

The Dreaming: Part 1

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*"So may you have dreams that save you from yourself
And I wish you dreams that take you far into mysteries
And I wish you dreams that show you the things you need to see that will help you
And I wish you dreams that will please your hear and comfort you
And I wish you dreams, especially, that are direct, sweet, loving letters from home"*
Clarissa Pinchola Estes PhD, 2003

What can be said about dreams that has not already been said?

Perhaps something: my dreams are the stories that no one else will ever be told; the films that no-one will watch except me – and even I cannot go back and watch my favourite film again, unless my unconscious considers it necessary to tell me something I should have already heard, and deigns to send me a reminder.

We all dream (we are told) several times a night, but for me my dreams have, since my childhood, been as significant in my life as any other events. For years I kept a dream journal of every dream and dream-fragment I remembered, and I still write down the 'big' dreams – the ones that catch my breath or are vivid and lucid, unusual, grand or significant. My dream history makes **me**, just as much as the memories that I delve up of experiences from my 'real' past. Besides, the boundary between my remembered dreams and my remembered life in the 'outside' world is always permeable. My dreams are not just symbolic images for me to understand and give meaning to my life, but part an essential and seamless **part** of my life - and of my self. One early dream of grandiose and terrifying power was, for me, as significant as any 'real' experience in shaping my self. In adulthood, a numinous dream of a golden tower was a gift that led me back from the path I had been following away from what I wanted and needed to be. I am the adult, yes, that grew out of the child, but also out of my pool of dreaming.

Dreams are the road to the unconscious, the keys to our body's wisdom, the gateways to archetypal and shared understanding, the place where we sort each day's trash and treats, the palaces where genius resides, the puzzles and clues to our life stories, soul's path and our cultural truth. For James Hillman the dream is *"the best model of the psyche because it shows various styles of consciousness co-present in one scene"*.

And we can share meaning with others through our dreams; some would say that through dreaming we share a community, a world and a universe with others that we could not possibly ever share in the real solid, mechanical world in which time runs forward. In the world of social and collective dreaming, the dreamer gives voice to the many, and the voices and symbols of the many are seen and heard in all our dreams, if we care to watch and listen.

In every generation the dream captures us, asks us questions that we can never really hope to answer in the daytime world. In dreams history breaks down; images, meanings and magic permeate across the membrane – pass through the veil; we travel to places where there may be no boundaries, or where the idea of a boundary is not reliant on the science and psychology of the daytime world. In some cultures and times, of course, there is, or has been, no boundary between dream and waking – and perhaps it is in these cultures and epochs that our wisdom is captured and held, and yet where the essence of both our human creativity and peril is also there to discover, and to be revealed.

Dreams, like much else in our lives, can hold truth at different levels. There's the truth of experience – that I guess we call psychology: my personal subjective truth that only I have, which feeds back to build and re-build the self as it lives and is expressed in our

conscious and submerged night and daytime worlds. Dreams, as experience, belong to this truth, and are as significant as any other experience in our history (childhood, peer group, parenting) in forming the frame of the subjective self in which we can safely work and play in the world. There is also the subjective truth of the physical, in which the body dreams through its physical symptoms, feelings, pressures, aches, pains and illness and accesses another layer of subjective truth. Arnold Mindell calls this the **dreambody**: "an entity that is dream and body at once" and which is "a term for the total, multi-channelled personality", the "absolute real personality".

Then there is also the truth of the objective – that which we call science – the phenomena that seems to explain the how and why of our lives – and of our dreams: we can all read about the biochemistry of dreaming, the physiology of sleep. Dreaming is part of this truth too, because while its phenomenology can, in part, be mapped by science, its contents can never be. The dream is perhaps, the ultimate metaphorical challenge to science as the one truth about nature, and may be as important in this role as in any other. As Hillman writes, dreams are about "*making soul in the very midst of nature*".

And so there is the truth of the metaphor – that which is meaningful and collective – the archetypal, mythical, symbolic, shared and imagined. When we tell our dreams, and they have resonance for others, we are touching on this ground – tapping into the subterranean reserves of ancient metaphorical forests - as oil, as coal, as diamond – seams of deep meaning that give us our humanity. When Gordon Lawrence and his colleagues worked with groups sharing and experiencing dreams together, perhaps they were, rediscovering a cultural truth, by which: "*the meaning of the dream and dreaming spreads out to capture and formulate echoes-of-the-thoughts-that-are-there, in the space between the 'many-in-mind'*" (David Armstrong in *Social Dreaming at Work*)

In dreams, the boundaries between objectivity and experience - between physiology and psychology, between soul and nature, between metaphor and reality - simply break down; as the logic of traditional science was seen to break down at the quantum level. In the metaphorical quantum world matter is shared and simultaneous – may not even be matter at all - like in dreams, where logic and the rule of time and the physical world collapse. A pioneer of the new science of consciousness, Stuart Hameroff raises the intriguing possibility that even science might be starting to speculate that consciousness, dreams and the unconscious could be operating at a quantum level not contained by the boundaries of the personal psyche. Hameroff writes: "*In the quantum world there are deep interconnections and multitudes of possibilities. Time doesn't exist. In some sense our unconscious dream world is a lot like the quantum world. In fact, dreams may actually occur in the quantum world. It's not a different dimension, just the other side of our everyday reality*".

