

# The Morning After: A Pragmatist's Approach to Dreams†

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*The Association for the Study of Dreams is an international organization which includes a broad range of members interested in dreams from every possible standpoint. This paper, therefore, begins with an analogy between the study of dreams and the study of bread in order to orient the audience to divergent and unfamiliar perspectives on dreaming. The discussion then deals with the clinical use of dream interpretation in outpatient psychodynamic psychotherapy. A contemporary eclectic technique, described by G. Delaney, is the method of interpretation applied to the dreams described. Dreams interpreted in this way commonly produce four different categories of psychodynamically oriented insight which can be used to describe the dreams. The categories are Emphasis, Reconceptualization, Confrontation, and Discovery. Emphasis dreams are frequently transparent and serve to underline particular issues in the dreamer's life. Reconceptualization dreams organize both familiar and unfamiliar feelings and information in a new metaphor that enables the dreamer to understand a life situation more thoroughly. Confrontation dreams usually bring the dreamer uncompromisingly face to face with insight about themselves. Discovery dreams provide totally "new" information to dreamers about themselves. Each is described with examples for which the dreamers gave permission. The application of these categories of information to the dreamer's life and some approaches to its incorporation into ongoing goal-oriented psychotherapy are discussed. The importance of selecting a technique of dream interpretation appropriate to the style of therapy is noted.*

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## INTRODUCTION

I thought it might be helpful at the beginning of this address to orient you to where my work fits into the study of dreams as a whole, since there is such a rich variety of presentations here at the 1987 Fourth Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of Dreams. It occurred to me that one might compare the study of dreams to that

of bread. They are both, on the surface, ordinary daily staples. Yet there are as many types of dreams as there are different types of breads — from crumpets to cornbread. Some of them are appealing, some are not, and one might relish them daily, or never notice them.

Thinking about the actual study of bread, one could look at the genetics of wheat grains or the impact of weather after planting. There is also the production of wheat and the harvesting; the flour mills, the machinery, and the transportation. There are the bakeries and the marketing. At the end of the process, there are the recipe books on ways not only to bake bread but how to use already baked bread in a variety of ways to help people grow and develop. One could even treat wheat as a useless by-product and study only the straw from the stalks.<sup>3,10</sup> Similarly, at ASD's annual conference you can hear talks and attend workshops and lectures on any of these parallel levels in the study of dreams. Those of us who dream are, of course, the bakers; the agriculturists of dreams are probably the sleep physiologists<sup>9,12</sup> who look at the EEGs and the best time for harvesting dreams, REM sleep, and write books and articles on the subjects. The psychologists who research the various kinds of dreams,<sup>1,5,8</sup> and do manifest content analysis<sup>7,11</sup> could be the gourmets sampling and categorizing the various varieties of falling dreams, animal dreams, chasing dreams, flying dreams, etc.

The clinical theorists<sup>2,4,6,13,14</sup> are the authors of the 'recipe' books. The clinicians and psychotherapists, like myself, who use their recipes and adapt them to their own use are the chefs and everyday cooks. Their goal is to develop the most appetizing ways to use dreams for healthy growth. For both breads and dreams there are also the artists who use them for plots and props in their dramatizations and paintings.

Some ways of looking at dreams are complete in themselves, such as the paintings to be seen here at the conference. The Jungian approach to dreams, by contrast, provides us with connections to the history and universality of the human experience, similarly to matzo at Passover (connecting to the Israelites' flight from Egypt), and communion wafers (connecting to the Last Supper). The traditional Freudian theories allow the intellectual satisfaction of matching theoretical constructs to patient dynamics. The existential and Gestalt theories provide different formats for re-experiencing the feelings of a dream.

Contemporary eclectic approaches<sup>4,6</sup> to the interpretation of dreams explore some of these and other aspects of dreams including problem-solving. These methods are frequently derived from the more traditional Jungian and Freudian methods and often include many of their assumptions and

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† Presented at the Fourth Annual International Conference of the Association for the Study of Dreams, Arlington, Virginia, U.S.A., June 1-7, 1987.

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approaches such as the presence of latent content and the importance of associations in understanding symbols. One of these contemporary eclectic methods is Gayle Delaney's,<sup>4</sup> which was used in the case examples because it proved especially productive in psychotherapy.

