

ANIMALS *and the* PSYCHE

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The world is made up of two groups: dog people and cat people. Some of my best friends are cat people ... I live with a dog - an Australian Shepherd who looks as if a superior, creative force had dipped a paint brush into several buckets and joyously and liberally dabbed her with spots of black, white, beige-brown and gray. Officially, her coloring is called "muddy meril" - and I am not so sure of the spelling, other than that it, too, is different and joyous somehow. She came into my empty-nest life by simply nestling calmly into my arms, taking the decision between her and her 17 or so sibs and half-sibs literally right out of my hands. When she was little, she slept in my bed with me, and during the first week of our togetherness, I awoke a couple of times to the tickling of her snout on my neck, as she searched for a mother's teat. She loves to herd anything that moves - preferably on four legs, but two will do and in a pinch she'll attempt to herd what's on wheels - regardless of the potential threat to her life. A callous acquaintance observed dryly: "This is not herding - she is chasing!" It was in that moment that I understood why she had growled at his arrival on the front door, when she usually greets newcomers and old friends with undifferentiated enthusiasm. Way down inside of me something agreed with her instant assessment.

This same exuberance, though, has led to a run-in with a car and several falls for me. Once I broke a finger. Then I understood the need for discipline and we enlisted in dog school.

I see clients in my library at home. Since my dog is still rather rambunctious, she usually stays upstairs during analytical sessions. The other day she greeted a client with joyous vigor. I apologized profusely and took her upstairs. A week later this client told me of a remarkable and profound connection the dog's ebullient greeting had brought about for her. Maybe she'll be an analytic dog, yet. Marie-Louise von Franz had one ...

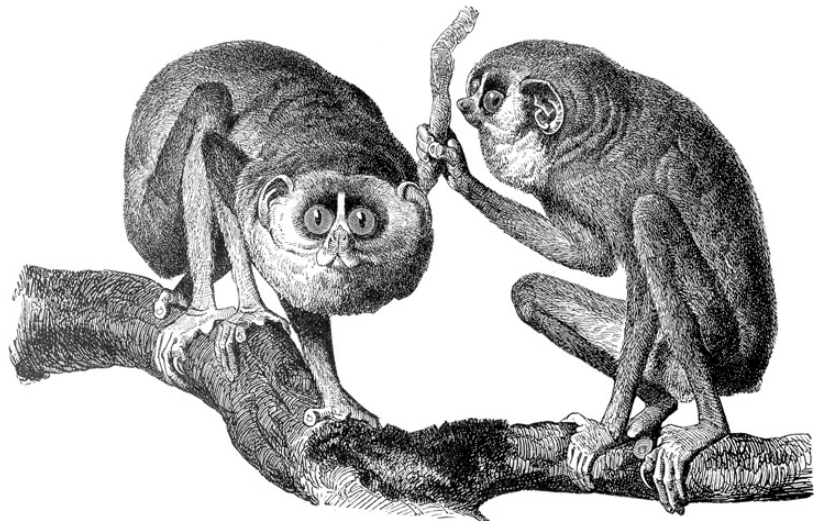
We hear anecdotes like these from animal lovers all over: a cross-cultural and transpersonal phenomenon. Pets claim us, heart and soul. They have a solid connection to "upstairs" and are gifted with ESP to an amazing

degree. Yet, to live together, some discipline is required on both sides.

Animals have always taken a very special place in ours and our ancestors' lives. Native American totemism and animism are only two concepts that testify to the importance of this relationship. Regrettably, we humans often consider ourselves superior to our brothers and sisters of the animal kingdom, although we share this earth, where we swim together in the water, fly about in the sky and move along on top of the earth or underground. Animals dominate the evening skies as the signs of the zodiac, animate the ancient and mysterious wall paintings in the caves of Lascaux, and appear in myths and fairy tales cross culturally. They are intricately tied to humankind's religious life: the gods of the Egyptians and Indians are often composites of animal and human bodies; in Christian tradition the snake stimulates disobedience and thus plays a consciousness-awakening role, God impregnates the virgin Mary in the shape of a dove, Jesus is connected to the lamb and the fish, and the apostles' animal totems grace the portals of many romanesque and medieval churches. In shamanic tradition, the shaman becomes a bird who flies about to locate and retrieve an invalid's lost soul. Once she is reunited with her soul, the patient is healed. And finally, today's pet cult indicates that our soul companions are largely from the animal kingdom. Some people find animals more trustworthy, likable and reliable companions than humans. Women who have suffered early sexual trauma often are able to relate to animals much more readily than people.

Animals provide us with nourishment - from sacrifice to slaughterhouse. We make blankets, coats and jackets out of their fur. Their skin gets tanned and provides hides for anything, from tents to shoes and briefcases. Even their bones and teeth become tools, weapons, buttons, jewelry and once they provided the staying power in corsets. Animal sacrifice continues today in the form of scientific research: we take their lives to save ours. Native Americans have known throughout the ages that we can and must learn from the animal kingdom: animals provide us with powerful medicine.

The etymology of the word ANIMAL is interesting. Webster's



shows that it is Latin in origin and derives from "animalis": living, as well as from "anima", feminine of "animus": breath, soul. Of the same root is the word to animate - to energize! It comes from the Latin: to fill with breath, and from "anima", breath, soul.

Under the entry "animal" we also find "... of, relating to, or characteristic of animals, the sensual or physical as distinct from the spiritual nature of man."

