

DREAMS OF SOPHIA

When a single character reappears in my dreams, this tells me that this person has become "larger than life" in my psyche, representing with special clarity parts of myself that I both admired, and repressed! In my case, this reappearing character was *Sophia* (my name for her). I quickly recognized that the two of us shared certain important motivations in the way we worked in the world. I suspected that the two of us occupied the same "Enneagram space"—a Three, a high performing achiever who measures much of her success by the admiring response of others.

Our personal home backgrounds were quite different. Sophia came from wealth, was Jewish, had a sophisticated education in an all-women's college in Saratoga Springs, New York, and was already moderately famous in her field. She was aggressively focused on success, and confident of walking into a totally new field and making her way in it to the top.

I was somewhat embarrassed by my dreams about Sophia, for they revealed a shadow side of me—a self-conscious preoccupation with appearing successful, projecting a "together" image, and making a big impact to elicit the admiration of my audience. Since dreams usually poke fun at our "shadow side", my dream figure, Sophia, would prove to be a helpful example of my own compulsions.

In real life, Sophia and I had been colleagues working together on an exciting work project developing national conferences at Urban Research Corporation, a job I held for a couple of years right after completing my graduate degree at the University of Chicago. Sophia noted my talent, felt simpatico with my energy, and we became good friends. We were part of a bold experiment—John Naisbitt (later known for other ventures and a book he wrote on national trends) had created a fledgling organization committed to affecting the national debate on current topics of concern in the political and social arena. Sophia was quick and bright, had creative ideas as to how to make things work, was unafraid of pushing for their implementation, and had developed an impressive network of connections with persons of prominence in the fields being considered for national symposia we put together. My competencies matched hers in some areas; I could write and had a good instinct for educational methodology, but Sophia was a more sophisticated and worldly wise woman, whereas I was barely "off the farm" by comparison, having spent the previous two decades in Pioneer Girls, buried in a small world, a religious organization devoted to the spiritual

growth of young girls. I was in awe of Sophia's brilliance.

After our work together on conferences came to an end, I joined others in creating the Urban Life Center, an alternative educational program for college students in the city, and this is when Sophia set her sights on changing careers to television production—a field in which she had no formal training or experience. She quickly found her way into Chicago's public television station, assisting the producer of a documentary on the court. Her husband being a newly appointed judge, this gave Sophia unusual access to persons in power. Soon she had her own program—the most famous of which was the original Siskel and Ebert review of movies. I watched in amazement as she quickly climbed the ladder of success, attaining awards and recognition for her work, and eventually starting her own company.

When my husband and I moved to the East Coast in 1979, I lost touch with Sophia—except in my dreams. In Boston, we were involved in a new work—Life/Work Direction. When participants in our process—sensing my attunement to psychological and spiritual issues—began turning to me for ongoing individual counseling to further explore issues which had been raised during the vocational process, I knew I had to seek additional training and supervision from a more experienced therapist. My interest in dream work had been sparked by a workshop I had attended, so I decided to look for someone with expertise in that area. I chose a trainer of analysts at the Boston Jung Institute. Jungians are especially open to the use of "lay analysts" in the kind of work I would be doing, so I was warmly received and encouraged.

Not surprisingly, these supervision sessions morphed into my own analysis. I began to feel the magnetic pull of the inner journey, especially as conceptualized by Carl Jung. His view that "the natural gradient of the soul is toward wholeness," coincided with my upbeat attitude toward life.

Of course, I misperceived inner work as something I could do—as a task, and I attacked it with characteristic zeal. Although my analyst called my ego state "inflated narcissism," he knew that my task-orientation and ego-involvement were major factors to be dealt with in supervising me in my work with women. I was not prepared for the necessary part of the analytical process which precipitated a dark descent into the depths of my psyche. My dreams would be my guides in this dark night of the soul. My shadow would be carried by dream characters with whom I closely identified. Primary among them was Sophia,

whom I saw as manifesting the gifts and hazards I myself possessed. I had lost touch with her since moving east; I was now in touch with the "Sophia" within, very much alive and well in my inner attitude. The woman in my dreams cannot be construed as a true representation of the person I knew. Even the physical likeness was not there in her image. Rather, she became, in Jungian terms, an internalized archetype of my compulsions toward creating an image of success.

