

# A Note on the Social Referents of Dreams

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## Abstract

Social as well as personal referents appear in dreams and, when recognized as such, provide insight into how unresolved social issues seep into the personal domain at an unconscious level. Dream-sharing groups (because of the time available and other factors) offer a particularly favorable opportunity to observe this interplay. The truth-telling nature of dreaming consciousness not only exposes disconnects from our past arising out of our unique personal developmental history, but also calls attention to the way such disconnects are reinforced by current bias and prejudice. The concern of the dream with connectivity leads to the broader issue of the role dreams play in maintaining the unity of the human species and its survival.

As members of the mammalian evolutionary line we share two forms of consciousness with our fellow creatures, namely, waking consciousness and the distinctly different form of dreaming consciousness that surfaces periodically during sleep. Remarkable as our achievements have been with our waking consciousness, it has been at great cost and has thus far failed to unify us as a species. We have managed to separate ourselves from each other along every conceivable line of cleavage. We do not know where our dreaming consciousness might have taken us had our dreams been given, if not star billing (Ullman, 1999), at least a featured role in the unfolding of the human drama. There are faint signs that dreams are becoming more than anonymous bit players. In anticipation of what I hope might be a step in the exploration of the full potential of dreaming consciousness this paper will stress the social significance of dreams over and above whatever personal treasures they may hold.

At this point in our history we seem to be generating situations that are getting messier and messier and more and more resistive to anything our current generation of leaders seem able to do about it. So far there does not appear to be effective answers to the increase in violence at an individual, societal and international level and to the growing level of ecological damage that outstrips our efforts to contain it. The social systems that should bring order and harmony into our lives generate unbelievable disparity between rich and poor, along with various other fallout resulting in a general state of moral slippage. Having said this, it might seem unrealistic, or at least overly optimistic to suggest that a greater understanding of and concern with our dream life might play a constructive role in providing us with insight into how what is wrong at a social level impacts us at a personal level.

Is there something so basically wrong with our way of life that we are at a loss to find solutions? Or, is it that we have come to an historical juncture where solutions will continue to defy us until we more respectfully factor human subjectivity into political decision-making? Might one way of doing that be to learn how to link the power of waking consciousness to the wisdom of dreaming consciousness? I think wisdom and honesty are somehow connected and, while not everyone might agree, I consider honesty to be the essence of the content of dream consciousness.

There is in each of us an innate resonance (not always recognized initially at a conscious level) to the moral and ethical overtones of the truth once that truth becomes clear to us. Just as the personal referents expose truths that are personally meaningful, I hope to show how unresolved social referents seep into our unconscious, find their way into our dreams and expose the personal problematic aspects of current society.

At the risk of projecting a utopian vision, I believe there is reason to hope that a deeper commitment to the understanding of what our dreams have to say to us may find a place in the struggle to alter our course. It may take a long time for this to come about but, then again, our problems were a long time in their making.

Before going ahead with the discussion of dreams and the social scene, I would like to offer a summary statement about my point of view about dreaming and what I have learned from my experience with dream-sharing groups that is relevant to the subject at hand.

#### Dreaming Consciousness

I regard the dream as the waking remembrance of a form of consciousness occurring most characteristically during the REM stage of sleep and reflecting in the form of visual and other sensory modalities, metaphorical representations of the interplay of residual tensions and reparative resources in the life of the dreamer.

Dream content can be triggered by recent residues that touch on any of the four dimensions in which we live out our lives ? the biological, the psychological, the social and what might be called the cosmic. Among other names suggested for this last one are the transpersonal, the transcendental, the spiritual. The point is that it addresses the mysteries of our existence that go beyond the first three dimensions. In each of these dimensions there is much that goes on outside our awareness and, in considerable measure, outside our influence. Fortunately, most of our biological life operates automatically to insure our physical integrity. Psychologically, we have become aware of an unconscious domain that bubbles up to consciousness in dreams as well as in waking life. The social unconscious, as I use the term, refers to the scotoma that limits our view of the impact on our lives of the social institutions and political arrangements we have created. With regard to the cosmic dimension we bring only our intuition, belief, faith and hope in the effort to mitigate the profound ignorance we have about such questions as: Where have we come from? Where are we going? How did this whole show come about? There are times when our dreams leave us with the feeling of our relatedness to domains majestically greater than our individual lives. These dreams usually have an ineffable quality and are probably what Jung had in mind when he spoke of "big dreams."

