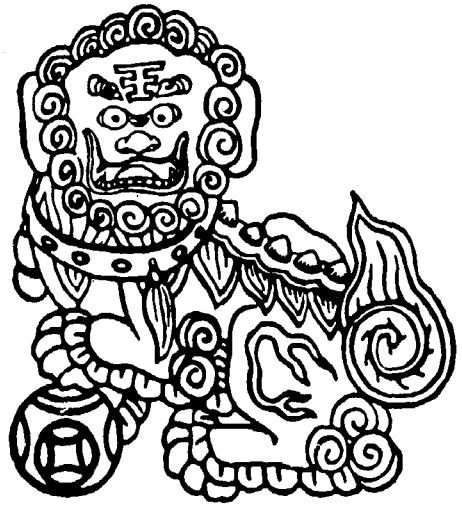
DREAMS — PART 3

Three Balinese Dreams

Stanley Krippner and Bruce Carpenter



I Wayan Ariana is a Balinese artist and mask-maker who has used his dreams as source material for his drawings and wood-carvings. He was born in the village of Mas in south-central Bali, one of the islands that comprise Indonesia, and the only one where the ancient Hindu tradition survived the onslaught of Islam. Wayan was 28 years of age at the time he was first interviewed in late 1984. Married, with two children, he was a member of the local *banjar*, one of two paramount social organisations in Balinese villages. (The other is the *subak*, the council which controls water irrigation and similar agricultural procedures.) Along with the other members of the *banjar*, Wayan was responsible for village upkeep, both physical and spiritual, and the preparations necessary for religious ceremonies. These duties reflected his devout belief in the Balinese religious and social systems.

I Wayan Ariana's background was typical of the young Balinese men in his region, with some notable exceptions. His father died when Wayan was quite young, having suffocated in a rice field when he fell face down during what was presumably an epileptic seizure. His mother remarried, but Wayan was beholden to the ancestors of his father, so he could not follow his mother to the house of her new husband, whose ancestors had replaced those of her first husband. Thus he spent a large portion of his childhood away from his mother, albeit in close proximity to his father's family.

The village of Mas, Wayan's birthplace, is considered especially blessed by the inhabitants because of its high percentage of Brahmanas, the high caste in traditional Hindu society. Mas is also famous for its wood carving, a profession that

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dominates its main road which is a continuous stretch of tourist shops. Wayan was initiated at an early age into this work. Even though he has had other jobs, it was the main source of his income at the time of this interview. In 1978, while working as a minibus driver for local passengers travelling to Den Pasar, Bali's capital, he met a Swiss painter who introduced him to the Western concept of being an artist. Following that encounter, he made friends with several Westerners and learned to speak reasonably fluent English. Despite his aspirations to adopt a Western lifestyle and succeed in his career as an artist, he consistently operated from within the Balinese mythic system, which he regarded with great respect and awe.

Because of Wayan's allegiance to the Balinese worldview, and due to his emergence as a local artist of note, Bruce Carpenter and I decided to arrange a series of interviews. Carpenter had known Wayan for some time, having lived in his house for several months. I myself had met him on a 1984 study tour of Indonesia and was impressed both by his artistry and by his ability to articulate his beliefs and experiences. In his interviews Wayan said that his life had been difficult, but that these vicissitudes had motivated him to seek out his spiritual shortcomings and try to correct them. He did this in his attempts to fulfil both the constant demands of his ancestors and those of the gods and minor spirits that Balinese tradition holds responsible for the majority of one's problems. He said that he had often sought help from the *balians*, the folk healers of Bali. He also confessed an interest in the stories of unusual events that circulate in Bali. For example, he had recently travelled to a mysterious spring that had supposedly emerged from solid rock on the slopes of Gunung Agung, the holy volcano.

Wayan followed the Balinese traditional belief that dreams are *surat* — messages from spiritual planes, often containing portents of the future, so that dream content is carefully examined for hidden instructions. He said that dreams were an integral part of his life, an inspiration for his drawings and sculptures.

Dream One

Wayan described this first dream as one of the most important of his life. He said that it occurred when he was 15 years old and very ill with a fever.

'I dreamed that I was on the shore of an enormous pool of bright blue water. It was full of many fish and beautiful lotus flowers that swayed in a cooling breeze. I wandered along its shores and filled myself with the great beauty and calm. When I looked to Kaja (to the north, the direction of the holy volcano, Gunung Agung) I saw a magnificent palace and temple that was covered in gold and stood shimmering in the beautiful rays of the sun. I had been staring at the palace for what seemed a very long time when I noticed that there was a deep ravine at the bottom through which a river roared. This river separated me from the golden palace.

