

Dream Appreciation

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“Our dreams have an incredible way of zeroing in on who we really are instead of who we would like to think we are or who we would like others to think we are.”

The foundations of dream work

By Montague Ullman, M.D.

When I look back over my 55 years of interest in dreams beginning with my residency in psychiatry in 1941, and then through my clinical practice from 1946 to 1961, and now including my more than two decades of work with experiential dream sharing groups, there are certain principles and premises that appear to me to be self-evident. I offer them in the hope they also prove helpful to anyone, therapist or layperson, setting out to help a dreamer relate to a dream.

I consider the following to offer a sound foundation for dream work:

Premises

The premises outline what dreams have to offer—and the context in which we can hear what they have to say. They call attention to the fact that everyone can be helped to hear their message.

First Premise

Dreams are intrapsychic communications that reveal in metaphorical form certain truths about the life of the dreamer, truths that can be made available to the dreamer awake.

Comment:

Dreaming consciousness serves the night time needs of the dreamer. The experience of dreaming itself is not intended to be a public communication. The dreamer awake can, of course, go public with it.

Dream imagery is potentially metaphorical. To realize that potential the dreamer is faced with the task of sparking across the metaphorical gap between dream image and waking reality. Our dreams have an incredible way of zeroing in on who we really are instead of who we would like to think we are or who we would like others to think we are.

Second Premise

If we are fortunate enough to recall a dream we are then ready, at some level, to be confronted by the information in the dream. This is true regardless of whether or not we choose to do so.

Comment:

Freedom and truth are inextricably linked. The more ac-

curate our perception of an issue is, the more freedom we have in coping with it. To experience freedom in that sense requires a level of honesty not always easily available to us while awake. Situations arise where, consciously or unconsciously, we act out of expediency. The dream offers us the opportunity to confront an issue with greater clarity and a deeper honesty. We get a bit closer to ourselves and a bit freer.

Third Premise

If the confrontation is allowed to occur in a proper manner the effect is one of healing. The dreamer comes into contact with a part of the self that has not been explicitly acknowledged before. There has been movement toward wholeness.

Comment:

Healing is simply another name for being more in touch with our own historical past and its influence in our relationships with others. It is as if the dream furnishes us with the connective tissue needed to repair areas of disconnection with our past and with others.

Third premise

Although the dream is a very private communication it
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Coming next issue: Dream work and the politics of connectedness

Ullman on the foundations of dream work

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requires a social context for its fullest realization. That is not to say that helpful work cannot be done by an individual working alone but, rather, that a supportive social context is a more powerful instrument for the type of healing that can occur through dream work.

Comment:

The dream is the waking remembrance of the raw content of our night time dreaming consciousness. Once removed from its natural environment, it has to undergo a socializing process if the information embedded in the imagery is to play an explicit and active role in our waking life.

That process begins with taking the dream seriously and engaging in the work necessary to allow the metaphorical potential of the imagery to unfold. The ideal social context for this emergence is a dream-sharing group.

Fifth Premise

Dreams can and should be universally accessible. There are skills that can be identified, shared and developed in anyone with sufficient interest. Dream work can be effectively extended beyond the confines of the consulting room to the public at large.

Comment:

Although there is more interest in dreams in recent years, we are still a dream deprived society. These nightly gifts are largely ignored. There are no political, social or institutional supports designed to encourage and promote dream work in the community.

By and large those trained in the art of psychotherapy have not assumed any responsibility to enlist their skills and knowledge in the growing dream-sharing movement. That movement could be

which we are capable. It is a very private affair and the element of privacy is respected at all times. Each stage of the process I use is designed to be nonintrusive so that the group follows, rather than leads, the

image and meaning is something that the dreamer alone can validate.

Comment:

The dreamer is the only one who can judge the effectiveness of the help offered. He or she alone has that resonant gut feeling when a truth strikes home. There is a distinct difference between intellectually accepting something that comes from the group and the spontaneous and richly generative response to a true fit.

The dream is the most personal communication of which we are capable. It is a very private affair and the element of privacy is respected at all times . . . The dreamer controls the process throughout the session and works at whatever level of self-disclosure he or she feels comfortable with in the group.

enhanced were there to be a serious collaboration between the professional community and the laity.

Principles

It bears emphasizing that dreams are intrapsychic communications. Any process that is geared to their explication must respect that fact and the constraints it imposes. The process I use evolved with this in mind.

