

An Excursion into Dreams

3/29/16

We were honored to be joined by [Stanley Krippner](#), an elder statesman of the expanded consciousness movement. In the 1960s he directed the Dream Laboratory in NYC, where one of his assistants was Bill Hughes, fresh out of college. Since Stanley is staying just down the road at Bill and Nancy's place, we set aside our normal program to sit at his feet and hear what he has learned in his long life of paying attention to important concepts about the mind/brain, or the mind's brain, as he calls it. Stanley first off mentioned the importance of Carl Jung's work. Where Freud had supposed dreams were defenses against the surfacing of unconscious material, Jung insisted on the opposite: dreams are often important messages from the unconscious, only they are cloaked in a symbolic, mythical language that may be hard to apprehend. Regardless, dreams don't conceal, they reveal. This belief opened the door to direct interaction between a person and their dreams, whereas in Freudian analysis an "expert" needed to be employed. Stanley recounted the outrage that Jung's ideas generated in the psychoanalytic community once upon a time, because of this. A bit like Islam doing away with the necessity for priests to intercede with God.

Jung learned from an East African tribe, the Elgoni, that we have "Big Dreams" that are important communiqués, along with the little dreams of less importance. Big dreams are very vivid, and seem to serve important spiritual purposes. Creativity is fostered, and we can make breakthroughs in any field. Everyone knows about the discovery of the benzene ring in a dream, but Stanley recommended *The Committee of Sleep: How Artists, Scientists, and Athletes Use Dreams for Creative Problem-Solving—and How You Can Too* by Deirdre Barrett, a psychologist with the Harvard Medical School, for much more on the role of dreams in educating the conscious mind and solving problems. (This is a book I will look for as soon as the notes are done and the lawn is mowed.)

According to Stanley, many scientists regard dreams as mere neural noise, but that's not how nature works. Nothing in nature is extraneous. This means that pretty much everything in us serves some evolutionary purpose. Other animals have rapid eye movements (REM) that indicate dreaming is taking place, and they seem to be rehearsing tasks that will end in some reward. In humans these rewards include downloading emotions, which is healthy in itself, and at other times they help us plan for the future, to rehearse what's going to take place. There is a problem-solving function, including repairing broken relationships. He recommended a recent book of his (with two co-authors): *Extraordinary Dreams and How to Work with Them* (NY: SUNY Press, 2012).

Jan prompted him to talk about receiving wisdom from our dreams, getting the kind of spiritual insights that meditation or therapy can also bring up. Stanley noted that in comparisons of therapy with and without dream analysis, the ones that included dream work were more efficacious: bringing dreams into therapy gets better results. He recommended *Dream Work in Therapy: Facilitating Exploration, Insight, Action*, by Clara E Hill, and gave a simple technique for inviting dreams to teach us. Basically, as you are falling asleep you think "Tonight I am going to have a dream that concerns such and such a problem and I will remember the dream when I wake up." Say this to yourself 20 or 30 times as you drift off. The repetition of the affirmation to remember is most important, as we usually don't retain very many of our dreams. Keep writing implements handy and be sure to write down your dreams as soon as you awaken.

Stanley shared a technique for group dream work that we all joined in on. It is outlined in *Appreciating Dreams*, by Montague Ullman, founder of the Dream Lab. Briefly, the seven stages are:

- I. Dreamer retells dream. If it is a long dream, copies should be provided to all participants. We used a short dream that we could all remember easily.

- II. Listeners ask the dreamer questions about specific aspects of the dream – no personal questions. Dreamer answers questions.
- III. Listeners close their eyes and imagine the dream as being their own dream, while the dreamer retells it slowly.
- IV. The listeners talk about the dream as though it is theirs, beginning with “If this were my dream...” They can relate how it strikes them and what it means to them.
- V. Dreamer tells what the dream means to her based in part on what she has heard.
- VI. Listeners offer their interpretations of the dreamer’s dream.
- VII. Dreamer tells what she has learned from the process, and explains how she will carry the dream interpretation into her daily life.

It was remarkable to hear the range of interpretations, similar yet distinct, and it seemed to have been helpful to Bushra, our dreamer. I also had the feeling that the dream—clearly a Big Dream—would have had an effect on her whether it was interpreted or not. While there is a benefit to conscious understanding, I think dreams operate effectively even without our awareness of what they are up to.

