy tale indicates that the story contains something that resonates with an unconscious process in the reader or listener, for one cannot be attracted or repelled unless one recognizes something that is personally meaningful.* Recognition indicates the possibility of a healing awareness through discovery of processes imaged in the stories. Jung expresses this idea well in his book, *Aion* when he says the following:

Without the existence of conscious concepts apperception is, as we know, impossible. This explains numerous neurotic disturbances which arise from the fact that certain contents are constellated in the unconscious but cannot be assimilated owing to the lack of apperceptive concepts that would “grasp” them. That is why it is so extremely important to tell children fairytales and legends, . . . because these things are instrumental symbols with whose help unconscious contents can be canalized into consciousness, interpreted, and integrated. (p. 169)

To illustrate with a personal experience, I shall relate an interaction between my daughter and me when she was about four years of age. I was awakened in the middle of the night by her crying. Upon entering her bedroom, I saw her sitting up and looking very frightened. In response to my asking her what was the matter, she explained that there was a ghost in her room and that frightened her terribly. The ensuing conversation went something like this:

“Has the ghost been here before?”

“Yes.”

“Lots?”

“Yes.”

“Has the ghost ever hurt you?”

“No.”

I sat down on the bed and pondered, “If the ghost wanted to do you harm, it could have done it any time. So maybe the ghost want's something else.” After telling her I'd be right back, I fetched a crayon and clean piece of paper. “Here,” I said, “draw me a picture of the ghost.” She made some random marks on the paper. I looked at it and said, “That doesn't look like a dangerous ghost to me. Maybe . . . maybe it's a lonely little girl ghost who just wants someone to play with.”

Her eyes wide, she asked, “Do you really think so?”

“Must be, because otherwise the ghost sure could have hurt you long ago, if it wanted to. No, I really think it's a ghost that needs you.”

“OK,” she said, and lay down.

As I was leaving the room and shutting the door, I heard my daughter say, in her little squeaky voice, “Little girl ghost, would you like to play with me?” I never heard anything more about ghosts from her after that.

Providing her with images that she could connect to her fears appeared to enable my daughter to deal with them effectively. Fairy tales and myths can provide the same assistance.

To reiterate, myths and fairy tales are symbolic dramatizations of what is basic in the human personality. They can serve as portals to understanding the human condition in general, but they also touch each of us individually, and where we are touched opens the door to our self-understanding. For example, a pre-adolescent girl might find herself drawn to the stories of "Sleeping Beauty" and "Snow White" without realizing their connection to each other or to the mythological Teutonic Edda, in which the maiden Earth, having been put to sleep by the awful winter's power, is awakened in the spring, freed from the cold dragon by the hero sun. These are fertility stories imaging the dawn of every pre-adolescent girl's forthcoming capacity to be fertilized (Jung, CW 4, par. 494).

### **Why Are Fairy Tales Thusly Named?**

Before going on, it might be of interest to reflect on the question as to why fairy tales are called *fairy tales*. Why not "fantasy stories" or "dragon tales" or "witch and ogre tales," or the like? The words *fairy* and *tale* themselves contain the answer. It is not arbitrary or mere convenience that these words were chosen to describe the kinds of stories subsumed under their very broad umbrella. I think of the analogy of our having to accept the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil as being an apple, even though that specification is not in the bible. Why? The apple must have general acceptance as the image symbolizing whatever

that fruit or the fruit of that tree represents in the human psyche. The apple appears to arise in many stories as a symbol of one's inherent capacity for developing consciousness. Consequently, we accept *fairy tale* as the term representing stories of fantastic events. We even use the expression to refer to tall tales in everyday conversation.

Perhaps we can better understand our general acceptance of the use of the words *fairy tale* if we do a little etymological investigation. The word *fairy* derives from the Latin, *fatum*, meaning fate, and from *fatus*, the past participle of *fari*, meaning to speak. From the Greek comes the associated word *phani*, also meaning to speak or say, and that has the same root as *phone*, meaning sound or voice, as in *telephone*, *phonic*, and *phonograph*. The second part, the word *tale*, derives from middle English and means *talk* and *number*. These are related to the Gothic *talzjan*, meaning to instruct, and are associated with the Latin *dolus*, meaning guile or deceit. As we know, fairy tales were told orally before they were written or recorded. But even written, they are frequently told aloud. Thus the term *fairy tale* seems less to do with fairies than with vocally communicating and instructing about fate through guile. Telling a fairy tale is, in essence, verbalizing an allegorical story, the representational process of which is drawn from a vast list of human conditions and experiences.

