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“Archetypal Phenomena Surrounding Death”

Dr. David Van Nuys Ph.D., aka ‘Dr. Dave’ interviews Monika Wikman, PhD
(Transcribed from <http://www.shrinkrapradio.com> by Gloria Oelman)

Introduction:

My guest today is author and Jungian analyst Dr. Monika Wikman, who previously was my guest on episodes #286 on *Jungian Active Imagination* and #235 – *Using Alchemical Archetypes in Jungian Analysis*. Today we’ll be discussing dreams and other archetypal events surrounding death. For more detail on her background please visit our show notes at www.shrinkrapradio.com

A Jungian analyst and author of *Pregnant Darkness: Alchemy and the Rebirth of Consciousness* and various articles in Jungian psychology journals, Monika obtained her BA from UC San Diego and her doctorate from the California School of Professional Psychology in San Diego, where her research took her deep into the study of dreams of people with terminal cancer. After teaching graduate students at California State University, Los Angeles, she graduated as a diplomate from the Jung-Von Franz Center for Depth Psychology in Zurich. She lectures internationally on mythology and symbolism, dreams and wellness, alchemy and creativity. In private practice as a Jungian Analyst and astrologer, she lives along a creek and under starry skies in Tesuque, New Mexico with horses, dogs, and friends.

Now here’s the interview.

Dr. Dave: Dr. Monika Wikman welcome back to Shrink Rap Radio.

Monika Wikman: Thank you Dr. Dave, I’m happy to be back.

Dr. Dave: It’s so great to have you on again. You’re one of my favorite guests and so I’m really happy to have you here. And I understand you’ve just recently returned from a workshop in Ireland that you gave on dreams and other phenomena surrounding the dying experience. How’d that workshop go?

Monika Wikman: Well, actually I ended up doing a workshop that had something to do with peril and renewal in individuation, which includes that edge of life and death and I didn’t get as far into that material on death as I had planned, although I do give that workshop regularly. I ended up getting more into the subtle body phenomena that is the medium and material from which we experience these phenomena that do surround death.

Dr. Dave: O.K. well you’ll have a chance here to go into some of the material that you didn’t get around to in Ireland. So how did you come to be interested in the topic of phenomena surrounding death? My guess is the interest probably grew out of some of your own personal experiences.

Monika Wikman: Yes, Dr. Dave that's completely true. I think about in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* where Jung says that 'one ought to be close to death to have the freedom to talk about it' and I feel that in myself, I've been for whatever reasons – and it's not a shining badge, it's actually been an arduous part of my life experience – I have been close to death a number of times and on the borderland a number of times in my life. And that happened to me very young, early on at twenty four was the first time when I had ovarian cancer and I had a long four year road of dealing with ovarian cancer. It was stage four and a prognosis that at one point turned into two weeks to live and that put me really at the mercy of the psyche and of working with the psyche and thank God for Jung's work in the world. I had good analysts who helped me access the psyche and work with dreams to help me in the process, thinking of course that I was likely going to die given the diagnosis. So anyway that's the first time that I encountered it and I have at other times in my life as well. I'm sure I'll sprinkle certain stories throughout our talk today from that time.

Dr. Dave: So at age twenty four you were seeing a Jungian analyst already?

Monika Wikman: Yes, I had the great fortune of getting a lightning bolt awareness when I was at UCSD in undergraduate that the rat labs was not the kind of psychology I actually was interested in.

Dr. Dave: Right, many of us discover that at some point. (both laugh)

Monika Wikman: Exactly and of course UCSD was the hot spot for behaviorism at the time and all this... I had to laugh – I was finding myself there, of course longing for Jung, so when I happily got into graduate school I immediately dive bombed for working in Jungian Analysis and thank God I did because that was the place that really held me as I went through the process of discovering I had very serious life threatening cancer. But yes, I was interested in Jung in graduate school and there were professors who taught it in the clinical psychology program I was in and that was a real blessing.

Dr. Dave: Well, you sent me some more or less random notes prior to this and I'm gonna more or less randomly try to touch on some of the topics. One thing that you refer to, was that you used dreams to help when you were diagnosed with stage four ovarian cancer so I'm wondering – how do dreams help?

Monika Wikman: Good, I think that's a great place to start. First of all, when you think about 'what is this doorway that exists between dimensions of reality' and dreams so track and open us to that doorway. In times of need we cry out and the psyche gets a chance – the ego consciousness gets a chance – to reach out beyond the domination of rationality and I clearly was thrown in and people get thrown in to initiatory processes with the psyche that allows the centre of ego consciousness to cry out for a larger experience of something of the Self, of something of Higher Power, of something of other realms of consciousness that can help in healing. And dreams are of course a real gateway... we think about Freud saying it's the royal road to the unconscious, well I think it's really the kind of a numinous flaming doorway and we think about – and this is my roundabout way of dropping into the dream piece, if you don't mind. There's a beautiful few lines of W.B. Yeats, the Irish poet, who really led the Celtic revival in Ireland and his lines, he says 'We who still labor by the cromlech