'Bridging that chasm was a single pole of bamboo. Overwhelmed by the desire to cross over, I was also petrified at the thought: even if the bridge were strong enough to support me, crossing it would require a balance I knew I did not possess. Instead I began to wonder who lived in such beauty. Without thinking, I cried for help.

'As my voice echoed over the hills, I saw a man come out of the main gate. He was dressed in a white sarong and a long white shirt, with a star of gold on his chest.' (Except for the gold star, this description matches the attire of the *pemangku* of village priests.) 'Slowly, he approached me. Much to my amazement, he crossed the bamboo pole gracefully. When he came within speaking distance, he asked, "Where are you going, my son?" I answered that I wished to travel to the golden palace and asked him to whom it belonged. In high Balinese, I also asked him his name and his caste.' (Wayan asked, *'Titiang nunas ontok melinggeh?'* This 'high' Balinese is a language used by high caste members or when a member of the high caste is addressed.)

'When the man answered that his name was Karung I was shocked, because that was the name of my deceased father. From my pocket, I took out an old picture of my father that I always carried and saw that it was indeed my father who stood before me. Overwhelmed with joy, I wept with the happiness of having finally met him. He touched me and radiated love for me. With calmness he announced, "It is I who live in this palace, my son. One day you will come to live with me here, but this time you may not enter, for you are not yet *murni* (pure). It would be dangerous for you."

'Together we circled the pool, but my joy had now turned to sorrow at his denial of my desire to stay. I pleaded with him, but he said that I must return to my home. He promised to help me, but I was not placated, and repeated that I did not want to lose him a second time. He said, "Fear not, for in the future you will have great success and many friends." With that promise, he gave me two sweet smelling flowers and pointed to the east' (according to Balinese tradition, the direction of positive forces). 'When I turned my back, he was gone.

'I cried out for him and woke to find myself with a compress of red onions on my forehead and surrounded by many people. They told me that I had been in a delirious fever for many hours and had come close to death.'

In this dream, one can observe a creative combination of Wayan's personal myths and traditional Balinese cultural mythology. At an age when a father-figure was needed for guidance, the young Wayan was separated from his natural father by death, and from his stepfather by tradition. The dream provided both a confirmation of future success and a spiritual direction — to become *murni*, so that some day he could join his father in the golden palace.

In other words, the dream encouraged Wayan to embrace the family heritage and fulfil the potential symbolised by his father. This personal myth was embedded in the context of the culture's mythology — the symbolic importance of directions, the reference to the sweet-smelling flowers (*cempaka dan sandat*), and the placing of his father in the costume of a *pemangku* with the sun on his chest. Balance is an important concept in Balinese mythology; custom dictates that one does not perform to excess. Although Wayan felt that he had not acquired the balance to cross the bamboo bridge, the *pemangku*/father-figure did so adroitly. This feat set the direction for Wayan, upholding the cultural values and motivating him to avoid

excess in his life.

However, this situation also set the stage for mythic conflict. Wayan's ambition for wealth and success would be considered *sombong* or vainglorious for someone of his social and financial background. He resolved this dilemma by using traditional forms to legitimise his ambition to make something more out of his life than he could by remaining a poor woodcarver. He also attempted to manage this conflict by admitting his shortcomings. He admitted, in his dream, that he was not pure and had not enough balance to cross the bamboo pole. This set a directional matrix and allowed him to moderate his personal goal within the framework of the traditional culture, which esteems both balance and *adat* — the strict adherence to old cultural norms. Balinese tradition emphasises blending into society rather than standing out; Wayan's awareness of this principle is evident in his dream.

Dream Two

About two years before our interview, Wayan had become involved in a house-building project with a Frenchman. Unfortunately, because of their irreconcilable cultural and personal differences the two of them were never able to come to terms. They became alienated from each other, especially as money ran short to complete the project.

Wayan found himself in a difficult position. Many of his friends assumed that he was rich, since he owned property. Thus he 'stood out' from his culture, a serious transgression. In reality, he was in debt and was struggling to finish the house. To complicate matters, this was taking place in a strange village, far from his native town of Mas. Since the local residents were suspicious of him and felt no obligation to him, the more daring of them stole his building materials when he was not on the site.

