

# Dream Appreciation

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**Where does the creative energy come from that shapes the images in a dream and puts them together in a story that speaks so specifically, so eloquently, so honestly and so effectively to where we are subjectively at the moment?**

## THE ENDURING MYSTERIES OF DREAMS

By MONTAGUE ULLMAN, M.D.

An organization came into being in Sweden in 1990 with the dual purpose of training leaders in the experiential dream group process I had initiated there 26 years ago and with the equally important goal of raising the level of interest and understanding about dreams in the community. It was called the *Drömgruppsforum* (Dream Group Forum). I attended a meeting in Växjö April 28-30 to celebrate the organization's tenth anniversary. More than 100 people attended the scientific sessions which included five formal presentations and a day of workshops. I gave two presentations, one of which was a theoretical paper outlining my thoughts on the nature of dreaming consciousness. The following are excerpts from that presentation.

— Monte

What has always surprised me is the extent to which we take our dream life for granted, completely oblivious to the remarkable and still quite mysterious qualities of dreaming consciousness. It is their very mysteriousness that has been covered by theoretical formulations that seem to account for the clinical usefulness of dreams, but fail to come to

terms with any of the mysteries I will set before you. Modern psychoanalysis has tempered drive theory or even, in some views, eliminated it completely. It is one thing to arrive at a more sophisticated adaptational view of dreaming, but another to give a coherent account of the basic features of the dream, namely, its biologically initiated cyclical appearance during sleep in a sensory-based presentational mode, its ability to expose the connection of current feelings to the past and its truth telling capacity that goes beyond what we are capable of while awake.

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In our everyday work with dreams, we are in the same situation as the physicist who, in his work,

uses the equations of quantum mechanics with spectacular success while seemingly oblivious to the fact that the underlying implications of the basic concepts that led to these equations raise new and very puzzling questions about the nature of reality in general, and more specifically, our relationship to a world the objective nature of which is taken for granted.

I am simply going to offer my own point of view, a view originating in my psychoanalytic practice and supported and deepened by nearly three decades of group work with dreams. The conclusion I came to is captured in the title of a book written by Paul Bjerre in 1933, *Drömmarnas naturliga*

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#### Note:

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system (Dreams as a Natural Healing System) and re-published in 1982 as *Drömmarnas helande kraft* (The Healing Power of Dreams). If we combine the titles I think we have the basis for understanding a framework for re-evaluating all that we know so far about dreaming. To make a case for dreaming as a natural healing system, we would have to see what it has in common with the other natural healing systems we are endowed with, such as the immune, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, muscular and central nervous systems.

1. All systems face in two directions: internally to meet the bodily needs of the organism and externally to regulate those needs in response to one's experience in a world that extends beyond the body's borders.

2. Bodily systems each have a unique structure and function. The endocrine system is made up of glands, the function of which is to secrete the hormones necessary to both maintain an optimal internal milieu and respond to emerging demands. Our dreams have a neurological substrate at both a cortical and subcortical level. The interplay between these two levels modulates the level of arousal. Where there are adequate resources to deal

with the tension involved, the state of arousal terminates naturally and sleep continues. Where the stress of tension is too great, awakening occurs. The "secretions" of this noctur-

understanding of the dream itself. It is as if in the discovery of the insulin-secreting function of the pancreas all our attention focused on the Langerhan cells where the insulin was formed, and

intake, nor do we consciously direct red blood cells and platelets to do their thing when bleeding occurs.

Analogously, our dreams "digest" residual feelings triggered by recent events and evaluate them in regard to their significance for our future. It does this by opening up our remote memory bank and exploring the degree to which a current concern links up with unresolved tensions in our past. Dreams arise spontaneously and involuntarily. No one can consciously decide to have a particular dream or consciously design the opening scene.

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***To make a case for dreaming as a natural healing system, we would have to see what it has in common with the other natural healing systems we are endowed with, such as the immune, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, muscular and central nervous systems.***

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nal organ of consciousness is the imagery that results.