on the shore/and the grey cairn on the hill/when the day sinks drowned in dew/growing weary of the world empires/bow down to you/Master of the still stars and of the flaming door.’ I think where our culture sits is exactly in this place, we are tired and weary of these world empires and we are seeking culturally, collectively, some relationship of what can help us and assist us in a deeper existence and in transmutations and transformations and so where our culture sits – we individuals have initiatory processes that throw us into needing to find what is this flaming door. It’s so provocative and dreams really help us find a way with that. This, as the Alchemists called it the *fenestra aeternitatis* – ‘the window to eternity.’ It sounds a bit like Harry Potter there with Jung using all the Latin but this flaming door, this doorway, as window to eternity, that may sound lofty but it’s not. Of course in the time-space continuum a big part of us is travelling with consciousness in the time-space world and what we find is that dreams help us access beyond time and space and help us in a healing crisis. That was true for me – when I was sitting there at twenty four, before I knew I had cancer, I did have a dream that absolutely announced it and it was an awesome dream. When I look back on it I end up realizing how amazing the amount of intelligence that lives in the psyche that can come to assist us. Basically a piece of the dream was that there was a doctor who I was talking to in the dream and he said ‘listen, I’m sorry, I know you just came to draw blood but I actually have to do a hysterectomy.’ And in the dream I was incredibly upset by this and I was talking to him about ‘what are you talking about, how can this be?’ And then he said ‘but don’t take it as personally because there really are two wombs and you still have the other one.’ And then I could see that there was this womb made of some kind of subtle essence that I still would have after this hysterectomy. Well I had no idea, no idea that I had ovarian cancer and so I had the dream and just as synchronicity would happen I was going in for a regular check up exam after this and the doctor immediately said ‘you have to go in for exploratory surgery, something’s wrong.’ And I immediately flashed on the dream.

Dr. Dave: What was the length of time separating those two events?

Monika Wikman: Oh, like two weeks.

Dr. Dave: Oh, my goodness. Yeah.

Monika Wikman: Like a couple of weeks and it really helped me feel held because it let me know something of the psyche could see me before I could see where I stood. And also that it could speak to me, it could image it and of course I knew then that that’s where I would be turning to find a way to make it through that process a step at a time, reaching out for help from the dream world that could see the process that I was engaged in.

Dr. Dave: And were there in fact other dreams that helped you through that process?

Monika Wikman: Yes, you know it’s something I think about, Dr. Dave, the last time we talked, we were talking about Jung as a wounded healer and I would hope that most of us Jungians get into the path via that exact archetype and that’s certainly my path. I went into the whole of this by absolute need and becoming a Jungian analyst is based completely on what unfolded for me starting in my early twenties when these dreams unfolded and it was step for step, dream for dream, finding the

way. If I didn't have the dream path I don't know what would have happened to me – I assume I would have died because I didn't have the ability to access a larger point of view and larger energy field that could help heal my physical body and also other parts to the psyche body in me that were really in trouble. So yes, it was a dream path that unfolded a step at a time.

Dr. Dave: Can you perhaps share one of the dreams that were particularly important along that path?

Monika Wikman: Yes, there's a whole string of pearls of them that I hold as really dear to myself that are like prayer beads for me and they helped me feel a map of reality and a sense of something with me that was going to help me in the passage if I was dying. I think what I'll do probably is name a few as we go through the hour and mention one to you now and this one happened when I was in the hospital. I had come out of the surgery and the doctors were afraid to tell me how bad it was, so they had told me kind of partial truth, or reality, about it. They told me 'you know you have ovarian cancer and it's really serious and it's a virulent strain and we tried to get as much out of your body as we could.' And then I went back of course to the anesthesia, pain killers in the process of trying to get even just coherent in the hospital and then this was days later, when it was starting to dawn on me what actually was happening and I was about to be released from the hospital. The night before getting released to go home I dreamt that I was in a dark tunnel and I was moving through the tunnel – this is kind of classic near death phenomena and many people report this, this just happens to be my own experience – and I was in the tunnel and I had my hands around a little candle flame and there was a feminine being standing behind me who had her arms around me and around the candle flame and she said to me as we were moving through the tunnel 'whatever you do, don't let the candle flame go out.' And with that came the awareness that we were holding this candle flame together and that I could in fact try to turn around in the tunnel with her help. So I turned around toward where I had come from, from the light source behind me and when I woke up I felt the presence of that feminine being and its ability to have its arms around me – help guard my little flame of life force and also help me try to turn back toward life. And it helped me really feel the presence of what would guide me through either living or dying. So I know throughout the whole time, Dr. Dave the thing I kept feeling was 'I can do this as long as I'm not alone' and I don't mean alone with human beings because I was in a time when I was quite alone in my life but alone in the psyche. If I had help in the psyche I could do this – either way.

Dr. Dave: Wow, what a powerful dream. Now, you mentioned earlier before the interview that you had drawn also on research on dreams of the dying at the UCSD Medical Centre as well as from your own clinical work with the dying. So I'm interested in touching on those two sources. I was not aware of a database of research on dreams of the dying.

