

Daimonic Imagination:
Uncanny Intelligence

Edited by

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

C. G. JUNG, TIBETAN TANTRA AND THE GREAT GODDESS: AN EXPLORATION OF SACRED ENTITIES AND ARCHETYPES

JUDSON DAVIS

There are moments in the lives of nearly all human beings in which everyday human perception gives way to encounters with miraculous phenomena that cannot readily be explained. Often these experiences—which may arise through the presence of discarnate entities, the emergence of spontaneous visions or intuitions, or through powerful, transformative dreams—leave a profound and lasting effect. It was just this kind of miraculous encounter that was experienced by the author in Tibet back in 1996, an experience that is given a heightened sense of meaning when examined through the lens of Jungian depth psychology and Tibetan Buddhist Tantra.

The event in question occurred whilst I was travelling as part of a small, overland expedition that had left the capital of Lhasa en route to the ancient city of Kathmandu, Nepal. One evening, whilst sleeping at Rongbuk Monastery near the base of Mount Everest, I awoke in the middle of the night and instinctively found myself drawn up a neighbouring hillside where, upon reaching the top, I encountered the undeniable presence of an utterly vast feminine entity that seemed to blanket the sky above. Her being exuded tremendous power, depth, and sensitivity, and at that moment I felt that my mother might have passed away and that her expanded spirit was now visiting me. However, when I put this question to the sky I received no reply, and later I would learn that indeed my mother was still alive, which draped this profound experience in mystery. What, then, was this immense and unfathomable entity, and how, though invisible, was she able to exude such power?

A few days later we arrived in Kathmandu, and the next day, while strolling through the side streets of this medieval metropolis, I came upon an image that immediately captured my attention. The image was of a female figure, clearly presented in the context of veneration and surrounded by a host of exotic and esoteric figures. At the time I was not well versed in the pantheon of Tibetan Buddhist deities and religious icons, and so I was not immediately attuned to the fact that this mysterious and alluring female presence, with her air of serenity and deep green colouring, was the Goddess Tara, accompanied by her cohorts and astral attendants. This specific identification would come to me at a later date; all I knew then, after first setting my eyes on her, was that she must return home with me. For more than a year prior to my return to the States she lay peacefully rolled up and stored away in my apartment in Kyoto, Japan. It was not until I returned to California that she was carefully framed and subsequently began to assume a distinct visual presence in my living space. However, a deeper appreciation of her essential meaning—in a broader religious context and in my own personal existence—remained largely beyond my conscious awareness.

Jungian depth psychology and Tibetan Buddhist Tantra

Some years later while in graduate school I became simultaneously exposed to the work of C. G. Jung and the precepts of Tibetan Buddhism, with their mutual focus on the sacred feminine. Jung, for example, placed great emphasis on the importance of actively embracing the natural world in a deeply spiritual and mythological framework,¹ and in this context he viewed nature as the ultimate manifestation of the archetypal Goddess. One of Jung's contemporaries, Erich Neumann, outlined the meaning of the sacred feminine—and its prominent correlation to the Goddess Tara—as follows:

The archetypal feminine in man unfolds like mankind itself. At the beginning stands the primeval goddess, resting in the materiality of her elementary character, knowing nothing but the secret of her womb; at the end is Tara, in her left hand the opening lotus blossom of psychic flowering, her right hand held out toward the world in a gesture of giving. Her eyes are half closed, and in her meditation she turns toward the outward as well as the inner world: an eternal image of the redeeming female spirit. Both together form the unity of the Great Goddess, who, in the totality of her unfolding, fills the world from its lowest elementary phase, to its supreme spiritual transformation.²

¹ See Jung 1963.

² Neumann 1983: 334-335.

