



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Dream Divination: Intuition and Dream Sharing

Dream sharing is becoming more popular. Dream groups abound. We have always been dreamers, but only recently have we, in this European, Protestant culture, become dream sharers. Telling one another our dreams can be good, because it is one way for dream medicine to spread out into the public arena and educate our culture. On a more personal level, dream sharing helps us to learn that our dreams are not that unique, that others have strange dreams just as we do. Yet our dreams also reflect something unique about us as individuals. There is something both universal and individual in our dreams. The universal dimension allows others to understand or relate to our dream stories. The individual dimension of dreams makes it difficult for others to interpret our dreams in their most personal of meanings. We are left imagining what we would think if it “were my dream.”

DREAM MEDICINE

Needing ways for people to constructively share their dreams and their ideas about these dreams, folks interested in the dreamwork movement have had to confront this challenge of the universal/individual dilemma. After all, the dreamwork movement would be self-defeating if, while it encouraged people to share dreams, it also encouraged people to play amateur psychologist and interpret other people's dreams. What would be the advancement in that? At least professionals have some training in how to interact with other people while sharing with them delicate information that might hurt the person's vulnerabilities. So to encourage dream sharing among regular folks requires us to go outside the arena of dreams and into the larger arena of human relationships, communication styles, the interpersonal negotiation of advice giving and receiving, and the difference between sharing among equals and influence peddling between folks who feel unequal. In other words, if you have two people, neither "professional" in their study of dreams, how can they constructively share their dream insights with one another? Do people have any natural abilities at their disposal which would be useful? They certainly have a background of human experience and what they have learned from those experiences.

Here's one way to harness those experiences: Montague Ullman, mentioned several times in this book, is a psychiatrist who has devoted himself to the "de-professionalism" of the dream. In his program for a self-help dream group, he advises people to take a "if this were my dream" approach to sharing comments about other people's dreams. In other words, he objects to our assuming the right to say to another person, "Your dream means that you...." Instead, he advocates that when you hear another person's dream, allow the dream story to affect you personally, and then share what is happening within you as you digest the dream. That information can help the dreamer to explore their own feelings. I believe it is a sound method. Unfortunately, however, the phrase, "If I were you, I..." is already in our vocabulary, with it the common connotation of one person with a supposedly superior perspective giving advice to a person with a relatively inferior perspective. Thus the "if it were my dream" approach, although technically innocent of projecting ideas onto the dreamer, in actuality often lends itself to allowing one person to blatantly influence the dreamer about the dream's meaning and what the dreamer should do about it.

I agree with the spirit of Ullman's method as it is consistent with general principles of communication theory. I know that psychologists of human relations often encourage people to use "I" statements to another person, rather than "You" statements. In other words, rather than claiming to someone you admire, "You are a genius!", it might be better to say, "I find myself in awe of

Dream Divination

your abilities." It doesn't seem like it would make much of a difference, but if you allow yourself to offer a positive judgment of another person, you are implicitly allowing yourself to offer negative judgments. If the statements are negative, the different impact of the two styles becomes more obvious. Look at the difference between, "I find myself feeling shy around you, afraid I might hear something that would hurt my feelings," compared to, "You have a hurtful mouth!" Which would you rather hear? The first formulation leaves the listener free to respond, even inwardly, in whatever manner comes natural, as there was no direct attack upon the listener. The second formulation sets up a confrontive reaction. Ullman's "if it were my dream" approach respects this reality.

Technically speaking, Ullman's approach derives from the perspective called "inter-subjectivity." This perspective says, in essence, we do not see each other objectively, but rather we see each other in our own terms. As once quoted from the *Talmud*, "we do not see things as they are, but as we are." Rather than bemoan this fact, or try to overcome it, what Ullman is doing is trying to harness it for a good purpose. It is like taking advantage of the truth, "it takes one to know one." If you want to know what another person's dream means, find that same dream within yourself and ask what it means to you, for you, and what you plan on doing about it. In other words, sometimes we can help another person best by sharing with that person what is going on inside of ourselves. That idea is the principle behind the "if it were my dream" approach, and I am in accord with the intention that drives this method. I have developed different, but comparable methods, also in the inter-subjective manner.