Monika Wikman: Well, what I did – it makes me laugh now thinking about it because I'm far from doing this at this point in my life – but after I wrestled with cancer for four years and had a gift of spontaneous remission, as they say, or an outpouring of grace, or contact with the psychoidal, it left my body overnight after a two week prognosis, I had this healing experience. And then after that I started to realize that I was going to be living my life. I didn't have cancer any more and I

haven't had cancer since and it's many years since... what happened about four years after that, is I had got this flaming arrow in my quiver talking to me about wanting to do research on dreams of the dying because I had finished my Master's and I wanted to go back and finish my clinical PhD so I went to UCSD Medical Centre to conduct the research at San Diego Hospice and I did my research at these facilities and collected the dreams from people who were dying and they had a cancer prognosis and diagnosis that left them with six months or less to live – that was the criteria for being part of this study. And there were thirty five people who had that prognosis and then I had thirty five people who were part of my control group and I collected fifteen hundred dreams...

Dr. Dave: Oh, my goodness, a lot of dreams!

Monika Wikman: ...that's why I laugh when you ask me about it now, I think 'who was it that did this?' So, yes I gathered fifteen hundred dreams and then looked at them from a number of different perspectives and then the group sorted out by multiple regression which dreams were stronger and which and... the work of Von Franz was behind me – I had written her and she'd written back and her book *On Dreams and Death* had just come out, while I was designing this and I decided to see if she would help me at all and so I was looking at certain motifs that would show up in dreams. First of all an intensification of the psyche in people who are ill and who have that kind of diagnosis, that they're dreaming more, with more intensity, longer dreams, more dreams and the archetypal intensity in the dreams was higher – all of that bode completely true.

Dr. Dave: Wow, what great findings.

Monika Wikman: Yes, it was a lot of fun, I had a lot of help too, along the way – I just want to thank all the people who helped me – and then also there were archetypal motifs in the dreams that also appeared stronger in the cancer group than in the people without cancer – in the control group and motifs of transition. Jung's work and Von Franz's work has spoken about that motifs in the dreams of the dying often show river crossings, water crossings, initiatory processes, baptisms, bridges – there are certain motifs like that that I went looking for and different variables that showed up higher in the people with cancer. So that all did come out actually quite strongly. And then the specific dreams actually were the part that becomes more interesting. You end up watching then, these themes being worked out in a dream series, for example and watching the person making peace with, at some very deep level, the reality of death. This is what interests me now when I look back on the research. I definitely appreciate... you know Jung certainly has his empirical scientist side and his shamanic side, his wounded healer side and I think this phenomenological side of ourselves that wants to look at actual raw data and see if we can sort it out and see differences between people who are under deep initiatory experiences with death and those who aren't. It is interesting to see how the differences pan out and one of the processes I mentioned is to see dream series that show people making actual peace with death and I actually also saw this in my grandmother. My grandmother was dying at the same time and this was very meaningful to me because she let me be close to her while she was in the process of death and I feel her very strongly in my love for her as I talk to you about it. She was Irish and Welsh and she had, interestingly, ovarian cancer. Now ovarian cancer never ran in my family and she

ended up getting it after I had it, which is odd but there she was in her seventies with this and so the dream process that took her through showed this outrageously painful terror and anxiety about having to face death and it would show her up on a cliff and something extremely dangerous and deadly approaching her and her just terrified and trying to figure out where to hide. And this figure that kept approaching in the dreams slowly transformed over time – I'd say in about six to eight months – that figure slowly changed and her anxiety toward death changed and as that being changed it turned into, literally, a sister of mercy. It turned into this felt presence that had tremendous compassion that loved and knew her like no one else, that was there to take her into her arms and she ended up being able to feel in the end that death was something mysterious that she could welcome and believe me, her psychology, she started from such a different place. If you don't mind I'll tell you also a dream I had of her when she died.

Dr. Dave: Yes, I would love to hear that and I was just thinking that your being with her and drawing her out about sharing her dreams and being there for her must have helped that process and that transition to happen.

Monika Wikman: You know, I'm so grateful that she... she was kind of gruff and she had some kind of rough sides to her personality and the older she got – they were very strong. I'm really glad that she had the chutzpah to call me on the phone and say 'I unplugged myself from the dialysis machine, if you want to see me I'll be gone in seventy two hours.' And of course that was typical of her, so I called my father who lived in Denver and said 'listen catch an airplane ticket that I've reserved for you. Let's meet in Phoenix and let's get out there, let's be with her.' So he came and we're both so grateful that we did that, I can't tell you. It was just incredibly important that we both were there.

Dr. Dave: You know I've had a couple of experiences with colleagues who had very rough edges – people who I didn't particularly like. Then they had to deal with some serious illness and it really softened them and really changed them and transformed them in a way that they were much humble and approachable.

Monika Wikman: Yes. Oh my gosh, I think about Von Franz speaking to that too, that the most authentic relationship that we often get with the psyche and with ourselves and with life comes from tremendous suffering – initiatory energies that really take us into something that purifies us, purifies those states of being, it's true. My grandmother definitely, some of the gnarly aspects of her, my father and I did really watch as she moved through her death process too. We do get tenderized by life completely don't we? We're all on the same ground.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I like that – tenderized. So you were about to share a dream that you had during that period.

