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Dreams

"Grasping the true nature of dreams, train in the clear light of miraculous transformation."

The Tibetan Books of the Dead.

At the very least dreams are an interesting part of our lives, and though dreams may be 'just' an evolutionary quirk I think it is unlikely that we would go through fear and ecstasy each night again and again if there was no value to our nightly experiences. The ideas I describe here, and my purpose in writing about them, are to help express this value.

After looking at several psychotherapeutic theories of dreaming, I came to the conclusion that the unconscious (assuming that it supports the process of the dream) is basically helpful and chooses to tell the conscious part of the individual whatever s/he want to know with whatever s/he is ready for and in images that are familiar. Thus every analyst's theory is correct in so far as their own clients' dreams go, since if the clients are motivated to use dreams in their own growth work then their dreams will adopt the same approach as the intellectual theory of dreams used to 'interpret' them. By this I am suggesting that we have more control over our dreams than is commonly believed.

I think it is likely that a great part of the imagery of our dreams is derived from actions and thoughts, conscious or otherwise, from our whole (primarily wakeful) life. This is sufficient to explain most of the observations from dreams that are taken to support the common theories. Thus Freud's theory of dreaming, that it is the attempted fulfilment of a (frequently repressed) wish, can be explained quite simply; during our wakefulness we have some desire - possibly stemming from childhood or before - and as the wish is turned over in our minds, possibly without notice, it provides the basis from where our dream takes off.

Assuming that the dream elaborates on mental themes like this and yet has its own story to weave, then there are two major types of theme it might draw upon. First the dream will take over consuming images that we have dwelt on so much that perhaps they manifest themselves virtually all of the time in our lives (such as birth trauma), including whilst we are asleep. Secondly there are recent events that have not been assimilated sufficiently to have a complex of many value-loaded associations and these can be utilised freely without evoking 'irrelevant' associations to the dreamer. In both categories I would include transpersonal experiences; I assume that in our dreams we have access to memories or functions that although more controllable in waking are, for me anyway, more accessible at night.

There is no exact correspondence between the deeds in waking life and the deeds during dreams; there does, however, seem to be a powerful correspondence between the emotions felt - fears, desires and so on - whether in the past or now.

Now what I have outlined is a causal-reductive approach, and as such, it gives no indication of the human value of dreams. A dream might be the pathological product of the dreamer's complexes, a normal psychic function, a paranormal exercise that the waking brain perceives as bizarre, or any number of things. In working with dreams we may have the preconceived plan of unearthing bits of our biography, uncovering neurotic motives, rationalising our lives, solving problems, predicting the future, enjoying ourselves or meeting the Self. . . But if we truly relate to the unconscious, even as we perceive it in our dreams, we are in a process of transformation.

In gestalt therapy a technique is used where a person fantasises what and how s/he would be like as a certain object, perhaps as 'mundane' as a banknote. From the fantasy the worker may come to significant insights into their personality. Working with dreams or dream images must have at least as much potential as this, since in the dream the object of fantasy is not taken arbitrarily from the world outside but one way or another has emerged from within (at least, the dream was conceptualised within) the dreamer. Gestalt assumes that all aspects of a dream, at least as a starting point, may be taken as expressions of parts of the whole of the dreamer's personality. Whether the mechanism for this is condensation (combining bits from different objects or persons to make a composite image with some of the characteristics of each), displacement or symbolisation is immaterial. Thus all aspects of a dream are taken to be expressions of the dreamer. Indeed, if anything I do in some fashion express who I am, then my dreams do also.

The Buddhists go a step further; all that occurs in a dream is illusion, howsoever caused, and through 'clear perception' the individual may be liberated from the symbolic life and its concomitant desires. Instead, most of my life is spent trying to become my idealised self.

What follows I hope will be a practical guide for working with dreams. The ground rule is quite simple: if I value my dreams and do not dismiss them as meaningless and bizarre they do become meaningful and furthermore, I recall them more readily.

Recalling and Recording. The best way to recall dreams is to have a lively interest in them, and to discuss and share them with friends. Sleeping in a new environment, especially where there is no pressure to 'get on' in the morning helps; so does being woken up while still dreaming; this is easy to do if you have an alarm clock. But before opening your eyes, run over the dream(s) again as this will help retain them. Once you have recalled as much as seems possible, gently turn over and this will sometimes facilitate more recall. Jolting or getting up quickly will be disturbing.

