

Dream Appreciation

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A supervisory workshop for those leading dream groups yielded solutions to numerous problem situations that arise.

Insights for dream group leaders

By Montague Ullman, M.D.

In the spring of 1990 I held a special three-day workshop at the suggestion of Jenny Green, someone who had worked with me over the years and who had been leading groups of her own. Since she lived in Vermont, isolated from other dream group workers, she felt the need for some kind of networking arrangement to keep in touch with others who were leading groups as well as for supervision of the work she was doing. I felt she was raising very timely issues.

By this time there were a number of people who were competent to lead groups and were doing so. I informed 10 other dream group leaders about Jenny's suggestion.

Eight responded favorably, so that along with Jenny and myself the group of 10 met for three days with an agenda that was to consider the general and specific problems they faced in doing group dream work, to how best pursue supervision and, finally, what further steps could be taken to provide a supportive and helpful networking system.

The agenda we worked out was to devote the first day to the questions they had and to the issues they wished to explore. The second day I would lead the group with the goal of exploring some of the problems they might face at each stage of the process. We then would do the same with a member of the group taking over the leadership, leaving sufficient time at the end to plan for the future.

It was a rich and productive three days and, in retrospect, I regret that the discussions were not taped. What follows are summaries from my written notes, modified by contributions and changes noted by those present.

Day One:

The question was raised about how one goes about getting people to join a dream group. Among the strategies used were:

- Advertising in local newspapers
- Getting involved in local adult education programs
- Writing articles for local publications.

For those who work in institutions there is the possibility of including experiential dream group work as part of an in-service education program. An example of this is the course I gave over many years in a residency training program.

Another suggestion was to begin by offering free introductory sessions. There was some discussion as to how effective that would be. People tend to place more value on what they pay for.

There was general discussion of the problems that stood in the way of attracting people to dream groups. Those who are most likely to be interested are inundated with New Age ads and literature that often caters more to magical expectations and instant gratification than a serious commitment to dream work. The process we use does demand a certain level of maturity, and an ability to attend to the needs of others. It

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A supervisory workshop — how to handle the

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is real, not magical.

The question came up of using my name in ads or fliers as a way to attract participants. Here I urged some caution. In the past there have been instances when my name has been misused and implied either certification by me or competence in the method I use. I do not certify anyone as a leader in dream work. This is a matter of personal responsibility and conscience. There have been instances where people may have been in a group with me for a short time or have had a single leadership workshop with me and then have advertised using my name to imply competence.

I have no objection to using a reference to their work with me in the context of a proper presentation of their credentials and in a way that doesn't imply certification, and providing they have had sufficient training in the method to in good conscience present themselves as competent to lead dream groups, particularly if they seek to do it as paid professionals.

The next set of questions had to do with the make-up of the dream group. Linda and Roberta were co-leading an all women group. From time to time they thought of making it a mixed group but so far had decided not to. They felt that in working with dreams, specific women's issues came up and they felt this added to the feeling of unity in the group.

Jenny comes from a small town where people tend to know a good deal about each other. There are assets and liabilities connected with this familiarity.

When the group is too incestuous there may be a tendency to take liberties that will turn the process in the direction of becoming a therapy group. On the other hand, people who know each other outside the group may have an inhibiting effect. On the positive side, the knowledge that one or more members of the group have of the dreamer can result in bringing their projections in Stage II and later in the orchestration closer to the mark.

When people who do know each other in prior circumstances and do find themselves in the same group, pre-existing tensions and even animosity may be felt. In one instance which Jenny described that involved herself and another person in the group, the process of dream sharing led to a natural resolution of these feelings. The work evoked compassion and an ability to identify with the human frailty of the other. In some instances there is a natural weeding out of one or the other person involved in the problem in the course of time.

The next issue discussed was whether a group should be open or closed. Linda and Roberta were reticent at first about bringing others into their ongoing group. For practical reasons (people leaving) they had to. Soon they

found themselves looking forward to new people joining. "Looking back, I liked the new energies. It was like letting others share in a growth process," one said. Since both had at one time participated in

my weekly group which was an open one, I asked them how it felt. The comments were generally favorable. There was some initial anxiety about the new person changing the atmosphere in the group, but this soon dissipated. It is the respon-

sibility of the leader to see that the new person has had an orientation to the process to make it easier to work within the structure.

Next we turned to some of the specific questions and situations that arise in the course of the work.

Can material shared in the group in connection with earlier dreams be included in the projections of Stage II, the Playback and the Orchestration of a current dream?

The answer is yes, if all currently present were privy to that material.

Can you tell a person who missed a session about the dream presented in his or her absence?

