

Evidence of Wisdom in Dreams, Robert J. Hoss, M.S.

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Carl Jung (1875 to 1961) the eminent Swiss psychologist and one of the founders of analytical psychology, claimed that the aim of the psyche is to come to know one's other side, to control the whole range of one's capacities. Jung saw the dream as a method for bringing unconscious material into consciousness, whether it came from the outside (something we never became fully aware of) or whether it came totally from the unconscious. He divided the unconscious into the personal (material that was once conscious but is now repressed or forgotten) and the collective (content which has never been conscious, that is common with all humanity, perhaps linked to our evolutionary past)[1]. Jung further indicated that this collective unconscious contains the organizing principle of the personality which he called the 'Self' which he claimed had no deliberate plan outside of an urge towards self-realization [2]. The process of self-realization and becoming a whole being he termed "individuation." Jung indicated that dreams act on a natural tendency towards balance and becoming a whole person, by reconciling our conscious and the unconscious parts. Dreams generally employ what Jung called "compensation" as a means to balance the misconceived beliefs of the ego, which stand in the way of accepting our less desirable unconscious side and becoming a whole integrated personality.

Jung also found a strong relationship between the role played by characters in our dreams and the mythology of humankind which depicts reality as mystical patterns, and life as directed by unknown forces greater than ourselves. He called these collective forces and patterns from within, Archetypes. He noted that the archetype of the "Self", the organizing principle of the personality, often appear as wise and benevolent, guiding characters as well as focusing patterns, elements and storylines in our dreams that lead us toward new discoveries and transformational outcomes [3]. From the dreamer's standpoint the "Self" appears as an internal wisdom, directing the dream ego through a process of what Jung related as a "death of the ego" and rebirth of the new transcendent self. It begins when the ego abandons the existing belief system (personal myth) that no longer works, and journeys within to find a new belief system (a new myth). At some point the organizing principle (the inner "Self") begins the transformational process by first revealing the old myth (the misconceptions) and guides the dream ego, either through direct revelation or the parable of the dream story, toward a new self or new belief system (new myth). Jung indicated that in order for the transcendence to take place the dream ego must accept what is being presented by the unconscious.

Some biological correlates have been observed that are support of the Jungian theories. Integrating neurophysiological, neuropsychological and neuroimaging work, Hobson [5,6] describes a unique combination of active and inactive brain centers during REM state dreaming that appear to account for not only the unusual characteristics of dreams, but some of the functions that Jung and other prior theorists observed or attributed to dreaming. The activation of the amygdale and other limbic regions and relative deactivation of areas responsible for episodic memory, supports the Jung's contention that dreams deal with emotionally important "unfinished business of the day," even though the waking episode may not be re-enacted in the dream. The medial prefrontal cortex becomes active, which is involved in goal-directed behavior and attention demanding tasks that are explicitly self-referential, involving the many aspects of the multifaceted "self" [7]. This is supportive of Jung's contention that dreams focus on or are influenced by the "self" in its many dimensions (from the re-centering of the Ego to the attention demanding forces of the inner "Self"). The anterior cingulate is also active during REM. This part of the brain plays a role in: emotion control, detecting conditions under which errors are likely to occur [11], recognizing anomalies and initiating action to resolve inconsistencies between conflicting perceptions; decision making based on anticipating, determining and valuing rewards (positive outcomes) [8], whether

the reward is experienced or imagined. It is involved in understanding which decisions are successful and which ones fail by interpreting not only the successes and failures of one's own decisions, but the successes and failures of others' decisions [9]. It monitors the consequences of actions and mediates subsequent changes in behavior, providing the ability to recognize and respond to imagined outcomes [10]. This gives some support to Jung's theory that there is a creative, deductive, imaginative ("wise") decision making process active during dreaming that focuses on errors, anomalies and inconsistencies in our perceptions (our misconceptions) and can anticipate the consequences of our actions and mediate subsequent changes in our behavior.

This process of revealing the old beliefs, presenting new possibilities and accepting those possibilities is observed to take place in dreams in three ways or with three common characteristics. This internal guiding wisdom, when recognized, can help the dreamer to explore the inner wisdom displayed by the dream, which can be useful when exploring the dream in a therapeutic setting or simply for personal dream work. The three common characteristics observed when internal dream wisdom is apparent are: 1) surprise; 2) guidance; and 3) positive projection/Ending [4].

Surprise is typically a revealing of ego misconceptions, a visual representation of one's inappropriate belief system (the old myth), in order to ready the ego for re-direction. It is evidenced in the dream as: a) an unexpected twist to the dream story (ex: God appearing as Santa Clause); b) unexpected imagery combination (ex: the husband you were arguing with in the dream appearing to have your father's face on his body); c) unexpected new discovery (ex: exploring an old abandoned house only to find new rooms filled with valuables); or d) other such unusual imagery or action that juxtaposes opposing or seemingly incompatible beliefs or concepts.

Guidance is typically expression of internal wisdom attempting to redirect, or re-center the dream ego around a new belief system (new myth). With some exception this guidance is usually not literal but appears as any other dream element does, as a metaphor or parable within the dream story. To be understood by the waking mind the guiding action usually must be considered as a metaphor or analogy in terms of its relationship to one's waking life situation. Guidance typically appears as: a) direction from some dream character (ex: wise old man pointing the direction, angelic or motherly female giving you some direction, group of people answering your question "the exit is that way"); b) written or verbal words in the dream, which are rarely literal and sometimes nonsense phrases, but may relate in some direct or bizarre fashion to the context of the dream (ex: the words "stop you are only making it worse" coming from a voice in the sky); c) revealing or discovering new paths, ways, valuables, the light etc. (ex: "I then saw a bridge leading across the stream") and d) other actions in the dream which lead to dreamer toward a new possibility or potential direction within the dream.

Positive projection or positive ending, a reinforcement of the internal guidance or wisdom, which often comes when the dream ego has accepted or is contemplating accepting that wisdom. The new possibility, once contemplated by the ego, is projected as a positive resolution to the dream situation the dream ego is mired in. Often when the dream ego really accepts the new possibility (the new myth) the dream seems to celebrate and reinforce the decision with a pleasing or positive ending. This can be observed as: a) a positive projection (ex: seeing the place you are trying to find up ahead or a knowing that you are now on that path); b) a positive ending (ex: you emerge from the dark place you were into a bright beautiful place; the puzzle falls into place; you feel at peace)

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