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“Ally Work”

Dr. David Van Nuys Ph.D., aka ‘Dr. Dave’ interviews Jeffrey Raff, PhD

(Transcribed from <http://www.shrinkrapradio.com> by Gloria Oelman)

Introduction:

My guest today is Jungian Analyst Dr. Jeffrey Raff and we’ll be discussing a variant of active imagination which Dr. Raff calls ‘ally work.’ Dr. Raff is co-founder of the C.G. Jung Institute of Denver and a senior Jungian Analyst who has been in private practice in Denver since 1976. Trained in Zurich in the early 1970’s Dr. Raff is the author of four books, including *Jung and the Alchemical Imagination*, *The Wedding of Sophia*, and *The Practice of Ally Work*. For more information about Dr. Raff consult our show notes at <http://shrinkrapradio.com>

Now here’s the interview.

Dr. Dave: Dr. Jeffrey Raff, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Jeffrey Raff: Well, thank you for having me.

Dr. Dave: I was referred to you by your fellow Jungian Analyst Monika Wikman, who I’ve interviewed a couple of times and my last interview with her was about active imagination and I asked her who was doing good work in that area and yours is the name that she gave me.

Jeffrey Raff: Ah, that’s nice.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, so as a result I’ve been reading your fascinating book on the practice of ally work, so maybe we should start by my asking you ‘how did you initially get into this ally work?’ because it’s not a term or a concept that I recall encountering per se in Jungian literature. So I’m wondering when and how did you first get into it?

Jeffrey Raff: Well it actually goes back to the late sixties, early seventies, I had myself some spontaneous experiences which I really, at that time, didn’t know how to understand or explain to myself. So that started me reading and looking around and seeing if I could find someone to help me understand that and the searching took me finally to Zurich where I got into analysis and into training in 1971 and at that time Casteneda’s books were very popular.

Dr. Dave: Exactly. That was my first association to it, *The Teachings of Don Juan* and the subsequent ones.

Jeffrey Raff: Yes, the first four books in particular I found really incredible and of course he writes quite a bit about the ally and looking at that material, led me into shamanism where the concept of the ally is also very well known. So I kind of stole the term, I borrowed the term from both Casteneda and shamanism in general to

describe the kind of experience that I was having. So, you're right, there isn't really the concept of the ally in Jungian literature – not the way that I've been using it. The closest similarity would be what Jung called the Self and there are some similarities and also some differences there.

Dr. Dave: Well, also in Jung's Red Book there is Philemon, the imaginal figure that he interacts with. Do you think even though he didn't use the term 'ally' I'm wondering if Philemon would be an example of what you mean by an ally.

Jeffrey Raff: Yes, absolutely. Jung's description... of course we've just had *The Red Book* a few years ago. Before that, I had to go through *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* in which he talks about his relationship to Philemon and it struck me then that this was very much what I was calling an ally figure. And *The Red Book* just goes into much greater depth showing that.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, that must have been very gratifying to you when *The Red Book* came out because even your book here on the practice of ally work predates the release of *The Red Book* and so *The Red Book* really gives a lot of substance to what you're talking about in your book. That must have felt really good.

Jeffrey Raff: It did. I had a hunch that's what he was talking about but it really wasn't until we could get the actual *Red Book* and look at it that it became clear that it's very, very similar.

Dr. Dave: Yes. So I'm trying to recall, it's been a long time since I read the Castenada books but Castenada is a young student of anthropology, I think he's in graduate school perhaps at the time and reported that he... and I have to say that book had a... I think you and I must be of a similar generation and it had a big impact on a lot of people in our generation.

Jeffrey Raff: Oh, yeah. Very much.

Dr. Dave: It was very inspiring and probably our audience is a lot younger by and large so that's why I'm reprising it a little bit here. So this young anthropology student goes to Mexico and encounters a Yacqui Indian wise man, sorcerer, magician, shaman – whatever word we want to use – and one of the things he tells him is that he needs to be open to, to cultivate, an ally, which is a kind of... later you use the term spirit guide, so it's a kind of spirit guide. Have I characterized it accurately?