This approach has been variously called dream interviewing, or descriptive definition dream interpretation. It differs from Jungian work in not requiring specialized knowledge of symbols and from Freudian techniques, in not encouraging loose associations nor using a specific theory such as wish fulfillment to analyze dreams. Delaney uses a series of focused questions designed to elicit personal and definitive descriptions of the dream images and actions in an interview format. These descriptions may include but are rarely limited to associations. They are fairly similar to the specific history an internist would elicit about chest pain for example. These definitive descriptions are recapitulated in the dream plot using the dreamer's own words and sequence of dream feelings. The dreamer is then asked to bridge between the dynamics of the dream and waking life. This technique is, therefore, ideal for allowing the dreamer to explore the dream insight on a variety of levels depending upon their depth of psychotherapy. Patients can work with the situational aspects, developmental issues, neurotic conflicts, or transference possibilities.

Other techniques provide similar insights as the dream symbols are explored, usually in a less focused way than Delaney advocates. The advantage of less structure is that a broader area is often explored. The disadvantage seems to be the loss of specificity in understanding the psychodynamics of a particular issue at a particular point in time of the dreamer's life, i.e., the night they had the dream. Thus the focused technique appears to facilitate a more efficient resolution of specific issues without sacrificing depth. Pragmatic psychotherapists like myself, therefore, often prefer Delaney's specificity because they can then use the information from the dream either in goal-oriented psychodynamic psychotherapy or in direct application to daily life problem solving common in brief therapy.

In the Delaney and Flowers workshop Monday and Tuesday, we dealt with the technique itself, and today I will discuss how I apply the information from Delaney's technique, or any similarly specific method, to a particular person's life. From the collection of dreams amassed in private practice and at the Delaney and Flowers Dream and Consultation Center in San Francisco I have isolated four of the more common types of information provided by interpreted dreams. I will discuss them in turn, using an example for each of the four types.

## FOUR TYPES OF DREAMS

### OVERVIEW

The four categories of dreams discussed are Emphasis, Reconceptualization, Confrontation, and Discovery. Despite some obvious overlap, I think the categories are a useful

way to think about dreams from the therapist's point of view. People new to therapy and insight often will recount Emphasis and Reconceptualization dreams first. The further one goes into psychodynamic psychotherapeutic work, the more unknowns are encountered and the more Confrontation and Discovery dreams seem to appear. In addition, people with heavy denial seem to have both transparent Discovery dreams (often Emphasis dreams to their therapists and friends!) and Confrontation dreams. I would put many nightmares in the Confrontation category because they often function in a way to force the dreamer, even without interpretation, into awareness of at least some significant feelings in a part of their lives. As one might expect, the further from consciousness the issues are, i.e., Confrontation and Discovery dreams, the higher the resistance is likely to be to the dream interpretation process itself. The apparent transparency of some dreams is tricky because it sometimes masks a less acceptable latent content. For this reason it is worth pursuing at least the initial interpretative steps, with transparent dreams to either provide confirmation or indicate a deeper meaning. A useful rule of thumb is that a dream always provides some new information, if only emphasis or recapitulation.

For beginners in dream interpretation, Emphasis and Reconceptualization dreams are the easiest place to start. They are more obviously bridged to waking life, and their new information and implications for action are often experienced as both a pleasant relief and a solution, which reinforces the dream work. Some Discovery dreams share this rewarding aspect, especially the ones specifically incubated<sup>4</sup> to solve a problem.

### EMPHASIS DREAMS

The first type of dream is the Emphasis type. It is often transparent, seemingly the most straightforward and in that sense the easiest to work with. It usually brings into awareness a certain amount of information that is not quite new or unfamiliar, but of which the dreamer has not really assimilated the importance.

*Example 1:* A professional couple, Jane and John, had gone to John's meetings out-of-town. Jane dreamt, "I was in school and there was a test. We were timed for the test and the teacher wouldn't give me my booklet. It was very frustrating. I was worried because I couldn't get started on the test."

In interpreting this dream, it became clear that to Jane, the test that she was experiencing in her life at that time was, "Could she and John still have fun together?" They had both been so busy that there had really not been an opportunity to play for quite some time and she was beginning to be worried that it would be impossible anymore. In the circumstances, they were at the meeting for his work and because he went to the talks every day and was unavailable to play, she was feeling that there was inadequate time for her to do a fair job on the "test." In reality, at the time, she was experiencing that as very frustrating, but had not really paid it much attention.