3. What dreaming consciousness as a system would then have in common with all other systems is that it serves the survival needs of the organism which in turn is the precondition for the survival of the species. Dreaming then is just as essential to our psychological life as the enzymes secreted by the gastrointestinal system are to digestion. We don't accord it that degree of importance, but that is *our* problem.

Earlier societies were more respectful of the dream. Even in the current era where we have turned our attention to fine tuning our knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of dreaming, there has not been a commensurate advance in the depth of our

very little to the functional importance of the insulin itself to the organism.

The secretions of our bodily organs work their magic in their own way and can be explored chemically. The magic of the dream is the production of symbolic imagery which can be explored by uncovering the emotional content. The point is that, as in the case with any other system, our dreams operate in the service of the survival of the individual.

4. Most bodily systems function at an unconscious level. So do our dreams. They arise out of an unconscious domain and function in an involuntary spontaneous manner to meet normal and abnormal organismic needs. We don't command our digestive systems to respond to our food

Two questions arise at this point. How does the imagery in our dreams come about and how does it serve a survival function? The first is that dreaming as a primitive mode of thought may have anteceded self-reflective waking consciousness. In the course of becoming symbol-making animals, we simply transformed this basic imaging mode into a vehicle for expressing in a most wondrously condensed form the tensions that arise in our more complex symbol-driven lives. After all, a single picture can capture more than a thousand words.

Regardless of how the presentational mode came about, the more interesting question is how the imagery now serves a healing pur-

pose and in that way relates to the survival of our species. At night, while dreaming, we are in the business of manufacturing visual metaphors. Metaphor is our uniquely human way of expressing feelings that are rising up within us but are not yet clearly conceptualized. We are expressing feelings in their continuity with the past.

The images of the dream are not static. They are metaphors in motion. They tell a story which, in a very creative way, speaks to where we are subjectively at a given moment in our lives. That is all they do. They are not there to argue with us, tell us what to do, make us feel good or bad about ourselves. It is the task of our waking ego to free up the feelings embedded in the imagery and thus spark across the metaphorical gap between image and reality.

Feelings are emotional connective tissue supporting the fabric of our social existence. The feelings embedded in the imagery are authentic. When they come to life in the working out of the dream, they deepen our bonds to each other. Awake we often play games with our feelings. We brush them aside, suppress them or express them in ways that are inappropriate to the situation. They then become manifest in what I refer to as inauthentic feelings (e.g.,

neurotic guilt in contrast to genuine remorse). They maintain distance rather than furthering closeness.

I have referred to the dream image as creative in its origin, authentic in its nature, connective in its effect. All are key to understanding dreams and require further elaboration.

Let us consider the question of creativity first. When a dream is worked through in a dream group, I am left with a sense of awe. One of the mysteries is: Where does the creative energy come from that shapes the images in a dream and puts them together in a story that speaks so specifically, so eloquently, so honestly and so effectively to where we are subjectively at the moment?

I believe that the creativity displayed in our dream life derives from the same source of creativity we commonly associate with art and science. In other words, I use the term to include an innate capacity we all have and use asleep to confront ourselves in our dreams with the flux and movement in our inner affective world. It goes beyond the usual limitation of the term to its manifestation in art and science. Asleep or awake, its essence is the unconscious spontaneously inventive response to novelty. By novelty I mean the unending new choices our

objective existence confronts us with awake. It is the ever present feature of the dream, even in the most seemingly banal dreams.

There are times in a dream-sharing group when, by the end of the session when the dream has been worked through, I am overwhelmed by the level of creative thought that crafted the imagery and the story that unfolded. In the spontaneity and raw talent that is involved, it far surpasses anything a painter does if he consciously set out to capture on canvas the complex interplay of the emotional currents within him at a given moment. So many of us go through life unaware of this never-ending creative flow we call upon every night.

The creative impulse in its most specialized manifestation is in the work of art. The artist transforms feelings into something new in the world that is meaningful to others as well as himself or herself. The creative impulse is at work nightly in our dreams where feelings are transformed into unique images meaningful to the dreamer. The artist awake creates a felt connection to the world at large. The dreamer creates an authentic felt connection to himself or herself.

