

# Dream Appreciation

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*A dream is "so flowerlike is it in its candor and veracity that it makes us blush for the deceitfulness of our lives."*  
— Carl Jung

## DREAMS: THE PATH NOT (YET) TAKEN

By MONTAGUE ULLMAN, M.D.

The year 2000 marks the one hundredth anniversary of the publication of a remarkable book, *The Interpretation of Dreams* by Sigmund Freud. Although much was known or intimated about the unconscious domain prior to Freud, this book laid out the first systematic approach to the clinical use of dreams as a tool for the mapping out of human behavior and its vicissitudes.

Freud had discovered what he termed "the royal road to the unconscious" and considered this discovery his most important gift to posterity. Embarking on this road, he soon realized its potential for uncovering the developmental roots of the various neuroses and in so doing laid the foundation

for the new science of psychoanalysis.

Under his guidance others, with increasing frequency, began walking this road. A new dynamic outlook infused the then therapeutically static field of psychiatry. That enthusiasm reached our shores and took root through the efforts of one of Freud's most devoted disciples, A.A. Brill. With a mastery of public relations skills, he almost single-handedly, at least in the beginning, introduced psychoanalysis not only to the therapeutic arena, but also to the growing mental hygiene movement, to art and literature, and to the general cultural life at the time. As a psychiatric resident in 1942, I attended a lecture of his. It was fascinating, both in its content and as a sales pitch.

The years brought substantial growth in the theoretical underpinning of psychoanalysis with considerable movement away from Freud's emphasis on wish-fulfillment, repressed instinctual impulses, and toward a greater interest in the more generally adaptive nature of the dream. The

laboratory investigation, beginning in the early 1950s into the relationship of dreaming to sleep (the rapid eye movement phase of sleep) laid to rest Freud's notion that dreaming was instigated by forbidden urges threatening to awaken the dreamer. The onset of a period of sleep when most dreaming occurs is biologically controlled by nerve centers in the brain stem.

Another road slowly became discernible at the time Jung broke with Freud. Freud's effort to work out a scientific, deterministic, cause and effect theory of the neuroses carried over to his view of the dream. Just as the hysterical bodily symptom was a disguised expression of a repressed desire, so the manifest content was the censored disguised version of a repressed wish. Jung tried to open up a different path, one that emphasized the creativity and truth telling nature of the dream. "So flowerlike is it in its candor and veracity," he once said, "that it makes us blush for the deceitfulness of our lives."

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**NOTE: Monte's website:**  
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Many thanks to Markku Siivola in Finland for all his wonderful work on Monte's web site!

## DREAMS: THE PATH NOT (YET) TAKEN

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Then the existentialists came along, led by Medard Boss, who dispensed with theory altogether and saw the dream as another and equally valid rendering of the dreamer's waking existence. There were others, like Fritz Perls, who worked in a group setting. There was one thing that all these different dissident paths had in common. They all saw dream work as a treatment modality and, as such, requiring professional expertise. They didn't build a road open to the public. They built individual footpaths.

Without minimizing the pioneering efforts of Freud, his linkage of dream imagery to a particular theoretical system had one

fatal flaw. It flew in the face of the reality that dreaming was a universal experience and there was no reason why it should not be universally accessible. The road Freud mapped out was very inviting but very narrow in terms of the traffic it could accommodate. It required a mastery of theory and technique to uncover what lay hidden behind what he termed the manifest content, the actual imagery itself. This had the effect of orienting dream interpretation to a particular array of symbols congruent with that theoretical system. The sign at the entrance to Freud's road warned against anyone embarking on this road without proper psychoanalytic guidance. The road was

mined with hidden and dangerous id impulses. It was this way of looking at dreams that separated a body of experts from the ordinary mortal and the dreams he or she dreamt.

Dreams serve as natural a life-affirming function as childbirth. Babies were born long before there were obstetricians on the scene. If difficulties arise, it is fortunate there are obstetricians. The cult of the expert left the vast majority of dreamers adrift. At least in the case of childbirth there were helpers in the form of midwives to ensure safe passage.