Monika Wikman: Yeah, when my grandmother was dying, my father and I were in the room with her and we really just sang to her, spoke to her, met whatever kind of state of consciousness she was in and when she'd ask for help, we'd try to help her in whatever way she wanted us to and I know that the music and songs, singing, were really helpful, also touch, very helpful. And I know people do this regularly now for people who are dying, all the time but here we were finding our own way with it and

the process of her actual death... when she was actually dying I had put my head back in the room and immediately had this vision and dream – ‘cause I’d fallen asleep with my head against the wall I was so tired – and I dreamt that, quote, God, which was this interesting, was male, interesting and he came in from the right and he was in a subtle body state. this figure not so exactly clear but of subtle body material and light and stepped in on the right and said to me ‘I’ve come for my lover, my beloved’ and I said – which is really funny – ‘oh, I’ll tell the doctors.’ And then I laughed, I said ‘oh, my God, this is so beyond the doctors, I don’t have to tell the doctors’ and then I was sort of laughing at myself and trying to catch up with this. So this figure is walking toward... my grandmother’s bed is in the hospice centre and he’s walking over to where she is and his arms reached out and I say ‘oh, but wait, God, you know when you say you lover, your beloved, I remember when she was beautiful and her eyes were sparkling blue and her hair gorgeous and her skin so lovely and her presence so strong and I remember her countenance so well and how is it now you call her your beloved, your lover?’ And in the dream I got this big ‘shhh’ and kind of a hand that moved me to the side, a little gesture that moved me to the side and then a smile and the message then came through, which was ‘this is perfect preparation for becoming my lover, my beloved.’ And then scooped her – and believe me she had no teeth and she smelled, of course she was dying and her hair was in every direction and her face sunken and as death does to us. So he sweeps her up into his arms and absorbs her in a field of love right into his whole body field and held her and then vanishes and is gone and when I woke up she had died.

Dr. Dave: Hmm, wow. You know relevant here might be something that you put in your notes – you said ‘suspending belief and disbelief when working with dreams of the dying.’ What are you getting at there?

Monika Wikman: Oh, it’s really important. It’s actually the cornerstone to this. My childhood faith had blown apart as I’d worked in analysis that was one of the things that had gone and being contained by any of the world religions in a dogmatic way... very few people are these days and even when people are, the psyche seeks to free them to get a bigger sense that’s not static and so *belief* in an after life or *belief* in God never gets us anywhere and whatever that does, it stands in the way actually. I think to take the agnostic – the not knowing position – to... I think the fixity comes in as if we think we know or as if we think we don’t know. So to totally believe or to absolutely declare there absolutely isn’t, is a very rationalistic approach that is not the reality with the mytho-poetic imagination and we’re starved for the mytho-poetic imagination in our world. In fact this whole Western culture with Descarte and this Cartesian dualism and the rationalistic... you know something’s always on the throne of consciousness in our culture and we’ve had rationalism there for ever which kills off anything to do with the imagination the imaginal, so but what’s going on underneath each psyche and it was going on under mine and it is under every one of us, is that there is this reservoir of the unconscious that is alive and well in the depths of the human psyche, of the human soul. And it is infinitely capable of regenerating itself and coming up inside our own human experiences. I think actually a quote of Jung’s here is just really perfect, when he says ‘My work is one of taking the fixed thought forms of world religions and melting them down and pouring this melted substance into the moulds of individual experience.’

Dr. Dave: What a great quote.

Monika Wikman: Isn't it? Yeah, it's his work in a nutshell, isn't it? And it's our work with the psyche, so that's beyond belief and disbelief and it's beyond fixity and dogma that in the individual human soul lives this living poetic force field of the imaginal that's infinitely capable of rebirthing us and it does it through imagery. Now my grandmother of course was Irish Catholic so it fit that it came in looking like this in that dream, which did make me laugh and it's also very interesting to look at every world religion – behind each world religion are these mystical traditions. There's the mystics behind the Christian tradition, behind Judaism, behind Islam and ancient cultures – the whole reality of Taoism. Alchemy is a complete compensation behind Christianity that happened in the West and it was in Egypt as well. So there're ways in which the mytho-poetic imagination is busy rebirthing us using it's force fields and imagery that's beyond these fixed thought forms and that's what I mean by getting beyond belief and disbelief because I think if we think we believe in something, we're in the way of it. The mind puts a fantasy out onto the psyche and onto experience and that doesn't work and then if we do the opposite, we can block experiences.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, that's beautifully stated. Now earlier you mentioned a near death experience that you had and so what's the relationship between dreams and NDEs – Near Death Experiences?

Monika Wikman: Well, if you work with your dreams it can really help you to be open and more conscious to be able to track when you're having near death experiences, so that is like literally exercising a muscle. It's a part of us that can learn to be aware and hold consciousness around this field – this phenomenological field of where symbols and images come from. So, I think for people who have near death experiences... many people have them but they don't remember them and how sad that is. So, they come back, they don't remember what happened but if you can remember it – come back – then you have a solid sense of presence and even a teaching that came to you, through you, about while you're still in your incarnation. So dreams are a way to learn how to tend that border between worlds and also have an easier time when it comes to either literally dying or getting into near death experiences. That was certainly true for me and it's certainly been true for people I've worked with.

Dr. Dave: Um, hmm. Yeah, one of my buddies when he was in graduate school studied near death experiences and out of the body experiences and one of his main findings, interviewing people who'd had those kinds of experiences was that people who have had those experiences no longer fear death.