As if this were not difficult enough, the house was in a canyon carved by Bali's longest river, on ground that had never before been the site of human habitation. Thus the location was felt to hold, paradoxically, both danger and the potential of spiritual power. Because he was short of money, Wayan had been unable to afford a cleansing *mecharu* ceremony where he would make offerings and ask permission of the local deities and spirits to live there.

Wayan reported that this next dream had occurred on the night of a full moon and *Kajeng-Kliwon*, a day in the Balinese calendar considered to be very powerful for the operation of both benevolent and malevolent magic. He had found himself alone on the building site which even his closest friends had now abandoned with great fear. They warned him of grave consequences and even death if he dared to remain on land not yet blessed and purified, on the night of such power and magic as Kajeng-Kliwon illuminated by a full moon. Wayan was petrified, yet had vowed to stay, having taken the precaution of making various offerings to several gods and spirits. He reported:

'I had fallen asleep about midnight when I thought I saw a bold black-skinned giant. He was wearing a magic black and white chequered cloth.' (*Kamben poleng* is a black and white chequered cloth, considered to be sacred and representing opposing cosmic forces.) 'He awakened

me with a great yelp. Looking at my watch, I saw that it was one o'clock and, being very tired, I went back to sleep.

'Again he returned and I awoke. But this time I got up and started to sweep the floor. Outside on the veranda I noticed that the flowers of one of my offerings were unusually bright. As I approached them with curiosity, they seemed to become black and rotten. I repeated this motion several times and noticed the same result. Picking up the offering to examine it, I noticed that a coin fell out — a coin that I had definitely not put in the offering. It was black and dirty. Without thinking, I put it in my pocket and went back to sleep. Again the giant came to me. To tell the truth, I did not know if I was dreaming or awake.

'This time the giant spoke to me. He said that this land was *suci* (holy). I was destined to own it and must therefore never sell it because the land would bring me *kesaktian* (power). The giant promised that as long as I continued to live on the land, be honest and follow *hidup jujur dan sopan* (a just and decent life following traditional ways), my luck and success would gradually increase.

'He warned me that two of my workers were, in fact, stealing from me a little at a time, and that they would be punished for their wickedness. He told me their names.

Finally, he revealed to me that the coin I had found in the offering had magical powers and was his gift to me. He said that he gave it to me because he felt *kasian* (compassion) for my poverty and bad luck. With a smile, he said that if I wanted immediate riches I need only dig, because this land held many hidden treasures. Fearful that he was testing me, I answered that I preferred gradual prosperity when I deserved it.

'The giant laughed and told me not to be greedy, and to remember the gods and my ancestors. I was given special instructions for offerings that I needed to make every *Kajeng-Kliwon* (which occurs every 15 days). He told me that I must never give my coin to others and must always carry it on my person.

'I got out of bed, (found a coin in my pocket) and scrubbed it. I saw that it had, on one side, a picture of Arjuna (one of the heroes of the Hindu Mahabharata epic).'

During the interview, Wayan produced the coin. It resembled the old Chinese bronze coins, with square holes in the center, that are used often in Balinese ceremonies. On one side there appeared to be a stylised image of a human figure. Whether or not it was an 'Arjuna coin' is difficult to say. These coins are often mentioned in studies of Balinese magic and are associated with love because Arjuna was renowned as the 'lover-warrior.' As soon as Wayan had saved enough money for the required ceremonies, the rites were faithfully performed and he continued to make offerings to the giant every 15 days on *Kajeng-Kliwon*.

In retrospect, the giant's role in the dream seems to be a confirmatory one. He assures Wayan that the land will bring him power and success. In the Balinese culture, it is considered poor taste to adopt a life style that diverges from that of one's neighbours. Creativity is allowed, but only within fairly traditional forms. The giant, however, gives Wayan assurance that he can pursue his artistic career as long as he follows the traditional ways. Wayan

can own the land, situated as it is in a spot so prominent that few Balinese would consider living there, because he is 'destined' to do so and because it is 'holy.' This message is impressed upon Wayan by the repeated awakenings and by the appearance of the coin, adorned by the heroic Hindu figure Arjuna who represents a balance between strength and tenderness, famed for being both a warrior and a lover.

Dream Three

The third dream was said to have taken place the night before the interview. That afternoon Wayan had been visiting some friends in the village when they all noticed that three leaves on a garden bush were trembling in a peculiar fashion. One of the friends ran off in fright while the other retreated inside his house. Wayan continued to watch for about 15 minutes as the trembling continued. Closing his eyes, Wayan concentrated in an attempt to determine if something was trying to work *bebai* (sorcery) or if it were a message from the gods. Wayan called on the spirit of his father for aid, a practice he had begun after the first dream of this series.