Within the context of the archetypal feminine, Tara can be viewed as belonging to a broader group of female embodiments of wisdom and divine power in Tibetan Buddhism that include the *dakini*, which “has been sometimes compared in the West with Jung’s concept of one of the major archetypes, the *anima*.”³ The correlation of Tibetan feminine archetypes with the *anima* exists as an important component in this study, because “in the male-oriented Western world the concept of *anima*, as the feminine counterpart of the masculine psyche, and the proper integration of the two aspects, is crucial to the psychological balance of the individual and the culture.”⁴ Marie Louise von Franz further exemplified the fundamental importance of the *anima* as follows: “Vital is the role that the anima plays in putting a man’s mind in tune with the right values and [...] opening the way into more profound inner depths [...]. The anima takes on the role of guide, or mediator, to the world within and to the Self.”⁵ The role that the sacred feminine plays in the process of spiritual development was further outlined by Nathan Katz: “The inspiration of the anima or the *dakini* is a call for one to look inward. As such, she is the link between the conscious and unconscious. In appearing to consciousness, the anima calls its attention to what has remained hidden; she is the door to the unconscious.”⁶

Indeed, one of the most prominent archetypal figures in this process is the Goddess Tara, who exemplifies compassion, enlightened activity, and the fundamental qualities of a saviouress. Furthermore, she is “is revered as the mother of all buddhas. Tara, in her essence, symbolises the totally developed wisdom that transcends reason.”⁷ In Jungian terms, she “represents the mother archetype [...] she is the image of the mother who has integrated in herself all the opposites, positive and negative.”⁸ This notion of the reconciliation of opposites represents a primary element in both Tibetan Buddhism and Jungian psychology, and a fundamental principle in both traditions is the fostering of one’s true nature through the process of creative visualisation. Although there exists a conspicuous differentiation between the Jungian “Self” and the Buddhist “no-self” (and its attendant precept of “no-God”), in Tibetan tantra meditations and rituals centred upon the visualisation of deities such as Tara play an important role in this process:

³ Moacanin: 63.

⁴ Moacanin: 64-65.

⁵ Von Franz: 193.

⁶ Katz: 322.

⁷ Moacanin: 63.

⁸ Moacanin: 63.

Even though the notion of no-Self (Skt. *anatma*) is a central tenet of Buddhism, the Buddhist tantric path conceives that our potential for wholeness is personified in the symbolic form of a deity [...] The deity in Tantra is understood as a gateway or bridge between two aspects of reality [...] In Buddhism we speak of ‘relative truth,’ the world of appearances and forms, and ‘ultimate truth,’ the empty, spacious, non-dual nature of reality [...] The deity stands on the threshold as the potential for creative manifestation.⁹

Tara and other such archetypal deities are often depicted within the context of a *mandala*, a universal form that Jung came to see as the ultimate symbolic expression of psychic wholeness: “The mandala is an archetypal image whose occurrence is attested throughout the ages. It signifies the *wholeness of the self*. The circular image represents the wholeness of the psychic ground or, to put it in mythic terms, the divinity incarnate in man [...] which spontaneously arises in the mind as a representation of the struggle and reconciliation of opposites.¹⁰ He later explained:

It seems to me beyond question that these Eastern symbols originated in dreams and visions, and were not invented by some Mahayana church father. On the contrary, they are among the oldest religious symbols of humanity [...] and may even have existed in Paleolithic times [...] The mandalas used in ceremonial are of great significance because their centers usually contain one of the highest religious figures: either Shiva himself—often in the embrace of Shakti—or the Buddha, Amitabha, Avalokiteshvara, or one of the great Mahayana teachers, or simply the *dorje*, symbol of all the divine forces together, whether creative or destructive.¹¹

This passage emphasises the role that mythic imagery and sacred symbols play in spiritual development, and indeed both Jungian psychology and Tibetan tantra stress that such imagery arises in conjunction with the developmental stages that accompany spiritual growth. Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche expressed this notion in the following statement: “The underlying truth is that these teachings arise spontaneously from humans when they reach a certain point in their individual development. The teachings are inherent in the foundational wisdom that any culture can eventually access. They are not only Buddhist or Bon teachings; they are teachings for all humans”.¹² So, even in Buddhism, in which one’s true

⁹ Preece: 38-39.

¹⁰ Jung 1963: 334-335.

