

Traversing *the* Living Labyrinth

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Dreams and Dreamwork in the Psychospiritual Dilemma of the Postmodern World

Asleep, we turn our attention to the reality of our interconnectedness as members of a single species. In this sense, we may regard dreaming as concerned with the issue of species interconnectedness.... Perhaps our dreaming consciousness is primarily concerned with the survival of the species and only secondarily with the individual. Were there any truth to this speculation it would shed a radically different light on the importance of dreams. It would make them deserving of higher priority in our culture than they are now assigned.

— Montague Ullman, quoted in - Myron Glucksman and Silas Warner
Origins in New Perspective - The Royal Road Revisited

As a species, Homo sapiens is in trouble. The toxic by-products of our voracious technologies are polluting the soil, air, and water to such an extent that the ability of the planet to continue supporting complex mammalian life appears to be in jeopardy. Our social, political, religious, and cultural institutions, East and West, are breaking down at a rapid rate and everywhere men, women, and Particularly children seem filled with an increasing sense of hopelessness, coupled with a feeling of spiritual and an absence of broader vision, purpose, and connection with anything worthy of the name divine.

Even the numerous religious and political fundamentalisms that appear to be so militantly on the rise everywhere in the world are, in my view, also the result of this increasing loss of felt harmony with higher realities, purposes, and meanings. In all the instances I have met, rigid ideological and doctrinal fundamentalism is a direct consequence of neurotic denial of the anguish and anxiety of lost communion or harmony with something once experienced (often in childhood) as greater and more important than the "merely" personal feelings, opinions, and experiences of individual life. The "fundamentalist attitude" is an effort to regain, by an act of sheer will, the lost sense of harmony and communion with the divine.

One major reason for the intensity of our particular contemporary crisis of confidence and perceived meaning is our fumbling sorcerer's apprenticeship in science and our unfeeling manipulation of nature and the physical world. The stunning short-term economic and political success of our narrowly focused, conscious, abstract, linear, time-limited, technological thinking has produced the secondary effect of distracting us from our deeper, seemingly less rational unconscious psychospiritual experience. In the process of "conquering" the physical world, we have become alienated from two of the oldest and most important and reliable sources of balance, sanity, and evolving self awareness: myth and dream. (It is worth remembering that "myth" is simply a name for somebody else's religion.)

Dream and myth always address the deeper realities of our lives below the surface of appearance. Appearances can be measured; it is the *immeasurability* of the patterns of meaning that lie beyond appearances, beyond the ability to be "objective" and stand separate and quantify, that has tended to make myth and dream seem so foreign and irrelevant to the lives of people in postmodern industrial societies.

A "mythic" story from the Sufi tradition may serve to elucidate the dilemma. Although it is apparently about a distant, nontechnological world of donkeys and camels and rural villages where everyone knows everyone else, it is also an ironic and exquisitely accurate commentary on our own contemporary Western psychospiritual dilemma.

It seems that the incomparable Mullah Nasrudin has lost his precious gold ring. He wanders through the streets of his village staring at the ground, searching for his lost treasure. His friends and neighbors notice his concentrated efforts, and soon they all become involved in, the search. Finally, it occurs to one of them to ask Nasrudin, "When do you last recall having the ring on your finger?"

Nasrudin casually responds that the last time he can remember actually having the ring on his finger was a while ago, when he was shoveling dung in the course of cleaning the stable behind his house.

"Oh?!" says his friend, "Then we should concentrate our search there, don't you think?"

"Oh, no!" says Nasrudin, "The light's much better for looking out here!"

That which was lost in the dark will also be recovered from the dark: the solution to the escalating crisis of global culture and ecological unbalance will not be found in increasingly urgent and desperate efforts to dominate and manipulate the environment even more effectively - it will be found in a deeper exploration of the unconscious depths of humankind that have brought these problems into being in the first place. Our current predicament stems in greatest measure from the dramatic disproportion between our limited and relatively static knowledge of our own intrinsic (unconscious/archetypal) nature as human beings, and our vast and cancerously increasing knowledge of

how to manipulate and exploit the physical environment for our short-term gratification.