At the same time, he tried to be aware whether there was a special trembling sensation on the surface of his skin — one he claims is an indication that someone is attempting to work *bebai* in the vicinity — an ability purportedly shared by many Balinese. In this case, he concluded that *bebai* was involved and that it originated in Mas, his home village. Opening his eyes, he lit a cigarette and noticed a rare brilliant blue fly sitting on one of the leaves. He blew smoke in its direction and the insect flew away. Wayan began to head toward his home, beginning to worry about the warning and speculating on the danger it presented. He stopped to buy coffee and some special ingredients so that he could make a special offering to protect him against the danger. He reported the following dream from that night:

'A deep, dreadful voice boomed out, "Wake up, I am going to burn you up." I found myself in a jungle, surrounded by big tall trees. Without warning, a fire sprang up on my left, burning the trees and animals who lived in the jungle. I wondered who was trying to burn me and what wrong deed I had committed for such punishment.

'Resigning myself to my fate, I spoke to the fire, saying, "If you wish to burn me to ashes then do so, for once I am dead I cannot die again." To my surprise the fire, instead of attacking, fled from me toward the sea. As I watched its retreat, I was filled with great anger at the destruction of the beautiful forest and the many dead animals. I felt that it was a coward for having failed to destroy me as well. I wanted to punish it for those wrongs.

'When these thoughts filled my mind, I saw two wondrous birds flying toward me. They swooped down. Taking me by the arms, they lifted me into the air. Together, we chased after the fire with great speed.

'As we drew overhead, I began to urinate on the flames. The fire was large and we circled many times as an endless stream of urine flowed until the last ember was extinguished. It was like a war, and one that I had won with the aid of those heavenly birds.'

In this dream, there are several possible

allusions to cultural mythic images. The sea is looked upon by traditional Balinese as a source of danger. The fire retreats toward the sea after wreaking destruction on nature. The *garuda* bird is a mythological Balinese creature, originating in Hindu mythology where it once came to the aid of Arjuna, the figure supposedly represented on Wayan's coin. Urination is a common source of humour among the Balinese and does not carry a heavy negative connotation. So it is appropriate that Wayan used his own resources (his urine) as well as a cultural symbol (the 'wondrous birds') to vanquish the fire. Whatever the meaning of the fire (pride, lust, vengeance), it can be seen as a force disruptive to the natural balance so extolled by the Balinese. It is this balance that triumphs at the end of the dream. Wayan feels that he has won a war — just as Arjuna had been victorious in Hindu mythology.

Discussion

In Wayan's dreams, one can observe the importance of direction (movement toward north and east being associated with positive elements, movement toward the south and west with negative events), the emphasis on balance (the *pemangku*/father-figure crossing a bamboo bridge), the need for resolution and unity (the giant wearing the black and white chequered cloth, a sacred pattern used on special religious occasions and representing the unity of opposing cosmic forces), the Arjuna coin, and the 'wondrous birds'.

Embedded in this Balinese mythological matrix are Wayan's own mythic issues. A detailed interpretation of the dreams can not be undertaken without knowing more about the dreamer's life experience. Nevertheless, one can observe Wayan's appreciation of beauty (the pool filled with fish and 'beautiful lotus flowers,' the 'beauty and calm' of the shores, the 'magnificent palace,' the 'beautiful rays of the sun,' the 'sweet-smelling flowers,' and the 'wondrous birds'). Wayan seems attracted toward the artistic life where he can not only appreciate but create objects of aesthetic value (e.g., 'I wished to travel to the golden palace').

There is an obstacle to Wayan's growth that is stated in several ways (the river separating him from the golden palace, his lack of balance which prevents him from crossing the bamboo bridge, the degenerating flowers, his 'poverty and bad luck,' the malevolent fire). However, the dreams are optimistic in that the obstacles are removed, or at least there is a promise of their removal (he will enter the golden palace when he is murni or pure, the land will bring him kesaktian or power, the gods take kasian or compassion on him for his poverty and will improve his fortunes).

But Wayan is not to be a passive recipient of these gifts. He must work to purify himself, he must 'dig' into his *lang* (or psyche) to obtain its 'hidden treasures.' He must make offerings every 15 days. He must urinate on the fire to win the 'war' he is waging against malevolent forces. Indeed, the urination might be a metaphor for some type of inner purification needed to quench the internal fires that keep him from attaining his goal. His successful battle is waged from the air — perhaps a metaphor for rising above or transcending his problems (the fire) in order to overcome them.