It is better not to since

the dreamer should be the only one free to break the bond of confidentiality about their own dream. It is also conceivable that the dreamer might have handled the situation differently had the missing person been present.

How do you call a group member's attention to something they are doing wrong without their taking offense? For instance, a group member seeks out the dreamer's association right after hearing the dream in Stage I.

Explain that the dreamer's associations are of vital importance but if we started with the associations before Stage II, they would inevitably track and limit our projections when we make the dream our own. Besides, when we return the dream to the dreamer and invite her to offer associations, they are usually much richer by virtue of the work the group has done with the dream.

What about when in Stage IIA a group member proceeds to deal with the symbolism of the dream rather than focus on the feelings?

Ask the person, "As you reflect on what you just said, can you say what feeling you might have about it?"

What about when a group member asks a leading question?

Clarify this by saying something like, "You undoubtedly feel there is something more to be explored in this area. Can you rephrase your question in a more open way that leaves the dreamer freer to

problems that arise in leading a dream group

go in any direction rather than the direction you're suggesting?"

What if there are sexual themes that seem to be suggested by the imagery that the group is refraining from talking about?

The reticence can be broken by the leader taking the initiative and projecting sexual meaning into an image that appears sexually suggestive. A little humor may help. I may remind the group that, after all, someone well-known thought that dreams have something to do with sex.

How do you handle someone presenting a dream who may tend to approach it in a one-sided way, e.g. exclusively in spiritual terms?

Our only instrument is the dream itself and, by confronting her with what the dream is actually saying, help her focus on gathering more relevant associations needed to build the connections of the imagery to concrete life events.

What if one person in the group keeps handling the dream images in a very literal way and seems incapable of grasping metaphorical meaning?

Occasionally it takes a good deal of time and seeing others develop metaphorical possibilities to help alleviate what a colleague of mine, Jon Tolaas, refers to as "metaphor blindness."

Can you reorient a group involved in group therapy to feel at ease with the structure of the experiential

dream group process?

Once a group has consolidated into a group psychotherapeutic format it may be difficult to reorient it to the experiential dream group process. In group therapy people are used to expressing their thoughts freely about each

particular person the leader, at some appropriate time, may point to the need for projections to be as concise as possible so that everyone has a chance, emphasizing that, since they are our own personal projections, we are not in competition to see who can

We are all susceptible to rescue fantasies. But when group members use the orchestration to give the dream reassurance, it should be pointed out, repeatedly if necessary, that the only valid reassurance comes from the success the group has had in helping the dreamer come into contact with what the dream is saying.

other and what is going on in the group at every moment. They are not used to a structure that orients them solely to the dreamer, imposes on them the responsibility for managing their own process and which may very well take up the time of the entire session.

In Stage II where people are offering their own projections, they sometimes get on a roll and it is hard to stop them., Sometimes I feel they are trying to cover the entire dream and do it in a competitive way. How should this be handled?

This may require some delicate handling as you don't want to inhibit the spontaneity people can bring to their own projections yet, at the same time, the leader must see to it that everyone has the opportunity to offer their projections within the limited time available for this stage of the process. Without singling out any

say the most about the dream. It is one of those occasions where tact will be needed.

Someone asked if he could call the dreamer after the session to offer an additional orchestration. Is this appropriate?

It is better to refrain from doing this until the next meeting of the group. This is the only way its appropriateness could be evaluated.

If the dreamer seems satisfied with the work done on a dream, is it appropriate for someone in the group who has later had some additional thoughts about the dream to offer a delayed orchestration?

Yes, but only at the invitation of the dreamer.

Often it seems people use the opportunity to offer orchestrating projections to give reassurance to the dreamer.

We are all susceptible to rescue fantasies. It should be pointed out, repeatedly if necessary, that the only valid reassurance comes from the success the group has had in helping the dreamer come into contact with what the dream is saying.

After offering their orchestrating projection, some people tend to get into a discussion with the dreamer, often in an attempt to get their point across.

The leader should intervene. Any effort to engage the dreamer in a discussion to validate the orchestration should be avoided. All that should occur following an orchestration is a moment or two to see if the dreamer wishes to respond before going on to the next orchestration.

Sometimes there is a problem with people who have done a lot of reading, superimposing on their orchestrating comments broader theoretical ideas not warranted by what the dreamer has shared. There is a tendency to involve Jungian archetypes or Freudian formulations that lead to generalizations that go far beyond anything the dreamer has said.

It is up to the leader to caution those involved not to go beyond areas delineated by the dreamer.

Sometimes a member will refer at some point in the dialogue to a projection he had in the second stage and to which the dreamer made no

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DREAMWORKERS' CORNER

Dreams of other dream group members

By Montague Ullman, M.D.

