

# Dream Appreciation

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**The notion of healing can be applied appropriately to dream work in a number of ways.**

## **Dream work and healing**

*By Montague Ullman, M.D.*

Dream work is not an exercise in a vacuum. The group dream work I engage in has as its endpoint behavioral change. Change, in turn, is related to one's capacity for self-healing. Dreaming consciousness is potentially a natural healing system in a way quite analogous to our immune system. Ever available, our dreams respond to the resurgence of unresolved issues in our lives.

The notion of healing can be applied appropriately to dream work in a number of ways. These relate to the nature of dream content, the way in which dream work is carried out, the altered relationship of the dreamer to his or her own dreams as a consequence of dream work, and the changes that take place in relationship to others.

### **The content of dreams**

All of us continually rework the emotional heritage of our past. Our dreams help us do this in rather remarkable ways. When some vulnerable area is exposed in the course of our daily life, the dream takes the initiative in tracking it down to its historical origins. Our dream seems to have access to deeper informational sources than are ordinarily available. Since we are always honest with ourselves while dreaming, the information we come up with is reliable. Jung spoke most movingly about this feature of our dream life when he wrote, "So flowerlike is it in its candor and veracity that it makes us blush for the deceitfulness of our lives."

The dream's relevance to our current life situation, the historical perspective it affords and the honesty of the self-scrutiny that ensues are the qualities of the imagery that makes their explication a healing experience. The result of dream work is a movement toward greater clarity and openness, not about a trivial aspect of our life, but rather around an issue from our past that has intruded into the present in a way that has set up an unresolved tension.

### **The process of dream work**

Consciously or unconsciously, there is a tendency for people to seek out emotionally healing experiences. One way that it can happen is through dreams. There is something curious about the curiosity everyone has about dreams. It is more than idle curiosity. I believe it hides a deeper awareness that dreams speak to hidden truths about our nature.

With the dream comes an insistent urge to get at those truths. It is as if, at some level, we all recognize the validity of the Swedish author, Poul Bjerre's characterization of the dream as a "natural healing system." Quite early in the century Bjerre took issue with Freud and saw dreams as readily available routes to healing. His writings demystified dreams and showed how the understanding of dreams could be helpful to everyone in their every day life. Jung, who was more intuitive and insightful about dreams than Freud, pursued the same path.

In contrast to physiological healing, emotional healing takes place outside the physically defined limits of the person. It happens because of

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## The nature of dream work and healing

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changes that occur in an interpersonal field. Other people are an essential component of emotional healing. Emotional difficulties start with human beings and are resolved through human beings.

Dream work evolves best in the context of an interpersonal field. The process I have described is so structured as to elicit and maximize the ability of others to function in a healing way toward the dreamer. This effects the release of the dreamer's own self-healing potential. Accompanied by, supported by and stimulated by the group, secrets are shared and a truer version of the self emerges.

In group dream work there are general and specific factors that contribute to the healing effect. The general factors include:

1. The rapid generation of trust in a non-intrusive atmosphere created by the structure.
2. The concern with and respect for the dreamer that are built into the process.
3. The sense of mutuality and commonality of experience that is generated by the way the group members, through their projections, share aspects of themselves with the dreamer.
4. The lack of hierarchical structure. The leader assumes no special professional role and has the same option to share

dreams as everyone else. In all other respects he or she functions as one of the group members. This flattening arrangement makes for greater sharing.

dreamer becomes better known to himself or herself and to others in a way that has elements of release and a sense of greater wholeness. The freedom to let oneself be known to

she has come to see in themselves.

The dreamer has had the rare experience of witnessing people coming together as healers for each other. The dreamer has learned how to participate in healing others as well as himself or herself. There is a deepening appreciation of self and others and a growing sense of communion. There is a greater awareness of the circumstances under which other people live, a greater sensitivity to the struggle that is part of being alive and a greater interest in and tolerance for others. There is a healthier expansion and deepening of the social field and, as a consequence, a greater openness to new experience and competence in interpersonal relations.

The dreamer benefits not only from what the dream says but also from how it is said. Dreamers come to recognize and appreciate, sometimes for the first time, the range of their own creativity and how it keeps them supplied with an unending source of useful imagery. When so motivated, the dreamer can channel this creative resource into artistic and aesthetic outlets in the waking state. Nighttime imagery is experienced as a hidden creative resource which is there for the dreamer's benefit and which can be called upon when needed.