¹¹ Jung 1974: 170-172

¹² Wangyal: 71

nature is understood as lacking any inherent existence, mythic imagery and entities (e.g., Buddha Sakyamuni, Avalokitesvara and Tara) are employed in tantric methodologies as a creative means of furthering one's spiritual development. According to Lama Yeshe, this is done with the understanding that the deity we choose to identify with represents the essential qualities of the fully awakened experience latent within us. To use the language of psychology, such a deity is an archetype of our own deepest nature, our most profound level of consciousness. In tantra we focus our attention upon such an archetypal image and identify with it in order to arouse the deepest, most profound aspects of our being and bring them into our present reality.¹³

Psychic projections and autonomous dimensions

The role of archetypal images and entities in spiritual development is emphasised in both traditions, but their ontological status remains something of a mystery. Do such images and entities have an autonomous existence, or are they merely psychic projections? In this regard, although *thankas* and other forms of sacred art used in Tibetan meditative practices depict deities, paradises, and other dimensions, Lama Yeshe was careful to clarify that “tantric meditational deities should not be confused with what different mythologies and religions might mean when they speak of gods and goddesses [...] The deity we choose to identify with represents the essential qualities of the fully awakened experience latent within us.”¹⁴

Echoing the same perspective, Pratapaditya Pal stated that “on a more metaphysical level, the divine images are simply symbols of the Buddha [...] They are not themselves real but help to define reality, and are dispensed with by the enlightened mind and by the true yogi.”¹⁵ Jung, in *The Psychology of Eastern Meditation*, also emphasised this fundamental principle when he stated that “in the meditation it is realised that the Buddha is really nothing other than the activating psyche of the yogi—the meditator himself. It is not only that the image of the Buddha is produced out of ‘one’s own mind and thought,’ but the psyche which produces these thought-forms is *the Buddha himself*.”¹⁶ However, in apparent contrast to these assertions, Lama Govinda, in his foreword to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* that accompanies Jung’s own commentary on the same text, emphasised that:

¹³ Yeshe: 30

¹⁴ Yeshe: 30.

¹⁵ Pal: 36.

¹⁶ Jung 1936/1958: 567.

[...] animism permeates all Buddhist texts, wherein every tree and grove, and every locality, is held to have its own peculiar deities; and the Buddha is represented as discoursing with gods and other spiritual beings, inhabiting the Earth and the realms beyond, as if it were a most natural procedure. Only a completely intellectualised and Westernised Buddhism, which attempts to separate the thought-content of Buddhism from its equally profound mythological elements, can deny this animistic background and with it the metaphysical foundations of Buddhism.¹⁷

According to the present Dalai Lama, these various realms are inhabited by other conscious entities of widely varying characteristics:

Basically we can say there are different worlds, different experiences; human life is just one of them. What we usually call spirits are some different form of life, beings who have a different body and mentality. Within the desire realm, and more specifically within the environment inhabited by human beings, there is quite a variety of other entities [...] And they're all cohabitating with us right here.¹⁸

It is thus essential to note that Tibetans consider spiritual entities to be more than mere psychic projections, even if their religious practice of creative visualisation involves the worship of such iconic figures as Tara (who in this context would be understood as a psychic projection). Indeed, an array of spiritual entities are thought to possess their own autonomous natures and to exist in innumerable spiritual planes and universes, a phenomenon that is given greater clarity in the following passage by Tulku Thongdup:

Buddhist cosmology encompasses an unimaginably vast number of world systems beyond our earthly home. Outside of the mundane world, the six realms of samsara, there exist innumerable pure lands extending in all ten directions of the universe [...] These purified paradises are the dwelling places of advanced beings, including celestial buddhas and great bodhisattvas.¹⁹

In the light of the different perspectives presented above, one appears to be left with a complex and ambiguous ontological problem: do such entities and dimensions—as readily depicted in Tibetan sacred art itself—exist apart from human psychic projection, or are they “real” in the same way that human beings consider their own lives and the earthly physical domain they inhabit to be a factual reality? Perhaps this question can be answered in part when the Buddhist notion of “no-self” (i.e., no inherent

¹⁷ Govinda 1960: lvii.

¹⁸ Varela: 141.

