

Earth, Climate, Dreams
Dialogues with Depth Psychologists
in the Age of the Anthropocene

Bonnie Bright
and
Jonathan Paul Marshall

Featured Interviewees

Stephen Aizenstat
Veronica Goodchild
Susannah Benson
Jeffrey Kiehl
Jerome Bernstein
Jonathan Marshall

Michael Conforti
Robert Romanyshyn
Nancy Swift Furlotti
Susan Rowland
Sally Gillespie
Erel Shalit

Bonnie Bright

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Summary of *Earth, Climate, Dreams* Book

Over time, humans in western cultures have undergone a profound restructuring of the psyche resulting in a traumatic sense of separation. In modern day, we face a growing set of challenges on ecological and social fronts, in part due to the significant impact of human activity on the planet, an era now informally called the Anthropocene.

If humans are going to deal with climate change, ecological destruction, and the recognition of an age in which humans are changing the very structures of our world, then we need both social and psychological change.

This crisis requires that we reflect on our situation from a depth psychological perspective, contemplating how we might tap into the underlying archetypal themes at work in the culture and begin to articulate them in ways that inspire and move us to personal and collective action.

Indeed, without some understanding of our psychological processes and our unconscious dynamics, it is unlikely that any social change we can generate will solve the problems we face. Our psychological drives will continue the crisis.

Yet, in this book, Jungian analysts, therapists, and academics with an interest in Depth Psychology discuss their approaches to these problems with Bonnie Bright, Ph.D., a certified transpersonal coach and the Founder of Depth Psychology Alliance, with hope and inspiration. Together, they contemplate psychological issues of ecological collapse, our conceptual separation from nature, the cultural complexes that drive us, and the importance of attending various Jungian, depth, and transpersonal modalities—including our dreams—for engaging with what may well be the challenge of our age and of ages to come.

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Culture Collapse Disorder

Bonnie Bright Interviewed

by Jonathan Marshall

Excerpted from the book, *Earth, Climate, Dreams: Dialogues with Depth Psychologists in the Age of the Anthropocene*, Eds. Bonnie Bright and Jonathan Paul Marshall, Depth Insights Press, 2019, pp. 361-391.

JM: Hello, Bonnie. Thank you for agreeing to do this dialogue with me today. It's normally *you* doing the interviewing!

BB: It's nice to have the tables turned for a change, so thank you. I'm really happy to have this honor of sharing my research and passion.

JM: One of the things we'll be talking about today is what you've called "culture collapse disorder," which derives from your study of colony collapse disorder in bees. I understand that you have argued that people in Western cultures, nowadays, suffer an ongoing and collective sense of separation and disorientation. We have no sense of home or belonging. This condition has led us to what you perceive as culture collapse. So, can you tell us a little bit about how this idea arose, what colony collapse disorder is, and what the analogical links are?

BB: This is a big topic, I'll start with colony collapse disorder, since that is quite concrete. We first become aware of this problem in late 2006, when beekeepers, on routine inspections, began finding their hives almost completely empty, except for the queen and a small handful of her attendants. The worker bees had virtually vanished, abandoning the hive, the unhatched bees, and all of the honey.

In nature, it is virtually inconceivable that the worker bees would desert the hive *en masse* like that, especially leaving the queen to fend for herself, because the queen is the lifeblood of the hive. If the worker bees no longer bring back the nectar and the pollen that are so vital to feed the colony, then the queen can no longer lay eggs; the brood will never mature; and the hive dies out. The queen simply cannot gather her own food from outside the hive.

When I first heard about colony collapse disorder, I found it to be a curious but frightening phenomenon. We need bees. Without pollination, humans are going to experience significant issues. Bees pollinate about one in every three bites of food that we eat. They are profoundly important to us for our own nourishment and survival. We are extremely interconnected with bees, and with all nature. Obviously, we *are* nature. I ended up working with the phenomenon of colony collapse disorder from a depth and Jungian perspective, and wrote my Master's thesis on the topic, having recognized that it could serve as a very powerful metaphor for something that's happening amongst humans.

Let's begin with the premise that we are all connected to something bigger, that we have some relationship with what people variously perceive as a higher self, the universe, the divine, god, or the sacred, depending on your own set of beliefs and values. Jung believed that we desperately need to be in regular relationship with that "something bigger" in order to

experience perspective and to gain meaning and understanding for our lives, or to have guidance as we grow and follow our journey of individuation in this life on this planet.