In the past, human beings were collectively protected to some extent from the full consequences of our ignorance, greed, hubris, and fear by our relative weakness and ineffectiveness. The advent of modern science and technology has made the consequences of our stupidities and self-deceptions much more vast and terrible, but it has not changed the basic source of the problem(s): human consciousness, and unconsciousness itself.

The Mullah Nasrudin, a universal archetypal fool/trickster representing human consciousness itself (dressed in the "homespun" of Sufi tradition), prefers to look for the archetypal "lost treasure," (the "gold ring which has always symbolized the depth of commitment to and relationship with something larger than one's self), in the relatively clean and brightly lit public street, rather than in the nasty, smelly depths of his own stable. One clear symbolic message of this story 'is that we human beings are predisposed to shy away from the work of looking at the "nasty," dark" (unconscious/emotional) aspects of our individual and collective problems, preferring to engage in repetitive intellectual examinations of the external technical details of our problems, "where the light is better" - where consciousness has less difficulty 'seeing," but where the lost treasure will not be found.

An ironic contemporary example of the "logic of Nasrudin" can be seen when Harvard professor J. Allan Hobson uses exactly the same metaphor in his book *The Dreaming Brain*: "In science we often have to look where the light is." He resorts to this metaphor in an attempt to justify his all but exclusive emphasis on the neurophysiology of dreaming, and his dismissal of other methodologies for and perspectives on examining dreams with an eye to their possible meaning and significance.

Even the religions of the world, which profess to know better, generally collude in the suppression of attention to the unconscious, symbolic aspects of human experience (at least in their public, exoteric practice). The sacred/mythic narratives of the world are in startling agreement that human beings have more direct access to the divine and the Will of God(s) in our dreams than any other ordinary state of awareness. Despite their numerous and bloody disagreements about so many other things, the sacred texts of the world's religions offer astonishingly unified testimony on this point. Despite this (and indeed, to a great extent, because of it), the actual practice of organized religions today uniformly discourages, or even prohibits paying attention to our dreams.

Judeo-Christian scriptures, for example, are filled with references to the divine revelations that come in dreams, and yet only recently, and with noticeable reluctance, have Christian and Jewish congregations approved of their members examining their dreams, and then only in the "private" context of secular therapy, rather than the traditional public context of collective spiritual debate and discernment.

There have always been moments of historical crisis (not unlike our own), when a return to the primary revelations of the unconscious and the divine in dreams, waking visions, and reassessment of original sacred narratives has been attempted. The Protestant Reformation turned the attention of many believing Christians back to canonical scripture in the effort to replace the traditional authority of the Roman popes and bishops with a "purer" and "more reliable" source of spiritual guidance. In so doing, the early Protestants rediscovered the same dilemma that faced the earlier Church Fathers with regard to the many, unambiguous scriptural assertions and stories pointing to dreams as a direct source of revelation of divine guidance and intervention in the lives of human beings.

Like the established Roman Church against which they were



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protesting," the early Protestant theologians were quickly forced by administrative necessity to adopt the same negative stance toward dreams and paying attention to dreams that their predecessors had done: that is, that although dreams had once been a primary source of direct revelation of "God's Will" (in the spiritual "golden age" in which the scriptures were first revealed and recorded), the "book" of such direct revelations was now definitely and firmly closed. Even though there was no scriptural precedent for such a change of attitude, one by one the early Protestant leaders adopted the position that any attention to dreams in the current "common" era was "deviant" and "unacceptable."²

In one sense, this recapitulation of the earlier Roman suppression of interest in dreams was historically and politically "inevitable," in large measure *because* the scriptural precedents for the authority of dream revelations was and are so unambiguous and strong. Without such an "administrative" prohibition, it would be all too easy for anyone (the scruffier and more malcontent the better, since social deviation and marginality is a clear and repeating element in the makeup of archetypal figure of the "divinely inspired prophet") to speak up and say, "I had a dream last night, and in it God told me to tell all of you" Given the undeniable authority of direct dream revelation in the biblical narratives themselves, it would be all but impossible for any merely local authority to maintain order and discipline in any congregation in the face of such a challenge, unless the whole area of dreamwork were collectively prohibited.