Jeffrey Raff: In the first book *The Teachings of Don Juan* the ally is actually used to refer to the experience with hallucinogenics. Peyote for example would be kind of an ally. Don Juan talks about the little smoke and drug related information of that sort but in the later books he divorces the concept of the ally from the hallucinogenics and begins to talk much more about a very powerful spirit guide who, on its arrival, gives you not only information but power, who performs sorcery and that kind of thing. So it became a very important figure in the books that Castenada wrote.

Dr. Dave: Indeed. Now you point out that this work is in the 'imaginal' versus the 'imaginary' realm and I think for many people this may not be an easy distinction. It's a little bit subtle and sometimes I lose my grip on it as well, I think. Maybe you

can take us through the difference.

Jeffrey Raff: Yeah. Primarily the difference is emphasized because in our culture the imagination is looked at as something unreal and not to be paid too much attention to other than if you're engaged in some kind of a fun activity or something. I think that's slowly beginning to change but certainly when I was writing, the idea was to try and distinguish what I mean by the imaginal, from imaginary. Imaginary would have that quality of being a kind of fantasy and not particularly real in an experiential way. It's something that, kind of seeing pictures in your mind and having a fantasy of some kind but the imaginal is conceived to be an actual real realm. This is an idea that is beginning to gain ground largely due to the work of Hillman and Henry Corbin who wrote a lot on the Sufis and their concept of the imaginal, which had a big influence on me later on too. So the imaginal is conceived of as being a realm of experience that is not the same as the external mundane world but is neither simply an imaginary space, it's a real space that we experience though a special mode of perception. It gets a little confusing but the mode of perceiving that we use is the imagination and that allows us to experience the imaginal. Now the use of the word imagination in this sense is what Jung meant by the term 'active imagination' which was, for him, a technique of experiencing the world of dreams and inner figures while awake. So, one wouldn't have to go to sleep to dream, one could do it very consciously which makes a very big difference. But those experiences which stretch across a wide spectrum but we conceive of them to be real experiences, nothing unreal or, in quotes, 'imaginary' about them, so I try to use the term imaginal to emphasize that we're talking about very real and often very profound experiences.

Dr. Dave: Well, you're talking about complex ideas here and I have to compliment you on writing about them very clearly in your book. The book just comes across as very clear and not a lot of intellectual obfuscation and so I really appreciated that. And as I was listening to you just now, something that came to mind that didn't come to mind when I was reading the book but comes now, is the movies *The Matrix* in which and I don't know if this comes into the underlying metaphysics or not but the notion that I know is in some branches of Buddhism as practiced in India, the idea that what we think of as objective reality is an illusion and that maybe all of this is swimming inside of a some kind of other kind of soup, in which all of this is illusion and kind of matrix-like in a way.

Jeffrey Raff: Right. Well the difference would be from the Jungian perspective the ideas that both realities are real – if you only emphasize of one to the detriment of the other you're very one-sided actually. So the idea is that we wouldn't say your ordinary realm of experiences is illusionary but it's not the only realm of experience and what we'd normally consider to be illusionary, like the imaginal, is just as real. And one of the fascinating things in doing this work is to try and experience and understand how those two realities overlap, how they interact with each other and we're just beginning, I think, to try and understand that.

Dr. Dave: Okay. Now, as you described, the practice has its roots in shamanism, which you've mentioned and alchemy and Kabbalah and Gnosticism. Maybe you can give us a little bit of the flavor of each of those and I know they're big topics...

Jeffrey Raff: Yes, they are.

Dr. Dave: So it's a kind of a difficult task that I'm setting for you here. The shamanism part I definitely understand both from reading books like the Don Juan series and also one of my students went on to go very deeply into shamanism and has created an institute where he takes people to Peru and other places in the Amazonia and does shamanic trainings and has really turned it into a very successful business. And I went to a couple of his workshops and I'm kind of a tough nut to crack, I don't enter into this imaginal realm easily or dramatically but I did have an experience during one of the exercises there in particular where I really got a good taste of what that could be like and I could see that if I were devote more time and energy to it where I just had this fleeting image that I was bodily picked up by an eagle and it was flying with my little self. It was like a giant eagle and I could see this green valley and it was very vivid but just very brief.

