

The Inner Banks

By Ann Loomis

When my husband and I visited North Carolina's Outer Banks, I was unprepared for the soulful scenes we encountered there: arching bridges over wide expanses of water as we drove the long stretch of highway into Nags Head; the rolling surf with red flags warning us of its wildness; mounds of sand dunes etched with glistening pools of water at Jockey's Ridge; crape myrtle and magnolia trees blooming in profusion at the elegant Elizabethan Gardens in Manteo.

While all of these scenes took me somewhat by surprise, the lighthouses most captured my imagination that week: Currituck, Lookout, Okracoke, Bodie (pronounced "body"), and Cape Hatteras. Perhaps because Hatteras was the only lighthouse we were allowed to climb, it felt increasingly numinous as the week went on and even appeared in a dream. So as any good Jungian would do upon recognizing a projection, I set out to receive the message that Hatteras was sending.

I began by listing phrases describing Cape Hatteras: 1) red stone foundation; 2) black and white spirals; 3) windows looking out over the water; 4) winding steps leading up to the beacon; 5) a large prism inside the beacon; 6) the panoramic view from the top. This list of descriptive phrases helped me to visualize Cape Hatteras more fully before I moved into the next exercise, a form of amplification.

Amplification is a technique that Carl Jung recommended for dream work, but it can also be used with any symbol or image attracting your attention in the outer world. With amplification, you write the name of the image in the center of the page and then you write associations that come from the image.

Given the natural beauty that greeted me at the Outer Banks, I thought the shape of a flower would be appropriate for this amplification exercise. At the center of the flower, I wrote the phrase, "Cape Hatteras Lighthouse." Then I wrote associations stemming out from that phrase in the shape of flower petals. Inside the first petal, I wrote "strong foundation." Inside the second petal, I wrote "dark and light spiraling energy." Inside the third petal came "house of light," on the fourth petal "body of light," and on the fifth petal "beacon of light." As the petals rapidly unfurled with associations, so did my insights. Aha, I thought. The light represents spirit. The black and white spirals represent feminine and masculine energies rising to the beacon. The beacon represents consciousness. So far, so good!

We left the Outer Banks early the next morning so that I could be back in time for my monthly Jungian study group. The Jungian analyst who led the group liked to include non-verbal exercises, such as drawing, but I usually preferred the time for discussion. That day, however, I eagerly anticipated the time set aside to draw. Even as the analyst was giving instructions on drawing a symbol of the deeper Self, my hand began sketching the brick foundation. I drew a fine image of Cape Hatteras with its black and white lines spiraling upward and its bright beacon lighting the way in the darkness.

But as I allowed myself to receive more images, I began drawing sand dunes and glistening pools of water around Hatteras. Then, almost without my awareness, I began to draw the trees I had admired in the Elizabethan Gardens. As my hand moved lower on the page, roots of the trees began to form on either side of the lighthouse, and then suddenly I felt a rush of energy within me, like one of those wild waves crashing into the rolling surf. I soon realized that my first drawing of Hatteras, with its stone foundation and bright beacon, came from the ego-self. When I added the nature images, the drawing came more from the Eco-Self that lives in the deep waters of the unconscious.

"The power of God reveals itself not only in the realm of spirit, but in the fierce animality of nature both within us and outside us," Jung writes. Was the stone foundation a defense against receiving messages from the animality of nature? Was I so caught up in my outer experience that I missed the connection to my inner experience?

In our culture, we tend to go straight for spirit, to ascend rather than descend, to value the light over the dark and intellect over instinct. We look up to the Father while we overlook and dismiss the instinctual, watery realm of the Mother. In short, we split spirit and matter. But when we allow ourselves to travel over the bridge of the imagination to our "inner banks," the lighthouse can be a message about bringing body, soul, and spirit together in a spiral dance with Earth.

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