We closed with talking about the relationship between dream work and the kind of exploration we do every week in our class. In both, the idea is to open up to inner promptings that range from mundane to sublime. As Karen pointed out, we have been working all along to discard false notions and retain the essential core truth of our experiences. Dreams too have a core importance and are clothed in mythological finery that can either distract or enlighten us. Part of our work is to tease out the value from the chaos. Stanley kept reminding us, as Nitya used to do, that karma, events, dreams, are all nonlinear. They are extremely complex, so simplistic interpretations are likely to fall short. Part of the brilliance of our mind’s brain is to extract a coherent narrative from out of the chaos, a supremely sublime accomplishment. We

don't need or want to reduce our interpretations to trite vestiges of the richness they embody.

In closing, Stanley recommended *Realities of the Dreaming Mind*, by Swami Sivananda Radha, one of his innumerable friends. The subtitle is *The Practice of Dream Yoga*. Need I say more?

Postscript: Just as dreams have been considered worthless by some conventional thinkers, DNA has until very recently been thought to consist of only 3% useful code, with the remaining 97% simply “junk.” This goes against all our beliefs about evolution, needless to say. Now it's beginning to look like there is plenty going on in that vast genetic arena, which you can look up if you wish. Here's a brief overview:

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/hidden-treasures-in-junk-dna/>

Part II

A lot was said about lucid dreaming and shamanism, both subjects of special study by Stanley. Deb asked about shamans taking journeys—does it happen in the dream world? And what is the difference between a trance and a dream? Stanley replied that shamans tend to take it literally that they are journeying to different worlds, and they don't make distinctions between dreams and waking life. Certainly some aspect of their psyche is journeying, but he was dubious it was done physically. The jury is still out.

Lucid dreaming is familiar to most of us I'm sure: the attempt to retain wakeful consciousness within the dream and so being able to direct its course. All sorts of unusual accomplishments can then be accessed: flying, meeting people in remote locations, solving specific problems, and so on. Stanley seems to feel there is a connection between the abilities of shamans and lucid dreaming. When asked if the claims of shamans were “real,” he responded, “What difference does it make, if they heal people?”

To me, the distinction between lucid dreaming and Big Dreams is the former is based on conscious intention, while the latter, while perhaps being consciously invited, is more listened to by the surface mind, without any particular expectations. It allows for a wider ambit of possibilities, inviting the inner guru to teach the personality without preconditions. Political commentator and former psychotherapist Thom Hartmann has talked about working on lucid dreaming at one point in his life, and then giving it up for this reason. He felt that the blessings of dreaming were best left uncontrolled, and the lucid dreaming was creating stress when he should have been relaxing. Be that as it may, I'll append my humble effort at lucid dreaming later on. I do agree with him, yet there may well be benefits from adding intentionality into the mix at times. Stanley's suggestions for consciously trying to remember our dreams border on lucid dreaming already.

Stanley admitted with a laugh that shamans are famous as tricksters, and very clever to portray their abilities as larger than life. It was obvious he was skeptical, and he shared a good story. He was a close friend of the Native American shaman Rolling Thunder, who claimed he could turn into an eagle, and also Grateful Dead drummer Mickey Hart. One time he was going up to visit Hart, who on his arrival told him that Rolling Thunder was probably going to drop by soon. Why? Well, he had seen him out in the pasture gathering herbs, probably for a healing ceremony, so he must be around. Stanley knew that Rolling Thunder was at his home in Nevada at the time, so he thought this was an excellent opportunity to see if shamans actually traveled in the flesh or if it took place only in dreams. He said let's call him. Well no, why? I just saw him! Stanley eagerly insisted, anticipating a revelation, "I'll just ring him up at home and let's see."

Stanley called the number and Rolling Thunder answered. He was just about to ask him what he had been doing today, without giving any clue of why he was interested, but Hart grabbed the phone out of his hand and said, "Hey Rolling Thunder, I just saw you out in my field picking plants! What's going on?" Of course

that blew the experiment. Stanley ruefully admitted that shamans are expert at crafting a story on such a slight indication. Rolling Thunder then said, “Oh yes. I had to do a healing and I knew the plants I needed grew at your place, so I just flew over and took some.” Stanley knew if he had said something like that without a prompt, it would have constituted impressive evidence of something unusual. But now we’ll have to wait for another exceptional chance like that to come along.