Monika Wikman: Boy, that's exactly true. I find that to be so, so true and that's, I guess, both what we're talking about when dreams show a series through time of people who are dying – you can literally see some part that's working hard to find peace with the process and that is important. It's not a cookbook, it's not morality and it's not a dogma about having to be at peace with death – people can go anyway they need to, or want to – it's just an easier way to birth yourself out of this life, to find a way. It's a bit like if a bunch of fetuses were sitting around together and they said 'we don't know where we're going but it helps to put your head down.' I think it's similar. When we're leaving this life we have no idea – it's a giant mystery but it evidently helps to relate to the phenomenon of death, to relate to dreams and the

imaginal field that can help us, to cry out for help, to reach out for help and find it, assist us and of course making peace helps us in the birthing process when we leave life.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I want to go back to that magical period that you mentioned where you had been given a two week death sentence and then somehow you went into complete remission. Was there any internal or archetypal experience around that to announce it, herald it, guide you through it – what happened?

Monika Wikman: Yeah, gosh, well I have recent experiences too of having been sick recently, like in the past three years and I seem to end up working on this borderland, so I'm thinking of those as well. When this happened back in the eighties I had had many dreams of course throughout the process that really were guiding me and I stayed on a really good diet, which most people do these days, just trying to bring consciousness up and since life's about awakening I was busy, I knew that this was a crisis of awakening, no matter what, live or die. It was about working to save, quote, 'my life' whether I died or didn't die, I needed to really wake up and so I was busy doing that in every medium I could think of – in yoga and diet and changing my life in radical ways, changing relationship patterns. I moved to Colorado to live in Crested Butte, in the middle of nowhere 'cause I knew that was going to be part of the monk life that would help me heal. I got a horse. So I was doing all this at the same time as I had stage four ovarian cancer and I had a process of dreams telling me also kind of step by step to get out of the treatment. The treatment was not helping me, the medical results were very clear, that chemotherapy was not helping me and it was horrific at that time. For stage four ovarian cancer it was cytoxins, platinum and adriamycin and all just killer chemicals so you don't want to take that if it's not working.

Dr. Dave: Definitely.

Monika Wikman: So anyway, it was dreams that actually were speaking to me with a really deep inner authority that got me out of doing this and the reason I go to this when you ask me about what happened in the very end, is that it was a constant building of an inner authority presence that was bigger than my ego and bigger than self doubt and bigger than orientation of positive psychology, or trying to conjure confidence or courage – beyond any of that. This inner authority of the Self was growing behind things and it helped me. Literally I was riding the elevator to go to the hospital to take the sixth treatment of chemotherapy and as I was riding the elevator I heard this voice say 'you're not doing this, you're done.' And it was so strong, so strong and centered a voice, that its authority I really could not debate. I stepped off the elevator and went 'oh, my God, I'm not doing this!' So I went to tell the doctors 'I'm not doing this' and they had said 'well, listen you might be having a breakdown' and I said 'well, that's fine but I'm still not doing this.' And I still wanted the medical tests because I still want to keep track as by biofeedback to know how the cancer is doing and I'd like to use other mediums and see what might happen. So that's what I did, I ended up still using the medical tests so when I was living in Colorado and I'd gotten extremely sick I'd gotten to where I knew that it had gotten much worse – it was very clear and I decided to go back and get some tests in San Diego, so I went back to San Diego and I could hardly stay awake, I had headaches, I couldn't eat, it was very clear I was fading and I was 28 at the time and it was the

fourth year into this process and I remember going to the doctor's office – Dr. White in San Diego was the second opinion person telling me the same thing for the second time that day, that you have about two weeks to live. This is where the CA 125 markers are and this is it. So my partner at the time, Ray Hillis, drove me into the desert – I had said 'let's just drive all night into New Mexico, let's just get out under the stars, let's just get on the open road while we get some room to breathe.' And we didn't own a place in New Mexico at the time, we ended up buying a place later in New Mexico, which is where I still live. We drove all night, we ended up, without knowing it, on the edge of the Hopi and Navajo nation. We parked under the stars in the back of a pick up truck, poor Ray was very tired, I suddenly woke up and when I woke up, I realized that 'oh, my God I wasn't going to be awake much longer,' that I was so exhausted by the whole process of this and I was just digesting the news I'd gotten in San Diego, so what I did is, of course, what people have done throughout time and it's highly recommendable – just cry out. Talk about humble ground – in my mind's eye, I think about an image from ancient Egypt that shows the supplicant whose in the process of dying and she's beautifully down on her knees with her nose at the river of life and on the other side is the God, Sobek who's going to help her in the passage and this is an archetypal reality for all of us. As soon as this boundary between life and death appears, we ought to be finding that religious attitude that Jung so deeply speaks about and get to the water of life. Get down on our hands and knees and ask for help and there I was crying inside my heart and soul in the back of the truck as Ray was sleeping and I had my dog at my feet, Kiever, (sp?) a little red husky wolf pup at my feet and as I cried out I was just saying 'I can't do this alone' and I suddenly feel very alone. The whole four years I felt these presences that were there to help me and in this moment I didn't know where that presence had gone and I just was crying out for help. And in my mind's eye too I was thrashing, I was saying 'oh, I could get back to the cabin and I can do more of the diet and yoga' and all the rationalizing that goes on for all of us at this border of... you know, 'I could still apply more energy' and of course there was no more energy to apply. The ego was completely defeated, there was nothing left I could do and so then I started calling out to the goddess in every name I could think of and as I did that, this presence... I felt a presence with me and then a whole of field of the subtle body – a visionary field inside the subtle body state, appeared in front of me and gave me a series of visions and a series of messages and experiences, one by one, by one, by one and I thought as they were unfolding... now I'd never done any hallucinogens but I had done all this dream work so I was prepared to be present to this. I'd done active imagination, I'd been working with the subtle body in active imagination and dreams, so when these visions came I knew to take a deep breath, stay present for them, that it was really something very important not to be anxious of and so as it unfolded, the message was to surrender. At one point I saw this giant scarab beetle sitting in front of me, floating in front of me and the message was to make peace with the spirit of this creature and down into the earth it went and it called me also to go with it to go down into the earth and once I was down in under the earth, it was this energy field that was breaking apart everything. It's like what death was – it breaks apart everything and became one with everything and suddenly everything I was getting ecstatically released and it was tremendous freedom, tremendous light, a feeling of peace. Sound and vibration came out of this and this whole field of sound and vibration started just emanating and grew and a series of other visions then came in. Now I thought, with my rational mind that was looking in on this, the observer was saying 'well, you're dying and this is the death process and just go through all of this if you can and if you can, come out

