

Joseph Friedman

DREAM GROUPS

My involvement with dream groups began after I read an article by an American psychologist, Kilton Stewart, about a society called the Senoi. Originally discovered in the 1930's by Herbert Noone, the Senoi were a society which emphasized the daily sharing of dreams. They were studied jointly by Noone and Stewart, but unfortunately Noone buried his extensive notes on the Senoi at the start of World War II and upon his death these were lost to us. Stewart's writings are thus the only source material we have concerning the early exploration of this unique tribe.

Every morning the extended family of the Senoi met over the first meal of the day to share and discuss their dreams. As soon as a child was able to speak, he was encouraged to tell his dreams, and through doing this and hearing his dreams discussed, he would learn to become familiar with his own dream world, as well as the dream worlds of his family and friends.

This familiarity would be increased by the way in which the Senoi encouraged their children to dwell with and in frightening dreams or nightmares. If a Senoi child dreamt he was being chased by a large animal, and woke up extremely frightened, his father might urge him to turn and face his pursuer in another dream. If the animal was too large to be confronted by the child alone, he was encouraged to call on his brothers or friends to help him outface the animal in his dream. The aim of this confrontation was a dialogue with the spirit of the animal, one in which the spirit would give the Senoi advice and guidance, and the Senoi would perform certain acts (ie. gathering special flowers for a dance) according to the spirit's wishes.

Through the encouragement and advice given by their families, the Senoi children gradually learned to confront their fears while dreaming, and by doing this, to change what had been a frightening dream into a more enjoyable one. In this way, the Senoi children found they had fewer and fewer frightening dreams as they grew up, and that their dream lives became an important and pleasurable part of their world.

This method of dealing with dreams, however, was not what particularly attracted me to working with dream groups. Rather, I was fascinated by the vision of a group of people sharing dreams, and was moved to try to discover the effect of the regular sharing of dreams on myself and others.

This interest has led to the development of a group that concentrates on the sharing of dreams. In these groups, it is the telling of the participants' dreams and the understanding of dreams within the group that is seen to be important, rather than any "work" to be performed on the dream.

My groups meet one evening (or afternoon) a week for a period of eight to twelve weeks. Each week, everyone in the group (including myself) tells one dream they have had in the week between the group's meeting. After each dream is told, the group tries to clarify what happened during it, and the feelings that had accompanied it. The dreamer is usually asked to give any associations to, or context of, the dream as a whole, and then to amplify particular dream elements. After this, the group discusses the dream with the aim of helping the dreamer gain a better understanding of it.

Any method for understanding dreams within this context must take into account the particular advantages and disadvantages this sort of group presents. Probably the major disadvantage would seem obvious - with from five to nine people sharing a dream each week, the amount of time that can be devoted to elucidating any one dream is limited. This in itself would exclude any approach to dreams which would involve spending a large amount of time with a dream - eg. the classical Freudian approach of getting associations to each element of the dream.

In these groups, the approach to dreams which I most favour is the phenomenological one described by Medard Boss in his books **The Analysis of Dreams** and **I Dreamt Last Night**. This approach concentrates on delineating two major aspects of the dream, the sort of world within which the dreamer finds himself in the dream, and the relationship to this world which the dream reveals.

I have found this approach helpful for two major reasons. First, it allows the dreamer and the group to dwell with the dream that is told, rather than using it as a take-off point to do something else - for example, fit the dream into some theoretical superstructure.

It is in this dwelling with the dream that the dream begins to speak to the group, revealing its resonances and its connections with the day world of the dreamer. Often, simply telling the dream to the group allows the dreamer to hear these resonances.

A second major strength of this approach is that it enables the group to speak to the questions the dream (in the way it is shared, and the associations to it), raises for us. In doing this, the importance of staying with the dream as experienced in dreaming and as re-experienced in sharing is emphasized.

It is the fact that in such a group the dreams are part of a series that enables us to put them into a context, and to understand what they reveal about the dreamer and his relationship to the group as the group progresses. Often, later dreams in the series elaborate on or examine the resistances or blockages to projects that the dreamer's initial dream seems to propose.

On occasion, we are unable to make much of individual dreams that are told. When this happens, we accept this, not resorting to other methods (Gestalt, etc.) to get something from the dream. Rather, we trust to future dreams in the series to move our understanding onward. In these groups, the dreams move us to explore the world they present us with. It is the dream world that leads our quest.

