

SWEET DREAMS

Many of you have heard the expression: “What’s in a dream?” The contexts in which I’ve heard that phrase, and most of the people I’ve heard use it, would suggest that it is simply a rhetorical question; not meant with any degree of seriousness or any sense that the “dream” could have any real meaning. And yet, it is nearly universally accepted that all humans dream; about 4-5 times every night, in fact. For the vast majority of us, most of the dreams we have are quickly forgotten by morning. Thank heavens for some dreams that were not forgotten!

Such as:

In 1965 Paul McCartney, one of the 4 members of the Beatles, had a dream in which an entire melody came to him fully formed. Upon waking he immediately went to his piano and wrote out the piece of music. The song became known as “Yesterday,” and according to the BBC “Yesterday” is the 4th most successful song of all time in terms of royalties paid! And then there’s:

Niels Bohr, the father of quantum mechanics who had been trying to decipher the structure of the atom. He dreamt one night of multiple spheres spinning around a larger orb, much like the planets and the sun. He suddenly awoke with the dream-inspired concept of an atom with a central nucleus around which electrons would orbit. This concept was later validated in his laboratory, and for this discovery Bohr received the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1922. And:

Elias Howe, who in 1846 had been attempting to mechanize the making of clothes. But he was having no luck on the key issue of where to place the needle's eye. One night he had a dream in which he had been captured by a savage king who had given him 24 hours to produce a machine for clothes making. Having failed, the king sentenced Elias to death. As he was standing amid the soldiers, awaiting his execution, he noticed that each of the soldier's spears had a piercing or perforation at the blade. Upon waking (he awoke prior to his execution!) he now

knew where to place the eye of the needle! He was later awarded the 1st United States patent for the Lockstitch Design Sewing Machine.

In previous presentations in this very room some of our Literary Club members have expressed an interest in dreams. Distinguished member William Pratt, in his expansive paper of April of last year, entitled "Perchance to Dream," gave a marvelous account of a veritable treasury of both dream inspired and dream like literature, some of it his very own.

But what of dreams in and of themselves? Why do we dream? The answer to this is controversial, to say the least. The one thing that most authorities can agree on is that dreaming occurs during the REM phase of the sleeping cycle. R-E-M, or "REM," stands for Rapid Eye Movement. REM sleep is specific to mammals and some birds, and when in the REM sleep phase there are physiologic similarities to the waking state, one of which is rapid eye movement. Non-REM sleep, the

term used to describe all other phases of sleep, alternates with REM sleep to form a “sleep cycle,” which is about 90 minutes in duration.

Take note some night of the duration of time that has elapsed from one of your visits to the biffy to the next. In all likelihood that time is going to be a close multiple of 90 minutes.

What is the purpose of REM sleep? That’s the controversial part.

Explanations can generally be divided across two categories; the physiological and the psychological. The physiological camp entertains such explanations as:

We REM sleep to reinforce things we learned during the day. Or:

We REM sleep to cleanse our brains of useless things we learned during the day. Or:

We REM sleep to better oxygenate our corneas. Or:

We REM sleep to stabilize our brain circuitry. Or:

We REM sleep for no apparent reason at all.

The psychological camp has explanations which share some overlap with the physiological camp, particularly in the areas of memory

improvement and overall brain circuitry maintenance. But this camp also includes the school of thought that believes REM sleep exists so that we can dream, and that dreams are necessary for one's personal health. And further, dream content is necessary not only for the individual's psychological and spiritual health but also for the psychological and spiritual evolution of the human species. What do dreams have to do with psychological and spiritual health or evolution?

This is probably a good moment for a bit of self-disclosure. I have become deeply interested in dreams and dream work over the past several years. After my retirement from 35 years in Diagnostic Radiology, I began a personal "repurposing" process. The distillate of that process revealed a desire to remain within the healing arts but perhaps outside the confines of the large medical institutions. And so after considerable research I enrolled at the Haden Institute for Spiritual Direction. Located in Asheville, North Carolina, the Haden Institute is primarily Christian in its spiritual underpinnings and relies

heavily on the writings of Carl Jung with regard to process and methodology of spiritual direction. Jung's interest in and his lectures about dream work are a significant part of the Institute's curriculum.