¹⁹ Thongdup: 284.

existence) is applied to such entities, just as it applies to human beings. Nevertheless, the Western mind continues to insist upon the ontological reality of its own existence (on Earth and often elsewhere). More recently, however, such considerations have been expanded and given further clarity through the pioneering transpersonal findings of Stanislav Grof. His extensive research into non-ordinary states of consciousness strongly suggests the existence of an immense array of spiritual realms and experiential dimensions that lie beyond the perception of ordinary waking consciousness. His findings postulate the existence of two forms of ultimate reality, which are referred to as *absolute consciousness* and *cosmic emptiness*, or the Void. Absolute consciousness represents the supreme creative principle (which is responsible for the creation of manifest existence and finds a correlation in Jung's notion of the *Self*), and this creative principle is thought to co-exist with, and emanate from, the great Void, as outlined below:

When we encounter the Void, we feel that it is primordial emptiness of cosmic proportions and relevance. We become pure consciousness aware of this absolute nothingness; however, at the same time, we have a strange paradoxical sense of its essential fullness [...] While it does not contain anything in a concrete manifest form, it seems to comprise all of existence in potential form [...] The Void transcends the usual categories of space and time, and lies beyond all dichotomies and polarities, such as light and darkness, good and evil [...] agony and ecstasy, singularity and plurality, form and emptiness, and even existence and nonexistence [...] This metaphysical vacuum, pregnant with potential for everything there is, appears to be the cradle of all being, the ultimate source of existence. The creation of all phenomenal worlds is then the realization and concretization of its pre-existing potentialities.²⁰

This passage addresses a number of primary themes in Buddhist cosmology, including the Void as primordial emptiness, the reconciliation and union of all opposites (one is immediately reminded here of the famous Buddhist adage, *form is emptiness, and emptiness is form*), the existence of a timeless dimension, and the presence of countless world systems. It also touches upon the theme of manifest existence arising out of this Void, and Grof proposed that some of the various realms and the entities that inhabit them are understood to interact with and inform our earthly dimension in ways that are consistent with aspects of Jungian psychology:

²⁰ Grof: 30.

The material realm that we inhabit and with which we are intimately familiar seems to be just one of these worlds [...]. Of special interest is a domain that lies between our everyday reality and the undifferentiated Absolute Consciousness. It is a mythological realm that has been extensively studied by C. G. Jung and his followers [...]. Jung referred to it as the archetypal realm of the collective unconscious. The beings inhabiting these realms seem to be endowed with extraordinary energy and have an aura of sacredness or numinosity. For this reason they are usually perceived and described as deities [...]. The encounters with mythological beings and visits to mythic landscapes [...] can be in every respect as real as events in our everyday life, or more so. The archetypal realm is not a figment of human fantasy and imagination; it has an independent existence of its own and a high degree of autonomy. At the same time, its dynamics seem to be intimately connected with material reality and with human life.²¹

Indeed, it is just this kind of heightened dimension that is sometimes accessed through the creative, meditative and dream practices emphasised in both Jungian psychotherapy and Tibetan tantra. Tulku Thongdup, for example, confirmed that many stories in Tibetan Buddhist literature tell of “meditators who leave their bodies for days at a time to travel through the invisible world.”²² Such practitioners, who are known as *delogs*, then “come back to their bodies to record their extraordinary journeys, which could span the lowest rungs of hell and the sublime pure lands.”²³ One fascinating account of just such a psychic journey—abounding with mythic imagery and sacred entities—is revealed in the following experience of a young Tibetan woman:

Dawa Drolma felt that she moved through the sky, soaring like a vulture. She found herself in the manifested pure land of Guru Rinpoche, the Buddha in the form of a realised master. There was a boundlessly vast field. In the centre she saw a giant red rock mountain in the shape of a heart. The mountain was surrounded by many sharp, sword-like mountains, all shining with a reddish colour. The sky was adorned with a canopy of five colored rainbow light. All kinds of beautiful birds were singing and playing joyfully. The ground was covered with flowers of all kinds and colors. The whole atmosphere was filled with an amazing sweet fragrance that overwhelmed all her senses. There was also a blue mountain, as if made of sapphire. These were not vague appearances, but vivid images with real presence [...]. In the middle of the mountain, she saw the inconceivable palace of Guru Rinpoche called the Lotus of Light. The palace was the

²¹ Grof: 69-70.

²² Thongdup: 6.

