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“Exploring Archetypal Patterns”

Dr. David Van Nuys Ph.D., aka ‘Dr. Dave’ interviews Dr. Michael Conforti PhD
(Transcribed from <http://www.shrinkrapradio.com> by Gloria Oelman)

Introduction:

My guest today is Dr. Michael Conforti and we’ll be discussing his research into archetypal patterns. Michael Conforti PhD is a Jungian Analyst and is the founder and director of the Assisi Institute. Dr. Conforti’s work has resulted not only in a training institute based on his discoveries, but also the development of a new discipline: Archetypal Pattern Analysis. He has been a faculty member at the C.G. Jung Institute in Boston, the C.G Jung Foundation of New York, and for many years served as a Senior Associate faculty member in the Doctoral and Master’s Programs in Clinical Psychology at Antioch in New England.

A pioneer in the field of matter-psyche studies, Dr. Conforti is actively investigating the workings of archetypal fields and the relationship between Jungian psychology and the New Sciences. He has presented his work to a wide range of national and international audiences, including the C.G. Jung Institute of Zurich and Jungian organizations in Venezuela, Denmark, Italy and Canada. He is the author of *Threshold Experiences: The Archetype of Beginnings* and *Field, Form and Fate: Pattern in Mind, Nature and Psyche*. His articles have appeared in *Psychological Perspectives*, *San Francisco Jung Library Journal*, *Roundtable Press*, *World Futures: The Journal of General Evolution*, and the journal *Spring*.

Dr. Conforti is a Senior Fellow of the James MacGregor Burns Academy of Leadership at the University of Maryland. He is currently working on a new book: *When the Gods Are Silent: Awakening to Meaning and Healing*.

Now here’s the interview.

Dr. Dave: Dr. Michael Conforti, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Michael Conforti: Thank you Dr. Dave it’s a pleasure. Thank you so much for inviting me.

Dr. Dave: Well, the pleasure is mine, I’ve been hearing of your work over the years so I’m really happy to have this opportunity to speak to you and one of the people who has been very faithful about making announcements about the various activities you have going on is Bonnie Bright of the Depth Psychology Alliance.

Michael Conforti: Bonnie Bright is a gifted woman who is doing... she’s probably one of the premier people in the entire field right now promoting Jungian psychology and creating this online forum. Officially probably over three thousand – thirty five hundred people at this point from all over the world and I have the highest regard and respect for her and appreciation.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I do too. I feel very happy to have the strategic partnership with her that we have going on. You're a Jungian and I'm always interested in the stories behind a person becoming a Jungian analyst. I know it's not necessarily an easy thing to do. Maybe you can tell us the story of how, in Joseph Campbell's terms, you got the call.

Michael Conforti: I also love a bit of a back story. I agree with you, there's always a back story that's probably even more interesting, or at least as interesting. There're a couple of pieces that are a part of this back story. I grew up in 100% Italian culture – my grandfather's from Calabria in Southern Italy, my grandmother's from Sicily and my other grandparents are from Salerno up off the Amalfi coast and there was always this sense of another world. We'd go to their house and visit... and specially my father's parents, they really maintained the tradition – they never really assimilated to America, it was all Southern Italian and we were raised really Sicilian. And I remember going to their house and they were maybe five blocks away from us and just even the aromas of the house – the aromas of the house were different from any other house.

Dr. Dave: Oh, I can imagine – Italian cooking.

Michael Conforti: Oh, it's Italian cooking, it's the old Italian DeNobilis cigars they would smoke and then there was the wine making – my grandfather probably made 500 gallons of wine every year and like a lot of people that make wine, he would give it away. It's just a wonderful thing to do – the generosity and the spirit and you make it 'cause you want to share it. Then there was the dialect, when I go to my mother's side they all spoke Neapolitan and it was an interesting sound and I was aware at a young age – even though I wasn't speaking Italian but I would hear it a lot. My mother wouldn't let it in the house but it was a sense of, especially with the Sicilian – this is very old. This is a really old, old culture and the traditions were so strong – the sense of family, the sense of the worshipping of the mother, the deep regard for the father and he had eleven kids, my grandfather and the kids at that point when I grew up, they were all still alive and they were there at least once or twice a week. All the kids came and all the cousins were there and they'd call you Dave or Dr. Dave, it was to this day, these are the best experiences of my life.

Dr. Dave: Oh, I can imagine how rich they are. What a rich background. I've been to Italy a couple of times and loved it and last time I was there I was on the Amalfi coast and so I can understand how it is that you do these programs now at Assisi in Italy – every summer you do a program there but back to your story of your call.

Michael Conforti: Well, a lot of it began by the power of knowing there was another world and I remember, to fast forward for a second and we'll go back and forth, when I began training at the Jung Institute in New York, I began really young – I was 26 and it was unheard of back then. And one of the teachers, talking to the whole class said 'when did you know there was a sense of self and the other world?' This other world of the archetypes and the transcendent and everyone's like scratching their heads and opening their notebooks and I put my hand up. He said 'yes, Michael.' I said 'being at my grandparents home' and he knew – he was from Israel. He knew about the power of tradition and that began the whole journey there. So that was a

very big part of it and so we always had traditions – the food, the language and the love of the other culture and so that was really the start. The other one was growing up Roman Catholic and like many of us that survived the Catholicism, it was a very rich background for me and I grew up at a time where it was still at the very end of the period when the masses were in Latin and again you didn't know what was being said but you knew you were brought into something.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Conforti: And then how many – forty years later, fifty years later – I begin reading, both in Jung and also in mythology, they say there's a term called anamnesis, which a lot of it means that when you go into the time of the Catholic mass and the benediction and transubstantiation, the early Christians really believed. That wasn't a ritual, you were literally brought back – the word anamnesis – you're brought into an eternal time where this stuff is really happening. It's like opening a door to a movie house and the movies are ongoing – that's what they believed. And Jung wrote about this in detail and you know I had no words as a kid but I felt there was something big. We'd go to church, yeah, we'd meet your buddies and girls and guys and all that but for me it was also – in addition to all that regular stuff – I knew there was something there.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, you had a chance to live in the myth rather than sort of being an outside observer, intellectualizer about it?

