

DREAMING - a balancing act

Dreams provide us peeks into our subconscious, revealing our deepest, darkest fantasies. This is how Sigmund Freud described dreams, as wish-fulfilment. But Carl Gustav Jung said, they help correct imbalances in the psyche. And in addition to that, often in dreams, we can find codified solutions to problems we are up against in life, as I have found out over the years of my practice as a dream analyst.

As a dream-counsellor I am often asked about dreams and their significance. In my explanation, I cite a metaphor used by Carl Gustav Jung: 'Whenever our body is infected by a virus or a bacterium, the rising level of fever is a natural process. No conscious decision is needed to re-establish the body's balance. The same system works in our psyche. In times when we are out of balance with our natural pattern of life, our subconscious sends us dreams and visions that are created by our inner self.'

That means for example, that during phases you feel too great, too important, wise and invincible, you tend to dream about falling down, being small, feeling the ground giving away beneath your feet or of planes crashing to the ground. 'Down to earth' is the message here.

On the contrary, when your self-worth is low, you underestimate or belittle yourself, you get a boost in the form of dreams about huge houses, great quantities of food, walking up a mountain or taking off in a plane. At times, you even see a form of a mandala, the archetype of the spiritual self. Thus, most dreams have a regulating and compensating function to help you maintain balance.

Dreams fall into four categories.

In the first category of dreams, the message that is revealed to the dreamer is simply mirroring his or her present circumstances and situations.

Stefanie, a 24-year-old student of law, dreamt she was running to reach the metro station. But no matter how hard she tried to move, her body refused to respond and she remained stuck on the ground. In actuality, she desperately wanted to quickly complete her education and get on with her career. Totally focused on her future plans, she ignored the fact that she still had to sit down and study hard for her next exam. The message her dream conveyed was: At present you cannot

go ahead, even if you wish to speed up your journey (the metro, as any transportation device, is symbolic for the journey of life).

Alexander, an Austrian engineer, landed a new assignment with a company in Norway. As he was required to move to the north for three years, he needed someone to look after his apartment. Being familiar with the creative power of dreams, he contacted me for the interpretation of his dreams two months before he left for Norway. At that time, he had planned to ask his elder brother and sister-in-law to look after his property, but hadn't discussed it with them yet.

In one of his dreams, he saw himself walking down a hill in deep snow, accompanied by his brother and sister-in-law. Suddenly he fell into a dark hole. His brother and sister-in-law continued on their descent unconcerned. Getting out of the dark hole, Alexander turned away from the snowy hill to a new landscape where he stepped into a boat and peacefully floated down the river. The message of the dream was: Don't expect anything from your relatives and proceed on your path of your life, taking it as it comes.

In this **second category** of dreams, the subconscious again produces an image of the present situation. But the dream also adds a suggestion for trying to take another direction or possibility in life. In this compensatory part of the dream, we see exactly what we tend to ignore in our waking self.

In the **third category** of dreams, we meet our shadow and other symbols of the collective unconscious. The life force within us begins to create a tension between the conscious and the unconscious levels by flashing symbols that represent the so-called shadow or 'the other person in us', the one we tend to ignore and forget.

Mary, a 44-year-old photographer, presented herself as a decisive, strong and independent woman. Although she seemed capable of connecting with people easily, inside herself a part was vulnerable and shy. In her waking life she ignored this part of her personality, but in her dreams, she was often followed by an unknown young girl, begging for help.

She first tried to get rid of the girl in her dreams. By working with Mary on her dreams, the narrative slowly changed. As she gradually realized, her being shy and vulnerable was a function of her soul, protecting her from dealing with the wrong people. This girl in Mary's dreams was her shadow, the part of her personality that needed to be included and accepted. The shadow is an archetype and is mostly expressed in your dreams as a person of the same gender.

Last year, Serita came to me describing a dream in which she was sitting in a huge car. Her driver drove straight into a jungle where they got stuck in mud. All of a sudden, snakes, most of them with a colorful skin, surrounded the car. Despite the doors being closed, the snakes managed to get into the car and surrounded Serita. Overwhelmed by fear, she awoke.

Snakes are common symbols in dreams, being ancient representatives of the collective unconsciousness. They are also a female symbol of creative skills and forces.

Being a student of art previously, Serita had given up her passion for painting to spend more time with her family. When this dream occurred, Serita could spare enough time to follow her interests. It was then that her inner self had chosen to remind her to give vent to her creative skills and include her love for painting into her life.

