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# GUIDED DIALOGUE AND UNDERSTANDING DREAMS

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by

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The Hypnoprimary view of therapy is that it is Guided Self-help. The client is the person who is exploring her or his own organism, exploring relationships, exploring the dream world, the significance of psychosomatic symptoms. The client is helping herself or himself.

It is very difficult to explore without a guide. The guide plays a role which is supportive, which gives ample space and time to explore, to free-associate, to recount experiences, to talk about psychosomatic difficulties, about relationships; and the skill of the guide is to choose the right moment to intervene; to help the client to recognise more and more of what has been dis-owned.

Dis-owning is a very important concept. It refers to an alienation from some aspect of the organism and a denial of responsibility. Many people, for example, regard their dreams as events that appear like clouds in the sky, over which they have no control, and in which they very often find no meaning and no sense. Dreams are often dismissed as nonsensical, or banal, or uninteresting, or irrelevant. This is often an attempt to dis-own the messages which are coming from the unconscious.

Re-owning is very closely linked with taking responsibility. When we begin to accept that our dreams are our creations, that we invent them, create them, just as a poet creates a poem, a novelist creates a novel, then fewer and fewer of our dreams are experienced as irrelevant or unimportant, or meaningless, or banal. More and more become significant, because we acknowledge that we select, from a vast range of experience, certain elements which we combine and put together in a structure which we call the dream.

A client came to see me today and reported a short dream which was ordinary and came to nothing; and a dream fragment which was boring and had no significance at all. He was tempted to dismiss the dream and the fragment as totally irrelevant to the exploratory process.

I suggested, "Tell the dream as if it is happening now", and he reported, 'I am in a church, with my friend Harry, sitting on a hard pew, and I see Vaughan Williams in the church. He is there because it is a celebration of his music, and it is a joyful event. He comes across to us

and says he would like to join us. There is no room for him in the pew and I offer him my seat; but as he is a very modest man he sits on the stone floor. I protest and give him my seat and he accepts it. I find a chair and sit beside him and he speaks to me; but what he says to me is completely unintelligible. It is in a strange high voice and I can't make any sense of it at all; and that is the end of the dream'.

It is fairly easy to see why he is tempted to dismiss this dream: it comes to nothing. It can be left like that; or the therapist can intervene at this point, and encourage some form of development of the dream material.

I suggested that he should go back to the point where Vaughan Williams turns to him and starts talking and then I said, "Be yourself, Robert, and speak to Vaughan Williams, and say to him: 'What you are saying is quite unintelligible to me. Can you say it in a way I can understand?'"

So he repeated the question and then I said, "Be Vaughan Williams, and say the first thing that comes to mind". He said, "That is where I am stuck . . .

I have nothing to say . . . there is nothing at this point . . . blank", so I said, "Switch, be yourself, say to Vaughan Williams, 'I believe you have come here and have come up to us because you have an important message for me. If this is so, can you please put this message in some form that I can understand?'"

So he asked the question and I said, "Switch, now be Vaughan Williams and say anything that comes to mind". As Vaughan Williams, he

said, "I've come to tell you that you should use your creative talent; you are neglecting it, you should make use of it". Then the dialogue continued and it became more and more significant; it became quite clear that Vaughan Williams was brought into the dream because he is someone my client greatly admires. He has the significance of being the wise and helpful father which he did not have in his childhood.

Now from that point on, I intervene at the various points where he cannot really identify with one character or another, and what I am saying is usually the obvious; not always, but I am not drawing upon my own fantasy, I am staying within his conceptions and simply filling in the gaps or asking questions. Even a question is sometimes enough. There was such a resistance to getting the message that first, he wants to dismiss the dream; second, Vaughan Williams's speech is almost unintelligible; third, when he reconstructs the dream, he still gets a blank; but because I persist beyond that point he has to stay with it, and Vaughan Williams begins to speak and his message is perfectly clear, and it becomes more and more clear as the conversation develops.

The art of Guided Dialogue is to encourage something to continue which is cut off, but the reason for cutting off is usually a refusal to accept the message from the unconscious, making the speech unintelligible, making the dream banal.

When we had worked on the dream for some time and the identity of Vaughan Williams was firmly

established as the wise man whose old age was perfectly tolerable to him because he was still creative, then it became clear that there was a link between the fear of growing old and the fear of not using one's own talent.

If the talent is being used, then the question of aging becomes unimportant. If it is not being used, it becomes all important. "What am I doing with my life? I'm getting older; there is nothing but deterioration".