*Reprinted in abridged form from "Closeness in Personal and Professional Relationships," Edited by Harry A. Wilmer, Shambala, Boston, 1992, with the kind permission of Dr. Wilmer. □*

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***The process I have described is so structured as to elicit and maximize the ability of others to function in a healing way toward the dreamer. This effects the release of the dreamer's own self-healing potential. Accompanied by, supported by and stimulated by the group, secrets are shared and a truer version of the self emerges.***

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The specific factors involved arise in connection with the way the group facilitates the occurrence of metaphorical responses in the dreamer to the various elements of the dream. The group's ability to open the dream up for the dreamer begins first with the range and virtuosity of their own projections and later is furthered by the skill and effectiveness with which the dialogue is carried out.

### **The dream and the dream**

As dream work develops there are changes in the relationship of the dreamer to the dream. From being accidental, intrusive, strange and sometimes frightening visitations, they are transformed into useful communications which contain information of value to the dreamer. Dream work becomes demystified. There is a sense of the potential accessibility of the dream and an awareness that, when the dream is pursued in a supportive social context, the

others is also the freedom to be oneself.

One learns not to judge a dream on the basis of the immediate reactions it produces. These largely reflect the set and bias of the waking state. To judge a dream by the standards of the waking state, e.g., whether it is deemed interesting or not, is also misleading and prejudicial. Such judgments are irrelevant to the nature of the dream. The dreamer soon learns that the only thing of importance is the connection the imagery has to a larger and more truthful version of the self. Regardless of the waking impression it produces, the dream comes to be looked on as an available and helpful private resource.

### **The dreamer and others**

Healthy changes occur in the dreamer's own interpersonal milieu. The dreamer has been given privileged glimpses deep into the souls of other people and has seen there the same mix of vulnerability and strength that he or

## A Swedish Parliament member on dream work

I came in contact with the work of Dr. Montague Ullman and his dream groups almost 10 years ago. Out of a personal interest for dreams and dream interpretation I studied some of his books. But gradually I understood that his theories and concrete works also could be used in a much wider context as a preventive measure in psychiatry.

At that time, in the late 1980s, I was engaged in politics as an elected member, at a regional level, of the County Council of Stockholm. My main field of responsibility was to deal with different services to families and children with physical or mental retardment or with social or psychological problems. Dream groups were started by the family counsellors in one office in Stockholm.

It was a success and many people became interested in the possibilities offered by the dream group method. Of course, other people and I were aware of the fact that this is not a method to be applied to situations with persons with severe mental disorders. But dream groups could definitely be one, out of different means, to prevent psychological problems.

I made a formal proposal to the County Council, describing the advantages of this work and proposing the introduction of the method at some local health stations. The proposal was partially accepted.

In 1991 I left the County Council to become a member

of the National Parliament of Sweden and I have presented a similar proposal to Parliament. I cannot say I succeeded in getting the approval I asked

for, but I can certainly say that the proposal itself raised the interest in research about dreams and the possibility of using dream groups as one

method in preventing mental disturbances.”

*Eva Zetterberg*  
Member of Parliament  
Sweden

## “Footprint of trust” essential says co-author of *Working with Dreams*

Trust is the footprint upon which every dream group stands. Trust is so fundamental, so imperative that our assumption that we are within the boundaries may allow us to wander outside without conscious awareness of departure.

During the first meeting of our groups, we are careful to work with the contract of confidentiality and intra-group respect. We emphasize the dream group belongs to the dreamer, giving the dreamer full control over disclosure and determining closure. We recognize that our making the dream our own spreads out for the dreamer a montage of possibilities enabling distinct personal meanings of the metaphors to take shape. We know that our responses are just that — our responses. The dreamer remains the sole owner of every detail of the dream, the sole participant in every past and current happening that destined that certain dream to be dreamed on that certain night. The dreamer is the child that walked through thousands of days to arrive in our group, at this time to share this dream.

What would we ever do to violate this remarkable experience?

Belong to the human race.

We are by nature engaged in two pursuits. One is the desire to identify ourselves as unique from all others. We defend this self vigorously and seek through myriads of daily activities and private responses to understand and maintain this self. Our projections, given to the dreamer in Stage II, are drawn in part from this reservoir of separateness.