In recent years there have been several confluent influences that prepared the ground for what in the past two decades has been a palpable increase in knowledge and interest without our dream life. As more and more knowledge seeped out of the laboratory, it became obvious that dreaming played a significant role not only in our own lives, but throughout the animal kingdom. There is at present a small but discernibly movement to move beyond a passing interest to active involvement in dream work. The most visible evidence is the growing number of dream-sharing groups coming into being. This is something quite new on the cultural horizon.

My own experience as

a practitioner and teacher of psychoanalysis convinced me that there was another path, one that could realize the full benefit of dream work and be open to the public. The construction of that path would require a radically different perspective. Although dreams are, as Freud noted, of inestimable value to the clinician, their very universality laid claim to a wider audience. My aim was to arrive at an authentic and effective way of relating to our dream life without any mediating theoretical knowledge.

Let's take a look at what a different scenario might have produced. A psychiatrist-philosopher, Gordon Globus, once drew an analogy between dreaming and the immune system insofar as both are built-in biologically rooted survival mechanisms. Our immune system is activated by intrusive matter foreign to the natural functioning of the organism. Asleep and dreaming, we cope with any intrusive feelings left over from our recent experience. How do we do that in a way that might conceivably be connected with survival? The answer is that while dreaming we are endowed with an innate and insistent capacity to confront ourselves with the truth about feelings that were unable to surface at the time they occurred in

**The Association for the Study of Dreams  
17th International Conference  
July 4-8, 2000  
Washington, D.C.**

Monte Ullman and Wendy Pannier will be presenting a workshop on Monte's Group Process at this year's ASD meeting. Monte will additionally participate on a panel.

For information on the conference program or a brochure, please contact the ASD Information Office at (925) 258-1822 or send an e-mail to:  
ASDreams@aol.com

Information about the conference — and about ASD and what it has to offer dreamers — is available on the organization's web site:

**www.asdreams.org**

waking life. Recent feeling residues and their connection with remote past experiences gain metaphorical expression in the imagery of the dream. These images are our T-cells. They may or may not be successful in mobilizing the resources needed to cope with whatever has been stirred up. If the feelings are too strong, we awaken. Whatever function dreaming serves asleep (and this is by no means clear as yet), awake we are the accidental beneficiaries of the information embedded in the imagery we have created.

We are endowed with two naturally recurring interconnected forms of consciousness. Waking consciousness is necessary to accommodate ourselves to the objective world in which we find ourselves. Dreaming consciousness informs us of the subjective cost to ourselves of whatever accommodations we have to make. We might reverse Freud's dictum and say that dreams are the royal road to the vagaries and self-defeating aspects of waking consciousness as a result of these accommodations. At this point in our efforts to civilize ourselves, too many of the inhabitants of this planet are far from any satisfactory level of self-fulfillment.

What will it take to

build this other road in a way that would ensure the safety of those who embark upon it, and that would open up a new and exciting domain to those who travel it? Briefly, it would involve the following:

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***Waking consciousness is necessary to accommodate ourselves to the objective world in which we find ourselves. Dreaming consciousness informs us of the subjective cost to ourselves of whatever accommodations we have to make.***

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1. **Knowledge:** The knowledge is available. In the recent past, more and more informative books have appeared, organizations have sprung up to foster interest in dreams (The Association for the Study of Dreams), periodicals encouraging the spread of dream sharing groups (The Dream Network), and for the first time ever, courses on dreams and how to work with them have been included in college curricula. Some basic knowledge about dreams is essential, but it doesn't involve any concept more complicated than the concept of metaphor. Dreams start in the present, the so-called day residue Freud referred to. That residue is significant enough to find a place in the dream because it triggers unfinished emotional business in the past.

It is our own innate creativity that shapes this information into metaphorical imagery that speaks so eloquently to us of a deeper dimension of self-knowledge that escapes us or is only dimly sensed while awake.

2. **Skills:** The skills are identifiable and teachable to anyone interested in satisfying their curiosity about dreams. There are only two basic skills. The first and most important is the art of listening to the dreamer, listening to all the dreamer has to say, listening to how he or she says it, and finally listening without any a priori judgment about the meaning of the dream. The second skill is that of putting questions to the dreamer that are helpful to the dreamer without being invasive. It takes time to perfect any skill, and these skills are not exception.