I ended this dialogue by saying, "Thank Vaughan Williams for his important message, and say to him that you would like to have him representing the wise part of yourself, whom you can turn to and from whom you can get advice". And Vaughan Williams replied, when I asked him to switch, "Yes, I would be very glad to play the part of the wise part of yourself".

This means that he has now an internalised good parent and can keep referring to him, because he is really referring to his own wisdom, which he is tempted to disown because it's uncomfortable; it's reminding him of something not being done.

When that was complete, and it seemed to have a natural completion, I said, "Just tell that fragment you mentioned as if it is happening now", and he said "Oh, that's very boring; I'm in an old car, and I'm with some people who are very nebulous, I don't recognise anybody, we are driving out into the country, and at some point we stop and I get out and then I wake up".

Once again, it's obvious why he should be tempted to dismiss this as totally irrelevant; it's very boring, very dull, and it never gets anywhere. What's the point of reporting a fragment like that?

So I said, "What comes in mind in connection with old car?" And he said "I'm not interested in old cars, I'd rather have a new one!" I made a mental note, without saying anything, that this may be referring to an aging body. He is not interested in old cars; he is not interested in the process of aging; but when we are not interested, we do not bring these things into dreams. This suggests the opposite, that he is very interested in the process of getting old.

At this point, I asked, "Are you driving the car or are you a passenger?" "No, I'm a passenger, and I'm not sure who is driving the car". "Are the people with you men or women, or both?" "I really don't know, they are so vague, I think perhaps, two of one sex and one of the other, I'm not sure which sex". And then I suggested, "Be the old car and say 'I am an old car'; say anything that comes to mind". He said, "I am an old car, I'm likely to cause more and more trouble, various things are going to start breaking down, I shall need repair more and more". At that point it became fairly clear that there was something significant about the process of aging, so I said 'What comes to mind in connection with getting older?' He said, "It depends who is getting older, Vaughan Williams, for example, is not worried about getting older, because

he is productive, he is very alive and composing late in life".

Then I asked him to step out of the dream and to ask the two dreams if they were connected, and if so, what was their message.

He asked the question and I said, "Switch and be the two dreams", and he said, "Well, we are connected, we are telling you that you are getting older and it is very important whether you use your creative talent or not. If you do, then the aging process will not be painful, will not concern you at all. If you don't, you will feel like the old cars which you are not interested in because they simply cause more and more trouble".

It became very clear that these boring fragments of dreams were boring because the message was coming through and he was not allowing himself to understand it. They are trying to 'bore' through his resistance.

Now quite clearly, the danger of this process of Guided Dialogue is that the therapist will in some way impose his own ideas, and direct the person rather than leaving the person to find the answers for himself. If the client is actually finding the answers, finding the significance, acknowledging that he has created the dream, acknowledging what message he is giving himself, then there is no need for intervention on the part of the therapist. The therapist is helping by encouraging the exploratory process to go beyond the point where the client wakes himself up, in order not to understand, or not to face a certain danger or a certain crisis.

For example, many people wake up as they fall off a cliff, so they do not know what happens, but if they are encouraged to carry on and to let themselves fall and look at the cliff and to see it passing by: where they land, what happens when they land: then they will inevitably find that the dream, however frightening it may be, can not actually hurt them. Their bodies do not actually get destroyed, wherever they may land, whether it be in water or even on rocks.

They cannot be destroyed by a dream. Therefore they not only begin to take responsibility for the dream as their own creation, but they also recognise that the dream dangers are not critical dangers; they are not dangers to the organism. Therefore they can allow the dream to develop more and more, and bring it to a different conclusion.

So, waking up is usually an attempt to escape from something frightening or from something, like a message, which is disturbing, and when the dreamer begins to acquire the habit of letting the dream go on beyond the crisis point, then the exploration becomes really interesting and more and more insight develops.

If this understanding becomes really well established, and the fear of the dream diminishes, the client is moving closer and closer to lucid dreaming, when he becomes aware in the dream that he is dreaming, and that it is a creative act, and he can carry it on in whatever way he likes.

In other words, he is not the victim of the event in the dream, but the Creator, and the Creator cannot be the Victim, even if the situation is frightening. If the dreamer is creating the situation and creating the plot and inventing the dialogue and playing various parts, then what emerges from the dream is not a threat but a message. The danger in the dream is illusory. It is caused by failing to understand that dream perils are not body perils; they are not threats to the organism.

When you take a client back into the dream, you start at any point which seems a significant point for better understanding. For example, in the Vaughan Williams dream, I took the dreamer back to the point where Vaughan Williams speaks unintelligibly. The unintelligible speech is a deliberate garbling of the message in order not to understand it, so that is the point where I can keep insisting that he should get an answer to his question. If I only get the client to ask questions, that is enough. If I am suggesting that my client ask questions of Vaughan Williams, I am not imposing my ideas; I am simply insisting that he should get an answer instead of waking himself up and getting no answer at all. If you find that the significant point in the dream is the point where the dreamer falls off the cliff, then that is the moment, when the fright wakes them (her or him) up, to 'continue' the dream.

