

Dream Appreciation

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"I regard dreams as creative and aesthetic experiences that depict in the form of visual metaphors the present state of our connections and disconnections with the world about us."

The transformation process in dreams

By Montague Ullman, M.D.

Editor's note: This is based on a paper delivered at a Conference of Scientists with J. Krishnamurti and David Bohm at Brockwood Park in October, 1974. It is an adapted version of a paper original published in Revision, Vol. 2 No. 2, 1979.

I felt drawn to the theme of transformation as a consequence of three significant failures in my own life, which originally I thought were due to my own failings but were related to what I now think are the limitations of science.

We start out in this world as more or less undifferentiated globs of protoplasm and our task appears to be to evolve into a human being having a place in a complex technological society. If we shift to a metaphorical mode we are up to our collective necks in deep water when we consider the problems we face as a species. To save ourselves from going under we

reach out for support with only our right hand to grasp at what we think are a succession of solid structures.

This is the master hand, the hand that enables us to master nature, to see the world as object and deal with the world objectively. This is the hand of science as science has come to be practiced. There is an awareness of the existence of a left hand and, on occasion, it flails about in the water. It is not seen equal in strength and power to the right hand; rather, it is seen in a somewhat negative light. It is labelled the "sinister" hand and is simply regarded as not being the right hand. Using only the right hand we do achieve a differentiated state, but one that never quite gets us out of the water, so we continue to struggle against the forces tending to pull us under. Using both hands together in complementary fashion, however, would not only get us to that state of differentiation, but would also enable us to tackle the really important question of coming together on dry land in order to get on with the business of exploring and enjoying the universe.

End of metaphor.

The use of both hands in getting us out of the water can still be called a science, I sup-

pose, but it would be quite a bit different from the science we now know. It would move from its preoccupation with nature as object to be mastered to a concern with what it is that has been mastered; and conversely, what it is that has been omitted, i.e., the sensuous aspects of man and nature and the price paid for this one-sidedness in human terms.

There have been various ways of noting this duality apart from the right brain, left brain dichotomy implied in the metaphor — the way of science vs. the way of mysticism, the categorizing vs. the contextual mode of information processing. Others speak of objective knowledge vs. sensuous knowledge, or the active mode vs. the receptive mode. The terminology I find most congenial is borrowed from the formulations of Andras Angyal, a psychiatrist who should be better known than he is. Angyal characterized the two essential trends in the human organism as the striving for autonomy, i.e., the self-organizing, self-enhancing, self-determining tendencies, and the striving for homonomy, by which he meant the need to relate to and feel a part of a larger whole.

The methods of objective science appear to have evolved
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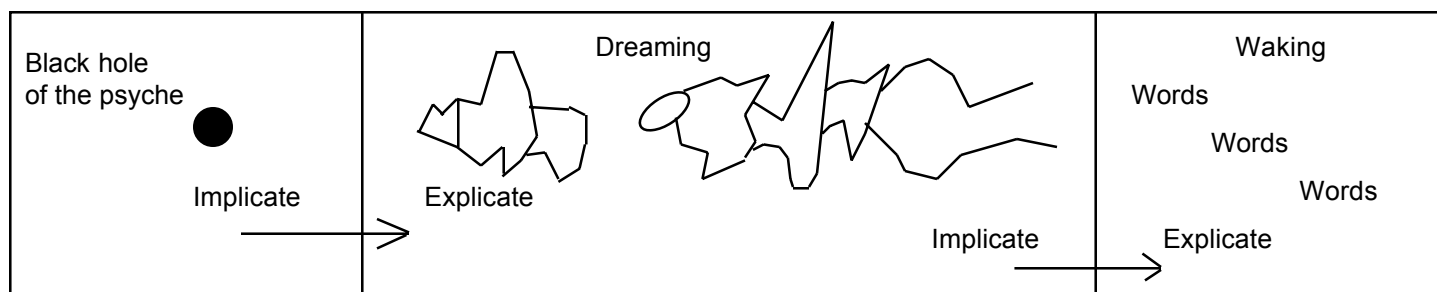
The transformation process in dreams –

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in connection with the former, whereas our capacity for love and our aesthetic expression seem more related to the latter. My point is that science has paid too little attention to man's homonomous needs and there are too few psychoanalysts around to pick up the pieces.

beginning trends in this direction, i.e., R.D. Laing's effort to provide a total environment at Kingsley Hall, Maxwell Jones in his evolution of the therapeutic community at Dingleton Hospital in Scotland and now, in the States among the young, a movement known as radical therapy.

