

A Dream Grows in Sweden...

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In September, 1974, my wife Janet and I left for Sweden for what turned out to be an experience which, in a way that had not been anticipated, gave a new and exciting direction to my life. I discussed this in detail in the Winter, 1997 issue of *Dream Appreciation*, and will recap that briefly to let you know how that work is evolving.

Back then another analyst from the States and I were teaching psychopathology and psychotherapy to a group of students, most of whom were doing graduate work at the Psychological Institute of Gothenburg University. (The group also included a student in the social studies program, another in the philosophy of science program and a psychiatrist.) There was no clinical tract at the Institute at the time. The students eventually created their own institute, the Institute for Psychodynamic Psychotherapy, and it was here that most of the courses were given.

My co-worker and I shared the courses, with my share including an ongoing course on dreams. That gave me the opportunity to teach about dreams the way I had always wanted to - experientially. It was also very much of a challenge to me to work out the ground rules for maintaining a classroom atmosphere while at the same time inviting the students to delve into their own unconscious domain through the medium of their dreams.

I had to counter their expectations of safe learning based on their reading of Freud and ensuing theoretical discussions with one involving some measure of self-exposure. I had to work out the safety features and get across my conviction that learning how to dialogue with a dream was the best way of helping a dreamer recover the relevant associations.

My first effort in this direction was to indicate that no grades would be involved and that no one would have to share a dream if they did not wish to do so. While not as fully thought out at the time, they embodied the basic ideas of chapters III, IV and V of my book, *Appreciating Dreams*. The process itself was not as carefully structured as it now is. There was much learning on my part as we got on with the course.

Sweden is a small country (the population approximately the same as New York City). Word that I was giving a course on dreams in Gothenburg soon reached Stockholm, with the result that a group of analysts on the faculty of the Holistic Psychoanalytic Society, were soon making the trip from Stockholm to Gothenburg for three hours of dream work every Saturday.

Before the year was up, I had been invited to lecture on dreams in several hospital settings. I so enjoyed living and teaching in Sweden (a welcome relief from the administrative duties at the Maimonides Medical Center), that I managed to stay on until April, 1976.

On my return, I resigned from my position at Maimonides and knew by then that the rest of my career was going to be devoted to further developing the experiential dream group work

I had started in Sweden. Evidently the Swedes also continued their interest. From 1976 on to about 1996 I received enough invitations to continue this work to keep me busy there for from four to six weeks twice a year. Initially they were from various hospitals and training centers but gradually included more and more lay groups. A good deal of my time was spent on training leaders to do experiential dream group work.

Two things followed from these visits. Some groups had repeated exposure to the leadership training. The other was that groups began to form in almost every major city in Sweden, from Lund and Malmö in the south to Luleå and Boden in the far north.

Several things aside from my growing excitement about the work made this expansion possible:

1. There was a great deal of emphasis on and support for adult education in Sweden during the period that I worked there. Any group of 10 adults interested in a particular subject and who had an accredited teacher available could have most of the expenses for the course paid for, leaving only a small portion for the participants to pay.
2. In 1974 when I first came to Sweden, psychiatric care was mainly drug-oriented. Psychoanalysis came late to Sweden. There were two small training centers in Stockholm and none in Gothenburg, the second largest city. The psychotherapy that did exist was mostly practiced by psychologists and social workers. In one hospital where I lectured before a group of psychiatrists, they had no previous exposure to dream work. Fortunately, this situation has changed in the past 15 years as the government set standards for training in psychotherapy.
3. Because of the relatively small number of professionals engaged in psychotherapy in the 1970s, there was a greater tendency for them to know each other. Networking was easy and resulted in the gradual expansion of interest in the work I was doing.
4. Like most Swedes, the people I worked with had a mastery of English. For the few who were not so proficient, my books on dreams were available in Swedish.
5. Finally, in teaching the process, I was not up against an entrenched ideology in opposition to my efforts to deprofessionalize dream work.

There has also been some support for dream group work at a political level. In Zetterberg a member of the Swedish Parliament had been seeking government funding to explore the mental health preventive potential of dream sharing groups. In 1991 she arranged for me to meet with several members of Parliament to explore this possibility.

In spring, 1990, eleven Swedes who had had extensive training with me over the years - and who were all well versed in the process - came together to form a society, the Dream Group Forum ([Drömgruppsforum](#)) to train others and to launch an educational program to extend dream work into the community. In addition to the founders, there are now over 70 students at different levels of the training program. They have also initiated a newsletter, DrömDialog, to keep members informed of current developments. I have been invited to attend the tenth anniversary meeting of the Forum to be held in Växjö, a city in the south of Sweden, in April of next year. On page 5 is an open letter to the DrömDialog outlining a vision for the next decade.