

**"Personal Mythology" by David Feinstein and Stanley Krippner****Reviewed by  
Madeline Nold**

How would you like to read a book that would hopefully provide for you the experience of taking a transformational workshop, without actually leaving your house? David Feinstein and Stanley Krippner have provided such a manual for you, replete with suggestions for guided visualizations, journal writing, for the construction of ritual objects, and a theory about your own personal and family mythology as the overall framework for your inner journey. It's effectiveness may vary, depending on one's given personal myths and their "severity." I would not recommend this technique to be followed without ongoing therapy, especially for people who are undergoing extreme distress or have borderline symptoms. If utilized as a suggestive device for personal growth, and especially by people well worn on the beaten path of workshops and similar transformational growth experience, it can be an excellent ancillary tool. The style of writing is accessible to any who want to pursue the "written form" of self-actualizing through rigorous exercises.

The book provides a primer for working with your dreams, a manual of exercises in guided imagery designed to take the reader through an inner rite of passage, deep into the recesses of the psyche. At the source of the inner reenactment of a primal drama from which you constructed your personal myth, you, the reader acolyte are then led on a gentle journey returning from the depths of self-discovery, with the result of the inner quest, the information which you retrieved from the process as a tool for further self-healing.

Feinstein and Krippner suggest creating an image of your own "inner shaman" whom you identify as your transcendent sub-personality, or your spiritual guide throughout this journey. You are assisted in creating the image of the inner shaman by utilizing techniques similar to those used in Native American ritual, such as creating a "protective shield," actually constructing a shield, fashioned according to the shield first created in your imagination. The "protective shield" is used as a "power object," and imbued symbolically with your personal mythology, with designs and colors representing your hopes and fears. It is used as part of the healing process, as an aid to healing the wounds which caused you to develop an emotional protection or personal mythology.

The journey begins by having the individual identify outmoded or unproductive personal myths, "and to experiment with ways of bringing your life into greater harmony with these revised myths." Ever meticulous in the development of this process, the authors hardly "miss a beat" in the development and execution of their program. At the start, they advise, "We encourage you to appreciate the resistance and to approach it with an attitude of curiosity and a sense that if you penetrate it to its core, you will gain greater

self-understanding."

Why use "myth" in embarking on this inner journey? The authors give ample recognition to their predecessors who also advocate the use of myth, such as a quote by James Hillman, "Myths talk to the psyche in its own language; they speak dramatically, sensuously, fantastically." According to Ernest Kris, myths portray "certain elusive elements of the human psychology that psychoanalysis must account for if the effects of therapy are to be lasting."

To further validate their approach they periodically quote the late, great Joseph Campbell, "Myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestations. It has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that move the human spirit forward."

Their "proofs," examples from other psychiatric lore, including a few quotes from Carl Jung, tend to cross a bridge from the experiential approach to scholarly justifications for the use of myth. Certain sections of the book tend to lean too heavily on documentation of the basic theory, diverging at times from the fundamental nature of the book which is more an experiential manual than an academic treatise.

Fortunately, the theoretical documentation is amply fortified with photographs, which restore the mythic image to the reader's consciousness. The illustrations are aptly chosen and sprinkle the pages with fuel for the reader's imagination at appropriate junctions.

Illustrations in the form of narratives of people's lives and specific case histories are interspersed amongst technique and theory. The journeys of certain workshop participants are chronicled in their growth from having had unproductive personal myths to the development of new and healthy transformations in their lives. The case history approach, approximating clinical case histories, serves as a guideline for the readers, as an encouragement for their own transforming personal myths.

Some basic premises which operate throughout the "book/journey" are that, (a) "Personal myths are intimately connected with deep feelings," (b) Personal myths do for an individual what cultural myths do for a community, (c) Often your personal myths will be in conflict, as evidenced by the discrepancies between personal "belief systems" or your individual "philosophy of life" and your sense of well-being, (d) The individual's instrument for voyaging through Feinstein and Krippner's system is the "Inner Shaman" who "guides the evolution of your existing mythology...introducing new mythic visions into society" and in this case, to the individual practitioner of this model of personal growth.

The authors lightly touch upon the meaning for the shaman's role in a traditional sense. In traditional settings where shamanism exists, as in some Native American instances, we can say, by comparison, that the shaman is the tribal psychoanalyst,

listening to the reported ailments of the "patients," and through an intricate process of healing (techniques vary) affecting a "cure."

In addition, the tribal shaman is considered to be a "medium" who can contact the forces of the underworld, the overworld or realm of the beneficent spirits, and the three dimensional world of the earthly participants. Traditionally the shaman is spiritual medium, mediator between the forces of this tripartite universe, and expert on devices for healing, gleaned from experiences in these intersecting "realms."

The worldly shaman sings, dances, "emotes," and assists the individuals, guiding them through experiences symbolized by the underworld, the heavenly realm and their own mundane dilemmas. In this book the individual's imagined "inner shaman" acts as a medium, a spiritual advisor guiding the reader-acolyte through the labyrinth of his or her own unconscious, superconscious, and emotional conflicts, towards a healthy integration of the self.

Using Ruth Benedict's criteria from her *Patterns of Culture*, on a scale from "Apollonian" balance and harmony to "Dionysian" madness of dancing and verbal harmonics, as points of comparison, the Feinstein and Krippner version of the inner shaman is a peaceful prince of moderation. Although the reader constructs the image and action of the personal shaman according to his or her own fashion, the authors describe this tour leader of the unconscious as more of an angelic priestlike figure rather than the highly emotive, if not at times raucous extremes to which a human shaman might take his histrionics. The Feinstein and Krippner inner shaman is "nice," sedate, if a bit ministerial, in contrast.

Of course it is "apropos" to the method of using a book for self-healing, that the inner guide be as balanced a figure as possible, since the art of transformation is conducted without a "live" professional care-taker. The risks of "borderline" reactions to the process are thereby reduced. Emphasis on the individual's "quest" for re-integration and wholeness is consistent throughout the book, which culminates with a focus on "mythic renewal" and "weaving a renewal mythology into Daily Life." The concept of an individual's innate sense of "Paradise Lost" as well as a meticulously staged path returning to inner harmony which can be described as "Paradise Regained" is the essential course of the mythic journey. Rather than leave the reader adrift, this work operates as a firm and assiduous entreaty to continue to develop personal growth through continuing the process of "dreamwork," "journaling," and openness to the healing properties which can result from carefully designed visualizations. The act of "imaging" a part of the "self," as an "inner shaman," a readiness to accept messages from the psyche which include what we would term the "numinous" or "transcendent," also help to produce a richer understanding of the doorways to growth beyond one's traditional "personal mythology," towards a more humane and actualized self.

The book concludes with a mild exhortation towards applying personal transformation to social issues. The authors cite Clara Barton, founder of the Red Cross, as having said that the benefits of her organization "lie not in past service, but in the possibilities it has created for the future, the lessons it has taught; in the avenues to humane effort it has opened." They also refer to one of Joseph Campbell's designations of the functions of myth, to underscore their final message, that of "the compassionate mode of mythology, which prompts empathy," and which the authors state "elevates it to the level of social action." One wishes that Feinstein and Krippner had developed that theme further, but perhaps that would be another book.