The result, of course, was that I felt impelled to build a special psychic closet in which to house this particular skeleton. Only in recent years, in response to a changing scientific ambience, have I gently opened the door. Some day it may be possible to transform the skeleton into a full-bodied creature, able to walk

caping Freud's container. Without going into details of an alternate theory of dreaming, let me emphasize that I regard dreams as creative and aesthetic experiences that depict in the form of visual metaphors the present state of our connections and disconnections with the world about us.



The three areas of failure I referred to earlier are ones where the scientific method should presumably work, but where in my experience it falls somewhat short of the mark. In each instance my feeling is that the failure is traceable not to the flaws of the scientific method, but to the lack of an effective complementary approach.

Shortcomings

Failure #1 is the general field of psychiatry. I am a psychiatrist by profession. A significant transformation occurred in my life when I began to realize that psychiatry was not a part-time affair, that its practice was more of an art than a science and, as such, it demanded a total commitment and that the level at which one pursued it could not be divorced from the life style of its practitioners.

I will not go into the evidence in support of this except to call your attention to several

Failure #2 has to do with the longest, unsuccessful courtship in history — the near century old effort on the part of a handful of serious scientists and scholars of all kinds, interested in psychic phenomena, to woo the interest and acceptance of the scientific establishment so that the romance could be legitimized and ultimately consummated.

While still in college I discovered that men like William Crookes, William James, Charles Richet, Oliver Lodge and Henri Bergson, to name just a few, took a serious interest in what was then called psychical research. At that same time, add the fact that in the course of experimenting over a period of two years with some fellow students I came upon what I felt were rather remarkable and genuine paranormal phenomena, and you have what, for a young person, were the makings of a terrible dilemma.

out of the closet by itself.*

The final failure was linked to, perhaps, the most profound realization of my professional life. It was my realization that Freud's theory of dreams was wrong. Lest this sound both immodest and disrespectful, let me hasten to add that his was a magnificent theory, richly presented, and it was the first to call attention to the therapeutically useful features of dreams. Freud, in my opinion, in his determination to build a scientific psychology, approached dreams through the wrong mode. It was like trying to pick up a mixture of water and solids with a sieve. Much is lost in the process.

Unfortunately, the very magnificence of Freud's work cast a long, paralyzing shadow on the subject for well over 50 years, although Jung and others did sense a little of the nature of the essence that was es-

* Anyone interested in a full account of these experiences, please call Monte at (914) 693-0156.

understanding what it is, how it occurs

dered as best we can in time and space. These are the visual images that make up the dream as depicted by the various shapes in the figure. The information is still highly condensed, less so than formerly, and is spread out before us.

A second transformation occurs when we reach the waking state. Here we try to transform this private experience into a public mode. This requires a further unfolding of the information contained in the images and the translation of this information into a public medium of exchange, namely language. Here is where we get into trouble because the information goes beyond what can be conveyed in a discursive mode. Much of the information is more readily felt than described. Moreover, the engagement with the information at a feeling level is an experiment in growth. That black hole contains within it our personal expanding universe and we do both ourselves and the universe an injustice when we try to reduce it to a play of instincts.

Comments by the distinguished physicist David Bohm have provided me with a language fitting to this process. I am referring to his concept of the successive transformations that go on between an implicate or hidden order and an explicate or known order of reality. What is implicate at one stage becomes explicate in the next stage through a process of unfolding, and what is explicate at this stage becomes implicate for the next stage.

If we use dreams simply as illustrative of a broader

range of phenomena, unattended to or inadequately attended to by the present focus of scientific inquiry, the four general features of these phenomena emerge:

1. They are more readily appreciated than interpreted. Psychiatrists should

Someone once remarked, our eyes may be regarded as the means nature created in order to see itself. Analogously, our dreams may be viewed as instruments that can enable a given social order to see itself, along with its distortions, as reflected unconsciously in one of its own creations.

have courses in dream appreciation rather than dream interpretation.

2. They share with all aesthetic experiences the quality of transcending space and time.

3. Their specific domain is the connective tissue between people, the underlying matrix of human existence, the sense of contact or contactlessness between people.

4. They are all in one way or another the creative embodiment of unpremeditated responses to novelty. Dreams provide us with perhaps our most familiar experience with this in the way our dreams rearrange appropriate, socially derived images to express subjective events.

What is the agency that provides this unending source of unerringly apt visual metaphors? I don't think we honestly know the answer to this

question, but I do know how easy it is to gloss over our ignorance by attributing the whole works to some reified, internal demon, variously known as Primary Process, our Unconscious, or simply, our Id.

Perhaps a prior question would be, what is the nature of

the process involved in the selection and organization of the visual images with which we build the content of our dream consciousness?

If we look at the process simply, it is one without an allegiance to any particular metapsychological theory. We seem to be involved in a rather intriguing process. We seem able to bring together a selected array of bits and pieces of our past history and then to rearrange these data in a way that bears no relationship to their original time-space frame of reference, but which enables them rather precisely, dramatically and effectively to express the particular interplay of feelings mobilized by a current unresolved life situation.