When I planned to get married to an Indian citizen and leave my home country Austria, naturally it took some time to prepare. Six months before I shifted to India, I had a series of intense dreams. Apart from the usual dreams about missing trains or wandering around at airports and train stations, losing luggage and searching for tickets, some of the dreams clearly indicated that my decision was right. There was one dream where I was standing at the banks of Varanasi. I first felt the chill in the air and saw pilgrims sitting and shivering in the river. Then the picture turned into a warm and comfortable image with me enjoying the sun on a bench. A Sadhu slowly came up to me, sat silently next to me and other people followed him and the dream ended in a peaceful and divine atmosphere.

For dream interpretation it is important to focus on the end of the dream. The theme of my dream had changed from cold to warm which is a clear indication of a positive development. The feeling of cold at the beginning reflected my fear of the imminent change, but the prospect of a peaceful transition gave me a lot of confidence to go ahead with my preparations.

Dr. Josef Dapra, my teacher and expert in Jungian dream-interpretation, carefully collected all dreams of his son since the age of four. 'Children are better connected to the subconscious mind and therefore are able to produce fantastic images of our ancient psychic heritage. 'The young soul perceives good and evil as having a common origin and instinctively carries forward this knowledge of wholeness that is often lost later in life.'

Sometime back I received a call from my friend Virginia who was in great distress over a dream she had. I knew Virginia was trying hard to lose weight, although her family and friends thought she looked just fine. In her dream she went to a diet-center with her husband. The center was next to the seashore and Virginia and her husband went for a swim. In real life her husband does not know how to swim. The waves were getting higher and dragged him away from her. Virginia desperately tried to find him but in vain. She realized she had lost him. She was then called to a tribunal in which she was accused of murdering her beloved. She awoke in horror, terrified about the signaled danger in their lives.

In most dreams death is a symbol for change and does not imply the real death of a person. Also, Virginia wondered about the connection between her husband and the diet-center. When questioned, she responded: Oh, he thinks my diets are useless and stupid. He constantly keeps nagging me about it.

What her husband tried to tell her in reality was revealed in her dream. The sea is an ancient symbol of the subconscious. Virginia had to dive into the water of her unknown self to understand that she might lose her husband's attention if she did not heed his advice. And it might result in Virginia blaming herself (the tribunal) for the loss of her husband. Virginia was stunned at this revelation and finally learned to accept herself as she was.

In the rare fourth category of dreams, the subconscious reveals its message in a "Great Dream". Usually starting with simple images of the dreamer's personal life, the subconscious proceeds to completely take over and project selected symbols of the collective unconscious. Interpretation of these symbols requires sound knowledge of our ancient collective heritage of symbols and myths.

The well-known psychologist Ernst Aeppli, born in Switzerland in 1892 and a follower of Carl Gustav Jung, gave an example of such a "Great Dream," that occurred to one of his patients: Being entangled in his scientific study and caught in an unhappy relationship, he had fallen into a deep depression. Aeppli successfully helped him to recover through a process of analysis. Shortly after his recovery, he dreamt of a huge ball rising from black earth. The ball turned into a marvelous blue sun, which opened up and turned into a crystal vessel. In the vessel, four snakes ascended, holding a glorious cup and out of the cup a crystal pillar rose which in turn was held by four lions. Another pillar rose and on top of it lay a shining diamond. It was clear then that the

dreamer's dark period of depression had come to an end and that his life was opening into a new vista.

To discover the actual theme of a dream, the symbols should be contemplated either from a subjective or the objective point of view. On an objective level, dreaming about a particular friend actually means the friend himself. For example, if this friend is helping you in some way in your dream, you probably will receive something from him in reality.

On the other hand, dream interpretation on the subjective level would consider the same helping friend as a part of the dreamer, telling him that he should become more helpful. The method of finding out which level has to be used is called 'amplification', wherein the dreamer participates in a dialogue with the interpreter, reflecting on all aspects of the dream's uncovered message.

How are dreams actually born or created? If dreaming is a creative art, who is creative? Is it our 'self', the center and the wholeness of our psyche, as Jung describes it? As the 'self' is the regulating, developing and controlling factor of our life pattern, it is different from our small ego, which is a rather recent development and much younger than the 'self'. In order to maintain an inner equilibrium, the self provides us with a network of dreams and visions throughout our life, to guide us, enable us to grow and develop our skills as best as we can.

Dream-interpretation accelerates the process of understanding this network that guides us through life. In order to learn how to interpret your dreams, it is necessary to recall and write them down in the morning. You might require guidance at the beginning to help you unlock the potential of your dreams. However, you can always contact me to read your dreams and teach you how to interpret them, so book a session and you will see.

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