While writing about the bees, I also recognized that, from a social standpoint, humans go out into the world each day much like bees do, and busy ourselves with the myriad of tasks of living life. However, as a general rule, we are not consistently bringing something of value back home to the hive. We are not engaging with that something bigger through ritual, prayer, and worship. When we fail to turn our daily tasks into an offering to something bigger than ourselves, then our own “hives” are bound to collapse.

That “something of value” we need to be taking home to the hive translates into contact with the sacred through contemplation, working with symbols or dreams, or whatever works for each of us individually to feel we are in communion with something divine, something bigger than everyday selves. We have to do something on an ongoing basis that keeps us in touch with and learning from our Selves, and I mean the Jungian “Self” with a capital S here. In a very real way, our Self is our home, and if we don’t relate to it, we will feel fundamentally homeless and empty. If we don’t have that contact, we may even become destructive and self-destructive.

When I began to think about research for my doctoral dissertation, I began to recognize that this idea has profound implications on a collective level as well, not only for our own individual well-being and wholeness, but also for our culture and society. I was just recognizing the extent to which we humans, especially in Western industrial societies, have trained ourselves to use various coping mechanisms that actually prevent us from noticing and feeling the sense of emptiness and meaninglessness that so many of us, in our culture, carry.

We have generally become a culture of people who are quite empty and distressed, and this emptiness arises because we are not coming back home to ourselves or coming home to the sacred. That clearly affects our relationship, or our ability to even have relationship, with nature, and it explains so much about the ways we are abusing the earth, consuming natural resources as if there were in infinite supply, and contributing dramatically to climate change. I don't mean to make this sound completely reductionist and universal, because clearly people do have practices from which they derive meaning, such as religion or their work in the world.

JM: And sometimes, even though people have spiritual practices, these do not put us in touch with reality. Puritan Americans were not renowned for their ability to relate to Nature, for example, or to other people for that matter.

BB: That's why you have to let things speak for themselves. We live in a universe where everything is intelligent and ensouled. However, on a large scale in contemporary culture, we have become dissociated and numb, and we turn to addictions and commodities, which enable us to try and spare ourselves from the sense of loss which we feel at a very core part of ourselves. A lot of this is unconscious: We come home from a day's work, watch TV, or eat, or shop, or whatever helps us numb ourselves and distract ourselves from the pain of not having a deeper sense of meaning in our lives. There's a psychologist named Philip Cushman, who wrote about what he calls the "empty self" in his book, *Constructing the Self, Constructing America*. His work really articulates this challenge we're up against.

In my own exploration of the phenomena, I got really lost in the research for a long time. There is so much out there that is negative to focus on when it comes to the distress that our planet and our culture are each going

through. And if you begin to really get a sense of it, it can be overwhelming. There's a level at which we try and ignore all the negative news and statistics, but of course we are taking it in even if we are not overtly aware of how it's affecting us. We watch the news, or even if we manage to consciously avoid watching the news, it's almost impossible to avoid seeing news headlines popping up on your smart phone or computer every time you open a browser, or catching stories on your car radio or in airports where TVs are tuned to Fox News or CNN. Any one of us might even be doing something meaningful, like reading poetry or something depth psychological, and those headlines are suddenly just there.

My conclusion was that for us to come back in touch with ourselves and to come back home to the hive again, we all need to do our individual work on that level. And, by the way, by doing that individual work, we are also doing it on behalf of others who are not consciously aware of how they are affected. Not doing it leads to what I call "*culture collapse disorder*."

JM: So, can you tell us a little more about colony collapse before we move further into culture collapse disorder, as we need to understand the basic points of both?

BB: Well, what mystified scientists about colony collapse at the time that it began to emerge in late 2006 or so was that, normally when bees die, they die just outside the hive. So, if there is a disease or an infestation of mites or just old age, you will see the bodies piled up nearby. When a bee gets old and she knows she is going to die—most bees die of old age because their wings wear out—then, rather than dying inside the hive where her sisters have to clear away her body, she goes outside the hive to die alone. Quite selflessly.

However, in the case of colony collapse disorder, the bees vanish completely. We now know, they are dying farther afield dispersed quite widely so that we just couldn't see them—they are not making their way back to the hive. So, there is a difference between not coming back home to die, and making what we could almost believe is the selfless gesture which they make because they are in tune with the rest of the hive and its needs.

JM: I was just thinking that I've seen recent reports from Europe which say that flying insects, in general, are diminishing in numbers. This will cause problems for insect-eating birds. This is a real sign the earth systems are not well.

Part of that might be the insecticides we use because we are trying to get rid of insects because they are troublesome or messy, or we want to grow food in particular ways. We don't take note of the unintended side effects of our orders until it's too late.