²³ Thongdup: 6.

enlightened wisdom of Guru Rinpoche himself, spontaneously appearing in the form of a luminous mansion of light [...]. This pure land was filled with masters, dakas, and dakinis [...]. Accompanied by White Tara, Dawa Drolma entered into another inconceivably beautiful palace, made as if of red crystal [...]. In the middle of a great hall, Dawa Drolma saw an enormous throne—higher, it seemed to her, than a three-story building [...]. On that throne she beheld the amazing presence of Guru Rinpoche, Padmasambhava, the embodiment of the wisdom, compassion, and power of the enlightened ones [...]. Dawa Drolma drew closer to the throne and touched her forehead to the feet of Guru Rinpoche [...]. Guru Rinpoche bestowed upon her empowerments and blessings. With great compassion, he said [...] ‘Tell people what you saw and entreat them to pursue virtue’ [...]. Then White Tara led Dawa Drolma to the hell realms. Dawa Drolma journeyed through the experiences of the bardo. She saw the Dharma King of the Lords of the Dead in wrathful and terrifying form in his Court of Judgment [...]. She also saw the results of karmic effects and the severity of sufferings of the hell realms with her naked eyes, so she would be able to more effectively on her return to the world of the living [...]. White Tara then took Dawa Drolma to visit Potala, the pure land of Avalokiteshvara, and Yulo Kopa, the pure land of Tara, before returning to the human world [...]. Dawa Drolma spent the rest of her life teaching Dharma based on her delog experiences and totally devoting her life to the service of others [...]. In 1941, at the age of thirty-two, she died [...]. People witnessed many miracles at the time of her death and cremation. She and her delog accounts inspired the hearts of many people in many parts of Eastern Tibet to believe in the law of karma and rebirth. That in turn awakened a kinder nature in many.²⁴

This extract portrays an array of mythic imagery and entities that represent aspects of the practitioner’s own inner spiritual processes while simultaneously revealing heightened experiential domains. In the light of the decidedly extraordinary nature (at least in modern Western terms) of this other-worldly portrayal, the question must again be asked: how does one differentiate between this woman’s own spiritual processes and projections and the supposed autonomous existence of the entities who appear in her experiential vision?

The intermediate world of the *mundus imaginalis*

Attempting to make sense of such psychic phenomena requires an approach that is not limited to our usual modes of perception, and it is arguably in the pioneering work of Henry Corbin that a cogent ontological

²⁴Thongdup: 151-155.

basis for such phenomena can be established. Corbin, who was an intimate colleague of Jung, delved deeply into the ancient mystical traditions of Iran, and through the work of Zarathustra, Mazdean angelology, and Sufism discovered an inner world of archetypal forms and entities (consisting of subtle bodies, as in the Tibetan tradition) that lies between cognitive awareness and the five physical senses. This dimension of *active imagination*, or *medio mundi*, requires an organ of perception inherent in the soul, one that “implies an intellectual faculty that is not limited to the sole use of conceptual abstraction nor to the sensory perception of physical data.”²⁵ Accessing this dimension thus reveals an intermediate universe that is neither that of the Essences of philosophy nor that of the sensory data on which the work of positive science is based, but which is a universe of archetype-Images, experienced as so many personal presences.²⁶

Perceiving this intermediate universe through the faculty of visionary intuition reveals “a world of archetypal celestial Figures which the active-Imagination alone is able to apprehend. This Imagination does not *construct* something unreal, but *unveils* the hidden reality.”²⁷ Corbin further emphasised that:

[...] the active Imagination thus induced will not produce some arbitrary, even lyrical, construction standing between us and ‘reality,’ but will, on the contrary, function directly as a faculty and organ of knowledge just as *real* as—if not more real than—the sense organs [...] This being so, the authenticity of the Event and its full reality consist essentially of this visionary act and of the apparition vouchsafed by it.²⁸

This perspective is further echoed by the Tibetan Buddhist scholar David Snellgrove as it relates to the tantric practice of creative visualisation:

It would be useless to invoke any form of divinity, higher or lower, without believing in such a being. The high point of any such rite is the descent of the actual divinity (known as the ‘wisdom-being’ or *jnanasattva*) into the symbol of the divinity (the sacramental-being or *samayasattva*), which has been prepared for this mystical (or magical) conjunction. The practitioner is certainly taught that the divine forms are also emanations of his own mind, but they are not arbitrary imaginings and they are far more real than his own transitory personality, which is a mere flow [...] of consubstantial elements. In learning to produce mentally such higher forms of emanation

²⁵ Corbin: 4.

