

THE LOOM OF LIFE

Paco Mitchell

Weaving ...

Your comments on *thread, fabric, weaving, and the fates*, Russ, had a striking effect on me. The image of something like a secret doctrine came to mind, like an initiatory rite being performed in some pagan underground chamber—a vision revealed.

Or is that too dramatic?

I mean, you don't exactly go around promoting "secret doctrines," Russ, or wearing a tin-foil hat at the UFO festivals in Roswell, NM, or preaching from a pulpit fashioned out of a whale's jawbone, as Father Mapple did in Melville's *Moby Dick*.

That's not your style.

But *openness to dreams, to the strange, the accidental, the uncanny*, and so forth, *is* your "style." And that is how I experienced the *images of weaving*, woven into your reply. There was something mysterious and gossamer-like in your words—unexpected, uncanny, surprising.

In fact, your weaving-words reminded me of a *hand-woven scarf* I received as a gift. I love it for many reasons, one of which is that it seems to carry a "secret aura." I say "aura" because it *almost glows, but not quite*; and I say "secret" because, when I wear it, people don't realize I am wearing a kind of *Grand Talisman*—greater, let's say, than an "everyday" *amulet*. Both words—*talisman* and *amulet*—are related, having to do with magical effects to avert evil and bring good fortune. *Talisman* derives, by way of Arabic, from the Greek, *telein*, "to initiate into the mysteries." That original meaning gives it more weight, to me, than *amulet*—a magical charm—does, although they are often used interchangeably.

I think of the scarf, then, as my "heron scarf," because it consists of subtle colors that remind me of the feathers that Great Blue Herons "wear," especially female herons for their nesting-incubating-camouflage purposes. But there is one subtle difference between ten thousand run-of-the-mill factory scarves, and *this particular hand-woven scarf*, with its heron-feather colors—so resonant with actual herons sporting their "time-space" feathers. The difference is this—that among the gray, blue, and white longitudinal (warp) threads, patterned and interwoven, there appears *now and then*, in the cross-wise weft, a few fine, single threads the color of **gold**. The color is only faintly visible, almost subliminal—like a fine vein of finer gold, running back and forth across an exposed-quartz rock-face.

While writing about the scarf and its gold-colored thread, I began wondering about the properties of gold filaments. Since I'm interested in certain metals, thanks to years of working with copper-based bronze alloys in my Blue Heron Foundry, gold is interesting to me. What caught my interest here was its *extraordinary ductility*—in fact, gold is **the most ductile** of all the metals. To me, that property alone qualifies it as a cosmic marvel. For example, a skilled goldsmith can take *one ounce of pure gold*, and—with great care, effort, and an appropriate set of dies—the smith can, theoretically, “draw” that gold out to finer and finer diameters and therefore greater lengths. One site reported that a single ounce of gold can be (or could be), drawn into a wire **1250 miles long** and **1 micron** thick. Another website said the distance was “only” 43 miles of fine gold wire, but did not suggest a thickness.

Undoubtedly, shorter would be thicker; and since anything with a diameter of one micron (= 0.0000393701 inch) is invisible to the naked-eye, I take the 1250-mile figure as *theoretically possible*, though probably impossible in practice. But either set of numbers tells me that *gold* is transcendent, as *honey* is transcendent. In fact, from a mythic perspective, they *almost* mirror one another. For the Egyptians, gold was the “*breath of Ra*,” and honey was the “*tears of Ra*.” Close cousins, at the very least, and both related to the divine principle inherent in the sun.

To add a dash of Greek *gravitas* to this section, here's a little lesson on gold and virtue from Plato, writing in the fourth century BC: “*All the gold which is under or upon the earth is not enough to give in exchange for virtue.*” That was high praise, indeed, coming from Plato, reserved for virtue! Coming so soon after my Mary-Lute-Honeybee dream as they did, these gold-thread and gold-wire associations add considerable interest to the picture.

Ethics ...

