



DREAMWORKERS' CORNER

THE TALE OF TWO TELEPHONE POLES

By **MARKKU SIVOLA, M.D.**

It was autumn 1980 in Boden, a little town in Northern Sweden. I worked there as a psychiatrist when I heard my fellow workers talking about a psychoanalyst who was coming to lead a dream group there. They asked if I was interested, and I said "No!"

*

The reason for my negative reaction was that I did not want to experience again the claustrophobia I had so intensely experienced during my psychiatry training years when every oblong, elongated object symbolized a penis and every bowl-like formation a vagina according to my teachers. How could this psychoanalyst be different?

I remembered an embarrassing situation in the early days of my medical training. It was the first psychiatrist meeting I had attended. I arrived late, sat down and tried to get into the discussion. For a while I thought I had come into the wrong room, because the behavior of the older colleagues was so strange.

For a moment I thought that they might be rehearsing some strange burlesque play, perhaps for some personnel party. Everybody was extremely serious, talking about mother breast in a way which made the situation so absurd that in all my inexperience, I really believed that they were joking!

Then they changed the topic where the earth represented the vagina which the hoe as penis penetrates. I still remember my embarrassment and anxiety about how I could manage to hide my bewilderment, when it began to dawn to me that these gentlemen were seriously serious! They did not pop out of their theorizing, continuing to exist as though in a theoretical bubble, closed from the life outside, seeing only their own intellectual projections on the walls of that bubble, not the world outside.

The claustrophobic experiences continued throughout my studies but, fortunately, only a couple of them were as grotesque as this first en-

counter with traditional psychoanalytic thinking. During the years of my medical studies I became more and more conscious about the devastating effect of placing life into the Procrustean bed of all kinds of conceptual systems, whatever their nature. I began to recognize that whatever the system, it always acts as a filter between the observer and the observed, diluting the artistry of life.

*

My fellow workers in Boden did not give up but continued persuading me to attend the dream group. At last I gave in. This decision turned out to be one of the most important turning points in my life.

During the first workshop day the strange feeling about the leader of the group, Montague "Monte" Ullman, began to grow stronger. This man did not interpret anything but, in an extremely gentle way I had never seen before, guided the group to listen to the dream. I saw for the first

time how the dream opened into its full glory, beginning to speak with its own voice to the whole group.

There was something in him, something I recognized deeply inside myself, some similarity, some indefinable connection, resonance. Longing for something long ago forgotten and lost, I recognized a living force inside me, a spark of energy I had always been after, something beyond all explanations and theories. I saw this man catch the uncatchable, creating the atmosphere where the dream was able to burst into flower in all its touching innocence.

And how different we still were, he and I! I was young, he was old; I spoke English laboriously and he was fluent; we were from different cultures, living on opposite sides of the earth. But all these differences could not explain away the common factor. He was a stranger to me and at the same time he was not.

The second dream group day dawned. Monte asked who had a dream to

share. No one had. He then said he had one. It was a short sequence, and it was about me:

In his dream I had come to his hotel room and asked two questions which he did not remember, nor his answer to the first one. The answer to the second one was this: he took me to the window of his hotel room, and pointed at two telephone poles outside. He said to me: "If you understand why those telephone poles are just there and nowhere else, you have received the answer to your questions."

That was Monte's dream. And the turning point for me. Monte said he did not know the message of the dream. But I did. The dream immediately opened to me. The opening was not a logical process but a strong immediate emotional impact. The dream symbolized perfectly the intriguing feeling I had had about Monte during the previous day. There we were, Monte and I, like two telephone poles, irrevocably apart, without any possibility to come closer to one another. Just like I had felt it the day before! But between the two poles

there was an electrical unifying current. Just like I had felt it the day before!

The dream said that if I understand the position of the poles I have received the answer. I understood, and received the answer just like the dream said I would!

The dream was his, not mine. How could I know if my view of the metaphors was right or wrong? It became irrelevant. Right and wrong belong to the realm of the rational world where dreams cannot be understood. The flashing impact opened to me the living view about the potential of dreams. The dream illuminated my feelings much more clearly than what I alone had been able to understand.

The last act of this dream was played out twenty years later. I had been busy some months building up Monte's Internet site, scanning hundreds of pages of material which Monte kept sending me partly through fax. One night my wife said: "now the dream has really come true," pointing to the way Monte and I communicated: we, the two telephone poles, were there again, the connective current of faxes flowing

through the telephone lines between us, now across the globe! Then I felt that the dream at last had conveyed its contents at all levels.

*

Right or wrong? Was it a coincidence or was Monte's dream precognitive? I do not care. I can never know. I know that the dream does contain more, like all dreams; they are limitless like life itself, that everything they may contain cannot ever be grasped completely.

Either way, this incident gave me at last the key to dreams, which during the following years has helped me to maintain my

faith in the incorruptible core of all human beings, irrespective of how deeply it may have been buried behind the barriers we have put up against each other in our daily struggle of existence. Dreams have been the oasis of innocence, the purity of the human soul during my journey through the desert of every day routines and the overemphasis on our separateness from each other in the competitive atmosphere of our culture.

Dreams are the common realm, the connective, healing tissue for us, who have lost our way to the connectedness of the human species.

— *Markku Siivola*