Planning events of the next day just before you drop off is a good way of lowering the quantity and quality of the dreams you recall. When I have been anxious about the next day, not only have I recalled less but I have had less time for working on the dreams the next morning.

Some people like to use a tape recorder at the side of their bed and some like to write their dreams in a notebook. How you record your dreams is up to you. There is no reason to assume that the written word is the best way of recording your dreams; you can make any representation of them you will - pictures, cartoons, models, actions. If you start out trying to be very rigorous with yourself, recording every dream 'properly', you may well lose interest - so I suggest that you do what gives most pleasure at the time and soon (if you wish) recalling and recording will be a habit.

Some simple techniques will help in recording clearly; try to express yourself in the present tense, as if you are at that moment reenacting the dream. Also give your dreams names and dates. Some of the points to cover in a dream record are these:

- * *where does the dream take place?*
- * *who are the characters in it?*
- * *what are their names, ages, sex, race: are they strangers or known?*
- * *what actions do you and others engage in?*
- * *what things do you see, smell, hear, touch, taste, sense?*
- * *what direction do you move in,*
up, down, left, right, East, West. . .?
- * *what emotions do you feel?*

If you wish you can include any immediate associations that occur to you in the dream record when you write it down (or whatever) just as you awake. This will probably be very useful later.

Ways of Thinking. If you enjoy the intellectual approach to interpretation, then you may like to keep some of the ideas below at the back of your mind. I imagine that if you clarify some of these ideas during the day, they may emerge more frequently during your dreams. The ideas I describe for thinking about dreams assume the latent content of dreams (what the dream is supposedly 'about') to be other than the manifest content (what actually happens).

Any interpretation of dreams must be considered as tentative, especially if it is done by someone other than the dreamer, and rejected if it does not fit. Of course, the dreamer may reject suggestions that fit only too well. . . Although symbolisation appears to be the primary mechanism of dreaming, other defenses such as displacement (emotions are associated with something other than their cause) and reaction formation (when just the opposite of the intention is expressed) occur also, which really means that reading things *into* dreams may be just that.

There is no "Universal Dream Language": so I give these suggestions simply

to illustrate the sort of things you might expect in your dreams. Dreams should not be handled in a rigid way: choose whatever approach seems most valid and useful to you - which may not be mine.

Colours tend to represent clichés: black is bad and white is good, blue is male and pink is female, green is growth and brown decay. Red is blood, and it may mean 'coming of age' (i.e. menstruation).

Numbers can represent all sorts of things in general, but particular numbers often have special significance. Thus 3 is a process and 4 a goal. The arithmetic in dreams is often naive and the number 111 or 12 can be 'added up' to make 3 - by summing the digits. Whenever three objects occur you might ask, if this is a process, where or what is the fourth that will complete the quaternity? Jung equates 4 with completeness and an expression of the four functions: thinking, feeling, sensing, and intuiting. If there is a threesome in a dream, perhaps the fourth is a suppressed one of these functions. One is often an expression of unity - what else? The numbers 1, 3 and 4 may arise geometrically as in the circle, triangle and square.

Words play is often rampant in dreams. New words are formed, especially as names for people and things, which are formed out of other meaningful words, frequently by merging the sounds of the words or by punning. An example of this is a dream where ants occurred, ants are insects, insects is incest (the connection was made by the dreamer). Dreamers who enjoy doing cross-words will probably see, and be capable of, abstruse 'clues'.

Myths and religious symbolism will frequently occur in dreams (especially, I assume, if your analyst is Jungian), and the obvious way to look at such dreams is to be familiar with a range of myths and symbols. Generally, the way to elucidate mythologems is in discussion with someone else. Journeys may well be figurative: a journey to the East is birth (or rebirth) and a journey to the West is to death: life is a journey. Cities may represent destinations and animals, especially horses, can represent instincts.

Buildings may represent the self; so when the dreamer goes into disused or dusty rooms these may be neglected parts of her or his personality. Houses have basements and these may well be aspects of the unconscious. Similarly dark places, like deep lakes, may contain the treasures and phantoms of the unconscious.

Freudian sympathisers will probably have sexual symbolism (or signs) in their dreams and here the obvious referents are genitals. Thus snakes, towers, trees, taps ('cocks') can represent your - or someone else's penis. Holes, doors caves can represent the vagina. Also, rooms, caves, trunks and so on may represent the womb and desired security. Landscapes sometimes represent aspects of the body: hills may be breasts, for instance. Statues, stone bodies, are dead, at least sexually.

