

# DREAMS and DREAMING

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## Dream as Symptom, Dream as Myth: A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Dream Narratives

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Freudian dream analysis pays little attention to a dream's manifest content, except as a starting point for free association. But many dreams have a clear narrative structure, and in many cultures, the manifest content of such dreams is culturally patterned and significant on its own terms. The dreamer and others may find in the story of the dream a resolution to personal and even social conflicts that may be transformative. Such phenomena suggest that in clinical settings, attention to dreams as a creative process as well as a vehicle for expressing symptoms may further healing. (*Sleep and Hypnosis* 2000;4:152-159)

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### INTRODUCTION

Many of us have an image of a classic anthropological approach to dreams: in "traditional" cultures, dreams are used to predict the future; dreams are part of "folk healing;" dreams are a social phenomenon. As the anthropologist Ellen Basso has put it, folk dream theories tend to be "progressive" or forward-looking, in contrast to the "regressive" Western dream theory, which uses dreams as a window through which can be seen the repressed desires and conflicts stemming from the individual's idiosyncratic personal history and from universals of the human condition such as the Oedipus complex (1). Freud emphasized this distinction between his own approach to dreams, as revealing an individual's unresolved conflicts, and the prophetic use of dreams, even as he sided with traditional dream theories by recognizing that dreams have a meaning that must be interpreted. This emphasis on meaning was in contrast to the approaches of his more biologically-minded colleagues, who limited their explanations of

dreams to various somatic causes—such as the idea that dream images are merely random electrical discharges from the brain (Freud summarized some of the research being conducted in his own time in a lengthy first chapter of his classic *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud 1953 [2]). Similar debates continue today, as in the work of J. Allan Hobson, who (at least in his earlier work) saw the dreaming brain as struggling to make sense of the bizarre things it produces because of random chemical bombardment and electrical activity (3). On the other side, researchers such as Foulkes have argued that the scientific study of dreams has made little progress since the "discovery" of REM sleep in 1953, despite great advances in our understanding of the physiological processes of sleep (4,5). By the late 1980's, researchers have found few reliable physiological correlates of dreaming in experimental research (6), though more recent studies of brain activity during REM sleep have begun to show some significant findings that may account for some of the attributes of dreams (Allen Braun, for instance, has measured patterns of blood flow to various parts of the brain and found that areas of the brain associated with emotions and visual imagery are highly activated during REM sleep while the areas of the frontal lobes associated with logic and planning show markedly reduced activity. Such patterns may explain, on the one hand, the emotional power of dreams and, on the

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other, their often disjointed quality [7]).

For Freud, finding meaning in dreams was also a scientific endeavor—as long as he saw it only as a way of understanding the past. He engaged in the paradoxical project of seeking past causes for dreams in the meanings they had for patients (as Ricoeur has argued, Freud's juxtaposition of a causal model and a hermeneutic, interpretive one involves a fundamental incompatibility, since causes are antecedents while meanings are intentional, forward-looking, or teleological [8]). He found these causes in the history of unresolved conflicts, neuroses, fixations, and traumas that could be exposed through the technique of free association. The patient could be cured of the neurosis that manifested itself through dreams and symptoms (which he also recognized as meaningful) by means of psychoanalysis as a medical practice. Suggesting that dreams could predict the future was, in contrast, necessarily unscientific (though, of course, the most rigorous science is considered to be that which is predictive).

Though Freud dismissed traditional dream theories because of their emphasis on the oracular and the predictive, the dichotomy between traditional dream interpretation and psychoanalytic interpretation that Freud articulated actually embeds and confounds two contrasts that should be disentangled: a forward-looking versus backward-looking approach to interpretation on the one hand, and a social versus an individual understanding of dreams on the other. When we disentangle these two axes, it is possible to understand how dreams can be in some sense predictive, in the way that good hypotheses in the social sciences are predictive: because they involve astute analysis of a social situation and hence provide a kind of map of how people will act in the future. Even further, in certain cases, dreams are a social act that has the power to create a future. Dreams can be transformative, even mythical, not only for the individual dreamer, but also for others in the dreamer's social world. Freud's own approach was firmly grounded in a discourse of modernity that included cultural assumptions which prioritize the individual, articulating for the individual a private interior or "inner self," and pathologizing and medicalizing the experience of distress and conflict. Focusing only on latent meanings for the individual not only breaks up the socially communicable "text" of the dream; of also projects the dreamer backward, away from the social present and future trajectory of his or her life.