Let us return to the previous question: What do dreams have to do with psychological and spiritual health or evolution? The answer lies within the records and chronicles, the stories and legends, the myths and folklore, from antiquity onwards, in which dreams are so wonderfully interwoven.

There is no end to the anthropologic, historical and biblical literature maintaining that throughout history humankind has always been interested in, and sometimes directed by, dreams. Consider the Magi at the time of Jesus Christ's birth; they were instructed – in a dream – to avoid returning to Herod the Great. Constantine, in 312, initially had a vision in which he saw in the skies the insignia of the Cross on which was inscribed "BY THIS SYMBOL YOU WILL CONQUOR," and later, as he slept, Christ appeared to him and commanded him to recreate

what he had seen and use it as a safeguard against his enemies. And Oliver Cromwell, just prior to his political rise to become Lord Protector of England, Scotland and Ireland; had dreamt of a massive female figure, approaching his bed, throwing back the curtains and informing him that he would become “the greatest man in all England.” These persons, famous as they are, all believed in their dreams.

But famous or not, throughout history dreamers may have consulted a priestess or soothsayer, oracle or seer, fortune-teller or prophesier, clairvoyant or sibyl, augur or necromancer, each dreamer seeking some sort of explanation or interpretation of his or her dream . . . for spiritual guidance? For psychological resolution? How about political advantage, or tactical reasons, or economic planning? It becomes quite clear that in any century people were driven for a myriad of reasons to uncover the meaning of their dreams.

It was Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, who was the first individual to seriously attempt to connect dreams with one’s

psychological wellbeing, to dispel some of the ancient myths related to dreams, and to establish a consistent methodology for dream interpretation. His book, entitled THE INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS, published in 1900 (interestingly, the book was first published in an edition of 600 copies, which did not sell out for 8 years!), this book expressed his overall view that all dreams are forms of “wish fulfillment,” the desires of the dreamer. The role of the dreamer’s unconscious is to condense, disguise and distort the “wish” or “desire” such that upon waking the dreamer cannot readily recognize the dream’s true meaning; hence, the need for deeper examination and interpretation.

For Freud, the unconscious mind is a reservoir of feelings, emotions, desires and memories. Some of these feelings and emotions, especially those related to sex, competition and aggression, would be considered reprehensible if brought to conscious awareness and are therefore held in check by a host of defense mechanisms, such as : repression, denial,

displacement, sublimation, projection, intellectualization, rationalization, regression, et cetera. The persistent use of these defense mechanisms may produce anxiety. And one way to diffuse the anxiety was to access the unconscious through dream interpretation.

Probably overstated in importance but not an entirely unwarranted critique, was Freud's apparent fixation on sexual interpretation.

Essentially, all dream images that are convex are male or phallic; all dream images that are concave are female or vaginal.

Carl Jung, in the early and mid-1900s, redefined dream interpretive methodology by introducing new concepts within the field of psychoanalysis and by redefining some of the terminology of Freud.

Jung's refinements to Freud have greater acceptance among today's therapists doing dream work. I believe the refinements to reflect a more accurate description of the human psyche.

A bit about Jung's background:

Carl Gustav Jung was born July 26, 1875, in Kesswil, Switzerland, along the shores of Lake Constance. Jung's father was both a minister and a classics scholar and his paternal grandfather was a German born physician and professor of surgery at the University of Basel. Jung's upbringing was Christian, very strict, and highly intellectual. Carl was instructed in Latin at the age of 6 and continued to study and read Latin texts throughout his youth. This skill likely facilitated his interests in history, anthropology and religion and predisposed him to his chosen field of study once he reached medical school, psychiatry. Jung chose psychiatry as a way of combining his philosophical interests with his commitment to the natural sciences.

Jung, both a mountain climber and a sailor, always lived next to a river or lake. Married and with 5 children, the wheelhouse of Jung's career was between 1919 and 1944. It was during those years that most of his major works were written and during which he maintained a large psychotherapeutic practice. Even up to the time of his death Jung

demonstrated an undogmatic attitude and openness to new ideas by frequently commenting to his students and audiences: “I am not a Jungian!” Jung died on June 6, 1961, near Zurich, Switzerland.