of it at the end and wake Ray up and tell him what happened so everybody you love knows that death is not to be feared and that they know that *your* death wasn't to be feared and in fact was beautiful, that much about (?) even the passage. So that was my heart's intent as this was unfolding and at one point, a certain creature came with a light force field and lit up my subtle body and all the chakras and my body was lit up and I could see it lit up in my then partner Ray and I could see it in my dog Kiever and I looked out under the night sky and I could see liquid silver drops, the divine feminine raining out of the sky and dropping into all of matter and all of matter was black and dead but once the drops of silver dropped into it all, it all took on an ecstatic hum and music and a subtle body state and it all went into an ecstatic reverie and it took on the sound tone of Om and just echoing, resounding and of course this was all so big, the perception so beyond the time-space world, so beyond my little mortal ego who's getting news and wondering if she's going to live. It was such a field of energy, so healing and so big. I really thought I was dying so when I came out of this, I of course woke Ray up and told him every piece of what had happened so that he could commit it to memory because I found it to be so beautiful and he did and of course I went to sleep and then the next day I actually woke up, I felt a little better, I actually felt like eating something for the first time and slowly but surely I got myself back to my cabin in Colorado and then step by step came to take medical tests in Gunnerson (?) and one by one, found out that in fact I no longer had ovarian cancer.

Dr. Dave: Wow, what a story, what an experience.

Monika Wikman: You know it's something Dr. Dave I think about Jung mentions in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* so exquisitely, that when people have near death experiences and they come back, what they report is that when we get to the other side, however it happens in this phenomenological reality, beings on the other side want to hear the story we lived in time-space world and when I had these experiences I realised, O.K., yeah, that's true but that's also true on this side of life. The stories that we're living and the depth of meaning in them and the depth of initiatory experiences and what our myths and lives are about, they're important on this side too.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, definitely and just even to hear your experience is inspiring and hopefully opens all of us who are listening to the possibility of being more open to that kind of experience for ourselves.

Monika Wikman: And thank you, too, for giving me a place to speak that story out. I do know there are many people with like stories. I'm amazed and moved to watch how the psyche is doing this. It wants to initiate us, it wants to break us open and it wants to help us heal. Now sometimes of course the healing comes and the healing is also dying and one can never know about this. I've worked with people for so long and I hesitate to talk about my own experience because it's hard for people where they get into the process and it does not end up being a complete recovery. Why this happened to me? Gosh, it's always a mystery but nonetheless I think about Irvin Yalom and his brilliant book *Love's Executioner* and that one chapter I'm sure you've read that... did you read that Dr. Dave *Love's Executioner*?

Dr. Dave: I don't think I did. I interviewed him but I don't think I read the book, or if I did it was a long time ago and I don't quite remember it all.

Monika Wikman: Okay, well that one is a real gem I have to say and he's got a story in there of working with a man who had cancer and it's a very touching story, God, it's so touching and in the end, the man, as he's dying he says to Irv, 'thank you for saving my life.'

Dr. Dave: Yeah, you know one way that's come through to me is... Jerry Jampolski, somebody else who I've interviewed and have kind of known a little bit, started something he called The Centre For Attitudinal Healing and just the title, kind of carries a message that was very meaningful to me and is just what you were getting at that the healing may not be a physical healing, that there can be a kind of healing, even if the person ends up dying, there can be a healing of attitude of spiritual woundedness if you will.

Monika Wikman: I so agree, I so, so agree and I think there's something too about of course most of us would like, in these incarnational choice points, we'd like to make a choice to live longer and you and I could actually spend another hour talking about these incarnational choice points where we can watch the psyche of people approach this threshold in different ways at different times of loss, and when we get sick, or we face death, there's a big place in the psyche, in the soul of us that's trying to decide whether to choose life or not and that's a huge part of course and an important part. And there's also parts that are so deeply mysterious that are operating and the part about surrender, either way, regardless of outcome, reaching out for the presence of these deep healing experiences, regardless of outcome. I so agree and that's actually where it took me. I truly did not think that I was going to be living at that point. I had to deeply surrender and I think something in the psyche loves us to surrender that deeply. Oh, boy that's a mouthful! (both laugh)

Dr. Dave: Yeah, you noted in the notes that you sent me that other cultures have a sense of those who die that function as ancestors and so there's this whole area of ancestors and whether or not the people who appear to us in our dreams are communicating from the other side, or is that just an inner projection. And I just finished teaching a course on dreams for a lifelong learning program at Sonoma State and that was one of the questions that came up, that some people were asking about 'well what about when people who've died appear to us in our dreams?' So I'm gonna toss that ball to you.