The neurological anlage of what we experience as dreaming is found throughout the mammalian phylum and to some extent in lower forms as well. Both Evans (1983) and Winson (1985) suggested that sleep provided the organism with the opportunity to reorder dysfunctional behavioral residues in the light of new experience. Whatever the prototypic subjective experience that accompanies sleep in creatures living in the wild, a profound shift occurred from a primary concern with the vicissitudes of the natural environment to a primary concern with the vicissitudes of a man-made environment. From birth on we are faced with the task of finding our own way in an ever more complex social order. The survival task we face ultimately comes down to the way individuals in a society relate to each other and this, in turn, influences the way different cultural groupings relate to each other. The task goes directly to the heart of the adaptive function of dreaming consciousness. Dreams zero in on areas of disconnects between ourselves and our past and ourselves and others, reaching out first to the significant others in our lives and with more or less intensity to humanity at large. Anything that continues to interfere with that quality of connectivity in our lives, be it trivial or life-threatening, becomes the organizing focus of dream content. This is not to say that our dreams cannot be positive, full of fun, and expose treasures within us that we have hardly been aware of. The important point is that, in order to enhance our connectivity to others, it is time to connect with our dreams.

#### Social Metaphor

We are all familiar with the personal referents of the dream and in the way they conjure up visual metaphorical representations of personal issues. Dreams also contain social referents metaphorically depicting the way social issues impinge on our lives. What is social metaphor? How is it different from ordinary metaphor? Let me begin with the word metaphor and then see what happens when we add the word social.

Metaphor is more than a figure of speech. It goes to the heart of whatever it is we mean when we speak of creativity. It seems to be a way of moving into new and as yet unexplored areas, cloaking them with analogous, original and sometimes fantastic creations. Metaphor acts as a force propelling us into the future. It represents movement, change, a tampering with the unknown, an exploration of a mystery. Directed at the

outside world as in poetry, art and even science, it brings more into the domain of the known. Metaphor arises in our inner world and eases the passage of material from the unconscious to the conscious domain. In either instance it offers to the creator of the metaphor and to those who benefit from its creation a more compelling connection to what is real.

All this applies to dreaming consciousness. There we seem to turn our resources into a metaphor-making operation. Repetitively we come upon a spontaneously generated flow of visual metaphor. In a sense, all dream imagery is social in origin. As cultural creatures we have a vast array of images available to us. While dreaming we reshape and combine them to reflect the emotional currents at play at the time. We speak of the image as a social metaphor when it seems to tell us something about the unsolved problems of society while, at the same time, relating it to an unresolved issue in the life of the dreamer. Dream imagery makes the relationship of the social to the personal more explicit.

#### Social Referents in Dreams

Psychological healing is both personal and social. It is personal in the sense that current behavioral patterns have a developmental origin from birth on. It is social to the extent that prevailing socio-cultural expectations and values reinforce both beneficial and self-destructive patterns. That reinforcement occurs regardless of whether it is acknowledged consciously or seeps into our unconscious. The growth-enhancing features of this reinforcement and the limiting and self-destructive features that have never been consciously acknowledged well up from our unconscious domain and are manifested in our dreams. The personal referents to the dream image are unique (e.g. "In my dream I found myself in the home of my grandmother"). The social referent, the component of what I have referred to as the social metaphor, is what is shared in common with others. The gender issue comes to life in the following dream of a successful professional woman (Ullman, 1993).