BB: Yes, that's true. However, we are not completely sure of the causes of the collapse of bee colonies. Within the first year, something like a quarter of beekeepers in the United States had reported losses amounting to 30% of their bees, which amounts to billions of bees. All over the world, other reports began coming in of people discovering that hives were virtually abandoned. As I said, this is seriously worrying, and I just couldn't leave it alone. I began looking into it, and, of course, I discovered a lot of symbolism and connection between bees and humans.

Bees show up in mythology in various ways and are linked to the goddess and her tremendous creative power. There's a creation myth from Egypt that says the Goddess Neith emerged from the primordial waters and gave birth to Ra, the sun; then flew away in the form of bee. She established her sacred temple, called the House of the Bee in Lower Egypt where it still stands to this day.

The Greeks literally called priestesses of Demeter and Artemis the *melissae*, the Greek word for bees. In ancient Eleusis, during sacred, mysterious rites centered on fertility and initiation, priestesses were referred to as “producers of sweetness,” potentially in relation to their sacred role of helping bring forth the fruitfulness of the earth, the body of the Great Mother. And, the goddess herself was known as the queen bee.

The Mycenaean culture who particularly revered the Mother Goddess, built tombs, called *tholos*, in the form of beehives, which connotes, as some believe, the womb of the goddess and the cycles of life and death in conjunction with its creative powers. Also, the earliest human-kept hives found in Israel from 12,000 years ago were excavated alongside fertility figurines, which seems to allude to some kind of significant relationship between the bees and the goddess.

In Greece, Crete, Turkey, and Egypt, I had the privilege of seeing ancient artifacts in museums which showed what an important role the bees had in various cultures: a Minoan golden seal from 4,000 years ago found buried with the dead depicts the goddess and her priestesses, dressed as bees, dancing together. Coins from Ephesus, in what is now Turkey, feature bees, and a statue of the Ephesian representation of the goddess, Artemis, has bees carved on her clothing.

In many cases, the goddess herself was depicted as a bee. Anthropomorphic images—that is, part human and part animal—are featured on pottery, plaques, and jewelry uncovered on the island of Rhodes. These show the goddess Artemis with a human body and bee wings and antennae. In other forms, she has a bee body, with a human head and hands. In Crete, she was said to manifest at times as a swarm of bees. Wherever there were goddess cults, bees were never far away, and her influence even lasted well into the cultural shift toward patriarchy. In Greece, the oracle at Delphi who ultimately served Apollo was

called the “Delphic bee” even long after the primarily patriarchal pantheon of Zeus was established.

Homer referred in his writings to three bees or bee-maidens who practiced divination in many ancient cultures and the Minoan bee goddesses are thought to be the three bee maidens who originally taught Apollo how to prophesy. I could go on and on. There’s much more than I can mention here, but obviously, all that is very interesting.

But going back to colony collapse disorder, the key thing is that the bees are apparently just not coming back home to the hive, which is really significant and troubling.

JM: So, this becomes a kind of out-of-control feedback situation.

BB: Yes. As fewer and fewer bees return to the hive bringing pollen and nectar, additional bees have to go out to get that food. Eventually, none of them come back either, and the hive itself collapses. In a way, the whole system just gets exhausted, and runs out of juice.

Of course, as we know, a hive is much more than the thousands of individual honeybees that live inside it. The hive literally sustains the survival of the bees. It is the community. As the hive begins to fail, or the community begins to fail, we have this downward spiral, and both collapse together. The hive collapses, and so the individuals collapse; and vice versa: because the individuals collapse, the hive collapses. As the hive weakens, there is less there to attract the bees back home. There is less and less incentive to come back, and so something vital gets lost.

JM: So, you are suggesting this is the case for humans as well. The less we get involved in community, the more the community collapses and the less it involves us, or seems attractive?

BB: Yes, that’s one way to look at it. And, I would add, if we go out into our lives and gather experience and understanding, but then we fail to return “home” to commune with that something that is bigger than our everyday ego selves, to integrate and honor that experience, we are not nurturing our larger, soulful selves that can sustain us.

JM: I see. So, there is an interesting ambiguity in the way you are using the term “hive” at the symbolic level, because, as you describe it, it is a return to the Self, as Jung defined it, but it’s also a return to community at the same time.

BB: Exactly.

JM: So, how do we fulfill this need to go back to the Self, and to give back to the larger community?