Q: Our group had a dream in which another member of the group was in the dream. It seemed to complicate things since the person in the dream was a "hook" — at least for the dreamer — and

people didn't feel free with their associations. Although we always say, "If this were my dream," it still seemed difficult. We wondered if we should work with such dreams and what Monte thought.

Insights for dream group leaders

Continued from page 3 mention of in her response. Are they free to carry over at will projections offered in the second stage into the dialogue?

Definitely not, unless in her response she has acknowledged the projection as helpful. Once we return the dream to the dreamer it is no longer our dream and we let go of our own earlier projections.

Sometimes the orchestrations go on for too long or

are monopolized by just a few in the group.

Again, there is only limited time for the orchestrations and the leader has to intervene so as to arrange time for everyone to have a say. People will respond to the request that they make their orchestration as concise as possible.

Other points

Other important points of emphasis that came up in the course of discussion were:

A: There is generally no problem when the other person is depicted in a positive light. If the dreamer suspects that negative or critical feelings would come out in the course of working through the

dream a number of subtle factors have to be considered.

The feelings may be experienced as justified by something the other person did in the group that was experienced as hurtful. On the other hand, the dreamer may sense that the nature of intensity of the reaction may be saying more about himself or herself than the other person. In either event, the chances for resolving the issue are greater if it is brought out in the open. The choice, of course, is up to the dreamer.

If the dream is shared and the issue faced squarely, it has been my experience that the honesty and openness of the exposure is the important determinant of the other person's response. The respect that kind of honesty evokes takes the edge off any immediate defensive reactions.

In the case where two people involved know each other outside the group situation, as in the case of a husband and wife or two friends in the same group, the same option to share is the preferable one with one important difference. The dream group is not the place to work out deeper, long-standing tensions. That is what formal therapy is for. On the other hand, where upsets arise in the course of a sound and affectionate relationship, dream work can be a helpful resource to clear the air when an occasional rough spot is encountered. □

□ The fact that the dreamer is in control of the process doesn't relieve others of their responsibility, e.g., to confront the dreamer with every image in the dream.

□ The mark of a successful group is when group members themselves assume the responsibility to correct others who may be misusing the process.

□ Humor is important — at appropriate moments and handled in an appropriate way that is not at the expense of the dreamer.

□ Avoid asking "why" questions since they tend to put the dreamer on the spot. In the playback, for example, instead of asking "why do you think you put a cat in your dream?" phrase the question in such a way as to help the dreamer explore the image e.g., "Do you have any further associations to the appearance of a cat in your dream on the night you had the dream?"

Note: This was based on an supervisory workshop. Please contact Monte if you are interested in the next one.

Leadership Training Workshop May 9, 10, 11

There was such a good response to the April Leadership Training Workshop that Monte is having another one May 9, 10 and 11. This is an intensive three-day workshop which will cover the underlying premises and key principles on which Monte's group dream work is based. It will explore in depth the kinds of problems that occur at each stage of the process as well as the techniques of leading a group. Even if you have attended a Leadership Workshops before, this is a good way to "fine tune" the process. For more information call Monte Ullman (914) 693-0156.

Lecture and workshop in Omaha

Monte will be giving a lecture and conducting a workshop in Omaha, Nebraska, May 1-3 as part of a program co-sponsored by the Association for the Study of Dreams and the Nebraska Methodist College of Nursing and Allied Health. For more information contact Nancy Amsler by phone at (402) 354-4936 or by fax at (402) 354-2185.

Dreams: What are friends for

By David Brooks

Blood rushes to a wound like a cop to the scene of a crime. Should the liver be in disrepair from alcohol, stop drinking and healing can occur. Break a bone, set it properly and, in time, it's like new. The self-healing powers of the body astonish! It is an interrelated world of natural dependencies — an Internet — and its normal capabilities to heal are in place before birth.

True, nature can be cruel. A small percentage of us are born physically deformed or genetically impaired. But most of us, when we enter the world, possess a built-in organic hospital staffed with an amazing array of around-the-clock doctors and nurses, equipped and ready to attend to our physical and emotional needs. Add to that the miracles of modern medicine which are fueled by the greatest economy and brain bank the world has ever assembled, and we have every right to ask why societal ills grow at such an alarming rate.

We are #1 in too many unwanted categories — homicide, homeless, drugs, divorce. The list is long and alarming, topped by distrust and despair almost everywhere. Who's to the rescue? Anybody?

Try dreams.

Dreams are the legacy of every civilization and every spiritual path. The Greeks built dream temples where a pilgrim could stay in search of a telling dream. We have written records of the dreams of Alexander the Great and how he and his court dream shaman interpreted them.