The more unrecognized but universal manifestation of our innate creativity is what might be called the practice of love. This is where bonds between the self and others deepen and grow through inventive and

### **LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAM**

A Leadership Training Workshop in group dream work will take place at Monte's home October 27-29. This experiential three-day workshop 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: October 27, 28, 29

PLACE: 55 Orlando Ave.  
Ardsey, New York 10502

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

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growth-enhancing responses to the uniqueness of the other. In the practice of loving, the creative impulse is directed to the task of building an ever-deepening and ultimately indestructible connection to the other.

The authenticity to be found in art, dreams and love have in common a deepening of the sense of connectedness to the self, to others and to the world at large. Art is creativity in the public domain. Love is creativity in the interpersonal domain.

If creativity is the first feature of the dream, then the second prominent feature is the way that creativity is put in the service of revealing truths about ourselves that have not yet surfaced in waking life. Our dreaming psyche is that part of ourselves that is constantly and insistently in touch with the reality of our feelings. It is fundamentally a truth-telling mechanism, a hangover from our mammalian heritage where a false move could expose primitive man to predatory danger. Perceptual accuracy was essential. There was no room for self-deception, perhaps even no ability for it. Once we made the move from being a creature living in the wild to inhabitants of a complex social world which has not yet solved the problem of survival through social evolution, the capacity

for self-deception came prominently into focus.

Freud recognized the unconscious as a container of the truth, but his meta-psychology as it pertained to

d r e a m s placed that truth in opposition to the ego. Jung was closer to t h e m a r k when he said in reference to the dream, "So flower-like in its innocence, it puts us to shame for the deceitfulness of our lives." Both men came at the healing potential of the dream but in very different ways — Freud by unraveling what the dream censor was suppressing and Jung by what the dream was trying to say overtly through its manifest content.

Whereas our fellow creatures living in the wild had to rely on perceptual accuracy to keep them out of trouble, we have had to rely on our conceptual awareness of what is going on around us to enable us to avoid unintended consequences of our actions. There isn't much room for error in the case of animals. Their lives are often at stake if their perceptions deceive them. We, on the other

hand, rely more on our capacity to conceptualize the situation we are in and that, unfortunately, leaves much room for self-deception.

Too many Germans

saw Hitler as the savior who would salvage German pride. The unintended consequences that ultimately followed are painful testimony to the incredible level of self-deception possible in a

modern state. It should be a lesson for all of us.

A false consciousness, one based on false conceptions, leaves us vulnerable. Animals only have their life to lose if they misperceive reality. We have our integrity as human beings to lose if we misconceptualize reality. Denying truth at a conscious level never destroys that truth. It simply resurfaces in our dreams.

Dreams are truth-telling confrontations. In an imaginative metaphorical way, they call attention to a bit of reality that has not been given its just due. In the modern idiom, the dream tells it like it is, not what we would like it to be.

In short, the truth-tell-

ing orientation of dreaming consciousness is the result of the transformation of physical vigilance to social vigilance, where vigilance becomes the orientation to social reality. This implies the need not only to recognize what is new, but also to respond to it as new. That is where the creative impulse comes in. Creativity and truth-telling are the tools always at hand in our dreams. Unfortunately, they are not always available while awake.

So much for the authenticity to be found in our dreams. The third word I have used in describing our nocturnal existence is connectedness. Implicit in what I have said so far is the assumption that our innate creativity and the incorruptible core of our being that filters our truth from falsity, are gifts which, if used properly, make for richer and more real connections to others. Bertrand Russell once said, "The rational unites. The irrational separates us." Our dreams know the difference.

A flawed society both generates and maintains a flawed (waking) consciousness. It also takes a toll on our own self-respect when it facilitates expediency at the expense of honesty. Bias, expediency and ignorance limit, distort, and make for a false consciousness and fur-

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*DREAMWORKERS' CORNER*

## **THE BIRTH OF DREAM GROUP FORUM**

**By KERSTIN ANDERSSON**

In 1980 I invited Monte Ullman to St. Sigfrid's Hospital in Växjö for a three-day workshop with the staff there and also for a course during the weekend with 150 participants from the all of Sweden. It was the first time I met Monte, but I had heard of him and his method from friends in Stockholm. For me and for many others, this meeting led to a deep friendship and a fascination with his method.

