

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DREAMS

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DO YOU believe in dreams? If you do, you are no different from millions of others and your credulity is quite natural; for dreams have been a never-ending source of wonder and doubt, philosophical speculation and ignorant superstition from the very earliest ages of which we have any knowledge. No one, apparently, escapes the experience of this phenomenon. It visits the rudest savages as well as the most cultured of the world of civilization and shows no distinction of color or race. The society matron feels its influence as does the old colored "mammy" with her dream-book, and, perhaps, understands it not a whit more. Powerful kings, in ancient times, kept constantly in their service men who were skilled in dream interpretation—even as the wealthy of today have their psychoanalysts—and the fate of mighty empires often depended upon no more momentous a thing than the nocturnal vision of the sovereign.

What are dreams? From whence do they come? Whither do they go? Of what stuff are they made?

In order to answer these questions intelligently, it will first be necessary to understand something of the nature of the mind and of the manner in which it seems to function. The age-old problem of how to bridge the chasm which perpetually yawns between the physical world of matter on one side and the immaterial, spiritual world of mind on the other is still as knotty as ever. The solution is still unfound. There must be some connecting means whereby the world of matter is transferred and transformed into the world of spirit, but how that change takes place or what means and objects are used in its operation will probably always remain more or less of a mystery. Science, striding with seven-league boots ever onward toward the goal of perfect knowledge, has added considerably to our

understanding of many things; but the human mind, ever a wonder even to itself, still beats its wings impotently against the darkened glass that obscures its view in other directions and but faintly comprehends the mode of operation of its own faculties.

The concensus of opinion at the present day seems to point unmistakably to the conclusion that the mind of man possesses three distinct characteristics—consciousness, unconsciousness, and subconsciousness. It is evident that these are not separate entities but belong to the same entity functioning under different states of being. The ego, the distinctive personality is a unified principle; it remains the same whether in one state or another and its faculties are unchanged. An individual retains his memory, his will, and all his personal characteristics whether conscious or unconscious. He is the same man this morning that he was last night, although in the time intervening he has passed from consciousness to unconsciousness and back again to the former, experiencing all the natural phenomena of both states without in the least suffering any change in his fundamental, essential nature or acquiring any additions to his peculiarly individual personality. In one state of being he experiences realities; in the other state he experiences—**dreams**.

Now dreams are purely mental phenomena; their habitat is the mind. But their concrete expression—if so it may be termed—is in the unconscious. In this they differ from ideas, judgments, and propositions because the latter have their seat of expression in the conscious. The origin is the same for both forms of mental activity, that is, in things entirely outside the mind, but their internal manifestation takes place in different states of being and appears under different forms.

For all knowledge comes to the mind from without. There is nothing in the mind which is not first either directly or indirectly in the senses. The senses are the media of communication between the two worlds of matter and spirit and may be compared to the carriers bringing various commodities into a great city by wagon, truck, railroad, etc., through its artery-like system of highways. Impressions by the thousands pour into the mind through the senses every day of our lives. Every moment of consciousness is filled with impressions of sight, sound, taste, smell and touch, all of which the mind automatically gathers and stores, co-relates and co-ordinates, properly fitting this impression with that one and otherwise bringing order out of chaos until, by separating and placing these various impressions in their correct relationship with one another,

they finally coincide exactly with the things of matter which exist outside the mind and of which the ideas are complete mental reproductions. In other words, ideas are mental pictures of material objects. When these pictures are exact photographs of the things they are supposed to represent, that is to say, when the process of co-ordination and co-relation is properly carried out, we have *truth*.

Now the question, "What is truth?" has persisted from time immemorial. The philosophers of all ages, from the ancient Chaldeans and Persians down through the Chinese, the Hindus, and more latterly the golden age of the Greeks, have greatly concerned themselves to find a satisfactory answer, and the multiplicity of philosophical systems and schools of thought are the natural results. Some of these systems are still extant and some have long since been forgotten, but the search for truth still continues unabated. It is the object of interest to all mankind and represents the eternal attempt to harmonize theory with fact, and appearance with reality. Briefly defined, it is the *conformity of the mind with the thing existing outside the mind*.