She is in her late thirties and is about to embark on a new relationship. She senses some hesitancy on her part and has a dream that displays some of the roots of her ambivalence. At one point in the dream she sees her father sitting on a swing with four female relatives, all in their heyday, dressed almost like cancan girls. What emerged from the dream work were two powerful images that surfaced from her childhood to influence her approach to a new relationship. One was that of the male, derived from the image of her father, as privileged to flirt and play around with other women. The other image was that of the female as victimized by the profligate male, as her mother was. These are images that she is still struggling with. In a larger sense they relate to the residues of sexism, a social issue not yet disposed. The privileged male and the victimized female are still available social stereotypes.

The importance of the social referent is twofold. It has an objective social meaning which goes beyond the responsibility of any one dreamer. Through its congruence with the needs of the dreamer at a particular time, its metaphorical potential is available to the dreamer in his nocturnal rendezvous with himself. For further examples drawn from the dreams of patients, see Ullman (1960) and Ullman and Zimmerman (1979).

#### Social Referents and Dream Sharing Groups

In my work with dream sharing groups over the past three decades, I have more and more extended the focus of the group to the way unresolved social tensions play into our lives. There are aspects to this group experience that are relevant to the idea that there can be broader social overtones to our dreams.

1. Dream sharing can and should fill an unmet social need. Over two decades of group dream work have convinced me that all of us have a need for a place where we can explore and resolve residual tensions and begin to free ourselves from the constraints they impose on our present behavior. None of us grow up perfect. Dream work can lighten the emotional load we carry from our past and lead to a greater degree of freedom in our relationships with others.
2. Dream sharing furthers growth and relatedness in a number of other ways. When mutual

sharing goes on in the framework of a supportive, non-hierarchical structure there results:

- a) An empowerment of the dreamer who remains in charge of his own unconscious and controls the flow of the process according to the degree of self-exposure he or she feels comfortable with.

- b) An empowerment of all the participants in the group as they master the skills needed in becoming healers for each other.

- c) A heightened regard for the dream as a spontaneous, creative, and profoundly honest display of our subjectivity.

- d) A sense of communion that arises out of deep-level sharing in an atmosphere of trust, support and the helpful concern of others.

These features of this group approach, plus the time devoted to each dream (at least an hour and a half), allow for the careful tracking of the metaphorical potential of the imagery. Sensitivity to the appearance of social referents in the dream is helpful to the dreamer in several ways. The following examples are illustrative.

Irma is a 50 year old white woman who presented a dream, the key features of which were that she was with a group of children and an African-American mother on a bus in which she tried out one of the seats in the back. A little boy was speaking to a man. His black mother was angry because she didn't want her black boy speaking with a white man who would be a bad influence.

After hearing the dream, the group engages through a number of stages designed to help the dreamer get in touch with the emotional context that shaped the dream. In the first stage, the group engages in a "game" in which they make the dream their own and offer their own projections into the feelings evoked by the imagery and the possible metaphorical meanings they could convey. This is only a "game", a kind of pump-priming exercise, in the hope that some of what the group comes up with resonates with the dreamer. The dream is then returned to the dreamer for any response she cares to offer. This is followed by a dialogue between the group and the dreamer designed to bring the dreamer closer to the information embedded in the imagery. For a more detailed account of the process, see Ullman (1996).

What follows is a concise summary of what emerged.

There were several projections of the group that were meaningful to the dreamer. These were:

"I'm in the back of the bus, a scene reminiscent of the beginning of the civil rights movement."

"The black woman in the family is often strong and wields the power. She provides sustenance."

"In the dream everything is black or white. I'm sensitive to differences."

"I take a back seat."

"The big white man is a bad influence."

"The dream is about my own self-agency and advocacy."

Irma's thought centered around her identification with the strong black mother. The recent relevant day residues arose out of events at her work place. She is in a middle management position. "Those above me have all the arrogance of 'the old boys club'." The particular issue was the responsibility she was given to make a number of important appointments designating various department heads. Those applying were a mix including many very eligible men and women. She was determined to make the choices as fairly as possible knowing that the positions were limited and that some competent applicants applying would be disappointed. An option was to send out form letters to those rejected. Reacting to what she felt was both impersonal and insensitive, she was determined to meet with each rejectee and share with them the basis for the decisions. In her own words:

"I wanted to be nurturing to all of the applicants including those who were unsuccessful.