We cannot understand the level and range of creativity displayed in this manner as having its source in the individual alone. It has to be understood as a function of the individual and society. The dream comes about because, in

the interest of reaching out toward this sense of unity, each of us has tuned our psyche to an exquisitely sensitive pitch with a capacity to link past and present discord in our lives and to register every possible feeling from passion to prejudice. The world endlessly nourishes and replenishes our creative juices, although for some of us they gain expression only at night, and for all of us they are far more discerningly honest at night.

Dreams and social reality

Social reality makes a significant contribution to our dreams. It provides us with the very special kinds of building blocks it takes to capture and express one or another aspect of our subjective life. When you stop to think about it, it takes a rather high level of creative and organizational ability to tap our own internal computer for the appropriate bits with which to solve the puzzle and then to rearrange them in a way that makes sense as a kind of emotional template, highlighting a problematic aspect of our immediate experience.

Having gone this far, we are almost forced to admit that the powers displayed by our dreaming selves far exceed the scope of our waking faculties. The comparison is, of course, unfair, since each is supreme in its own domain. One is not better than the other; each is a powerful way of grasping different aspects of our existence.

Our problem is that we have paid more attention to the one than to the other. This

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DREAMWORKERS' CORNER

Working with the dream group process

The part of the process that requires the greatest skill and is most difficult for the beginner to master is the dialogue that begins at the dreamer's invitation following his or her response to Stage II where the group has worked with the dream as their own. There are three substages to this stage, namely the:

- search for content
- playback
- orchestrating projections

I will consider the first two in this issue. The questions to be put to the dreamer are instruments we give to the dreamer in the hope they are useful in exploring his or her psyche and in that way can begin to close the gap between dream image and waking reality. The cardinal rule is that all questions are framed in the

simplest open-ended way possible and that leading questions are taboo. The main thing to remember is that the imagery arises out of the unique life history of a unique individual and it is our task through the questions we ask to facilitate the flow of thoughts and feelings of the dreamer in a way that culminates in a full sense of the metaphorical power of the image to capture the emotional currents in play at the time of the dream.

These principles pertain even though the types of questions asked in each of the two substages are quite different.

Search for content

In the search for context our goal is to help the dreamer recreate to the extent possible, given the amount of time that

has passed since the dream occurred, what might be called the recent emotional diary of the dreamer's life. By that I mean we try, by our questions, to help the dreamer recall the concerns and preoccupations that surfaced the night the dream occurred. We are trying to uncover what experiences that day, that night, or the past several days before the dream left any feeling residues in its wake. This includes anything in his or her private life, work life, exposure to the media, etc.

At this point our questions are asked *as if the dream didn't exist for us, the members of the group*. Our questions are not based on the imagery of the dream. They are not asked so we can satisfy our curiosity about why a certain image was used. They are designed with the single goal in mind of focusing on the dreamer's inner life and recapturing feelings and concerns arising in the days before the dream.

The dreamer, of course, is free to go anywhere with the questions, including a concern with whatever light a question sheds on the dream. The error group members tend to make is to start with an image in the dream and ask if anything happened that night or recently that might explain that image.

The playback

Our concern with helping the dreamer connect to the

dream imagery comes into play in a focused and systematic way in the next substage, the playback. Here the dream is read back aloud scene by scene by various members of the group. This is when the dreamer is confronted with the imagery of the dream and is now invited to review what has thus far been shared with the group to see whether or not any further thoughts or associations occur that might shed light on why a particular image was chosen to appear in a dream that night.

This sounds easy but it takes skill to help a dreamer recall not only the facts of a given experience, but to also search for the feelings associated with that fact. This is the time when we are focusing on the dream and on every detail in it. It is a kind of quiet but firm confrontation of the dreamer with the dream in the hope we can jog loose a further flow of associations.

The most frequent error here is to ask leading questions to confirm one's own feeling about a connection between something the dreamer said and an image or scene in the dream. We leave the question of making connections (at least at this stage) up to the dreamer. Again, our goal is to help the dreamer focus as freely and as openly as possible on what spontaneously comes forth once a simple open-ended question is asked pertaining to the images in the dream. —**Monte Ullman**

Transformation process

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view of our dream suggests that we are capable of looking quite deeply into the face of reality and of seeing mirrored in that face the most subtle and poignant features of our constant struggle to transcend our own personal, limited, self-contained, autonomous self so as to better be able to connect with and be part of a larger unity.

Someone once remarked, our eyes may be regarded as the means nature created in order to see itself. Analogously, our dreams may be viewed as instruments that can enable a given social order to

see itself, along with its distortions, as reflected unconsciously in one of its own creations. We have in our hands a tool for both personal and social transformation.