BB: That’s such a good question. When we humans don’t recognize—or are not willing or able—to come back to that “something larger” that sustains us, it becomes a problem for us. Sometimes I think we feel more related to others if we can relate to the Self (with the capital S, as Jung referred to it). My sense is that there needs to be a balance; a regular pattern of communion, but I’m also very aware that if, indeed, we are in tune with the Self, we can sometimes understand that there are times, as in nature, when things die. They may die alone, as in the case of bees. Of course, in Jungian terms, sometimes we need to risk dying symbolically in order to progress, and that can be part of contact with the greater Self.

In our culture, it is really necessary to understand that there is a powerful need for us to go back to that something larger—whatever you decide to call it. The Self is the totality of the person’s being, conscious and

unconscious. And when that is activated, and we listen to its wisdom, and it gives us context, then we grow, and the communities we inhabit can also grow.

JM: With that contact, we may then begin to recognize the systems we are immersed in, and possibly try to save them?

BB: Yes. All of these ideas involve the understanding that life is more than just our ego. It is much bigger and richer. Understanding this can nurture us. It allows us to be aware and conscious of our interconnectivity with all beings in the web of life. When we don't make the effort to look at that, or to say it another way—when we're not coming back home to that awareness on daily a basis—we can feel very lost and separate.

That was really the core symbolic connection that I made between colony collapse disorder and what I'm calling *culture* collapse disorder. It highlights the real risk that, by becoming disconnected from the Self, we are not bringing any nourishment home to ourselves or others, and the culture will collapse.

We know that life as we know it could change dramatically—and *is* changing dramatically and perhaps catastrophically—and we need the wisdom and awareness of our Self to respond. I think that to respond constructively we need to have a more soulful approach to what it is that we are doing here on this planet, both individually and culturally.

JM: There is also the issue you talk about, of the wounded relationship between nature and culture, and how we as humans are contributing, whether consciously or unconsciously, to this pattern of culture collapse disorder, which helps produce ecological destruction. It seems probable we have climate change, partly because we are trying to hide from reality. If we truly allow conscious

awareness of the emptiness and pain in a given society, we might see the direct connection to our ecological problems.

Because I'm an anthropologist I tend to think in social terms; things like the dimensions or organization of our work, or of our society, more generally. Is it possible that this society might even depend, for its economics, say, on generating a sense of emptiness in people or in separating people from nature so that they fill that emptiness with commodities or busy-ness? I'm not saying this is deliberate, it's just the system. But how would you heal that wounded relationship?

BB: That is the underlying question, and it's one of those situations where we're all implicated. None of us can step outside our culture and say that we are not contributing to the problems. Obviously, some people contribute more to the problems than others, but it's not about declaring some people guilty. Anybody reading this probably has some sense of responsibility for what is happening. Our culture and the crisis are so interconnected. For example, most of us drive cars. It's expected and often necessary, due to the way our cities and towns are designed. Even if we don't drive cars, we probably have to take a bus, and using either one increases greenhouse gas emissions. So, living the way we live is responsible for the problems.

All kinds of actions drive the greenhouse gas emissions resulting from our lifestyle. By consuming products that are not locally grown or manufactured means those products have to be transported to wherever we live—and that requires fossil fuels. But it's not only that. Anybody who is using electronics, which we all do, has probably contributed directly to energy expenditure, mining, bad labor conditions, and the severe disruption of the environment somewhere on Earth. This is one of several topics I focused on in *Depth Psychology and the Digital Age*, an anthology I published a couple of years

ago that takes a Jungian view of technology and its impact.¹

I'm not going to pretend that there is only one right answer to the question of being implicated in our own destruction, but we do have to change our understandings of life and the way we live. So, my answer from a depth psychological or transpersonal perspective is that we need to become more connected with our Selves (with the capital S, again) and that sense of something larger.

You know, Jung said “The greatest question for mankind is, is he connected to something infinite or not?” I'm paraphrasing here, but when we do not realize that we are connected to that infinite, that *great mystery*, that's when we tend to go into despair; to shut ourselves down, and cut ourselves off. That's when the culture collapses. The requisite nourishment is just not there. We are not renewing our vitality through sacred ritual or spiritual engagement.

Now you are absolutely right in what you said earlier. Our culture is clearly geared toward fostering that sense of emptiness for economic reasons. If you begin to look at consumerism, you can see that advertisers try to create a longing or deep desire for something, so that we will buy what we really don't need. Before mass manufacturing, people would only buy things when the basic things they needed wore out. If their shoes wore out, developing holes or breaking down, they would get one new pair because they had to. But advertising began to create the idea that our lives would be even better with certain items so that those manufacturers could sell those things. They conditioned us, relentlessly, with the idea that we could be happy through owning *things*, and the wave of consumerism we see nowadays in Western industrial nations gradually became the norm.