Jung had always been interested in dreams. In his autobiography, entitled MEMORIES, DREAMS, REFLECTIONS, Jung jokes that he found his inner life to be much more eventful and exciting than his outer life! How many of us can say that!

Jung read Freud’s seminal works on dreams and the two men met in Vienna in 1907. Freud was 51 years old at the time and Jung 32. Each must have found something incredibly interesting in the other as it is reported they talked on and on for 13 consecutive hours at that first meeting! The two men maintained a very close professional collaboration from 1907 to 1913. Their shared interest in dreams and the unconscious was at the center of their association. In 1910, Jung became the President of the International Psychoanalytical Association, an organization which Freud helped to found.

But in 1913 their professional relationship came to an end. The demise was triggered by increasing differences in what each meant by the concept of the unconscious. It was not uncommon for the two men to share their dreams with each other and offer interpretations. In 1909, right here in the USA, Freud and Jung received Honorary Degrees from Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. While on that trip Jung shared this dream with Freud:

The dream was of a house that Jung did not know, but it was “his house.” The upper of the 2 stories was furnished in the Rococo style; the lower floor had medieval furnishings. There was also a cellar containing the remains of a primitive culture and 2 human skulls.

Freud, always looking for the sexual or wish fulfillment reference, interpreted the 2 skulls as Jung’s wish for the death of two persons close to him. Jung disagreed, feeling that the 2 skulls were the same 2 he had studied in paleontology. But what is more, Jung saw the house as an image of the human psyche that was somehow inaccessible to conscious awareness. It was this dream of Jung’s that laid the

groundwork for his concept of the “collective unconscious,” a concept I will address in a moment. It was his book, entitled THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE UNCONSCIOUS, published in 1912, that became the final wedge between Jung and Freud. After this publication Jung and Freud never saw one another again even though Freud would live another 25 years. Jung had come to find Freud’s view of the unconscious too limited in scope, too negative in perspective. Jung’s view of the unconscious had evolved to become incredibly expansive. Yes, the darker urges and emotions still resided therein, but so did a sense of mystery, and movement towards personal fulfillment, towards spiritual exploration, towards the source of bright energy that he felt existed within each human being. For Jung, one might even find God within the unconscious. This is why a number of the healing arts have adopted Jung’s views and methods and have infused these into their core beliefs and practices.

Jung authored numerous papers and several books but failed to leave behind a schema by which he would instruct his students in the art of dream interpretation. However, from his many writings and lectures Jung's followers, including those at the Jung Institute of Zurich, other psychoanalysts, and still others trained in aspects of the Healing Arts, have attempted to piece together a "standard" approach to dream interpretation. What follows from this point in my paper is an amalgamation of Jung and his late 20th century adherents. Two of those adherents warrant mentioning.

The first is Dr. Mary Ann Mattoon. Dr. Mattoon, who trained at the Jung Institute of Zurich, compiled what some consider to be the definitive work on Jung's approach to dreams. Published in 1978, in her book entitled UNDERSTANDING DREAMS, Mattoon, having painstakingly filtered through each of Jung's works, produced a comprehensive yet readable manual on dream interpretation. The second adherent of Jung is Jeremy Taylor. Taylor received his

Doctorate Degree in Divinity and spent nearly 50 years in the fields of Spiritual Direction and Dream Work. His chief contribution was his book entitled THE WISDOM OF YOUR DREAMS, published in 1992. In this work Taylor articulates some of the principles or “ground rules” that need to be understood before dream work can begin. And what are some of these principles? The first of the four principles is by far the most important:

You, and only you, are the final arbiter of your dream’s meaning. No one else, not even your Jungian Analyst, can foist an interpretation upon you with which you do not agree. Others may “weigh in,” particularly those with expertise and experience, but you have the final say in what your dream ultimately means.

The second of these principles maintains that all dreams come in the service of health and wholeness; basically saying: there are no such things as bad dreams! But what of nightmares and other really scary or troubling dreams? The prevailing wisdom is that all dreams,

nightmares included, are a potential source for insight and information.