This dream occurred early in my analysis:

I am sitting in a restaurant with Sophia and other women. I am aware she is divorced. The women keep making little remarks and nodding in the direction of the door, indicating possibilities for men for Sophia. I think that her recent divorce hurt her more than they realize.

We leave to go to her home, which has been renovated. We walk outside the house and see a group of buildings that have been taken off their foundations and shifted a quarter turn so as to face a new direction. The basic structure shows, for the foundation has not yet been filled back in and landscaped. There is open space around it because they have removed buildings to relieve the congestion.

In the house, her children come downstairs at one point. She is seated on the couch with a younger man who has come to call and who admires her. He seems quite prosaic and plain and I'm amazed that she puts up with him, carrying on a conversation on his level. I feel she's either condescending or desperate. He calls to the kids, relates to them and I appreciate that.

Sophia begins to describe her current job, working for Sears though she is currently on loan from Sears to the American Baptists. That seems ironic to me, because she is Jewish.

In the house again, as a house guest, I try to think of tasks for the black maid to do, as she is about to leave and nothing else is really needed of her. She lives nearby. I feel some connection with her.

I first concentrated my attention on a primary image: the renovation of the house in which she lived, the naked basic structure of the buildings lying exposed, and the significant shift in orientation which occurred. I wrote in my dream journal: "The structure of my life house has been turned. The intent is

naked. Uncovered. Visible." I was beginning to explore the foundations of my inner life in a profound way. I could acknowledge that the "Sophia" side of me had many attractive aspects, but the thirst for achievement and the image of success was at variance with a truer part of my self. I wrote, "So I part with it with mixed feelings. It had some health in it, yet now it stands in my way. I have clung to the idea that I can have it all—the material, worldly acclaim and success, and the spiritual. The "Sophi" in me has stubbornly continued to try to make it on my own, through brilliance and cleverness, the best of achievement orientation."

I had to wonder what the "divorce" indicated. Would this new direction in my life sever me from some aspect of my familiar connection to life, and in this case, particularly to the masculine? I had experienced half a lifetime of professional success in my career, much of it built on my Three-like facility with proprioceptive tasks: directing, organizing, training, public speaking, promoting. Being seated with women in a restaurant seemed to point to the development of a more nurturant quality. If these women could point out a right relationship to the masculine for me, I might be able to experience a deeper integration of the masculine and feminine sides in my counseling of women.

The younger man who appears on the couch in her house might point to a younger, less developed masculine side—one more prosaic and plain than my inflated Ego-Vanity would have preferred. I would learn in subsequent months to appreciate the value of an ordinary, low-key approach to those I worked with. This young man was also at ease with children. My analyst suggested that the "child archetype" often appears in our dreams when we are embarking on a new direction in life. Children help us to feel a blessed naiveté; we become open to learning, and able to admit, "I don't know." Even Jung, after having analyzed literally thousands of dreams, said that when an analysand came to him with a dream, his first reaction still was, "I have no idea what this means." To be a good analyst requires that we hold this attitude uppermost. Thomas Merton speaks in a similar way about spiritual growth: it is not a journey from Point A to Point B in some linear progression, but rather a moving from the known to the unknown. It was hard not to know, not to be on top of the situation. Analysis dislodged me from certainty, from "knowing."

I found highly improbable the idea that Sophia would go to work at Sears, and even more unlikely that she would be found with the American Baptists. But dreams are like this, posing odd juxtapositions. And the "Sophia" of my dreams, a stand-in for the person I was being led to become, would have to leave

behind cherished fantasies of greatness (persons aspiring to lead others in spiritual work are not immune to such fantasies), and experience the everyday ordinariness symbolized by these very prosaic American institutions. Sears may not be tops in fashion, but when one needs a tool set or a kitchen range, Sears is a solid resource. The reference to American Baptists takes me back to my childhood. I grew up as a minister's daughter, attending rural American Baptist churches in New England. It was in connection with such a church that I was baptized as a six-year-old child one early June morning in a New Hampshire lake. There was a mixed meaning in this ritual: I was seeking connection with my parents and their church, but I also harbored an instinct for a deep connection with God.

