

STORIES, MYTHS AND LEGENDS



Stories, Myths and Legends

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Since the dawn of time or consciousness, I imagine that people have made up stories or found stories or borrowed stories to give meaning, structure and sense to their lives as individuals, as groups and as cultures. The narrative structure of understanding the shape of human experience underlies most of the great works of all the spiritual traditions which attempt to give meaning to important questions such as the beginning of time, the beginning of life, and what happened next.

Victor Frankl, the Viennese psychiatrist, showed in his very important work, *Man's Search for Meaning*, how the importance of attaching meaning — narrative structure — to the unimaginable psychophysical torture experiences of the concentration camps of Auschwitz and Buchenwald could facilitate transformation, endurance, altruism, or even, most basically, survival.

Today, counselling psychologists such as Donald Polkinghorne have discovered

that practitioners 'work with narrative and knowledge. They are concerned with people's stories: they work with case histories and use narrative explanations to understand why the people they work with behave the way they do . . . But,' adds Polkinghorne, in *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, 'what I have learned from the practitioner's kind of knowledge is the importance of having research strategies that can work with the narratives people use to understand the human world.'

In this issue I have the privilege of bringing together the fruits of the work of several practitioners who relate to story, myth and fairy tale as important and significant prisms for the therapeutic or self-developmental journey.

Annemarie Schimmel describes in *The Triumphal Sun* how Rumi, a great spiritual teacher and leader of a school on one spectacularly ordinary day became completely entranced of a filthy old beggar named Shams who 'did not fit in at all to the Konya society'. Rumi neglected his religious and social duties to spend all his days and nights with Shams in ecstatic conversation and blissful union. Eventually Shams went away, but Rumi pined and pined until Shams was brought back to Mowlana's

house, where they continued their relationship. In the end the jealousy over their intimacy and the outrage at Rumi's privileging of the old dervish with his company and his gifts became unbearable. By an account which now appears proven, Rumi's heirs and students murdered Shams. They hid their complicity and Shams' body from Rumi who poured out his grief in their midst for years and years afterwards.

Deirdre Haslam uses the seven-level model to look at different aspects of psychotherapeutic practice with lesbian and gay clients, differentiating along the way the respective characteristics of myth, legend and fairy tale.

Marie Angelo contributes one of the finest pieces I have ever read to articulate the soul of the kind of education which I value and which I now try and embody in the learning structures at Physis.

Emily Young, a sculptor and a granddaughter of Rodin, brings us the reflections of an artist as she meditates on the transfiguration of stone.

Geoff Mead's delightful tale focuses us on the role of myths and stories in organisations.

Finally, 'Chiron's Academy' is my own attempt to look at reactive countertransference issues through a mythical prism.