Dreams have been part of our social experience before we coined the word "human" and declared ourselves homo sapiens. We have always known dreams knew something we didn't. Dreams wake us up and, with a little effort, we remember them. They are functional because they are organic. We do not own a useless organ, with the possible exception of the appendix, and even it is thought to have had a function at one time.

The brain looks a bit like gray ground hamburger and is about the size of Mike Tyson's fist. In spite of the fact we know it has processed thought for millions of years, it is only recently we have discovered the brain mechanisms related to dreaming.

In 1953 scientists discovered that when sleeping our eyes flutter and we are dreaming. It's called REM sleep for rapid eye movement. One of the most astonishing aspects of the REM process is that it is observable even in the womb!

When we are born we are chock full of natural gifts. Although we don't "know" how to walk, talk or think, we'd never grow up if the makings weren't there already. Our parents help us to develop walking skills, but no one teaches us to crawl. And no one teaches us how to dream.

When we go to the movies, most of us don't care if it is produced by Warner Brothers, 20th Century Fox or MGM. Who's the star? What's the subject? Is it a cartoon, musical, drama, comedy?

Does it relate to our interests? Of course it does, or we wouldn't be there. In that sense, dreams are an ever present movie theater. While we are asleep, about every 90 minutes, we screen one. And, whether or not it is blissful, nightmarish, social, sexual, whatever . . . we made it. A dream is our production totally. We write, cast, choose its place, time, theme and style.

Dreams are a second language, but not a foreign one. Strange as they may be, they are friends from our built-in inner hospital staff. Their language is metaphor and often they seem a mass of contradictions, just like the front page of the New York Times with its disasters, discoveries, editorials and Op-Ed columns. Dreams are, in fact, nocturnal newspapers, whose form is akin to a Hollywood film. It's no accident we have nicknamed Hollywood the "Dream Factory" and the eponymous "Tinseltown," because dreams are gifts we give to ourselves in the form of pictures. Except . . . they don't lie.

The visual metaphor of the dream is a new pharmaceutical prescription to an old problem. Sometimes it parades in odd bits and pieces of the past and present, or performs a masquerade in a strange place. But always it relates to a present problem; when "bizarre" seems a good name for the dream/movie from which we have just awakened, we best give credit where credit is due. We produced it. Dreams harbor the

incredible power of telling it like it is, was and like we want life to be. When we remember dreams, they are our life: you/me/we/they.

In a photographic or postcard way, dreams are seldom realistic, probably because a part of us is born to fancy. But our culture sneers at the artistic and tells us that macho and sexy are better.

Most of us lose the artistic impulse early, but dreams never do. Their metaphoric form is a useful tool born in sleep. When we dream, we've had it with reality because reality has ceased to provide answers to questions and metaphors come to our rescue.

Realistic images would bore us with their redundancies — "what's new about that picture? It's old hat." There's not much to learn from postcard/photographs. A dreamed metaphor embraces, in our own home made symbols, our deepest, often forgotten feelings about past, present and wanted future, sometimes all at once, in black and white or living color. Dreams are screened in their unique forms on the mind's eye for us to remember — and learn from.

David Brooks was a well-known actor/singer on Broadway for 20 years, starring in three Agnes de Mille productions, including Brigadoon. Through his passion for art he became interested in metaphor, which led to his interest in dreams. The above passages are derived from a joint project about dreams and art he is currently working on with Monte. □

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FROM THE EDITOR

How has working with dreams affected your life?

I have given a number of introductory workshops in the past few months and have realized how little most people understand or appreciate the importance of dreams.

In one workshop a man came in, sat down, crossed his arms over his chest and in-

formed me he was only there because he had to take notes for his wife who could not attend. He added that he hadn't remembered a dream in 30 years and didn't think they were important.

After another workshop a woman, who had come because a friend invited her, came up and said she didn't remember her dreams and never thought anything about it until she heard me talking about how much people can gain from dream work.

It's obvious there has to be a higher level of public education about the benefits of group work with dreams before people will commit themselves to it.

To that end, I am look-

ing for readers to share with me what dreams have meant to them and the effect they have had on their lives. Anonymity will be guaranteed if you wish.

Some of this information will hopefully find its way into the pages of this newsletter. I also hope to use this as pre-

liminary research for other articles and possibly a book manuscript. My goal is to find ways to reach a larger audience and share the riches of dream work.

Please contact me if you are willing to share your experiences. Thanks! —WP

Are you going to the Association for the Study of Dreams conference in Asheville, NC June 17-21?

If so, let me know and let's get together while you are there! I'd love to meet readers in person and learn what you are doing with dreams. —WP

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

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