¹ See *Depth Psychology and the Digital Age*, edited by Bonnie Bright, and published by Depth Insights, 2016.

Even today, all those advertisers are competing with each other to amplify the emptiness we feel so that we will attempt to fill with some product or other. And that's it. The solution to feeling better, or living better, is to buy something. The deep sense of meaninglessness that we carry around with us is actually due to the fact that we are not coming home to the sacred; we are not communing with something larger than ourselves; something divine. But since most of us don't recognize that that is the issue we're constantly searching for other ways to fill that emptiness.

We need to create an awareness around what it is that we are doing specifically to avoid feeling the sense of loss that has occurred to us collectively. If we are able to reconnect with our Selves on an individual level, then I believe that we can gain what we really need. Once that reconnection occurs, then we can manage the urges we have to dissociate and to numb ourselves, and which we turn to things like shopping, consumerism, or other addictions to fill.

It might seem like this is an easy answer, but it's not. First, we have to be aware of the issue, and then we have to be able to follow up with some kind of action to remedy the situation. While I may be aware of what I perceive the problem to be, it doesn't mean that I find it easy to take some kind of specific action to reconnect with that sense of the sacred in this crazy society we live in.

The speed of our lives is not conducive to reflectivity or to the connection to nature and soul that we require to find real meaning in life. Some people talk about the "Great Acceleration," a term which has been used to describe the past few decades where everything seems to have sped up exponentially. We move at such a pace we don't have time to think about essential reality very often—certainly not as often as we need to, to maintain a healthy center and to navigate life's challenges with resilience, integrity, and hope.

JM: I don't think it has always been like this for humans.

BB: It certainly appears that our ancestors, and many people even today, lived, or live, with more of a sense of communion with nature and the Self. This doesn't make them perfect of course. We're still human, and we've always been detrimental to our environment to varying degrees. But in indigenous cultures, there has traditionally been more of a sense of communion with the vast tapestry of life. When hunters went out to kill an animal, they paid homage to that animal through a direct and sacred relationship.

They didn't just kill indiscriminately; they would express their thanks to the animal spirit through ritual and prayer. Trees had spirits, too. They were alive. They could be spoken to and listened, too. When we listen to trees, I like to think we are listening to part of the Self. As our ancestors saw everything in the world as animated, with their own sense of soul, it was easier to see that everything related to everything else, and relationships could be made. The tendency to objectify the world around us, seeing the objects in nature as largely inanimate or even dead, has been a profound loss in our culture. This is another reason why we need that sense of being part of something greater, that we can listen to and interact with.

And again, a big part of the problem is that we may not even realize what it is that we've lost. We go through our lives being busy, giving over to all of our various addictions to mitigate the emptiness we feel, when we really need to pause and engage with the living world around us. And I would suggest that we can do this through symbolic work; through ritual, witnessing, contemplation, prayer, making art, dream work, or what Jung called *active imagination*. Relating to our Self helps relating to the world and to other people.

JM: So, you are suggesting that we need to regain our active relationship with nature, because we really *are* part of nature, or the wider self, and that is the reality which would fill our emptiness?

BB: Yes. Let me briefly touch on the symbolic thinking I just mentioned. This is a very Jungian idea. It's really the idea that psyche (and not just human psyche) speaks in images and stories, so that we turn our attention to that part of our reality. That includes the natural world, since most of our myths and symbols have connection with that world.

Then, once we are paying attention, we need to listen to our dreams, study mythology, tell and listen to stories—all of the arts come into this. When we have familiarity with this way of being, we can begin to integrate some of those symbolic ideas into our own lives, and we can start to make the shift from surface level thinking down to a deeper way of being in the symbolic life. This process then provides us with the context to give us real satisfying meaning. This gives us context, but also allow us to slow down the crazy urge to consume, to stuff our uncomfortable feelings of sadness, angst, or isolation down into the depths, or fill up that empty space with artificial meaning.

JM: So, you are suggesting that symbolic thought can help fill the emptiness, we normally fill with consuming, and help use better relate to community and nature?

BB: Yes. It's a much richer source of nourishment than any consumer goods. We can ask, at a symbolic level, how are we feeding ourselves? What are we bringing home to the hive? How are tending our true need—the need for soul? Currently, because we are disconnected from the true source of essential being, we are failing to nourish our

souls. We have to come back to the symbolic realms, to tap back into these connections in order to feed ourselves.