Michael Conforti: That's a good way to put it – I lived in it. So that's a big part of the back story and then more officially, I went to a place called Goddard College in northern Vermont. I went to City University first few years in New York then I transferred and they said you could study anywhere in the world and I said 'well, I'm gonna go to the Jung Institute' and I remember reading about it and I was having – and this is very strange – but I was having a series of dreams about some analysts I'd never even heard of and I began reading about it and I was remembering when I was in college the first few years, one of the teachers mentioned two words: he mentioned the word alchemy and the word anima. I had no idea what he was talking about – I began, I was gonna be a Phys Ed major my first semester in college, then I changed after day 2 but he mentioned those two words in the class, I think I was in my first year of college and I said 'I don't know what they mean but there's something here for me.'

Dr. Dave: That's interesting. So even as an undergraduate then you got to go and do some study at the Jung Institute in Europe?

Michael Conforti: I began at that point then I went to the Goddard College to do my last two years and they said you can go anywhere and I said I'm gonna go to Switzerland and become an analyst. Now I didn't read the fine print Dr. Dave. I sent over some money, I'm gonna go, I go over with a friend, I'm gonna be in Europe for three months and I get there and we show up at the Jung Institute, it's still in Zurich at the time and I said 'well, I'm Michael Conforti' and they said 'Oh, so *you're* Conforti?' and I'm thinking 'well I guess they know about me already, huh.' They said 'we've been waiting for you, because here's your money, go home, you're too young.' They said 'come back when you're older but go do a Jung tour, take a Jung

bus, you're way too young for this.' I was nineteen years old. You talk about a back story – it was already cast. It was cast and I think the major issue was there was a real sense of we have to live in the world as we see it and we do our sports and our food and all of that stuff but you also know that there's something else – there's something else guiding it and that I had since I was really, really young.

Dr. Dave: Well speaking of something else guiding it, for a number of years you've been working with what you call archetypal patterns so what are you getting at there? We've heard the term archetypes but this idea of archetypal patterns seems like it's maybe got something of a different spin to it. What are you getting at with that term?

Michael Conforti: Well if I can give you the longer story – the longer version of this, I had a mentor for almost 25 years. His name was Dr. Yoram Kaufmann – the man from Israel that I mentioned before and he was probably *the* most brilliant person I ever met in my life and the man who understood psyche in such a deep way, in such a profound way. And what he would do with dreams... I said 'my God, how could anybody know so much about a person by looking at a dream?' And he was looking at patterns. Now he was a physicist before he became a Jungian analyst, so he had an interesting background. So I saw that he was looking at images and images were clustering in dreams and from the clustering he'd be able to say 'well I think the issue's about A, or B, or X, or Y' and he got, I gotta say, 80-90% of the time he got pretty damn good validation. So I was off and I began really studying and studying and studying and I began really studying patterns. Being an extravert it makes perfect sense to me because I'm taking in a lot from the outer world. Introverts are a different experience and I'm always looking at patterns, whether it's the way when you go into a restaurant how you feel when you walk in or how they serve the bread, the quality of the wait staff and I realized, so no matter what was happening at the restaurant you can make a pretty accurate rendering about the nature of that restaurant by the way they serve the bread and people think you're crazy. And then I began looking at dreams and I said my God you know, not only are these about archetypes and all but you begin to find that archetypes begin to coalesce into recognizable patterns. That was the key for me.

Dr. Dave: Uh, huh.

Michael Conforti: In other words, you have a story. I mean take any of our movies and great literature, you have a coherent presentation of an archetype and the coherence comes through by virtue of the pattern. I've worked in the movie industry for about ten years now as a script consultant – you take a movie like *Miracles* the one about the hockey team, the 1978-9 American hockey team when they beat the Russians and it's a great story.

Dr. Dave: I think I saw that.

Michael Conforti: It's a great, great film. Kurt Russel's in it. Actually my cousins made it – they wrote it and produced it and anyway the one scene tells you the archetypal pattern. It's this group of ragtag American hockey players – some drink a lot, some drug a lot, some do a lot of other things but they're all good hockey players but they're young guys. And then one day they go on the ice and they go up against these giants of these Russians with shoulders eight feet long and probably all about

six foot eight. They're monsters and these Americans – it's just this great image – they're looking straight up, saying 'we're playing them?' No one ever beat them in like twenty years. So anyway you watch the story and of course eventually... and it's a true story, it's all totally true, where Americans beat the Russians and forget Cinderella or whatever – they did it. And one of the reasons that story captivated so many Americans when the Americans actually won, I mean I don't care for hockey, it's not my thing but it was captivating because it's an archetypal pattern in the story. This is David and Goliath.

Dr. Dave: Yes, I was just thinking that very thing, yeah.

Michael Conforti: When you go up against odds that you can never beat – an adversary that you can never do anything with and then somehow you beat it. Whether it's how we win against diseases today... I don't want to say win or lose but you know we're able to make a life and sometimes get beyond the disease, whether psychological or physical, or other things that we have to face in life say 'you know what, can you really make it' and 'this seems bigger than me' and many of us have been in situations like that with traumas and tragedies. We say 'this one seems bigger than me. Can I really go out after this and greet the day the next morning?' and somehow many of us do.