### **Examples of Tales and Their Meaning**

Here are two brief tales that contain a common motif and illustrate my approach to understanding the psychological meaning of one of them. These stories provide a bridge to another, much longer story through which I illustrate the principles of the masculine and feminine in the human psyche.

"The Dream" is a tale from the Santal Parganas, an East Indian tribe of people located in Northern India:

One night as a man and his wife lay talking in bed, the woman told her husband that she had dreamt that in a certain place she had dug up a pot full of rupees, and she proposed that they

should go and look for it and see whether the dream was true. While they talked, it chanced that some thieves, who had climbed on to the roof, overheard the conversation and at once decided to forestall the others. So they went off to the place which the woman had described and began to dig, and after digging a little they were delighted to come on a pot with a lid on. But when they took off the lid an enormous snake raised its head and hissed at them. At this the thieves cursed the woman who had misled them and agreed to take the snake and drop it through the roof on to the man and his wife as they lay in bed. So they shut the snake up again and carried it off to the house and, making a hole in the thatch, dropped it through. But as it fell the snake changed into a stream of money, which came rattling down on the couple below; the thieves found a snake, but it was not a real snake, it was Thakur [a god]; and it was his will to give the money to the man and his wife. When these two had recovered from their astonishment, they gathered up the money, and lived in wealth ever afterwards. (Bompas, p. 157)

Aesop's Fable, "The Ass and the Grasshopper," speaks to the same moral issue as that in the Santal Parganas story:

An ass, hearing some grasshoppers chirping, was delighted with the music, and determining, if he could, to rival them asked them what it was they fed on to make them sing so sweetly? When they told him that they supped upon nothing but dew, the ass betook himself to the same diet, and soon died of hunger. One man's meat is another man's poison. (p. 72)

These are straightforward stories, which, I suspect, all of us can readily comprehend. If the stories are universally meaningful, they must correspond to some process in the psyche common to all of us. We humans frequently are moved by internal impulses to act in some impersonal or collective manner detrimental to our unique strivings or intentions. For example, if we continuously attend to internalized "shoulds," "ought-tos," and "supposed-tos," we can lose contact with our individuality and personal identity. In this example, we become the child-



victim of the conventionally driven negative father archetype, rather than focus on the experience of the soul or the directives of the Self, the archetype of wholeness.

Another short tale illustrating a similar idea is told among the Sufis about the renowned teacher, Nasrudin.

One night, a man was walking along a road when he chanced upon Nasrudin on his hands and knees on the ground below a street lamp. The man asked Nasrudin what he was doing, and he heard the reply, "I lost my keys and I'm hunting for them." The man, offering to help, got down on his hands and knees and looked all around the area. Finally, the man said, "Teacher, I've looked all around, and I can't find your keys anywhere. Where exactly did you lose them?" "In my living room of my house," replied Nasrudin. "In your living room! Then why the heck are you looking for them here?" Nasrudin explained, "The light's better here." (p. 26)

In other words, the street light—the collective light—is brighter than the light within. Other people's (groups', religions', schools', etc.) ideas and directions have a history, a supported following, and are far more well defined (well lit) than an individual's unique, personal propensities that often may be totally strange and untried (dim light). But it is within one's self that wholeness has meaning and the connection to the soul can be achieved. Psychic harmony cannot be found outside ourselves.

Maintaining a connection with the soul can sometimes be aided by the inner thieves, as the first story, "The Dream," tells us. That story illustrates how the trickster-like thief in us makes certain that we end up focusing on that which leads us to wholeness. When we are unaware of what is truly valuable to our lives, it might be said that we are out of focus. Similarly, when we fear the loss of a possession or concept, we are victims of the fear, and the

possession or concept does not feed the soul. For example, we might be trapped in the idea that we must always be kind, nice, or generous. Since the thief seeks to take what we value, and usually does so at a time when we least expect it, we might unconsciously find ourselves acting coldly, cruelly, or stingily. But the concept (in this case, of being nice) is valueless for living life—in fact, it can be dangerous, like the snake of unconsciousness, for it can grow to become the source of blind automatic acts rather than the gold representing an expression of one's true nature.

Many stories illustrate that gold can refer to the highest value of one's human existence and individual development. Gold corresponds to what Jung calls the Self—a term referring to the wholeness or totality that transcends opposites. When in tune with the Self, we might readily act kindly or cruelly, depending upon who, what, and how we are, culturally, physically, genetically, intellectually, spiritually, and so on, and the specific contextual circumstances at any particular moment.

