

# Dream Appreciation

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## **PEOPLE WHO LISTEN TO HORSES AND DREAMS**

*By Montague Ullman, M.D.*

I have just read an amazing book. It's a book that deservedly had been on the best-seller list for quite a while. I refer to *The Man Who Listens to Horses* by Monty Roberts.

Although we share the same given name (except for a small alteration in the spelling), his life was very different from mine. He grew up in horse territory in California, living in a house on the rodeo grounds. Horses were and still are the focus of his life. He won his first trophy at the age of four in a competition for age 16 and under, and continued to win them throughout his life.

By the age of 13 he had mastered the "silent body grammar" of horses living in the wild. From

that point on he became a teacher whose mission in life was to use gentle rather than forceful means to invite a creature used to the freedom of the herd to voluntarily accommodate to a man-made world.

As a child he turned away in disgust and revulsion from the cruel ways in which his father went about getting the job done by breaking the animal's spirit. Over and over again he was forced to witness the terrifying agony of the animal struggling from the bonds that held it. He chose a different path against not only the opposition of his father, but of many others who, despite the evidence of his successes, clung to the old ways. He did, in the end, achieve recognition — much of it — and throughout the world.

As I said, our lives couldn't have been more different. I grew up in New York City and had nothing to do with horses after the age of four or five. On that occasion I was with my father at a fair where there were

pony rides for small children. I don't recall who instigated it, whether it was my father or me, but I have a vivid recall of what happened. I was no sooner placed on the saddle than the animal reared a bit and I found myself gently sliding down the pony's back onto the ground. I wasn't hurt but I screamed as if I were, and that was the end of my contact with that species.

My point, however, is that, despite all the overt differences in our lifestyles and interests, one powerful analogy really seized me as I read the book. We were both interested in learning a language that is not obvious to the casual observer, is easily overlooked, and even when it is not, is generally not taken seriously. He was interested in learning the body language of the mustang, I of the dream.

Roberts got in touch with his calling a good deal earlier than I did. It wasn't until I was 16 that I got jump-started by a book published in 1899. The

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## PEOPLE WHO LISTEN TO THE LANGUAGE OF HORSES . . .

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book was written by Thomas Jay Hudson and was entitled *The Law of Psychic Phenomena: A*

*Working Hypothesis for the Systematic Study of Hypnotism, Spiritism, Mental Therapeutics, Etc.* The circumstances of

my life at the time added to the impact. Along with several friends of the same age, I took an interest in psychic phenomena and we began our own experiments to see what we could accomplish by holding séances in the dark. I won't go into this as it would take too long, but the fact is that the results we got far exceeded our expectations.

The book also stimulated my interest in hypnosis. My sister, three years younger, was an innocent but quite responsive subject. I touched her with a penny at room temperature while she was in a trance and told her I had heated it. Within a relatively short time redness appeared where I had touched her.

My interest in the powers of the unconscious dimension of our lives eventually led to my becoming a neurologist and then a psychoanalyst. Where Roberts' passion was horses, mine became dreams. What they both had in common was a hidden language. And a lot more.

Let's begin with clarity about the analogy I wish to draw between his approach to mustangs and my approach to dreams. (See chart at left)

In both situations, with horses and dreamers, progress is uneven. Set-backs occur when vulnerable areas are exposed and mismanaged. In the horse, the flank is the area where the horse is most open to attack by predators. In the case of the dreamer it's the ability of the dream to, on occasion, expose the dark side of one's personality.

Tact, empathy, perseverance and reassuring support are the necessary ingredients in dealing with these areas. When these are present in full measure, it is amazing to witness the risk-taking resources that surface and make exploration of and accommodation to these areas possible.

In the case of the mustang it may mean something as simple as getting the horse used to something soft and protective on the flank before working with the saddle and its attachments. In the case of the dream, many factors are at work that make for risk taking and movement into those dark areas.

In the group work I do with dreams, all of us share dreams and gain in courage as we see others dive deeply into the murkiest places. We further share parts of our psyche

### Cast of characters

The Mustang	The Dream
The Trainer	The Helper (helpers)
The Rider	The Dreamer Awake

### Goals

To transform an animal living in the wild and reared in a herd into a friendly and cooperative creature which, when gently handled, willingly and helpfully learns how to live in and enrich a man-made world.

Dreams are also creatures of the wild that come into being outside of the constraints of waking consciousness. When gently transformed into the coin of waking life, their intrusive spontaneity, honesty and vitality come alive and enrich the life of the dreamer.

### Basic Assumptions

The same basic assumptions apply to the transformation of both the mustang and the dreamer.

1. The potential exists for the transformation to occur. The horse can become man's friend and the "unread letter" of the dream can be read.
2. The transformation can best occur in an atmosphere of safety and with a capacity of each of the parties to understand the language of the other.
3. Neither one has the upper hand or seeks it. It is an encounter between equals that brings out the best in the teacher working with the mustang and the teacher working with the dream.
4. Both transformations are processes that unfold in time.