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I wrote this about flying for a book collection that never happened (200 word limit), and may have already shared it, but here it is again:

Flying Lessons

When I was a boy, my mother told me she flew in her dreams. I tried for a long time applying forceful intent, without success. When I asked her for advice, she said you take off backwards, gently rising up through the back of your neck and shoulders. It worked!

Once you get the hang of it, flying happens automatically, and you are free to soar through the empyrean. Many of my dreams now have a celestial perspective, whether or not I’m flying. The most delicious ones consist of gliding through the air, circling over verdant hills or bucolic countrysides sprinkled with farmsteads or medieval castles. Exquisite streams wend through the scenery. I can dip down for a close look or ascend to airy heights with the least nudge. Sometimes dear friends circle the sky with me. The dreams are always permeated with an atmosphere of kindness and sweet joy.

I have heard that some psychologists believe that flying dreams are indicative of egotism, which only shows their dreams must be very different. Forcing my way never worked for me;

flying required letting go of my aims and allowing the natural buoyancy of the universe lift me to the sky.

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I received enthusiastic responses from several participants, including Susan's: "Wow! What a class. I loved that guy! So smart and interesting and amazing. Now I want to be a Shaman but I'll just start by trying to be a better dreamer!" (She is already a fantastic dreamer, by the way.)

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My favorite mantra in life was taught to me early in life, and only later did I realize its profound significance:

Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream,
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,
Life is but a dream!

* * *

Charles, who was able to attend this class wrote (on his challenging ipad):

I don't remember dreams but I am usually half awake by four.im never awakened by an alarm ,awakened abruptly.often I'm in a reverie,which I suppose is a continuation of whatever I was dreaming.there are occasional big reveries.today is one.

A billionaire hires a corps of bright Indian techies for a grand project:

To take the entirety of works in Sanskrit and analyzes them in terms of number,a structural analysis,looking for patterns.small scale ,as in syllables and meters,large scale ,the way large works

are composed,in chapters or books.this would include all Buddhist works in Sanskrit.

Then we would be looking for characteristic differences ,let us say ,fingerprints.shakespeare and blank verse.

Well,if we did that,Narayana Guru's work would stand out.i think that not much original innovative work of serious heavy merit has been done in the 20th century.the archetectonics of it make one mighty big distinctive fingerprint.

Early Narayana Guru is like cormac McCarthy in Knoxville.his later period is like cormac in El Paso.

Or,say that the Atmo and Darsanamala,compared to earlier literature in Sanskrit,is as Bauhaus to earlier world architecture. It is a fingerprint you could call scientific.he was in this sense,a 20th century thinker you might compare to Ramanujan the mathematician.narayana Gurus base ten squares are Cartesian in form and in spirit as Nataraja Guru hints using such terms as vertical and horizontal.its a style of thinking he called scientific.descartes,the father invented the coordinate system in his dreams.

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Since Freud was mentioned in the notes and he is not always appreciated, Jay offered the following critical primer:

Freud All the Time

Understanding commonly used, and generally discredited, psychoanalytic terms

- By [Julia Shaw](#), [Bianca Baker](#) on March 29, 2016
- http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/mind-guest-blog/you-unintentionally-reference-freud-all-the-time/?WT.mc_id=SA_MB_20160330

He has such an *ego*. That's probably a *defense mechanism*. I *repressed* that memory.

Whether you like it or not, every time you use terms like this you are giving a small nod of approval to the field of psychology known as [psychoanalysis](#). These are terms originating right from Sigmund Freud's couch, yet most of us only have limited appreciation of what they actually mean.

I'm not the most balanced when it comes to writing about Freud, or his *highly problematic assumption of memory repression*, so in order to introduce a bit more balance into my perspective I have partnered up with an expert on psychoanalysis. My co-author for this piece is [Bianca Baker](#), a psychologist who is an expert on Freud and his therapeutic techniques.

Note that the following is a lesson on how these terms were *originally intended*, so keep in mind that the scientific support for every single one of these terms is highly questionable.

