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DREAMS, SPECIES-CONNECTEDNESS AND THE PARANORMAL¹

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My subject is the unity of the human species as a prerequisite for its survival and the role that dreams play in this. Murphy (1947) called attention to this theme in following up a suggestion by H.E. Starr (1933) that, in addition to the more obvious motives of the dreamer "there exists a self-realizing motive based on identification with humanity, [and] that the sociality of man leads to the all-embracing motive of unification with the human family" (p. 430).

What can our dream life have to do with problems that face us in maintaining the viability of the human species? To ease you into this seemingly far-fetched notion, I will present several assumptions about the nature of consciousness and dreaming, and explore the link between dreams and psi.

Assumption 1: *If we assume that all adaptive changes in the course of evolution serve a survival function, at least initially, then consciousness serves to establish the kind of connections to other members of our species necessary to insure our survival as a species.*

I regard waking consciousness as an evolutionary adaptation that enables us to move into the future as social creatures bent on shaping our own cultural and social destiny. Barlow (1980), a biologist, noted "that consciousness . . . is Nature's method of making humans behave cooperatively. Our being is centered in our conscious self, but if consciousness is the relating of one brain to another, that means that one's being is centered not in one's brain, but in the relation be-



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tween one's own brain and others" (p. 82). An early pioneer of the psychoanalytic movement, Trigant Burrow (1964), spoke of the preconscious stage in development, referring to the sense of total unison experienced by the infant with its environment, and that the unity between mother and child offered a template for all future relatedness. He stated that in our subsequent development, we fail to preserve this common biological heritage and no longer feel linked in a total way to our natural and human environment. Burrow felt we have overemphasized our existence as discrete creatures and discrete nations at the expense of species unity.

We certainly have succeeded in fragmenting ourselves as a species. In our long struggle to become civilized, we have exploited fully every conceivable line of cleavage that can separate human beings from one another. The evolution of two superpowers, poised on the brink of mutual annihilation, is both symbolic of this fragmenting process and, unfortunately,

¹On April 7, 1989, the ASPR held its Fifth Annual Gardner Murphy Memorial Lecture at the Hotel St. Moritz in New York City. Dr. Ullman's paper is a condensed version of the address he presented on that occasion. The full-length paper will appear in a future issue of the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*.

an accurate and true picture of where our history as a species has brought us.

The situation is serious but not yet hopeless. Manifestations of what Burrow referred to as the "organic" unity underlying our existence do persist despite the vicissitudes and failures along the path toward individuation. They make their appearance in art, literature, and in the communal life of primitive tribes. We can disregard, hurt, and impair this unity, but we can never rid ourselves completely of its influence. Whenever we move against it there is a contrary reaction to preserve it. We build weapons to destroy the other and then we work with the other to destroy the weapons.

Assumption 2: *There is a basic identity between dreaming consciousness and waking consciousness with regard to the processing of novelty.*

In establishing this underlying identity, let us consider the nature of the stimuli impinging on us in both states and how they are handled. One constant feature of the waking state is the way we are bombarded by stimuli from the outside. Only a small and selective portion of these stimuli requires our attention; most are dealt with automatically and unconsciously. That small fraction serves to keep us alert, interested and engages our attention.

Our ordinary perceptual processes are quite complex. To "see" an object, we must have had prior experience with that or similar objects. The form, shape or other sensory attributes initiate a quick memory scan and, based on models we have available from earlier experience, recognition occurs and we perceive the object for what it is. This is so habitual with most of the objects we encounter that we are unaware that it is a process. We become aware of it only when we are up against a novel encounter of some sort. When there is no immediate recognition, we automatically scan the environment for more information to see if we can fit it into a model available to us; if we cannot, we remain in the dark as to what precisely it is.

Waking consciousness has something in common with a radar system. In our concern with what is going to happen in the future, we scan the environment, as well as our past, to shed as much light as possible on what is happening in the present. When we come up with the resources needed to cope with what is novel in our lives, we succeed in enlarging our behavioral repertoire; when we cannot, or avoid dealing with what confronts us, there results a lingering tension of greater or lesser intensity, depending on the significance of the issue.

We go to sleep with varying degrees of success in setting to rest the various tensions that accompany our forced march into the future. While asleep and dreaming, we pursue the same orientation to what interests us most at the moment as we do when awake. The difference lies in the nature of the information that is processed and the way it is processed. Nature has seen to it that, even while asleep, we are aroused periodically and, by means of dreaming consciousness, we take stock of how things are with us at the moment. Asleep, we are still moving into our future, but passively, without (with occasional exceptions) the exposure to the external stimuli that impinge on us while awake. The tensions that are left over from the previous day surface when our brain becomes sufficiently aroused and become the formative matrix for the dream that ensues. In contrast with the waking situation, however, the end result of the way we think while dreaming is not an immediate or projected external behavioral response but, rather, an

interior change. Dreaming affects the level of arousal by the intensity and quality of the feelings evoked and causes us either to awaken or allows us to return to dreamless sleep.

