

The use of dreams in group analysis” touching intangibles”

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Abstract

The dreams have a natural symbolic language that can be difficult to understand and every dream is something new. Jung compares dreams to an unknown foreign language. The symbol in a dream is a fact, it means what it is. It must be understood, not as if it were a facade to hide. The language of the dreamer is in the signs and symbols, figures of people are also archetypal motifs as the treasures in a cave, the hero's journey, the cross a river. One of the symbolic forms of the archetype of the Self appears in a Mandala, the magic circle, the main symbol of unity, the transcendent Self, Jung often describes images like this. Freud asserts that symbols are signs with a fixed meaning and uniformity of meaning. The dream has changed its value in moving from the point of view of a person to two people. Foulkes was a psychoanalyst who wrote the classic short on dreams. He believed that Freud: "The dream is an individual creation is not intended to be made public, nor to be communicated to others. He points out that dreams are influenced by the situation of the dreamer and that must be understood in the context of the transference. He defines his attitude towards the dream as "capacitor phenomena," the members lose their strength and are lost each other in deep unconscious levels. emotional loads are generated and stored and then dumped in a shared event of the group, often dreams support this event. Foulkes emphasizes that the group is the background of the dream: "Every dream recounted in a group is owned by the group and should be left to the group analysis", for example, sometimes they are ignored, sometimes are taken into account, but they can convey thoughts that might not otherwise emerge.

Key-words: dreams, group analysis, large group, context, interpretation

"I have spread my dreams under your feet. Tread softly, because you tread on my dreams".

W.B. Yeats

"All men dream but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity; but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men for they may act out their dreams with open eyes to make it possible."

T.E. Lawrence (7 Pillars of Wisdom)

"A dreamer is the guest of his dreams - nothing more illustrates the psyche and inner mystery of a man than his dreams".

Fellini

What is a dream? What part does it play in everyday life? Although many people are curious about their dreams, they tend to be given low priority in our society apart from professionals like us who struggle to understand the meaning behind them. We disregard them at our peril. Part of the 'mystery' is that so few people respond seriously to their dream life. TV programmes tend to use dreams usually as a means of entertainment: I have twice been invited to slot into a comedy programme as an 'interpreter' of dreams and met with some hostility when I declined.

Nightmares are being studied seriously by the Nightmare Research Group at Bethlem Hospital in Kent. Mary Burgess is endeavouring to help sufferers to help themselves deal with this trauma. She estimates as many as 5% of the population in Britain suffer nightmares.

Since Jung's death in 1961 (his last work was on dreams and dream symbols) the C. G. Jung Clinic in Zurich has conducted continuing dream research. And, of course, symbolic awareness has increased in the last decades - dream seminars, popular lectures and increasing numbers of people entering analysis have resulted in greater interest in unconscious material.

The ancient Hebrews considered dreams to have prophetic importance and often thought they were of national significance. I will come back to this with an illustration. In the Talmud it is stated, "a dream is a reflection of the heart." Rabbis preferred bad dreams to good because they brought fear to the heart and repentance. They recommended fasting after a bad dream. A young Persian Jewish woman in an exercise class presented the Jewish version she had been taught - "dreams must be ignored, but if you dream the same dream three times you must go and see the Rabbi". There was some amusement in response; she looked round the room seriously and said, 'it is written in the Cabala'.

Dream analysis was used in the 1914-18 war in the study of "shell-shocked" soldiers. In the French/Cajun/Creole culture with surviving Caribbean voodoo traditions, Dream Interpreters sit in the French Quarter of New Orleans offering their services alongside fortune tellers, tarot card readers and others, and enjoy a world-wide clientele. On a similar note a Louisiana paper, the 'Times Picayune', carried this advertisement:

DREAM ON: Dying to know the meaning of your dreams?

You know, the ones in which you're running in slow-MO, flying, falling, or losing your car?

Call the School of Metaphysics in Windyville, Missouri, a non-profit Group that deals with the study of the mind, including Memory, willpower, concentration and dream interpretations.

Teachers and students will attempt to unravel the mysteries of our wacky subconscious^{1/4}

Friday 6 p.m. C.T. Midnight Sunday^{1/4} your only cost is the call.
We may smile, but it genuinely reflects the local fascination with dreams.