## AND OF DREAMS . . .

with each other when we make the dream our own and this has a similar effect. Most important of all is the trust the dreamer develops in the process and in the group, based on the fact the dreamer remains in control of the process. The respect the group has for the dreamer to decide how deeply to dive actually has the effect of making deep dives possible.

### Learning a new language

Roberts set about quite early in his life to learn Equus, the language of the mustang. Helpers to the dreamer have to learn the language of the dreamer as adults. Let us look at the two languages. Both are quite different from the discursive speech we are used to.

### Equus

Wild horses use the language of bodily actions to express their reaction to the danger or their needs within the herd. Having learned that language through his observations of mustangs roaming freely, Roberts uses his knowledge to imitate communications and to establish a relationship. The first and most important feature is what he refers to as Ad-

vance and Retreat. The horse is a flight animal seeking to distance itself from danger. It retreats. Only when the source of danger either retreats or shows no interest in at-

tacking does the horse show some interest, even to the point of moving closer to what at first was considered dangerous.

Roberts mimics this scenario in order to

achieve what he refers to as "join-up." With the horse in a pen large enough to stay away from him, he assumes an aggressive stance at first.

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## Leadership Training Program For Experiential Dream Groups

A Leadership Training Workshop in group dream work will take place at Monte's home April 23-25. 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 technique of leading a group.

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

DATE: April 23, 24 and 25  
PLACE: 55 Orlando Ave.  
Ardsley, New York 10502

These workshops fill up quickly, so for more information call Monte Ullman at:  
(914)693-0156

The intensive three-day workshop will cover:

- A presentation of the structure and rationale of the Experiential Dream Group. This will consider in detail the roles of the dreamer, the group and the leader at each stage of the process.
- The principles, guidelines and necessary precautions for effective and serious dream work will be emphasized.
- The kinds of problems that arise at each stage of the process will be discussed.
- If they choose, participants will have the opportunity to lead the group and benefit from a critique by the dreamer, the group and the leader.
- A final session will be devoted to some of the practical problems involved in carrying out Experiential Dream Group Work. These include the size of the group, the make-up of the group, the length and number of sessions, issues that arise with participants who are in therapy, etc.

## PEOPLE WHO LISTEN TO THE LANGUAGE OF DREAMS

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Maintaining eye contact, he moves toward the horse who then takes flight and starts circling the pen. He keeps doing this in the hope the horse will tire and be ready to renegotiate the situation. Ear movements, lowering of the head, licking and chewing movements indicate readiness to terminate the flight mode. The horse is quite eloquently conveying the message:

"I am a flight animal so if I look like I'm eating it's obvious I have gotten over my fear of you. I don't like the feeling of being alone and isolated. It isn't natural. Since there aren't any other horses around I might as well consider the possibility of closeness to you. Part of me is still afraid of what I may be in for if I risk going further into your world. It's so different from the world I have known."

Roberts then assumes the submissive role and, by casting his eyes down and changing his stance a bit, conveys a message of safety and an invitation to the horse to come closer. These tactics are repeated

until the horse feels secure enough to come up to him and then calmly follow him as he moves about the pen. Roberts refers to this as join-up. Once this occurs, the stage is set for

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***"Your friend Mr. Roberts says horses don't lie. Neither do I; I call a spade a spade. That means at time exposing sensitive and painful areas. The truths embedded in the imagery and the originality of the way they are expressed most often elude the dreamer awake."***

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slowly and gently familiarizing the horse with the equipment needed to saddle up and accept a rider.

Roberts by his body language conveys:

"I understand the difficulties you face in befriending me and will do my best to take your feelings into account every step of the way. We both have much to learn and much to gain in becoming friends."

Now let's turn to the dialogue between the dream and the helper (helpers) to the dream.

### **The Dream**

"I speak a different language than you.

You will have to have a good grasp of this language if you are going to help the dreamer benefit from my existence. I have a certain advantage because al-

though you are not that familiar with my language, I know your language, having been around the dreamer ever since he or she came into this world.

"The language I use differs from yours with regard to its form. I mostly use a pictorial form in which the images that appear are metaphorical expressions of feelings that are surfacing at the time. The visual metaphor of the dream is no different in essence from the poet's use of metaphor. They both have a way of reaching their mark with greater impact than ordinary speech. The visual metaphor of the

dream captures emotional currents that have not yet risen to the surface. Not only do I have a better grasp of what's going on than the dreamer himself or herself, but I can express what I feel with greater depth and honesty through my natural gift for metaphor.