That is why I wanted to discuss the factors involved in the decision instead of taking the easy way out and sending a memo. If I listened to the advice from my male bosses, they would look upon what I planned to do as just another game where someone wins and someone loses. Real men take it and get over it. Women worry about preserving

relationships regardless of winning or losing. Furthermore, it is unfeminine to win the game, especially if it shows up the boss. It happened to me once before and I knew I was walking down a dangerous road. I want to be a good mother but I'm a "black" mother who has to keep this danger in mind.

"Maybe I'm the little black boy, one who has the potential for power but whose mother doesn't want him to be corrupted."

What Irma was left with at the end when the dreamer has the last word was:

"I like the idea that came up that I was born a black woman. It goes beyond the events of the past week. It goes back to my relationship with my father."

Women were second class citizens in her childhood home, controlled by a very dominant father whose strict religious teachings drew a very sharp line between right and wrong. That line was more favorable to her brothers than to her.

"In my workplace I felt like the underdog. If I 'speak up' maybe I will eventually learn that a strong voice will not always be perceived by men as aggressive. Being born 'black' I had to have the ability to contain myself and still struggle to maintain my self respect and respect for my ideas. I have felt an affinity to black women all my life."

The deeply felt mesh of the personal and the social was laid bare by the image of her taking a seat in the back of the bus. The current issue at work led back to her life long struggle to free her intelligence and spirit from the limiting structure of her family life as set down by her father. Her growing self-confidence enabled her to take a step that not only upset a given status quo, but, as noted in her discussion of her next dream, led to a reconsideration of the decision made about this applicant.

The identification of the social referents in their specific relevance to the issue at hand makes the connection between the social and the personal explicit and reciprocal. The connection becomes reciprocal when insight into the social scene sets in motion the hope of coping with her own disenfranchisement. In her ruminations about the dream in the week after she presented it, she felt the plight of the African-American woman on the bus was a "parable for my entire life experience, oppressed as it was by the strict regime my father and his religious beliefs imposed on me." In what follows are further thoughts she had in the interim before the next session of the group.

"The power struggle and the silent or weak voice I used to preserve relationships made me very angry throughout my life. I knew that this dream can be related meaningfully beyond the events of the past week. So as I took my early morning walks I wondered about this power balance and its effect on my relation with men. Was this the stumbling block of my marriage? Of my unsuccessful attempts at establishing a healthy relationship with men? I do not know how to integrate the strong voice with love. Certainly the "recipe books" for attracting males give the opposite advice. I want to be respected and loved and give respect and love while not losing my voice and keeping myself down. I know this is a typical conundrum for many women."

Irma did have an opportunity to share another dream at the next session. She had recorded her thoughts the night prior to the dream.

"The continuing saga at work exhausted me. Again, is the strong voice and anger affecting my work? It would be good to have a dream that would further elucidate the last dream I shared, although I'm sure someone else will want a turn."

As it turned out, no one did. Irma shared her dream.

"I was in England in the country. I was following my hostess. She was showing me my living space. People would be walking through the area as if it were a shopping mall. There was no privacy. In the next scene we crowded into a bus. I was in the bus with my brother, his wife, and their 13 year old son Jim. My brother wanted Jim to get a haircut."

In the first image in the dream, Irma's living space was diminished. This had to do with a recent disturbing event.

"My privacy is lost. The builder behind my condo is cutting down the trees next to me so I

feel more exposed."

She felt, and indeed, was helpless in the face of this development.

"Loss of power is still a theme with me. Is my power being cut away from me" How can I maintain power and at the same time nurture?"

Another event occurred prior to the dream where she had to exert her power and where it emerged in a mutually satisfactory way.

"I spent three hours with the manager who we had not initially chosen for the position. I subsequently learned more information and knew that I had listened to bad advice. I acknowledged my responsibility for the pain this caused her, but I was grateful for our earlier conversation, painful as it was, for the opportunity to get to know each other better. At the conclusion of our conversation and before any final recommendation was made about the appointment, she said, "I love you." This was an amazing statement made in a professional arena."