I certainly agree when you say that there must be *many pathways* from the *individual originalities* of dreams, to a *collective acceptance* of the wisdom and value that those same dreams can hold for human collectivity, reflecting Plato's *virtue* back to the multitudes over time. I also agree with your sense that those two “tasks”—(1) getting *individuals* to attend to the originality of their own dreams, and also (2) learning how to facilitate the transmission of those originalities back to the *collective*. What seems crucial is how “the two” lead to “the third,” which you rightly identify as having something to do with *ethics*. Finally, you emphasize the ultimate challenge of ethical considerations, when you say: “***The new does not necessarily mean good.***”

With that last formulation, Russ, you have put your finger on what for me may be the “sticking point.” I cannot imagine a person taking a truly moral or ethical position as a matter of course, habitually, and over time, without first having access to a *healthy conscience*. To me, it means that, in order to make ethical decisions, one must be *free to decide otherwise* than what “the norms” dictate and allow—although

one must be prepared to accept the consequences of one's decision, to bear the *burden of guilt*. Without such a freedom, nothing ethical has taken place. Furthermore, now that the global population has been estimated as *exceeding* eight billion souls—several *years* sooner than expected—these moral/ethical considerations will become all the more complex, tortured, difficult to puzzle out, and ever more consequential, as our numbers continue to increase. But please beware: Our numbers cannot increase forever. And *crowds*, by their very nature, cannot make conscious ethical choices, any more than a *mob* can behave ethically (cf. J6 and the assault on the Capitol). What mobs *are* good at, though, is *acting without reflecting*, stirred into “action” by the contagion of raw emotions.

As for ethics, I suspect most of us prefer to comport ourselves *as if* our ethics were long-since established, like “settled law.” But that is far from being the case. The “triumph of reason,” is nowhere near as universal an achievement as we like to believe. For centuries now, our technologies have raced ahead of our moral development, especially in terms of psychological self-awareness, compassion for others, and so forth. Our technological achievements far outstrip our morals and ethics. After all, what was Confucius getting at when he said, “There is one moral essence”?

We are far from knowing *who* we are—let alone *what* we are and what we are *capable of doing*—for good and for evil—or *how* we can possibly deal with the magnitude and ferocity of what is already confronting us. And already, far more and far worse consequences are heading our way, *before* we have come to terms with the latest “shock.” It doesn't take much effort, really, to see what is happening, or to see where this is heading. All it takes is a little intuition, some differentiated feeling (i.e., valuing) and a lot of curiosity. [OK, there's more, but these will get us started.]

Simply put, I am suggesting that, *if we take ethics seriously*, we must deal as much with our psychological illnesses and constraints, as much as with any alleged cures—illnesses and cures, then, weaknesses and strengths, whether as individuals or in our collectivities. In Jungian terms, this simply means that for any “new” collective ethical values to take hold and put down roots, *it depends* on there being enough of us willing to acknowledge and come to terms with our personal and collective Shadows—a painful task most of us usually prefer to avoid. This suggests that, sooner or later, any ethical concerns we might have will run up against our most archaic—and “conservative”—instincts. One of the oldest of those instincts constitutes the basis for *our very ability to learn*, which is part of our animal inheritance—that is to say, **animal mimicry**. Thus, in the foundational aspects of our instinctive structures, this entire civilization and the cultures it hosts, rely to a high degree on ***our animal ability to imitate others***.

Of course, it's more flattering to think that we were wrought from clay with *God's own hands*, or dropped by a stork in a basket on a doorstep; but perhaps it's time to let go of those beautiful stories, cherished and beloved as they might be. By “let go,” I

mean we must get over the patronizing attitude that religious statements must be taken literally, as absolute certainties, instead of symbolically, as expressions of our nature, *in nature*. I must admit, however, that, as a former potter spinning clay on a potter's wheel, I am quite comfortable with the mythic image of the Egyptian god Ptah, *throwing the world* out of clay on his spinning potter's wheel.

As we ponder the mystery of humans, then—something we *definitely should be doing*—we have to take our capacity for genius into account, but we must also confront the human capacity for depravity. And we *all* carry these qualities as potentials, however pious we might be, or might wish to appear to be. No one escapes the truth of what it is to be human. Even if we never tempt the fates by entering the turbulent waters of individual ethics, *we are all*—each one of us—*capable of anything that humans are capable of*. Something to keep in mind.

“The Three Fs ... ”

Finally, what can I say in response to the *finale* of your ONTSO #7 reply, Russ? As I consider the question you pose at the very end, I can only *agree* with what you have set forth. But lest our readers mistake the meaning of my words, let me clarify a bit: In psychological matters, I place a premium—so far as possible—on ***experience*** over ***theory***. That goes for Jung and his works; but it also goes for you and your works. If you say something, or if Jung says something, I listen as carefully as I am able to at the moment. But, how can I “own” the knowledge you offer up, unless I have—in some fashion and to some degree—*experienced it myself*? “To say something” can at times be considered noble, but to “*experience the truth*” of something said, and then to *embody that truth*, that is the “*Gold Standard*.” In other words, that’s one place where we can find the golden threads that are woven into the fabric of our lives.