Jeffrey Raff: Yeah. That's a good example. That would definitely be what we mean by imaginal experience and you're right, it takes a lot of practice. It takes a lot of work, which is why I decided to write the book the way that I did. It was really designed to offer people who might not otherwise have access, some kind of exercises to develop their skill in particular with the ally. But the traditions that you mention, the reason that I was interested in them, is they all, along with a few others, they all compose what's today called the esoteric tradition, which is a tradition very, very ancient in the West but one that's always been a little bit underground, a little bit not quite the accepted spiritual direction and teachings. And they have a lot in common because I think to a great extent they come from the same original source which probably is shamanic in origin. I suspect shamanism is one of the oldest forms of the esoteric.

Dr. Dave: Yes, I've read that elsewhere too, other people have either to some extent documented it or speculated in the same way.

Jeffrey Raff: Yeah and shamanism is about healing very often. It's about exploration of the imaginal realm. It can be about sorcery but one of the fundamental things in shamanism is the ability to interact with spirits and it's the interaction with spirits that allows one to heal or to know where the tribe needs to go, or where the hunting is good and those kinds of things. So Eliade, who wrote a great deal on shamanism, calls the shaman the master of ecstasy and by that he meant that the shaman has the ability to go into trance state, or ecstatic states of some kind and then have an interaction with the spirits and one of the most important spirits that they would interact with would be their own personal ally who would then protect them and take them to other spirits and be their companion.

Dr. Dave: I have the impression that this ally often took the form of an animal.

Jeffrey Raff: Yes, quite frequently. It could appear as a human being and in fact in some of the shamanic traditions the shaman would actually marry his or her ally and they would live together in a hut outside the village and he or she might have a human wife as well that lived within the village. So the ally was conceived of as a spirit that could take many forms and that one would frequently engage in a relationship of love and living together in a very real sense. So that always fascinated me – that particular tradition.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, that is fascinating. I hadn't heard that part before. Well, you draw upon alchemy a lot in the book and the impression of alchemy that most of us have received through, quotes, the dominant culture, is one of false science, or proto-science, the early beginnings of what we know as chemistry but there's a whole other way of looking at it. Tell us a bit about alchemy.

Jeffrey Raff: It's a very complex topic and alchemy is really the reason that I fell in love with Jung and his works because he's written three massive volumes on alchemy from the psychological perspective. But alchemy has always had two main traditions – one is the physical side of it and the other is the spiritual side of it. And the alchemists' real goal – and again there's what we call pseudo alchemists and real alchemists – the pseudo alchemist was trying really to create gold, physical gold. That's what we think mostly of alchemy, that these are people who are kind of mad in some way, and they're in their laboratories trying to create gold to give to the king and they got into a lot of trouble because they couldn't really do it. But there were other alchemists who believed that gold was a symbol and was a symbol of what we would call enlightenment and that if you could create this symbolic gold, you would experience not only enlightenment for yourself but you would have a tremendous effect on material reality and bring what they considered to be redemption into the world. And that I would guess, the alchemy that we can document goes back almost three thousand years from the West, so it's a very old tradition that went through a lot of forms. But one of the keys in the spiritual alchemy is that the imagination was the main way that you would experience the gold and for the alchemists a thousand years ago there wouldn't be any difference between imaginal gold and physical gold. They believed that if you can actually experience, really experience, the creation of gold within your own soul, you could make physical gold too. At that point many of them didn't want to, or that became less of a goal for them. But the way that one did the alchemical processes, you know, mixing all their little chemicals, they understood every chemical process symbolically and not only symbolically but imaginally, meaning that the alchemy had to be experienced by the alchemist. Not in the physical world but in this imaginal world for it to be real.

Dr. Dave: One of the key concepts of alchemy that you dwell upon a bit in the book is the Philosopher's Stone. How does the Philosopher's Stone relate to... in a way stones seems like a strange image – how does that relate maybe to the gold that you were talking about?