In responding to the second scene, Irma spoke of a recent visit of her brother, his wife and their son Jim, age 13. They had arrived from the midwest where they lived on the same farm where she had grown up.

"We had a great time seeing New York together. One day when we were in the car, my brother noted that Jim had not put 'goop' in his hair. Jim's explanation was that he didn't know anyone here, so he did not have to worry about his reputation. His mother responded, 'We appreciated that, Jim' and we all chuckled. In the dream my brother wanted him to have a haircut."

The continuing saga of sexism and power emerged more clearly as Irma, with the help of the group, developed the dream further. The images of Jim and his father were meaningful to her. Her own circumstances are changing. She feels freer to take the "goop" out of her hair and no longer conform to an earlier role assigned to her as a female. In her identification with the father, Irma picked up on a group member's projection during the game linking the haircut to the story of Samson and Delilah. This implied for her the potential loss of power as the price of an adult world managed by men.

In the last stage of the process, ideas are offered to the dreamer based only on the dream images and what the dreamer has said about them. These are offered as "orchestrating projections" in the hope that they resonate with the dreamer. One of them did:

"You are floundering to make sense of the disruptive use of power and its effect on others as well as on yourself. You, like many other women, find it difficult to integrate power and nurturing love. You gave an example where power was used constructively. When power is used to enrich or support others, it deepens the relationship. As Maslow (1971) has stressed, asynergistic power is power used to gain power over people or money. Synergistic power operates for the betterment of all concerned. That is love."

The dreamer has the last word:

"The last orchestration is extremely helpful because it places power and love in a conceptual framework. I could not do that before. Now I know it is not only acceptable to use power, but also the proper use of it will lead to love."

Comment:

The bus is significant in both dreams. In the first it brought her back to her childhood and herself as a second-class citizen. In the second dream, she is crowded onto a bus with members of her family whose visit she enjoyed. With less dread than she felt as a child, she is able to use the image of the adolescent and the father to reflect on where she is now in her struggle to be herself in a world that can still expect compromising conformity with regard to gender role and the use of power.

Social Referents and Social Change

Delmore Schwartz wrote a short story "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities" (1976). Dreams have much to say to us about the use and misuse of power. With power comes responsibility. When that responsibility is not recognized or acted upon, the problem persists along with whatever misery it entails. When a felt insight does occur in the way the personal and the social intermesh, there is an opportunity for change in both. Reframing our life in its relation to the broader social scene affords such an opportunity. The end point is not an adaptation to but a change in both the personal and the social status quo. When one sees an opportunity for change, there is the possibility of taking advantage of it. Rosa Parks saw an opportunity for change and a social upheaval resulted. Irma saw an opportunity for change, and was instrumental in effecting a small but healthier atmosphere in the work area under her supervision.

While social referents are as obvious in formal therapy as in dream sharing groups, they are generally not dealt with as such. Therapy focuses on the internal dynamic factors that resist change and not with the way current social values reinforce a given status quo. When, in a dream sharing group, at least an hour and a half is devoted to a single dream, there is an opportunity to do both. Irma's evolution into personhood was damaged by having been subjugated to the will of her father, a damage reinforced in open and subtle ways by still prevailing authoritarian and sexist attitudes.

From Freud on, therapists have looked to the dream for its truth-telling nature. Poets and writers have always known this. In introducing the notion of social metaphor and the importance of including in one's focus the social as well as the personal referents, we are taking a bit larger bite into the truth about ourselves and of society than we might otherwise. Einstein had something to say about this. In a foreword to an encyclopedic work on man's engagement with myth and gods by Smith (1952), he was in accord with Smith's view that "...[O]nly if every individual strives for truth can humanity obtain a happier future; the atavisms in each of us that stands in the way of a friendlier destiny can only thus be rendered ineffective" (p. ix).

Dreams alone won't change the world, but at the very least they can show that the world needs changing.