This conformity is accomplished through the mediumship of the senses. When the mind receives a distorted idea of the thing existing outside itself, when the conformity is incomplete, then there can be no adequate concept and hence no truth. This often happens through the imperfect functioning of the physical organism, which accounts, in a measure, for the variable reports sometimes given by a group of observers viewing the same phenomenon. The attention of one individual may be concentrated more upon his sense of sight than upon his sense of hearing, while that of another will be upon his hearing more than upon his sight. Hence, one may see things unnoticed by the other and the latter will hear sounds that are garbled or perhaps missed entirely by the former. The normal person, however, whose senses all function properly and are reliable in their office of transferring impressions to the mind, will be able to acquire more real information of the phenomenon than the other two, and hence will have in his possession more truth. Defects of vision, hearing, etc., may cause distorted ideas, or incorrect mental images, and therefore give rise to erroneous judgments and propositions.

And so it goes. Knowledge is the accumulation of the correct representations of accidents which inhere in objects existing outside the mind; and therefore, the more objects and their properties with which the mind familiarizes itself and comprehends the greater is its fund of knowledge.

But the mind possesses other faculties than that of being, as it were, a mere sponge soaking up and retaining cold facts—it is more than simply a store-house. It also has the ability to take the raw material received through the mediumship of the senses and to make of it mental pictures which have no counterpart in the world of matter, although the elements from which those pictures are composed really exist. By means of the imagination the mind can dissect and analyze this material, can disconnect and resolve it into its component parts and then re-create it into almost any form it desires. Strictly speaking, man can create absolutely nothing. His numerous inventions, which are called the products of his brain, are nothing more than a re-assembling of the bits of knowledge he already has and a re-casting of them into a new mold, thus affecting new combinations of material realities and new relationships between parts so as to achieve a certain definite purpose. He sees stones and trees around him, and by changing their accidental properties assembles them into a house. He finds gold in the mountains and fashions it into a ring for his finger. The mental process is the same in all such cases; and no matter what bizarre or unnatural forms the imagination may choose to conjure up, it must always be limited by the number of ideas which are at its disposal through sense-perception. It may put wings on horses and cause pink alligators to breathe fire and brimstone, but in so doing it is merely affecting new combinations and new relationships of ideas which themselves have their prototypes in reality, and which are indirectly the origin of these unreal phantasms. The imagination can form no single idea, no mental picture of a thing which it has never experienced. An Esquimo, for instance, who never had seen or heard of a palm tree or a warm tropic isle could never in his life image or have even an approximate idea of what those things look like. He might possibly have a vague longing for a land warmer than his own, but if he had never been away from snow and ice, it is doubtful if he could picture such a land.

More important than the imagination, however, is another faculty of the mind called the intellect. Everyone is agreed that the mind has the power to reason, to draw conclusions, to discover from the material presented for its consideration, various underlying laws, principles, and specific causes which are not apparent to any of the senses, no matter how perfect their functioning. Of these things the senses can take no cognizance. Such abstract notions lie entirely beyond their sphere of activity and come under the power of the

intellect alone. They belong exclusively to the supra-sensuous order which is on an entirely different plane of mental activity, but which, nevertheless, is dependent indirectly upon the sensuous. Before the mind can have any knowledge of universals, it must first have a knowledge of particulars. Abstract ideas, like justice, good, evil, unity, loyalty, are formed from the observation of these qualities in particular individuals. The elements from which they spring are first apprehended by the senses and then by the action of the intellect are transformed and taken away from the sensuous order and placed in what we call the supra-sensuous order. This is what is meant by saying that some things in the mind are obtained *indirectly* by the senses.

But what has all this to do with dreams?

If you will remember the distinction made in the beginning of this article—that ideas, judgments, and propositions have their manifestation in the conscious mind and dreams their expression in the unconscious—I think the connection will be readily apparent. It is only by an understanding of what takes place in the one that we are able to gain some insight into what takes place in the other. Through consciousness we try to discover the operations of the mind in unconsciousness. The matter resolves itself, therefore, into the question, “What is consciousness, and what is unconsciousness?”

