THE WAY OF THE DREAM:
CONVERSATIONS ON JUNGIAN DREAM INTERPRETATION
WITH DR. MARIE-LOUISE VON FRANZ

Produced and directed by Fraser Boa
With new introductions and epilogues
by Marion Woodman

REVIEWED BY

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The Way of the Dream, first released in 1985, has been re-released (2008) by the Marion Woodman Foundation with introductions and commentary by Marion Woodman. This 4 CD set is composed of 20 films, each approximately 30 minutes long. In these films, Marie Louise Von Franz, is interviewed about dreams by Jungian analyst Frazer Boa. Throughout the series, dreams of ordinary people, collected by Frazer Boa over a three-year period, are interspersed, illustrating, along with Von Franz’s interpretations, the universal themes that emerge in dreams.

Von Franz, a student and analysand of C.G. Jung, produced a prodigious amount of work explaining and interpreting Jung’s opus. In addition to dreams, she wrote extensively on alchemy and fairy tales. Von Franz contacted Jung after having a “big dream” when she was 19 years old. Her subsequent work with Jung led her toward a lifetime of inner exploration, practicing analysis, teaching, and writing.

In the initial series of films, Von Franz offers a little primer of Jungian psychology, bringing Jung’s basic concepts to life. Emphasis is on the shadow, the anima, the animus, and the Self. Von Franz appears to embody these concepts as she
amplifies their meanings in a myriad of ways. While listening to her rich and imagistic language, one cannot help but emerge with a deeper understanding. Von Franz goes on to speak specifically about dreams, all the time honoring the unconscious as possessing a superior intelligence, which, through dreams, can warn, predict, and hint at the deeper meaning of life. Von Franz describes dreams as being part of nature just as the appearance of animals and flowers are part of nature. The source of the dream is a creative mystery which we cannot rationally explain.

Von Franz explains Jung’s concepts through amplifying dream symbols in a very lively way, with much humor and erudition. Her amplifications, including the telling of myths, give the symbols form and substance. There are illuminating sections where she works with such symbols as the constellations, the moon, stars, angels, and stones to name a few. She does a section on cats and dogs that makes the instinctual side of life come alive. These amplifications give us a fuller sense of what these symbols can mean in both the context of mankind and the context of the individual person.

Von Franz describes the shadow as consisting of both inferior and creative factors, including the unlived life. In dreams, shadow figures, often enemies of the same sex, pursue us. They want to come to us, and we are afraid. Von Franz interprets various shadow dreams suggesting that we need to turn and face these figures. She speaks of nightmares as vitally important dreams, describing them as nature’s form of shock therapy, giving us a wake-up call that something on an inner level is terribly out of balance. For instance, she connects dreams of vampires to our split off complexes that suck the psychic life out of us. We have to use so much psychic energy to keep these complexes at bay that we suffer from a loss of vitality, as if our blood were being sucked.

The second disc in the series focuses on masculine development, especially the anima, the inner feminine aspect of men. Using alchemical pictures and language, Von Franz explains the relationships between the anima and the mother, the lover, the masculine and the feminine. She tells us some myths with the motif of “slaying the dragon” to illustrate men’s struggle to separate from the mother. She also brings in examples of dreams from her own analytic practice and uses them to illustrate her points. This pairing of the symbolic and mythological with clinical material is a very effective way of teaching.

The third disc focuses on the animus, the inner masculine aspect of women. Through dreams of women, Von Franz interprets what she sees as a major problem of our time, the lack of feminine development because of too much attention paid to animus demands. Here women act out roles with men, careers, and society rather than nurturing their inner feminine selves. The negative animus can be seen in dreams as a
hard fighting man that devalues the feminine, discouraging personal feeling. The negative animus is very critical, rational and attacking, keeping women from contacting their creative spirit.

A classic example of a negative animus fairy tale is “Bluebeard.” Here the owner of a castle cuts up and slaughters his former wives. Our heroine escapes with the help of her brothers. If a woman cannot escape her self-annihilating thoughts, she cannot escape her Bluebeard. In such a situation, the animus is allowed self-destructive opinions, impulses, and actions that rape her psychological personality. Von Franz sees this negative animus problem as being partially rooted in society which degrades feelings and intuition while exalting rationality and thinking. This way of valuing harms the instinctual life, making it incumbent on society to change.

Von Franz ends the series with remarks about the impact dreams can have on the Self of the dreamer. Through dreams we connect with the unconscious. The unconscious is the water of life and makes us feel alive. A sip of the water of life each night when we dream helps us feel in touch with ourselves and with the flow of life. As this series unfolds, one is spurred to think and muse over Von Franz’s remarks and cannot help but relate personally in some way to the material. Thus the effect of watching this series is to raise the consciousness of the viewer, offering the opportunity for a transformative experience.