3. **A Group Approach:** The most natural way of introducing people to dream work is in a dream-sharing group. Our personalities and our prob-

lems evolve in a social milieu, and are best explored in the company of others who are also there to explore their dreams and who can offer each other the support and help needed by a dreamer faced with the task of moving into the very private areas that our dreams often touch upon.

4. **Structure:** Successful dream work comes at a price. That price is self-disclosure. That in turn involves exposure and vulnerability. Therein lies the possible danger of dream work. The danger is not in the dream. The danger is in the eye of the beholder who approaches the dream clumsily and without respect for the fact that the dreamer is the guardian of his or her unconscious. To respect that guardianship and at the same time further self-disclosure, a very special structure is needed. It is a structure that at every step deepens the dreamer's trust in the group and in the process. The only fool-proof way of ensuring that level of safety is for the dreamer to be in control of the process and the level of self-disclosure. In the dialogue between the dreamer and the group, the questions are simply instruments to help the dreamer explore the emotional context that led to the dream. It is the

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## INTERCONNECTEDNESS: SPECIES UNITY AND DREAMING

By MONTAGUE ULLMAN, M.D.

We are endowed with two naturally recurring states of consciousness, waking and dreaming. While distinct in form and content, they are complementary in working to maintain the integrity of the organism while at the same time maintaining the unity of the species.

Waking consciousness is geared to the waking reality we face every day. Language is our tool for

categorizing the reality and for communicating to others and to ourselves about it.

Asleep and dreaming we register at a feeling level the impact of our social patterns of behavior on what Trigant Burrow refers to as our basic organismic needs. The language we resort to is an imagistic one metaphorically displaying the residual feelings we take to bed with us. Tensions

arising from the day are explored in their connection to unfinished business from our past. Awake we are actors on the social scene. Asleep and dreaming we engage in an evaluative process signallying how well we are doing with regard to the level of honesty and authenticity we bring to our dealings with others. In Burrow's (1964) terms, our I-persona (our social facade) manifests itself in

varying degrees of co-extensive (connecting with another) and ditensive (failing to connect because of self-deceptive protective maneuvers) responses. The problem is that language is a two-edged tool equally available for revealing or concealing the truth.

Although Burrows did not seem to have a special interest in dreams, his insights into what he refers to as our phylobiological unity as a species and the fragmentation and separateness that has evolved as a consequence of our failure to recognize in practice the reality of this interconnectedness, is precisely what is addressed while dreaming. In fact, it is the dynamic underpinning of dreaming consciousness.

Let us look at this more closely. Dreaming is associated with a phylogenetically primitive subcortical arousal system that sees to it that repetitive bouts of arousal occur during sleep. The consciousness that accompanies these periods of arousal presumably serves an adaptive purpose. Both Evans (1983) and Winson (1986) have suggested that this provides the animal with the opportunity to modify its behavioral repertoire to meet new contin-

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dreamer's decision to share or not whatever information turns up. The greater control the dreamer has over the process, the more that control is respected by the group, the greater the trust and with that the greater the level of self-disclosure. The group members have to keep in mind that they function only as midwives in a safe delivery. They do not own the baby. Just as a complicated delivery requires an obstetrician, there are people who drift into a dream group who need more than what a dream group can provide. A dream sharing group can be enormously therapeutic, but it is not formal therapy.

In this country this second path is only a foot-

path and its future is still uncertain despite its potential to include both clinicians and laity. There is, however, one country where this path has been transformed into a very visible road. Sweden has been more enterprising in many ways than the United States. They were ahead of the U.S. in the struggle for women's rights, providing facilities for the handicapped, the provision of universal medical care and free higher education that goes far beyond anything in the U.S. To add to this list is growing awareness of the role dream-sharing groups can play in preventive psychiatry.

There has been support for this both from below and from above. At the grass roots level, an organi-

zation was founded 10 years ago this spring, the Dream Group Forum, to offer the necessary preparation for leaders to educate the public about the importance of dream work, to train leaders and to initiate dream groups in the community.

