

# Psychoanalytical Reflection of Psalm 23 Freudian, Jungian and Kleinian Perspective

**Ignatius C\***

Graduate Theological Foundation, United States

**\*Corresponding author:** Charles Ignatius, Graduate Theological Foundation, 7 Wainwright Avenue 1A Yonkers, NY 10710, USA, Tel: 347-452-4122; Email: charlesmani@yahoo.com

## Commentary

Volume 4 Issue 5

**Received Date:** August 19, 2019

**Published Date:** September 12, 2019

**DOI:** 10.23880/pprij-16000221

## Abstract

The famous Psalm 23 in the Bible starts as "The Lord is my shepherd there is nothing I shall want". This psalm has captured the hearts of millions both in Judeo and Christian traditions for centuries and it still has deeply touched even our modern generation.

Freud found that the unconscious process as manifested in dreams and symptom formations ruled by a mode of mental organization, were different from that mode used in our conscious mental activity, which he called primary process and secondary process respectively.

Jung saw the human psyche as being divided into a conscious and unconscious level with the latter further divided into a personal conscious and a collective conscious.

As a psychoanalyst I have attempted to read and understand this psalm in the approach of Freudian dream analysis and the Jungian approach of personal and collective consciousness and in the approach of Kleinian object relations theory.

Psalm 23 is one of the most acclaimed song or poem written by or attributed to King David in the bible. This psalm has captured the hearts of millions both in Judeo and Christian traditions for centuries and it still has deeply touched even our modern generation. As I was reflecting over this psalm as a psychoanalyst, I think this entire psalm was a dream David must have had as a king. Therefore, I would venture to treat this psalm as a dream analysis.

Freud found that the unconscious process as manifested in dreams and symptom formations ruled by a mode of mental organization, were different from that mode used in our conscious mental activity, which he called primary process and secondary process respectively. Psychoanalysts have traditionally viewed

dream as a product of regression to an infantile mode of thinking called primary process wherein drives are discharged through hallucinatory wish fulfillment.

David having been a shepherd in his younger days sees himself as sheep guarded and protected by the Great Shepherd, God himself. In Freudian tripartite structural model dreams are viewed as a product of regression, a regression in ego and superego systems tied with id material. And the dream necessarily becomes predominantly primitive and regressed product. David regresses in his unconscious mind being the sheep that is tired, worn out and lost when the shepherd makes him lie down in grass meadows and near quiet and restful waters and restores his life giving new energy. This trust and faith in God manifests in his dream, his belief that "when

the Lord is the shepherd there is nothing I shall want", meaning his ego is being strengthened and all his needs are taken care of.

David's life was complicated, and he had to hide away from King Saul for fear of being killed, before he was anointed as the king. But he always kept the right path, the path of justice and followed the commands of the Lord. The shepherd was leading the sheep. In his own humanity David followed the precepts of righteousness and justice. His ego was guided by the superego. While David speaks about walking in the valley of death's shadow it must have been very scary and terrifying to him.

Although King David had fought many battles and won many wars victoriously, there was one battle in his life where he was shaken to his core. Although he repressed it, it appears in his dream as the shadow of death. This was the incident of coveting Uriah's wife and sending her husband to the forefront of the battlefield to be killed. He had failed in two commandments, coveting his neighbor's wife and killing him. He knew that what he had done was wrongful in the sight of God. He feared the consequences. The superego was tormenting him. Id had taken precedence and he took another man's wife for his own enjoyment. Ego was pushed aside. Now after the fact, he fears the shadow of death and repents. The psychological death instinct is at play. Then the ego rises up and David pleads to God saying, "Have mercy Lord, and cleanse me from all my sin". God listens to his plea and forgives him. His favor is upon David again. Now David says, "I fear no harm for you are with me".

Now as the dream continues David sees the shepherd with his rod and staff that consoles him and feels the relief in the presence of the shepherd. The dream regresses back to the day when David killed Goliath with his sling and rejoices over the mighty power of God and says, "You set out a table before me in the face of my foes" and David is happy that he was anointed with oil while being made a king which brought prosperity and wealth which he denotes in the psalm as "my cup overflows".