This dream brought into Jane's awareness the importance

she had placed on this trip as an opportunity to play with her husband. This was not unconscious. What she had not been fully cognizant of was how *significant* she had made this particular trip as a test for their relationship. The dream made clear to her that there was inadequate time to have a fair test. The teacher in the dream represented the conference which was teaching information about John's work. The test booklet was a component about which she was powerless to do anything. This dream therefore allowed her to recognize: 1) she was not completely in control of this test that had been set up; 2) as a result, she was not being given a fair opportunity to show her ability to have fun with her husband; and 3) she was feeling very frustrated, and this was the dominant feeling in the dream. Clearly, it might be advisable for her to address this frustration, and not ignore it or allow it to be displaced. For example, she could negotiate with her husband about extra time. Could he perhaps skip some of the meeting and spend more time playing together? Could he skip some of the general socialization and spend time alone with his wife? These applications of the information of the dream are very practical in trying to accomplish the goal that she had set for herself and the question that she wanted answered, namely did they still have the capacity to have fun or had all the work that they had been doing destroyed that in some way, and should they then begin rebuilding?

*Example 2:* This was described in the last session of a five-year supportive therapy group which began in the second year of medical school. Over the last few sessions the group had been dealing with termination and the progress of each individual member and this was the final good-bye meeting. Natashe had this dream the night before the last group. "We are at a country place and we are all learning to fly and we were all coming into our own. We were all learning to trust flying. I was loop-de-looping and trusting that when I lost visual cues I wouldn't flop. I was soaring over a canyon in a freely liberating way, natural and freeing. Joan was practicing flying and Mary was just laughing, dive-bombing, and risking — she was the furthest along, like Top Gun. I was feeling it was nice to belong, to be one of the flock. We were all soaring and it was wonderful. There was a sense of connection and yet all in our own flight beginning to get our wings, though we were not going to all fly together. Theresa and Karen were beautiful, graceful flying, not the extremes."

The group had been aware of their increasing individuation which was the reason for the termination at this time. However, they had not clearly recognized both the excitement of their individuation with its sense of achievement and the new sense of connection that was there. They had only experienced a sense of loss of the old connection from the beginning group when they had all been very mutually interdependent classmates. Natashe's dream conceptualized for her and everyone else the reality of the new connection in individuation. This dream also emphasized for them the extent of their achievements and, interestingly enough, the group concurred with the dreamer's perception of their various levels of psychological individuation and sense of self. It emphasized the joy of the achievement, in the face of the conscious sadness in terminating the group. It also clearly demonstrated the need for and appropriateness of more space to spread their wings these days. It was in

this context that the group was able to conduct their last meeting and evaluate their own sense of progress, their sense of loss and their sense of connectedness at termination.

## RECONCEPTUALIZATION DREAMS

A second common type of dream provides reconceptualization of a known issue in a more useful and meaningful way.

*Example 3:* Theresa had this dream while working in a hospital as a resident.

Scene I, I go to meet Nora in the CCU and I say, "Can I ask you one more question," and she snaps, "No." I try three times and she cuts me off.

Scene II, It is Mary's birthday and she has flowers from Elizabeth and I felt bad because I hadn't given her flowers and even though I had given her lots of other gifts.

Scene III, Then I go to my sister's bedroom and I couldn't go to the beach with her because I was on-call. She was angry and I felt guilty about being excited about the emergency room and sad about not going to the beach.

Now what did this dream say to Theresa? First, her definitive description of Nora was that she's a decisive person, knows exactly what she wants, goes to get it, and is very intelligent. To Theresa, the CCU is a very safe place, it's contained, quiet, it's more focused and calm and familiar and not noisy even though there is a great deal going on. When asked to bridge this to her real life, this was her first recognition that there was indeed a focused calm place in medicine for her and that she had, in fact, experienced it in the week she had the dream. In addition, although she had been acting decisive and productively, she had not really recognized that there was indeed a Nora within herself. It was new to her. But she could recognize the behavior. Bridging the plot of Scene I, had she indeed been repeatedly cutting herself off from trying to learn more from that part of herself? Yes, indeed she had. She really didn't have a way in which to get more information from that side of herself, especially when she became unfocused, confused, and anxious. Reconceptualizing the developing identity issue in terms of herself and Nora gave Theresa a way in which she could attempt to draw on the more decisive part of herself when she needed to.

Scene II provided her with a new concept about her relationships. Flowers to her were a bright wonderful embellishment which you have to make an effort to get, an aesthetic touch. A birthday to her was a time when you show your appreciation of someone. This scene made her aware that although the Elizabeth in her had been able to maintain this level of embellishment on her relationships, the work side of her had not been able to; and, in fact, during that week she had felt out-of-touch with people, though still close to them. This reconceptualization helped her realize that things had changed, but not as badly as she was feeling — she was only omitting embellishments.