In fact, the way in which this process occurs is one of the most fascinating aspects of the groups. The understanding of a dream series comes to resemble the unfolding of a flower, the later dreams enabling us to understand and elucidate earlier dream developments, putting them into a meaningful context which was not clear to us at the time they were presented. These later dreams cast light on those which preceded them, enabling us to see them in different ways.

This process happens not only within the dream series of an individual, but also between members of the group, as dream images, themes, metaphors, and situations are picked up by other group members and re-dreamt in later dreams. These later reworkings change the understanding of the original dream, lending its images new resonances. Through this process, a dream language unique to the group gradually develops, a language which reflects the concerns of the group members.

Trusting the group's response to the dreams of its members allows the dream world time to reveal itself at its own pace. We do not try to wrench information or guidance from it. Rather, we let its

speaking of us and our speaking of it in-form our being. In doing this, we allow space for the kind of direction from dreams which Jung speaks about. Often, in these groups we find mis-understandings of earlier dreams corrected in later dreams.

By making dreams and the sharing of them the essential part of the group's dynamic, we link the group to a method of revelation which quickly allows the group to begin to explore basic issues for the dreamer. Usually, to emphasize our meeting over the dream world as opposed to the day, I ask each person to introduce himself to the group during the first meeting by sharing a dream and his associations to it, rather than telling the group why he is there, his day world occupation, etc. When we do this, we find that through sharing dreams we come to know each other in a profound, intimate way, and that when the day world preoccupations of the dreamer are revealed, it is in connection with a dream in which these situations are already placed in a meaningful context.

We find that dreams are accurate and precise in showing the way the world appears to the dreamer, and that through sharing one's dreams and hearing the dreams of others, one can begin to appreciate how unique in style one's dreams really are. It is often the hearing of another's dreams, rather than any comment on one's own, that promotes this understanding of one's dream life. It is the contrast between this world and the world revealed by the dreams of others that helps one to appreciate what is essential in one's dreams. This opportunity for comparison is one of the major differences between the use of dreams within a group and in one-to-one therapy.

In the Senoi society, the sharing of dreams often serves a kind of group homeostatic process. For example, if a child constantly dreams of being mistreated or persecuted by adults, his parents might discuss whether or not this is actually the case and whether they might change their behaviour towards the child. They assume the child would not have had such dreams without there being some truth to them.

In a dream group, a similar process occurs. Through sharing our dreams, we are given a space in which we can express ourselves about what is going on in the group. Because we do not feel responsible for our dreams in the same way as for our waking behaviour, this space is less "egoically" involved. Through telling and discussing the dreams, differences are aired and seen through a different light - that of the dream world. In my own participation in the dream sharing, I hope to allow this process to work freely, as well as to establish the fact that all of us are fellow explorers of the dream world.

It is this mutual exploration of the dreaming realm that brings the night world into our lives in a powerful and immediate way. The oneric tales we tell and hear move us in profound ways we cannot hope to describe fully in the use-oriented language of the day world. The dream group ritual calls our hearts into a being with others as we follow our dreams together.

Joseph Friedman is writing on a book about dream groups. He has worked and studied with the Philadelphia Association for the past seven years. At present, he runs dream groups in London from his home at 30-7 Trellick Tower, 5 Golborne Road, W10. He also sees clients in individual psychotherapy.

Winifred Rushforth

THE ANALYTIC DREAM GROUP

*Winifred Rushforth has pioneered therapeutic and creative group work in Scotland through the Davidson Clinic (for which she received the O.B.E.), the Salisbury Centre and the Sempervivum Trust and now aged 95 is still active as a psychiatrist and New Age catalyst. Her new book **Something is Happening** has just been published by Turnstone Press.*

The dream group is, as far as I know, a fairly recent approach to seeking and finding our way into the Unconscious. My own experience of it dates back to 1958 in which year I left my work in Edinburgh very abruptly to travel to New Zealand, where my younger son was seriously ill. This dates the first dream group which I then handed over to a colleague and which took up again on my return eight months later. The group had originated with the reading of P.W. Martin's **Experiment in Depth** but gradually, I think, we moved over to the sharing of our dreams. We had no rules laid down. Literature regarding the Jung-Senoï method in California and Montague Ullman's books came some twenty years later.