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# FAIRYTALE THERAPY

*The four Paths*

Basic level

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*“A belief is not merely  
an idea the mind possesses,  
it is an idea that possesses the mind”*

*Robert Oxton Bolt*

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FairyTale Therapy 3 - The four Paths - Basic level  
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## Introduction

The investigations carried out so far have ascertained how the fairy tale has a different meaning than those more commonly known and shared.

The idea of the fantasy story to be told to children to entertain them or make them fall asleep and of narration with moral contents and pedagogical-educational functions is definitively overcome.

The particular language that distinguishes the fairy tale was also revealed, as an expression of the deepest intimacy of the human species.

Especially for this reason it seemed useful and necessary to identify and structure an organized way of enjoying the qualities of the fairy tale, which was outside the scope of psychology and therefore distant from symbolic interpretation.

Placing the fairy tale in the natural place of storytelling of internal images allows a deeper understanding of oneself and others, for the benefit of communication and relationships, for greater individual and collective well-being.

It should be remembered that self-awareness too often becomes an abused rhetorical concept.

Here it is understood as knowledge of one's internal images and their functional dynamics.

This knowledge, from our point of view, is the indispensable requisite, that knowledge capable of permeating life even in the most concrete aspects to weigh choices and actions from an otherwise unattainable perspective.

As illustrated in the handout of the Language for Images, the indispensable point of observation is the dynamics of the story, discarding existing symbols and interpretations, to identify a different organized and coherent system.

Starting from these assumptions, the work done by Propp was an extraordinary starting platform for identifying images / functions.

Considering the huge amount of fairy tales available, we wondered why, finally, only a few are so famous and imprinted in the collective imagination.

In part of the Russian linguist's studies we find the answer.

The functions that he has determined bring to evidence as in many fairy tales, even if the title, the characters and the story are different, in essence we can observe the story of similar narrative functions.

To answer the question, then, the hypothesis that we think is the most plausible is that the most remembered and well-known fairy tales contain, compared to other similar ones, the clearest and clearest narrative of some specific dynamics and functions narrated in them.

Starting from this assumption, we concentrated our attention by reading and rereading the most famous fairy tales to find out which ones had similarities in their functions and which ones narrated different ones.

The Language of Images with its rules has allowed us to study fairy tales from a new perspective and discover that the many narratives could be traced back to four functional sequences.

These four sequences are perfectly sculpted and visible in the Fairy Tales of Snow White, Cinderella, Puss in Boots and Sleeping Beauty.

Each of them tells a specific behavioral as well as structural dynamic, and we can say that all four collect the general perspectives of the whole of humanity. The knowledge of these dynamics allows a greater awareness of one's own, and an easier understanding of the other's view, for a consistent improvement of the interaction. In fact, even if unconsciously, each individual attributes his or her vision to the “world”,

giving each event and behavior meanings that are considered obvious or obvious. In fact, the disciplines that study human nature make evident the existence of different characteristics or types.

In a recently published text entitled "The principles of success", Ray Dalio, founder of Bridgewater Associates, the largest hedge fund in the world, defines these types of wiring.

This means that an individual sees, interprets the world on the basis of these neural "wiring".

But we are rarely educated to the knowledge that those in front of us can think and behave in a certain way for reasons other than ours. Fairy tales have revealed to us that such awareness has existed since the dawn of time.

Understanding the types of wiring and the related visions of reality is essential, as Maslow would say, for a fully realized life.

The purpose of this text is to make known the macro perspectives of vision or reading of the world and the resulting behavioral dynamics.

For this purpose, it is essential to know that the four types or Paths, as we have called them, do not represent static conditions, but rather movements of specific dynamics and therefore cannot be read in order to label, but to understand and discover every vision of reality.

Because only by having a complete vision, that is, knowing the four possible perspectives, can one act effectively and wisely.

## Another classification system?

Before going into the dynamics / paths of the four fairy tales it is necessary to make a clarification.

Human beings need classification systems to simplify and give order to the phenomena of reality.

Our mind cannot contain an unlimited number of cases.

We need to catalog everything we come into contact with by similarity, otherwise we would not be able to interact with the environment.

For this reason we use categories or classification groups.

It is the logic behind the set theory that is learned in elementary schools.

Units go with units, tens with tens, and so on.

So, are the four Paths also nothing more than the umpteenth classification system of human "types"?

Yes, if the purpose is to placate the mind it has to put everything in the right container.

No, if the aim is to become aware of the meanings.

The use of the tool determines the difference.

It is obvious that information must first of all be weighted, and if following evaluation it is consistent, effective, valid, then it is good to use it actively, that is, to experiment with it.

The four Paths have meaning if they are read from the perspective of a functional dynamic.

Each of the four includes the function of the Antagonist, as well as of the Donor and of the Trials, but the interesting and useful interpretation is the way in which these functions interact with each other within the dynamics, giving it a specific character.

