

Dream Appreciation

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Everyone involved in a dream group is privileged to participate in a profoundly healing ceremony.

REFLECTIONS ON LIFE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE A DREAM GROUP

By MONTAGUE ULLMAN, M.D.

As the title suggests and, as it might seem obvious, there is a difference. What isn't so obvious is the problematic aspect of this difference. This was brought home to me most poignantly subsequent to the completion of an intensive 10-day dream workshop in the summer of 1976 sponsored by the Lifwynn Foundation.*

The circumstances of the workshop were quite unusual. It took place on an isolated island owned

* The Lifwynn Foundation is concerned with perpetuating the contributions of Trigant Burrow, an early psychoanalyst and one of the founders of group psychotherapy.

by the Foundation. There was no electricity and no recreational facilities, making it easy to focus just on dream work. What I hadn't quite expected was the level of upset that occurred once the group disbanded and returned home to resume their lives where they had left off. The account of one of the participants spoke to this most poignantly:

After Lifwynn, the deluge! The experience of Lifwynn Camp left me so sensitized to my dreams and to the intensely close relationship I shared there that my re-entry became an excruciating ordeal. Through my experience at Lifwynn (this sounds like a testimonial) I developed an immense sense of trust for those in the workshop as well as reaffirmation of the knowledge that social isolation is not a healthy state of being. Through participation in the group, I felt the beginnings of the de-

velopment of an important life-sustaining social context. I left the camp feeling sad that the lovely context was about to vanish.

I felt vaguely angry and humiliated at having raised my expectations of others and myself only to find the old world was, indeed, the same mechanistic place it had always been.

In contrast to the intensity of that experience, most dream groups meet weekly or bi-weekly and the transition to life outside the group doesn't rise to that level of difficulty. There are, however, still significant differences between life inside and outside of a dream group.

Let me in a few words try to describe the atmosphere necessary for effective dream work. When the process unfolds as it should, it approaches, in my opinion, the closest we can get to a totally nonviolent arrangement for

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Leadership Training Program

Monte's next workshop will be November 5-7.
Call him at (914) 693-0156 for more information.

REFLECTIONS ON LIFE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE

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healing to occur. Knives and guns are left at the door. Once the two guiding principles are in place — namely the Safety Factor to ensure trust and the Discovery Factor* where help is offered to the dreamer without ever being invasive — a natural healing system comes into being. The way is cleared for the dream to speak in its own clear voice to the dreamer and the group. Everyone involved is privileged to participate in a profoundly healing ceremony.

A recent member of a current group, Abby Kupersmith, summed up his initial reactions in this way:

It allows people to conduct their own search and provides the tools to do so. It is the dreamer who determines the limits of the search as he or she participates in a multi-faceted support system. The dreamer is empowered to move at his or her own pace into the meanings evoked by the dream imagery and to determine the depth of that exploration.

* See the author's book described in last quarter's enclosed flier for an extended discussion of these two factors.

To someone who spent a good part of his career in practicing and teaching psychoanalysis, it came as somewhat of a surprise to me to see how the special atmosphere generated in the dream

neously and unconsciously our old patterns reassert themselves — but with a difference.

In the unwilling immediacy of the switch, there is something in common with what happens when

familiar conscious view of yourself as you resume the role you have created for yourself as an actor in the social scene. Same person, different views.

But that is where the analogy breaks down. In the case of the cube, the same identical switch repeats itself. Dream work evokes change. That change may be subtle or massive, but in any case you are dealing with a psychological cube that has undergone a change in shape which in turn alters the view from below or from above. The taken-for-granted rigid outline is no longer quite as rigid.

Some definitions are in order to more fully understand the nature of the switch. These include Interconnectedness, Social Facade and Resistance.

Interconnectedness

Holistic views to a greater and greater extent are shaping our visions of reality. From the growing awareness of the ecological unity of Nature to the way once related subatomic particles remain entangled forever, there is a beginning shift from a mechanistic approach to matter and events to one concerned with context and the fundamental interconnectedness of all

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group enabled the dreamer to bypass entrenched resistance to self-disclosure.

As noted in the last issue of this newsletter, two women, even on first encounter with the process, shared of themselves to a degree that initiated transformative changes. The dream comes into its own as an intrinsic part of the many natural healing systems we are endowed with from birth on.

The fact that entrenched inhibitions and resistances can be bypassed in a dream group doesn't mean they are gone forever. What happens to this remarkable healing mechanism once re-entry into our own little world occurs? We are quick-change artists. Instanta-

viewing the magic Necker cube. Most of you are familiar with the optical illusion that occurs when looking at the bare outline of a cube drawn in such a way that as you look at it you see it for a while as if viewing it from below, and then the view of it instantaneously changes to seeing it from above, or vice versa. It is the same cube, but your experience of it has changed without a conscious intent on your part.

This is somewhat analogous to what happens when you resume your existence outside the group. A switch takes place from a view of yourself taken from an unconscious domain as depicted in the dream imagery to the more

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that exists. To understand the meaning of interconnectedness, we have to take into account how internal (motivational) as well as external (overt behavioral) factors influence outcome.