Recall the "Dream Drawing Story Game," where one person draws a dream and the other person makes up a story about the dream. Here we have a good example of using the inter-subjective approach. In response to one person's dream, another person shares something from within by way of telling a story. The dreamer is left free to detect or invent any or no connections between their dream and the story the other person told. It is an inter-subjective method in that the person interpreting the dream does not create statements about the dream itself, but offers something subjective, from the person's own repertoire of responses. The person's "interpretation" thus reflects as much about the person sharing than it might about the dream and the person who dreamed it. It is a method relatively safe from passing judgments, yet it does take advantage of the intuition that can play a role in such story telling.

The "Dream Helper Ceremony" has a similar feature. The dreams do not directly confront the focus person with a solution, as in, "Here is your problem—here is what you need to do!" Instead, it is the common patterns in the

continued on page 252

DREAM MEDICINE

Tracking the Dream Story

Sometimes the most simple, obvious statement contains the most profound truth. Case in point: A dream is a story. It's a simple idea, almost obvious when you think about it. Dreams have the drama of powerful stories.

Have you ever wondered why, if dreams are supposed to be "messages", that they usually come in the form of stories, rather than in the form of explanations or instructions? I'm sure you've wished, "If my dreams are trying to get a message across to me, why don't they do it more directly?" Have you ever considered that, maybe, the story is the most direct method?

We all enjoy stories. We respond to them more directly than we do to dry, intellectual explanations. We are now just beginning to understand, in a dry intellectual, scientific way, how people understand stories and grasp their meaning. Responding to stories is so natural, we never wondered how we do it. Carl Jung pointed out the dramatic structure of dreams and began the study of how stories affect us. Edgar Cayce used the theme of the dream's story as a basis of his dream interpretations. That method is now a cornerstone of modern dream interpretation.

If story is such an important way of learning, it would seem natural to teach about dreams by telling stories about them. Of all the dream experts I know, the one who does the best job of this style of teaching is Robert Bosnak. A Jungian analyst originally from the Netherlands, Bosnak first came to national attention with his book, *Dreaming with an AIDS Patient*. In this book (that became the basis for a stage play), he told us the story of his involvement with a person who was very much alive as well as terminally ill. At the same time he taught us a lot about dreams and dreamwork, using both his patients and his own dreams. In an earlier book, titled, *A Little Course on Dreams*, he told us stories about himself and his patients to illustrate the life of dreams and the attempts to find meaning in them.

Bosnak's third book, *Tracks in the Wilderness of Dreams*, is a story within a story, and an important new contribution to dream interpretation. At one level, the story is about his visit to Australia where he exchanges professional trade secrets with Aborigine healers. At another level, it is Bosnak's own story of his dreams

Dream Divination

helping him reconcile with his father's death. Within these two personal accounts we learn how to work with dreams in the Bosnak mode.

An important dimension of his creative style of dreamwork is attending to the emotional atmosphere of a dream. Much of the value of a dream is in revealing emotional realities normally hidden from the dreamer. Bosnak illustrates how the emotional atmosphere in a dream story is a psychic field in which others can participate. Yet I've found that the story doesn't even have to be told for its emotional field to have communicative power.

In the "Dream Helper Ceremony," a group of people "donate" their dreams to help a stranger in distress who is dealing with an unexpressed dilemma. What happens (perhaps your local study group has attempted this healing ritual) is that even though no one knows in advance the nature of the focus person's problem, most everyone's dreams proves to connect to it! That in itself is amazing. Yet even more, each person's dream also relates to the dreamer's own personal version of that problem.

What's going on here? By intuitively recognizing and uncovering the hidden emotional reality underlying the focus person's problem, the dream "helpers" seem to be reminded of a related emotional reality in their own life. Each human story has universal elements. A psychic "field" is created by the focus person's story and the community of helpers collaborate on tracking down a healing solution for a dilemma by reflecting upon their own lives. The dreams tamed the wilderness of the unknown and the stranger in distress became a part of a healing family.

Bosnak calls this kind of communication we observe in the Dream Helper ceremony "symbiotic communication." We come to understand the emotions of another person by participating in them. This intuitive link between people, evident in the empathic experience, is a key to dreamwork. Just as we better understand a person by empathy than by analysis, so we better understand a dream by empathy. A story naturally evokes empathy.

If we can empathize with a person's story without even hearing it, as in the "Dream Helper Ceremony," it suggests that the realm of stories is beyond space-time, existing in a transpersonal, fourth dimensional realm. Dreams are stories our souls tell to elicit our empathy. Listen to them!