One story illustrating the significance of one's inner gold is the Swiss tale, "Hans Kuhschwanz.

In a small, old chalet on the slopes of the alps near Interlaken, Switzerland, lived a hard-working young man named Hans Kuhschwanz [German for cow's tail]. He herded cows for a wealthy landowner who had a lovely daughter named Annabaebeli. Hans and Annabaebeli were very much in love. When her father found out about their growing relationship, he forbade his daughter to meet with poor Hans. However, they continued to meet secretly every day in the early hours of the morning before Hans had to go to work.

Then one day, tearful Annabaebeli met Hans with some terrible news. Her father was going to hold a ball and find her a wealthy husband. But, she cried, she only wanted Hans. What could they do? Hans reassured her and told her he would try to think of a solution.

Next morning, before he awoke, Hans had a dream: He was standing on the bridge in the nearby town of Thun when a man approached him saying, "Young man, I have something to tell you that will help you for the rest of your life!" But before he could say any more, Hans awakened. He met Annabaebeli with a feeling of frustration, because he wanted to know what the man had to say. He told his sweetheart his dream, and when he was finished she expressed her shock. She had had the very same dream that morning, and she was going to tell him her dream. "What could it mean?" she asked.

Hans made the serious decision not to go to work that day. Instead he put on his Sunday suit and walked down the mountain and along the Thunersee [Lake Thun] into Thun to see what might happen if he stood on the bridge. After standing there for a few hours, he started to feel silly. People were looking askance at him. Young Swiss men just did not stand around doing nothing.

As it grew close to 3 P.M., Hans decided to return home. He began to gather his belongings, when a man approached him reproachfully. "Young man, I've walked across this bridge several times today, and you have just been standing here. Have you nothing better to do?" Hans stuttered a bit and mentioned that he'd had a dream. The man shouted, "A dream? You are here because of a dream? You are as silly as a cow's tail. Why, if I listened to my dreams, I too would be doing the craziest things. Why just this morning I dreamt that I went to an old chalet on the side of the mountain near Interlaken and dug up a chest full of gold from under the floorboards in the center of the living room. Can you imagine anyone doing such a stupid thing!? That just goes to show how meaningless dreams are. Go home and stop listening to your dreams."

Hurriedly, Hans thanked the man and headed home. Upon arriving there, he grabbed a pick and shovel and dug under the floorboards of his living room. Sure enough, he pulled up a huge chest full of gold that one of his ancestors had buried many years ago. Now he was wealthy, and Annabaebeli and he could be married. And they lived happily ever after. (p. 157)

In this story, as in many other versions containing the same motif, Hans demonstrates the hero characteristics of persistence, determination, and the willingness to take whatever risks are necessary to reach a goal. The discovered gold, one's primary worth, is a widely encountered symbol. Gold generally represents the most highly valued material. It often is associated with the sun, which can symbolize the light of consciousness, a brilliant insight, or perceptual clarity. The association between gold and the sun probably derives from the color of gold and the fact that it never tarnishes, so that it never fails to reflect light in its fullest brilliance.

But gold is a metal. One definition of metal, according to *Webster's*, is "the material . . . out of which a person or thing is made." It is also "a quality of temperament or disposition." A synonym of the associated word, *mettle*, is spirit, "an animating or vital principle held to give life to physical organisms." Like gold, one's life sparkles with perpetual brilliance when it is brought out into the light. One who discovers the inner gold becomes attentive to the quality of existence; life becomes an expression of personal human value manifested in behavior arising out of one's creative individuality.

To the alchemists, gold meant the final outcome of long and tedious but transforming work, the lapis, the ultimate goal. Thus, it can symbolize wholeness, as mentioned earlier. But gold is not the only possible symbol of wholeness; there are many. Any image containing opposites can also symbolize totality, such as the rose, with its beauty and its thorns, and the joining of the masculine and feminine.

The next fairy tale deals with this latter issue in a unique way. It illustrates how the masculine principle can function effectively in a woman, and how the feminine principle can represent meaning and passion in a man's life. Through understanding how these principles function in ourselves, we have access to a greater awareness, not only of what happens in the world around us, but also of the complex dramas that transpire within us all the time.