Our second pursuit is the desire to relate to others in ways that honor our participation in an underlying whole. Because we are connected we dare and desire to believe our responses to the dreamer may enliven the understanding of the dream and may be a piece of the puzzle that releases the elation, “Yes! That’s it!” What a great moment for the entire group!

As strong as these pursuits are by nature, so are the parallel fears that threaten them. In our attempt to maintain a separate identity we may seal ourselves off with aloof-

ness and secrecy. In our attempt to feel a part of a larger whole, we may cement ourselves to a doctrine or person or, disbelieving our connection within the whole, we may become weighed down by feelings of emptiness.

All members of the group are to some degree privy to these issues tugging away at our attending to the dreamer. The dreamer also has these pulls, and may close up or give in to group responses.

Stuck with our humanity, what do we do?

Perhaps the surest defense is a return to that which originally lead us into working with our dreams — the sense of wonder and excitement over their originality and honesty. This enthusiasm was given structure through Monte’s method of appreciating the dream as the dreamer’s, and seeing it as a powerful and poetic view of the dreamer’s current predicament. We are excavators in the mysterious realm of dream reality. Mysterious because at first telling the dream holds rich and unmined truth. This refocus of purpose helps us to be hon-

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*DREAMWORKERS' CORNER*

## Observations about using the process

By Wendy Pannier

At the recent Association for the Study of Dreams meeting in Asheville, NC, I had the opportunity to attend many different workshops and to experience a variety of ways of doing dream work. It was wonderful, fascinating and enlightening!

It was interesting for me to see how the second stage of Monte's process — where group members take the dream and give projections about what it might mean if it were their dream, has now become an approach that many people use as a nondirective way of working with other people's dreams.

The "if it were my dream" approach is a technique Monte began developing while working with psychoanalytic candidates at New York Medical College in the 1950s and in various growth centers throughout the country in the 1960s. He later incorporated it as part of a group process developed with Nan Zimmerman, with whom he wrote the book *Working with Dreams* published in 1979.

That other people recognize its merit is a testament to Monte's group dream work process — **but it is only one part of that process and should not be mistaken for the process itself.**

I heard a number of people at the ASD meeting talking about the "Ullman process" but only using the "if it

were my dream" segment. In one instance the dreamer confided to me later that she had not felt she had the opportunity to share her associations

responded to the projections of the group and shared his or her own associations, the initial goal of the dialogue is to help the dreamer reconstruct

— if there wasn't some streamlined way of working with a dream. However, to respect the complexity of dreams is to respect a structure that can safely help the dreamer plumb the depths of possible meanings. That's what Monte's process does.

It is inappropriate for people to refer to "the Ullman method" unless they use all the stages as they were intended to be used. The process in its entirety — the whole process — is a rewarding tool when used properly and completely.

Please don't get me wrong. There are many, many good ways of working with dreams. Different ways work for different people at different times. What I am trying to say is that it is a disservice to Monte's process to call it by name but limit it to the "if it were my dream" segment."

The last afternoon of the ASD meeting I managed to get a group of people together to do the process. First we were driven out of the student lounge by the noise from pin-ball machines. Once outside, rain forced us to move again. The process was disrupted by these moves and was not "typical" of how a good group works — but even under these less than optimal conditions it still helped the dreamer with her dream.

I am grateful for an organization like the ASD where so many different methods can be presented and explored. □

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***Do not confuse the "if it were my dream" technique with Monte's group dreamwork process. It is only one part of that process and should not be mistaken for the process itself.***

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or what was going on in her life when she had the dream. When she shared some of those things with me it became clear that by "playing the game" for an extended period of time rather than continuing with other steps in the process, the group had collectively gone off on tangents that had nothing to do with the dreamer. I think that's why Monte limits Stage 2 of the process — so there is enough time for the other and more essential stages.

What I find important about the "if it were my dream" technique is that group members can give their projections from their diverse personal perspectives. Monte often says the group could easily take up the whole time period with this stage of the process — but that is not the point. The point is they are not using the Ullman approach if they omit the heart of the process, namely the various parts of the dialogue.

After the dreamer has

the waking life emotional context leading to the dream.

The group then takes turns reading each section of the dream back to the dreamer in the hope of enriching the associative matrix of the dream. Next, the group offers orchestrating projections. The latter are **not** like the "if it were my dream" segment. Rather, now the projections are based **only** on what the dreamer has shared.

A final stage takes place the next time the group meets when the dreamer is invited to share any new insights that may have come up since the previous session.