#### Social Referents and Connectivity

Dreams confront us with either what we do not know about ourselves or have not wished to know about ourselves. In earlier writings (1990, 1992), I have referred to these as disconnects from the truth about ourselves. By the same token, there is a certain fallout from modern industrial society that continues to generate unintended consequences that are distressing to the point of generating a dangerous gap between our technological capacity for massive destructiveness and our capacity for a kind of moral behavior that could ultimately bring us together as a unified species. I refer to these consequences as social disconnects. The term social referent refers to the various ways these disconnects find their way into our dreams.

In different ways both personal and social disconnects are limiting factors in our effort to live up to our responsibilities as social beings. We are well aware that lies can be presented as truths, and all kinds of deceptions can ensue. In other words, there is nothing so compelling about the nature of waking consciousness that would insure its success as a way of keeping in touch with what is both real, humane, and ultimately an instrument for survival. Not only individuals, but whole nations have been deceived into thinking the emperor is parading through town wearing beautiful clothes. The tragedy of Germany during the Nazi era is a case in point. The growing horror was reflected in the dreams of the victims (Beradt, 1966).

Might dreams be the child in us protesting the deception? Rycroft (1979) refers to the "innocence of dreams," an innocence we otherwise seem to have lost. Might dreaming consciousness serve as an antidote to social as well as personal dishonesty in the way it cuts through illusion and reflects back to us the price to pay for self-deception? It is a more reliable ally in this regard than waking consciousness in that there are no spurious ego needs to pander to. It is more spontaneous, more insistent, more compelling. Awake, we are mired in our own discreteness and by the language we use, trapped by the seeming discreteness of all else about us. Asleep and dreaming, we forsake linguistic categories as a primary mode of expression. We risk feeling our way back into an underlying unity and set ourselves the task of exploring both internal and external hindrances to the full range of a deeper order of connectedness. The metaphorical imagery of the dream is our entry into a domain which defies the ordinary use of categorical language. It is simply not up to the task. That language is of use only after metaphor has forced what has been implicit out of its hiding place.

#### The Ethical Aperture

In the struggle to be fully human we constantly fight a battle on two fronts, a personal one that comes from unresolved issues out of our past experience and a social one from current unresolved social constraints that, in one way or another, continue to limit or corrupt our human aspirations. Out of this struggle evolves the subject matter that concerns us awake

and dreaming, as we pit the extent to which these constraints limit our lives against the range of resources we have to deal with them. The capacity to see these opposing forces pictorially as revealed in the dream is what I refer to as the dream's ethical aperture. Life confronts us with choices we must make, some minor, some major. Many factors come into play, depending on how important the choice is in its impact on our present and future circumstances. The reference to the ethical is not to any idealized sense of the term but, rather to its relative application in a specific instance. Given the individual history and the circumstances in which the choice is made, what is the most ethical choice available? Under favorable personal and social circumstances that choice may be obvious and present no difficulty. In that instance the ethical aperture is wide open. There are other circumstances, however, where the degree of freedom needed to make an ethical choice is very limited. This may be because of pre-existing personality limitations or the nature of the specific social context in which the choice has to be made. The ethical aperture is always open to some extent. Awake we may be unaware of it out of ignorance or disregard it out of expedience. Regardless of how easily it is overlooked while awake, it is an aperture that opens a bit more in the dark when we dream. This is true regardless of how limited our choice because of prevailing characterologic rigidities, or the social cost of the choice. Once we are helped to discover it and realize that it is an inherent and indestructible aspect of our existence we have at hand an opportunity for ethical growth and change.

The dream prepares us to look through that aperture in a number of ways. As Jung noted, it may, in a compensatory way, light up the dark side of the moon and reveal aspects of ourselves not visible to us awake. It may simply draw together and confront us with all the motivational currents at play in a given situation. In both instances it is the combination of conceptual and emotional honesty that nudges us toward an ethical response. Even in those dreams where solutions to particular problems seem to occur it is as if the dream has cleared a path for us to get on with our lives.