²⁶ Corbin: 4.

²⁷ Corbin: 11-12.

²⁸ Corbin: 11.

and eventually identifying himself with them, the practitioner gradually transforms his evanescent personality into that higher state of being.²⁹

This manner of visionary perception not only provides access to multiple psychic planes, but according to Corbin also serves to transform the physical Earth into a visionary geography in which “the *Imago Terrae* can reflect its own Image back to the soul, or reciprocally, that the soul can fix its meditation on the archetype-Image.”³⁰ Thus, the various paradises in the esoteric cosmology of all religious traditions are understood as the scene of visionary events in which plants, water, mountains are transmuted into symbols, that is, perceived by the organ of an Image which itself *is* the presence of a visionary state. Like the heavenly Figures, the earthly landscapes then appear haloed with the Light of Glory, restored to their paradisaal purity.³¹ Corbin further emphasised that:

The active Imagination perceives and shows itself an Earth which is other than the Earth which is seen in ordinary sensory experience [...]. Phenomenologically, we should understand it as being at the same time the Light which constitutes, haloes, and enlightens the soul, and the primordial Image of itself which the soul projects. [...] The *Imago Terrae*, while it is the organ of perception itself, also signifies those aspects and figures of the Earth that are perceived, no longer simply by the senses nor as sensory empirical data, but by the archetype-Image, the Image *a priori* of the soul itself. The Earth is then a *vision*, and geography a *visionary geography*.³²

The most essential representation of this *Soul of the World* is the Sacred Feminine, and especially the figure of the Great Goddess, which concurrently finds expression in such archetypes as the World Mountain (a universal image that is further delineated below). As outlined previously, such entities are accessed in the *mundus imaginalis*, an intermediate dimension that is itself the *centre*—the “meeting place of Heavenly Beings and Earthly Beings,”³³ of time and eternity—and as such “the Earth of visions has to be reached in *medio mundi*, where real events are the *visions* themselves.”³⁴ Such a psychic/subtle dimension thus represents “a world symbolizing with the sensory, which it precedes, and with the intelligible, which it imitates. It is a mixed world, mediating between the sensory and

²⁹ Snellgrove: 131.

³⁰ Corbin: 20.

³¹ Corbin: 16.

³² Corbin: 29-30.

³³ Corbin: 16.

³⁴ Corbin: 32.

the intelligible; it is the *center of the worlds*.³⁵ Thus, through such sacred mythic imagery as the World Mountain:

[...] what the soul shows to itself [...] is precisely its own image [...]. The universe thus imagined, free from misleading and perishable sensory data, is therefore a function of the pure transcendental Imagination and depends only on its categories, which are a priori archetypal Images.³⁶

Corbin further stressed that although such images and entities possess an independent existence in the subtle dimension of the *mundus imaginalis*, they may also on occasion manifest in the company of earthly inhabitants, and indeed their symbolic existence finds ubiquitous expression in the art of both world culture and religion.

Amplification of the mystical encounter at Mount Everest

Using this framework, I will now proceed to evaluate in greater depth my encounter with the undeniably autonomous Goddess entity at the base of Mount Everest, and my subsequent, inexplicable absorption with the Tara image in Kathmandu. First of all, it must be remembered that the reconciliation of opposites, and more specifically the union of one's inner nature and the world of physical form, exist as a fundamental aspect in depth psychology as well as in the tantric tradition. Accordingly the energies of both the physical body and the physical environment represent key aspects in the process of spiritual growth and transformation: "Tantra cultivates a return to the world where psyche and soma, consciousness and matter, are in an intimate inter-relationship. The understanding of subtle energy, both within the body and in the natural environment, makes this profound reconnection possible, principally through the body".³⁷ The body, then, essentially acts as a kind of alchemical vessel in direct relationship with the Earth, in that "throughout the body, both male and female elements localise in twenty-four particular places [...] These inner elemental centers correspond to the surrounding land, which gives Tantra a particular significance in relation to nature."⁴⁰ These male and female elements, which represent both exterior and interior forces, are represented in the tantric tradition as *dakas* (masculine aspects) and *dakinis* (feminine aspects) Preece explains their connection as follows:

³⁵ Corbin: 76.