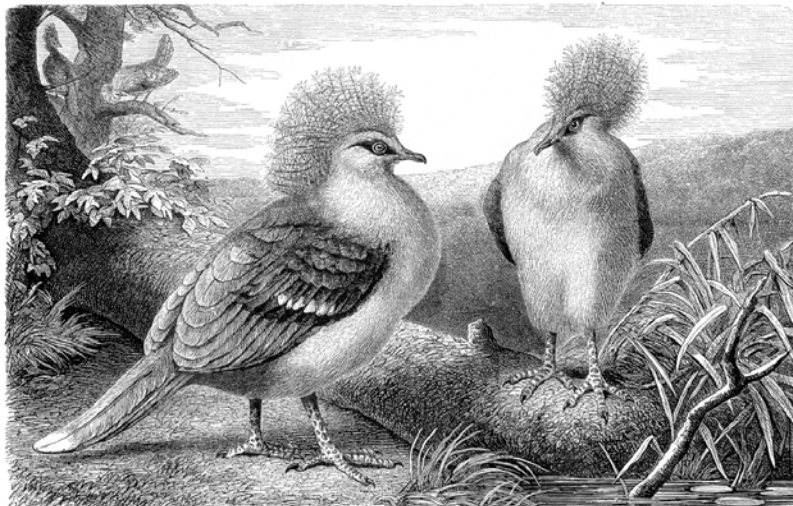
Roget's Thesaurus offers the following synonyms: "... beast, brute, creature, dumb animal ... flesh, flesh and blood ... carnality ... bestial, carnal, corporal, sensual." Animal also means someone beastly or brutish and to animalize means to make coarse and brutal, to sensualize. All these point to aspects of our inner nature, our instinctual lives, which we often reject or are at least quite troubled by, due to our developmental and Judeo-Christian religious agenda.

Expressions such as: *eating like a pig, pigeon holing someone, going to the dogs, foxy lady, pussy and bitch, snake in the grass, Playboy bunny, stubborn as a mule* to name only a few, cast animals in a negative light within our Christian and developmental framework. We devalue the animal within as well as the one without, which can lead to a dangerous depletion within our psyche of "breath of life, of soul." It also points to our profound ambivalence towards nature and the animals as her representatives. This antagonistic stand towards nature has endangered our planet earth and threatens to dehydrate our souls.

"Animals almost invariably represent instincts when we meet them in dreams and active imagination. Each animal represents a different instinct or, if you prefer it, another aspect of instinct," claimed Jungian analyst Barbara Hannah in her 1954 *Cat, Dog, and Horse Lectures*. Archetypal psychologist James Hillman insists that "a snake is not a symbol". (*Dream Animals*, 1997.) He looks at animals in dreams, fantasies and myths as carriers of soul, as Gods, as "divine, intelligent, autochthonous powers demanding respect." (*The Dream and the Underworld*, p. 147)

A symbol has at its kernel a breath of life energy, be it instinctual or archetypal, named libido or anima. Someone once said very correctly that a symbol can never be fully interpreted. It can only be experienced. This holds especially true for the images of our relatives in nature, from the animal kingdom as they approach us in dreams, myths, fairy tales and active imagination. If the image of the animal pulls, draws, attracts, repels, fills me with disgust, awe or wonder - if there is an emotional response, it is a symbol with a personal message. Like Philemon and Baucis, who hospitably opened their door to the beggars, unaware that they were gods in disguise, we are asked to open the door to our psyche, our heads and hearts, and be receptive to the energy, whether it appears incarnated as beggar or animal, a rose or a neurosis.

What about all those dreams in which we are pursued by a ferocious dog or a vicious snake? Jung posited that inevitably this indicated that we had become estranged from our instincts, had closed the door to our inner nature. Consequently, nature turns ugly, turns against us - much like the uninvited thirteenth fairy in "Sleeping Beauty", or in the story of Philemon and Baucis, the



gods punished those one thousand villagers with a flood drowning all those whose doors had remained barred to them. What is asked for is a change in consciousness: hospitable receptivity towards the Feared, the Uninvited, the Creature within. This shift in attitude alone often suffices and is transformative: the beast can show his princely aspects. Politely ask your dream dog or snake: "What do you wish of me?" Inevitably, the animal will answer back.

In responding to an animal that comes to us, say, in a dream, first of all we must be willing to relate to it. Secondly, we need to find out who exactly they are and what they are doing in our dream. That requires that we focus our attention on the image and less so on our feeling reaction to the image. In other words: put your terror of the snake from last night's dream aside and focus on the image "snake" - almost as if you were an invisible partner in her life. Getting to know an animal means that we study what it is all about, how it lives, what it likes and what it fears, how it mates, what it eats and who its enemies might be. This keen observation includes research into myths and fairy tales to trace the way of the animal there ... and that can bring about the archetypal and healing connection.

There are times when we must let ourselves be guided by nature. Parsival had to leave the Grail castle because he stilled his natural inclination which was to ask the Wasteland king what was ailing him. Riding away from the castle the next morning, he let the reins hang loose: now the animal has to find the way - ego consciousness had failed.

Often in fairy tales there are helpful animals. While the arrogant older brothers despise, overlook or even mistreat them, the dumbling helps or rescues them. With their help he then becomes the hero. There are also times when our intellect must provide the guiding light. Ideally, we can draw on our instinctual and intellectual capacities as the situation requires.

Different animals show us each their own, species specific style and shape of vitality. No animal ever means just one thing. Like us, they are mysteries to be approached with loving attention when they come to tell us about themselves - and ultimately about us.