DREAM MEDICINE



Dream Divination

dreams that may speak objectively to the dreamer, but that objective statement is more implicit in the patterns, rather than explicit, and relies on the focus person's own intuition to read those patterns for their personal relevance. What is more explicit is the fact that each dreamer is asked to find personal meaning in their own dream, personal meaning that may relate to the focus person's concern. The nature of the statement a dream helper person makes to the focus person is more along the lines of, "Here is what your concern has evoked in me and what my dreams have tried to do about that effect." Again, it is an inter-subjective type of interaction, rather than a directive one.

As I explored "under the hood" of the Dream Helper Ceremony, trying to understand how it is apparently possible for one person to dream for another person, I developed a comparable waking process, called the "Intuitive Heart Discovery Process." I wrote a book about it, *The Intuitive Heart*, that describes this spin off from the Dream Helper Ceremony. I want to share with you here how I have adapted that process to the interpersonal interpretation of dreams. It shows explicitly how one person's interpretation of another person's dream is but a dream story itself, yet that creative, intuitive dreaming can provide interesting interpretations!

The method is simple. The dreamer begins by thinking of the dream and asking for an interpretation, without actually telling the dream. The interpreter goes into a meditative state, makes a "heart connection" with the dreamer, and then initiates a "memory divination" process. The interpreter asks that a memory from a specific past experience will spontaneously come into awareness, a life memory that will be used to create a teaching story that will mirror the teaching story implicit in the dream. (I provided a good way to initiate this process; see the "Inspired Heart Meditation, pages 202-203 in the chapter on inspirational writing.) Having recalled a memory, the interpreter tells the story of that event, then begins to interpret that experience in terms of what the interpreter him or herself can learn from that experience. At that point, the dreamer shares the dream and the two people compare their stories for insights.

Here is an example. The interpreter, having been asked by the dreamer for an interpretation of an unspoken dream, made the heart connection with the dreamer and then offered this experience:

"I am remembering a Christmas when I was a youth, maybe in grade school. My dad gave me a Boy Scout knot tying kit. I wasn't a Boy Scout, nor did I know anything about tying knots beyond tying my own shoes. I was puzzled and intrigued by the gift. As I explored the kit and began practicing tying knots, I discovered a real joy and love of the process. Soon I had a passionate hobby. I never would have guessed that I was harboring such a potential love had it not been for that gift, and was surprised by my

DREAM MEDICINE

dad's insight into me. Even today I take pleasure in knot tying. I guess the moral of the story, its teaching medicine, would be that I can not always know all the gifts that lie within. We are lucky when sometimes a greater intelligence, such as my dad, or an "accident," or other event introduces us to something new inside of us."

Upon hearing this sharing, the dreamer responded:

"I can't believe it. Here is my dream. I am in my house, and I come to a room that I didn't know existed. I opened the door and found it decorated with unusual items. In the dream, it was like I was rediscovering old lost friends. But upon awakening, I am not sure at all what I have found, if anything. Your story seems to confirm the idea that I've been shown something important, something about me, maybe a talent or a love. Your story encourages me to spend some more time with the items I remember from that room, to see what they bring up for me."

So one person's story helped another person form a better relationship with their dream. We could call it dream divination, in that the interpreter relies upon a seemingly random, intuitive process to come up with the dream interpretation. For example, some people interpret dreams by laying out Tarot cards. The assumption is that through synchronicity, the layout of the cards and the patterns in the dream are both expressive of the same energetic, meaningful field. In our method, there are no cards, but instead we assume that every experience the person has ever had is a potential seed for wisdom, a personal "card." By making the intuitive "heart connection" with the dreamer, the energetic field of the dream somehow engulfs the interpreter, who then is reminded of a personal experience with a similar feel to it. It is easier to look back upon our personal experiences and extract a lesson than it is to see the lesson in a dream, but, as in all divination methods, we use what is easier to understand to help us to begin to understand something comparable, but more mysterious. Using the old and familiar to help us understand the new is the basis of metaphors. It is also the basis of dreaming, in that dreams often act as if to say, "today's experience has a lesson for you that is quite comparable to that time when you..." and the dream sticks in some item from the past as part of its vocabulary. The Intuitive Heart Discovery Process, based upon dreams, becomes a natural way for us to share our personal wisdom with someone who is sharing a dream with us. The memory-based teaching story also has the advantage of being analogous to the dream process itself, which puts daily experience into a learning context of a history of experiences. Thus the Intuitive Heart dream interpretation method makes equals of the two parties in a dream discussion, allowing them both to be learners and explorers. That's the ideal behind the learning community spawned by the modern dreamwork movement. ✨