³⁶ Corbin: 76.

³⁷ Preece: 245.

The relationship between the inner body centers and the outer land locations is very subtle. In Chakrasamvara Tantra, the forces that inhabit these centers take the aspect of dakas and dakinis. When a tantric practitioner meditates, he or she aims to tune into the relationship of these inner and outer forces and allow a process of healing to take place. In this way, the outer land manifests through the dakas and dakinis and blesses and heals the inner energies. The land is then experienced as if it were a complete mandala with specific locations for different functions, just as the body serves different functions.³⁸

Within this context, it is interesting to note that Tibetans consider dakas and dakinis to exist as definitive and very powerful spiritual entities who inhabit the “above land” centres in “a dimension of reality known as Khacho Shing, a realm closely related to our own, yet more subtle and more intimately connected to the elemental forces of nature.”³⁹ Further, in his book *The Sacred Place*, Paul Devereux observed that the interaction of cosmic and earthly forces appears to be highly concentrated in certain physical environments, and it is especially pertinent to note that throughout human history mountains in particular have been known to exist as the sacred refuge of the Goddess. This is precisely the belief that is held by the native Tibetan and Nepalese inhabitants who occupy both sides of Mount Everest. This mountain has long been considered a sanctified entity because many mystical experiences and encounters with various discarnate beings have been reported in its immediate vicinity. With this understanding in mind, the connection between Mount Everest and the Goddess in my own experience deserves further consideration.

The World Mountain

Mountains hold a special place in the religious thinking and creative iconography of the Himalayas, and Mount Kailash in particular (located in western Tibet) ubiquitously appears on *thankas* and other forms of Buddhist and Hindu art. Like Everest, Kailash represents the archetype of the World Mountain, and Mircea Eliade noted that in its various manifestations “this cosmic mountain may be identified with a real mountain, or it can be mythic, but it is always placed at the center of the world.”⁴⁰ The Sacred Mountain, as a form of *axis mundi*, thus represents both a physical and spiritual entity, and, as the outer form serves to activate the inner archetype, it is also directly linked with the union of

³⁸ Preece: 247.

³⁹ Preece: 248.

⁴⁰ Eliade 1992: 110.

opposites and the psychosomatic dynamics of the chakra system. In the words of Lama Govinda:

To Hindus and Buddhists alike Kailas is the center of the universe. It is called Meru or Sumeru, according to the oldest Sanskrit tradition, and is regarded to be not only the physical but metaphysical center of the world. And as our psychological organism is a microcosmic replica of the universe, Meru is represented by the spinal cord in our nervous system; and just as the various centers (Skt.: *cakra*) of consciousness are supported by and connected with the spinal cord (Skt.: *meru-danda*) [...] in the same way Mount Meru forms the axis of the various planes of supramundane worlds.⁴¹

This structural cosmology serves as the very basis of the all-important Buddhist stupa, and in depth psychology the World Mountain is one of the foremost archetypes of the Self and a most powerful and evocative symbol of spiritual ascendance. It also warrants mention that “as Kailas corresponds to the spinal column, it represents the axis of the spiritual universe, rising through innumerable world planes.”⁴² Here one finds a direct correspondence between the presence of the axial mountain, the human chakras, and the concurrent access to other dimensions of reality. In Tibetan Buddhist cosmology there exist numerous dimensions in various planes of existence, including such realms as Khacho Shing (the Pure Land of the Dakinis) and Yulo Kopa (the Pure Land of Tara).

In considering this relationship between sanctified realms and the natural world, Eliade observed that “where the sacred manifests itself in space, the real unveils itself [...]. It opens communication between the cosmic planes (between earth and heaven) and makes possible ontological passage from one mode of being to another.”⁴³ From this perspective it seems quite probable that my contact with the Goddess was facilitated through the spiritual axis of Mount Everest, and whether she derived from the realm of Kacho Shing, Yulo Kopa, or one of the many other exalted paradises, there can be no question of her advanced spiritual nature. In this way her emergence served to activate a deep, on-going archetypal process while simultaneously revealing a wholly expanded sense of divine potential. This points to the existence of greatly heightened celestial or psychic realms that are, in the Buddhist tradition, major steps forward along the path to final liberation. The vital link that then resulted in the amplification of the experience came through my subsequent encounter

⁴¹ Govinda 1966: 273.