In Boston, there is a study of people who have early morning heart attacks and these are being linked with bad dreams. Recent articles in the British tabloids have been concerned with the subject e.g., one in 'The Times' by Dr James Le Fanu was headlined, "May I examine your dreams?". He describes a study by Dr Robert Smith, a psychiatrist of Rochester, New York. " He studied the dreams of 214 patients admitted to a cardiac unit for references to death featuring graveyards, wills and funerals. The greater the degree of cardiac disability the more often were these death-related dreams reported, suggesting that they were in some subtle way warning the patients of their prognoses".

In 1992 the Italian Association for Research and Education in Group Psychotherapy and Institutional Analysis, collaborating with the Universities of Turin and Genoa, set up a "Permanent Academy of the Dream"

If you believe in the unconscious you have to take dreams seriously. Through working at them we have the opportunity to look at events in a different light - we can experience situations that may never occur in real life. Is a dream a product of a person's mental processes or is there more? Outer events can coincide with dream events in a meaningful way, so is there a motivating force?

Whilst asleep and dreaming, a pictorial figurative language takes over and reflects our feeling state. Where does the dream come from? We are alone when we are dreaming - dreams have been described as "emotional nudity", or a - "magic mirror" which dispenses with the screening device.

Freud paved the way to our study of this complex subject and the contemporary Freudian approach is nearer to the contemporary Jungian one. I will try to describe how I, as a Jungian analyst and a group analyst with a psychoanalytic 'upbringing' blend the two together when working in groups.

Dream Interpretation was one of Freud's earliest interests. Historically, he collected his dreams when he was a medical student in the 1880's and wrote to Fliess about the insights he was getting from them. The first analysis, i.e. his own, was a dream analysis. This led him to hypothesise that repressed infantile wishes are the universal motivating forces of dream construction. He wrote The Interpretation of Dreams in 1900 and sold 351 copies in the first six years.

Jung's autobiography shows how dreams pointed him in certain directions. The dream in Jungian psychology is seen as a natural regulatory psychic process analogous to the compensating mechanism of bodily functioning. Jung saw dreams as compensating the limited view of the waking ego.

1. A dream may compensate temporary distortions in ego structure - there might be a message in it e.g. anger at a friend may be on the wane but in a dream one may be furious; so a dream can bring back material that has been suppressed.

2. The dream, as self representation of the psyche, can show how one is deviating from the personally right and true path.

(This is different from Freud's view of dreams as wish-fulfilment).

Contemporary Jungians (like Freudians) try to remain close to analysing the dreamer which can be more difficult than analysing the dream, but could be better analysis. Michael Fordham, a distinguished Jungian, says that Jung was sceptical about the possibility or even the desirability of developing a general theory of dreams. In expansive moments he even prided himself on not having one. Freud's formulation of the manifest and latent dream contents did not suit him.

However, there are 3 major steps in the Jungian approach which I keep in mind when I work in a group:

1. A clear understanding of exact details and amplification.
2. Gathering of associations.
3. Placing an amplified dream (ie history, anthology, analogies and comparisons) in the context of the dreamer's life situation and process of individuation.

The backdrop is a person's life - the dreamer's philosophical, religious and moral convictions are taken into account.

Dreams have a natural symbolic language that may be difficult to understand and every dream is something new ; Jung likens dreams to an unknown foreign language.

Analogy - Freud and Jung come across an inscribed stone memorial on the desert:

-Freud would assume it was a disguised version of a consciously known language.

-Jung, like an archaeologist, would say the dream has meaning but it is an unknown language - the meaning must be sought.

The symbol in a dream is a fact - it is meant to be what it is - it needs to be understood - not a facade to hide behind. The language of a dreamer is largely signs and symbols; personal figures are also archetypal motifs like treasure in a cave, hero's journey, crossing a river. One of the symbolic forms in which a archetypal self appears is a Mandala, a magic circle, chief symbol of unity, the transcendent self; Jung often described images he found in dreams like this. Freud would say that symbols are signs with a fixed significance and uniformity of meaning.

The Nature of dreams

As Jung sees dreams as compensation , the general purpose could be to balance, to counteract a conscious attitude:

1. If the conscious attitude to the life situation is one-sided then the dream takes the opposite side.
2. If the conscious attitude is fairly near the middle, the dream is satisfied with variations.

3. If the conscious attitude is "correct" (adequate) then the dream coincides and emphasises this tendency.

Because of the compensatory behaviour of dreams, methodical analysis discloses new points of view and ways of getting over the impasse.

