

Remarks on the Interpretation of One's Own Dreams¹

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In one of his later books Adler (1) remarks that he ceased to dream after he realised that dreaming was inconsistent with healthy common sense, and that it is a kind of intoxication. According to his doctrine we face in dreams our unsolved life problems. We try out fictitious answers and bring ourselves artificially into the mood we desire for the coming day. A dream can occur as a warning which may cause us to hesitate, or even to give up some intended action. It may also take the form of consolation or of self-encouragement. In any case, the dreamer produces in a sort of childish self-intoxication, moods and emotions corresponding to his goal and in conformity with his life style. As, according to Adler, emotions in themselves are not significant and only what we *do* has meaning, our dream-life should decrease in proportion as we gain understanding of ourselves and live courageously on the principle of human solidarity. To those pressing forward towards this ideal, Adler's dream theory is of the greatest value.

The Individual Psychologist will do two things in his work of re-educating characters in need of help: he will endeavour from the very outset, by interpreting their dreams with them, to bring them to self-knowledge and self-education. And as long as dreams continue to appear in himself, he will attempt, by self-analysis, to remain himself alert and constructive. A few examples will now be given to demonstrate what the interpretation of one's dreams can do in the matter of self-improvement.

I. A young Individual Psychologist dreamed he saw his teacher, Adler, giving a lecture in a small room. There were only three persons present. The dreamer asked himself the following day what the dream denoted. He remembered that he was shortly to begin an introductory course on Individual Psychology. He was well versed in his subject, but he nevertheless feared that the course might be cancelled owing to lack of students. All at once the meaning of the dream became clear to him: he had transformed his teacher's usually overcrowded lecture

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halls into a small room with few people in order to protect his personality-feeling against possible failure. "If only three persons turned up when Adler himself was lecturing [he meant to say] it will be small blame to you if your course fades out altogether." The self-interpreter was delighted, but at the same time somewhat ashamed. He understood how strongly the tendency of depreciation was still alive in him, however well he had understood it in theory. He believed that, having gained this insight through analysing his dream, he had made a small step towards greater objectivity.

II. An older Individual Psychologist awoke one morning, calm and refreshed and was convinced that he had passed a dreamless night. But on meeting his unshaven neighbour he remembered, by association of ideas, that he had had the following dream: he had seen himself with a beautiful long beard and had stroked it through his fingers, remarking with astonishment: "That was pretty quick! Why, last night you were clean shaven!"

In order to find the meaning of this dream, he asked himself: "What occurs to you in connection with this dream-beard?" He remembered then a photograph he had seen the previous day in a newspaper of the oldest woman in the country. Upon examining it more closely he had noticed that the good old soul had quite a fine beard. He then remembered that his hairdresser had shortly before remarked somewhat tactlessly that his hair was getting very thin on top. These free associations gave the meaning of the dream: "It is the problem of growing old with which you are concerned . . . and you are training yourself in resignation."

The dreamer had become familiar with the manifestations of old age neuroses through Adler's book on the nervous character (2) and in his waking hours had endeavoured to view calmly the fact that he was growing old and to come to terms with the idea. After this dream he felt anew and more deeply how very difficult the problem of aging is for people nowadays, and he smiled sadly as he reflected that with this dream he had given himself an encouraging pat on the shoulder.

III. The narrator of the third example took some trouble to analyse his dream, which was as follows:

He entered a long barracks by an entrance at the extreme end and had the feeling that at the end of three passages Schiller was waiting for him. He went along one of the passages and there, waiting

for him, was a feeble old man leaning upon a stick. The dreamer ran up to him, calling loudly, "Friedrich!" and embraced him.

Here is the collection of free associations which the dreamer made.

During the war he worked in a barracks similar to that which appeared in his dream.

As a schoolboy and student he had read Schiller's works with the greatest enthusiasm and latterly he had returned to them with unimpaired interest. It was then with the strangest feelings that he discovered books with titles such as "Schiller as Fellow Combatant of Adolf Hitler." He had also re-read the chapter on Schiller's naive and sentimental type in C. G. Jung's book, *Psychological Types*.

Reflecting about the old man who appeared in his dream, his not particularly sympathetic face seemed to resemble that of Jung, whose appearance the dreamer was acquainted with through photographs. A friend of his who had seen him in Switzerland described him as "an old man who adopts the role of a prophet." The dreamer was aware that the old man in the dream in no way resembled Schiller, by whose first name he had called him. Also, he had embraced him with repulsion.

The evening before the dream, our subject had been reading in one of Jung's books a certain chapter on "The Analysis of Dreams and the Practical Application Thereof." Some of the passages, he had thought, could have been written by Adler; as for instance, when Jung says that without the knowledge of a certain dreamer's background the meaning of his dream would remain doubtful. On the other hand, Jung's speculations on the horse as an archetypical symbol seemed unacceptable.

He continued to think about his dream and looked up certain books. He became aware that he had never thought much of Jung's theories. Whenever he had given them some attention, it seemed to him that Adler's bitter designation, "*Zehengänger*" (man who walks on tiptoe to appear taller), for Jung, was not misplaced. During recent years he had often inveighed against Jung's attitude at the beginning of the Nazi dictatorship in Germany. He had read in an American journal that there was a period when Jung became editor of a German journal of psychiatry, the Jewish predecessor having been discharged. As far back as 1928 Jung had written: "It is a quite unpardonable error when we accept a Jewish psychology as generally valid" (3). Jung had, however, declared those people unintelligent who accused him of anti-semitism on that account; but our dreamer remembered that his books

were not burned by the Nazis as were those of Freud and Adler, and he felt that Künkel hit the mark when he wrote: "The Collective Subconscious is for Jung's 'Analytical Psychology' the real bearer of the psychic life. From that follows obviously that the racial basis and maturity has a decisive influence on the character of the individual" (4).

The following sentence from Künkel, penned in 1935, had often been quoted mockingly by the dreamer: "Race (*Volkstum*) expresses itself in character. It asks for obedience, taking risks, acts, sacrifices; it transforms itself into conscience. (Symbolically it appears in Northern peoples as a bird, as an eagle or a swan, in their dreams; in Eastern individuals as a flower or tree.)" (4).

Finally the dreamer recollected his surprise when in the *Internationale Zeitschrift für Individualpsychologie* (1951/IV) a book of Jung's was reviewed, and the learned professor was referred to as a man, unique in the century, whose home was in the "Realm of Wisdom."

Still unable to find the meaning of his dream, he discussed the matter with a friend, who asked: "What comes to your mind if you think of 'Friedrich'?" Immediately the significance of the first syllable became clear: Friede = peace! The meaning of the dream appeared now to be an endeavour to come to a more peaceful attitude toward the Swiss psychiatrist. It is, however, apparent that the training in this direction was started very hesitatingly (5).

In the experience of most of us, there will doubtless be many examples which indicate that Adler's dream theory, an essential part of his science of understanding human nature, is a most valuable mirror for us. We can see in it, both the failures and the advances in our self education. Of course, on account of our biased apperception, we may find it difficult to make the proper use of this looking glass.

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