Monika Wikman: Okay. When we suspend belief and disbelief and we really go with the phenomenological approach, we really end up being then open to how much of this phenomenon is actually happening? And to watch... and I think every person... you think about every person, to be able take in what your own experiences are in dream time and synchronicity phenomena – to take in what your experiences are and to generate out of that, something of *your* sense of where you sit in the cosmos and what's the nature of the cosmos, what's the nature of reality. Every being must play with that and answer that for themselves of course and so when we do that, we end up really finding people often dream of those that have deceased. And when you listen to the motifs and themes, it's pure soul music and there's qualities that keep coming back around again and again and this is what came through my dream research and also my work with the dying for so long, is that there are motifs that keep appearing, that bring us peace. So oftentimes, you're right, we'll see somebody

who has died and they'll come in and say, for example, 'I'm on special dispensation' and also that 'you can't touch me but I've come to share something of importance with you' and they'll come and they'll have something to say. I have many dreams collected that has this motif in it and I know that when we start to listen we really catch that. There are often times too, when you linked it with that first question too about ancient cultures. Ancient cultures have had a sense about this – not in a sentimental way, not in a Pollyanna way and not as something trite. It's deep inside their ancestral knowing and ancestral memory, that as they build culture through time, they have a sense of where the ancestors go on to reside in some other space dimension. Now this physics now has opened the portal to this – we now know of course with physics that there are many dimensions and so Jung's work about the psyche is completely beyond the time-space locality. One part of it is extending itself into the time-space world but it's intensity goes way beyond. It goes way beyond into intensity beyond time-space. We could get into a whole discussion on that but the part about the ancestors comes up in Taoism very strongly, it comes up in the native tribes that live in my backyard all along the Tawa (sp?), along the Rio Grande, the Tawa (sp?) and Tewa (sp?) tribes and Towa (sp?) tribes they all have sense about their about their ancestors that as people die, they take up residence in another dimension that they are then guardians, guides and helpers – some of them. Now what ones they are going to have a felt connection to is always a mystery and it comes through dreams and it comes through synchronistic phenomena. In other words it's phenomenology of connection to them, it's not just a belief that this will happen. It's like 'well, did you dream, or did you get a felt sense' and felt sense is very, very important when we're getting into this material, because felt sense can get highly refined. So you listen to people who are having dreams of ancestors who've died – if you ask them to stay with the dream material, they start to get a felt sense of what's happening inside it. A parent for example who's died early on in a young child's life – if that child can get a dream of that parent in any way, shape or form it can bring incredible bridging and comfort. So the use of these in psychotherapy is beyond helpful, there's nothing like it, it's really the transcendent function. But sometimes you get something that feels more like an archetype, or a symbol, or the presence of, or a memory – that's part of felt sense – and then part of felt sense is 'no that feels like the *actual* presence of them in another dimension' and it's learning to differentiate through felt sense. What is it? So, that I think is important and it's an art that we take to this, working with the phenomenon of dreams and death – to develop and refine this felt sense.

Dr. Dave: So did you say that it seemed to be a theme that when the ancestors do appear, when somebody who's passed on appears, that they're generally delivering a message of peace and comfort?

Monika Wikman: You know it's interesting – it works on both sides. So for example if you have someone that you know, or it's ourselves that are dying, oftentimes we'll be having dreams of those who have died who are coming across to be of some help. My ex husband Ray, when he was with his father, at his father's death, his father's last dream report was that his deceased wife had come and said 'I'm on special dispensation, Howard, please pack your suitcase.' That was his last dream. Now, he had no sense of dreams, he'd never reported a dream. This is also what's extraordinary about asking those we love when they're dying 'what are you dreaming?' Because it will all come out and I really say that for your listeners

because a lot of us will be with people that we love and if you're present at the deathbed of anyone you love to just say 'have you had a dream? What are you dreaming?' Also if they come out of kind of a coma state 'where were you, what did you dream?' And just let them speak it out loud, it doesn't have to be interpreted. The medicine is in it. It's very clear. There was a woman who worked with me in San Diego – it was so touching. Her father, who repaired satellites his whole life and was completely a sensation type and a technician and would make fun of anything to do with psychology or anything to do with spirituality for sure, on his deathbed she asked him a dream and he said 'shhh, shhh, shhh, everyone quiet, there's a very, very, very, special guest here.' Of course, she just... I mean, there it was. So you see how through the imaginal window – that window to eternity – if we can open it at all, it's the simplest thing. That's why dreams are so unbelievably helpful. Near death phenomena too, it's a little bit more dramatic but dreams will do too. So yes, it happens for those who are dying and then also when we've had someone die, to have dreams of them from the other side who have a message that can bring incredible peace and there are innumerable ones of these that people have had. Von Franz speaks of one of her father coming after he died – Marie Louise Von Franz, Jung's right hand – when she speaks about her father after he died, he came to let her know, he tells her, that he was carrying on the same work that he didn't get done in this lifetime and he wanted her to know that. So that all of the heartbreak that she'd gone through in trying to deal with him, he was delivering this message 'listen, I want you to know, if it's consolation here, everything you were seeing...' basically, the gist of the message was, you know 'what you were seeing, I'm working on on the other side.' So oftentimes there are messages and presences... I have someone I've known who lives in the South, who has experiences when a child that died, a grandmother that keeps coming in. The grandmother keeps coming in to talk to her about her child that had died and it is bringing her peace, step by step to see these dreams.