Going through a tunnel, being helped out of a room, being in a collapsing

cavern, emerging into a strange world (which is probably this one). . . these may be dreams related to birth. (However the dream also has reference to the dreamer's present life.)

Teeth and hair frequently occur in dreams, and they frequently fall out. Perhaps the loss of teeth is a way of representing the loss of something which we were literally attached to.

Content Analysis. If important ideas in waking life are reflected in our dreams, then it follows that important occurrences in our dreams are also important for us when we are awake. Assuming the 'importance' of a dream image is related to how often it occurs over many dreams, then we can find out what is important for us by counting how frequently certain categories of situations happen in our own dreams. To do this with any statistical reliability you may need a series of at least fifty or so dreams.

Ways of Doing. I have already hinted at the Jungian technique of amplification, and indeed most of the 'things to do' are most easily done with someone else, with a (co-) counsellor, in a group or with the family. The attention of a supportive listener (the assistant) will greatly assist in working with any of the following techniques. And if you are not already familiar with peer counselling then I suggest you read "*The Barefoot Psychoanalyst*".

One of the best times to try these methods is just after you have awoken from a dream.

Amplification is a technique whereby you take a particular aspect or object of the dream and see what it brings to mind. If the object chosen is a fish, amplification might go like this: "fish swim in deep water, the fish is a symbol of Christ, I like fishing, fish are wet and slippery, it is sexy, the fish is a zodiacal sign, it is primitive. . ." Any of these individual amplifications can be filled out if they seem useful.

Free association is similar but the free association leads on a trail of ideas starting from the object, whereas amplification always comes back to it again. A free association might go like this: "fish, I was fishing last week, I got wet and that was like when I was at school, I nearly drowned once and nobody came to help me, I'm always ignored, Daddy never takes any notice of what I do. . ." When this is done with an assistant (someone to be there and give attention and suggestions), the assistant can make a note of times in the free association when the worker appears to get stuck, or times when s/he blushes, yawns, laughs or whatever. Generally, you will get 'stuck' when you hit a resistance - and trying hard to overcome the resistance will probably just make it all the more powerful. Incidentally, free association often brings to mind 'lost' dreams. (As a typical free association may get a long way from the dream motifs, although it will certainly uncover complexes, some of the potential of the dream itself may remain unrealised.)

Continued fantasy means carrying on the dream, either where it (that is,

you) left off or at any interesting point in the dream. Again, as in recording the dream, try and make the fantasy flow in the present: "I *am* walking up the corridor. . ." The assistant can greatly help (and this is only necessary if the worker comes to an impasse) by suggesting walking round obstacles and seeing what is behind them or by following paths, digging holes or using gadgets. If the fantasy seems to get stuck in a desolate place hop on a helicopter or sprout wings. . . Before starting a guided fantasy (and any work) it is a good idea to clarify how many and what form of interventions the assistant will make.

Very similar to this is one of the techniques of Gestalt therapy mentioned earlier. Try fantasising what it would be like to be one of the objects or characters of your dream. It will greatly help - it may even be of immediate value to give these characters names. As assistant, if the worker mentions other affective objects or says 'you' referring to another person (or thing) in the dream, suggest that the worker switches and plays the role. In this way the worker can build up a conversation between parts of himself or herself. A practical way to aid this process is to actually change seats or cushions when changing roles, and then talk back to the cushions.

You can try this dialogue between yourself and your 'dreaming self', and this may be very useful if you think your dreams tell you nothing or if you have some difficulty recalling them. Ask them what they do it for.

If your dream is interesting as it stands, such as an archetypal dream, then one possible way to work with it is to expand the dream into a fully blown story. This will obviously mean making up dialogues between the characters (if there are any). If you wish you could also illustrate the dream with a series of pictures or other representations.

Another way is to paint your dream on a blackboard in your mind's eye. Then turn the blackboard over and find out what you see. Or put parts of your dream or the characters in it on a cable car that is climbing a mountain. Describe what or who gets out of the cable car when it returns from the top.

Finally, all these fantasy techniques need not be done verbally, but can be done on a sheet of paper, in clay, in acting, or through creating a mandala.

One thing that the assistant can look out for is omissions of events and particularly missing people in the description of the dream. Fantasy approaches can be used very well even if virtually nothing of a dream can be remembered: after all what is usually important is the value of the dream to the worker in the present and not, in fact, what it might have meant whenever it was dreamt. "Techniques" are just the beginning; the further the growth process proceeds the more it will gain an identifiable *life*.