Jeffrey Raff: Well the Philosopher's Stone is considered the real primary objective of alchemy and it actually transcends the quest for gold because the idea in alchemy is if you can create the Philosopher's Stone then that stone will transform anything you want it to into gold, so if you have the Philosopher's Stone you can make as much gold as you want. But it had other uses too, it was considered to be the healing elixir so if you had the stone you could heal diseases and you would have access to the spirit world. Again they put a lot of emphasis on interaction with spirits, so the Philosopher's Stone is a great mystery, there is really no conceptual way to translate it. It is, I consider, the ultimate form of it, to be what I call in my writings a 'baby God.' It is the incarnation of the divine within the material world and in that sense the fact that it is an incarnation of the divinity that I relate it to the ally which I consider to be also an incarnation of the divinity. So it's a stone but it's not. It's a paradox in

all the images, it's considered to be hard and rigid like a stone but it flows like water simultaneously so there's nothing that you can say about Philosopher's Stone that you wouldn't have to include its opposite. So in that sense it certainly seems to be a divine figure and in alchemical imagery in the emblems that they painted and drew in their little workbooks the Philosopher's Stone is very often depicted as a youth, an adolescent boy often really is a divine being.

Dr. Dave: Hmm, hmm. And at times you refer to spirit guides, in fact the sub title of the book is *Meeting and Partnering with Your Spirit Guide in the Imaginal World* and the term spirit guide would seem to open up a whole sort of New Age association. I wonder if that's anything that you've struggled with, or if you can comment on that?

Jeffrey Raff: Ah, yeah, definitely. I personally wouldn't use the term spirit guide that frequently but you know this was kind of a publication decision because it was thought that spirit guide would be a term that would be most understandable on the face of it and mostly because of New Age material. I think the problem with New Age thinking often is that it's very simplistic and it makes these things sound very easy and you know if you think good thoughts and you do good things, then good things will happen to you and you are the master of your own destiny, things of that sort, with which I disagree very much. So I go to some pains to try to distinguish the ally from angels or the kind of New Agey spirit guide image. I think it was in the book called *Healing the Wounded God* that I have a chapter on angels and I try to dispense with some of the New Age stuff, I got so virulent about it my publisher had to tell me to cool it, be a little nicer.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. You know this whole thing about entities and the imaginal world brought up a whole bunch of associations for me and lead to questions that I want to ask. There are other people who have written about hierarchies of entities and one that comes to mind is Emanuel Swedenborg, Swedish mystic. I'm not sure of the period in which he lived – would it be around the sixteen hundreds, do you know?

Jeffrey Raff: Yeah, I believe so.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, somewhere kind of in that realm and he's described as both a successful politician, I think and philosopher and scientist of that time but he also either cultivated or had a gift for, I'm not sure which, for going into interior, maybe almost like hypnogogic spaces and where he encountered a whole chain of beings, or entities or hierarchy from very high ones to very low ones. And then I'm thinking of the neuroscientist John Lilly who passed away some years ago and the entities that appeared to him when taking LSD in a sensory deprivation flotation tank, was perhaps an extreme way to go after this but he had an experience certainly that in some ways seemed reminiscent of Swedenborg.

Jeffrey Raff: Yeah and some of these traditions that I was talking about have this idea of the hierarchies of beings as well. Kabbalah very much so, the whole experience for some of the mystics in Kabbalah is to have encounters with divine entities at a ever higher level, you kind of climb up that world tree that's so central to Kabbalah. You slowly climb up by experiencing these entities and there's definitely a hierarchy to experience them through. The Sufis also have a great tradition of all of these spiritual entities that one can experience.

Dr. Dave: So I guess one of the questions that immediately comes up is, if there are very high ones, there are also going to be very low, perhaps diabolic entities, is there a danger in this work of hooking up with the wrong kind of entity?

Jeffrey Raff: There is. In my experience it's not a frequent thing but it can happen and one of the things that I try to emphasize in the book on ally work is to trust your feelings, to develop what I call the felt sense so that you can feel if an entity is dangerous or threatening or hostile and I give a few other criteria to try to use, for example if it's critical, or if it makes you feel bad about yourself, it's an entity not to be trusted.

Dr. Dave: I was struck by your use of the term the felt sense because another author who's used that term and it's the only other place I recall encountering it, was Jim Bugental, now deceased, humanistic existential psychotherapist. Were you at all familiar with his work?