David has been up and down in his journey of life but never moved away from his Shepherd and he sees in his dream that he follows the shepherd faithfully. He finds peace and solace. He wishes that this scenario continues. His unconscious fantasy is that the goodness and kindness pursue him all the days of his life and prays for the good fortune to be with the Lord enjoying peace and harmony at least most of his days. He wishes a good and balanced

psychic life. As he relishes that peace, he wakes up and says, "This is only a dream". Then he sits down and writes this psalm.

### **Psychoanalytical Jungian reflection of Psalm 23**

Jung saw the human psyche as being divided into a conscious and unconscious level with the latter further divided into a personal conscious and a collective conscious. Some unconscious processes flow from our personal experiences but others stem from our ancestors' experiences with universal theme. Jung divided the unconscious as personal unconscious and the collective unconscious which includes various archetypes.

David's Psalm 23 is a clear testimony to the personality of David who was a very passionate man, who had in the words of Jung both physical energy and psychic energy. From his younger days he used to fight the lion and the bear to protect his flock and, in every instance, he felt protected by an unconscious phenomenon to which he gives an image of a shepherd. He believes in a mystic connection with the higher power, he names it as the Lord and fantasizes that the Lord is his shepherd who takes care of him and protects him and fills him without any wants. He leads him towards grassy meadows and by quiet waters and makes him lie down in comfort. David has not seen God. It is the collective unconscious, the archetype that is beyond his personal experiences which is stimulating him. He goes on to say, "My life he brings back. He leads me on pathways of justice for His name's sake". Here you can visualize David's persona, the side of David's personality, the kingly qualities to rule the world in the pathway of justice. People hailed him as the greatest king. This was the persona he showed to others.

David also had a shadow, the dark side of personality. Jung says that in order for people to reach full psychological maturity they must first realize and accept their shadow. This is what we see in the verse, "Though I walk in the valley of death's shadow, I fear no harm, for you are with me". In his sinful and dark moments David always accepted his shadow and regretted and asked for mercy. Also, in the entire psalm David uses many images like shepherd, grassy meadows, quiet waters, the valley, rod, staff, table, oil, cup, house that are full of meanings for the ego to touch and experience. Every image produces an emotion which an individual can experience either consciously or unconsciously like in a dream.

When David talks about "Let goodness and kindness pursue me all the days of my life", he is achieving a maturity by accepting his anima and fusing it with the

Other. The most comprehensive archetype is the self, which is the image we have of fulfillment, completion or perfection. David ends the psalm with the words, "And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for many long days". The ultimate in psychological maturity is self-realization. Self realization or as Jung calls it individuation involves a psychological rebirth and an integration of various parts of the psyche into a unified or whole individual. Self realization represents the highest level of human development. David hopes to reach that peak with the divine and live in peace all the days of his life.

### **Psychoanalytical Kleinian Reflection of Psalm 23:**

#### **Infant's Psalm 23:**

My mother is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
In her good breasts she feeds me

She caresses me and embraces me  
When I suffer from destructive impulses  
She comforts me with her gentle hands  
and makes me lie down in my crib.

When I go through schizoid-paranoid feelings  
and phantasize that my ego is falling into pieces  
she brings assurance and comfort by her cues  
and restores peace within me.

When I go through depressive position and  
experience physical weaning and psychic separation  
You are there to cuddle me, make me laugh

and thus strengthen my ego.  
When I always thought Oh, mother!  
You and I were one; you stood before me saying  
you are my precious one!  
You made me realize I am a separate  
and a loving object, and the other.

When I suffer through hate and aggression  
walking in the valley of death instinct,  
you were there introjecting the good object within me  
to console and comfort me.  
You bathed me, freshened me  
anointed my head with baby oil  
Through your projective identification  
you promoted growth in me,  
gave me power, potency to bloom  
and gather knowledge and wisdom as I grow.

Oh, my gentle mother! Your goodness and kindness  
shall follow me all the days of my life  
You will remain the good breast and my mother  
for the many long days as long as I live.

By Charles M. Ignatius PhD