It makes no sense to use them to say that there are four other containers in which to store ourselves and the people we know.

Instead, it is useful if through dynamics we discover the characteristic way in which functions interact.

By doing this we can find out where to look, for example, when we are in trouble. Each Path is a specific map to find what you need, in the "place" where it is kept. The aim is to know all the dynamics in order to make the best use of it. For this reason, when we talk about the Snow White Path, for example, we mean it complete with all its functions.

And even if the most evident and fearful part is the antagonistic one, it is essential to know the characteristics of the other functions and to know exactly which one is meant to "defeat" the Antagonist.

This allows you to recompose the dynamic and make it "move". In concrete terms, it means that a conflictual relationship remains such until the dynamic is complete or active.

To overcome the impasse, it is necessary to know how to deploy the other functions, depending on the Path or Paths involved.

## The essential functions of a Path

When we observe a Path contained in a Fairy Tale, we must pay attention to its functions.

By studying the structure of many fairy tales we have determined that a dynamic / path is complete if it contains the essential or structural functions.

If one or more of these functions is not operative, the sequence cannot be said to be complete and therefore the internal dynamics are not activated.

To explain the concept just expressed, we refer to a singular and famous scientist "met" during our studies.

This is Desmond Morris, British ethologist and zoologist, author of the highly contested best seller, published in 1967, "The naked monkey".

Below is a part of the preface that he himself wrote for the re-edition of the book, fifty years later.

*"... Our genes not only influence the color of our eyes and other anatomical features of ours, but they also play an important part in determining how we behave. ... Today it is widely recognized that we are programmed at birth by a series of genetic suggestions on how to behave if we are to enjoy life to the full.*

*We may be educated to discard these suggested paths, but in doing so we risk running into a wide range of frustrations and mental disorders, because the new courses of conduct do not fit the biological personality of the species. You may have noticed that I used the term "genetic suggestions" and not "genetic instructions".*

*It is because these influences are not rigid and we can slightly change them one way or the other without causing too much damage. It is only when we deviate from our ancient patterns of behavior that trouble begins. "*

If the prof. Harari explained to us why the narration is so important for our species, as are the elaborations of prof. Morris allowed us to extrapolate the specificity contained in the narrative form called FairyTale.

In fact, as prof. Morris, the troubles begin because the human being can deviate from genetic suggestions and slip into the labyrinth of ineffective, counterproductive, not optimized, incomplete behaviors.

In other words, a sentence of unhappiness.

What we saw in the fairy tale is the narration of complete natural behavioral dynamics, that is, with all functions active, in motion.

The best sequences that the species has selected not only to ensure our survival but to achieve full realization.

The fairy tales that we love most, or that are famous and recognized, contain dynamics that we feel ours and that we need to see in action so that we can "set in motion" the inactive functions of our specific behavioral pattern.

The essential functions common to the four types of Paths are seven, they do not necessarily occur in the order listed below, but must all be present:

- Opening;
- Antagonist;
- Protagonist;
- Difficulty;
- Gift;
- Giver;
- Final scene / Purpose.

The fairy tale is therefore a narration written in the Language for Images, contains the seven essential functions, tells the movements of each and the relationship between them.

The exciting peculiarity is that, while respecting the rules just mentioned and having the same functions, the four fairy tales that we are going to analyze tell distinct behavioral paths / dynamics and contemplate completely different visions of reality.



### Macro Snow White Path

It is interesting to remember that we find the Fairy Tale of Snow White for the first time in the Brothers Grimm collection of 1812.

As far as we know there are no traces of this fairy tale in previous versions of other binders, so we can almost say with certainty that it is inspired by a Germanic native tale. As noted in the previous handout, the Grimms had to make several changes from the original Fairy Tale collection.

Even in the specific case of Snow White, compared to the first edition, the second edition in 1819 has some variations. It seemed right for our work to consider the second, since the story has not undergone structural changes and is the best known version after the Disney cartoon.

Opening-> G-> Gi-> Pr-> A-> d<sub>1</sub>-> d<sub>2</sub>-> d<sub>3</sub>-> P

The opening scene tells of a pregnant queen who is busy sewing in front of the ebony window of her room. It is the middle of winter, outside the deep snow has covered everything. She stings herself and three drops of blood fall on the white snow.

From this vision springs the desire that the daughter has hair as black as ebony, skin as white as snow and lips as red as blood.

This is the specific scene in which the queen expresses the **G**iver function and has just requested that her daughter can embody a particular **G**ift.

And so it is.

At birth, the little girl shows the enchanting and candid beauty that her mother asked for her and which inspires the chosen name: Snow White.

In the little Snow White we can certainly see the **P**rotagonist function active. Nothing is missing.

Unfortunately, the queen dies in childbirth and some time later the king remarries a woman who becomes Snow White's queen and stepmother.