Waking consciousness and dreaming consciousness are both concerned with the impact of impinging stimuli and both involve the challenge of novelty. Awake, we scan an external environment. Asleep, we scan an internal environment. Awake, perception begins with sensitivity to form and motion and is directed outward. Asleep and dreaming, perception begins with sensitivity to feelings triggered by recent intrusive events and its directed inward. Awake, we strive toward conceptual clarity as a guide to action in the world. In the case of dreaming there is a flow of imagery that both expresses and contains feelings; the "action" that results is an internal one affecting the level of arousal. Both forms of consciousness serve a communicative function. Awake and through the power of language we are able to keep in touch with others. Asleep and dreaming, we use a different language to tell ourselves stories about ourselves that we have not heard before.

Assumption 3: *In a fundamental sense, our dreams are not concerned primarily with us as individuals but, rather, as the necessary agents in ensuring the survival of the human species.*

The building tool for conscious social adaptation is language, a somewhat unreliable tool. Lies can be presented as truths and all kinds of deceptions can ensue. In other words, there is nothing so compelling about the nature of waking consciousness that would insure its success as an instrument for survival. Not only individuals, but whole nations, have been deceived into thinking the emperor is parading through town wearing beautiful clothes. Might dreams be the child in us protesting the deception and serving our survival needs as a species by the way they cut through illusions and call attention to both our basest and our loftiest attributes?

If dreaming is an unconscious ally in the struggle of the species to survive, then its concern with the individual is both secondary and selective. It is secondary in the sense that the survival of the individual is necessary for the survival of the species. It is selective in the sense of being indifferent to all that goes on in the life of the individual except that which furthers or hinders the prospects of survival of the species. In practice this would mean a concern with whatever goes on in waking life that either strengthens or destroys collaborative ties between people.

Is there any evidence for endowing dreaming consciousness with so transcendent a function? The case rests largely on what I refer to as the intrinsic honesty of dreams. Dreams tell it like it is with regard to the range and depth of our feeling life, regardless of whether or not it is disturbing to our waking sensibilities. Our dreams inform us as to the stage of our emotional development, the degree to which we have consolidated our identity, and the extent that freedom and honesty characterize our exchanges with others and with ourselves.

What concerns us here is the facilitating role our dreams can play in fostering greater harmony than now exists among us. Dreams speak not only to the disconnects in the immediate life of the dreamer but they also address issues that confront society as a whole. If we take the trouble to permit those nocturnal reflections to find their place in our waking world, they provide us with a starting point in the continuing struggle to transcend our limitations. The nature of our interdependence is such that, as personal connections evolve more solidly, there

are effects that reverberate upward toward ever larger social units. Dreams can point us in the right direction.

Assumption 4: *The collectivity intrinsic to dreaming can become manifest through dream sharing.*

For the past 15 years I have been exploring the possibilities of group dream work as an educational rather than a formal clinical experience (1979, 1987). When a dream is shared and worked on in a small group setting it reaches a higher degree of "socialization" than when a dreamer works on it alone. The feelings and meanings that can be derived from the imagery are transposed from a private to a public domain. The "collectivity" quality of the dream becomes manifest in the interplay of curiosity, courage, honesty and in the creative nature of the quest, the freedom that results and the impact on the others in the group who are there as helpers.

Assumption 5: *The connection between dreaming and species survival has relevance for our understanding of psi effects.*

We have noted that both waking and dreaming consciousness start with incomplete data, closely associated with an attempt to make sense of the data by retrieving relevant information from the past. Dreaming begins with ambiguous stimuli in the form of feeling residues of recent experience; the data are incomplete and a search for more information has been implemented. The nature and results of that search, unique to the dreaming state, may provide a clue as to how a psi effect, once it comes into being, is processed. For the dreamer, it is the feeling tone that is important, the source and significance of the feeling that is about to be explored. The ordinary time-frame is by-passed and time dimensions are condensed into the present moment; the same is true of spatial relations. Time and space are not disregarded but are rearranged so as to gain sensory representation. The end point is not an accurate factual perception but a feeling-tinged metaphorical image. There is a spontaneous and compelling quality to the way that imagery is experienced.

All of these aspects are applicable to the way psi effects seem to make their presence felt: The data are generally experienced in a somewhat fragmentary way, the feeling tone plays the predominant role, ordinary temporal and spatial relations do not exert a constraining influence and seem irrelevant. The end point is reached as the dreamer succeeds in weaving together the psi-derived residue and the other residues at hand into some kind of metaphorical unity. While an ordinary dream has a compelling quality, that compelling quality may be more in evidence when telepathic or precognitive dreams occur. Feelings associated with an ordinary dream that stay with us may pique our curiosity about our inner world. A psi dream, connected as it is to external events to which we are not privy, may go beyond that and leave us with the urge to take some action in the external world.