Yes, this is a much more structured process than many people doing group dream work use. But in talking to lay dream workers at ASD I discovered that many of them were seeking more structure to make their group work more productive.

I admit there have been times when I wondered if Monte's process was too struc-

## Dream work in Sweden and Bali planned

By Wendy Pannier

A longtime Swedish dream worker, Dr. Ingegerd Hansson, is planning two international seminars which will use the Ullman group process of dream work. The first will be held this August (see information below) in Sweden. The second will be held next spring in Bali.

Ingegerd, who is a psychiatrist in private practice, has participated in Monte's

groups for many years and has been instrumental in organizing workshops for him in Hudiksvall. She is also one of the organizers of the Dream Group Forum, an association in Sweden that is dedicated to spreading dream work throughout the country and which trains leaders in Monte's group process.

Monte calls her "a very dedicated dream worker who

is also deeply interested in art and dance and is very sensitive to the aesthetic aspects of dreaming and dream work."

Ingegerd has organized two highly successful international dream seminars in Greece in past years. Doing dream work is always a moving experience — and sharing dreams with people from a variety of countries adds another dimension to the process.

Ingegerd tells me that Sweden is beautiful in August — and good for dreaming! The program includes an introductory lecture Friday evening, followed by a weekend of dreamwork. Side excursions to nearby Denmark are possible as well.

Ingegerd has generously offered to help participants find suitable accommodations. For those flying in, it is best to fly to Copenhagen. Ingegerd can also advise on ground

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### **Dreamwork An International Seminar at Öresund, Sweden — August 22-24, 1997**

Dr. Ingegerd Hansson, a member of the Swedish Dream Group Forum, invites you to participate in an international dream workshop she is arranging at her summer home overlooking the water in Öresund, between Sweden and Denmark. The location is Fortuna, south of the town of Helsingborg.

A lecture has been taped with Dr. Montague Ullman specifically for this workshop. The group will use his group process for dreamwork throughout the weekend.

The workshop is limited to 12 participants. The fee is \$150 or, for Swedes, 1100 SCr. This will also include an introductory lecture and light refreshments. Please pay by Aug. 1 to ensure a space in the workshop.

Reasonably priced accommodations can be arranged. Additional excursions before and after the workshop can also be arranged.

For more information contact:

Dr. Ingegerd Hansson at +46-650-13188 (phone and fax before July 27)  
or +46-42-222995 (phone and fax after Aug. 1)

or

Wendy Pannier at (610) 268-8702 (phone); (610) 268-8703 (fax); or  
dreams@chesco.com (e-mail).

### **"Footprint of trust"**

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est about the possibility of slipping into shafts of complacency.

We can trust the honesty in our dreams. As we work on our dreams we grow in our capacity to trust the truth about ourselves. And having a great time.

**Nan Zimmerman**

*Nan is the co-author of Working with Dreams with Dr. Montague Ullman, their first attempt to set forth a point of view about dreams designed to orient the general public to the healing potential of dream images and to provide a structure within which a dream could be explained in a small group process. Nan is a piano teacher, writer, homemaker and dedicated dream worker. □*

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### From the Editor

## **Communication works both ways — let's dialogue!**

The idea for Dream Appreciation originated about two years ago. Since that time Monte and I have enjoyed planning each issue and choosing the articles we think might be most beneficial to dreamers using his group process. We greatly appreciate the contributions some of you have made, which we have printed in each issue.

We know that some of

you out there are leading dream groups — or participating in groups. What are your experiences? What problems arise? What would you like to know more about?

Our goal is to help you use the group dream work process in the most effective way possible. In order for this publication to be a useful tool, we need to know what parts of the process you have difficulty

with, what aspects need clarification.

Let's dialogue!

We appreciate the many notes we have received thanking us for the newsletter and telling us you enjoy it.

How about some constructive criticism?! What

would you like to see more of? What would you like to see less of? Is there some area we have missed covering?

Please let us know — so we can make this publication as useful as possible for our readers.

— *Wendy Pannier*

### ***Dream work in Sweden, Bali***

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transportation to Fortuna.

Plans for the trip to Bali, which will be held around Easter, are currently being finalized. Dates and details

about that gathering will appear in the fall issue of *Dream Appreciation*.

Anyone with questions about either seminar can contact Ingegerd or Wendy for more information. □

***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 e-mail address is "dreams@chesco.com".

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