Same goes for dreams. We can recall a dream, but if we neglect to record it, the odds are that we will eventually forget it (especially at my age). We tend to assume, of course, that we “won’t forget.” But, thanks to the elusive nature of dreams, we *do forget!* Yet, even if we only record a dream, and then mull it over in memory, “au fond” (in the depths), doing so can affect something in the dynamics of our “body-psyche” unity. And if we carry an awareness of dreams we have recorded, close to our consciousness, and over time, that’s even better. Recording them helps us to remember them. The basic idea has to do with a process of “incorporation,” so to speak—that is, to find ways of ***living the dream in our embodied consciousness***.

This recalls Jung’s famous comment in the 1959 BBC TV interview, *Face to Face*, where John Freeman asked Jung: *Do you now believe in God?* Jung seemed nonplussed or surprised by the question, which, I can well imagine, may have sounded foolish to him. Later on, in his correspondence, Jung acknowledged that when Freeman sprang that question on

him, he had to say the first thing that popped into his mind. And so, we have the gift of Jung's honest and spontaneous reply, plus his personal example, which he left for the centuries: "I don't need to believe. I know!"

Over the years, Russ, if I have followed any of your teachings regarding the "Principles of the Three Fs" that you asked about, it was not because you declared this or that premise to be true—that helped, of course. But it was because it (1) sank in deeply enough, until it reached a kind of (2) "interior alchemical *laboratorio*," a "place" where I carry out my "*acid tests and experiments*," always testing for the truth; (3) in short, I was on the look-out for "evidence" that I could place in the scales, we might say, of *the Practice of Experience*. That's mostly how I learn, and I learned a lot from you and with you over the years.

You never steered me wrong. And gradually, despite my lingering burden of obtuseness, I finally learned how to "carry the Shadow."

Parthian Shot ...

In modern US slang, we still say "Parting Shot," to signal that a final comment is nigh.

But long ago I read that the modern saying was derived from "Parthian Shot," which referred to a tribal war-horseman's archery technique—turning in the saddle, facing backwards, and firing a deadly arrow-shot at your opponent as you galloped away. This will be my "Parthian shot," though my intent is not Parthian.

I know that my perspective on the topics we're discussing is *unorthodox* in high degree. I accept that. I also know that if I were to be too blunt in my statements, I would drive away readers who have not enjoyed similar experiences. And yet, Russ, don't these "changes" we both are calling for—*changes not just in ourselves, but in large numbers of others*—don't they require a fairly *radical shift in self-awareness* on the part of any of us caught up in the stormy, electric fields of accelerating change that are ruthlessly sweeping, as if to clean the world, like "God's whiskbroom"?

An image comes to mind. I see the jaws of a *blacksmith's leg-vise*—the kind I daily used at my foundry so long ago—closing in on us. On one side, we have the "Jaw of Forgetfulness" and the fake-bliss it permits. On the other side of the leg-vise, however, sits the "Jaw of Truth." Imagine, say, the Judgment Hall of Osiris, in ancient Egypt, where the "Heart of the Deceased" is weighed in the scales against the "Feather of Truth." Something similar confronts us today

I am not suggesting that we adopt ancient Egyptian religious practices in any wholesale way, but when a civilization such as ours has reached its *natural limits*, and the time for a radical renewal has arrived, we should consider quite seriously just what is required of us. Required? Yes, required. Of us? Yes, of us. Required by whom? That's

what you and I are inquiring into, Russ. I'm not sure it's ready to be named. Perhaps we should taste its wildness a few more times before the wildness has disappeared. But, if I am right in my feeling that we desperately need a "New (Religious) Dispensation," it will not come from those who profess outworn truths—even though it may seem to draw on some outworn truths that "still have a pulse." Besides, it is likely that only a relatively few of us can even approach such questions in our right minds, so to speak.