Reading these dreams one after the other, one can appreciate the wisdom of Jung's admonition to study dreams as a series. Many patterns and themes become evident when examining a number of dreams that could be missed if only a single one were studied. In this series, one can observe the distant goal of the first dream, the presentation of a power object (the Arjuna coin) in the second dream, and the quenching of Wayan's destructive forces in the third dream. At the end of this dream, Wayan has not only transcended the inner conflict but has resolved it. He has remained true to the personal myth of his artistic calling and has developed his potential in a way that draws upon his cultural myths rather than negating them.

The three dreams of I Wayan Ariana remind us that dream life and waking life share more similarities than differences, and that both may be 'thought' into existence in a manner not unlike the way in which the Upanishads described how Vishnu 'dreamed up' human beings and their world. In the case of 'waking life,' environmental information passes freely across a person's sensory receptors; if they match the 'tunings' of the neural filters, they help form that person's life world and personal mythology. In dreaming life, information from the preceding days, and from earlier life experiences, become reoperative. But the dreamer can create a specific life world out of many possibilities; according to Gordon Globus, 'dream life is our own formative creation' and echoes Hindu scripture's description of dreaming sleep as an opportunity for human beings to create as the gods create, by emitting images. However, Hindu philosophy used a divine artisan as its model, while Globus' mechanism is 'a possible world machine' that creates by selection from a plenum of enfolded possibilities that includes genetic predisposition, life experiences, and — indeed — randomness.

Both Tibetan Buddhist philosophy and Western social constructionism describe how the 'individual self' is socially constructed. These 'selves' are manifestations of the same filtering process, but during dreams the filters often collapse and humans are opened not only to the subtle signals described by Wolf but to new conceptions of being such as the 'wholeness of the events of our lives'. In ordinary consciousness, it appears as if our being is centred in our brains and bodies; but dreams attest that one's being is centred not in one's self but in the relation between one's own brain and the brains of others. Some of this feeling can be retrieved by group dreamwork and dream sharing during wakefulness. For such theorists as Wolf and Ullman, the history of waking consciousness is a history of fragmentation and separation, but the dreaming self reflects another 'reality' — the dreamer as member of a single species.

For Westerners, this notion is foreign, as is the traditional Balinese de-emphasis on the individual. I Wayan Ariana's dreams challenge the Western notions of the individual self, Western conceptualisations of the mind/body 'problem,' as well as Western ideas about 'free will' and 'determinism'. Virtually all Westerners know the differences between waking reality and dream reality, even though those dissimilarities have been constructed in varying ways in different cultures. Skilled lucid dreamers can answer the question 'Am I dreaming?' within a few seconds.

Most others can answer the question 'Have I been dreaming?' on awakening. If the answers are so obvious, why are the questions so persistent? Perhaps the attempt to distinguish dream reality from waking reality is part of a larger programme, one that — in the West — typically distinguishes object from subject, science from myth, intellect from body, reason from intuition, modernity from postmodernity, the normal from the paranormal, humans from nature, men from women, monotheism from paganism, technology from 'spirit' — basically, the established order from the 'other'.

Therefore it should come as no surprise that dreams should be linked with myth, intuition, postmodernity, the paranormal, the dominion of nature, the demands of the body, the domain of women, the rituals of paganism, the realm of the spirit, and all aspects of the 'other' that by Westerners can only safely be treated as 'object', lest they slide through the filters that Westerners have erected to protect their reality. Perhaps there are aspects of dream reality and species connectedness that pose a vibrant threat to the Western worldview that has exploited the environment, violated women, persecuted minorities, belittled other ways of knowing, and maintained a colonial and patriarchal approach to politics, economics, warfare, and the social order.

In 1816, Samuel Taylor Coleridge asked the question, 'If you could pass through Paradise in a dream, and have a flower presented to you as a pledge that your soul had really been there, and if you found that flower in your hand when you awoke . . . What then?' This question is more than poetic fantasy because Wayan claimed that he found such an object in his pocket when he awakened from a dream. The enigma implicit in these three Balinese dreams may yet force Westerners to explore non-Western traditions, asking questions outside their frame of 'reality' and — perhaps — obtaining answers that will require a revision of that framework. Just as dreams often provide explanations and solutions to personal problems, the social and global problems of waking reality may one day be approached in a different way if dream reality is entered and explored.

Further Reading

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