The Prophet Muhammad, "God's Holy Messenger," shared his own dreams and listened to and interpreted the dreams of his followers on a daily basis, and the same evolution—from the enthusiastic embrace of daily practice through to discouragement and outright prohibition—has taken place in the history of Islam as well, and for essentially the same reason. The same story repeats itself in the history of Buddhism, and even in the development of modern psychoanalysis. The emphasis placed on dreams as "primary revelations of the unconscious" by the great founders of psychoanalysis (Freud, Jung, Adler, et al), is being slowly replaced in the succeeding generations by increased attention to other techniques of intervention (ranging from "guided imagery" to the increased reliance on psychoactive drugs), all of which tend to minimize the importance of dreams and put the therapist and the analyst more firmly and directly in charge of the process.

However, when the dreamer is encouraged to take primary direct responsibility for the assessment and interpretation of his or her own dreams, then a more appropriate and healthy balance of authority and autonomy is restored. When dreamers feel genuinely free, and are encouraged to explore the multiple meanings of their own dreams, particularly in on-going, egalitarian, participatory dream groups, then their creative and decision-making powers are enhanced, and their social bonds of intimate relationship, responsibility, and mutual support are strengthened and deepened. The continuing proliferation of such "leaderless" and "lay-led" dream groups is one of the most interesting and potentially important contemporary developments in dream-related studies.

Ironically, it is secular psychology's ongoing demonstration that dreams have such undeniable value in the unraveling of neurosis that has made it possible for dreamwork to be reintroduced into the public collective life of organized religion. The extension of the psychoanalytic implications of dreamwork into the spiritual realm has been generally limited to fairly nervous, defensive, and tentative discussions of the value of psychotherapy and the resolution of personal neurotic dramas as a seemingly necessary preliminary step for truly authentic spiritual development. The understanding that dreams might also have value and worth, not only in the diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders but also as guides for spiritual unfoldment, did not emerge again until relatively recently.

It is only within the past twenty years or so, with the constellation of a genuine, broad-based popular movement devoted to "lay dreamwork" (pioneered by Ann Faraday, Patricia Garfield, Montague Ullman, John Sanford, and others), that the Western Christian world has begun once again to recognize that dreams can and often do play a potentially crucial and profound role in the unfoldment of spiritual experience and perspective, not just for characters in biblical narratives, but for the lives of contemporary people, as well.

It is the establishment of this broad-based, egalitarian lay dreamwork movement has also played a key role in bringing together academic and medical dream researchers with widely differing theoretical perspectives in a vital and creative dialogue. Despite the inevitable class, gender, cultural, generational, ideological, and professional conflicts that divide this burgeoning movement, contemporary dreamworkers are united by a shared conviction born of experience that paying serious attention to dreams and dreaming is a valuable enterprise.

At the individual and personal level, dreams regularly provide encounters with primary archetypal intuitions of the patterns of meaning and "divine presence" that address the specific details of the dreamer's own life and unresolved psychospiritual dilemmas. Let me offer an extraordinary dream narrative from the twentieth-century British author J. B. Priestly as a case in point:

I was standing at the top of a very high tower, alone, looking down upon myriads of birds flying in one direction; every kind of bird was there, all the birds in the world. It was a noble sight, this vast aerial river of birds. But now in some mysterious fashion the gear was changed, and time speeded up, so I saw generations of birds, watched them break their shells, flutter into life, mate, weaken, falter, and die. Wing, grew only to crumble; bodies were sleek and then, in a flash, bled and shriveled; and death struck everywhere at every second. What was the use of all this blind struggle toward life, this eager trying of wings, this hurried mating, this flight and surge, all this gigantic, meaningless, biological effort? As I stared down, seeming to see every creature's ignoble little history almost at a glance, I felt sick at heart. It would be better if not one of them, not one of us all, had been born, if the struggle ceased forever. I stood on my tower, still alone, desperately unhappy. But now the gear was changed again, and time went faster still, and it was rushing by at such a rate that the birds could not show any movement, but were like an enormous plain sewn with feathers. But along this plain, flickering through the bodies themselves, there now passed a sort of white flame, trembling, dancing, then hurrying on; and as soon as I saw it, I knew the white flame was life itself, the very quintessence of being; and then it came to me, in a rocket-burst of ecstasy, that nothing mattered, nothing could ever matter, because nothing else was real but this quivering and hurrying lambency of beings. Birds, men [sic], or creatures not yet shaped or colored, all were of no account except so far as this flame of life traveled through them. It left nothing to mourn over behind it; what I had thought was tragedy was mere emptiness or a shadow show, for now all real feeling

was caught and purified and danced on ecstatically with the white flame of life. I had never felt before such deep happiness as I know at the end of my dream of the tower and the birds.³

This is clearly a deeply emotional dream, addressing both psychological and spiritual issues, although it does not immediately reveal any particular "brand" of institutional religion. Priestly was raised in the Church of England, but his dream is immediately recognizable and communicative to anyone who encounters it, regardless of cultural background or religious heritage. It speaks a universal, archetypal language of symbolic form that appears spontaneously in myths and dreams at all periods of history in all parts of the world. The "white flame" that Priestly apprehends so clearly in his dream, and which fills him with joy and acceptance of life and the inevitability of death, could be equally called "a felt sense of the presence of the divine," or "Baraka," or "the descent of the Paraclete," or "Buddha mind," or "The Shekinah," or any number of other technical names that are found in the world's abstruse theological pronouncements.

Priestly's dream addresses "the problem of evil," and offers a solution that "reframes" the problem in a broader context and lifts the spirit without disparaging or minimizing the pain of the initial encounter. It is precisely the kind of *primary* symbolic revelation of the archetypal energy of the divine that the sacred narratives of the world memorialize and celebrate.

It is interesting to note that even in such an overtly "spiritual" dream, the details still reveal a "psychological" consistency of archetypal imagery. The "tower" suggests the structures of abstract and scientific thought that contemporary human beings have erected to get "an elevated perspective" on our existential dilemmas and the painful paradoxes of our lives. The dream implies that for contemporary Western intellectuals like Priestly (and ourselves), there is still a genuine possibility of primary spiritual experience, informed, shaped (and I would even say, enhanced), by the modern "anti-religious" intellectual frameworks of evolution and scientific inquiry. In addition to offering a primary experience transcending the fear and anguish of inevitable death, the dream proposes that it is not necessary to "check our brains at the door" in order to have a profoundly moving and important spiritual experience of this kind. In fact, the dream suggests that the elevated perspective provided by the "tower" provides an even better and broader view of this transcendent reality. Once again, the ancient and radical message is repeated: it is only when the *whole* personality, specifically including the unfettered intellect, is vitally and fully engaged in the messy business of living that authentic spiritual experience is likely to manifest in any conscious and communicable form.

It is worth noting that the archetypal image of the "tower" as a symbol of intellectual perspective and the philosophical assumptions that underpin conscious attitude is the same "tower" that is "struck by lightning" on the Tarot card of the same name. "The Tower Struck by Lightning" symbolizes (among other things) the direct experience of unconscious emotional and spiritual realities bursting in on the complacent

assumptions of conscious life and shattering them, in order to open up a broader and more whole and authentic horizon of awareness. In this image, the "lightning" is closely related to the "white flame" of Priestly's dream, only in this instance, the dreamer's conscious attitude already includes a radically open spiritual perspective, and thus does not need to be "shattered" by the "white flame/lightning" in order to "see" it and open to it more deeply.