For many years Monte came to Sweden regularly twice a year for five to six weeks each time. He travelled extensively here, training leaders and forming dream groups. He was the connecting link between these "dream islands." In time his visits to Sweden became shorter and less frequent, first to once a year and then to every second year. The question was raised as to whether we could go on ourselves, keeping his method alive in a form where it would not be misused and training new leaders.

Monte and I talked many times about this. Monte did not want the training to be too formal. But periodically we observed that individuals

were starting groups without the necessary training while still presenting themselves as trained by Monte even after only one or two days in his group. We then understood that an organization, which could take care of the training of new leaders and refer those interested in working with dreams to good and well-trained leaders, was a necessary development.

Monte was the only one who knew those who had worked with dreams in Sweden and who could evaluate those skilled in handling his method. He kept giving me names of persons he considered to be competent leaders. So, when the idea of an organization occurred to us, I had a list of 35 people approved by Monte as dream group leaders.

One day during Monte's spring visit in 1988, we sat for many hours talking about guidelines and principles for the organization. We agreed that a working group with six or seven persons representing different parts of Sweden was necessary to get things started. This group met in Stockholm for the first time in October, 1988. We worked intensely and prepared pro-

posals for a training program to present at a meeting of the entire group in Stockholm in January, 1990. Of the leaders, 30 of the 35 were interested in the idea of an organization. At the first meeting 24 persons participated. There were many differing opinions and feelings regarding the nature of the organization. However, we managed to pass a mandate to continue working towards forming an organization. At the next meeting of the founding group in August, 1990, the Drömgruppsforum was founded.

Until 1999, only leaders and those involved in leadership training were admitted to the Drömgruppsforum, but now the organization is open to everyone interested in dreams and in sharing our goal.

The aim of the Drömgruppsforum is to preserve and protect the method, established by Monte Ullman, to train new leaders, and to extend knowledge and information about dreams into the community.

It has not been easy to find an extensive way to train new leaders and be sure that they were ad-

equately skilled without being "institutional." We began with leadership training seminars in the way modelled by Monte. When a candidate starts to lead a group, we choose a supervisor for that candidate who will follow the dreamwork done by this person until he or she can be approved as a leader.

Presently, Drömgruppsforum has 93 members, including Monte as honorary President. Of these members, 44 are approved leaders, 29 trained by Monte and 15 by us. In April we celebrated our 10th anniversary with a three-day conference in Växjö where Monte was present. We are looking forward to the new decade.

The method Monte has created has been successful in Sweden. When it first appeared many had been hurt by the confrontational methods that had flourished during the 1970s. As a consequence, confidence in psychotherapeutic methods was very low. In contrast, this non-intrusive and respectful method provided a positive, healing experience.

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1990-2000

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ther disconnects. Aspects of these as they are touched upon in daily life are the psychological toxins that our dreaming consciousness seizes upon.

With our waking consciousness we negotiate our way in the world. Our dreaming consciousness reflects back to us how well we are doing from a truly human, truly honest, truly ethical point of view. For each of us to possess a gift like that and for society to remain blissfully unaware of it, strikes me as one of the wrong turns we have taken. Non-literate societies found a way to integrate dream life and waking life. We, who pride ourselves on our

level of psychological sophistication and scientific accomplishment, have failed to make this useful linkage.

Up to this point I have emphasized the general features of the unconscious domain viewed from the perspective that it is a natural healing system, geared as are all systems to the survival of the individual and the species. That healing function is realized through three special attributes:

- its capacity to creatively respond to novelty
- its concern with the state of connectedness to ourselves and others
- its capacity to discern truths that escape us while awake

Akin to an aesthetic experience, all of us have within us a musician endowed with perfect pitch who knows when we are singing off key and has no hesitation in calling it to our attention. He doesn't persuade or preach. He simply

presents. It's up to us to act on it. That way lies emotional growth. In the case of the dream, the right notes do not come through until the metaphorical content is heard by the dreamer awake.



*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](mailto:dreams@kennett.net).

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

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