The stepmother, obsessed with wanting to be the most beautiful woman in the realm, asks every day to account for this condition from the magic mirror that cannot lie. A few years pass during which the mirror always repeats to the stepmother / queen that she is the most beautiful.

Until, one day, she replies that her beauty is surpassed by that of Snow White. From that moment on, envy and hatred towards the girl took possession of the stepmother's heart and a furious rage gave her no peace.

She has to kill Snow White to be the most beautiful again.

The **A**ntagonist function has come to life and begins to act.

In fact, the stepmother takes the first action to get rid of the girl.

She sends a hunter to kill her, but precisely because of her candor the man is unable to complete the mission, so he deceives the queen by bringing her the liver and lungs of a young boar as proof.

So far we can observe that the individuals belonging to the Snow White Path have the best starting conditions, possess their candid beauty but the very evident presence of this resource activates the Antagonist function.

The stepmother wants to be the only woman with exceptional beauty, which means that she will be willing to take any action to maintain this condition.

The Antagonist function in Snow White's Tale is particularly determined.

Later she herself, disguising her own appearance, tries three times to poison the girl while she is at the home of the seven dwarves.

It is precisely in the place where it has found refuge that the Protagonist function fails the tests, repeatedly allowing itself to be deceived.

At the first two difficulty, the seven dwarfs find a remedy and save Snow White. The third difficulty is successful for the stepmother and the poisoned girl falls into a deep sleep that seems deadly.

From the starting condition there is visibly a demotion.

The Antagonist has taken over and dominates the entire dynamic, stifling the other functions.

Only the Purpose function can restore the right balance.

He speaks to the prince who is fascinated by the gift of the girl, albeit in stasis.

The Purpose function awakens the Protagonist function and gives the Antagonist function the ultimatum to contain its expression.

But this does not happen.

However, the Purpose must be fulfilled, under penalty of blocking the entire dynamic, so the Antagonist function succumbs to its own excess.

In the fairy tale we find this passage told in the last scenes, where Snow White awakens and the prince celebrate the wedding to which they also invite the queen. She finally decides to participate, but cannot accept the girl's triumph. She is full of anger, so the prince forces her to wear hot iron shoes and dance until she falls dead.

It is important, for the purpose of a conscious and fully realized life, that the Snow White Paths take into account their specific antagonistic function.

Because in this dynamic there are two great extremes; the candor and the darkest wickedness, a bit like the peaks and the abysses.

These two extremes cannot be reconciled, but they can be managed. Each Snow White is aware of the abyss that lives in itself.

A darkness against which the Protagonist function has no power, which it is ashamed of and which it must absolutely hide, deceiving.

But sooner or later that darkness will prevail, unless the only function capable of reconciling these extremes is activated.

It is the Purpose, and it must be a candid, worthy, declarable purpose, such that any shadow is forced to retreat.

The Snow White Paths have the ability to manage and produce extraordinary beauties (think of Sixtus IV with Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel), provided that they are delivered into the hands of the Purpose with the characteristics just described.

To make sure it is not a deception, they must openly state what they intend to achieve. The declaration makes the Purpose candid because it becomes clear to everyone, including Snow White.

For those who should be faced with a dynamic Snow White governed by the Antagonist, who sees and shows a situation as damaged, that is, in which an irreparable mistake has

been made that has no solution (scene of Poisoned Snow, similar to death, closed in the coffin of crystal), declare the Purpose (the Prince sees Snow White and declares that he cannot live without her), however absurd it may seem, out of place, naive, it is the action in front of which the antagonistic function of the Snow White dynamic retracts (Snow White regurgitates the apple and wakes up).

What has just been said shows that there are no irreparable situations, but in a certain sense they are such if the dynamics are not completed.

An incomplete dynamic is partial and lends itself to being understood as wrong.

The Antagonist function tends to deviate from the action of increasing beauty, towards "grabbing" or "poisoning" the beauty of others (stepmother who wants to eat Snow White's liver and lungs - or stepmother who tries to poison therefore to impoverish beauty of Snow White).

Instead, we can enjoy the other functions in action of the Snow White Path (Protagonist, Gift), in the scenes in which the girl is in the house of the seven dwarfs. She expresses all the beauty of her whiteness when she clearly reciprocates the protection of the dwarves, making their home beautiful and harmonious, lovingly taking care of them, in an exchange where deception has no place.

In the life of individuals Snow White Path there is always a "kingdom" to manage, it is a necessity.

A kingdom can be the family, the office, the company, an association.

Another peculiar feature is the ability to identify and, always having clear, the hierarchical scheme of any reality with which they come into contact.

For the members of this Path the hierarchy is a natural and essential condition, otherwise before their eyes there would be only anarchy.

For this condition they tend to be experts in the rules in force, of how the world works.