I am not talking about an obscure social phenomenon to be found only in remote, unmodernized areas, but one that is particularly likely to occur among those who are in complex social

situations negotiating inconsistent identities and expectations, such as immigrants and many other inhabitants of the modern world. I suggest this because many of the transformative dreams that I have seen or have read in anthropological literature have occurred in individuals caught between cultures. The difficulty for psychiatry and practitioners in other clinical settings is that people who have such powerful, transformative or "effective" dreams are unlikely to be among the population that clinicians see. Such dreamers have, in effect, found their own solution to a conflict, a solution that in some cases works for others as well. Nevertheless, this phenomenon is relevant for psychiatry because it suggests that there is a blind spot not only among medically oriented psychiatrists who ignore dreams when it comes to treating patients caught in stressful situations, but even for psychoanalytically-oriented psychotherapists. The dream is not necessarily just a symptom; it can also be a creative act that affects the dreamer's identity and social positioning, and in such situations it is often the dream's overt content and its narrative structure that are significant.

### *The Loss of Manifest Content*

In "The Limits to the Possibility of Interpretation," Freud distinguished mental activities into two types, those that pursue a "useful aim" (i.e., have a social purpose) and those that pursue "an immediate yield of pleasure"(9). The former includes intellectual judgements, preparations for action, and conveyance of information to other people; the latter are play or phantasy and essentially private. It is the business of preconscious thought to be concerned with the tasks of life. Dreaming is an activity of the second kind. Its only useful function is guarding sleep. While even few psychoanalysts today would accept this very narrow theory of human motivation, the causal aspect of Freud's theory of dreams rests on it.

In Freud's distinctive approach to deciphering the meaning of dreams, which sharply distinguished his technique of dream interpretation from traditional approaches, the dream narrative or manifest content was merely a taking off point for the process of free association, which would lead to the "real" underlying meaning or meanings of the dream, the latent content. This hermeneutic method of interpretation proved to be a brilliant technique for uncovering the multiple layers of meaning that he found dreams to have. In trying to understand what he called "dreamwork," he identified several strategies of interpretation: condensation (the combination of multiple of ideas into a single image), displacement (the substitution of one image by a related, less disturbing one),

considerations of representability (how dream thoughts such as negation can be expressed by images), symbolization (use of a neutral image that bears some kind of iconic relationship to a sexual thought), and the principle of overdetermination (the fact that a single image is linked to and evoked by several different dream thoughts). This approach to dream interpretation and the parallel process of understanding neurotic conflict have had a profound influence on western culture, including academic disciplines such as literature, history, film theory and other humanities and social sciences.

But is something lost in this kind of dream interpretation? Despite Freud's powerful influence on twentieth century thought, later scholars and even some of Freud's immediate followers sensed something missing in this approach. Perhaps the most famous and controversial dissident was Carl Jung, who broke with Freud over Freud's insistence that the latent content of a dream expresses, above all else, a sexual conflict. He also challenged Freud's tendency to move too quickly from the manifest dream images and symbols to the dreamer's free associations and their infantile roots. Jung placed greater emphasis on the dream imagery itself, encouraging the dreamer to "amplify" the dream by entering into the atmosphere of the dream, re-experiencing and examining its images more fully instead of moving away from the images through free association. Jung also felt that dreams seek to "express something that the ego does not understand" (Jung 1967-1978 [10], vol 7, paragraph 189). They are, in other words, forward-looking, even problem-solving (Stevens, comparing Freud's and Jung's own dreams, has pointed out that "Freud's dreams were relatively fragmented and disorganized in comparison with Jung's, which tended to have more coherent symbolism and a stronger narrative structure" [11], suggesting that such differences in personal experience may account for some of their disagreement.) Because of Jung's greater involvement with religion and mythology as fundamental components of his dream theory (Freud also dabbled in mythology, most notably in his use of the Oedipus myth, but his use of the myth is quite different from Jung's. He found in the Oedipus myth an explicit enactment of a fundamental psychological conflict, but he could have articulated his theory of psychosexual development and conflict even if the myth had not existed. Jung's approach, in contrast, identifies mythical archetypes as a basic source of the meaning of dreams) his approach, though influential in religious studies and among New Agers, has never been taken as seriously in psychiatric and clinical circles or even in academic and literary circles as

Freud's was.