Jeffrey Raff: No, I don't think I've ever heard of him.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Beautiful writer. I would highly recommend him. Another thing that came to mind – because you talk about how you can form a relationship with the ally and the ally will be your supporter – so linking that with the chain of beings that we were talking about – what about the idea of a guardian angel? I'm not sure where that idea came from but it seems to have some relationship to your idea of the ally.

Jeffrey Raff: Well, again, the ally is a complex entity. It can function as a guardian angel. The guardian angel is thought to be... I think it goes back originally to the early Judaic tradition and then it was developed in Christianity and might even go back to Persian thought around the same time as it appeared in Judaism. But it was conceived of as this entity whose primary goal was to take care of you, to look over you, watch over you, especially if you were righteous and you did the right things and so on. The ally can be thought of in those terms but that's not the only thing that it is. For example one of the differences that I speak of with the ally from other entities, is that you can develop a real deep union with it. You can enter into a relationship with it that can go on for years and years in which both you and the ally are transforming. You're both engaging with each other in such a way that each is growing in it's own way. And you don't see that normally with these other entities, you don't see a union of love and marriage that allows both partners to transform and to help transform each other.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, that was one of the fascinating things about it as you describe it in the book, is the idea that the ally can nurture you but that you also have some responsibility to nurture and grow the ally.

Jeffrey Raff: Right. Yeah and this comes from two main sources – Jung's idea of individuation in which the human being is trying to develop a total personality that includes both conscious and unconscious, that includes inner and outer and so on. He suggests in some of his more controversial writings that God too has to grow and individuate. The idea we have of a perfect and perfected being is not entirely correct, that the whole universe is evolving and so the idea of the ally as being your personal

face of God, the entity through which you can experience the divine most profoundly, suggests that the ally also is individuating, is growing. That it is not in a state of perfection but is also trying to develop and transform in certain ways.

Dr. Dave: I'm thinking of Greek mythology now, certainly the gods weren't perfect beings there.

Jeffrey Raff: They were a little too imperfect, I think (laughter).

Dr. Dave: They definitely had room for some growth.

Jeffrey Raff: And you couldn't quite trust them. You really don't see too many legends and stories of forming a bond with one of the gods or goddesses and then kind of entering into a relationship with it. They represented more of what I would call the demonic quality of the spirit, which is when you really don't have a personal relationship to it and you have no idea what it's going to do. That's another danger in this work is that you may encounter entities that are not hostile but they're not particularly beneficial either. They just are what they are, they're like a force of nature and if you encounter those it's much harder to build a relationship and get to a place where you can actually trust them in the same way that you can with an ally.

Dr. Dave: I'm thinking here about channeling and people who have, quotes, channeled books – books of wisdom, some of them quite large and extensive and complex. I'm thinking that that must have some relationship to this imaginal world and imaginal beings that we're talking about here.

Jeffrey Raff: Yeah, I think it does. When I was in graduate school getting my PhD I wrote a research paper on automatic writing.

Dr. Dave: I have that written in my notes here too as a place to... Go ahead.

Jeffrey Raff: Which actually wrecked my reputation in the school. I was from that moment on rather suspect and then when I got into Jung, I was even more suspect. I actually had to leave that school eventually but I was struck in the automatic writing that you find themes that are almost universal and it does, from the description that the practitioner gives, you do get the sense that they are engaged with an entity of some kind that is speaking to them through the writing process. It's one of the reasons in the book on the ally work also I did emphasize writing exercises and I think part of the reason for that was because the idea of automatic writing had a big impact on me. And trance states, mediums, certainly seemed to be a form of engaging the imaginal and the spirit. Mediumistic techniques go back to shamanism too, so they have a very long tradition. One of the primary differences between active imagination work and mediumistic work is that we don't recommend going into any kind of trance or use of any hallucinogenics. The goal is really to be as conscious as you would be in your normal life but in a kind of altered state in which the imaginal becomes more accessible to you.

Dr. Dave: Given the history of being an outcast in school for your interest in automatic writing and in Jung, I'm wondering how this book, these ideas of working with the ally have been received in the Jungian world. Are you an outcast yet again or

have you found a home?