Dr. Dave: Oh, yeah. Now you talk about patterns in nature and in fact you refer to nature and find patterns there and of course Jung felt that the psyche is part of nature and so what are some examples of archetypal patterns in nature?

Michael Conforti: Well, if I can begin with patterns in nature and again thanks for picking up on that – it's huge. Jung was a naturalist – he wrote throughout the *Collected Works*, he said many times in many different ways 'if you really want to understand something about psyche look at the natural world. Look at the growth pattern of trees, look at the growth pattern when trees are not thriving, look at the population patterns with fish in the water, look at the... look, just look and look and look.' And I remember my grandfather I mentioned a couple of minutes ago, he was a mushroom hunter and he would go out in Brooklyn, of all places – he would go to Dyker Park in Brooklyn and go looking for mushrooms and he'd find mushrooms. I had developed an interest in them as well and it's so interesting in that you go out one day and there's nothing there – no mushrooms, or I can't find any and you go to the spots where you think they should be or where they would generally be and they're not there today and they're not there tomorrow and in three days they're still not there. Then you get a rainstorm and lo and behold the next day after the rainstorm there's a whole group of mushrooms under the tree where there was nothing three days before, two days before. And I got excited – I said 'my God, this is a hand and glove fit between field and form.' That there is a field that holds in abeyance, that holds in potential, form – form then needs some very particular conditions in order to be expressed. So I said 'my God, this is a breakthrough for me to understand.' This is not rocket science for anybody but it was *my* breakthrough, 'cause I was understanding it. I said, 'you know what, there's not going to be these particular kind of mushrooms unless you get rain and you could be here and all of a sudden there's rain and there's mushrooms.' And then I began playing this game with my sons, saying 'where were the leaves before they came out?' And that was a wonderful article that Robert Henderson put together in a book on the Jungian interviews – that

series he does – and that’s why I recall that interview he did with me and I would do it with my son, I would say ‘Chris where are the leaves? We’re in winter and there’s no leaves but they’re gonna be here in another two months. And I really got into this whole thing about form and where form is held and that form, even when you don’t see it, is already implicit.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I listened to one of your teleseminars recently and you said something along the lines of ‘field comes before form,’ which is really a nice little mantra. It almost sounds Platonic – Plato’s idea that things exist somewhere in an ideal space before they manifest themselves.

Michael Conforti: I think we have enough biological and psychological proof that that is in fact the case and that’s what I’m finding with these studies and the comments that you’re referring to is something that really has been, I would say fundamental and has been so pivotal in my work and work of Assisi Institute and that was a comment made by Dr. Ervin Laszlo when he was in formal assistance there and he was a faculty member of our group for many years and he said ‘yeah, if you look at any living system, field precedes form.’ And you know we’d scratch our heads and say ‘it sounds great and we knew he was brilliant but what does it mean?’ And what he was getting at was he was talking about an example of regeneration in animals, like regeneration in starfish and eyes of newts and all that and he said ‘well, the form is already implicit in the field, waiting for – not waiting but being there until a particular prompt came.’ And the prompt would then trigger the re-emergence of that form that’s held in abeyance, it’s held in potential. So in other words you go there, you do a type of experiment – you cut off one of the limbs, or whatever you call it, one of the appendages, off the starfish and it’s gonna grow back. Or you do it with a salamander and they grow back. The biological things we don’t need to get into right now, they’re very interesting to talk about but what you begin to find is the image of wholeness – the five fingered prong of a plant, the five or six appendages, whatever they are, of the starfish, the design of a salamander... That design – and this is what’s incredible about it in terms of the psyche as I began making my bridges – the wholeness that’s already in the design is not mutated by temporal changes in it, not trans-site (?). You could take that... and you cut one of the appendages off the starfish and so say you had five to begin with and you’ve got four now and in time it will grow back. The original morphologic of the original design of that animal is not affected by the fact that you cut it off, where are we – in February 2013 at 4 o’clock in the afternoon – that doesn’t seem to matter because that wholeness and the shape that’s there will come through yet again and again. And this was proven in the early experiments in the seventies – you may remember some of this stuff – the days of LSD when they had their experiments and there was money for research and they worked with Kirlian photography...

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I knew some of those people.

Michael Conforti: They were great, they were doing great stuff and they would get, again say a five pronged leaf, put it on a photographic plate, cut one of the appendages off, they’d take a picture with Kirlian photography and they’d get a five pronged leaf and they’d say that something must be wrong because we just cut off that fifth one. They did it again and again and they found, again, the wholeness was not affected. Isn’t that beautiful when you translate that to the psyche? Oh, my

God.

Dr. Dave: Right. Say a little bit about that – do that translation for us.

Michael Conforti: Yeah, well what you begin to realize is... many people go through traumas. I tend to specialize in my career in dealing with a lot of severe traumas and people that somehow have this stuff that (unclear 21:55) and realizing, you know, when people can't but the sense of a spiritual life, the sense of transcendence, the fact that the archetypal process continues to work in these people, it doesn't seem to be dramatically changed. Even if you can't reach the way others can reach, or reach the way you could have if there wasn't such trauma in your life, that image of who one could be is still alive. And even if we say 'look maybe I can get three quarters of the way up that ladder, or I can go down three quarters of the way down into the depth that I need to go to.' The picture of the depth and the ascendance remains for evermore and that's just an incredible thing to realize.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, were you just making reference to the phantom limb phenomenon as well as part of that? The sense that 'hey I have this arm, I can feel it, it itches but it's not there.' Or 'I feel like I can move it but it's not really moving' but somehow that pattern is established in the psyche?