Consciousness is the state wherein we recognize our actions with ourselves as their subject. “I think,” said Descartes, “therefore I am.” I see; I hear; I walk down the street; I converse with a friend. I note the kind of material in a building across the way and observe its height, its architecture, and the use to which the building is put. I realize that I receive various impressions of heat, cold, pleasure and pain through my senses. I am in full possession of my faculties and can use them as I need or desire. I recognize my actions and know that I am their subject. It is *I* who eat, walk, feel hot or cold, and not another. In other words, I am *conscious*. My actions are governed by myself, my ego, and I recognize them as operating from and upon my own personality. Such is consciousness. And it is only when I am in this state of consciousness that I can do these things rationally and intelligently—it is only in this state that the intellect can function smoothly, correctly, and effectively. When *unconsciousness* occurs; when sleep shuts off communication between the world of matter and the world of mind; when the senses cease to operate and the current of impressions from without is throttled; when I no longer recognize my actions

with myself as their subject, then it is that the intellect deserts its post and reason flees to parts unknown. The field is abandoned to blind, capricious imagination which plays all kinds of tricks with passive unresisting memory in the formation of mental phantasms known as dreams.

Now just why some of the faculties of the mind should be inactive during unconsciousness while others are still active, is not clear. At times all are inactive and under such conditions dreams do not occur; which fact would seem to argue, as some psychologists believe, that mental faculties have their seat in the brain. It is difficult to see, however, how such could be the case unless we deny the existence of a *tertium quid*, an intangible, immaterial thing called the soul. It is difficult to see how anything takes place in the brain except physiological processes of nerve ganglia and minute cerebral cells, the product of which is nothing but purely physical effects, motion, heat, etc. To say that thought depends upon motion in the cortical area, is to state a proposition that can not be proven. Thought is certainly not motion, for motion is the result of physical activity and not its cause. If thought depends upon the latter for its origin and existence, it ought to take place anywhere in the body; for physiological activity is present in every cell in the whole organism and continues at all times, in some degree at least, whether that organism is under the influence of consciousness or unconsciousness. Thought may be the *cause* of cellular motion in the cortical area and there is undoubtedly a very intimate relationship between them, but it can not by any manner of means be its result. Thought depends upon the intellect functioning in the state of consciousness. Motion in the cortical area, as was just said, goes on equally as well during unconsciousness when the intellect is completely quiescent.

The dreamer does not and can not think. The intellect is never constructively active during dreams, and that is why they are generally so hard to remember when consciousness recurs. To the rational the irrational is incomprehensible; and as most of our dreams are hopelessly irrational, they fail to make an impression upon the mind deep enough to register upon the tablet of memory and so are relegated to the abyssmal depths of that mysterious region called the subconscious. However, there are times when fairly reasonable dreams do occur and the dreamer seems to be going through all the processes of logical thought the same as though he were awake. He solves problems and draws conclusions in a most remarkable manner, and to all appearances is in full possession of his facul-

ties. But the appearances are deceitful. As a matter of fact, such dreams are merely a series of properly associated ideas taken bodily from the memory by the imagination without the knowledge of the intellect which is absent from the scene of action and has nothing whatever to do with the matter. In dreams there is no directing intelligence to keep things straight. All the ideas formed from the impressions poured into the mind during the conscious life of the individual are at the complete mercy of the imagination and desire, to be joined together in any way caprice may dictate. Every canon of logic is ruthlessly violated, and the conformity of the idea, or mental picture, to the concrete, material thing which the idea represents and without which there can be no truth, is almost wholly ignored.

The dream is like a picture-puzzle the different pieces of which are wrongly joined together in a hodge-podge manner without regard for order or sense. The mind, under its influence, may be compared to a very naughty boy alone in a school-room and safe from detection. Books and papers, arranged so carefully and methodically by the teacher, are scattered with careless abandon; the waste-basket is used to decorate the noble brow of Julius Caesar or George Washington, and chalk is used profusely upon the blackboards. When little Johnny leaves, all is chaos and confusion. Everything loose has been disarranged and havoc reigns supreme.