Jeffrey Raff: Neither, quite. They're somewhat controversial. There's definitely a whole school of Jungian thought that embraces the idea and then there's a school that is much more conservative and doesn't quite like the idea and would rather have all of these things discussed much more from a symbolic, rather than an experiential kind of position. In other words the ally would be an experience of an inner psychological state rather than an entity. But I think if you do look at *The Red Book* it is very clear that Jung experienced these things as entities, as, I think, a cornerstone of his thinking about active imagination. So I can't quite totally relax at home in the Jungian world but certainly there is a good deal of receptivity.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I'm not surprised by either of those, you know, we're all totally human and that sounds like the human spectrum there at work. I think often the way that people often experience divinity, or entities maybe is shaped both by culture and by whatever religious framework they work within. So for example and I think this might be relevant here, my grandmother who was a Pentecostal evangelist, she said that Jesus appeared to her twice and spoke to her and gave her instructions and she was never in a mental hospital, always functioned at a very high level and there are other people like that as well. So do you think that experience that she reported somehow is a subset of what you're writing about?

Jeffrey Raff: Oh, yeah, I think so. It's interesting, we tend to have to say, you know, we're not crazy, we weren't in a mental hospital, we didn't... because our view in the culture of the imaginal is that it's pretty crazy to have experiences like this and that's really too bad. But in terms of the traditions it very much seems to be the case, up to a point, that the imaginal will speak to you in the language that you're most comfortable with. So, if you're a Christian it wouldn't be at all surprising that you would have an experience of Christ. If you were a Muslim you might have an experience of an entity called Kabir, or Allah, or Mohammed might come to you – something of that sort. And it makes good sense if you're a good Christian and you have an entity come to you that's not particularly Christian, you would be a whole lot more nervous about engaging with it. Of course in an earlier tradition of Christianity we'd label those things demonic and not to be trusted. So it seems to be the language of the imaginal is tailored to the individual having the experience. And I'd say up to a point because after you reach a certain depth you could be asked to grow past a particular tradition or concept, especially if that's too narrow for the kind of experience that you might be heading towards. I had a client who was a very devout Christian and very religious, whose dreams began... one dream she had was that God was coming for her and she rushed out of the house in great expectation and was horrified to see that God was a Tyrannosaurus Rex. Not exactly what she had expected and it's images of that kind will come when the inner guide is asking you to go beyond what you already know and embrace the unknown parts of the divinity. And that's a very profound place and a very difficult place.

Dr. Dave: You mentioned that in Christianity people would discount these kinds of experiences as perhaps being demonic and so they should be ignored and I'm also thinking that in Zen Buddhism the belief is, 'hey, don't pay attention to that stuff – that's a distraction, don't go there.'

Jeffrey Raff: Yes, I think that's true. I actually met a Zen teacher once who told me that that's what they wrote but they actually had a tradition of active imagination which was kind of a fascinating thing and Tibetan Buddhism is a very rich tradition of active imagination and entities and they very much pay attention to those. But the more classic forms of Buddhism, that's right, there's a big difference between the approach toward the imaginal and a kind of pure meditational state in which you try to block out anything that distracts you from that quiet space.

Dr. Dave: Yes, yes. Now we mentioned before your idea that the ally needs our love and support in order to develop and so I was interested that you mentioned Sufism because I put that in my notes. I didn't encounter it in the book, it's probably there but I didn't see it, but it put me in mind of the idea in Sufism of ecstatic love, such as that expressed by Rumi and Hafiz and others.

Jeffrey Raff: Very much so. The Sufis have a tradition – one of the Sufi traditions speaks of the friend and the friend is almost exactly the way that I describe the ally. It's not only your personal divinity it can come as your own personal Holy Spirit who will give you your own unique revelation. In the school of Sufism put a great deal of emphasis on the fact that we all have our own image of God and we all have our own ability to have revelation and your revelation will be a lot different than mine. That's one of the special qualities of it. So that tradition has a very long history of dealing with what I would call the ally, probably going back to the Persian original indigenous religions there as well.

Dr. Dave: So kind of where the rubber meets the road in a way, is what is the value of ally work? What can the ally give us?

