Book Review: *Dreams and Dream-like Experiences: Their Role in Spiritual Emergence Processes*

by Darlene Viggiano;
LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2011
ISBN: 978-3-8465-2593-7
268 pages, paperback, $109.00

Through the spiritual dream one may touch the very ground of being
(Viggiano, 2010, p. 61)

Darlene Viggiano’s research explores dreams and dream-like experiences (DLEs) and their function in healing and wholeness in spiritual emergence experiences—coming back to ourselves in relation to the earth; the body, mind and spirit; and to the presence of being. She places numinous experiences at the forefront of healing when she queries: what is the role of dreams and DLEs (daydreams, reveries, and similar experiences) in the spiritual emergence processes? Spiritual emergence is defined “as the problematic awakening or maturation within the psyche of that which is capable of relating to a sense of the divine” (p. 12). She examines historical literature and seven interviews through a Jungian hermeneutic lens coupled with ResearchWare Inc.’s HyperRESEARCH software for objectivity and reliability. Through this, Viggiano demonstrates dreams and DLEs offer healing, guidance, instruction, revelation, and connections, and that such dreaming is animating and enlivening. Through these roles and functions, they aid dreamers in comprehending their phenomenological experience in the spiritual emergence process. In bringing attention to the transpersonal images, themes, and patterns in dreams and DLEs during spiritual emergence, one may glean what kind of person one is becoming. In addition, what important aspects of one’s being are reaching up into consciousness toward manifestation and action. I suspect the attention and reflection upon dreams and DLEs aid the individual in traversing the spiritual emergence process by helping the ego reference itself within a psyche that is shifting.

Historically, in western culture through the displacement of egalitarian societies by patriarchal religious frameworks, spiritual connection and processes became the proprietorship of religious leaders; the individual was considered incapable of connecting directly with the Divine. Along with the separation of spirit from body/mind, the Judeo–Christian dogma separated nature and the body from the mind. The instinctual/intuitive body, along with its connection to nature-based spirituality, was subjugated with the rise of patriarchal-based cultures (Rickards, 2006). Hence, dreams and DLEs fell into shadow along with the marginalization of the body, nature, and nature-based healing practices. Denial of the link between body and healing has resulted in a lack of ancient knowledge in western culture and the subsequent dearth of continued gains in such knowledge. Transpersonal research like Viggiano’s helps us reclaim and remember that ancient knowing inviting it out of cultural shadow and into collective consciousness.

Darlene Viggiano presents an excellent and accurate review of the literature related to Jungian hermeneutics, spiritual dreams and DLEs, and spiritual emergence. The book is well organized, straightforward in its objective, and conclusions. The descriptive profiles of interviewees are compelling to read and her results are clearly presented and articulated. I enjoyed reviewing her participants’ interview descriptions against Grof and Grof’s types of Spiritual Emergency, Lukoff’s Visionary Spiritual Experiences, and Vaughan’s Healthy Spirituality Frameworks. Through the use of a hermeneutic lens Viggiano reveals the connections, value and importance of mind, body, and spirit in the dreaming of those undergoing spiritual emergence (as
defined by the Spiritual Emergence Network as those experiences which evidence psycho-spiritual growth).

Using a hermeneutic lens to study the texts of dreams and DLEs is appropriate since this method was originally part of a theological process. Using this research method with transpersonal and spiritual images and themes seems fitting as its cyclical process allows for the depth of the material to be plumbed and realized. Through hermeneutic text study the researcher gains greater insight, recalibrating through reflection, shedding assumptions and presumptions as she cycles (Rickards, 2011). As Gadamer et al (2005) stated, hermeneutics, at its heart, invites a “fundamental questioning of the meaning of being” (p. 22). In regard to the Jungian literature, the method of dream symbol amplification and archetypal identification were employed to help reveal contextual themes, patterns, direction, and purpose toward accurate interpretation of images, and other dreams and DLEs content. Dreaming in this context is demonstrated to act as signposts, symbols, or markers in the spiritual emergence process. This body of work places luminosity in dreaming at the center of healing, validates spiritual development as an integral part of the healing process, and aids in a healthy societal understanding of such dreams, visions, spiritual crises, and more.

Dreams may bridge the everyday state of consciousness, the subconscious mind, and superconscious mind. As Viggiano comments, “One begins to wonder if spiritual dreams/DLEs represent microcosms of spiritual emergence processes, much like tree branches may be considered fractals of the tree itself” (p. 112). At another point Viggiano wonders: “Could it be that society’s response to such liminal processes is actually tipping the balance toward their destructive end, when it could be instead helping to tip it toward creative enlargement?” (p. 120) These kinds of insights and creative tangents are often gained through hermeneutic reflection. I hope in future work Darlene Viggiano will comment further on the fruit from the tree of hermeneutic contemplation.

I enjoyed, learned from, and recommend this book for scholars and interested readers of spirituality, psychotherapy, dream work, hermeneutics, pastoral counseling, and Jungian and transpersonal studies.

References


—Diane Greig Rickards, Ph.D.

Diane Greig Rickards, Ph.D., is an international presenter and writer on: the benefits of long-term dream group sharing toward psycho-spiritual transformation and collective wisdom; women spy stories of the second world war; and cultural/collective shadow. She has a private practice in British Columbia, Canada, as a psychotherapist and dream-group facilitator. Currently, Diane is Membership Chair of the International Association for the Study of Dreams. During the upcoming year she will be releasing a book on the transformative stories of participants engaged in long-term dream groups.

Editors’ Note: To learn more about Dr. Darlene Viggiano’s work, she recently did an online radio interview with Bonnie Bright, MA, founder of the Depth Psychology Alliance, entitled “The Role of Dreams in Psychospiritual Emergence” on April 20,
Deep in the Belly

deep in the belly
life stirs
not yet formed
but quickening.
slight movement waking,
promising of life to come,
in the dark
as yet unborn.
manifesting, yet waiting,
the warming Earth
stirs.

—Deanne Quarrie
(See bio on p. 48)