From the beginning to the end it is geared to the expectations and needs of the dreamer as the one to whom the dream is being communicated. The communication of the dream to a group is a secondary affair, necessary only to enable the group to make its contributions toward clarifying the original communication. It is in this connection that the following principles obtain:

First Principle: Respect for the privacy of the dreamer

The dream is the most personal communication of

the dreamer. The dreamer controls the process throughout the session and works at whatever level of self-disclosure he or she feels comfortable with in the group. There is no pressure to go beyond that point.

Comment:

What the helping agency has to keep in mind is that when dreams are worked on outside of the clinical arrangement, the ability of dreamers to reach into themselves with the required degree of honesty is contingent on how safe he or she is made to feel. The goal can be reached only if the dreamer remains the guardian of his or her unconscious domain by maintaining control of the entire process, from beginning to end.

Second Principle: Respect for the authority of the dreamer over his or her dream

Dream images arise out of the unique life experience of the dreamer. The fit between

Third Principle: Respect for the uniqueness of the individual

Everyone's life experience is unique. Any symbolic image can be used in a highly idiosyncratic way. No a priori categorical meanings are assumed.

Comment:

One has to have a certain humility in dream work and realize that there is more to learn from the dreamer than we have to offer to the dreamer.

The reason is simple. Nothing in our prior learning and experience is a substitute for the work that has to be done to discover how these particular images have emerged out of the idiosyncratic life experience of the dreamer and why they came together to shape the dream on that particular night.

The work we do helps the dreamer uncover the answer. □

Dream work: Validity beyond psychoanalysis

By Margaret Arden, British Psychoanalytical Society

I visited Stockholm in October 1994 to attend one of Monte's workshops. The editor of the *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*, Jan Stensson, had put me in touch with Monte because we both share his interest in the work of the physicist David Bohm. On my return I wrote an article for his journal, addressed to psychoanalysts. This is the second half; the first half was to tell analysts about how a dream group functions.

On transference

My experience of the dream group weekend stimulated many thoughts about the nature of the transference and how we use it. There is a delicate balance between interpreting in the transference and being present for the patient as oneself. I have suggested in my paper, "Thoughts on the Healing Process," that the usual ways of describing the analytic situation do not take into account the healing process as a natural tendency.

The essential element for healing to occur is the establishment of trust. Monte gave up working as a psychoanalyst because formal analysis could not provide a framework for the work he wanted to do. The method he developed for dream groups is totally nonintrusive. In particular, by requiring the group to use the first person in the initial stages of the discussion, confrontations are avoided.

I find this an interesting challenge to our technique of interpretation, which has been

handed down as essential to the scientific nature of the analytic enquiry.

Burrow's heritage

Following Trigant Burrow, Monte takes the view that the detritus of a sick society

transference.

I have been impressed by the similarity of Monte's thinking to Rycroft's approach in his book the *The Innocence of Dreams*. Rycroft takes the view that dreams express the biological destiny of the

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clutters up our dreams. Through alienation, and centuries of rationalism, we are out of touch with the capacity to understand dreams which some societies have enjoyed since biblical time.

There is evidence from recent studies of child development, and many other sources, of the infant's need for an environment of trust from which the outer world can be safely explored. Colwyn Trevarthen has introduced the concept of companionship as one of the activities of the newborn. He describes a process which can be observed a few hours after birth, of actively engaging with another person by imitating their actions and expressions.

This seems very like a new version of Burrow's idea of a social instinct. Monte's dream groups are a more direct reflection of Trigant Burrow's ideas than group analysis, because of the emphasis on equality and the elimination of

dreamer in that they represent a commentary on the important circumstances of life: birth, reproduction and death. It is a small step from this idea to the inclusion of social relating as part of biological destiny.

Limitations of the Freudian approach

Rycroft's book has an implicit meaning which has not, as far as I know, been generally recognized. While giving Freud a central place in the history of dream interpretation, Rycroft argues that the distinction between manifest and latent content and the insistence on free association are unnecessary.

I think this means that although Freud recognized that dreams are the royal road to the unconscious, more recent developments in psychoanalysis have not fulfilled the promise of his discovery. Analysts' reports of their interpretations of patients' dreams can sound as

if they are made on the basis of the analysts' theoretical position rather than a true understanding of why this person has this dream now.

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Dreams and connectedness

Monte has updated Burrow's idea of innate species connectedness by showing how it can be discovered through dreams. People who work together in a dream group develop a sense of trust and solidarity. The innate honesty of dreams helps people understand their predicaments and in doing so to respect their own inner nature.