Scene III provided an awareness of her qualities that were like her younger sister, incredibly dependent, needy, lonely and intense, but also able to give a lot at times. She found that she was totally unable to go to the beach ("pure warm pleasure") and relax with that side of herself because, again, of work. And, at the same time, she was excited about her

present work and the next step of her work, the emergency room.

This was a complex time in Theresa's life. She was obviously developing a new identity as a physician and a Nora. At the same time she was trying to manage her personal relationships and her own internal needs, both of which were neglected because of work. She had been aware of this consciously, but the dream reconceptualized the problem in three separate compartments, three different and specific ways that she could then use as ways of thinking about the issues whenever she felt somehow distressed by them.

Scene III was very useful in showing her that the price she paid for enjoying and doing her work was some neglect of her internal emotional needs. Similarly, Scene II gave her information about her relationships, that she could do the basic bread and butter of them but the special events and the flowers, she again did not have time to do. Simultaneously, she was developing her own physician-self, a new part of herself, with some strength and decision and achievement. When one is going through a difficult time in one's life, merely to have some understanding of what all the threads are, what all the developmental factors are, can be very helpful in surviving the stress.

### CONFRONTATION DREAMS

The third type of dream brings the dreamer face-to-face with reality, often unpleasant, but occasionally even a pleasant reality that they have been reluctant to accept.

*Example 4:* A woman spending her first night with a new boyfriend dreamed he turned into her first husband.

This dream forced her to take a look at whether or not this new man was indeed similar to her first husband. The issue that had destroyed her marriage had been that her first husband wanted her to subordinate her life to his. In other ways, they were very compatible. As she considered this relationship over the next few weeks, it became clearer and clearer that this new boyfriend was a similar type of person, not domineering, but singularly tracked on his own ways so that the only way that the relationship could work would be for her, in effect, to subordinate her life to his. Having had this dream right in the beginning, she was able to see this particular trait as it developed in the relationship and deal with it so that no long-term investment was lost.

*Example 5:* Carol had a dream that she was back at her old job briefly for a training program. While she was watching some of the work, she was feeling like an outsider and feeling sad.

Carol had this dream while she was at a conference involving some of the employees of her old firm and feeling, in fact, somewhat of an outsider. Having felt that way she had approached one of her old bosses about possibly going back to work at this firm. The dream followed this discussion. In reality, she felt that she has left her old firm for a less sophisticated job which better suited her new lifestyle as wife and mother. She had some regrets about leaving the other high-powered job but felt in reality that it would not be good for her. She had not dealt directly with feeling like an outsider and feeling sad at the conference, but instead had attempted to undo her lack of affiliation with the

sophisticated job and to negotiate being rehired. The dream pointed out to her that even were she to accomplish this she would still not fit in. It reconceptualized her feelings of sadness and being an outsider in a way that made it clear that going back would not help. What was necessary was to face the feelings, work through the sadness and loss, and to be aware of her vulnerability to judgments about her change in identity and status and loss of sophistication.

You can see from examples 4 and 5 that even though the information in the reconceptualization dream may not appear to be anything different from one's daily life, the presentation of the issues is such that it does provide new perspectives, ideas, and information. That information may be the rearrangement of the issues, or it may be a reminder that undoing a decision is really not going to be effective or, alternately, it may point out that the emotional price of something is really too high.

### DISCOVERY DREAMS

The fourth type of dream is the discovery dream. These give one an entirely new look at areas of one's self or one's life. Incubation is often used to elicit such discovery dreams and it is an ancient technique that can be most helpful in directing your dreams towards a particular problem area. In addition, such dreams occur spontaneously. People will often recognize that they have a problem in an area, or that something makes them anxious, or that they keep repeating a life-pattern. However, although they feel upset or perhaps develop psychosomatic illnesses like tension headaches or allergies, they may have no idea of the nature of the problem, the cause of the problem, or how they can use their psychological awareness and their emotions to help resolve the problem. Sometimes these dreams occur when one isn't even aware that there is a problem because it has been sufficiently repressed and denied. The dream brings the issue to the surface, often in the way that leads to resolution of the issue.

*Example 6:* Anthony had this dream. "Some buses drove up a grassy cul-de-sac or courtyard. They were parked there and they seemed like tour buses. Nancy and I were supposed to get on one of them. I saw they were going to be overfilled and said, 'since we don't have reservations, let's get on right away'."

Scene II, We found ourselves at a very pretty pastry and sweet shop. There were pretty candies and patisserie everywhere. We were sitting at a table. There were other people at the other table. It was elegantly dark and I wanted to order something but I couldn't see the person in charge. I was visiting around and looking at the pretty glass jars filled with delicious things to eat and then I saw next to me on a little shelf a jar of toasted almonds and I thought, that's exactly what Nancy needs for her pilaf. I looked around again for the person in charge but there was no one to take care of us and I waited impatiently to help myself to the almonds, but I thought it wouldn't be the right thing to do so I decided to wait until someone came to wait on us and that was the end of the dream.