In both waking consciousness and dreaming, a scanning process sensitive to novelty is going on, but under very different circumstances. Awake and embedded in a social matrix we scan a limited horizon. Asleep and dreaming we are very much alone. We have taken temporary leave of that social cushioning and, as a consequence, we are potentially at greater risk. We now have to be open to a much wider scanning process, one capable of registering a range of possible disconnects from the most subtle to the most threatening. If

we take psi effects seriously, this is so regardless of whether the source of the disconnect lies close at hand or distant in time and space. In the most characteristic anecdotal reports, a psi effect makes its presence felt under circumstances where external, unforeseen circumstances either threaten or have brought about a significant loss. Our bonds to others are constantly on the line, at the mercy of our own misguided behavior, the behavior of others, constraining social arrangements and, in the case of psi, unforeseen events at a distance either in space or time.

Can we garner any further support for the way we have connected dreams and psi in the interest of survival? In his movement away from classical psychoanalysis, Jung introduced the principle of synchronicity, which he defined as the acausal meaningful conjunction of inner and outer events (1955). He regarded it as a second principle of nature, on par with causality. For Jung it provided an approach to the paranormal (von Franz, 1980).

What interests me is that there may be a way of looking at dreaming consciousness itself as a synchronistic event. Is there an element of synchronicity in dreaming, aside from the manifestation of psi effects? Is it synchronistic when recent, external, triggering events (often of a seemingly incidental nature) link up in a meaningful way with long-forgotten memories at a particular moment? Does the dreamer's way of bringing together outer reality (in the form of the day residue) and inner reality (in the form of a subjective range of feelings) have something in common with synchronicity, whether or not psi events come into play? The inner and outer events arise out of seemingly independent antecedent causes, but the coming together is both timely and meaningful. The external event was an event that happened to be there when an independent inner process had developed in the dreamer to the point where it was ready to become manifest. Might this be more than a coincidental occurrence in the ordinary sense of the term? Synchronicities of this sort do not ordinarily come to our attention. The external event registers, often only peripherally, but without its meaning being self-evident at the time. Only through re-experiencing it while dreaming are the inner related events joined up with it. Even then what we are experiencing is imagery shaped by the feeling aspect of this conjunction. The full grasp of the expressive power of the image and the meaning it conveys has to await its translation into the coin of waking life, namely, language. By contrast, in the kind of synchronicities Jung wrote about and parapsychologists have encountered, the meaning is generally there to see at the time of its occurrence.

Might there be an emotional gradient in terms of intensity that determines the synchronistic valence of a particular external event? Might an outer event, carrying a high valence, make a suitable triggering mechanism for the dream without regard to spatial and temporal constraints? Below a certain level of intensity we enter into the pattern of these external events through our ordinary dreams. Above this threshold the patterning includes events spatially and temporally distant from us and a paranormal dream occurs. The assumption I am making is that the same underlying, ordering principle is at work in both instances.

I am aware that in making this proposal I seem to be creating a mystery where none existed before. Ever since Freud, day residue has been accepted as the natural precursor of the dream; there was no mystery involved. It was simply an accidental event that could be used by the dreamer to carry

some heavier emotional weight. But is that all there is between the recent life context and the dream? Why is there any need for a day residue to trigger the content of a dream? Why do we need reminders from the outside that we have to attend to something? On going to sleep we put our unconscious on automatic pilot. Why can we not simply rely on whatever is there bubbling up on its own? Why does it have to be propelled into consciousness by external events? In accord with this more generalized view of synchronicities, one could say that any impending tear in the social fabric is a concern not of the individual alone but of the species. The underlying ordering pattern, in turn, unfolds in a way that makes the impending tear more visible. The dream processes that tear in the interest of restoring connectivity.

In short, I am suggesting that the dreaming mode is one in which there is a readiness for inner and outer events to come together on the basis of meaning. The dream is then the subjective side of a synchronistic set of circumstances where the outer event seems incidental but is nevertheless meaningfully related to the dreamer. Considering the reality of psi, that readiness includes sensitivity to events distant in time and space; this, of course, does not explain the mystery of psi. All it does is link psi more closely to the mystery of dreams.

I realize that proposals of the kind I have raised have far-reaching philosophical and cosmological implications. Those fall beyond the scope of this paper and my own area of exper-

tise. The only justification I can offer is that our ongoing encounter with such matters as synchronicities and psi will continue to push each of us to the far edge of our imagination in the hope of reaching an understanding that is both intuitively and logically satisfying.

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