Monte knew David Bohm and his work for many years and he sees dream life as the closest we can get to awareness of the implicate order of reality which underlies the world of appearances. There is a close connection with Jung's concept of the collective unconscious. Freud wrote in his paper "The Unconscious" in 1915, "It is a very remarkable thing that the Ucs (the unconscious system—Ed.) of one human being can react upon that of another, without passing through the Cs (the conscious

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Dream work: Validity beyond psychoanalysis

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system—Ed.). This deserves closer investigation.”

Unfortunately, he does not seem to have followed this up, but we do know that towards the end of his life he was much more accepting of the possibility of genuine paranormal phenomena, that is of communication between people by other means than consciousness.

Jung wrote that we are dreaming 24 hours a day but we only become aware of our dreams when conscious thinking ceases. Burrow extended Jung's ideas with his own concept of a collective social unconscious. He believes that the individual is forced to adapt to the socially conditioned pattern of what is right and wrong.

This seems to anticipate Winnicott's work on the true and false self. Burrow believed that society demands that the individual betray his basic nature in a way that is ultimately a threat to the survival of the species. He understood that we all need to learn to live together in society in the way that animals live together in social groups. There is now abundant evidence from ethology of the social life of animals, which was not available to Burrow, of an innate biological need to belong to a group.

Dreams: an honest mirror

Monte built on these ideas of Burrow's with his belief that dreams provide us with honest reflections of ourselves. This prompts me to think about the relationship between inner

and outer reality in our work.

For many years I held on to my belief in the necessity of working in the transference by telling myself that only in this way can the symbolic meaning of symptoms and behavior be conveyed to the patient. However, like many others, I have given myself permission not to

was the rule. Nowadays society has fragmented so much that the very idea of a standard of behavior worthy of general acceptance is difficult to formulate. Freud's idea of the analyst as impartial observer has been rendered obsolete by decades of work on countertransference but authoritarianism

escapes them.

The formal method, rigidly applied, can encourage resistance and regression. Excessive interpretation in the transference can also delay healing by obscuring the possibility of the patient being in charge of his own life.

Issues for analysts

The problem for analysts has always been that we are trying to describe the irrational in rational terms. Dreams represent the basic stuff of the mind out of which rational thinking develops. It makes sense to focus on the problems of the individual in order to understand them but it seems increasingly important to consider the interpersonal when thinking about a person's life as a functional whole.

In his recent book, *The Age of Extreme*, Eric Hobsbawm wrote, "The cultural revolution of the later twentieth century can ... be understood as the triumph of the individual over society, or rather, the breaking of the threads which in the past had woven people into social textures."

Rediscovery through dream groups

Monte's dream groups offer a remarkable opportunity for ordinary people to rediscover their capacity for healthier interaction with others, at the same time as they gain insight into their own inner life. This suggests to me that new social textures might be woven by rediscovering ancient ones through dreams. □

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make transference interpretations whenever it seemed to me that the patient was not ready to accept them.

I also have noticed that strict adherence to orthodox teaching can produce situations where the analyst abuses the power he or she has over the patient. For example, the refusal to answer questions can be deeply wounding and also an offense against ordinary courtesy.

Here the question of trust comes up again. One can retain a patient's trust by explaining sympathetically why asking questions is inappropriate, but silence or refusing to explain will induce mistrust. It is very striking how little agreement there is, after 100 years of psychoanalysis, about what is effective in treatment.

It seems worth speculating on why this is so. Freud took social values for granted in a society where conformity

still prevails in the attitude students are taught to take with patients.

Questioning psychoanalytic procedure

Taking part in a dream group made me question the basis of the psychoanalytic procedure. It made sense when analysis lasted a matter of months and when the idea of analysis as a scientific enquiry made sense, to provide a laboratory-like setting in which the patient's drama could be played out, understood and resolved.

We are now in a completely different situation. Many patients do not have the usual Oedipal experiences, treatment continues indefinitely and often lacks a clear goal. We no longer have the expectation which enabled Freud to call his method psychoanalysis. Our patients quite often know all about themselves; it is meaning that



DREAMWORKERS' CORNER

Working with the dream group process

Q: Is the dream sharing group suitable for everyone?

A: We are all dreamers and ideally dreams should be accessible to everyone. Being the complex creatures we are, however, no unqualified "yes" can be given to the question.

The one and only purpose of a dream sharing group is to provide an opportunity for people who have a genuine interest in their own dream life to follow through with that interest. It involves a willingness to share of oneself and to help others do the same.

Motive is very important. If that motive is to address personal problems at work or in relationships, more than a dream group may be indicated. Some people, out of ignorance or anxiety, may seek out a dream group in lieu of facing the need for formal psychotherapy. There is generally no problem in being in a dream group concordant with therapy. The combination can function in complementary ways, with each able to give the dreamer something special. The dream group is not an alternative to therapy when therapy is indicated.