In the analysis of the dream, it became clear that at present, Andrew saw his professional life, his career, as a grassy cul-de-sac, safe, rural, convenient, nondescript — that sort of place. The tour buses which came up somewhat unexpectedly were things which accommodate a lot of people, a way to get to know things, see things, do interesting things, and there is always a guide to explain what's going on. For him, this represented his sabbatical. It was clear to him that the first part of the dream represented his need to get moving on a sabbatical if he really didn't want to miss the opportunities that were there for him. He had to begin his planning and had been procrastinating and not quite conscious of the fact that this was a real problem.

Scene II reminded him of his childhood and the treats that were in store for him, not routinely, but occasionally. It also reflected his training which made him feel that he ought to wait for someone else to take charge and provide him with what he needed rather than to seek it out for himself. Thus, this dream both gave him the problem in the here and now and the psychodynamics behind his procrastination, namely that he had been on some level trained not to take initiative, not to be aggressively assertive or demanding, and as a result, when an opportunity came along for him to have the treats that were possible in a sabbatical, he procrastinated, perhaps unnecessarily. Using the metaphor of the dream, he saw a number of possible options for himself. He could call for help, he could go seek help, he could help himself and explain to the people afterwards why he had done so, but in reality he was waiting both in terms of planning his sabbatical and in the dream.

*Example 7:* Sally had a dream that there was a mole on her face that spread so much "that I'm amazed that I haven't noticed it and it's even involved my left eye and I'm sure I'm going to die. Someone had told me, look at your eye."

In analyzing this dream, she described a mole as a unique characteristic which sets you apart from other people. It's visible and can be attractive, but although it's potentially benign, it can become malignant if it gets too deep. She relies on her eyes to get very specific information about what's going on around her. Her face is what she presents to people or what she uses to give people a sense of who she is. So when we bridge this information to her real life and ask, was there any place in her life in which she presented herself to people in such a way that she obscured her own ability to see what was going on around her in a way that was possibly malignant and dangerous to her, she acknowledged that indeed there was. When anxious, she would behave in ways that did exactly that. It was indeed destructive to her relationships and wiped out her own self in relating to someone. She also had a chatty, effusive, and excited way of being with people when she was nervous, confused and felt weaker. The extremely frightening nature of the dream made her realize that this was not a benign characteristic but could become quite malignant in her relationships, and she needed to look at it and get it treated, i.e., bring it up in therapy.

## DISCUSSION

All methods of dream analysis rely on the assumption that dreams have meaning of psychological relevance to

the dreamer, but differ in the way that meaning is extracted. The traditional methods of dream interpretation evolved in the context of psychoanalysis and are consequently directed toward analysis of the transference, of the psychodynamic origins of the neurotic conflicts, and toward the collective unconscious. The contemporary eclectic methods are evolving in the context of individual growth — with or without therapy — and are directed more toward insight which can be more immediately applied to daily living. These differences produce variations in interpretation of the same dream. As in psychiatric treatment in general, the goal one is seeking from dream interpretation influences one's approach to the problem and choice of technique. It is therefore important to step back and choose a technique of dream interpretation in light of the results one is seeking and appropriate to the style of therapy being used.

This paper has dealt with the use of dream interpretation in goal-oriented psychodynamic psychotherapy using Delaney's technique as an effective model. It requires the dreamers to hear their own words reflected back in the context of their own dreams. This has the advantage of facilitating their recognition of their own dynamics. In my experience, Delaney's reliance on questions, rather than knowledge of theories or symbols, also protects the psychotherapist from some countertransference errors more easily made with other dream interpretation methods.

Techniques with more breadth of exploration do not lend themselves as readily to prompt application to waking life, whereas practical solutions can easily be derived from the specificity of the interpretations derived from Delaney's approach. Another consequence of Delaney's technique is that the process encourages self-reliance in therapy because the dream and the interpretation are so clearly the patient's own. This is especially useful in brief psychotherapy when one does not wish to encourage dependence nor transference.

Whichever techniques of dream interpretation a psychiatrist uses, there is usually significant insight to be gained from dreams which can be usefully incorporated into the process of psychodynamic psychotherapy, whether it is brief or long-term, group, couple or individual. The technique itself will influence the nature of the insight revealed, and should be chosen with this in mind.

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