The nightmare is dream language for “PAY ATTENTION!” “THIS IS IMPORTANT!”

The third principle is that all dreams have multiple meanings that are simultaneously true. There is no such thing as a dream with only one meaning.

The 4th and final principle is that all dreams speak a universal language of metaphor and symbol. This principle is probably the most difficult to grasp. Jung divided the mind into three parts. The first part is that of personal consciousness. This is your personal field of awareness; your sense of what’s going on around you. Your mind has a second part, the personal unconscious, composed of your own personal events and experiences which have been absorbed subliminally. Much of the personal unconscious comes from childhood events that have been forgotten or traumatic events that have been repressed, and from the tacit effects of your upbringing and culture. The third part of the mind

is the collective unconscious – referred to earlier – composed of inherited elements, events and experiences which all humans share. Just as the human body has evolved, so, too, has the human mind or psyche. And held within the collective unconscious of your mind are the universal images and symbols of mankind's psychic evolution.

Dreams, then, are the language of the personal and the collective unconscious. The better we are able to understand the language – interpret the dream – the better we understand ourselves, both as individual and collective. And the better we understand ourselves the more completely we realize our human potential and can promote our continued forward psychological and spiritual evolution. Evolution is not just a physical event.

Now, with all this background information at our disposal, what might a dream session actually look like? The first step is the recounting of the dream. When a person recounts his or her dream, whether in a therapy session, a dream workshop, a training session or alone at

home, it is important that the content and sequence of events be as detailed as possible. Which room were you in? What color were the walls? Were there other people? Did you know any of them? Was there a car? Were you the driver? Every aspect of the dream has some meaning, some level of importance.

Incidentally, persons who do a significant amount of dream work tend to record their dreams in writing, often keeping a dream journal.

Dreams fade quickly and relying solely on your memory increases the likelihood of “contaminating” the dream. Contamination of the dream occurs when one tries to fill in forgotten fragments; adding items to the dream that make the dream flow better or make more sense. Although this type of dream “editing” is discouraged, in some psychotherapeutic settings what one has consciously or unconsciously chosen to add or subtract from a dream may have tremendous interpretive value!

After recounting the dream in detail, the dreamer is then asked about possible associations or, what are called “amplifications” of the various

dream details. For example, in his or her dream, the dreamer has recounted the attic, a childhood home, family portraits, a yard sale, some windows and mother. In this instance, the dreamer would be asked for all his potential associations with, first, the attic. Did he spend a lot of time in the attic? Was he afraid of the attic? Was the attic clean? Dirty? Dark? You get the gist; and this line of association would be used for each item in the dream – childhood home, family portraits, yard sale, and so on. After all the potential associations have been brought to light these associations are then placed against the backdrop, or context of the dreamer's life, current or past. Using our previous example, the dreamer would attempt to place the "attic" and all the attendant associations, into the context of his present or past life. It is here, once one begins to mesh or weave the multiple potential associations with the occurrences of the dreamer's everyday life that one begins to move towards an understanding or possible interpretation of the dream. An important caveat:

The question is frequently asked, what do the specific people that occur in our dreams represent? Are they visions of ourselves or simply other protagonists or antagonists in our own play? It is generally felt that each of these people represents some aspect of the dreamer's own psyche. An angry person, a kind person, a generous person, or a stingy person that occurs in our dreams gives us a glimpse of some aspect of ourselves that may need attention. However, if persons in the dream are very well known to the dreamer in waking life, these persons are more likely to represent themselves in the dream, but are clearly brought forth by the unconscious for some reason.

