

## Perception of Death Message Through Dream Work: A Transpersonal Experience

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The present study was designed to explore the aspects of transpersonal psychology to the extent to which it can delve into the deeper levels of creative unconscious. A sample of 147 significant dreams was collected over a period of eight months. Each dream was carefully interpreted and those carrying a death message for the dreamer himself/herself were included in the study. Dreams, depicting death messages for other people were not included. Five out of thirteen dreams prophesying the death of the dreamers came out to be true within 2-4 months. Findings indicate that dreams provide an important method for the exploration of deeper levels of creative unconscious, including greater self-understanding and an indication of transpersonal connection with superior being.

**Keywords:** transpersonal experience, dream work, perception of death message

Dreams are subservient to the dictatorial wishes, arising during sleep, derived from libidinal urges. According to Freud (1900/1961) dreams have two aspects --- *latent* and *manifest*. The link between the two inferred by the intervening process called *dream work* by means of which wishes could be transformed into conscious dreams. This process involves mechanism such as displacement condensation and regression symbolization, etc.

By mid 1970s, Freud's theory of dreams as complex mental creation was disapproved because of the discoveries made by Aserinsky and Kleitman (1953). According to them, 'REM sleep' (a paradoxical state in which one is simultaneously aroused and yet fast

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asleep) which occurs after every 90 minutes is the cause of dreaming. This regulatory switch on and off process of REM sleep is controlled by the lower part of the brain stem and is nothing but the simple physiological process. However, the researches conducted later on (see, for example, Antrobus, 1991; Kondo, Antrobus, & Fein, 1989) revealed that far more dreams reported during nonREM sleep than the earlier studies suggested. It was also revealed that the occurrence of nonREM dreams was function of the level of arousal.

Researches in late 1990s (see, for example, Braun et al., 1997; Maquet et al., 1996; Nofzinger, Mintun, Wiseman, Kupfar, & Moore, 1997; Panksepp, 1985, 1999; Solms, 1997) have further revealed that dreams involve multiple brain mechanisms responsible for not only instinctual behavior but different domains of emotion, perception, memory, motivation, creativity, and goal directed behavior. This entire process is not restricted to any particular area like brain stem rather there is an evidence of interconnection between brain structures responsible for dreaming and biological emotions and motivation.

The above-mentioned researches are no doubt making headway into dream phenomena. Besides neuropsychological explanations, parallel researchers in transpersonal area are also needed. What is level of arousal? Is it creativity or some level of revelation, induced by some kind of Extra Sensory Perception? In this regard contributions of Jung (as cited in Sharf, 2000) are also worth-mentioning. According to him, dreams are neither mere production of memories nor abstraction from experience; they are the undistinguished manifestation of unconscious creativity. Dreams are a symbolic representation of the state of psyche (Hall, 1986).

Although dreams were important for Jung, not all dreams were of equal value. He distinguished between *little* and *big* dreams. More common than big dreams, little dreams come from the personal unconscious and are often a reflection of day-to-day activity. Significant dreams (big dreams), on the other hand, are often remembered for lifetime, and not infrequently prove to be the riches jewel in the treasure house of psychic experience (as cited in Sharf, 2000). Images within big dreams are symbolic presentation of still unknown or unconscious material.

The sources of dream material are varied. They may include memories of past experiences, important events in the past that are repressed, unimportant daily or past events, and memories of deeply disturbing secrets. Sometimes dream comes from physical stimuli such as a cold room, a need to urinate, digestive or acidity trouble,

etc. Sources of the dream are not important; the real focus should be on the meaning they convey (Mattoon, 1981).

To remember dreams and their images is not always easy. Most analysts advise individuals to record their dreams on a notepad as soon as possible, even if the dreams are experienced during the middle of the night. A tape recorder may also be used instead of a notepad. Although dreams often are forgotten soon after a person wakes up, sometimes they may come into memory shortly after one awakens. As much information about the dream can be remembered (including small details), should be recorded, because details are often symbolically significant and may turn an otherwise little dream into a significant dream (Harris, 1996).

Dreams that reveal personal association are those that relate to the dreamers on current affairs of life. These dreams need to be interpreted in terms of daily events of the individual as well as in terms of information about his family, past, and cultural background. Dreams, having personal association are more frequent than those with archetypal association. Both are equally significant. In short, it is too soon to reach any conclusion regarding mechanism involved at different levels of dreaming. Present research is designed to understand the expression of transpersonal message delivered through dream work.

## Method

### *Sample*

Sample consisted of 13 significant dreams reported to the researcher, either verbally or literally, by both men and women ranging in age from 40-60 years. All the individuals who experienced these dreams were muslims by religion and were not suffering from any terminal illness.

### *Instrument*

In-depth analysis (dream interpretation) of significant dreams was carried out by two independent interpreters. These interpreters were qualified psychologist and trained in *Sufi* traditions and had thorough understanding in this field.