The fright derives from the delusion that the dream is an actual menace to the organism, and once the person is encouraged to go back and fall off the cliff, and to see what happens as he/she falls, to feel the rush of air

perhaps, if necessary to scream with terror . . . the scream will be an expression of fear. To express is better than to suppress or to evade. Expression brings relief. Waking up is an evasion. Very often the person wakes up saying, 'I was trying to scream but I had no voice', or 'I was trying to run but my legs were like lead'. Now this inability to do what you want to do indicates a conflict, and the conflict is not resolved if the dreamer wakes himself or herself up at the very crisis point, so that there is no screaming; there is no discovery of what falling results in, and there is no message.

This is an evasion, and the guide can give support to the dreamer to confront instead of evading, to continue instead of interrupting, and eventually to get the message; to understand it and acknowledge it.

In cases where there is an artificial awakening . . . for example, being shaken, or being woken up by an alarm clock . . . the dreamer experiences a malaise, because something has been interrupted, and that point is arbitrary. The dreamer has not had time to complete his dream; and this is really an argument against alarm clocks, just as there is an argument against eating when you are not hungry, or drugging yourself to sleep or stimulating yourself when you are tired. All these things are a way of imposing something on the organism rather than allowing the organism to find its own rhythm.

If we are so used to using electricity that we ignore the seasons, then we are quite likely to go to rest, to go to bed much later than our organisms

would choose to go. Our organisms would choose to go very much earlier, like the animals. If we habitually go to bed at midnight, it is very likely that we are not going to wake up naturally for the work programme that we set ourselves.

Therefore we wake artificially and we become used to imposing an artificial rhythm on our organism; eating because it is lunchtime, not because we are hungry: eating when it's dinner-time when we have had enough food for the day: staying up when we are very tired because we don't want to miss some entertainment, and so forth.

So this imposing of an artificial rhythm means that we are going to jerk ourselves into consciousness; and that makes it even less likely that we are going to get the message from the dream world. The alarm is something which people find disturbing, but part of them may welcome this violent intrusion, so that they can't get the message and they can't remember. Very often there is a reluctance to receive the message; otherwise the message wouldn't be coming from the unconscious, we would be fully conscious; we are keeping it unconscious because there is something we don't want to look at.

If you recognise, when you are taking an interest in the dream world, that you are creating your dreams, then you begin to look for messages from the dreams which are important to your current life: which you could apply practically to your current life. There are then two possible tendencies. One, that you remember many more dreams,

you interpret them more easily, you accept the messages better, and you find it less necessary to wake yourself up to escape from the message. This is a benevolent progressive tendency.

On the other hand, if this process of understanding goes so fast that you are disturbed by what you are discovering, that you find out things about yourself that you have been deliberately disguising for years and years and years, then the opposite tendency may come into play: that you will remember less and less dreams, that you will find them less intelligible, that you wake yourself up at the critical point, simply because your insight is progressing faster than your level of tolerance.

There is an optimal speed of self-discovery, an optimal speed of exploration; if you speed it up too much, you will probably meet resistance.

Not remembering and not understanding can be a protective device against being overwhelmed by the messages from the unconscious. What is important is not to criticise yourself or bully yourself, not to say, 'You should be understanding more; you should be interpreting better'. What is important is to accept that there is an optimal rate of self-discovery, an optimal speed of exploration, so that you accept resistances as messages just as you would accept any other message.

In other words, something is telling you to slow down. That is perfectly acceptable; you can slow down without actually losing interest, and

when you have had your rest period, then you can return to the exploration. You are like mounteneers climbing one of the peaks of the Himalayas and establishing a base camp, and spending three weeks at that base camp apparently wasting time, in order to get acclimatised to the reduced oxygen at that particular height. Once the organism has become acclimatised then it can push on to the next base camp on the way up to the peak. But, if they go straight on up without that three-week pause, then they lose their strength and there may be a serious

accident. They know roughly how long the organism needs to acclimatise itself to that altitude.

Hypnoprimary therapy is a relationship of rapport, maintained by the therapist, in which the client has a near-perfect opportunity to express blocked primary feelings, such as fear, grief, anger, exuberance . . . , to break addictions, obsessions and compulsions, to receive and understand messages from the unconscious, and to move towards spontaneity, expressiveness, enthusiasms, love and self-love.

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