

# Dream Appreciation

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*"For too long we have lost sight of the reality that the healing potential of our dreams extends beyond the confines of the consulting room."*

## **The art of helping the dreamer**

*By Montague Ullman, M.D.*

I am grateful to Wendy Panier for initiating this newsletter. When Wendy first proposed the idea, it struck me as a most timely way of keeping in touch with those who have worked with me over the years and who share the point of view about dreams and dream work as first set forth by Nan Zimmerman and myself in our book, *Working with Dreams* many years ago.

Although the principles have remained the same, the process itself has evolved over time and hopefully will continue to evolve. In referring to this process as *Dream Appreciation* I am emphasizing the fact that it is a non-clinical way of teaching the *art* of helping the dreamer engage with his or her own dream. From the very beginning the process has been bi-directional. It has pointed to the general community and has provided an interested public with a safe and ef-

fective approach to a deeper understanding of the healing potential of dreams. It has proven equally effective in providing psychotherapists with a "hands-on" approach to working with the dreams of patients.

### **Reaching out to dreamers**

Having a regular way of communicating with each other through this newsletter can meet a number of needs. It will enable me to share with you what I continue to learn about dreams and how to work with them. It will also provide a forum for sharing your experiences with dreams, particularly if you have gone on to organize dream groups of your own.

During the two decades I have been working with dream groups in this country, several hundred people have had at least one three-day leadership training session with me, some have had many more and a certain (unknown) number have gone on to conduct groups of their own. Others have put their interest in dreams on the back burner because of other pressures and new pursuits.

By reaching out to those who have worked with me, I hope this newsletter will help keep their interest alive and, should they be conducting groups, provide them with a vehicle for sharing the problems they have encountered.

### **Growing popularity of dreams**

Over the past 10 years or so there has been a resurgence of interest in dreams by the general public. More so than ever in the past, the current scene is characterized by the plethora of books addressed to the public, efforts at networking stimulated by *The Network: A Journal of Dreams and Myth*, and the appearance of a new organization, the Association for the Study of Dreams, with membership open to anyone.

There is also a beginning educational thrust in the form of college courses on dreams, increasing popularity of dream workshops at the various growth centers and, finally, a relatively new phenomenon—the proliferation of dream sharing groups. The only surprising thing about all this is that it has taken so long, in western society at least, for dreams to come out of the closet.

This is all the more remarkable when you consider the pictorial metaphorical language of the dream is the only language shared universally by every member of our species. For too long we have lost sight of the reality that the healing potential of our dreams extends beyond the confines of the consulting room. We have remained unaware of the creative

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**Coming next issue:** Key concepts people should know about group dream work

## Ullman on the art of helping the dreamer

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core within each of us that, under cover of darkness, gives rise in our dreams to images that speak so specifically and often aesthetically to significant issues in our lives.

There is still much mystery as to how all this came about. An unfortunate consequence of Freud's monumental volume on dreams, which was so original and so all-encompassing at the time, was that it seemed to offer a theoretical approach to dreams that denuded them of their mystery. The experimental studies beginning the 1950s on REM sleep raised new questions about the nature and function of dreams and their phylogenetic origin. About the same time, the gestalt approach of Fritz Perls and the writings of Carl Jung and other theorists opened refreshingly new lines of inquiry and practice.

### Value of group dream work

Whatever the underlying social factors were that formed this development, it has come at a most opportune time. If group dream work helps us unload some of the constraining emotional baggage we all carry, as I believe it does, we become all the better for having gained a deeper understanding of ourselves and others. After all, it's people and what they do to and with each other that shapes and reshapes the world we live in.

Without underestimating the enormous obstacles to be overcome, our dreaming consciousness, were we to become better acquainted with it on a larger scale, might edge us closer to the goal of a better

world. By socializing our dreams through dream sharing, incremental changes, both large and small, ultimately result in changes in our social behavior. When we become more tolerant of ourselves we

you are having as you work with dreams in groups, on your own or in clinical practice.