Dr. Dave: What about your own grandmother, did you have dreams about your own grandmother, or your grandmother appearing to you after she had passed?

Monika Wikman: I have and that's been... I don't know what I would do without the dream window, I must be one of the densest people on the planet – I need it. I think about the alchemists, they were always trying to work to take what's dense and make it subtle, so without dreams I'd probably be just getting the denser word. My grandmother has come in through dreams and really then functions as a helper to me. I can feel her, she's like the Russian iconography where'd you see those old images of Mary and the Christ would be living in her heart chakra – I can feel literally in the heart center my grandmother's presence and it's like a compass, I can feel her... well, if you think of like, it's like an ability to read the feeling tone of something and tell me where I belong or don't belong. And it becomes very specific and I very much needed that, so this fits with Taoism that the ancestors want to be helpers and take up a resident field sometimes to help us, be with us and I would never have thought that, I didn't believe in that. It just happens to be what happened and I'm ever grateful – and I'm very grateful.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. In the notes that you sent me you made reference to Stan Grof's picture book and I had a delightful interview with him but I don't know what this picture book is that you're referring to.

Monika Wikman: Oh, I have to say it's so beautiful. It's called *Beyond Death: The Gates of Consciousness* and it is an exquisite collection of archetypal images that show us how death and this doorway, this flaming door, has been seen through the ages and there are images from Blake, from Doré, every tradition you can think of is in there and it's a must. It's a large book – its 8½ by 11 at least and it's called *Beyond Death: The Gates of Consciousness* and then in parentheses Art and Imagination by Stan Grof. It was done in 1980 and it is, in my sense of his work – all of his works have a long, long, long, long shelf life and this one goes to eternity – it's a beautiful collection.

Dr. Dave: Wow, I'm definitely gonna be looking that up. Well, we're reaching the point in the hour where it's probably time to start winding down although you open up so many flaming doorways that would be interesting to explore and I hope that we will in future conversations. Are there any last words that you'd like to leave our audience with?

Monika Wikman: Good point. I think that if you're deeply interested in this topic to read Von Franz's book on dreams and death and her last chapter of the book particularly where she talks about the psyche-matter extension and how the body... it realizes itself, the psyche, it realizes the body at death and travels us out the time-space continuum. That chapter is exquisite and that could be a whole 'nother talk with you some time if you wanted but I would suggest people take a look at that but mainly is that we leave our eyes open and hearts open and know how to cry out for help that true heart of the religious function that Jung was so after and to ask those who are dying or sick 'what are you dreaming?' Because often it's that simple.

Dr. Dave: Okay, well thanks for sharing so generously from your own experiences and your own learning – really deep material. So Dr. Monika Wikman I want to thank you once again for being my guest on Shrink Rap Radio.

Monika Wikman: Thanks so much Dr. Dave, it was a joy.

WRAP UP:

Wow, it felt really great to connect with Dr. Monika Wikman again. I really like the fact that she's not only very knowledgeable but also that she's very down to earth and open and of course I also appreciate the fact that she's very supportive of Shrink Rap Radio and is very accessible as a guest. As a matter of fact, she suggested two topics right after the interview. I think one of them was about the new physics, which she kind of got into and maybe the subtle energy body and the other one is what she refers to as incarnation choice points. Well you better believe I'll have her back on to talk on something – anything. During our conversation an insight was triggered for me by something she shared. I'm not even sure what the specific trigger was but I remembered a very significant dream in which I became lucid. The pre-lucid part was, I'm an actor in a play and a phone rings on stage, which I guess is part of the action but when I pick up the phone, it's my step dad, who's been dead for some years and he says 'the circle of your existence is about to come to a close.' At that point I become sufficiently lucid to have the thought 'wow, maybe this really is my step dad speaking to me from the other side.' I get so excited by that realization that it pulls me out of the lucidity and the dream and I wake up. Now that I've recorded this I

realize this dream memory must have been triggered when Monika and I were talking about dream ancestors – dreams of ancestors. The insight that's totally fresh for me – and let me say parenthetically – it's never been clear to me what that message about the circle of my existence is about to come to a close is about, since I have continued to live for quite a few more years. The insight is that in fact one of the biggest circles of my life, was a long run of synchronicities which culminated in my finding my biological father. I believe this happened some time after that dream but I don't recall exactly by how much time. I think my step dad was telling me I was close to finding my biological father. Wow! I've never put those two together before just now with Monika. I look forward to more such conversations with Dr. Monika Wikman and I hope you too.

Thanks again to Monika Wikman for sharing her work with us on the phenomena surrounding death and her very personal stories which I really appreciated.