Other more recent scholars have also turned to a reconsideration of the manifest content of dreams. For instance, Bert States, a literary theorist who has written a study of dreams as narratives (12), takes a position that, while not contradictory to Freud's, has a very different emphasis (States' pattern of citation demonstrates Jung's lack of academic respectability. Though States claims not to be addressing interpretive or motivational issues and is not interested in free association techniques that move away from the dream's surface structure, Freud is a frequent interlocutor in his text, while Jung merits only glancing mention in one footnote, despite the fact that States extensively explores and theorizes the phenomenon of archetypes, one of Jung's favorite concepts, and, like Jung, attends to manifest content):

"Narrative is a persistent characteristic of dreams, and a persistent characteristic of dream narratives is that its consistency—its aesthetic coherence, so to speak,—is the evolution of an emotional tension as opposed to the evolution of a causal sequence" (States 1993:101).

"The business of the dream, then, is not to point cryptically to, or away from, the primal source of a particular emotion but to enact the emotion in its entirety as a psychic state that can only be represented cubistically—that is, as a fusion of past and present experience" (States 1993:102).

Freud used the term "secondary revision" to characterize and account for the narrative flow of the dream, and Freud's method quickly set aside the product of this secondary revision, the dream's (more or less successful) coherence, in his quest for meaning. But for most of us, it is precisely the narrative flow that makes a dream so interesting to recall and even to recount. Dream-telling can be a social event, even in Western societies that do not recognize dreams as significant (or, influenced by Freudian theory, create a fear that if I tell a dream, I may be revealing some psychological disturbance or neurotic conflict). Psychoanalytic theory has removed the social dimension of dreaming—because it is an approach that is itself intellectually shaped by our cultural understandings, social pressures and scientific perspective, all of which presume and constitute individuals with private interiors.

### *The Anthropology of Dreaming*

Can a look at how dreams are understood and managed in other societies restore this missing dimension to our understanding of dreams? The focus in psychoanalytic interpretations of dreams is on intrapsychic conflict between what Freud saw as

basically anti-social wishes (egoistic and libidinal impulses) and the constraints of society. Early psychoanalytic anthropologists and psychoanalysts who did field work took this approach and applied it to the analysis of myths and rituals. They interpreted myths as if they were the dreams of an individual, as if they were a compromise formation, simultaneously expressing an unacceptable sexual wish and its prohibition. The primary meaning of these cultural products was thereby reduced to a collective defence against infantile, anti-social wishes. Myths were seen as symptoms of a "culture's" basic conflicts, and were even labelled by some as manifestations of a culture's specific "pathology." This was an approach that other anthropologists took strong exception to. It has always been evident to other kinds of anthropologists that myths meant other things and did important social work. While many anthropologists rejected psychoanalytic approaches altogether, others have tried more productive syntheses of anthropology and psychoanalysis. Victor Turner, for instance, drew heavily on Freud's work (while at the same time distancing himself from any self-identification as "psychoanalytic" in orientation) to show how ritual symbols carry multiple layers of social meaning, simultaneously expressing and resolving conflicts between inconsistent social principles, while at the same time drawing their emotional charge by expressing basic infantile wishes. He called such symbols "multivocal" (13).

With respect to dreams themselves, anthropologists have found many instances in which dreams, too, are an important dimension of social interaction and serve functions that go well beyond the modest one of preserving sleep identified by Freud. Certain dreams may actually produce social transformation. These socially and personally significant dreams are not important because of a hidden latent content (though this latent content is presumably also present), but because of their powerful overt content and narrative structure. For instance, Anthony Wallace, writing in the 1950's, discussed the case of the Seneca prophet Handsome Lake, a down-and-out, alcoholic early nineteenth century native American who, it is reported, had a visionary dream that not only transformed his own life but also that of his reservation-dwelling community (14). (Wallace has identified several other "revitalization" movements that similarly had their origins in the dream or visionary experiences of the movement's founder [15]. The case of Handsome Lake is particularly well-documented because Handsome Lake narrated his experience that same day to three Quaker missionaries, who recorded it.) In the dream Handsome Lake was instructed to alter basic