Using a question and answer format, I will try to address any questions concerning the process and your expe-

are times when our concerns and aspects of our experience seem to touch on this domain.

What are the markers that point to each of these domains? There is still much to learn about the first two—the biological and the personal. The social is almost virgin territory. How do we recognize the social referents in a dream and even more important, how do we put that knowledge to work in a practical way? I would also like to share my continuing interest in the paranormal dream—the telepathic dream where we seem to pick up non-inferable information across space and the precognitive dream where we similarly pick up information across time.

These are some of the items on my agenda. As you see, they touch on the continuing mysteries of our dreams. Each of you is invited to draw up your own agenda as to where your interest in dreams has taken you.

### Dream awareness our goal

I assume our common goal is to raise the nearly non-existent priority of dreams in our society to a more visible level. After spending much time teaching about dreams in Sweden over the past two decades, I am happy to report that it is beginning to happen there. There are now dream groups in most of the major cities, a national society which trains future dream group leaders and interest even on the part of a member of the Swedish Parliament in the preventive aspects of dream sharing groups. More about this in future issues. □

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When we share dreams we engage in a most spontaneous and profoundly honest exposure to others. As we become better known to others we become better known to ourselves. It takes courage to present ourselves to others in this way. It's amazing what this kind of courage can do for self-esteem. It more than makes up for any warts that are exposed in the course of doing so. Becoming known to others in this way is the essential ingredient to emotional healing. In dream sharing groups we become healers for each other. It's a very satisfying feeling.

### Reader participation invited

Our communications through this newsletter can go in many directions. Expect some period of experimentation before we come to the most useful format. The participation of our readers will greatly benefit its effectiveness. I have much to share and much to learn from the experiences

with it.

I also intend to contribute regularly and to share thoughts that come from my ongoing experience and reading. Most of that experience has to do with the way the personal psychological domain of our lives surfaces in our dreams. Our dreams, however, have access at times to the other three domains of our existence:

- the biological domain where dreams may reflect bodily changes before there is conscious awareness of them;
- the social domain where the institutions we have created continue to impact our lives and how the imagery we create reflects such influence;
- and finally, that most mysterious dimension, the one that goes beyond the biological, personal and social. This last has no agreed upon name (my favorite is cosmic but transcendental or spiritual would do as well). It addresses the most mysterious aspect of our existence—our role in the universe, how it all got started and where it will end. There

## Images of dreamwork on a Greek island

By Jenny Green

For a week, when summer had ended and autumn just begun, 20 dreamers met on an island in the Aegean to learn about and from our dreams. When I thought what I might write of our island week, two images came to me.

The first is of understanding as a spiral thread to be followed into meaning. Like the cochlea in the ear, which in its turning passage carries bits of noise and vibration inward to the source of meaning, the understanding of a dream also comes in a spiral movement that both repeats itself and gains ground.

When I explored my dream with the group I started from a place of curiosity and desire for meaning, but no solid sense of what it was telling me. Through the course of the process, I had little flashes of “that’s so; that’s not so”—as if, to use another image, I was mending one of those ancient amphora at Knossos and from time to time finding a piece that fit. Each time I felt that little “fit” I was encouraged, drawn on around and inward on the spiral, eager to see where I/it was going.

At the end of the first three phases (Day 1) I had a lot of those fits—enough pieces to give a basic outline, a sense of the form of my “amphora of meaning,” but not enough to bring it clearly to view. I also had a wealth of pieces arrayed around me—some given by the group, some from my own thoughts—that were not yet attached or discarded.

And then, traveling fur-

ther on the spiral that night, I found a key piece. For my dream this had to do with recognizing a time factor, a then and a now in my dream. With that in place, all those other bits and pieces either fit or clearly did not and my great clay pot became a solid form. I knew what it was and where I was.

The spiral continues even now, as if having found the real form/meaning my mind decorates and elaborates it with historical footnotes, practical applications and future implications. To get to where I am now with my shared dream, I find I have, like the spiral, gone in circles, turning pieces again and again in my thoughts, while simultaneously moving forward into meaning and clarity and—practical soul that I am—useful information.