The fact that it is "birds" that Priestly views echoes with the universal figure of the "Spirit Bird," the divine messenger in bird shape that has always brought revelations of the divine to "middle earth," the realm of conscious human awareness. Priestly's "aerial river of birds" is a twentieth-century cousin of the Dove of the Holy Spirit, Vishnu's Garuda, Odin's ravens, Zeus' eagle, the Great Goddess' sacred goose—the list is virtually endless. The dream might as easily have offered a vision of tigers, or butterflies, or human beings, whose pulsing life might have revealed the same transcendental "white flame," but the dream chose the "classic" image of the bird to deliver the message of hidden relationship with the energies of the divine, below and beyond the surface of tortured physical appearance.

Priestly's dream is only one example of a dream that offers primary spiritual experience to those who take the trouble to turn their gaze inward to the experiences. All human beings dream, and this form of inspiration and encounter with the deep collective layers of the human unconscious is equally open to all, even in this contemporary "fallen" age. As Emerson says, "Within is so great as to be Beyond."

Spiritual intuitions and concerns underlie virtually all dreams, even when the manifest content appears to be completely mundane, or nightmarishly "unspiritual." The dream of a student in an extracurricular dream group at the University of Toronto may serve as an example of a dream that may not appear at first glance to have any particular spiritual meaning, but which by the dreamer's own associations and "aha's" of recognition demonstrates a profound spiritual message.⁴

I am walking down to the ravine by Summerbill Avenue.... The surroundings now become more lush and tropical. It is a huge jungle. In the middle of it is an enormous wooden ladder which goes up, up, up. I don't recall seeing the top of

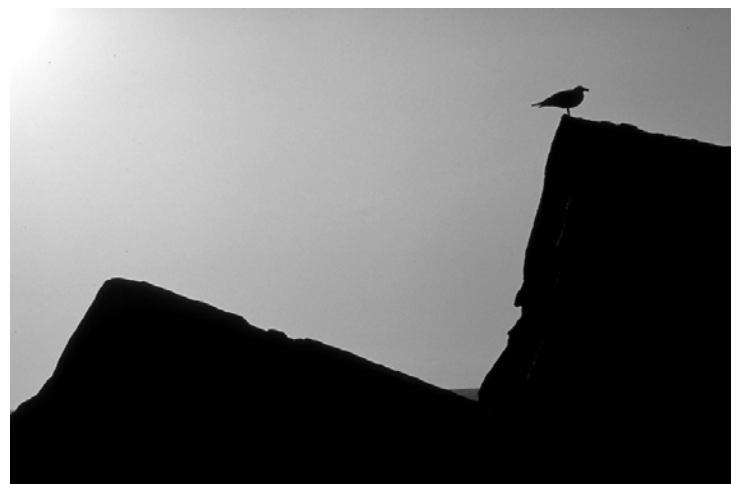


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it though there may have been one. It disappears into a fog or clouds.... As I approach the ladder I notice a snake in the path below me. I stop to allow him to pass. I am relieved that I saw him. But to my surprise another snake is coming down tile ladder. I realize that if I stop for tile first, the second will descend and get me. I panic but am frozen to the spot. I have a BB gun in a stapler and attempt to shoot the snake. I wonder if I should use the kitchen knife but figure it would be too messy. I shoot the snake but hit him only in the body. This does not stop him. I think lie may bite me when he squirms in pain. He is really close. I shoot him again and again but still he descends. I cannot move. I awake in a panic. That's tile dream. Weird, eh?

In this group, all tile participants were encouraged to draw the images in their dreams whenever possible. The young man followed this suggestion and was surprised (as is so often the case when the visual elements of the dream are explored in their own terms) by the insights that followed.