aspects of the community's social organization, for instance, to switch from matrilineal transmission of political office and status to a patrilineal system that would be more compatible with the American system that was impinging on the community. Wallace's explanation of the impact of the dream was both in terms of both wish-fulfilment understood in psychoanalytic terms and in terms of cognitive restructuring. It satisfied some of Handsome Lake's personal emotional cravings, including the experience of stable and benign authority figures in the form of 3 men who appeared like angels, offered him branches of curative berries to eat, and reassured him that he was not on his deathbed. They also gave him a strict moral code to preach to others. But Wallace also emphasized a cognitive restructuring in the face of cultural contradictions and crisis. This type of explanation is consistent with a dominant theme among researchers from several different disciplines today. Dreaming is one way in which the mind organizes itself, sorting and categorizing recent experience, perhaps analogous to what Piaget called "assimilation" of experience to existing cognitive structures. A significant dream like this may be an expression of a more basic reorganization, a kind of "accommodation" in Piaget's terms, in which perceptual and interpretive structures themselves alter and adjust to handle new experiences that do not fit into the old categories (16).

For Freud, the manifest content of a dream is merely the product of a conflict, which (in Freud's earlier statements) serves no function but to prevent such conflicts from arousing too much anxiety and thus to preserve sleep. The dream is not meant to be a communicative act at all. But dreams such as Handsome Lake's are clearly meant to be a communicative act with important social ramifications. Wallace, influenced by Freud's approach, pointed out that dreams such as Handsome Lake's differ in several respects from ordinary "symptomatic" dreams in the following ways: They often [but not necessarily, it is important to note] occur in a waking state as a hallucinatory experience or in a trance state; they impress the dreamer as being meaningful and important; the manifest content is often "rational" or coherent; and recollection is unusually rich in detail (15). Such dreams are a major social phenomenon when they result in the formation of a religious movement such as the religion founded by Handsome Lake, and even more influential religions such as Mormonism and Islam, which could be said to have been inspired in similar way. But it is important to realize that such dreams are not as extraordinary and rare as one might believe from these examples. Furthermore, it is misleading to create a

sharp distinction between "symptomatic" dreams and such formative experiences.

Because of anthropologists' concern that psychoanalytic interpretations reduce the meaning of social phenomena to the expression of individual psychological conflict, so that myths are treated as if they were individual dreams, those who do attempt to look at the relationship of dreams and myths have been careful to assert that they are distinct phenomena. Barbara Tedlock, for example, has written of some excellent examples of synthetic dreams analogous to the dream of Handsome Lake. Because of a dream in 1991, a young man became the inspiration for a major religious and political movement among a Mayan people in a region of Guatemala caught in intense civil war who were being threatened with cultural extermination under pressure from Catholic evangelists. The dreamer, a young man, had a visionary experience (Though Tedlock presents it as visionary experience, it is unclear whether it was an experience he had while asleep, since the experience involved walking into a mountain, traveling around all the local villages while inside the mountain, emerging from the mountain, walking home without being able to feel the rain, and falling asleep in his hammock before awakening to report the experience.) According to his narrative of the experience, he had learned that Jesus Christ did die for us, as the Catholic Church preached, but that we should also worship the earth deities because they care for our bodies and are guardians of our crops, even though not equivalent to Christ. After the dream, he made a tape recording of his narrative and set out to spread the word.

Tedlock also presents a myth that clearly shares elements with this dream. Though the dream and myth shared elements, they also differed in certain key features. These differences paralleled changes in social organization of the community in recent years. For example, the status of women had changed in the community. In the myth, a product of an earlier era, the female deity has a fairly low status and is portrayed in somewhat negative terms, while in the recent dream, the female deity is depicted as being on a par with a male deity, a depiction that parallels the rising status of women in the society (See [17] for an experimental study of how changing patterns of gender role socialization and the convergence of male and female roles in American society have affected the manifest dream content of men's and women's dreams).