From above, Eva Zetterberg, a member of the Swedish Parliament, has for a number of years been seeking government support for the development of such groups. A small number of the members of Parliament share her views. Several years ago she arranged for a one-day meeting of the heads of all the various health agencies serving the Stockholm area where, through both a lecture and a workshop, they were intro-

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## SPECIES UNITY AND DREAMING

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gencies. Animals are faced with the task of surviving in the wild. At the human level we are dealing with behavior patterns that have evolved in relation to survival in the socio-cultural environment in which we find ourselves. In both instances we are dealing with a genetically driven mechanism concerned with the survival of the species. What this ultimately comes down to with regard to the human species is how urgent it is, in view of our technological capacity for destruction, for behavioral patterns that unite us to prevail more decisively over behavior that separates us than has been the case up to now.

Our dreams are an ally in this task. They are not bound by the same rules that constrain waking behavior. They go beyond our I-persona that so often protects us from the full realization of the consequences of our behavior. Our dreams are truth seekers. They go by the same rules that apply to animals in the wild: the more truthful one's perception of reality, the greater are the chances of survival of the individual and the species. Our dreams are associated with those arousal periods and speak to us in a primitive imagistic mode. In contrast to subhuman mam-

mals, who presumably resort in a more concrete literal way to this imagistic mode, we humans call upon our imagination and our ca-

*dreams are connected with the basic truth that we are all members of a single species. (p. 1)*

Responding to this,

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***Our dreams have a no holds barred policy with regard to revealing the state of our connection to our own past and how connected we really are to others. We are creatures driven to survive as a species by moving to an ever expanding state of authentic interconnectedness.***

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capacity for abstraction to put together imagery that speaks to us in a creatively crafted metaphorically expressive imagery about both the good and the bad going on within us at the time. Our dreams have a no holds barred policy with regard to revealing the state of our connection to our own past and how connected we really are to others. We are creatures driven to survive as a species by moving to an ever expanding state of authentic interconnectedness.

Elsewhere I (Ullman 1981) wrote:

*(Our dreams are) organized by a different principle. Our dreams are more concerned with the nature of our connections with all others. . . . The history of the human race, while awake, is a history of fragmentation, of separating people and communities of people . . . nationally, religiously, politically, our*

*are reconnected with those of our species, by way of a transcendent mental function which has united the human race over all human space and over all human time. No wonder that even some "bad" dreams leave us feeling more whole, more human.*

*I may now refine my thesis: Our dreams are authored from within our individual lives merely to the extent that our self-interests provide their materials, their stuff, exactly the extent to which Shakespeare's plays were authored by the stuff of old histories and legends. Indeed, it was Shakespeare*  
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Richard Jones (1988) captured my meaning precisely, and a bit poetically, when he wrote:

*There's the truth: In dreams our sentence in the individual life is suspended, as our perceptions of living*

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duced to dream work.

There are two factions that resist the active development of this second path. Freud was familiar with the first variety, namely, that the prevailing view of dreams in his time was that they were unimportant by-products of brain activity. The first printing of Freud's book hardly made a dent. Fifty years later and based on much more sophisticated knowledge of brain function, the same neurological point of view about dreams has resurfaced. Unfortunately, this promising exploration of the

neurological substrate has come at the expense of giving due recognition to dreaming as the manifestation of a natural healing system.

A more passive form of resistance comes from the psychoanalytic fraternity itself, which has shown little or no interest in deprofessionalizing dream work and has assumed little responsibility for helping the current lay interest in dreams evolve in a safe and effective way.

We remain a dream-deprived society. It's time to do something about it. ♦

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## INTERCONNECTEDNESS: SPECIES UNITY AND DREAMING

*Continued from page 5 from whom I learned what I am trying to say here: "We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little lives are rounded with a sleep." (Rounded, in Elizabethan times, meant rounded out, not rounded in.) (p. 145)*

We find ourselves in an imperfect world where the striving for power often derails the expression of love. Add to that the vicissitudes of language, and it is not surprising that each of us, without exception, grows up with a flawed I-persona.

Dreams have little

value in our culture. They are very low on the priority list so that most of us are ignorant of their significance with regard to the unity of the species and their potential for the self-healing of the individual. The past two decades have witnessed some changes in society's attitude toward dreams with more and more books and periodicals appearing addressing the much needed task of educating the public. Perhaps once again Burrow's emphasis on species unity will one day register more deeply through work on our dreams. ♦

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*Dream Appreciation* is published quarterly for people interested in working with dreams and the group process developed by Dr. Montague Ullman.

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

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