When I speak of the masculine principle, I refer to the part of the personality that involves elements of action, penetration, assertiveness, discrimination, differentiation, and behavior directed toward a goal. The masculine is associated with the spirit and with movement. In the East, it is the yang principle. The feminine, the yin principle, concerns being or existence, receptivity, containment, substance/matter, nature, and the earth, and therefore is associated with materiality, practicality, the body, and feelings. The masculine and feminine principles exist in all of us, both men and women. Furthermore, the two cannot be found separate in nature, for it is next to impossible to conceive feeling without movement or movement without something that is moved. (When you get right down to it, archetypes in general are somewhat artificially separated for purposes of discussion and examination, for *child* and *parent* go together, as do *mother* and *father* and all positive and negative aspects of the psychological principles.)

This next story, "The Water of Life," comes from the Brothers Grimm. It is particularly interesting how the masculine–feminine issue is symbolized in the coda or ending portion of the story.

A sick king had three sons who were discussing their father's illness while outside in the castle courtyard. A little old man was passing by and inquired about their distress. When told, he said simply, "If he drank the Water of Life, he would be well." And the man left.

The sons agreed that the eldest would go forth to seek the Water of Life. If he didn't return, the second son would go, and if he didn't return, the youngest would go. The eldest son rode off and soon met a dwarf who asked him where he was going. The prince answered dismissively, "It's none of your business," and rode on. The dwarf, who had magical powers, made sure the prince ended up in a gorge from which he could not escape. The second son had exactly the same fate because of his rude reply to the same question.

The youngest prince met the dwarf and replied politely to the question about his destination, "Thank you for asking, but I really don't know where I'm going. My father is ill and I'm off to find the Water of Life to cure him, but I have no idea where to find it." The dwarf offered to help him. "Stay on this road, and it will take you to the castle in the courtyard of which is a fountain containing the Water of Life. To open the gate to the castle, you must strike it three times with an iron rod. Here is an iron rod. (He hands an iron rod to the prince.) Once on the other side of the gate, two lions will threaten to attack you, but if you throw them each a loaf, they will be mollified. Here, take these two loaves. Once inside the castle where everyone is sleeping, the princess will awaken. You won't want to leave her. But you must hasten. If you don't go out the gate before the clock finishes striking 12 o'clock, the gate will close and lock you inside forever. So go to the fountain, take some of its water and leave before 12."

The grateful prince thanked the dwarf and followed his instructions to get into the castle. There he met the beautiful princess. They fell in love immediately, and she urged him to leave before 12 and return in exactly one year so they could be married. He parted from her reluctantly and went into a room where he found a sword and a loaf, which he decided to take. The prince filled a goblet with water from the fountain and barely made it out the gate before the clock stopped chiming 12 o'clock.

Outside, he met the dwarf, who praised him for his success. The dwarf also commended him for taking both the magic sword, with which all battles could be won, and the eternally nourishing loaf, which could never fully be consumed. When the prince asked about his brothers, the dwarf told him what happened. The young man begged the dwarf to release his brothers.

When he saw his brothers, he told them all about his experiences. They were jealous and fearful that he would win their father's favor and become next king. The three brothers traveled together, and they passed through two kingdoms, each of which were at war and

having a famine. The youngest prince offered the kings the use of the sword and the loaf, and they were grateful to the prince for saving their countries.

To get home, the brothers had to travel by boat. On the boat, the two eldest brothers contrived to trick the young prince while he slept. They transferred the Water of Life into another container, and filled the goblet with sea water.

At home the eldest princes convinced their father that the young prince brought water that would make him more ill, while they had the healing water. The sea water did indeed make him more ill, but the Water of Life cured him. Angry at the young prince, the king ordered his death, but the prince escaped and ran away. Shortly thereafter, two caravans of gifts arrived for the young prince from the kings whose kingdoms he had helped save. As a result, the king regretted having ordered the prince's death.

[Here comes the “coda.”]

As the year's end approached, in preparation for the return of the young prince, the princess bade her subjects to coat the road leading to the gate of her castle with a layer of pure gold. At the gate, she posted guards bidding them to open the gate only to a horseman who approached the gate riding his horse down the center of the golden road.

363 days after the meeting between the young prince and the princess, the eldest brother, seeking to win her for himself, set off for the castle. When he came to the shiny, spotless golden road, he thought, “I cannot mar this road with my horse's hoof marks,” and he rode his horse down the left side of the road. When he reached the gate, it would not be opened for him.

On the next day, the second brother set off for the castle, hoping to win the princess for himself. At the golden road, he looked at it and had the same thought as his older brother. So he approached the castle riding down the right side of the road. At the gate he was not allowed entrance either.