Jeffrey Raff: Well if you can imagine that we live in two worlds simultaneously, that the outer world is only one world that we actually inhabit and the other world is almost totally unknown to most people, it's almost totally unconscious but has a tremendous effect on us in fact. Again this question of how the worlds interact is a great question but it does seem possible that what happens in the interior space, whether we're conscious of it or not, determines what's going to happen in the external space.

Dr. Dave: That of course makes me wonder what's the relationship between this imaginal world that we're talking about in which the ally and other entities exist and dreaming – nocturnal dreams?

Jeffrey Raff: Hmm, hmm. Yeah, I think we would have to be able to see in the imaginal space a whole lot of different territories. When I say the imaginal I'm probably speaking of a whole lot of sub-sets and things that we would need to differentiate. Dreaming would be one of them. There are different levels of dreaming – if you have an ordinary every day dream about an entity, it's probably a psychological state that you're dreaming about but there are dreams that you can have in which you feel an incredible numinosity and power of a being in your dream and those feel different.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Jung talks about big dreams and I've had maybe just a few big dreams. One comes to mind in which maybe there was a sort of entity there and I

know when I wake up from those dreams, there's no temptation at all to want to analyze it or tease it apart. It just feels like a gift.

Jeffrey Raff: Exactly. It feels like the experience that it was. There isn't any reason to interpret it.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. There was just a kind of bliss that was present there.

Jeffrey Raff: Yeah and so those dreams take us much closer to the deeper layers of the imaginal space. Probably all dreams are influenced by them to some degree or another. I just wanted to go back to your other question about what is the value of it. In alchemy the idea of creation is that it's an imperfect thing. It's a process, something in evolution and it's the task of the alchemist to bring the light into the darkness of our world to help that evolution move in a better direction than it would normally do. The alchemists, even the Christian alchemists, believe that Christ's death on the cross was only the first step of redemption, that we're all responsible for helping redeem the world. And as I said it's also helping to redeem God, which if God is not this perfected being but is an evolutionary process also, then it's partly our responsibility to help that evolutionary process and the ally is the key to doing that kind of work. It's the key to becoming more conscious of both worlds ourselves. It helps us to individuate. I think our relationship to the ally actually speeds up the process and at the same time it helps the universe in it's own evolutionary process.

Dr. Dave: If it's not too personal a question, can you share how the ally has supported you in your life, or any kind of breakthrough, or insight, or translation from that imaginal space into this other space that we normally live in? Has it impacted you?

Jeffrey Raff: Yeah, I first had an experience of the ally when I was twenty one, which was in 1967 and just the fact of having that experience changed my life – moved me out of the direction that I was in into taking up psychology and studying these spiritual traditions. It helped me through severe illness, giving me the ability to deal with that at a much deeper level than I would have been able to, helped me in my own relationships. There was a time, even in my marriage, that was very difficult early on. I'm not sure what I would have done but the ally really encouraged me to stick it out, work through the relationship, which was a very, very positive thing to do. So it can bring information, it can actually... like you were talking about your dream, you have experiences that you don't need to interpret, or even try to understand, they're just profoundly numinous and those kind of experiences transform you. They help you individuate and go onto these deeper spaces, develop your own consciousness. And I believe we're born to individuate, the reason that we're here is to become who we really are and to become as conscious as we can be and the ally really helps with both of those things.

Dr. Dave: Wow. And you emphasize that everyone has an ally which is a wonderfully comforting thought, that everyone can contact and develop a relationship with their ally but you also very strongly indicate that it takes a strong commitment, that it's something that you have to be willing to devote considerable time and energy to.

Jeffrey Raff: Yes, I think that's right. Its like any relationship, you know, if you're going to commit to a relationship that you want to see develop and last for your whole lifetime then it takes a whole lot of work, whether that's in a marriage or in an ally kind of relationship.

Dr. Dave: And there are resistances that arise if you're trying to undertake that journey.

Jeffrey Raff: Yeah, there are a lot of resistances. That's one thing we can count it.

Dr. Dave: The main one that I think you mentioned that I could immediately relate to would be the little voice that'll come up in your head and say 'oh, c'mon, this is a bunch of nonsense.'