Michael Conforti: Exactly and that's why you begin to see it from the biological patterns, the patterns in the natural world. You begin to then see 'wow, these patterns in the outer world are all created in response to some eternal design.' There is a wonderful systems theorist named Eric Jansen (?23:18) he said 'science is about to recognize the presence of universal tendencies.' He went on to say that if you understand what happens in biology, if you understand what happens in art, if you understand what happens in economics, if you understand what happens in dreams in your individual life, you begin to see that all of these are responding to some natural process that's alive in the human psyche. Everything becomes some expression of it, from the branching patterns of a tree to the branching patterns of the blood veins and then you begin seeing in the psyche how we begin going about our business, how we begin to express interest say in a prospective partner when you're dating, or how we deal with... I just turned sixty this year and it's like a brick – the reality of it. And then you say 'my God,' you know, you look at your behavior and you say 'that behavior is clearly part of the mid-life and beyond stage of life.' From the behaviors and the proclivities and interests that come up, the things that you were interested in before, you're not so interested in now and you realize 'wow, this all fits a picture.'

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Now you draw upon another concept from Systems Theory – self organizing systems – which sounds magical. Say something about that.

Michael Conforti: Well, Jung was really the first to talk about this stuff in psychology. He went so far as to say; we forget this tonight, that even psychosis is a self organizing process. And the guy that wrote about that was John Perry one of the earlier...

Dr. Dave: Oh, yeah.

Michael Conforti: ...and he would work with psychotics and he saw in the drawings

of psychotics, in the fantasies and whatever, he saw that there were these, again, these archetypal patterns, working on dismembering, reconstitution, things coming together in a new order and Jung was saying 'my God, there is this high level of self organization in the psyche.' And in Systems Theory which... I've actually spent time with a lot of these leaders right now and I love the work. I love it not because of the idea of a system but because of what it tells us about nature. In hindsight... I don't give a damn about math – I'm not trying to pan any mathematicians that might be listening – it's that I care about math because of what it tells us about nature. That's what I'm interested in. Anyway in looking at these self organizing tendencies in the outer world, you say 'oh, my God there seems to be and if you wanna use the forbidden word – there's some wisdom here, there's some intelligence guiding this stuff.

(Sound began breaking up at this point and a new connection was established.)

Michael Conforti: (Cont.) Now you asked about self organization – it's a great, great... I don't know if you want to pursue that piece but it's a very important aspect of Jung's work that is finding a lot of parallels in the outer world today.

Dr. Dave: Yeah and in fact isn't that one of the theories about life – that life in itself thrives on that idea of self organizing systems?

Michael Conforti: Well, yes – the simple answer's yes. You're heading to what I think is probably *the* most important aspect of Jungian psychology and what is the most important thing about the Assisi Institute and my work and something that really is, I think, being diminished in Jungian circles today and I'll put myself out there and say that. Where Jung was so brilliant in his work was he understood there was a natural order to life. Von Franz used a term which I love, she said 'archetypes are nature's constants.' Meaning the patterns we look at, the patterns of transitions in our lives, the patterns of marriage, the patterns of children and all that we do and Jung really was building on that for so many years by saying there's a natural cycle of life. The whole story of Easter – which we're getting close to Easter right now – is part of the cyclical myth, Christmas is part of the cyclical myth and he said to understand life you need to understand something about these natural cycles. And it's the same thing whether depression, whether sadness, whether jubilation and really Jung spent a lifetime and the early Jungians spent a lifetime studying the images and meaning of these cycles. And they looked at the symbols and said that symbol, or those couple of symbols, are part of a pattern of moving into winter and in moving into winter, certain things are going to come with that. I don't mean just the outer world winter but moving into the winter of life. How much did Jim Hollis and the colleague (unclear 28:14) been doing programs in Ireland for years on midlife. There's so much about the symbols, the archetypal pattern of midlife but anyway when you mention self organization and mystical and all that, on one hand it seems incredibly mystical to say that something really would know that as we move into this life there are certain things we need to do and certain things we need to throw overboard 'cause they're not going to help us on this journey – that's the beauty that I think Jung brought to the world. And I think, if I could say, where it's being lost today was Jung cared about the archetypal – Jung and Von Franz and Barbara Hanna and Aniela Jaffe and all the great early ones, Mario Jacoby – these people, they knew psyche was alive. They knew that there was a wisdom – listen to your dreams – they looked at dreams as like

the gods coming to you and saying ‘look, no don’t take the right turn, move to the left, it’s to the left.’

Dr. Dave: Yeah, now did James Hillman kind of bring that emphasis back in?

Michael Conforti: James, he did phenomenal work, yeah, he brought it back and he understood it. He would say ‘it’s not what gods you have, it’s what gods have you, what archetypes have you.’ It’s beautiful – it’s the transition and the translation, Dr. Dave, that’s really powerful because where many people then begin talking about archetypes if you really look at what’s happening today – and again I’ll put myself on the line here – I think Jung would be rolling in his grave if he saw how it is that we’ve taken these universal motifs, these aspects of the antique soul, these vestiges of psyche that have been with humanity from the beginning of time, that have eternal meaning, that we’ve made this into one big drama where we say ‘Dave, what do you want this to mean? What does Christmas mean to you? What does Easter mean to you? What does it mean that you went to Amalfi? What does the image of the night sea journey mean to you?’ ‘Well to me it means having a couple of drinks and a cigarette and making love.’ What’s happening is everything is being... so much of the beauty of these innate images are being run through the sausage grinder of contemporary biases and our own personal complexes.

Dr. Dave: O.K., that’s clear.