Inducing Dreams. Assuming that we can and do draw upon our conscious resources to build up our dreams, then it would make sense for us to induce particular images in dreams or even entire dreams by paying attention to

the relevant ideas during the day. Thus, you can give yourself permission and the skills to dream of pleasurable or useful things by consciously working on the thoughts they arouse. Thus you can have a better chance of flying in your dreams if you pay attention to birds, aeroplanes. . . To put it another way, if dreaming is simply wish fulfilment, then let your unconscious know what your wishes are.

During dreams it is possible to become more conscious of the freedom you have in your dream state - the best time to work with your dreams is during them. If you want to develop control over or in your dreams, then I suggest that some goals will be to examine dream situations more closely as they happen - go round the back of things and see what or who makes them tick. The Senoi have many lessons to teach us in this respect: confront or conquer apparent danger in your dreams, land if you fall over cliffs (or start flying), kill or tame nasty animals rather than waking up screaming. (It is likely that this form of difficult situation reflects very early experiences from before the time when the dreamer was able to control her or his environment.)

Better still, they suggest that you make friends with the characters in your dreams - and get something from them, either a 'physical' gift or some knowledge.

Children and Dreams. When young people describe their dreams, or write stories about them, they can show a considerable degree of creative skill. Their dreams are frequently quite direct. It is another form of oppression to ignore someone's dreams to the extent that they grow up believing them to be just meaningless parts of their personality.

Conclusion. The psychotic differs only from the psychologist, saint or yogi in that they do not have terms of reference to make their experience secure for them. Our dreams will remain psychotic manifestations until we take the trouble to give them value in our lives; then they will become visions.

I think the advantage of working with dreams is not so much finding a meaning in one dream, important as that may be, but rather in the starting, and valuing, of a dialogue with ourselves as part of our journey to self actualisation.

Now I have become an adequately repressed adult, my dreams have become so sophisticated that they (in other words myself) need considerable skill and patience to unravel. The evidence is that this process of making one's life obscure is reversible, but I wonder if, to a large extent, it is avoidable.

Note. I have not discussed aspects of dreaming such as out of body experiences, psychic phenomena, or certain relevant physiological functions (such as rapid eye movement) as these are all beyond my *direct* conscious experience.)

Bibliography

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Frances Tomlinson, Association of Karen Horney Psychoanalytic Counsellors, London 1978 (2nd edition). This pictorial book gives a clear and practical introduction to co-counselling and shows how some of the techniques discussed here can be used in a peer relationship.

"*Gestalt Therapy Verbatim*" by **Fritz Perls**, Bantam Books, New York 1974. A collection of sessions, including much dream work, illustrating Gestalt Therapy, and the personality of Fritz, at work.

"*Creative Dreaming*" by **Patricia Garfield**, Futura Publications, London 1976. Rather repetitively rubs in all of the surprising skills we can develop during dreams, for inducing them in the first place and for recording them afterwards.

"*Dream Power*" by **Ann Faraday**, Pan books, 1973. This 'should' be the 'dreamer's' bedside book. . . it is comprehensive. Ann later followed the book with "*The Dream Game*" (Temple Smith, London 1974) which covers much of the same ground more chattily.

"*The individual and his dreams*" by **Calvin Hall** and **Vernon Nordby**, Mentor, New York 1972. If you like knowing the statistical patterns of dream behaviour and how to dream up your own. Reveals such facts as that most people tend to dream of failure. It is down to earth and stresses that dream work should be based on collections of dreams and is not a one off exercise.

"*The Interpretation of Dreams*" by **Sigmund Freud**, Hogarth Press, London 1953. (And in Penguin 1976.) Freud's classic (with theories slightly modified in his "New Introductory Lectures"). A fine example of rationalising the irrational. Penguin have started a Freud library, and "*The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*" is an introduction to the workings of the unconscious in daytime, which through its parapraxes has much similarity with the dream life.

"*Dreams*" By **Carl Jung**, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1974. Excerpts from Jung's Collected Works, volume 4, 8, 12 and 16, related to dreaming.

"*Man and his Symbols*", edited by **Carl Jung**, Picador, London 1978, and published also by Aldus Books, London 1964 in a larger format and with many more illustrations, is a clear and readable exposition of the significance of symbolism in dreams etc. and how this is expressed by and may be used in the process of personal and cultural growth.

Tom Osborn

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