I don't think the truths that emerge in the dream spring de novo at the time of dreaming. I think that we are sensitive at all times to the truth but that awake we have learned how to use a number of defensive maneuvers (the mechanisms of defense) to play games with it. Whatever emotional dissonance is set up by these maneuvers is brushed aside but never quite disappears. It remains as background noise, hardly audible during the day, but loud and clear in the imagery of the dream. As members of the animal species we are sensitive to what is real. In the case of our own species, that means registering the truth when we are confronted by it, registering it not necessarily consciously, but somewhere in our bodily tissues.

#### Dreaming and the Survival of the Species

Might dreaming consciousness serve our survival needs as a species by the way it cuts through illusions and, with considerable drama and a good deal of hyperbole, calls attention to both our basest and our loftiest attributes?

If the point of view I have projected about the adaptive significance of dreaming consciousness has any validity it then follows that dreams are not rooted in the gratification of any particular instinctual need but arise out of the struggle to recognize and repair the disconnections that impede our struggle for a greater degree of freedom in our lives. There is a kind of intrinsic honesty, a genetically endowed incorruptible core of being within us that powers the dream and makes this struggle possible. As culture-bound creatures bold enough to participate in charting our own evolution we have created a problem for ourselves in maintaining species-unity through the combination of historical circumstances and our own foibles. It will take every bit of honesty we can muster to map out a less disaster-prone course for ourselves. Our dream life has a contribution to make to this effort. In stressing the connection of dreams to species-unity I have suggested that, while dreaming, we seem able to go beyond the range of personal concerns and more toward our place in a larger whole. The sense of our own discreteness dominates the scene while awake and we view the world and ourselves from that position. This perspective changes radically when we are asleep and dreaming. We rearrange our recent waking experience into a different order of priorities. Experiential residues are reordered around the issue of connectedness. Our dreaming self is reactive to anything in our waking experience that



tampers with the state of our connectedness to others. In our dreams we get down to basics and, from a more global perspective, see ourselves as the closely linked mosaic that we actually are.

#### The Task That Lies Ahead

Dreams, as we have come to know them in the modern age, were born with a symbolical umbilical cord linking them to their psychoanalytic parentage and has never been completely shed. The history of the psychoanalytic movement has left a heritage that played into the cult of the expert. A sharp line was drawn from the very beginning and is still much in evidence, between a professional class and the general public with regard to dreams. A mystique evolved that left a dreamer adrift in controversial theoretical waters. Therapists as experts in the art of psychological healing should make good use of dreams in conjunction with any theory they might find useful. The problem arises when dream work itself is made the exclusive domain of the therapist. The unfortunate result has been, at least until recently, the monopolization of a precious gift that belongs to all of us, and one that should not remain tethered to any professional theoretical system. Very few psychoanalysts have engaged with the public in fostering dream sharing. The natural curiosity about our dream life should never have been so exclusively diverted into professional channels.

I have tried in my writings (Ullman and Zimmerman, 1979; Ullman, 1999) to make the case for the importance of extending dream work into the public domain. The pertinent concepts and the necessary skills can be taught. A grasp of the personal referents of the dream results in behavioral change. By the same token, the social referents provide insight into the way problems that can only be solved at a social level insinuate themselves into the unconscious domain of the individual, resulting in a mistaken sense of exclusive personal responsibility. True responsibility lies not in the existence of the problem but in doing something about it. Therein lies the potential for behavior oriented to social change.

As any analyst knows, incipient change sets in motion resistance to change. Honesty is not always well tolerated, either at an individual or a social level. One of the unexpected but welcome features of a dream sharing group is the way the generation of trust in the process in combination with the natural curiosity of the dreamer keeps defensiveness at bay long enough for the message of the dream to be heard, regardless of what painful material is stirred up. Resistance to social change is more complex and more difficult to overcome. It requires cooperative effort and tends to occur in small incremental ways rather than in radical breaks with the past.

Every member of our species is a dreamer. If dream work had a higher social valence than it now enjoys, might it, in the way it addresses the micro-level of individual relatedness, make a contribution toward remedying relatedness within the family and the community? Once dreaming consciousness is more generally recognized as constructively complementary to waking consciousness, and were that complementarity ever to gain a foothold in the public domain, it just might open up one more pathway to a more humane social order.

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