Michael Conforti: Yeah, and I think again the beauty of where Jung was leading was to say there is some inherent meaning. I’ll give you one example of the beauty of this – Dr. Kaufmann wrote a book, one of the best books on images ever written. It’s a little, little book and it was published right before his death and a wonderful man named David Rothman (? 31:00) actually helped put that... and I helped with the process as well. Anyway, he gives one example on this – there are many examples but one in particular that’s stunning– someone dreamt that they were outdoors camping and then they begin to just say ‘I’ve got to go to the bathroom’ and they go urinate on a tree. Kind of a fun thing men do, right? Part of the freedom of being outdoors.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Michael Conforti: The next part of the dream, all of a sudden ten minutes later he looks down at the ground and there are hundreds of ants on the ground. So a man presented this dream to Dr. Kaufmann and Kaufmann said to him in no uncertain terms ‘my dear sir, you are diabetic.’ The guy said ‘what are you talking about, I’m not diabetic.’ He said, ‘you’re diabetic.’ He said ‘well, fine, whatever you think.’ So anyway, Kaufmann said ‘please, at least humor me. Go to the doctors and get your blood work done.’ Well, long story short, is the guy turned out to be a very dangerous diabetic.

Dr. Dave: So how was that in the dream?

Michael Conforti: Because the only reason why ants would be drawn to urine is because there’s sugar in the urine.

Dr. Dave: It's sweet – yeah, yeah, right.

Michael Conforti: I would have never thought about that?

Dr. Dave: Me either.

Michael Conforti: Now I don't want your listeners to think it's all about biology – that's not the point at all. It's about wisdom, Dr. Dave. You see what I'm saying?

Dr. Dave: Sure.

Michael Conforti: The fact that Kaufmann caught what nature was saying to this man, both about his biological situation but of course then in his inner world, there was something also about the issue of sugar and sweetness and all those kind of issues that were very much alive in that dreamer's psychological and emotional life as well.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, well that story kind of leads me to... I listened recently to one of your teleseminars and it was about the archetypal patterns that Lance Armstrong was playing out and I listened to another one about patterns in the world of business. Tell us a little bit about the Lance Armstrong story because I thought that was very powerful.

Michael Conforti: Yes, my work is I'm very interested in patterns. I'm interested in what these configurations are around us because the configurations are about nature and about archetypes. So I'm looking all the time. So with the Lance Armstrong piece – again it's not that I was particularly interested in Lance Armstrong but I'm interested in the issue, O.K.? So, like many of us, you know, the sense 'oh, my God the blood doping, he (unclear 33:35) all these people under the bus, he did these terrible things and that's all very true.

Dr. Dave: And he was a hero, like so many other heroes out there in politics and world leaders and so on.

Michael Conforti: Yeah, he was elevated to the ranks of hero and the only thing that was really heroic about what he had done, if you really want to cut to the chase of the archetype of the hero, was what he did for cancer. Athletes are not necessarily heroes.

Dr. Dave: O.K.

Michael Conforti: I grew up in a world where I was a very good athlete and all that and I loved athletics, I still enjoy athletics but it's not... is Wilt Chamberlain – you and I are similar ages – the old timers, or today... Shaquille O'Neil – is he really a hero? He's a hero on the court but anyway... So he was elevated, which is a dangerous thing right there. So then I began looking at... obviously the guy was inflated because here he wanted to get to this level where he was the best of the best. He was on Olympus, he was swimming, or cycling with Zeus and all of them – better than most of them and I knew there was something not yet settled about this for me. I looked at inflation issues, about the incredible narcissism, psychopathy. I don't know if you listened to the second lecture but then I do think I hit it – I think I hit the issue with the second one. And in preparing for it, I went to go look at a lot of the Lance

Armstrong videos on You Tube and there was one series that gave me the clue. They were when he was diagnosed with testicular cancer – and then again to summarize the story, the doctors had told him he had little chance, if any, to survive this cancer and it was spreading and then... so that's all part of one of the videos. The next part of it they show these pictures of someone – him, I don't know, just somebody else, going through surgeries where they had, from stem to stern, they opened this guy up. I didn't know this. Most of us didn't know it. They cut his stomach open to get the cancer. This guy also had brain surgery. Do you know that?

Dr. Dave: I don't think I did know that. I don't recall that.

Michael Conforti: I didn't. And then it dawned on me – this guy was facing the hounds of hell. He was facing death and what is the likely... the two major responses, two archetypal pattern responses to death – one is O.K. I'm going to die, let me just die and it's over right now. Let me pick my coffin and just go. The other one is 'I'm not going to die, I'm immortal and I'm going to do everything to prove I'm immortal. I'm going to be younger, I'm going to be faster, I'm going to be as good as I was when I was a kid and on and on.' And what happened was that at that moment he was propelled into the archetypal field of eternal youth – the puer archetype – puer aeternus. And it was motivated by one major issue which was he could not face the strong possibility, or the scent of death that he was living with and he was avoiding it on every, every, every turn. And at that moment, it's interesting because I suddenly felt compassion for this guy. Yeah, I think he still has done a lot of terrible things but I thought 'you know what, he's caught' – and this gets to the next part of my work – he was caught in the archetypal field of the denial of death.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Michael Conforti: And it's a highly... again patterns and fields – it's pattern. Pattern means it's a familiar expression – you greet somebody you like, you hug them, you give them a kiss, or you shake their hand or 'come on to my house, let's have a glass of wine, let's sit and talk, or let's sit by the fire.' These are all patterned things we do that have been there since the beginning of time and I realized 'you know what, this guy is possessed and he's taken over by the field of the denial of death.'

Dr. Dave: Yeah. I see that you recently did a blog talk radio podcast on Oscar Pistorius. I don't know if that's a different pattern or what. What's your take?