It's mind-blowing stuff, but may confirm what traditional cultures have always known – that the dreamtime, the dream world, the other-side, the unconscious – is as real as the world we (mostly) live in during our waking hours, and is a shared and permeable dimension in which images and symbols, themes and stories can find their way from place to place, person to person, culture to culture, time to time.

So at this time, as the quantum dream comes of age, can there be a science of the soul?

Perhaps not yet. We have evolved as animals who can experience soul and spirit; and yet, according to the rationalists (and I would like to be a rationalist if the only alternative is to bring dreaming and ritual too literally into the world as religious belief), there can be no ghost in the machine. This dispelling of the ghost, they argue, liberates humanity from the historical chains of religion and superstition. Yet out goes the baby with the bathwater, because dreams **are** the ghosts and while they don't have to come from God –they always come from the gods of our human imagination.

Perhaps like with the ebb and flow of the nature vs. nurture argument, there can be no real resolution to the debate on the ghost in the machine vs. the evolved machine. Phenomenologically - biologically - we have evolved as beings that experience and can be conscious of soul; whose dreams and imaginings give meaning to our selves; whose minds construct metaphors in order to explain why we are here - even if one of the metaphors is one that insists on rationalism. The idea of a spiritually empty, rational machine alone in the world with only one life-span, is as rich with meaning and metaphor as any ghost or god our dreams can conjure, and at **that** level of truth, no more or less valid.

For the evolutionary scientist this may be heresy: after all, the rationalist truth should be self evident to any thinking modern human being – just look at the evidence; it's been piling up high as mountains since Darwin and beyond. So why does science finds religious belief such a potent and slippery enemy? The pseudo-science of 'intelligent design' which is the Christian right's new version of Creationism, is so difficult to combat because it does not depend on science and scientific 'proof' for its potency. In fact it does not depend on proof at all, only on the projected, collective, literalised dreaming of religious men who have denied imagination - as most religious men tend to end up doing, even if they may start with it at the core of their faith. How can science hope to combat this without an understanding of metaphorical and imaginative truth?

For the religious dreamer, the dream or the vision opens up their relationship with their God – and hence this becomes the reason d'être of the imagination, which having now served its purpose in projecting their saviour out into the real, daylight world, can be closed down, rejected or channelled down the one true path. The projection becomes fixed in freeze-frame and only the one truth can **be** the truth – for no-one else's imagination (let alone their gods) can possibly match the cultural potency of a shared, faith blindly experienced as truth.

To me, my dreams are more potent and personal than any gods. For the dreamer who is willing to live with the uncertainties, ambiguities and ambivalences of the quantum world, the dream opens up a relationship with the self and (crucially) with the world and everyone (and thing) within it. The dreamed and imagined saviours, gods and ghosts are multiple and internal, and are therefore both the whispered and hinted voices of the **true** self (and in this sense the self does equate with the soul), and our guides (sometimes gentle and loving, sometimes brutal and uncompromising) to the collective truth of the world and of humanity.

This is the archetypal intelligence of dreams and dreaming. The way in which everything about being human can be incorporated, without boundaries, gravity or logic, within a (mostly) night-time phenomena. The poet sees dreams as magical receptacles of the dark and the mysterious – and the poet would be right. The psychoanalyst sees in dreams the hints and metaphors of the growing soul – and he or she would also be right. The scientist would see dreams as to-be-explained functions of a seemingly infinitely complex brain – and that view also holds truth. However the archetype and the metaphor and the way they manifest themselves in the human psyche and physiology is the stuff of a wider understanding of the individual person and how each of us to fit into our world.

We have always know, of course, that dreams carry the clues to this understanding, and that they are, perhaps, the first places we should look when we ask ourselves the big questions. And yet this simply loops us back to the age-old battle between the different gods of truth – between objectivity, subjectivity and metaphor. Perhaps we could think about dreams and the magic that emerges from them differently. Maybe the trick is not to explain the how or why, but simply to experience them and to live out that part of our lives with joy and wonder. And if we **can** simply be joyous dreamers, it may help us in some way to live our **waking** lives with more passion, love and understanding. Perhaps this is what Clarissa Pinchola Estes means when she wishes us dreams that are "sweet, loving letters from home".

....to be continued....

Bibliography

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