I also believe most of us have an unconscious sense that something is very wrong with our culture, and with the way we go about our daily lives, but it's just too much to consciously face our sense of separation on a deep level. The problem then is that so many of us are carrying a sort of disenfranchised grief or trauma around what's happening on the planet. We know at some level that people are suffering; that they lack a deep sense of meaning or context, and yet we are completely unable to articulate that profound despair, let alone to do anything about it.

Depth and transpersonal psychologies lead us to understand that there are unconscious forces and perceptions at work all the time—and that these are important—perhaps even more important than our conscious ideas. Freud mainly talked about the personal unconscious, which is the level at which we *personally* repress, or ignore, things that are affecting our personal lives. Jung then developed the idea of a collective unconscious, which is the idea that there are these unconscious forces at work which affect us as a collective of people.

This is vital when we are dealing with culture disorders, problems, and issues, and also with nature. Jung called some of these patterns or forces “archetypes.” They are patterns that are universal. We understand archetypes without anyone ever having define them—Mother, Love, Hope, Grief, Loss, Connection—but we don't always know they are working on us. The Archetypes often show up in our lives as numinous or sacred images that carry a lot of emotional charge, but they are really shared modes of thought, or organizations of thought and action.

JM: Is there a sense that meaninglessness and emptiness could be a cultural archetype?

BB: It's certainly a shared mode of thinking, feeling, and relating, so perhaps. Whether it is or not, just coming to awareness that some archetype is working on us in our life can be very valuable. Once we begin to understand that, we can then start taking steps to change the way that we feel. We can begin to dis-identify with the energies and emotions that run us. We can gain awareness that our experience is not really who we are. It's not a personal failing, it's a collective problem, which calls for resolution. Then we can begin to explore what the archetype is doing in our life; what effect it's having on us, and we can make other choices. We don't have to just go along with it.

Jung even talked about being “possessed” by these archetypes. The word “possessed” merely indicates that we are sometimes driven by forces that we don't understand, that are not personal, and which we may not even recognize. And to some extent that is what culture is as well.

So, an individual is not comprised of only the things they are conscious of, because there's always so much unconscious process going on—maybe even governing us—at any given moment. We can never know it all completely. However, through symbolic thought, we can begin to excavate it. We can learn from it, and access its creativity. A standard way of doing that in a transpersonal way is looking at, feeling, and talking to the symbols that arise in our dreams. Dream images can be as independent as other people in ordinary reality, everyday life.

We can also look at the mythology and stories that our ancestors used to create their lived context and their understanding of the order of the world. It helps us understand where we fit in. These stories and symbols can really provide us a glimpse into a ground of reality, one that's very different from the perspective provided by our egos or by our controlled, daily activities that we generally believe life is about. All we need is to slow down and take

the time to interact, be reflective and interact with these symbols in order to benefit from the wisdom and insight they carry.

JM: You have also talked about soul loss and, given the ways we tend to be culturally disconnected and empty, I was wondering how the concept, or the myth, of soul loss ties in? Perhaps that's the cultural archetype?

BB: Soul loss is a shamanic idea, the idea that part of our soul has fled or been taken away somewhere, leaving us with a deficit. The big questions are: first, where does it go when it's abducted, and second, how do we get it back? If part of the soul is missing, then it makes sense that we feel empty. Soul loss can cause all kinds of pathologies, including the mental illnesses that are so rampant in our society today (from depression to psychopathy)—because we are missing a sense of meaning. We don't feel whole. We know at some level that something vital is missing. And that's what soul loss really is, that loss of connection and meaning.

In psychoanalytic terms, we sometimes view soul loss similarly to the way we view trauma. Psychologically, there may be part of ourselves that just can't deal with what is happening, because it feels completely overwhelming. We may try and pretend it's not happening, but we know. In those kinds of situations, we become completely frozen—our emotions get frozen because to move forward would be perilous—and so there is no movement. It is like we have lost a part of our life force. We need to reconnect so it can flow again. In the most difficult moments in my own life, and I'm sure you can relate, I have often felt powerless. I know now, of course, that the solution is to just be in it; to hold the tension, and the grief, and the distress until something shifts, or until we can get underneath whatever the trauma is.

That feeling of holding the tension is like winter. I mean, bees do not go out and collect nectar and pollen in the middle of a cold winter. They hunker down inside the hive and keep the hive warm by fanning their wings. If a bee were to go outside, that's the end of her. Her wings would simply fail to work. Sometimes, as humans, we just need to be in that holding pattern, as long as we can sustain it, until something new can emerge. Then, in order for things to thaw, something needs to be triggered or initiated. We have to consciously (or sometimes spontaneously) tap into something that is enriching or that feeds our soul.