From time immemorial, religious teachings reminding us of the brotherhood of man implicitly recognize our interconnectedness as members of a single species. Unfortunately, historical circumstances and current arrangements among and within nations have honored this dictum more in the breach than in reality. All of us pay a price for this failure. What is set before us as an ideal will hopefully someday become a reality before our technological versatility in combination with our propensity for violence win out.

What have these considerations to do with dreams? Our dreams are born out of a phylogenetically ancient genetically driven mechanism that brings dreaming consciousness into being repetitively throughout the night, every night of our existence. This very pointedly suggests that it is part of our survival kit, not only as individuals, but with a greater goal in mind,

namely the survival of the species to which we belong.

To edge us closer to this latter goal, our dreaming psyche has taken advantage of these nightly dream bouts of consciousness to confront us with what we have to know about ourselves and our relations with others to ensure the ultimate goal of surviving as a species. That assurance can only come about if each of us struggles to maintain our connectedness to each other, and to learn how to assume responsibility for anything we may be doing unconsciously that undermines the integrity of our connection to others.

None of us grows up perfect in this world. We all have in greater or lesser measure a little of this potential for what might be called psychological violence to ourselves or to others, which when consensually reinforced, results in overt violence and the disruption of connectedness.

We have, in the form

of our dreaming consciousness, a remarkable instrument for detecting disconnects as they come into being, either as a result of the impact of our behavior on someone else or vice versa.

There is at play in the shaping of the message of the dream an incorruptible core of being that is remarkably sensitive to what is authentic and what is spurious in our

view of ourselves and in our interaction with others.

In either instance, pseudo-connections contaminate true connectedness. This spontaneous honesty of the dream, when it comes to life through dream work, offers us the opportunity to do some repair work. Jung, referring to the dreams, said the same thing more poetically:

So flower-like in its candor and veracity it puts us to shame for the deceitfulness of our lives.

This brings us to a closer look at the task the dreamer is confronted with.

Social Facade

The word facade refers to the appearance of a structure. In more personal terms it refers to that part of ourselves we show to others. The word often carries more subtle meaning, referring to something being superficial rather than genuine, or something hidden.

Fortunately, most of us prefer love to hate, honesty to dishonesty, and genuine self-esteem to either grandiosity or self-derogation. Not all of us succeed in living out these preferences all of the time. Nor can we expect that of ourselves. Life is too complicated.

Collectively our efforts to civilize ourselves have resulted in much that is grand and inspiring, but there are still too many booby traps around that limit our ability to be as fully human as we might otherwise be. Our social facade in that sense is our effort to put our best foot forward, given whatever limitations personal early developmental experiences have imposed on us, as well as whatever constraints we continue to be subjected to by the social milieu in which we function.

Our imperfections are often hidden from us by what are known as mecha-

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nisms of defense. We suppress, deny, we rationalize and we rely on other evasive techniques to distance ourselves from certain truths. Such tactics are more apt to be obvious to others than to ourselves. To the extent we rely on them, we are falsifying our relation to the other as well as to ourselves.

Whether we are aware of these disconnects or not, they do resonate in our bodily tissues and surface at night as the triggering focus of our dreaming consciousness. The healing potential of our dreaming psyche lies in its ability to precisely capture the of-

ten very subtle felt traces that a disconnect has occurred.

I have been talking about connects and disconnects. Let's concretize it a bit and talk about feelings instead. Our feelings are the connective tissue that make for the way we bond with others. Our feelings may ring true or be simulated. The difference between authentic feelings and simulated feelings is important. It is the difference between the "candor" and "deceit" that Jung speaks of.

Here is an example. If an act of ours has caused pain to another, we

can own up to it, feel genuine remorse for having done it, do our best to understand why it came about, and learn enough from the experience to minimize the chances of it happening again.

Simulated guilt is a defensive and manipulative act to appease whoever has been hurt and to get out of the situation as best we can. There is no real assumption of responsibility, no remorse and no learning has taken place. One can wallow in this form of "guilt" without ever realizing it has nothing to do with genuine guilt.

The one response is a healthy feeling that promotes change. The other is an attempt to cling to the status quo and avoid change. The question of avoiding change brings us to the next topic.

Resistance

The term resistance as I am using it is a technical psychoanalytic term referring to the fact that the patient comes seeking change but faces a powerful force (resistance) operating in the opposite direction. Our existing patterns of behavior are the only ones we know, and we hesitate to tamper with them. The patient is fighting a war on two fronts.

The art of therapy is to tilt the balance in favor of change.

As any analyst knows, resistances are slow to change. The restructuring of character in therapy has been likened to the slow peeling off of the top layers of an onion until the desirable core lies exposed. The most startling realization that dawned on me once I became involved in experiential dream group work was the plasticity of our defensive structure and how resistances melted away once the dreamer experienced the support and stimulation of the group in the atmosphere of safety and trust that is generated.

People vary in how rapidly this dissipation occurs, but the fact that it can occur even on a first encounter in a group of strangers leading to the initiation of profound transformative change is the significant point. The outer layers of the onion are still there, but temporarily invisible so that the rich, creative, nurturing potential of the core lies exposed. Once the dreamer has tasted the core, one gets to it more quickly on the next occasion.