But sooner or later, the questions, or perhaps *The Question*— will eventually confront every one of us, one way or another. I know we have both posed and pondered these questions before, Russ, and others like them; but I feel that, in this case, repetition furthers. *It also furthers one to cross the Great Water.*

I know you share these concerns. You've framed the same questions: *How shall we then meet the circumstances we face? How shall we govern ourselves in this age of mistrust and condemnation? Whom can we trust? When is our "faith" misplaced? At what target do we aim the arrow of our trust?* There is no simple answer to any of these questions, of course, but there are multiple answers, and most likely, few of them, if any, will meet with *undivided acclaim*. Rather, I expect that an ever-mounting tension and strife, such as we see today, will continue mounting, until it can mount no higher.

While scrolling through some mythical motifs some time ago, looking for a particular "Mesopotamian cylinder seal," I came across a modern reproduction painting of an Egyptian scene, in which a maiden lay prostrated on the banks of the Nile. And what was she prostrating herself before? A crocodile.

Though it was a modern reproduction "in the style of" ancient Egypt, it grabbed me nonetheless. The image of a young, beautiful maiden—the kind who would be chosen as the "Queen of the Prom," or "Miss Mississippi," etc.—lying prostrate before a crocodile against a background of the stylized waters of the Nile, was profoundly moving to me. Almost as moving, I would say, as **the dream-image of honeybees making honey** inside the dream-body of the Mary-Lute-Behive, was profoundly moving to me.

When I woke with the Mary-Lute dream, I instantly knew: "This is one example of the kind of moral images we need to guide us into the future." To that, I could easily add the image of the maiden prostrated before the crocodile, as belonging to the list of "guiding moral images."

That may be asking a lot for some readers. Nor is it likely to draw throngs of "worshippers" away from the mega-churches of today—where all the dazzle and hoopla make people feel better, like gladiators at the Roman Coliseum made Romans feel better, even when the barbarians were breaching the gates. But, if we are ever to shift away from our "half-couch-potato/half-frenzied resource-extraction" civilization and consciousness, we need more dream images of the kind that you and I have been discussing.

I may be terribly naive in saying this, but I still think these rare considerations —however unlikely they are to be fulfilled—will serve us better than what the majority of us, in our eight billions, seem to be doing today, with a vengeance.

Speaking of which, when the author of the Bible verse proclaimed—“Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord. I will repay,” it was clearly intended as a cautionary note to humans: “Do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to (= make room for) “divine wrath.” Please note: the Bible does not call for humans to exact vengeance upon one another; rather, vengeance is reserved for God. It is interesting to me that the louder the protests issuing from the Christian Right become, the less “Christian” they are.

I think we need to be imagining what new terms and conditions would be required for a truly New Dispensation, given the nature of the “*transitional kairos*” we are in—this changing of the dominants of our age. The old dispensation was accompanied by a merciless persecution of heretics, forced conversions, public tortures, etc. But seizing power or grabbing wealth cannot be “the answer,” if our ethics are truly at stake. Nor is “trampling one’s enemies.” I suspect that The New Dispensation, if it ever comes, will somehow issue from the experience of a willing *relatedness to the Other*, which—or whom—we do not know yet.

But strangely, I cannot help but feel that *the Other already knows us*.

What do you think, Russ?

What Thread of Gold Lines the Dream?

Russell Lockhart

Paco, you provide compelling compass-like directions: *four* paths. Something tells me to take one path and let the others go for now. But I don’t “know” which path to take. Each one calls out to me. Which one to choose? Finally, I am struck by your reference to “gold” and the fineness, the thinness—to near invisibility—to which it can be worked. I immediately thought of the fine gold thread that might run through the fabric of a dream and how it might be missed entirely as consciousness was preoccupied by the more visible elements. Another thought that came was that *time may be a gold thread*—particularly when time itself does not stand out in the dream context.

This relates as well, perhaps, to what I have described elsewhere as the “oddness” of certain dream elements—often ignored as consciousness grapples with the obvious and known elements. But why would the source of dreams (the “Other,” as I call it) go to such efforts to “hide” or “obscure” important dream elements. Is the *Other* something of a trickster? Or does the *Other* work to pull the ego into something deeper, something unknown? Some of the dreams you presented in your “Gold, Silver, Zephyr, Harmonium,”

remarks, clearly are pulling the ego into depths that the ego experiences as a *different* reality from the usual categories ego consciousness concerns itself with. It would be like physicists being pulled into quantum reality—a reality so different from the regular world of phenomena. The difference seems to be that physicists don't resist the pull, but most people do resist the pull of dreams.