I am comforted by the presence of the black maid who appears in the final scene of the dream. Black women I have known have exhibited a warmth of soul which has always stirred me. Significantly, this woman does not have tasks to do; her presence is enough. This is the lesson I must learn: soul work is not a task to accomplish efficiently, but simply a way of being with another person as she walks on the path.

Later I had other dreams of black women, some of them reminiscent of the "Black Madonna" figure of which Jungian analyst Marion Woodman has written, describing her as that earthy crone-like character who so often appears in womens' dreams and who speaks truth with authority. I would need that kind of presence and wisdom in my vocation.

I was fascinated with the way "Sophia's" character developed over time in my dreams. Each time, I was brought face to face with another aspect of my compulsions. One dream portrayed her as "successful but the star glow is gone. "She seems quite ordinary, even slovenly , deceitful, and disorganized." With some embarrassment, I had to confess my own failings, the deceit and concealment of my shadow side. Several dreams made references to her treatment of children, with varying attitudes—sometimes over-indulgent, sometimes careless and rough, and at other times, concerned and caring. There seemed to be no rest for me from facing some of my rough-shod and uneven treatment of my own child-likeness and that of others. One dream presented her as "plain and impoverished, no more glitz, Madison Avenue star quality, but homely and natural." It was a dream where the two of us embraced, "I looked deep into her eyes and said something about how easy it was for us to pick up where we left off—it was that sort of relationship."

Throughout these dreams, I was keenly aware that "Sophia" is the feminine word for God, which pushed me to a deeper level of meaning. A final dream played on this theme more explicitly and provided a tender denouement to the meaning of our relationship—both outer and inner.

I have been on an expedition with Sophia in the mountains. We are in an inn dining at a table set with food. I am picking up a plateful of food to eat before we leave. I have the sense of an ending, but am taking my time.

At the table a friendly man who knows Sophia starts talking. Soon three or four other men gather at the round table. They are animated and friendly. One of the men holds out his hand, Sophia takes it, and reaches for mine. We are all to pause while Sophia prays. She says she knows this is unusual, but proceeds to address God. Her prayer is that God will send me the right man (implication: to marry). I am amazed and pleased. It is heartwarming to see Sophia's simplicity and trust in praying.

We go outside and walk toward the street. I am aware that our time together is coming to an end. She is to meet two women, and our connection is fading.

We walk together along the street, crossing it, and come to a bridge. She shares with me something difficult she has been through. I tell her I am relieved to know about this shadow in her life at last. She asks me what I thought and I tell her that whatever it was, I chose not to question her or lose faith in her.

The dream ends, and the sense of her fades.

Here her nurturant aspect appears, as we sit around a table set with food. The men are "animated"—i.e., the masculine side is now infused with "anima" or soul. It is this masculine side which extends a hand to Sophia connecting her to me while she prays. And the prayer is for marriage—always an emblem for the union of opposites within us. Simplicity and trust replace the "complex-ity" and self-absorption.

The dream seems to be marking an ending of self-conscious effort, by "crossing" over a bridge to a new way involving faith and trust. I can now accept the shadow, no longer overlooking or whitewashing it.

Ultimately, my "Sophia" dreams have led me into my own soul. They were unerringly pointing me to the feminine wisdom of God as Mother which had to come to life within me if I was to become a nourisher of souls in my work with others, rather than a stellar and accomplished public figure stunning the world with my competence and expertise. That mothering part of me had been suppressed for most of my life because of my negative Mother complex—another story in itself. I had resisted the powerful influence of my mother (a well-meaning but stern woman) by living out my aggressive and willful intensity. I found in "Sophia" a warm and inspiring friend in the world, and within me, through my dreams, a mirror of my own yearning for success and acclaim in deceptively winsome ways.

And so on I go, guided by this mysterious world of the unconscious as it interrupts my conscious waking self each morning with morsels of wisdom I am invited to unwrap.