The information available to us in our dreams, if identified and worked with, provides the self with enormously powerful tools with which to effect both personal change and social change. Any system, including a given personality system, becomes more than it conceives itself to be when these connecting channels to a larger reality are exposed through working with dreams. □

'Appreciating Dreams' celebrates art of dreamwork

By Montague Ullman, M.D.

Anyone who reads *Appreciating Dreams* by Dr. Montague Ullman has to respect the decades of work that provide the foundation for his writing. This is not some "pop" psychology neatly packaged and marketed to capitalize on the growing interest in dreams and boost ratings on the hottest talk show. Nor is it stuffy and pedantic in the tradition of some psychoanalytic literature.

Monte calls himself a "recovering psychoanalyst" and, while having a full appreciation for the role of psychotherapy, he also understands the importance of moving dream work beyond the psychoanalyst's couch and into our daily lives. Dreams are healing and, as Monte points out, dreams are one way for people to participate in the growing trend of taking more responsibility for one's own state of well-being.

This book celebrates the fact that everyone dreams and provides a safe and effective way everyone can access their dreams through a supportive group process. *Appreciating Dreams* accepts the premise that dreams represent the honest, incorruptible core of our being and details a method of socializing the dream and allowing it to be understood for the personally crafted communication it is.

The process, which Monte has meticulously structured and fine-tuned, is based on the rationale that dreams come from a very private part

of our psyche and the best way to get at that private area is by "going public" with the dream. To facilitate this, the process provides guidelines to ensure the complete safety of the dreamer at all times. As Monte says, there is an "inverse ratio between lowering defenses and seeing more." The process progresses through a series of stages designed to help the dreamer discover what the dream is trying to communicate.

The book explains every aspect of the process in a clear and insightful way. More than the basics, it meticulously gives you the tools you need to understand and use the process if you are a beginner or to "fine tune" your skills if you are familiar with the process.

You will learn some basic rules—both breakable and inviolable—concerns and problems that may arise, mistakes people in the group may make with all good intent, and issues to consider.

There are many more facets of the book that are a delight to anyone seriously interested in pursuing the messages dreams send. There are nuances about the process. There are practical pointers about how to keep a group on course. There are do's and don't's such as appropriate and inappropriate questions. And, of course, there are dreams to illustrate the points.

In addition to explaining each stage of the process in detail, the book has separate chapters which explore the

process from varying points of view—the dreamer, the leader and other group participants. There is special emphasis on the leadership role with information anyone leading a group should know. One section I found particularly helpful included tips about the first session with a new group and how to handle problems that might arise with people new to the process.

This volume is a treasure trove for dreamers. Even if you have taken Monte's leadership workshops, been in one of his groups or led groups using his method, you will find your understanding of the process deeply enriched by this book. This volume is one that will undoubtedly become well-

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Leadership Training Workshop

A Leadership Training Workshop in group dream work will take place at Monte's home in October. 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 one of Monte's Leadership Workshops before, this can be a helpful way to "fine tune" the process.

DATE: Oct. 25, 26 and 27

55 Orlando Ave.

Ardsey, New York

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 if you are interested in future workshops.

Ardsey dream group may reopen

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

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thumbed and marked by serious dreamers as they refer to specific sections time and again to clarify or reinforce aspects of the process.

As much as I enjoyed the body of the book which addressed the group dream work process, I was equally as intrigued by the chapters toward the end. Here Monte shares some of his thoughts on topics such as dreams and healing,

dream appreciation and therapy, and the future of dream work. Still more insights are tucked away in the epilogue and appendix which include sections on topics such as dreaming and species survival, and dreaming and the paranormal.

In the past I have experienced dream groups which used other methods or abbreviated forms of this method. They tended to leave the

dreamers feeling defensive and unfulfilled. Monte's process, on the other hand, leaves the

dreamer feeling empowered.

Monte often describes his process as "dream midwifery" and indeed it is as it guides a dreamer through the labor pains of self-examination to the birth of a new understanding of self. I suspect his years of developing and working with this process have been the labor of love necessary for him to give birth to this rich volume which in turn can serve as midwife to many other dreamers.

For more information about *Appreciating Dreams* contact Sage Publications at 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320-2218. Phone is (805) 499-9774; fax number is (805) 499-0871; and E-mail is "order@sagepub.com"□

E-mail address now available

Yes readers, we finally have an e-mail address. It is:

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Thanks to all of you who have written, faxed or called. Now you can e-mail us, too.

If you got on the mailing list late and need back issues — or if you have changed your address — let us know!

If you have questions about Monte's group process, let us hear them. If you have ideas for future issues — share them! Keep those comments coming!

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. Our new e-mail address is "dreams@chesco.com".

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