So, how does one look more closely at dreams? How does one “magnify” the dream in such a way that the gold thread becomes visible? I think the answer to this is to be found in going into the imagination under the weight of the dream.

It is commonly thought that the imagination is a “talent” of ego consciousness. I do not find this useful. I think the imagination is a function of the *Other*. When the imagination is engaged in relation to the deeper psyche, something else happens than *fantasy*. I do consider fantasy a form of consciousness that is readily accessible to ego consciousness. But the imagination is not so readily accessible and is quite different than fantasy. Fantasy is always serving the ego's needs. Imagination offers the ego ways to serve the *Other*. Jung might say as ways to serve the Self.

To access the imagination, one must let go of what the ego *wants*. One must become *host* to experiences that one does not know the nature of in advance. That is quite a demand on the ego, as it clearly requires a sacrificial state. In today's culture dominated by experience mediated by screens, there is no desire for sacrifice, only immediate gratification. Access to the deep imagination is lost, abandoned, orphaned.

The number of people engaged deeply in imaginal work such as Jung exemplified in his *Red Book*, is vanishingly small. Is there anything we can sense that would influence this? I've been looking here, there, far and wide, anywhere and everywhere I can think of, and I see nothing. That is why I always come back to what the dreams have to offer as “the way.” And if that is true, then that is also the way and the entry to the imagination.

The greater part of our understanding, politically, economically, culturally, and scientifically, has produced the conditions of the times that so threaten not just our way of life, but our very existence. It is hard to see how any “solutions” can come from the sources that produce and exacerbate the problems. As Einstein noted that way lies madness.

How then to increase the number of people who will listen to their dreams? In a previous section, I spoke of this as a “call to arms.” You responded to this by referring to how things can “go viral,” and this may lead to the recruitment of large numbers to the side of dreams. But then you point out, and rightly so, that what tends to go viral is mostly negative, an exemplar being the “Trump disease.”

Perhaps a more telling point is your reference to not having enough time to accomplish what a “dream wave” might accomplish. So perhaps the question about recruiting people in large numbers to attend to their dreams must itself be abandoned. To be honest, I do feel this way. Finding ways to be content with small numbers is possible and all that we may have time for whether in our personal lives or collectively.

My “call to arms” led you to write of your dream you entitled, “Gold, Silver, Zephyr, Harmonium.” What an extraordinary dream! The woman speaks of people all over the world working on the globes. So, here we see a dream itself talking about people working on the psyche. Perhaps more than we know. As a dream fact, it becomes a powerful message. And, as the dream suggests, it is only out of the complete collapse that something *different* may follow. The idea that we can recover what collapses must be given up.

Whatever comes after—if anything at all—it will be different and not something we can take for granted will be to our liking.

This suggests that any attempts to “preserve” what has led to the imminent threat to human existence, is a chimera, a heroic gesture that is doomed to failure. So, preparing for “how to be” in the collapse and after becomes the most urgent framing question. And, as you note, there is a sense that this question must be faced *individually* and not as a part of a crowd.

So here is the potential point of emphasis in terms of the framing question. Face the collapse individually in terms of becoming the individual one can become, that is, to *individuate*, to catch hold of and follow *that* instinct. What may come of one’s individuating may hold the answer to what one may bring forward in response to the collapse and what follows.

I’m thinking that the gold thread leads to the spirit of the depths, that the gold thread *is* the path of individuation. But it is not easy to see and not easy to find. What ego typically considers as the most valued things have nothing to do with individuation. And even if dreams are considered, the ego tends to be concerned with what they can do for the ego, how dreams can benefit ego consciousness, what value, if any, they might have for one’s daily life. All missing the necessary target.

This is a dour outlook to be sure. Something familiar to someone of Scots lineage. Can you think of anything Paco, to change this overhanging gloom? So far, I have not found anything and instead, I am fully embracing what this darkness points to. I am now content with this. It does *not* stop me from writing or creating in other ways. It does not stop me from loving. It does not stop me from being with animals and plants and other things I love. Small things, one might say. I feel that small, local, limited is now what nourishes. Grand schemes are no longer viable.

Thank you, Paco, for the image of the gold thread. I do feel I have found it and followed its path often enough to feel fulfilled in this life.

One cannot ask for more.