So, if we consider the practical use of dream analysis - from a Jungian point of view, which is not so different from the contemporary Freudian view, or indeed the group-analytic -

1) The patient is analysed not the dream

"The dream shows the inner truth and the reality of the patient as it really is; not as I conjecture it to be, and not as he would like it, but as it is". Jung felt that the causalistic approach (why?) is too narrow. What for? is important too.

2) Establish the Context- (and similarly, in a Group, if the members choose)

Stay close to the dream and do not go too far afield

Explore each symbol, using amplification rather than Freudian free association. Confine associations to dream images, which helps to minimise the most serious error of the analyst, to impose his or her own thoughts on to a patient's dream.

What is significant? What is the atmosphere?

What is the mood on awakening?

3) Interpretation- (attempt to read an unknown text leave it to the group)

Jung suggested another way to think of a dream, as if it were an ancient Greek play with four phases

(1) Place, time, personnel: presentation exposition plot

(2) Exposition and statement of problem: development of plot

(3) Culmination, something happens: peripeteia

(4) Solution: lysis

I would like to mention two other analysts who have written and lectured about dreams :

Donald Meltzer has an artistic model of the mind which keeps changing. He equates dreams and the play of a child. (Like Jung's statement "Catch a dream by its tail").

His method -

(1) observe a patient's dream, like an image on a screen

(2) then look inward very deeply

(3) translate from pictorial to verbal

(4) leave it to the patient to interpret

He sees a dream as 'lighting a candle in the dark'. He regards dream interpretation as a highly technical job, and like the group analyst, seems to favour trying not to do too much - to stay behind the dream, to monitor it and to allow natural evolution.

James Hillman - talks about 'befriending the dream' - 'let the dream tell its own story' - 'listen to the dream'. 'To participate in it, to enter into its imagery and mode, to want to know more about it, to understand, play with, carry and become familiar with, as one would do to a friend^{1/4}'

Dreams in group analysis

The dream has changed its values in the move from the one-person point of view to the two person.

Foulkes was a classical psychoanalyst who wrote very little about dreams. He basically believed like Freud that "the dream is particularly an individual creation, not meant for publication, for communication to others". He emphasises that dreams are influenced by the dreamer's situation, and need to be understood in the context of the transference. He defines his attitude to dreams by the 'condensor phenomena' i.e. - members loosen resistance and affect each other at deep unconscious levels, emotional charges are generated and stored up and then discharged into a shared group event - dreams often stand for this event.

Foulkes stresses that the group is the backcloth to the dream - "every dream told in the group is the property of that group and should be left to the group to analyse" - the group analytic approach "does not reflect dreams but treats them like any other communication according to their dynamic significance", i.e. sometimes they are ignored, sometimes taken up, but they can convey thoughts that might not otherwise surface.

Foulkes states (I do not agree with him) that if a patient relates a dream in a group, "this is by and large an expression of a resistance and a withdrawal from human contact" and that analysis of this is of paramount importance. He talks about the temptation of the therapist to fall in with this resistance and feed on dreams. (This is no different in individual analysis where the analyst may also fall into the trap). Foulkes missed potentially valuable material by not paying enough attention to dreams in groups, which is surprising considering the immense work he put into group analysis.

The idea of the dream belonging to the group is supported by Jung who stated that if one is analysing married people, one cannot deal with their psychology as a separate factor - one is dealing with relationship psychology and not psychology of an isolated individual. So a dream would not be an individual's own property but also his/her partner's. Every dream is more or less an expression of that relatedness. So it is in groups. Although a dream is a personal experience, in a group it becomes public property and members appropriate what is meaningful for them.

Jung talks about young children in dreams absorbing the unconscious problems of their parents - I am sure that dreams of group members may absorb unconscious

problems of the group as a whole and/or the analyst. In a group, the analyst should try not doing anything, and allow natural evolution to monitor it; 'tread softly' includes delaying interpretation and allow the group to do so or not. Judith Hubback talks about "creative confusion" in the experience of dreaming and Jung's reluctance to be too categorical - this appeals to the group analyst as it allows for flexibility.

The group analyst, like the individual analyst tries always to remain close to analyzing the dreamer. We question why some individual patients do not dream. Why do some groups dream copiously and others not at all? If a group has members who never dream, is that group analysable or is access to the unconscious limited?