Before she presented the myth, Tedlock was careful to give the disclaimer now standard among psychological anthropologists that dreams and myths are different cultural phenomena, thereby

differentiating her work from that of psychoanalysts who interpret myths as if they were collective dreams. The problem that the careful distinction was meant to avoid is the reductiveness of psychoanalytic interpretations.

But we also need to reexamine some of the assumptions about the nature of myth that are embedded within the disclaimer itself. I suggest that if we reconsider the nature of myths and the nature of dreams, we will find that a clear line distinguishing them cannot be drawn.

Following States' emphasis on the narrative structure of dreams (12), we can say that dreams are like myths. This approach reverses the old psychoanalytic tendency to see myths as dreams. Unlike the old equation, however, this blurring of the boundary is not reductive, since such a recognition does not rule out the multi-layered significance of the dream, by means of which it also expresses the individual's desires and intrapsychic conflicts. Myths, too, have multiple dimensions: in addition to a myth's social meanings, it can also be a vehicle for expressing personal conflicts for the individual who tells a myth (18). Nevertheless, we cannot simply look at a myth as a text and read out a society's typical intrapsychic conflicts. The individuals within a society have a wide range of psychic organizations, an array of strengths, deficits, and conflicts, and a single myth may affect these individuals and serve as an expressive vehicle in very different ways (19,20). The key difference between a myth and each of the dream/visionary experiences presented in the present essay is that in the dreamer is explicitly positioned with respect to the actions of the dream, and the act of having and narrating the dream repositions the dreamer in the social world.

### ***Pakistani Sufi Dreams***

Among the Sufis I worked with in Pakistan, I met a number of people who had had dream experiences that would seem to match the lucidity, clarity and cultural structure of the visionary dreams described above. They were not dreams that had the potential to transform a social and cultural order, but they were transformative of the lives of their dreamers. And, like the Mayan visionary dream described by Tedlock, they bore a remarkable resemblance to an existing cultural template, which I would say is analogous to a "myth." Though explicitly dream narrations, they bears a remarkable structural similarity to a number of dreams and visionary experiences that have been recorded by Sufis in the Muslim tradition. In fact, the nature of the similarities and differences among the dreams are remarkably similar to the sorts of

differences Tedlock noted between the young Mayan's visionary experience and a local myth.

Here are two examples of such visionary dreams drawn from Sufi literature. One, from the fifteenth century, was a dream narrated by the Moroccan Sufi Muhammad al-Amin al-Attar (Died 864 Hijra/1459 CE). He was the head of an informal gathering of Sufis of the Qadiri Order in Fes. He recorded the following dream, which he experienced while staying at the tomb of a saint for twenty-one days, fasting all day and staying up all night:

At the end of this period, I took a noontime nap. Suddenly I saw that the grave had opened up, and a man came out of it. Another man with a tall turban came up to him, and said to the one who had come from his grave, "Give the man whatever he needs!" The first man answered, "It's not for me to give by myself." The turbaned man replied, "Give it to him!" Then I saw the two together give me knowledge. I awoke thrilled with what I had seen in that dream vision. I realized that I had received the blessing of these two great masters combined (21). (This passage was translated by Kugle from the Arabic text *Kitab al-Mu'za fi Manaqib al-Shaykh Abi Yi'zza* by Ahmad al-Suma'i. [Ali al-Jawi, ed. Rabat: Matba'at al-Ma'arif al-Jadida, 1996, p. 119.]

According to Kugle, the saint who rose from the tomb was a local saint and the other man in the tall turban was 'Abdul Qadir, the founder of the Qadiri order of Sufis. Such dreams thus embody a lineage of spiritual descent, which is the basic organizing principle of the Sufi orders, its mythological structure, as it were. This particular dream also linked the geographically dispersed Sufi order centered in distant Baghdad with a local saint, thereby legitimating the order in Fes.