⁴² Govinda 1966: 276.

⁴³ Eliade 1957/1987: 63.

with Tara's mythic image, as encountered in the shop in Kathmandu. For me the image carried tremendous power (as a personal mythic projection/association), and ultimately led to a much deeper appreciation of my own unfolding spiritual direction and processes. It also demonstrated the presence of a vast and autonomous spiritual entity, an utterly immense and numinous mystery that is symbolised by—and transcends—the image of Tara itself.

Therefore, what appears to have remained hidden and unconscious in my own experience was a deep and abiding realisation of the archetypal feminine, which was brought into direct conscious awareness through my encounter with the Goddess entity at the base of Everest. If one thus understands the deities depicted in mythic imagery as essentially symbolic representations of transcendent forces, these symbols possess a potent numinous quality by virtue of their archetypal nature. In Tibetan tantra they also denote—like the progressively advanced stages of the *chakras*—heightened levels of spiritual development to which inhabitants of this earthly dimension aspire. As previously noted, the Buddha is said to have interacted with otherworldly entities, and indeed the very basis of the bodhisattva ideal involves the instruction and guidance of all sentient beings in this earthly realm—and in innumerable other dimensions as well. The very mysterious encounter with the vast ethereal and distinctly feminine presence at the base of Mount Everest remains one of the truly remarkable experiences of my life, and whether she is identified as Tara, a *dakini*, or otherwise she certainly would seem to correspond directly to the sacrality and divine mystery of a genuine Goddess.

Conclusion

These kinds of experiences involve encounters with sacred entities and archetypes whose ultimate nature defies any absolute determination or conclusion. At the same time, there appears to be an intriguing interrelationship between such advanced entities and the related archetypes that are recognised—and/or created by—the human psyche. Both Jungian psychology and Tibetan Buddhist tantra emphasise the importance of creative engagement with these archetypal figures, and each acknowledges levels of spiritual autonomy that are distinct from the human psyche. In both traditions spiritual awakening is the ultimate aim of human existence, a process that is intended, in modern developmental terms, to lead the ever-more actualised individual “from the ego to the Self, from the unconscious to consciousness, from the personal to the transpersonal, the holy, the realisation that the macrocosm is being mirrored in the microcosm

of the human psyche.”⁴⁴

A deep and abiding awareness of this intimate interrelationship between inner and outer—of the psychic processes that unite the archetype of the World Mountain and the Sacred Mountain of Everest, or the blessed Goddess entity and her sanctified mythic image—is fundamental to this process, and accordingly the legitimacy of the imaginal workings of the human psyche must be realised. In the words of Lama Govinda:

The subjectivity of inner vision does not diminish its reality-value. Such visions are not hallucinations, because their reality is that of the human psyche. They are symbols, in which the highest knowledge and the noblest endeavor of the human mind are embodied. Their visualisation is the creative process of spiritual projection, through which inner experience is translated into visible form.⁴⁵

As described above, this inner vision necessarily extends beyond the realm of psychic projection to include an expanded cosmology of experiential dimensions. As Tulku Thongdup was keen to emphasise, “there exist innumerable pure lands extending in all ten directions of the universe [...]. These purified paradises are the dwelling places of advanced beings”⁴⁶—advanced beings that include the Great Goddess in one or more of her many manifestations.

My encounter with the vast and enigmatic Goddess-entity at the base of Mount Everest remains a great and enduring mystery, but the transformative impact of this experience and the subsequent effect it had on the direction of my spiritual development cannot be underestimated. Indeed, it seems that this encounter served as the impetus for the realisation of a much broader process, one that is ultimately shared by all human beings through their engagement with sacred mythic images and symbols. These sacred forms and archetypes constitute the guiding principles of spiritual awakening, and point to the existence of autonomous entities who sometimes interact with inhabitants of the earthly domain in a profoundly transformative manner.

⁴⁴ Moacanin: 67.

⁴⁵ Govinda 1969: 92.

⁴⁶ Thongdup: 284.

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