As I was sketching tile ladder, I was struck by a thought about the biblical story of Jacob who dreamed that lie saw God's angels ascending and descending a ladder from heaven to earth. Like Jacob's ladder, my dream) ladder reaches into the heavens. But instead of an angel of God, a snake descends! In the Garden of Eden, Lucifer, God's brightest (and proudest) angel takes the form of a snake. This suggests to me that when an angel becomes flesh I can only see it as evil. I am very afraid of this snake. I do not see it as in fact from God, that what it represents, this-worldly matter, flesh, is also from God. I have created or acquired a dualism which associates this world with evil.

I stopped painting for a minute and found my Bible. I looked for the passage with Jacob's ladder in it. After Jacob's dream, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.... How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven (Gen. 28:16-17). For me this is a very powerful passage. If I am the ravine then I am the holy ground in which "Jacob's ladder" is rooted. This means the Self is "the house of God." This ties in with a Christian doctrine I learned very early at school, that each of us is a "temple" in which the Holy Spirit dwells. This ravine, the Self as total organism – *the body as holy ground* – is where God lives.⁵

Although this insight by no means exhausts the meanings and spiritual energies lying below the surface of the manifest content of this dream, the dreamer's own "aha" of recognition (the only truly reliable indicator of the symbolic truth of a dream), stimulated by his sketching the scene of the ladder and the snake, specifically demonstrates how even the most distressing images and emotions in a dream can have profoundly spiritual implications.

The figure of the ladder itself which the young man equates to "Jacob's ladder" is in itself and archetypal image. Edward Edinger has named this class of images "the Ego/Self axis."⁶ By this he means to suggest the class of images that symbolize the psychospiritual function that brings the seemingly separate and sometimes fearful and defensive world of the mundane wak-

ing-life ego-self into direct communion and harmony with the transformative energies of the greater divine Self that resides at the core of all experience.

This ladder is made of "wood" in the young man's dream, and once again there is every reason to believe that at one level of symbolic depth there is a pun pointing to "would." The "would ladder" that connects the fear filled and clumsily violent ego with the profound energies of self-acceptance and transformation of the "dualism" of body and spirit is made up in great measure of the young man's profound *desire* for spiritual clarity, and his deep longing the sense of being "right with God." This sense of well-being and spiritual harmony is deeply connected to deeper emotional and psychological self-acceptance.

The "dualism" he discovers in himself is something we are all heir to. Many sectarian spiritual traditions (particularly the patriarchal ones) have disparaged the body, and the physical world in general, in contrast to the "pure," "disembodied" world of the spirit. Because *wholeness* is ever and again in the key to spiritual development, the body can not be left behind any more than the mind. The dreams, which always come to serve our evolving individual and collective health and wholeness, also serve our spiritual development by bringing us closer to whatever elements of our whole being we have ignored or undervalued-aspects of our wholeness which have spiritual gifts to offer, if we only pay attention.

To return for a moment to the work of Professor Hobson, in his book *The Dreaming Brain* he also recounts one of his own dreams, involving a waking-life colleague who accepted a post at another Ivy League school in "psychoanalytic psychology," abandoning the neurobiological approach that characterized their work together at Harvard.⁷ Hobson sees his waking-life annoyance with this colleague having "left him in the lurch" taking shape in the dream. The dream itself concludes with the dreaming Hobson observing somewhat sarcastically, "That is why you have such beautiful buildings and why there is nothing in them."

Although only Hobson's own "aha's" of insight and recognition can confirm any of the meanings in this dream, the image of "beautiful academic buildings" with "nothing in them" invites the thought that it is, among other things, a spontaneous symbolic representation of his "elegant" academic, scientific research into the neurobiology of the dreaming process, which, despite its elegance, is "empty" in the sense of being devoid of the sense of human meaning and importance it is supposed to illuminate. Whether this image is in fact "a minority report" from Dr. Hobson's unconscious pointing to a shadow aspect of his research work or not, it is at least a theoretical example of the way in which dreams, in the service of health and psychospiritual wholeness, convey their meanings symbolically, most often revealing uncomfortable truths to the waking ego-psychological and spiritual truths which the waking ego/persona aspect of the whole being would much prefer to deny and ignore. We can see this tendency clearly in the Canadian student's dream of the "snakes and ladders," and the same basic symbolic strategy can be inferred in Dr. Hobson's image of the "beautiful but empty university buildings."