A second example can be found in the spiritual diary of the Persian Sufi Ruzbehan Baqli of Shiraz (d. 1209 CE). This visionary experience affirmed to him his high spiritual rank among Sufis:

All created being... are enclosed in a house; numerous lamps provide a brilliant light, but a wall keeps him [Baqli] from entering. So he climbs onto the roof of his own lodging where he finds two very beautiful people in whom he recognizes his own image. They appear to be Sufis and smile at him affectionately. He notices a hanging pot under which a delicate and pure fire is burning without smoke and fed by sweet-smelling herbs. At this moment one of the visitors unfolds a cloth and brings forth a bowl of very beautiful form and several loaves of pure wheat. He breaks one of the loaves into the bowl and pours over it the contents of the pot, an oil so fine as to appear a spiritual substance. Then the three together eat a kind of communion meal. (22). (Corbin, a

French scholar of Sufism, summarized this dream in translation.)

The markers of his high status are the fact that he climbs to the roof of his house, thereby standing above all of creation enclosed within. His equal status to his illustrious visitors is marked by the recognition of his own image in their faces and by the fact that they eat a communal meal together.

The following dream was narrated to me (in English) by a man who was, at the time I met him, a khalifa (designated spiritual successor) of a Sufi teacher/saint (pir) in Pakistan. He had undergone significant intercultural dislocation in his early years, and this experience is reflected in the particular content of the dream. Though there are extraordinary similarities between his dream and that of Ruzbehan Baqli, this dreamer clearly sees himself as being of lower spiritual status with respect to his illustrious dream visitors:

I first met my Master in 1958, but I saw him in 1946. I searched for him from 1946 on. ...From my childhood I had been looking for a teacher, but I couldn't define my thoughts clearly. Then the war years interfered. I went to the United Kingdom for studies and stayed through the war, eight years in all. But always I had a yearning beyond the material aspects of life. In 1946 I came back to Calcutta and saw a dream. It was very vivid, as if it had actually happened.

I dreamed of a basement room, with a street passing outside at the level of the ventilators. It was a long narrow room with a low table and a carpet. There was food on the table. I was at the door waiting for a guest to arrive, sitting cross-legged in a spirit of great expectation. Then I saw two people coming, and they stood on the stairs. One was my pir. I didn't know him. The other was very saintly, tall, fair, with curved eyebrows and a white turban. Both were dressed in white, with black shawls, as the Prophet wore. I suddenly realized that these were the people I had been waiting for. I was awe-struck. I couldn't move. They came and sat at the low table. My pir beckoned to me and told me to sit with them. I crawled up to them on hands and knees, with great respect. The saint was on one side, my pir was in the center, and I sat on the other side. My pir said to the saint, "This is my son. Take a good look at him." The food on the table was dal [lentils], curried spinach, and chapatis [flat bread]. The saint took a morsel of chapati, dipped it into the spinach and dal, and then put it into my mouth. I can still taste it, a heavenly taste. It filled me with longing and love. I ate it, and as the morsel went down my throat, both of them disappeared. I ran up the road, like a madman on the public street, shouting and crying for them. I knew

that they were my life. The I saw a telephone booth and a thick telephone directory. I flipped through it as if I were searching for his number. I was saying Khwaja Moin-ud-Din Chishti [founder of the Chishti order of Sufis] over and over again. When I awoke I was actually saying this. Ever after that I searched for the pir who told Khwaja Moin ud-Din, "This is my son."

As in both al-Amin's and Baqli's dream, the dreamer is visited by two Sufis. These represent the continuity of this Sufi spiritual genealogy. The dreamer is initiated by partaking in a meal, the elements of which are typical of the food distributed at the annual death commemoration (urs) of a saint. The contrasting spiritual status of Baqli and this Pakistani dreamer is marked both by the location of the encounter—on the roof of Baqli's house vs. a basement room—and the nature of the relationship between the dreamer and his visitors.

This dream, like the Mayan visionary experience, clearly recreates what can be called an existing template or myth. But it is far from a simple mechanical reproduction of that template. On the contrary, the dream imaginatively updates it with details that reflect the particulars of the dreamer's experience and social world. Most striking are the elements that integrate his London experience with his Sufi identity: a thick phone book (not to be found in Calcutta in 1946!), a telephone booth, and a basement room with street ventilators (for a more detailed analysis of this dream, see [20].) His subsequent actions—the search for "his" pir and taking on a Sufi identity—suggest that this dream marked a significant and synthetic reorganization of identity.

