

# The Act of Dreaming

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In psychotherapy we generally regard the dream as a kind of production. There it is scrawled on a scrap of paper or perhaps calligraphed into a beautifully bound journal. Maybe we are moved or encouraged to draw or paint an image from the dream. Analytical interpreters will be inclined to see their favourite theories illustrated in the imagery. Gestaltists may try to lay conscious claim to the content of the dream by getting under the surface of an image and speaking from the 'I' position. In all these cases the dream is seen as a kind of mystery which is inviting work to be performed upon it in order to discover its meaning. This work is often called 'dreamwork'. The ancient Jewish book of wisdom, the Talmud, says that 'a dream which has not been interpreted is like a letter which has not been opened'. Many dream orientated psychotherapists would surely agree. The dream is like a letter, or a book of mysterious words and pictures, or perhaps a personal inner cinema or theatre. The dream is a kind of show or display. We are the audience.

Who, we might ask, is the producer of this production? Who is the mysterious author, musician, poet, humourist and visual artist? It is understandable that we may be fascinated by these sometimes beautiful, bizarre, extraordinary, sometimes banal or frightening productions. Our daily lives are woven into the imagery and story lines making them both familiar and unfamiliar. Who is it that knows us so well and yet adds so much mystery to the familiar? Analytic models of psychotherapy offer an enigmatic answer to this question. It is, we are told - the 'unconscious'. The Freudian model would have it that the dream's author is down there in the world of the repressed instincts, the frightening

seething 'id'. Jungians might say that this 'unconscious' has rather more to offer. New creative impulses from the autonomous life of the psyche may also be trying to nudge their way into our awareness. These first become apparent in the sleep state where we are free from our normal waking ego controls and defenses. In the Jungian view, the lessening of ego control admits both our inferior impulses and our creativity. We still talk of the unconscious however, and our task once again is to render the productions of the unconscious intelligible to the waking ego.

Erich Fromm has drawn attention to the parochialism of the waking ego

which likes to equate itself with the conscious mind. We are happy to describe the dream state as manifesting the unconscious. But, Fromm points out, 'the day world is as unconscious in our sleep state as the night world is in our waking experience.' In the dream state we can experience ourselves as young or old, male or female, rich or poor, a city or a country dweller. We are unencumbered by our day world identity, yet we still maintain our sense of self. From this perspective it is the day world that is the 'unconscious'. In recent decades there has been increasing research and interest in what has come to be known as the 'lucid' dream state. This is a state of full wakefulness within the dream. We are considering the paradoxical experience of wakefulness in sleep. We could weigh this against the much more common experience of our day world behaviour when it is carried out in kind of trance state of projections and selective attention that has only dubious claim to the term 'wakefulness'. We are commonly asleep to the dream state in the day world and asleep to the day world when we are in the dream state. The day world and the dream world are two different states of consciousness.

Alfred Adler broke away from Freudian and Jungian notions when he rejected the conception of the unconscious as a mysterious separate entity within our psyche. He said 'The unconscious...is not hiding away in some unconscious or subconscious recess of our minds, but is a part of our consciousness, the significance of which we have not fully understood.' The dream producer, then, is not the unconscious but what we ourselves do in a state of consciousness the significance of which we do not fully understand. Being in

the dream state is perhaps a bit like being an unselfconscious child busy at play. We wake in the morning to try to figure out the significance and meaning of the sand castles and footprints we have left behind. We wish to understand their significance, but instead of reentering the play we step back and analyse the results of our play. We could argue that in this way we succeed less in bridging the gap between the day and dream states, than in distancing ourselves even more by understanding solely from the viewpoint of the waking ego.

James Hillman offered a very different model of dreamwork. In his view the role of the dream is not so much to inform, guide or balance the waking ego, as it is to mystify the waking ego. He argues that we perhaps already have too much clarity. The rational scientific mind has been engaged in an ever accelerating project of demystifying the world. It has changed the living animated world of our ancestors into the objective world of today. We have an expansive conquering model of personal development. 'Where id was, there shall ego be', said Freud. Perhaps the dream is the last refuge of what used to be called the 'gods', together with their impenetrable mysteries. Heroic models of psychotherapy attempt to lay claim even to this refuge and make it subject to the rational mind. Hillman argues that when we are in the dream state we are not orientated to the expansive development of the waking ego. In this state of consciousness the psyche has quite a different agenda which he calls 'soul making'.

When we experience ourselves to be that other self who we are in the dream state we are making soul. In soul making we allow our experience to

deepen by opening to the unfamiliar, or by discovering the unfamiliar within the familiar. Our consciousness permeates into the unique particularity of experience. We reverse the action of the heroic waking ego which seeks expansion and growth by seeking familiarity in the unfamiliar. An effect this might have on the waking ego is to make us review what we thought was unremarkable. We begin to rediscover the mystique, autonomy and singularity of the things and events which populate our daily lives. Or, alternatively, we discover the lack of these same qualities in an environment filled with carelessly produced mass manufactured objects created without soul consciousness. We experience the emptiness and deadness of mechanised behaviour unrelated either to the rhythms of the body or to those of the world.

Robert Sardello has done much to develop and clarify these ideas. He opens possibilities for developing soul work. He sees the dream state as being at one end of a scale of psychic activities that manifest the creativity of the self we are in the dream, or of soul making. The scale runs thus; dream - fantasy - memory - thinking - perception. He explains;

'Creating activity is strongest with the dream, for there it is most free. This element is still present in fantasy, although more bound to the ego - the ego is always at the centre of our fantasy life, with imaginary pictures serving the wishes of the ego. With memory a creating element is still present, but is now bound to an event that occurred in the outer world. Thus memory recalls events that have happened, but does not do this in a completely literal way. With

thinking, the creating element is bound to the laws of logic, which brings an orderly relation between one thought and another. When this orderly element is lacking, we have something approaching free association rather than thinking. And, with perception, the creating element is most bound by what is actually present before us. Nonetheless, even in perception there is an aspect of creating what we see, as evidenced by the possibility of illusion.'

Sardello understands the dream state to be one in which we are actively involved in a spontaneous creative process that involves a sense of self that extends beyond the limitations of the waking ego. We are not merely the passive spectators of an inner display. He suggests that attention to this spontaneous creative activity of the dream can help us to strengthen the creative element in all of the psychic qualities in the scale and help to bring the qualities of soul back to the outer world. This kind of dream work can help to develop 'a consciousness of ourselves as creating beings who have the capacity to bring this creating into conjunction with the world'.

Sardello has a number of specific suggestions on how to work with dreams. His intention is to focus on the activity of dreaming rather than on the results of this activity which we recall in the morning. Unlike more established approaches to dreamwork, the goal of this work is not to further the aims of the waking ego by getting answers to our personal quests. Neither is it to expand and deepen our self awareness by exploring the imagery of the unconscious. Instead we aim to strengthen the sense of the creative self we find ourselves to be in the dream

state. In this way we strengthen our capacity for creative involvement in all aspects of our lives, through to the very way we perceive the world. We bring the sense of soul back to the outer world and begin to reverse the damage brought about by the excessive domination of scientific rationalism teamed with the heroic ego. We move toward wholeness by reversing the customary direction of psychotherapeutic work. We bring the sense of the dream self or soul more into the waking world, rather than extend the domain of the waking ego into the 'unconscious'.

### Further reading

Alfred Adler, quoted in James Hillman, *Healing Fiction*, Spring Publications 1983

Erich Fromm, *The Forgotten Language*, Grove Press 1957.

James Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld*, Harper Colophon Books 1979

Robert Sardello, *Facing the World with Soul*, Lindisfarne Press 1992.

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