For me, listening to music has been a good way to change my state, to feed my soul, because there is very little effort involved, but the results are profound. Evocative music helps things thaw, and it helps give me space in which a new perspective can emerge. I recognize that whatever problems I'm dealing with are temporary, or that it's possible to navigate them and come out the other side. Most powerful is when we get the hit that our problems are actually "medicine" in the traditional, indigenous sense; that if we engage instead of trying to just get rid of them, they transform us on our journey in life.

And for society it's similar. We are largely stuck as a collective, and it's easier to ignore the problems or to be reactive rather than to engage with the problems and surrender to the wisdom they can lend us. But I believe we are self-organizing beings in a self-organizing universe. Imagine if we had, a cultural practice in which we had open meetings in which we could all come and do group work together! I can think of any number of amazing processes we could go through as a group, but it's not even a concept we can really fathom, because our culture has moved so far from our indigenous roots. At the very best, people might seek out psychotherapy, but unless it is of a transpersonal nature with access to both a somatic and

symbolic perspective, it doesn't always instigate the kinds of very enriching states we need.

JM: Indeed, it can reduce it to one set of interactions...

BB: ...depending on what kind of therapy it is.

JM: Could we suggest that advertisers are stealing our souls?

BB: Not just advertisers. The problem is rampant in technology, social media, social issues, race and gender relations, politics...again, I can reference the *Depth Psychology and the Digital Age* book here²...but I think we have the capacity to begin to understand that metaphor of colony collapse disorder—that is, *culture* collapse disorder—is really meaningful to all of us, and that there's something there that we can begin to do about the problem.

JM: So, how can we heal from this condition? Is there a way to start over, to renew our connection with the earth and with nature?

BB: Well, everyone is longing for home; longing to return to a home place that sustains us. For each of us, I think there's a way that we can tap into that inner longing, a condition which I've been calling "ecostalgia," which refers to a sense of longing for Earth or for home—that we mostly are unaware of. But when we slow down; when we become reflective, and when we make opportunities for ourselves to really feel and feel *into* that sense of loss that each one of us is carrying around with us, then we can begin to find ways to reconnect with that hive—that "something larger"—that sense of home for each of us. That's one way to connect to the greater Self.

² See *Depth Psychology and the Digital Age*, edited by Bonnie Bright, and published by Depth Insights, 2016.

JM: A lot of people suggest that just sitting in nature can be one way of getting that sense of reconnection.

BB: Absolutely. What could be simpler than that? Just going out into nature and being quiet in nature is going to immediately start to re-position us into that web, into that fabric of life that's around us. Do you remember how you felt the last time you just lay down on the earth? That's a good beginning. But if you don't have much access to wild nature, there are still ways that we can slow down and take a few moments for ourselves, and touch into something that is right here all the time with us.

JM: We are nature, too.

BB: Yes, of course. And then there is connecting to the symbolic way we have of representing reality. Reading myths and fairy tales is a very interesting way to begin to understand human experience and how our connection to the greater fabric of being can metaphorically position and help orient and guide us. Are the animals and plants speaking to us?

What are they saying? What happens to the characters in the story—any myth or fairy tale—is also a metaphor for what's happening to us.

When we understand that, then we can begin to understand that there are resources that are available to us that we didn't recognize before.

Nature can help us out. I'm not saying we can just cross our fingers and hope that nature is always going to come to our rescue, but I do believe—and this is a very depth psychological idea—that nature is intelligent and is every bit as invested as we are in helping us to find ways to pull back from the crisis that we have reached through our own unconscious actions. Jung suggested that what happens outside in nature is connected to what's

happening inside each of us in our psyches. There's an intrinsic connection, which, if we pay attention, can help us navigate in our lives and to heal.

So, again, we can reconnect through paying attention to stories; setting aside time for reflection even in the midst of the speed at which we live; and paying attention to our dreams. Setting aside time is radical, because we clearly are not encouraged to do that; it's not in our culture. We have that powerful compulsion that tells us we should be buying something, or working all the time, or eating or drinking ourselves into numbness. Of course, that makes it hard; we have to persist long enough to get to the conscious action that can create a shift in our consciousness. There are plenty of Jungian analysts and depth psychologists who work with dreams and help people to understand what the unconscious is saying to us through them. That's what I do for clients in my transformative coaching practice, as well.

JM: Anything else that people should think of doing?

BB: Community is necessary, and obviously, everybody needs to be doing their own individual work. That's where it all begins. Then we can come together in conscious community and begin to talk about these things and create containers where people feel that they can have a voice and can be listened to. We need to talk respectfully, rather than trying to make others wrong. We can share our feelings, or sit with them together, instead of just shutting those feelings down.