Michael Conforti: Dr. Dave it's the same thing. When I did my research on this guy again I was interested that here we have yet again another fallen hero, right? So called fallen hero and I don't know if he's been found guilty now but he's being accused of this. You read his story – 11 months of age they amputated his legs – he has his knee, he has both knees. From the knee down he's amputated. You look at him today and he's this gorgeous athlete, a fantastic runner and great dancer and all those things and on one hand when you watch him run – they call him 'the blade runner' today because he runs with these blades on his legs – it's somewhat bizarre. But the other big piece – and it's not the question of bizarre, you say 'how wonderful and resilient,' and you know I love that – my father's also an amputee so I have a

special feeling for someone who has a leg cut, you know. I grew up with this. Anyway I realized 'you know what' – not that this is a new insight but it hit me yet again – the human psyche is not ready to deal with these traumas. We're not wired for this. How do you live knowing that your legs have been cut off? You know we create all these denial mechanisms, these incredible denial mechanisms that we live with every day and they get better and better and after a while we... 'I'm dancing and I'm running and swimming' and he's making love and he's doing all these things. Who thinks about it? Now people can say 'isn't that wonderful?' Well, it's wonderful you can be resilient but you should never forget the origins. And I gave that quote from Jung's *Red Book* where Jung says 'if you have been to hell you become hell.' And then he goes on to say 'and don't ever forget where you come from.' Oh, my God. Now, somebody wrote back – I'm going to respond to them because I wrote that in a blog and also that radio show – and they said 'Michael but you're not condemning people, are you, to always be in hell.' No, that's not the point. I would never condemn them, that's not it. The point is that you know something other people don't know – can you make that conscious? You see that's the issue – can you make that conscious? And live with the fact that, yeah, thank God I'm resilient, thank God I've got the courage. My father's ninety six, ninety seven years old – one leg, one eye. He hasn't stopped. I hope to God I've got that. Three languages – unbelievable. But he knows – he knows he's got one leg and one eye, he's never denied that.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Somehow Jungian psychology is all about holding the opposites, holding both of those and not getting totally identified with, say, the side that wants to overcome death and denial.

Michael Conforti: Well, you're right and this is one of the things I was drawn to, going back to the back story, with Jung. Jung is one of the few that really will talk about evil – he'll talk about evil as a reality, as one of the things that's part of the individual and collective psyche. Evil is built in like benevolence and transcendence and wonder, as the other pieces and I think it's hard to live with both. I think that's what's demanded of us but I don't think we are equipped at this point in time. I mean look at the horrors – I did a teleconference on that Newtown, Connecticut shooting. We had over six hundred people involved on that call. Do we know what the heck it is that runs through us? It's like the winds blow through a shattered pane of glass, the winds of psyche they blow through and we shiver, right? Then say 'what was that?' People going out and doing this stuff.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Well, you're not afraid to get out on a limb and talk about some of these current events and linking them to the deeper parts of the psyche. You've referred to dreams a couple of times – I've had a long standing interest in dreams myself and I see that you offer a certificate training sequence in dream patterning. What is dream patterning?

Michael Conforti: Dream patterning it's built clearly on Jung's work and Von Franz's work and archetypal patterns and also draws a lot on Dr. Kaufmann's work on the objective image and a lot of what this work is about is looking at the archetypal nature of an image. What that means for instance is... think of a long standing image – a vacation, think of an image of a vacation. Say someone dreams of a vacation. Now clearly that's a highly patterned activity. Now many, many different things

happen – we have what that funny movie that Chevy Chase made – something about a vacation, it's crazy what happens. It's a comedy but it's all these nutty things happen – families almost drown and all of that and they need a vacation from the vacation because it's so stressful. So with archetypal patterning, if you look at a vacation as an image, you say a vacation – the root of it, now I'm not sure of the Latin root, I'd have to find that – but we understand vacation, it's to vacate something. To vacate usually the activity and the way we live our lives every day to do something different to begin to restore ourselves. Like even, similarly 'Ristorante' – restore – and in parts of Northern Italy some of the restaurants are called 'restore' or 'Ristorante' – it means to restore oneself. Vacation, so as an archetypal root, is to look at taking time away from the daily grind of our life, no matter how much we love it, we need some time away to do other things. So regardless of what individuals would say, if they say 'oh, my God, me and my family vacation, Uncle Charlie and Uncle Louie and all those kinds and all the nightmares and all the arguments and the fights. Well you might say, 'vacations are terrible.' Well that's your opinion but that's not the image, that's not the reality. Your reality does not shape the universal reality. So much of our work – the work here is really looking to discern what is the universal aspect of an image and then see what the individual relationship to that is.

Dr. Dave: Can you give us an example of one or more dreams that you've worked with that stand out?

Michael Conforti: I'll give you probably one of the best. I just wrote an article... there's a book coming out, I think it's called *Dream Amplification (The Dream and its Amplification)* and Erel Shalit and Nancy Furlotti are the editors and they invited me to do a chapter so I just did one and they included this in it. A man dreams – a man who's in his early to maybe mid sixties – he dreamt that he finds this wood underwater, like a cache of wood underwater and it's all log length – maybe forty, fifty, sixty feet long and it's bound on both sides. So it's intentionally been bound by cord and somehow he knows that the wood's been underwater for fifty years and he thinks 'well I want to try and get some of the wood up and if it's any good I want to burn it in my wood stove.' Which is what people do up here, you know a lot of wood heat and all that.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, that's right – you're in Vermont.