And so it is with dreams. The imagination, aided and abetted by desire and a faintly active will, left to its own devices and abandoned by its lamp, reason, riots uproarously with everything poured into the store-house of the mind during moments of consciousness. The thousands of impressions and their accompanying ideas, catalogued and placed either in the memory or buried in the subconscious, are dragged forth and juggled without rhyme or reason. Ideas brought into the mind perhaps years before are ferretted from out their hidden recesses and freakishly connected up with ideas that came into it but yesterday. The picture-puzzle is wrongly put together—the association of ideas is distorted or destroyed.

As an illustration of this, let us suppose a person to be dreaming of an automobile. Now nearly everyone, in this day and age, has a fairly accurate mental picture of what an automobile looks like. He knows where the wheels are placed, what position the engine occupies in relation to the rest of the car, where the driver sits and so on. But what will a dream-picture of an automobile be like? In most cases it will be sadly lacking in conformity to the real thing, and the

various parts which go to make up an automobile will be out of place and not in their correct positions at all. The driver may straddle the hood; the spark-plugs may decorate the windshield; the radiator may spout steam like a locomotive—some of them do, as a matter of fact—the headlights may be on the top, and a steam siren may take the place of the horn. Everything is mixed up and the whole concept is out of joint. And yet, each of the parts which compose this picture; each of the individual ideas from which it is assembled has its counterpart in reality. Spark-plugs really exist; headlights for automobiles really exist; and so on for the rest. But in reality steam sirens do not belong on automobiles and spark-plugs normally are inserted in the top of the engine and not in the windshield. What has taken place in the dream is a wrong association of ideas and this because the intellect was not on hand to direct and govern the connection of materials so as to conform with reality. Yet to the dreamer the thing seems perfectly reasonable. He sees no incongruity and experiences no surprise at the unnatural, impossible monstrosities formed by the imagination, because he is, for the time being, wholly irrational. His state is analogous to that of a person insane. While the body sleeps, the desire and the imagination frolic.

It is this proclivity which gives rise to what Freud calls the "wish-fulfillment" species of dream. Every normal person experiences desires and longings which, because of prohibiting conditions of custom or environment, he is unable to realize and gratify. The only way in which he may obtain any pleasure at all in these things is consciously to allow his imagination full play and by picturing them in his mind, thus partially realize that pleasure which he believes their full possession would bring him. In accordance with our theory, therefore, these conscious mental pictures are subject to the action of the imagination during unconsciousness as well as any other kind of ideas, and hence they also find their expression in dreams. It does not follow, however, that a person may dream at will. No matter how much he may desire to dream of a certain thing, the fulfillment of that wish is wholly beyond his control. He can never be sure when the wish-fulfillment in the dream will take place. It is like every other species of dream in that it is subject to caprice and not to the rational volition of the intellect and only occurs when fancy may dictate. But such dreams undoubtedly take place time and again; and Freud is probably quite right in regard to this particular phase of his subject, although in others he is probably quite wrong.

Be that as it may, however, it is a fact that seems to be borne out by experience, that every idea acquired by the individual during his entire conscious life is subject to the action of the imagination during dreams; for nothing is lost. This is as true of the spiritual world of mind as it is of the material world of nature. The piece of wood you burn is simply decomposed into its component elements of gases, solids, etc., and there remains as much matter in the universe as there was before you burned it. Matter is indestructible. And it is the same in the world of mind. In some unknown manner every thought, every idea, every picture formed by the imagination is submerged in the subconscious and many of them are known no more. Peculiar circumstances or associations may occasionally cause certain of them to rise to the surface of the conscious and once more be restored to memory. But for the most part, the subconscious mind is hidden chamber whose contents and workings can only be guessed at. It is a region all to itself, a region of mystery which baffles investigation, an uncharted sea, a land unknown the mere existence of which alone is suspected.

From a region such as this comes the stuff of which dreams are made and back to it they go after they have briefly run their course as mere phantasms chasing each other rapidly through the unconscious mind. They depend primarily upon the imagination playing with the elements supplied by the memory; but even though they are phantastic, impossible, and sometimes decidedly unpleasant, they add a charm of interest to the curious and challenge the ingenuity of the philosopher by baffling him with wonder at the mystery of his own wonderful existence, and astonishing him with the depth and capacity of his more than wonderful mind.