"Your friend Mr. Roberts says horses don't lie. Neither do I; I call a spade a spade. That means at times exposing sensitive and painful areas. The truths embedded in the imagery and the originality of the way they are expressed most often elude the dreamer awake. That's where you come in. Your task is a very delicate one. You have to address any vulnerable areas exposed in a way that prepares the dreamer (the rider) to own (ride) the dream and feel safe in doing so. If you don't succeed you force me back into the unconscious domain (take flight into the wild) and then the gift of self-awareness I have goes unappreciated.

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## DREAMS AND DREAM WORK AT ASD CONFERENCES

By WENDY PANNIER

Last June I had the honor of leading a Monte-style dream group at the 15th International Conference of the Association for the Study of Dreams, which was held in a very dreamy setting on the Hawaiian island of Oahu.

Oahu means "the gathering place" — the place where Hawaiians historically came together to talk, to trade and to celebrate. So it was fitting that dreamers should gather there, to learn and experience together, and to reaffirm our community of dreamers.

At the international ASD conference each year dreamers from all over the world come together for a week of lectures, workshops, research findings, and performances that examine the nature of dreams and the healing influence dreams present through traditional therapy, personal study, body work, and the arts.

My first ASD conference was in 1995, when it was held in New York. I had recently reconnected with Monte and attended in large part to hear his presentation and take part in his workshop.

Monte's presentation, a talk on *Dreams and the Politics of Interconnectedness*, was very

powerful for me. A brief summary of this appeared in Vol. 1 No. 3. The room for his group workshop was

packed and we had to divide the people into actual dream group participants and observers. Little did I realize

that in a few years I would be leading a similar group on Monte's behalf!

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## LISTENING TO THE LANGUAGE OF DREAMS

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"This is a real challenge to you, the helper. After all, I hold secrets that the dreamer doesn't wear on his or her sleeve when out in public. Remember that as in the case of Mr. Roberts who prepares the horse to accept the rider, you have to prepare the dreamer to accept the dream. Only the dreamer knows when there is a true fit between dream and waking reality (sitting comfortably and safely in the saddle). That takes time and tact."

The helper (or helpers) in turn addresses the dream:

"I (we) am very much aware of the challenge you speak of. I (we) will do my (our) best to ease the movement of the dreamer into those vulnerable areas you speak of so that your full message is heard. If I (we) succeed in

this there will be a painless transition from your natural environment of origin (the unconscious) to a man-made environment (the world as experienced awake).

The helper (helpers) address the dreamer:

"I (we) am aware of the task before you in engaging with your own dream. There are vulnerable areas to deal with and new resources to uncover. My (our) task is to help you move as close to the dream as pos-

sible. I (we) will follow rather than lead you and at all times be respectful of your own protective instincts. I (we) can only be of help to you to the extent I (we) earn your trust and make it possible for you, of your own free will, to discover and share with me (us) the meaning you will discover in your dream."

The mustang and the rider disappear together into the sunset. The dreamer and the dream face the new day with greater self-awareness. □

**The Association for the Study of Dreams  
16th International Conference  
July 6-10, 1999  
University of California, Santa Cruz**

For information on the conference program or a brochure, please contact The Association for the Study of Dreams, Box 1600, Vienna, VA. You can call (703) 242-0062 or (703) 242-8888, or you can send e-mail to [ASDreams@aol.com](mailto:ASDreams@aol.com)

Information about the conference — and about ASD and what it has to offer dreamers — is available on the organization's web site:

**[www.asdreams.org](http://www.asdreams.org)**

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## **DREAMS AND DREAM WORK AT ASD CONFERENCES**

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There were other presentations and workshops that were meaningful to me at that conference and subsequent conferences. I have found the ASD a warm and friendly organization and consider myself fortunate to have made friends with many fellow dreamers.

ASD's membership consists of a broad spectrum of individuals with serious interests in dreams, including those who study dreams professionally and those who make a personal study of dreams. Members engage in a wide range of dream-related activities including academic

research, clinical practice, incorporation of dreams into literature and art, and individual study.

At this year's conference in Hawaii I was pleased to reconnect with Luh Ketut Suryani, M.D., Ph.D., from Bali, whom you met in the last issue. She was a presenter and also led a workshop on meditation.

I was also pleased to meet Anjali Hazarika, Ph.D. Her book, *Daring to Dream: Cultivating Corporate Creativity Through Dreamwork*, published by Sage Books, chronicles her work with engineers in a corporate setting in India. Monte's

group process is incorporated into the work she does. I hope to have her share this work in a future issue of this newsletter.

We had the luxury of a three-hour time slot for our Monte-style group at the conference. Participants came from the Netherlands, Australia, Japan,

France, Italy and the US.

Dreams have a language all their own that we could all understand, as the group proved as we worked on a very powerful and moving dream.

I look forward to leading a group in Santa Cruz this year and hope to see some of you there! □

*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) 925-0758, by fax at (610) 925-0759, or by writing 105 Taylor Lane, Kennett Square, PA 19348. Our e-mail address is <dreams@kennett.net>.

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

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