The understanding that the symbolic statements of dreams have relevance for the development of individual consciousness, personality, and psychospiritual awareness has been generally shared by all dream analysts and "interpreters" throughout history. Contemporary Western technological society appears to be the only society in the history of humankind that has attempted to promote the idea that dreams are meaningless.

One of the most interesting developments of the contemporary dreamwork movement is a growing awareness of the collective, social layers of significance in dreams. Exploring dreams, particularly in the setting of an ongoing, egalitarian dream group, can and often does provide exactly the sort of spiritual insight and perspective that postmodern, industrial people so desperately need.

Authentic spiritual experience is a form of self-knowledge. It tends to awaken people more fully, both to themselves and to the world, drawing them into deeper relationship(s) and into more expression of their creative energy. There are numerous examples of people discovering energies and specific possibilities for collective transformation and change as they turn their attention back to their dream experiences and begin to share them with one another, publicly, on a more or less regular basis.⁸

The psychological process at the root of virtually all forms of human oppression is the so-called repression/projection phenomenon. Whenever a person represses and denies some aspect of his or her own authentic being, that very energy will begin to "appear" (as hallucinated projections) in his or her



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apprehensions of the other people in the neighborhood. Having denied the humanity of some aspect of his or her own authentic being, it becomes inevitable that this person will deny the humanity of other people, particularly those who overtly express something like the energies being repressed.

Dreams regularly offer symbolic images of the aspects of the psyche that are being repressed and projected. For this reason, working with dreams provides an unrivalled opportunity to recognize and withdraw these projections. Whenever projections are withdrawn, not only is the life experience of the individual clarified and deepened, the collective social situations in which that person previously participated less consciously-situations characterized by projection and its attendant prejudices and oppressions-are also transformed.

In this way, among others, dreams carry information of interest and value for the dreamers whole community and society. In traditional, nontechnological. cultures, dream sharing is most often a regular part of social contact. In such societies, dreams have always been, and often still are discussed and analyzed publicly with an eye to their relevance for the whole community.

Contemporary scientific research into the content of dreams, as well as modern experiments in regular group dream sharing, confirm the value of this ancient practice. Just as there are "leading indicators" of economic and political life that can be examined to anticipate trends and changes in business, education, and government, analysis of dreams from a whole community can provide "early indications" of changes and transformations in our collective cultural and spiritual life.

Let me offer one specific, concrete example of how such collective information can be discovered in the collective, longitudinal analysis of multiple dream reports from a single society.

Statistical research into the content of contemporary dreams in industrial society has shown over and over again that "women dream in color more than men." There is substantial reason to believe that this collectively demonstrable phenomenon is directly related to sex role stereotyping in these societies.

There is an archetypal resonance between "color" and "emotion" in the symbolic archetypal world of myth and dream. Because little girls are consistently encouraged and directed by society to pay minute attention to the aesthetic side of life, and to their own and other people's emotions, while at the same time little boys are consistently discouraged from doing so, it is not surprising that collective content analysis of multiple dreams from many different dreamers should show a consistent pattern of "women dreaming in color more than men."

My own conviction is that this observed pattern is related to habits of *remembering* dreams, rather than primary dream experience. When "black-and-white dreamers" undertake serious and sustained work with their dreams, they invariably become more consciously aware of the subtleties and significance of their own and other peoples' emotions. This expansion of conscious attention to the realm of feeling is invariably

accompanied (in my experience of working with more than 80,000 dreams in the last twenty-five years), with an increased awareness of the colors present in their dreams, almost always beginning with the color "red," the color symbolically associated most consistently with the strongest emotions, felt in "hot blood."