As for my second image—as my plane climbed up after takeoff I had a bird’s-eye view of the azure sea below decorated with dots and enfolded by the rugged mountain arms of the mainland. Perhaps we as individuals are the islands, unique and reaching for the sun, and the shining blue sea is our dream life in which, when we dive in along with the dolphins and dive deep, we discover that each seemingly separate island self is in reality only an uplifting on the surface of the bed of the sea (which is also the face of the earth, by the way).

We find at our base we are connected—not only with each other, but with the great rugged mainland home of the gods that surround our sea.

We find, in actual fact, we are all one. We find connectedness as a rock solid, rock bottom reality.

And then, as my plane circled higher like a great bird riding the winds, the mists dimmed the scene below. The islands and blue sea faded into cloudy obscurity, until all that remained clear was the tall crag of Mt. Olympus, where I was

sure I saw Zeus raise his cup of wine in salute as we flew high overhead . . . or was it a dream?

*(Editor’s note: Jenny is a social worker from Vermont who recently participated in a week-long group dream work seminar with Monte Ullman in Greece sponsored by Swedes who have studied with him and coordinated by Dr. Ingegerd Hansson.)*



### DREAMWORKERS' CORNER

## Taking dream work into the community

*Q: What possibilities do you see of dream work developing in the community?*

A: Dream work does not have a high priority in any Western society. While the situation in the United States is beginning to change in a small way, it is still minuscule compared to the attention our dreams should have. The trend, however, is in the right direction with significant changes having been made in the past two decades.

The most intensive dream work in proportion to the population is now developing in Sweden. A cadre of well trained dream group leaders are preparing others to lead dream sharing groups there as well as stimulating interest in other Scandinavian countries and on the continent.

In order for community dream work to expand, the first need is for a broader educational base. The study of

dreams and their potential should reach into the educational system at every level from grade school on up.

Until the present upsurge of interest in dreams, preparation for dream work was the exclusive prerogative of psychotherapy and psychoanalytic training institutes. Only a handful of therapists have been concerned with moving dream work beyond the consulting room. Notable among them is the late Richard Jones, who for many years gave a successful course at Evergreen State College in which he integrated literature studies with dream sharing (see *The Dream Poet*, G.H. Hall and Co., Boston, 1979).

A second need is for the preparation of leaders who are competent to lead experiential dream groups. The books I have written have been addressed to both lay and professional audiences with a view to

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## ***An invitation to join us in Dream Appreciation***

If you receive this newsletter you have already shown an interest in dream work and

have benefited from firsthand experience with Monte's group dream work process.

### ***Dream work in the community***

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laying out the essentials of safe and effective dream work. While books can serve as guides, they should be supplemented by first-hand experiences in training courses.

A third need is to educate both the general public and all those in the health professions with regard to the healing aspects of dream work and the enormous potential it has for preventive psychiatry. Only beginnings have been made with regard to the latter. There are target populations that would benefit from what dream sharing has to offer. These would include adoles-

cents, geriatric populations, drug abusers, incest survivors and prisoners, to mention a few.

In my work at two senior centers, one Italian and one Jewish, it was the participants' first encounter with serious dream work. It was exciting to witness the excitement of those in their seventies and eighties as they experienced the creativity involved in shaping dream images so relevant to their lives.

Dream work in the community *can* become a reality—and it is people interested in the group dream work process who can bring it about.

**—Monte Ullman**

You appreciate the importance of dreams and how they can enhance your waking life. We invite you to share your experiences with us—as well as your ideas, questions and concerns. We promise to protect your privacy, if you wish.

Are you looking for a dream group to join? Are you trying to start a dream group? Do you want to learn more about the group dream work

process? Write us and let us help you network with other dreamers. Also let us know of others who might be interested in Monte's future workshops.

We have just begun to tap the potential of our dreams and how they connect us, one to another. Join us as we explore the language of our dreams and find our lives enhanced by *Dream Appreciation*. **—Wendy Pannier**

*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. (By next newsletter we may have an Internet e-mail address too!)

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