Large group dreams

Many workshops on 'Social Dreaming' are now being held where group members share their dreams and evaluate them. The Large Group is an important component of group analytic training in London. My own experience is drawn from daily large groups in hospitals, various workshops and Training block groups. Some time ago I chaired the IGA's General Course when the Large Group ranged from 180 to 200 participants. I had dreams in relation to that, fairly easily interpreted.

Ø. The first was the night before the large group began - I was hosting a large party, masses of people were coming and I had no food prepared. I was worried and sent a lot of them out on a double decker bus for a mystery tour while I sorted something out. Two analytic friends arrived with a huge piece of French pate and bread. Felt very relieved and found a large circular bread board to put it on! An interpretation was not difficult.

Ø. Anxiety

Ø. What to provide

Ø. I have to drive the bus like (the large Group) on a mystery tour with no idea of where it will go

Ø. Others (staff/students) will bring rich food

Before the second group my dream was "not hearing the music properly and getting told off. The themes of the Group were:

- nobody is hearing/the staff are not interested/they do not want to know.

- staff don't make it easy for the group - they did not help a man who talked about being in a concentration camp.

The themes of the following groups included Noah's Ark; a spider's web; spiders are dangerous and can bite: concentration camps; hopelessness- lectures were preferable; the group is useless- a man wants a machine gun- " this setting makes me feel murderous" splits and divisions; the oppressors versus the oppressed.

At the 5th group I had to announce the sudden death of one of our students. Again my dream before the next group was about the context and the anxiety and pain in the Large Group:

" I was in a large hall, many people were being held hostage. I go in to check them out despite warnings from our armed guards. I tell them they need food and that I'm going to get sandwiches. Nobody shoots me and I feel relieved. A colleague, a member of the staff gives me 2 ebony pieces."

The following groups looked for unifying themes instead of controversy. Other dreams from group members as well as myself linked up with the Gulf Crisis, the political backdrop at that time.

Here I will return to to the ancient Hebrews' idea that dreams have a national significance and illustrate this with a story from the book "Palace of Dreams" by Ismail Kadare, Albania's greatest living poet and novelist, banned in Albania.

"At the heart of the sultan's vast but fragile Empire stands the mysterious sinister Palace of Dreams: the most secret, powerful macabre Ministry ever invented. Its task is to collect citizen's dreams in every town, village, hamlet - then to sort and classify them in order to identify "Master Dreams" that will provide the clues to the Empire's destinies and those of its Monarch - tapping into an entire nations' unconscious^{1/4}.the employees are in constant dread of overlooking that one critical dream that will forewarn the sultan of impending doom."

There are various Departments in the Palace

1.Copying/reception - where dreams arrive

2.Selection:

- . private dreams are eliminated
- . sham dreams are eliminated

Dreams caused by hunger and cold also(the files get thicker in November)

The rest are sorted out and sent to the next department,

3.Interpretation "The Aristocrats of the Tabir"

Top Top Secret!

There is a frenzy file for the brilliant interpreter

4."Secret Tabir" - the state obtains dreams by its own methods

5.'Master Dream' offices-

where the best, most significant dreams are put into solitary rooms and guarded by sentries before being moved to:

6.The Archives

One Master Dream is sent every Friday to the Sultan in a carriage surrounded by guards.Sometimes the horses are too frightened and won't take the dream.

"Whoever controls the Palace of Dreams, possesses the keys of the State".

Is this where dreaming in large groups could take us?

Considerations for the Analyst in dealing with Group Dreams

The classical Jungian approach complements and compensates the Freudian approach in a creative way, and when it comes to the daily handling of dreams in groups, there are various points the analyst might consider. I will summarise these:

1. The context of the group - we can't understand the dream if we don't understand the atmosphere/the history of underlying images in terms of the group as well as the dreamer. What, if anything, does the dream do to the group?

2. Dream is one aspect of communication - does it link up with a previous session?

3. Use of analyst's intuition - based on WHAT?- check evidence. We need a combination of thinking, feeling and sensation factors and intuition.

'To be intuitively sensitive and at the same time objectively critical of one's own insights is an art that requires practice and long training. It requires, above all, a happy synthesis of intuitive imagination and self discipline.'(French & Fromm)

4. Eliciting dreams from patients - How? Should we?

It takes little time for groups to work out the analyst's interest, or not, in the dreams produced. Dreams are part of analytical material. Imaginative and intuitive analysts can easily slip unconsciously into becoming dream interpreters rather than analysts of patients' dynamics.