If you don't have a community, you can still begin somewhere. You could start by gathering a group of friends over to your house and saying, "Let's talk about this." Or you can find people online. Technology has made it so easy to gather as a group from all over the world and really do some intimate and meaningful work.

Having some foundation in depth or transpersonal psychology is also really useful because it gives you tools and resources with which to work. Reading books that feature conversations like this one might help. Most bookshops stock some of Jung's writings. Or go and find somebody local who is interested in Jungian or depth psychology or join an online group. There are many.

I founded Depth Psychology Alliance, which is an online community, to connect with likeminded people who are also looking to connect. There are also many of depth psychology, transpersonal, and Jungian groups on Facebook and LinkedIn nowadays. Not all of them are particularly good, but they are very easy to find—and if they don't work, then go elsewhere, or be aware of what it is in you that makes it not work. And just don't give up. There are others out there just like you that are longing to be part of something bigger than themselves.

With Depth Psychology Alliance, we've had community conversations via video platforms, where people can feel more connected because they can see one another, and they can talk about things like race relations, violence, mass shootings, natural disasters, ecological crises, or the way that they feel really desperate around the holidays. You can try organizing your own group—it can be hard work, but it can be very worthwhile. We all think we are alone, but we are not, and these kinds of groups help us to recognize that.

So, to repeat, there are two things you can do. First, find time in your life—even if it's just a couple of minutes a day—to really start reflecting, paying attention, and re-positioning yourself, using symbolic thought to begin to reconnect yourself with that something larger; whatever that is to you. Whether it's through meditation, through reading mythology, paying attention to your dreams; speaking poetry, listening to moving music, or simply listening or feeling into what you normally don't let

yourself feel, it is critical to intentionally try to increase awareness and make conscious change in your life.

Finding a transpersonal coach or therapist is also highly recommended. Those of us who offer such services are trained to help people access non-ordinary states of consciousness through which new insights and understanding can come in. If the point of life is wake up to our true, essential nature, then you can't go wrong with any of these possibilities. Just put your toes in the water anywhere you like and see what happens when you stay with it.

The second thing is to come together with like-minded others who are also waking up and wanting to do something good in the world.

Through my coaching practice, I offer occasional online video groups focused on spiritual awakening, psychedelic integration, and working through spiritual emergency, among others, but there are tons of meetups and things available, both online and in person if you just start looking. That's it. That's enough. That's how you start.

JM: That's a great start for anyone. These seem important things to consider for all of us during our current cultural crisis, and they are not impossible, though they do require a bit of a shift in thought and action. Thank you again for being so open with us.

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Biographies

Bonnie Bright, Ph.D., spent fifteen years in the corporate world working in media and technology before earning Master's degrees in Psychology from Sonoma State University and in Depth Psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute, where she also earned her Ph.D. She is the founder of Depth Psychology

Alliance, an online community for Jungian and depth psychologies. She created Depth Insights Journal and served as Executive Editor for six years. Bonnie also produces audio and video interview podcasts on depth psychological topics for Depth Insights. She is a certified Transpersonal Coach, and an Archetypal Pattern Analyst who has also trained extensively in Holotropic Breathwork™ and the Enneagram. She uses psychological, somatic, and shamanic perspectives in her work with individuals who are interested in spiritual awakening. Learn more at www.DepthInsights.com.

Jonathan Marshall is an anthropologist and currently a Future Fellow at the University of Technology Sydney. He is currently researching the unintended consequences of climate technologies. Previously he has written about living online, online gender, the ways computer software does not work, and the social psychology of climate. Author of *Jung, Alchemy and History: A Critical Exposition of Jung's Theory of Alchemy* (Hermetic Research); *Living on Cybermind: Categories Communication and Control* (Peter Lang), Co-author of *Disorder and the Disinformation Society: The social dynamics of information, networks and software* (Routledge). Editor of *Depth Psychology, Disorder and Climate Change* (JungDownunder). Co-editor of *Environmental Change and the World's Futures: Ecologies, Ontologies, Mythologies* (Routledge); and *Crisis, Movement, Management: Globalising Dynamics* (Routledge). He is an unpublished novelist and failed musician.

[To access all 13 dialogues, buy the book, *Earth, Climate, Dreams: Dialogues with Depth Psychologists in the Age of the Anthropocene* in paperback or Kindle versions on Amazon](#)

[Find the original video dialogues from the online symposium, *Earth, Climate, Dreams* \(2017\), on which the book is based on YouTube or at \[Depth Insights.com\]\(http://DepthInsights.com\)](#)