On the 365th day, the youngest prince came out of hiding, mounted his horse, and headed for the castle. He was looking forward to reuniting with his beloved. He recalled her

appearance and his feelings he had for her. He dreamt of holding her in his arms and of their marriage. At no time did he focus on the nature of the road, because his full attention was on the image of the princess. So the youngest prince approached the gate down the center of the road, and the gate was thrown open for him.

He and the princess had a glorious wedding, to which the prince's father was invited. The king learned about the elder sons' trickery. He ordered them executed, but they had long since fled the country and were seen no more. When the king died, the prince and princess became regents of their two countries, and they lived happily ever after. (p. 339)

To analyze a fairy tale, I consider the setting of the story as an indication of an initial condition of the personality—a condition that can be transformed. The story's exposition speaks of the process of transformation leading to a new—generally more conscious—condition. A story then reaches its climax, following which is the lysis or outcome, which usually (but not always) indicates a more conscious condition. A few stories depict regression.

The initial setting of “The Water of Life”—a sick king with three sons—suggests an overmasculinized condition of the personality. Notice that there is no queen, mother, sister, or any other female when the story begins. This is the situation when one lives life in a routine, mechanical way without experiencing a passionate connection with what one is doing. It is a collectively preprogrammed, robot-like existence.

That the king is sick symbolizes that one's ruling principle of life is debilitated so that one lives not only mechanically, but also without vitality and without a meaningful direction. The hero in the story is led to the princess with the aid of the old man and the dwarf. These latter characters represent the unconscious principle that can guide us to the goal, and corresponds to the Greek god Hermes (Mercury), guide of travelers and thieves. It is this guide that directs the courageous heroic character, the young prince, to meet and confront the previously missing feminine principle that provides meaning and vitality to life. It is she who owns the



water and thereby holds the cure for the rigid, mechanical adaptation presented at the beginning of the story. Her arrival symbolizes the allowance of passion to enter one's otherwise autopilot kind of existence.

"Water of Life" is a direct translation of the Latin *aqua vitae*, which in turn can have the same meaning in alchemical literature as *aqua permanens* and *aqua mercurialis*, the transforming water. The beginning of the alchemist's work corresponds psychologically to the beginning of self-analysis when one opens oneself to the unconscious. Jung quotes one alchemist as stating that one must approach the work "*liberi et vacui anima*," that is, "with a free and empty mind" (CW 12, p. 270). Note that *anima* is the term given to the feminine principle in a man. In the fairy tale, when we first meet the princess, she has been sound asleep. How much more freer and emptier can one get? It is in her castle that the transforming water resides, which the hero carries off in a goblet, a feminine symbol itself. In Volume 14 of Jung's *Collected Works* (pp. 274f), he discusses the very issue of "The Regeneration of the King" and connects the *aqua permanens* with the "Church's 'water of grace.'" The king's drinking of this water is equivalent to baptism resulting in a symbolic death and rebirth.

The ending of the story excites me most because it demonstrates through dramatic action how the masculine and feminine join, one to the other, in a kind of fourfold fashion so that a new condition of the personality is achieved—one in which life is lived with spirited passion.

The princess wants to ensure that only the true hero—her beloved—will gain admittance to her castle after the year is up. So the creative spirit in her devises a method by which her reunion with him, and only him, can be guaranteed. Here we observe how the competent masculine principle (what Jung refers to as the *animus*) can operate to manifest an effective and relevant course of action. The princess experiences a kind of intuitive, feeling sense of

how things of the heart must be. To give form to that experience, the masculine principle brings a practicable, relevant solution—that is, to create a road of gold that will, like the light of the sun, enable differentiation between what is right (soul-fulfilling) and what is not.

Meanwhile, the prince/hero does not concern himself with the characteristics of the road, as his older brothers do. He follows his feelings for the princess—that is, he is guided by the anima to fulfill his passion. The material from which the path is made is irrelevant. What *is* relevant is the prince's rejoining his beloved. The feminine principle (the anima) can connect us to whatever relevant action we decide to take. It is through the feminine principle that we feel excitedly involved (impassioned) in life.

Thus, this fairy tale illustrates, or provides a metaphor for, the transformation from a mechanistically listless condition of the personality to one of creative effectiveness and passion.

I have attempted to present a few tales to demonstrate how they speak not only of what goes on within the human psyche, but how transformations can take place so that we can lead more fulfilling lives, true to the promptings of the Self and soul.

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## **Further Reading**

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