5. Transferences/Countertransferences - dreams are a point of reference for the analytic process. Destructive negative responses to interpretation (by anyone in the group) may be due to envy. Sometimes dreams are told to rival the analyst.

Countertransference can be helped by analysing one's own dreams in relation to a group - one can monitor feelings, and maybe unresolved ones.

6. Presentation of dreams: at what phase in group analysis?

The initial dream is not necessarily the most important although Jung mentions "there are cases where a dream in the beginning of analysis contains the whole analytical procedure. If one realises it, one would possess everything one needed^{1/4}". The first dream in a group can be significant, and can offer information both as to diagnosis and prognosis.

In the early phases in joining a group it is not uncommon for a patient to dream of something threatening - e.g. flood in basement - speeding car with no brakes. A patient reports this dream the night before joining a group, "I was in my Jag going really fast and it had no brakes. I was totally exhilarated but intensely anxious as I had no idea what road I was on." Fear of exposure/shame/dangers on journeys.

7. Regular dreams produced out of compliance. - The Group Dreamer? (Dreams can come in waves and knock you over)

8. Mass of dreams - (borderline position can be evacuational - we need to help the group to think as well).

9. None at all - What is the significance of this? or Scraps thrown in isolation
 10. Forgetting dreams - is this repression or not? What does it mean?
 11. Focus on the behaviour of the patient - sometimes dreams are offered in order to disown them, sometimes as a gift.
 12. Contents and actions in dreams
- The group needs to look for acting out. Every dream is a plan for action in the outside world - "The interpretation of dreams is like a window through which we can get a glimpse of the interior of that apparatus (Freud 1900).
13. Dreams in relation to termination of treatment can be illuminating as can dreams before a group break.
 14. Resistance may be in relation to the way a dream is reported - the dreamer could use dreams to avoid other unpleasant material. When a dream is told at the end of the group, this could also be resistance as there is no time left. But it may not be.
- It is a complicated task for the group analyst to address the group process, individuals, and the dream at the same time. Let the group members do the work.

In The Group

At all times, we endeavour to treat dreams very much in the context of the wider web of communications -

"Therapy in, of, and by the group".

Finally the following Lakota legend tells us how to "catch" our dreams

Legend of the dream catcher

Long ago when the world was young, an old Lakota spiritual leader was on a high mountain and had a vision.

In his vision, Iktomi, the great trickster and teacher of wisdom, appeared in the form of a spider.

Iktomi spoke to him in a sacred language that only the spiritual leaders of the Lakota could understand.

As he spoke Iktomi, the spider, took the elder's willow hoop which had feathers, horse hair, beads and offerings on it and began to spin a web.

He spoke to the elder about the cycles of life...and how we begin our lives as infants and we move on to childhood, and then to adulthood. Finally, we go to old age where we must be taken care of as infants, completing the cycle.

"But," Iktomi said as he continued to spin his web, "in each time of life there are many forces -- some good and some bad. If you listen to the good forces, they will steer you in the right direction. But if you listen to the bad forces, they will hurt you and steer you in the wrong direction."

He continued, "There are many forces and different directions that can help or interfere with the harmony of nature, and also with the great spirit and all of his wonderful teachings."

All the while the spider spoke, he continued to weave his web starting from the outside and working towards the center.

When Iktomi finished speaking, he gave the Lakota elder the web and said..."See, the web is a perfect circle but there is a hole in the center of the circle."

He said, "Use the web to help yourself and your people to reach your goals and make good use of your people's ideas, dreams and visions."

"If you believe in the great spirit, the web will catch your good ideas - and the bad ones will go through the hole."

The Lakota elder passed on his vision to his people and now the Sioux Indians use the dream catcher as the web of their life.

It is hung above their beds or in their home to sift their dreams and visions.

The good in their dreams are captured in the web of life and carried with them...but the evil in their dreams escapes through the hole in the center of the web and is no longer a part of them.

They believe that the dream-catcher holds the destiny of their future.

To conclude with Jung:

"A dream is a theatre on which the dreamer is himself the scene, the player, the producer, the audience, the public and the critic."

Note

This paper is based on a lecture originally given to students on the London Introductory Course in Group Analysis.

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