Dream work informs us of the remarkable self-healing mechanism we all

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APOTHOGEMS AND OTHER INSIGHTS

Dreaming is a universal human experience. Dreams should be universally accessible.

If we recall a dream we are ready to be confronted by what it has to say to us.

Danger is not in the dream, but may be in the eyes of the beholder.

No dream is dreamt to make us feel worse. It is dreamt to make us more aware.

Dreams don't lie but liars dream. (Milton Kramer)

We all possess a camera with an ethical aperture that opens more widely when we are dreaming.

The art of dream work is the art of letting the dream speak for itself in its own language.

Dream work is like the sport of curling. If you simply clear the way for the dream to say what it has to say, it will follow its own proper path.



DREAMWORKERS' CORNER

HEALING DREAM WORK WITH CANCER PATIENTS

BY WENDY PANNIER

This is the first of two articles on the healing nature of dreams and dream work with cancer patients.

There seems to be a phenomenon that dream recall intensifies with serious illness. Perhaps this is part of the survival mechanism Monte talked about in his article. I experienced this myself when I had cancer four years ago and have heard it frequently from cancer patients I lead dream groups with at the Wellness Communities in Philadelphia, PA and Wilmington, DE. I have actually had people come to my introductory workshops to find out how they could *stop* dreaming because their dreams were so frequent and intense.

I believe what Monte said about if we recall a dream we are ready to be confronted by what it has to say to us. He also said that dreams are meant to make us more aware, not to make us feel worse. Or, as I say in my workshops, dreams are meant to enlighten, not to frighten.

Dream/Body Connection

With regard to enlightenment, I was sur-

prised how many people at my workshops had dreamed about their illness before it was diagnosed. The well-known oncologist, Bernie Siegal, has documented many cases of people who not only dreamed of their health problems before they were diagnosed, but who also pushed their doctors for more extensive examinations to find what their dreams had already told them.

But not everyone is grateful for dream advice. A woman in one of my workshops said she dreamed that her aunt, who had died of breast cancer, came to her and told her that she, too, had breast cancer. The woman was extremely angry about this. She thought the dream was "horrible" because it told her something she "didn't want to hear." She ignored the message, although she was soon diagnosed with breast cancer during a routine examination.

Are these dreams precognitive or merely reflections of somatic conditions in the body, sometimes too subliminal for the dreamer's awareness? I don't feel a need to use a

label either way. Monte talked about the healing potential of our dreaming psyche to precisely capture the very subtle changes in feelings that often occur. If dreams do this with feelings, why not with subtle physical changes?

A Personal Perspective

Dreams were extremely helpful in my own experience of dealing with cancer.

More than a year before I was diagnosed I had a very short but intense dream in which my gynecologist called me on the phone and told me I

needed a D&C. The feeling in the dream was alarm. I was vigilant about my check-ups, but never mentioned the dream to her. In December of 1994 she called me and told me I needed a D&C. It was that procedure that diagnosed my cancer.

Shortly before the diagnosis I had a dream that a building I owned was being imploded. It turned out this dream had significance on multiple levels, but the metaphor about what was going on inside my body — how my body was being destroyed from the inside

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possess. I have outlined the reasons why, once we leave the special ambience of the dream group, the outer layers of the onion become very visible again, but the taste of the core remains with us, enabling us to deal a bit more effectively when old defensive patterns threaten to re-emerge. They no longer come into being as unconsciously and as unchallenged. To paraphrase General MacArthur's last lament, "Old resistances never die, they just slowly

fade away."

The level of honesty that comes into being through dream work is addictive. That honesty fortifies us in dealing with the circumstances that produce "aftershock." To that extent, dreams are counter-cultural, which may be the reason why so little attention is paid to dreams in industrial societies where materialistic values, self-seeking and the pursuit of power compete so successfully with compassion, cooperation and, to put it bluntly, love. □

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out — was very powerful. I also had dreams that alerted me to a developing blood clot and later a dream letting me know that the coumadin I was taking had thinned my blood too much.

Many participants in my Wellness Community dream groups have had similar experiences.

Changing Metaphors

It has also been interesting to note the change in metaphors as the healing process occurs. This process has not been linear or consistent for myself or other cancer survivors I know. There are many

uncomfortable metaphors — frightening warlike images, guns, toxic waste dumps, hospitals and medical personnel, being pursued, being threatened. No wonder these images have scared some away from dream work! But what I learned in my groups is that the people who worked on their dreams, who examined what those images were trying to say to them, tended to stop having nightmarish dreams.

While this may not have meant they were cured, it did show that healing was occurring at some level.

For those who did go

into remission, as the bad dreams became fewer and fewer, positive images began appearing in their dreams, like sunshine, green growing plants, young animals, new clothes. I had one dream where I was remodeling a building from the basement up. Some of my most positive dreams occurred during my most difficult times, when I most

needed encouragement.

While not all the people in my dream groups have survived cancer, participants have discovered the various aspects of the healing potential of dream work. For some, this dreamwork helped them deal with cancer and life after it; for others, dream work helped them face death. More next time. □

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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