Michael Conforti: Yeah, I'm in Vermont, yeah. And so that's the dream. So again the dream is a man finds this cache of wood underwater. It's been (planed?) already but it's full tree length, like sixty feet, forty foot, whatever and it's bound from the front end and the back end and he thinks if I could just get the wood up – there's a part of the Freudian piece (both laugh) – if I could get the wood up and then we will see if it's any good, if it's not punky, 'cause usually wood under water is very punky – it's all rotten, right? If it's not punky, I'm gonna cut it up and use it in my wood stove. So O.K., so we could do some fun things with the Freudian piece again – the wood up, it's a Viagra dream – well it's not. Anyway, about three days before that dream I had an incredible synchronicity – before the man presented that dream to me. He was a relatively new patient, O.K.? So I'm in my car driving to work and there's this NPR radio show and it was about a man up in Michigan who had a lumber yard, who somehow found wood underwater and it was bound like this – in all tree lengths, right? I'd never heard about this before. So the guy says 'well, look since I have a

lumber mill, let me get the wood up again and see what's there because in all likelihood it's all ruined.' 'Cause you know what happens to wood underwater?

Dr. Dave: Sure.

Michael Conforti: So anyway he gets it in the lumber mill, he gets the blades going and all that and he opens it up. He debarks it and he begins getting into the wood and he finds, lo and behold, to his total amazement – this is the outer world story now – the most exquisitely grained wood he has ever seen in his life and he begins to call people, say 'well, what's happening, what is this I've just found here? And they'd say 'well, this is one of the ancient ways of curing wood.'

Dr. Dave: Uh, huh.

Michael Conforti: And then I begin to do my research and I talk to a lot of people, as I like to do as an extravert and people said 'does anybody know anything?' And I'd get on the (unclear) 'do you know, do you know?' And then I did my research and I found, lo and behold, the Viking sailors – one of the greatest ship builders of all times – use this as a way of curing wood. And then I found out some of the greatest musical instruments were built with wood that had been stored underwater.

Dr. Dave: Interesting.

Michael Conforti: So rather than being wood that's ruined it's, you know... Look I just put Brazilian Cherry wood in my floor in the living room. It's expensive, maybe seventy (?) bucks a board foot. This wood, forget it, hundreds and hundreds of dollars a board foot. It's invaluable, O.K? But anyway we have this dream and I get all this information, right? So he tells me a dream, I say 'I can't believe the synchronicity, which is a meaningful event in and of itself, right?'

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Conforti: And I say to him 'do you know anything about this kind of wood?' He says, 'no, never heard anything.' And so we worked on the dream and I said 'I'm going to tell you a story.' And I told him the story I just told you about the wood. I said 'do you realize you have just found in your psyche something that's been curing for fifty years which is some of the most incredible value imaginable?' That's part A. Part B as I said, this is a gift. If we can translate this and understand it and find out where it is and all that, I said 'but there's a very disturbing part of the dream' – and this is a challenge to catch this one. I said 'but you want to burn that in your wood stove.' Now of course we want wood for the stove and all that and we think of the inner stove, the inner alchemical stove and all that and I said 'but guess what though? This is not a wood that you put in your stove. You can go out and buy wood to heat your house with. You don't take a wood as this value.' So it's saying here that you have the potential to misuse something of immense value.

Dr. Dave: That's interesting. I caught part without knowing the story but I could just kind of feel 'oh, something really of value here' but that part B is interesting that you picked up on. I don't think I would have caught that.

Michael Conforti: Well, this is really a lot of what I learned by being with Dr. Kaufmann – the precision of working with images. And this is a guy, as I write in the article, so it's public – I said, you know this is a guy who was a tremendous educator, he was a great clinician. Students went from all over the world to be around him and he was retired now. But he wanted to do other things, he wanted to do very different things with his life. I said 'you know what, you've got to go back to teaching. You've got to go back – part time, go to a community college, doesn't matter, do something to feed that hunger of yours. Now I said 'look, we will never know fully what all the expressions of that dream are, what are all the things in your life that are akin to this beautiful wood but what we do know is that you have something that's a treasure and you have to really value it. You don't misuse it.' And about aging for fifty years – I think he was about sixty five or so at the time of the dream – what about that many years ago, what happened fifty years ago, he was what fifteen or so? And there was a time he'd developed this love of nature, and love of the outdoors and everything from the solar system to the frogs, to whatever...

Dr. Dave: Maybe the woods?

Michael Conforti: The woods and all of it, yeah. And this guy had a love of learning that was just exceptional (?). I loved working with him at so many levels. So you know that dream in so many ways captures almost everything we've talked about in this entire call today. Both in terms of the essence of what we teach in the training program and it's so easy to miss this stuff because you have to 'what do you think and what do you feel?' And there are facts. You know Jung said 'there are psychic facts. There's psychic inevitabilities.' And this is what I think is the tremendous beauty and richness of what Jung had to offer us. That psyche is teaching us every day. It's like being with a great chef – O.K. you know what, you go into a kitchen with a great chef, just shut up for a while. You gotta tell them the way you cook your pasta and you cook the fish – I know how to cook my fish, I'm here 'cause I want to learn from a great chef. It's not going to diminish me as a cook, let me learn. You talk about great interviewers – Charlie Rose and Terry Gross and all that – do we have to tell them what we do all the time? That's what subjectivity's all about Dr. Dave, you know and that's where I think we've taken Jung's work and we've really misused it in so many ways. We have to... 'Terry Gross, let me tell you how I interview people.' Well, she may want to engage with that after awhile but wouldn't it be nice to know what she does, how she got there, the way she does it, to watch that chef, watch some of the great chefs, Lidia and some of the other ones, Julia Child and watch what they do? I mean, my God...

Dr. Dave: Yeah, short of a full blown Jungian... it raises an interesting question, you know, of what one can do on their own and what one can do working with a talented therapist, so short of a full blown Jungian analysis, how might a person, a listener here, recognize some of the major underlying patterns at work in their own life? Do you see that as possible, or not?

Michael Conforti: I do. It's a great, great question. I think Charlie Rose and Terry Gross would love that kind of question.

Dr. Dave: Oh good.