## *Procedure*

Written instructions were given to the students of M.Sc. studying in the University of Peshawar, Pakistan and their respective families to report any dream which they thought was significant in some way or the other. Immediately after the initial briefing, the important dreams were regularly reported. Altogether 147 dreams were reported in a time period of eight months. The source and the contents of the manifest dream material were put forward to two independent interpreters who after deep consideration interpreted dreams in tandem. In this way 13 out of total 147 reported dreams were picked up as significant dreams and were included in the study.

The criterion for the selection of these 13 dreams was symbolic indication of death message for the dreamer. The dreams, which conveyed the message of somebody else's death, were not included in the present sample. The purpose and interpretation of the dreams was not revealed to the subject or source. Those who dreamt or conveyed the dream were asked to report any peculiar incident taking place in the family. Furthermore, in next four months the sources were also contacted telephonically to get the relevant information about the dreamers, without disclosing the purpose of the contact.

## **Results**

Five dreams out of 13 significant dreams that were interpreted as conveying death message proved to be true within 2-4 months from the date of reporting dreams.

**Table 1**

### *Perception of Death Messages through Dreams*

| Total no. of dreams | No. of significant dreams carrying death messages | No. of dreams confirming the death | Percentage of true dreams |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 147                 | 13                                                | 5                                  | 38.4%                     |

Results in Table 1 show that 38.4% of the dreams were proved to be true, while, the authenticity of remaining 61% could not be followed. Following are some commonalities and peculiarities of dreams on the basis of which they were interpreted.



1. Though, the sources of dream material were varied but invariably all 13 dreams reported having some kind of connection with deceased relatives/friends.
2. In seven dreams, the deceased relative or friend forced the dreamer to accompany him that they did.
3. Broken roof of the house or visit to the graveyard were seen in their dreams.
4. Some common means of transportations like horse, bull cart, and train were also reported.
5. Sometimes, the overall emotional impact concomitant with the dream content was so strong that the dreamer perceived some kind of significance attached to it.
6. The dreamer's profanity were also taken into account.

### Discussion

Evidence has been provided in late 1950's from wide range of disciplines that we may have underestimated human potential for psychological growth and well-being. Much of the new data shows consistencies between traditional models and transpersonal psychology. An attempt has been made to integrate knowledge from both western science and eastern wisdom under the domain of transpersonal psychology.

The term transpersonal is used to reflect experiences given by exceptionally healthy people who can feel or extend trans (beyond) the personal (person, ego, or personality). In other words it relates to the exploration of transcendental state of consciousness beyond personal identity. A key issue was recognition of non-western psychology which in its own way, was as sophisticated as western psychology and equally concerned with the well-being of mankind. It also recognizes that both these models are (western and eastern psychologies) complementary rather than antagonistic. It has the potential for understanding human identity, consciousness, motives, meditations, etc.

Of all the transpersonal methods currently recognized, meditations and dreams are two of the most widely available methods used for the exploration of deeper level of the personal unconscious. The current research was an attempt for identifying the role of dreams in the attainment of direct experience of true self through spiritual/mystical experiences. The result of this study shows that only 38.4% of dreams came out to be true. Unfortunately the authors could not follow the remaining eight dreams due to certain limitations.

According to Jung, the dreams are compensatory and part of the process of regulating the individual's personality (as cited in Whitmontt, 1991). Dreams may serve the purpose of bringing the unconscious material into consciousness. However, in his own words, not all dreams have compensatory functions. Some dreams may anticipate future. The question is what the personality is composed of and how this unconscious is being brought to the surface (dream). Creative personality will reflexively mobilize the cognitive unconscious, while, a mystic will establish a spiritual relationship between Divine source and the self. This spiritual explanation is in line with the Muslims' belief of prophetic revelation, which may give support to the notion of unconscious perception or intuition.

According to one *Hadith* (words of Prophet Muhammad [PBUH]), a true dream is  $1/46^{\text{th}}$  part of prophetic revelation (narrated by Anas Ibn-Malik in Sahih Bukhari [9: 112]). The Quran (12: 6) also says that Prophet Yousaf was endowed with the power to interpret dreams. Many additional examples are cited in the same *Surah* (Chapter 12) which supports the notion of divine revelation as well (e.g., 12: 4, 36, 43), but maintains that all dreams do not have compensatory functions.

The main concern of this paper was not the dream itself but the implicitly perceived message of the death, concealed in latent dream material. Although, every individual represents his own world of experience followed by unique perception, but at the same time, share a common collective unconscious (Jung, as cited in Sharf, 2000). This collective unconscious may be understood as having material common to all mankind whether it is archetypes or *nafsal kulliyya* (universal self) which binds all human beings together. Man is tiny part of greater and divine Gestalt or Universe. Through dreams, one may have subjective experience of this divine revelation.

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**Received October 19, 2006.**

**Revision received July 11, 2007.**