For those of you who have not yet entered REM sleep I thought it would be interesting to present a dream and render a potential interpretation of that dream. Much as I would have truly enjoyed soliciting a dream from one of tonight's attendees, using one of my own will have to suffice. The following is my dream:

I am standing in front of a rock formation. The rocks are arranged in such a way that they resemble a group of smooth stony platforms. The stony platforms are separated by small clefts filled with water. These clefts are able to be jumped over. I take several jumps and I stop on the last stone platform. I walk to its edge. Instead of a small cleft there is a long drop-off into a pool of very clear, deep water. I want to jump in but there are a few rocks at the water's edge; I would need a good running start and an heroic leap to clear the rocks and hit the water. Instead, I walk to the other side of the stone platform where I notice a grotto-like structure. I sit within the grotto, my back against the stone, looking out over all the other platforms. Suddenly, the entire grotto has begun to fall off the edge of the platform. I am now in a free fall within the grotto. I'm bracing myself to hit either the solid rocks or the water. In my fear, I am hoping for the water. The dream ends.

What are the potential associations that each of these dream items present? In real time this phase may take a while as although some

associations may come quickly, others may come only after a period of deep reflection. In the interest of time I have reduced my associations to a few for each of the salient items in the dream.

The first: smooth stone platforms separated by clefts. The chief associations that I had for these included:

Various stages in life from childhood to adulthood

Multiple academic fields of study

Various responsibilities/committees/obligations

Multiple theories/dogmas/schools of thought

Next: the pool of deep, clear water into which I wish to jump.

Associations for that included:

A new adventure or search for excitement

A leap into the unknown

A quest for new knowledge

I must interject at this point that water symbols in dreams are rather common, so much so that they can be considered “archetypal” symbols. An archetype is a dream symbol that is considered both ancient and universal, dwelling within the collective unconscious.

Other such archetypes include: mother images, father images, religious or tribal artefacts and images involving the sky or the sun. Water, as an archetype, reflects a sense of vastness, a sense of awesome breadth and depth. Moving on,

Next: the grotto in which I sit down, associations for that are:

A place of reflection or respite

A place of safety

A zone of “time out,” or waiting

And finally, the grotto begins to fall. Associations for that:

Frightful anticipation

Being out of control

Impending death or destruction

Unwanted change

Now the task is to place these associations against the backdrop of my present day context; what has been going on in my life. As I mentioned earlier, I’m retired from my primary occupation of Diagnostic Radiology and am seeking to transition to some other aspect of the healing arts.

In tendering an explanation or interpretation of my dream I surmised that the numerous platforms were likely stages of my personal and professional life that I had now left behind. The final stone platform on which I stood offered at least two choices. The first, the deep pool of water surrounded by the rocks, possibly represented any number of alternative careers or transitions, but each with its own risk. The second, the grotto, seemed to offer a sense of safety, retreat and reflection; and in the dream this is the choice I made. But all periods of reflection are “time limited” and, ready or not, Fortuna sought me out, even in the presumed safest of places, challenging me to “move on;” this represented by the free falling grotto.

Can I verify that such an interpretation is accurate? How does one know that an interpretation is correct? The answer involves a few more questions.

Does the interpretation or explanation “click” with the dreamer?

Does the interpretation provide a profound “A-HA” moment of revelation?

Has the interpretation allowed the dreamer to proceed with life a bit more comfortably, with less anxiety?

If the answer to any of these questions is “yes,” the dream interpretation can be considered to be verified. I am well aware that the hard scientists find this sort of verification non-quantifiable, and the entire dream work process fickle and subjective. And I will admit that much of this criticism has merit. But for me the only important question is: has dream work been a useful modality? For me, personally, yes. Is it a useful modality for everyone? My answer is a qualified “yes.” To the extent that you, as a sample of one, believe that your psyche or soul is on a lifelong mission of personal growth and individuation, to that same extent you will likely find dream work to be of value on that journey.

Everyone dreams. But whether you sense these dreams offer potential meaningful messages from your inner unconscious, or, simply your brain resetting its circuitry in anticipation of a new day, is entirely up to you. Gentlemen, sweet dreams!

Thank you

Resources/Bibliography

The Haden Institute, Dream Lecture Series, Jung Lecture Series. Much of this information is available on CD.

UNDERSTANDING DREAMS, Mary Ann Mattoon, 1978

THE WISDOM OF YOUR DREAMS, Jeremy Taylor, 1992

JUNG TO LIVE BY, Eugene Pascal, 1992

INNER WORK, Robert Johnson, 1986