Michael Conforti: Look at what gets constellated in your life. Look at what begins to happen. One of the early discoveries (unclear53:00) made was about repetition – the powers of repetition in the human psyche. The beauty of that discovery was things repeat, the shadow that is things repeat. So if you look at what begins to repeat itself, what the familiar refrain is in your life, you're going to catch one of the major patterns and then if you can begin the work of identifying it and translating it. So I think if you become really observant about your life, it's a great, great way to start this. So you know and interesting 'every time I go out I'm drawn to this particular kind of thing, I'm drawn to this particular kind of person. Or no matter where I go I seem to fall over the same thing, the same crack in the sidewalk, I fall on no matter where I go.' And then you say 'O.K. well, look what's the story, there is an implicit story there and you know right there you've already begun the process of developing an interest in how psyche communicates and how psyche talks. And it's going to start right there – that can help you a lot. Like relationships, I mean, to just say 'oh, my God you and your wife get into... or whatever... you and your partner get into a problem, it's because you're just so pig headed and she's just so this.' Well, that's too easy. I mean, you know if you look at the natural world and what we've learned from... go back to your early term – self organization – life evolves into more complexity after there is periods of disruption. Disruption is a necessary precondition for a new level of novelty and a higher level of meaning.

Dr. Dave: That's such a hard lesson to learn. I mean I've had to learn that lesson over and over again and trying to develop an attitude when that adversity comes along or that challenge comes along, to remember what you just said...

Michael Conforti: It's huge. I mean how many nights do you want to spend on the couch Dave? I'm gonna stop that behavior – 'I'm never gonna do that again!' (Both laugh) But it really is profound and you know Guggenbuhl-Craig wrote about that beautifully in a book called *Marriage Dead or Alive* and he said 'look, you have a marriage of well being, or a marriage of salvation.' If you want to really take like, to stay with the marriage example, that he said 'if you want to take it seriously' he'd say 'you, for whatever reason, marriage is your way towards individuation of the Self. Can you, as a couple, take this on and say you gonna hold together, when the storm begins to really get going and when the winds start howling, hold tight and it's going to be rough but we're doing this as a way both to live a better life together, a more meaningful life.' That could be the glue to hold it and look, I know it's tough. This is very tough stuff. It's tough stuff when, I think, whenever you let psyche have a real place in your life. A lot of you would say nice things and all of the bells and whistles but you're right and I love the way you're being so honest about it. It's a challenge.

Dr. Dave: You mentioned several times that you're an extravert and I'm hearing that, that you're very out in the world and yet you've done all this reading and reflection and so on. Where do you find the time, how do you create space in your life for that inner part of your work?

Michael Conforti: Well, right now I need to have more of that time 'cause I'm doing so much in the outer world – it's hitting a point where I know I'm really very happy if I could spend five or six hours a day reading and writing, I could do it. I have that kind of temperament now. For years I would be doing non stop... I'd do my work and then study and I'd be up at four in the morning writing and reading. I've always

had that kind of dedication. It's more difficult when I get older to try to keep on burning at both ends but getting back to your question, I could answer it this way – and I've got to run to a client in a minute – you know when you've had a good meal, you say 'my God, this is great' and you know when you're sitting reading something or when you're with a client – I love my client work and my teaching – 'this is great.' And especially as we get older you know when you're not having a good meal and that needs to become part of our lens – say 'you know what, why am I at this restaurant, I know I don't like this food that much and that one down there's got some great stuff.' And I guess I could leave you on this note – a friend of mine gave me a little throw pillow – another Italian guy – 'life is too short to drink bad wine.'

Dr. Dave: Well, I know you've got a client – we're bumping up against the hour here and you've got a client to meet with and I skipped over a whole bunch of questions here that I could have plied you with and was looking forward to but I just enjoy your whole style of conversation and am happy to have been able to spend this time with you, so Dr. Michael Conforti it's been great to speak with you and I want to thank you for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Michael Conforti: Oh, it's a pleasure and thank you so much for your genuine interest and your engaging quality with this, so thank you and if you're ever interested I'd be back in a heartbeat, so if the time ever comes up, I'm there. Thank you so much.

WRAP UP:

I get a very down to earth feeling from Dr. Conforti. I suppose it's the mix of what I think might be a Brooklyn accent and the warmth of his Italian background that he shared with us. I conducted this interview without the benefit of having read either of his two books – there's *Threshold Experiences: The Archetype of Beginnings* which he wrote in 2007 and the earlier *Field, Form and Fate: Patterns in Mind, Nature and Psyche*. I hope at some point to get around to these. I love that he's written a book on threshold experiences because that strikes me as a very important pattern right off the bat. Joseph Campbell talks beautifully about the crossing of the threshold in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. If we'd had time I would have liked to hear what Dr. Conforti's take on that is. Also I'm intrigued by the sub title of his earlier book – 'patterns in mind, nature and fate.' It's the 'fate' part that particularly intrigues me and I planned to ask him about that before we ran out of time. If I had to guess I would think it might be an extension of his notion that field precedes form. Might he be suggesting that there is already an existing field that we grow into as our life progresses? Certainly Jung suggests that we're not only pushed by the past but also drawn by the future. Dr. Conforti did stress that he's be happy to come back on the show so let me know if you'd be eager for that. He's very prolific in offering complimentary teleseminars as a way of promoting his workshops in Assisi, Italy and the other programs he offers. You can find full information about pretty much everything he's up to at www.assisiinstitute.com including a link to his blog, which is called *Patterns We Live By* and of course you can purchase his books using our Amazon.com widget in the right hand side bar at ShrinkRapRadio.com.

I want to thank today's guest, Jungian analyst Dr. Michael Conforti for sharing his work on *Archetypal Patterns*. I hope maybe we'll hear more from him in the future.