To illustrate the fact that such remarkable dreams are not all that rare an occurrence, I will reproduce another similar dream that another Pakistani Sufi, who had become the disciple of a Sufi named Ghulam Rasul, told me:

I saw a dream one night. I saw in the dream that I was entering a small mosque. When I was in the center of the courtyard of the mosque, two persons came from the interior of the mosque. One was clad in white clothes and had a very attractive face...I didn't even look at the second person. The first person was smiling. He said, "You please sit here. We are coming." That was his exact sentence. The strange thing is that a name, Sufi Ghulam Rasul, came into my head. After that dream, I started my research, reading biographies of old Muslim saints, trying to find out the appearance, dress, and personalities of all the saints who were named Ghulam Rasul.

In each of these four Sufi dreams, the dreamer is in a significant place (his home, a shrine or a mosque) and is visited by two elder Sufis, representing the

spiritual lineage of the order the dreamer is about to join. In the first three, these visitors bestow initiation, in the form of spiritual food or knowledge. In the final example, these Sufis seem to be promising a future initiation.

### *Myths and Dreams*

These instances of dreams/visions from 3 quite distinct societies, and based on my experience of Pakistani Sufis, the frequency with which people would seem to have such coherent, integrative and myth-like dreams, suggest a need to reexamine not only the relationship between myths and dreams but also the very nature of myth. Myths are not timeless narratives, but rather creative works produced within specific historical circumstances, analogous in some respects to modern genres such as magazine stories and novels. We tend to equate myths recorded by anthropologists with the fairytales recorded by the Grimm brothers in Europe as they are experienced today in the USA and Europe—as tales frozen in books over a century ago, quaint tales of kings and queens who lived "once upon a time" and who are the stuff of children's fantasies. Only modern cultural productions are seen as creative products—and are rarely seen as relevant to psychiatry. Neither dreams nor myths are looked at as creative productions.

Going back to Freud once again, we see that Freud himself considered the relationship between day-dreams and creative writing, especially in his essay "Creative Writers and Day-dreaming" (23). He identified the "motive force" of fantasies to be unsatisfied wishes, just as in dreams. Emphasizing the similar qualities of fantasies and creative writing, he recognized their creative dimension but reductively located that creativity in sublimated sexual desire and ambitious wishes. Novels are thus fantasies: the better the novel, the more skilfully the writer has been able to transform his egoistic day dreams through the use of aesthetic techniques, i.e., culturally elaborated models and strategies. Freud also pointed out that novels show properties of day-dreams and dreams: the subject (the ego) is the hero; in popular fiction, as in many melodramatic TV shows, other characters undergo splitting—being sharply divided between those who are good and those who are bad. These and other characteristics suggest primary process thought. But Freud also adumbrates the view that fantasy and dream organize experiences, which has become central to recent theories of the dream. He suggests that fantasy hovers between three times:

Mental work is linked to some current impression, some provoking occasion in the present which as

been able to arouse one of the subject's major wishes. From there it harks back to a memory of an earlier experience (usually an infantile one) in which this wish was fulfilled; and it now creates a situation relating to the future which represents a fulfilment of the wish. (Freud 1959:147).

What Freud doesn't emphasize is that a great novel is often so because it portrays a social issue in an insightful way that goes beyond the asocial impulse of infantile wishes. It reveals to us the contradictions in our own lives. This is even true of the "psychological novel" of modern times, particularly if we see the inner self as a social construction, constituted by social phenomena such as psychoanalysis. The psychological novel reveals features of our socially constructed inner landscape.

By the same token the transformative dream also demonstrates the cultural contours of our "individual" psyches. Just as there are great novels, so are there great dreams—ones that transcend the social

contradictions confronting the dreamer. If such a dream is successful in the telling, people may even take it up and use as a model for understanding their own lives in a new way. The dreams of Handsome Lake and the Mayan visionary described by Tedlock both have this mythical quality. It is crucial that clinicians—even those who identify themselves as scientists and physicians—recognize patients as creative individuals who tell stories that reveal their situations and their attempts at solutions to problems they face. Some stories work and some don't. Some people are able to find solutions—whether through dreams or other means—while others are stuck and respond with depression, neurosis or other symptomatic behavior. In order to see this creativity in the process of dreaming and story telling, the interpreter must attend to both the manifest and latent content—as Sufi dream interpreters and those of many other cultures continue to do.

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