

Demons and Dragons: A Dialogue

Aleph: Tav and Tava, demons and dragons are images of mythic beings from millennia past. Are you rewriting a myth?

Tava: You could say so. But our experience gave us the stories we write.

Tav: We lived through times when we were engaged with demons.

Aleph: What was it like?

Tav: I felt them. They were real enough. They tore at me, hurt me, and took my energy.

Tava: And I experienced the horrors.

Aleph: Were you frightened?

Tav: There were moments when I did not know if I would survive.

Tava: And times I wanted to die. We were in the grip of forces over which we had no control; forces that felt like they came from underground.

Aleph: Ah, so that's what was real – the forces. How did you survive?

Tav: We learned that the forces were in our underground depths; they were our demons; they were me.

Aleph: So you were living in the natural energies of your own beings that have such depth and strength.

Tav: Yes. And that's where the reality of the myths comes in. The forces of nature are greater than our small selves. When we acknowledge them within ourselves, demons become dragons.

Aleph: Aren't dragons just as bad?

Tava: Dragons are different; they don't tear at you; they are known for protecting precious treasures.

Aleph: They protect you! You are what is precious, your own self.

Tav: Yes. That's why we can say we are riding dragons.

Preface

One sunny warm day in October 1991, the clerk of the small town where we lived, Pepperell, Massachusetts, came to our home and officiated at our marriage. At that time, Vellie was fifty-five and Phil was fifty-eight. We had become a couple and lived together for ten years before this day. And, during the ten years before that, we were sometimes lovers, constant friends, and eventually colleagues.

We were in our mid-forties when we became a couple. Phil was born in 1933, Vellie in 1936. Both of us were raised in small towns, Vellie in the Deep South, in Louisiana, Phil in the north, in New York state, near the Great Lakes. Regardless of the geographic and cultural spread between our towns, in the 1960s, it happened that we both were in the Boston area for professional training in psychology, psychotherapy, and mental health. Our paths first converged in 1970, and as the 1970s progressed they gradually intertwined. We shared training in the same kind of psychotherapy and eventually shared a practice.

At the time we became a couple, we longed to fulfill our yearnings for sexual love with a loved partner. However, our capacity for love was undeveloped and disturbed, and this had been the case since our adolescence. Our passionate seeking

to realize our wishes brought us directly into contact with the inner emotional disturbances standing in the way of fulfilling love and desire. These dominated our inner worlds. We often found ourselves in states of fear, rage, shock, and suffering. We understood these disturbances as the destructive effects of multiple, painful traumas experienced as children.

We devoted more time, attention, energy, and strenuous effort to learning to live in love and enjoyment than to anything else. This has been our way of life. Often frightened and unsure, we remained committed body and soul to our lived experience – whether joyful and exciting or deeply painful. For us, and for many others we have known, such is the path to love and fulfillment with another person.

We are proud of the work we have done. We accepted the sometimes agonizing struggles to sort out our sexualities. We often did not know the way, but we stayed the course. And we were able to remain dedicated to our goals, free ourselves from inner disturbance, remain connected, and find a safe haven, peace, love, and well-being within ourselves and in our connection with each other.

Several years ago, when we looked back, we were excited about the lengthy process that brought us to this happy time. At this point, I (Phil) was moved to start writing about my experience. I did not make a plan. I knew I wanted to write about the outstanding graphic mental and emotional pictures that had emerged in my mind over the preceding years. Each of the depictions I wrote captured some kernel of the essence of my life. Eventually these depictions became chapters with headings and subheadings, interrelated through emotion and an emerging sense of my identity.

After reading my chapters for a year, Vellie became engaged in the same exciting process for herself. She found self-affir-

mation in her skills and intuition. Now we read each other's chapters and shared our experiences in intimate, feelingful ways.

Our series of chapters cover the most significant aspects of our developmental years up to adulthood, our adult years before we became a couple, and the crucial developments and changes that occurred after we became a couple. Themes include the difficult struggles around sexual identity and expression, our capacity for being with another person, and our capacity for surviving in the social world. They are explorations of the inner worlds underlying our difficulties, descriptions of how we went about freeing ourselves, and above all, the process of finding ourselves and our capacity for love.

We have one goal or intention that makes publication important for us. Our reports (as we call them) challenge a set of boundaries, and it is our intention to challenge them. The boundaries have to do with recognition of the life of the deeper self, the inner life of the individual.

These boundaries have to do with selfhood. When we explored our inner selves and troublesome behaviors coming from them, we encountered shame, humiliation, fear, and negative self-evaluation. These affects are the way these boundaries function. They regulate, suppress, censor, hide, and protect all aspects of inner experience. Exploring these emotions and their roots in the safety and privacy of our relationship and our home is enriching and leads to change and inner strengthening.

Through our efforts, we freed ourselves personally of much of our anxiety and shame passed on from the culture of our families. But our culture in fact does still retain the same or similar boundaries in the forms of judgments and disapprobation that affected us in the first place. When we share our reports publicly, we are exposed once again to the action of these boundaries.

And here is where we protest! We protest against forms of social mores that caused us unnecessary harm and suffering. We want to shift social mores to allow for the healthy, freer, development of the inner life and the expression of feeling, excitement, curiosity, and the meeting of natural needs. We want to do what little we can to challenge the cultural envelope and move it towards the awareness and acceptance of a wider range of life experience. Our belief is that social mores regarding the development of the self are best when guided by love and an understanding of health. We believe this is the most basic way to enrich human life.

Our reports define and demonstrate the practice of self-study. We believe it is a crucial way to open the boundaries of the cultural and social mores that constrain and impair development of the individual person. The practice of self-study could have a place in the cultural and social world, and it could be a part of daily life. It could be understood as an aspect of education and child development that leads to a healthier, more resilient adult who is capable of empathy and love. Self-study as a practice neutralizes the almost universal tendency to turn the other into the bad or evil other. Self-study is the practice that allows us to own and take responsibility for our negative attitudes in the way that strengthens the self. It allows room for the development of self-love, thus enhancing the capacity to love others.

We hope readers will find that our reports touch on themes intimately concerning their lives and that they will stimulate reflection. More importantly we wish that they will encourage and support others in their own unique journeys to develop the capacity for love and intimacy and to discover their deeper self. To these people we dedicate this book.

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