Here is what Bianca has to say about the original meaning of some of the most commonly used Freud-isms that populate your parlance.

1. You're so *egocentric*

The term **ego** comes from Sigmund Freud's model of the mind where he defines three structures that work against one another; the *id*, *ego* and *superego*. The *id* is responsible for all instinctual impulses, the *superego* for the societal pressures, and the *ego* is responsible for maintaining a balance between the two. Originally, Freud used the term *ego* to refer to a sense of self, so being *egocentric* meant being too focused on your sense of self.

2. Stop being *defensive*

Freud believed that if the *ego* allows the *id* to be more pronounced, then the *superego* will punish the *ego* with feelings of guilt, anxiety or fear. Simultaneously, the *id* will punish the *ego* for allowing the *superego* to come through. When this happens the *ego* will fight off these feelings with **defense mechanisms**. Freudian defense

mechanisms that you may be familiar with are denial, humor, projection, idealizing, intellectualizing, and passive aggression.

3. You must have *repressed* that

According to Freud, **repression** is a type of defense mechanism. It is said to occur when the ego protects the individual from harmful memories by making traumatic memories inaccessible. While we cannot directly access them, repressed memories of trauma are thought by people who practice psychoanalysis to be the underlying causes of many mental health problems. This assumption is *highly problematic* as trauma often does *not* underlie mental illness, and it is through the process of trying to uncover a repressed memory through [regression therapy](#) that *therapists may inadvertently implant a [false memory](#) in their patients.*

4. I'm so *anal*

When someone is categorized as being **anal retentive** it refers to Freud's anal psychosexual stage. This is the second stage of a person's sexual development that takes place between the ages of 18 months and 3 years. In Psychoanalysis, when something prevents development, it is said that the person becomes stuck in that stage. The anal psychosexual stage is meant for potty training. The notion is that if parents are too harsh on their children during potty training, they may develop the need to overly control their surroundings in the future, thus making them 'anal'.

4. He's totally *neurotic*

Freud used the term **Neuroses** to refer to psychiatric disorders that are the 'lesser' of the disorders. They can include things such as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), anxiety, and depression.

6. You're being *hysterical*

Freud believed that **Hysteria** was a type of neurosis. In the late 1800's Freud claimed that his clients who had hysteria were all at one point or another sexually abused during their childhood, which made them act *hysterical* – or overly emotional. We need to be very careful with this assumption, because like with assumptions of repression, assuming that sexual abuse must have happened to an individual *can lead to the generation of false memories through*

leading or suggestive therapy in the attempt to uncover these memories of abuse. In today's clinical settings hysteria has been largely replaced by Histrionic Personality Disorder, which is also a highly controversial diagnosis.

Next time you use these terms in conversation, realize what they actually mean and remember that *scientists consider all of them highly problematic*.

A note on Freudian therapies from a *psychotherapist*

The strength and quality of the client-therapist relationship, called rapport, is an important factor for effective therapy. An important part of rapport is providing an [empathic environment](#), allowing the patient to feel comfortable enough to open up. A psychotherapist or a therapist should allow for a free and judgment-less environment.

The message to take away from this for psychotherapists is to continue offering an empathic environment that facilitates rapport, without using suggestible questions and/or comments. Equally, for those seeking treatment it is important to remember that memories are malleable and therefore to not let the therapist cloud your judgment.

Further, remember that it is the psychotherapist's job to challenge you, yet also be empathic towards any of your thoughts allowing you an undiscriminating atmosphere that will enable you to work through your concerns.

A note on Freudian therapies from a *memory scientist*

If done right, even if some of *their scientific foundations are shaky*, many psychological therapies can help a person in need make positive changes in their life. This includes psychoanalysis and psychodynamic therapy.

Some researchers have even provided evidence that at least for short-term psychological treatment it really [doesn't matter what kind of therapy you use](#) (known as the [Dodo bird verdict](#)), as long as you have rapport with the therapist. That being said, if I were to recommend a particular type of therapy to you, I would send you

to Cognitive Behavior Therapy because it has the [strongest evidence base](#).

I encourage you to find the therapy that you like the most, but do always remember to be cautious when assumptions are made about your memories so you don't get caught in a [false memory trap](#).