Some people would genuinely like to connect with their dreams but have great difficulty in recalling them. Dream recall is a variable thing. Being in a social context where dreams are considered impor-

tant can be a stimulus to recall. Being in a dream group over a period of time can increase the yield of dreams.

A less frequent source of difficulty is what a Norwegian colleague of mine (Jan Tolaas) called "metaphor blindness." Some people tend to be so literal and concrete in their thinking, so linear and logical, that the shift to the more abstract metaphorical mode presents a problem for them. I have seen them make progress in a group if their motivation remains high.

Q: What do you do when you feel someone should not be in the group?

A: The arrangement I make with the people entering my groups is for four weekly sessions, renewable for four weekly periods as desired. Within this period of time a new member usually discovers whether the dream group is suitable or whether more (i.e. psychotherapy) is needed. If not, I would offer my recommendation privately at the end

of the four-week interval. People differ in their readiness for group dream work. Psychopathology in and of itself is not a contraindication for pursuing dream work if there is also a genuine interest in dreams. Group dream work brings out the best in people.

Q: What do you recommend as a good size for a dream group?

A: Eight is ideal—from five to 10 is workable. □

Leadership Training Workshop

Are you interested in doing group dream work?

Are you leading or have you led a group in the past and want a "refresher course?"

Do you just want to learn more about Monte's group process?

Then the upcoming Leadership Training Workshop is for you! During the 3-day workshop you will discuss in depth the underlying premises and key principles on which Monte's group dream work process is based, as well as the techniques of leading a group.

You will learn about the issues and problems that arise in leading a dream group. You also will share three wonderful days with like-minded people who are interested in exploring and learning from their dreams.

Even if you have attended one of Monte's Leadership Workshops before, this is a wonderful way to "fine tune" the process.

DATE: June 28-30

For more information call Monte Ullman (914) 693-0156

Monte also conducts Supervisory Workshops for those who are leading dream groups. These provide an opportunity to learn how to deal with difficult situations that may arise in a dream group. Call Monte for dates.

Ardsley dream group may reopen

Monte is considering restarting his weekly dream group in Ardsley if he can find enough interested dreamers. For more information call Monte at (914) 693-0156.

Do you have a dream group and need more dreamers? Are you trying to start a dream group? Are you looking for a dream group to join? Write us about it! We will help you spread the word of your interest.

Mail/ing label for address goes here
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Dream Appreciation
c/Wendy Pannier, Editor
487 W. Street Road Apt. 1W
Kennett Square, PA 19348

Editor's Notes

Helping dreams become more "socially acceptable"

In the last issue Monte talked about the purpose of this newsletter and the group dream work process saying, "I assume our common goal is to raise the nearly nonexistent priority of dreams in our society to a more visible level."

Those of you reading this already appreciate dream work and have experienced its significance in your lives. People who have not yet had this experience may be curious—yet also a bit shy—about talking about their dreams.

Many times I have had co-workers come in my office and say something like, "I had this dream and it probably doesn't mean anything but . . ."

While I scrupulously avoid playing "dream guru" and trying to interpret their

dreams, I encourage them that dreams are important and they are right to search for meaning in them. I keep in mind Monte's principles and use variations of techniques from his process. I explain that dream images are metaphors and help them develop their own associations. I also try to help the dreamer reconstruct the emotional context in which he or she had the dream. After these things the dreamer is usually starting to come up with ideas of his/her own. (We will have more on how to work one-on-one in a future issue.)

This makes people feel their dreams are acceptable, creates interest, and could even encourage them to join a dream group.

Another way we can help

make dreams more socially acceptable is by talking about our own dreams with others. I share only as much as I feel comfortable with, but even a small amount of such sharing shows that I find dreams credible and give them an important place in my life. This encourages others to open up about their dreams.

I am also in the process of going public with a series of dreams I had during treatment for cancer as part of an exhibit called "Confronting Cancer Through Creativity" sponsored by cancer centers in my area.

Letting others know what our dreams have meant to us can encourage them to tap this creative resource as well. □

Dream Appreciation is published quarterly for people interested in working with dreams and the group process developed by Dr. Montague Ullman.

Comments, suggestions, questions and letters are welcome. Contact the Editor, Wendy Pannier, by phone at (610) 268-8702, by fax at (610) 268-8703, or by writing 487 W. Street Road, Apt. 1W, Kennett Square, PA 19348. (We are working on an Internet e-mail address.)

We encourage you to share this information with others, as long as proper credit is given.