If one were interested in an objective relative measure of whether or not the sex-role stereotypes of more traditional Western industrial society were actually beginning to break down and transform in response to the contemporary movement for women's rights and the overthrow of sexism, then one might well look to see if the seemingly consistent differential between the reported incidence of remembered color in men's and women's dreams were changing, particularly in relation to the results of similar research in this question carried out earlier in the century.

This is just one, clear, concrete example of the kinds of "objective" information about the psychospiritual depths of our collective experience that would, I believe, be made more available by the pursuit of research into the patterns revealed in the regular, ongoing examination and comparison of many people's dreams.

This process of paying attention to dreams not only reflects the transformations of heart and mind that relieve oppression, it also actively promotes those transformations. When people gather together to explore their dreams together, they enter into a process which challenges and promotes withdrawal of the projections, denials, and self-deceptions that fuel the collective dramas of gender, race, class, and other oppression. The emotional, psychological, and ultimately spiritual information revealed by the successive layers of "aha" recognition of the multiple meanings that are woven into every dream inevitably brings the people involved in the process closer to their wellsprings of archetypal creative energy.

My own experience in working in prisons, community organizing projects, and the like, has convinced me that all dreams serve evolving health and wholeness, not only for the individual dreamer, but for the society, the species, and the cosmos as a whole. The projection of disowned and rejected aspects of the whole self out onto others is an act of self-hatred. When the dreams repeatedly offer and show us symbolic examples of these denied aspects of our being, we have the opportunity to re-collect ourselves, and in so doing, radically alter our relationship with the world and a whole. It is truly said that the truth shall set us free, and our dreams serve the deeper truths of our lives, both individual and collective, on a regular, nightly basis. The exploration of dreams actively promotes the insights and creative energies that are instrumental in the "reconciliation of each with all."

In this connection, it is interesting to note that as of this writing (12/93), the professional Association for the Study of Dreams is currently considering a proposal to establish a computer data base, connected to a large sample of dreamers who are in the habit of recording their dreams by writing them on their personal computers, and who would agree to log their

narratives into the system on a regular basis for word-frequency analysis, in order to begin to assess the feasibility and value of such broad-based, ongoing research into the collective "trends" of statistically measurable dream content.

If (and I suspect when), such an ongoing research effort is inaugurated, the data itself will also suggest many new lines and directions of inquiry that simply are not clearly imaginable before the initial information is gathered. This is a new and potentially transformative field of inquiry and investigation into the collective significance of dreams and dreaming.

From:

*Among All These Dreamers:
Essays on Dreaming & Modern Society*
Kelly Bulkeley, editor
State Univ. of NY Press, Albany, 1996

1. J. Allan Hobson, *The Dreaming Brain* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 232.
2. For an extensive discussion of this parallel development in Catholic and Protestant thought, see Morton Kelsey's *Dreams-God's Forgotten Language* (New York: Lippincott, 1968), and God, *Dreams, and Revelation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1974). The latter is a revised edition of his earlier work, *Dreams, Dark Speech of the Spirit*.
3. J. B. Priestly, *Man And Time* (New York: Dell, 1968), 352-53.
4. Quoted from James Gollnick, *Dreams in the Psychology of Religion* (Lewiston/Queenston: 1987), 146-47.
5. *Ibid.*, 158.
6. Edward Edinger, *Ego and Archetype* (Baltimore MD: Penguin Books): 1973.
7. Hobson, *Ibid.*, 233.
8. This collective aspect of dreamwork has been a central focus of my work for more than twenty-five years. It is discussed in much greater length and detail in my two books: *Dream Work-Techniques for Discovering the Creative Power in Dreams* (Mahwah: NJ: Paulist Press, 1983) and *Where People Fly and Water Runs Uphill-Using Dreams to Tap the Wisdom of the Unconscious* (New York: Warner Books, 1992).