Jeffrey Raff: Right. Yes, I think that's a universal one. It's that kind of inner skeptic and critic that says that... no matter how profound the experience you can almost count on the next day thinking 'well is that really what happened or did I make that up?' And that can be a very diabolical kind of resistance in the sense that it sucks the life out of your work because you don't trust yourself but it's something that I think everybody who does this work really has to deal with.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I can fully believe that. Well, it's probably time for us to start winding down here so I'm wondering if there's anything that you'd like to add that you haven't had a chance to touch on here.

Jeffrey Raff: Well, I would just emphasize what you just brought up, that I believe that there is an ally for every human being and that there is a certain level of growth and transformation that can occur when the human being turns in the direction of the ally and begins to do that work. And without it neither the ally nor the human being develops in a certain sense. I don't think this is the only way that one can work with the imaginal, there are definitely other traditions but in terms of what the ally brings, it's pretty unique and it's not only about growth and power and transformation, it's about a deep, deep sense of love and being loved, which is a tremendous comfort to know that you have that companion with you no matter what life brings to you.

Dr. Dave: Yes. This has been a fascinating conversation and an inspiring one. Dr. Jeffrey Raff I want to thank you for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Jeffrey Raff: It's my pleasure, I was happy to be here.

WRAP UP:

I hope you enjoyed this conversation with Jungian analyst Dr. Jeffrey Raff. As you heard me suggest, Dr. Raff's book on ally work is very clearly written. Most of the chapters are devoted to a practical progression of exercises designed to assist the serious student along the path of dialoging with and then developing an ongoing relationship with their personal ally. One area I meant to bring into our discussion was lucid dreaming – in fact Dr. Raff does comment on lucid dreaming in the book. Let me read you a couple of pages from the book and you'll get a feel for his writing and the approach. So starting midway on P.113 here goes:

Developing awareness while asleep is as difficult as developing it during daily activities. Being aware in your dream is known as lucid dreaming but I do not mean by this term what is often meant. Frequently there is associated with the notion of lucid dreaming the idea of controlling your dream but that is not the goal of this practice. You do not want to control your dream but only to be aware as it occurs. Moreover, in this practice, no matter what is happening in your dream, you want to reach out for the ally and turn your attention to it. For many years I had the experience of seeing my ally appear in the middle of a dream that had nothing to do with it. This became almost comical as if the ally appeared as a character in a play but in the wrong play. I realized however that it wanted my attention, so gradually I practiced remaining aware of what it was doing. In time I felt union with it in my sleep and in dreams of all kinds. This certainly does not happen every night but when it does it's a beautiful experience. As in my case it's easiest in sleep if the ally appears first.

To develop the skill of being aware of your ally while dreaming ask the ally to appear in your dream. Ask it every night before going to sleep and when it does, try to remember its appearance in the morning. Next when it appears try to remain aware of it no matter what else is happening in the dream. Together you and the ally can develop a sense of union that will permeate and in time transform your experience of dreaming. During those periods when you have more time to yourself, practice shifting your awareness between the ally and some other activity such as reading. Read for a short time and shift your focus to the ally. Pay attention to the ally for a while and then return to your reading. Ask your ally to partner with you in developing your focus. Work together as a team to develop this skill.

And then he has a little section on obstacles:

The major obstacle during the day is the compelling fascination of daily events. Without practice your attention is usually so firmly placed on the world around you that you do not remember the ally. Work slowly and patiently to develop the ability to shift your awareness at will. The obstacles to connecting with the ally during sleep are all too apparent. Sleep is a deep state of unconsciousness in which awareness is dimmed greatly. Be patient and approach this effort in a playful way. Ask the ally to come into your dreams and try to become aware when dreaming. Lucid dreaming can be great fun but requires great effort.

Okay so that gives you both his perspective on lucid dreaming in relation to ally work and also a feel for his writing. I'll be sure to place a www.amazon.com link to his book *The Practice of Ally Work* on the www.shrinkrapradio.com website. Dr. Raff regularly conducts workshops on ally work by the way. You can contact him for more information through his website, which you'll find at www.jeffraff.com

Thanks to Dr. Jeff Raff for sharing his explorations into ally work with us.