Chapter 49. Errors. The Dream Door.

Where the patient drops into the recall of a dream is so important to keep in mind, but so often forgotten. This is because this dream door is placed precisely where it needs to be placed: between the hot engine of society (Levi-Strauss quoted in Charbonnier, 1969) pulling clockwise to the right and the cold engine of instinct (op cit) pulling counterclockwise to the left. If the doctor can keep his bearings and balance, in this mid-position, the patient may be able to orient himself and not get swallowed up by the vortex to the right or the vortex to the left.

The Dream Of Getting Off the Train in India. This patient finished a Ph.D. ten years ago, but has lost his way in pursuing an academic career. He has been janitor ever since. The resident summed up his situation for him beautifully. On the one hand, he just wanted a professorship handed to him like his father had, but on the other hand, he did not want to have to compete for it, and sell his candidacy, and propagandize for himself. That reminded the patient that he had a dream the night before! Suddenly, a door opened into the dream.

He dreamt he was in the south of India. There were no taxis. He recognized the region, but the people didn’t speak the language he knew there. He decided to get off the train at a stop to get some water. Then he looked back and saw that the train was gone. The train had all the volumes on it that he had hoped to translate into English.

The resident and the patient knew very well that the train represented his ticket into the modern world of academia that he had gotten off ten years ago. Thus, the dream went back precisely ten years ago, to where he had gotten lost on the way.

The resident and the patient got bogged down, however, in the details of looking for water in the south of India: how you have to boil it, and how scarce a resource it is, and so on.
Thus, they never got the full amplitude of the dream. On the one hand, the right hand, there was this train he wanted to be on, and on the other hand, the left hand, there was this need for water. The dream pulls clockwise on the train and counterclockwise for water, or into the great symbol of the unconscious.

Thus, the doctor can hold in his hands the two ends that need to be connected. This is the very lifeline that has been cut. He can just give back the metaphor of the dream that is the transit between the world of trains and the world of water. He can just pose the metaphor as a metaphor. To wit: "If water is a metaphor of vital need, what is it meaning to you to seek water and lose the train?"

If the doctor bears in mind where the door opened to the dream, he will also know that the water has something to do with his longing to be handed a professorship like his father's, while the train has something to do with competing, and selling, and propagandizing for oneself.
Chapter 50. Errors. The Dream in Two Dimensions is a Metaphor, An Exaggeration, About An Emergency.

I am finding that patients can often face danger in nightmares, if I give them a simple idea of what is probably going on: namely, that the dream is a metaphor, an exaggeration, about an emergency. Do they want to know what the danger is about or not?

The Nightmare About the Husband. A resident and I saw this patient yesterday for a first visit. She was obsessional like most of our patients, needing to be in control of details, and bored. But she had been having nightmares for about six months, once or twice a month, and all of them were about her husband. I asked her if she wanted to face the message or not? She did. The first example she gave was a nightmare of her husband appearing bloodied in the face and chest, as if he had been beaten up. I suggested it was a metaphor and an exaggeration, and she was able to bring up her fear that she had hurt him by not wanting to have sex. The second example was of a nightmare in which she imagined that he was dead and she was dead, but they didn’t know they were dead (like in a movie they had seen that evening on people who didn’t know they were dead). She was able to connect this to his telling her that he had resigned himself to giving up on sex with her. She had thought (consciously) that their sex life could wait. Now she felt (unconsciously) that maybe it could not be allowed to wait!

I was challenged at a seminar a month ago about this idea that dreams are of present emergencies, for, after all, don’t they go back to the family of origin as Freud told us? Yes, they do, I answered, but an animal that misses the present emergency will never be around to face the old emergency! Consider the following example, which I might have failed to get across to the
patient, if I had not been simple enough in my message about the dream as metaphor, in exaggeration, about a present emergency.

A Pair of Dreams As A Matter of Life and Death. I had heard about this patient from his doctor, because of his dream of speaking French to Gorbachev and killing him (Chapter 38, Punch Dreams, Literal Punches). Now the doctor brought him in for consultation.

To condense a lot of material, I would say that the patient was stuck doing a sales job that he hated, because he had to have the money and benefits. Yet it was a set-up for him to lose his temper and thus lose his job. The boss was demeaning, like a drill sergeant, and like his father.

The first dream he told me was dreamt the night before visiting his family on Easter Sunday. He dreamt he was in a strange contest of about 12 to 15 people, a shooting contest, on the road in cars, of shooting at road signs and buildings. Suddenly, someone pulled alongside and shot him in the stomach, and he woke up in terror.

Once I told the patient that the dream was a metaphor about his present emergency, exaggerated, he quickly saw it was a parody of his job, picking off customers like road signs and buildings, and that he was terrified of someone picking him off and taking him out of the race. Just as he had been betrayed by his father and his aunt—which explains why the dream occurred the night before visiting the family on Easter Sunday.

I decided to ask him at this point with only a quarter of an hour left in the consultation whether he wanted to go into the Gorbachev dream? I asked this because I thought it would reach to why the boss might want to shoot him!

He was very glad to go into it. He said he had this dream in color, while the previous dream was only in black and white. He was out in the woods in snow with pine trees when he saw Gorbachev’s security men and Gorbachev himself in his black fur hat and black fur-collared
coat. He wanted to have a meeting with him and try to find a common language. He put his hand on Gorbachev’s shoulder and said, “Parlez-vous francais?” Gorbachev lit up right away, but in three seconds he clutched his chest and fell over right on top of the patient nose-to-nose with incredulous pain and terror in his eyes!

Again we follow the metaphor. He, the patient, is fluent in French. Gorbachev is an alcoholic like his father and his boss. He, the patient, is trying to find a common language like the hero in “Star Man,” an alien from another planet.

Then the patient volunteers to me that he has a feeling he is also Gorbachev! I say that that is a very high state! Did it ever occur to him that this might come across to his boss and be very threatening to his boss who is without education?

No, he had never considered it! But now that the dream brings it up, he sees that trying to talk with this man might indeed be very dangerous.

Two Ways of Disappearing Forever

The man who dreamt of getting off the train in India (Chapter 49) has disappeared counterclockwise into the water of his unconscious. The man who dreamt of the strange shooting contest (Chapter 50) has disappeared clockwise by getting shot in the stomach.

When you contemplate these two men, you have the chance of glimpsing why man is hardly present at all. He is either rushing clockwise, or he is running away, counterclockwise. Either puts him in continual emergencies. That is why he is hardly listening to what you are saying, unless you address his present emergency. If you address that, you will have his acute attention.
The Practical Use of Dreams
And the Human Comedy

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