The role of dreams in the human psyche

Literature, Russian Literature

Plan:

- The history of dream perception in indigenous cultures.
- The modern theories of sleep and dream interpretation.
- Jung's archetypes. The Meaning of Sleep andDreamsidentified by Freud, Jung, and other theorists.

We all dream. Every night - as we dim the light of consciousness - we enter the realm of the dream. In this dream state our imagination runs free with little or no interference from our conscious mind. In the morning, when we awaken and return to consciousness, we may bring with us a recollection of the wanderings of our imagination - we remember the dream.

To dream is natural, it is a universal experience. All people of all cultures enter into this dream state when they sleep. As sleep research has shown even animals dream. How we regard the dream, however, varies fromcultureto culture and from person to person. Originally the dream was held to be the voice of God. Most indigenous cultures hold that the dream is sent by the Great Spirit and serves to offer advice and instruction. This idea of the divinity of the dream can also to be found in ancient Egyptian and Greek society.

In the Old Testament Jacob interprets a dream for the Egyptian pharaoh. Jacob explains that God has spoken to the pharaoh and warned of seven years of prosperity to be followed by seven years of famine. In Egypt and Greece the dream was considered as a message from the gods. “ The Egyptian people believed that the gods revealed themselves in dreams, but the soul was not transported to another place or time. The Egyptians

believed that dreams served as warnings, advice, and prophecy” (Agee, 2010).

Both Egyptian and Greek society there existed temples where one would go to dream and receive healing or instruction from the gods. Homer's Iliad (8th century BC) tells the story of Agamemnon who receives instruction from Zeus through a dream. “ Another element of Homeric dream interpretation, similar to that of the Egyptians is that not all dreams are prophetic, so people had to attempt to distinguish between “ true” dreams and “ false” dreams. For example, in the Iliad Zeus sent a misleading dream to King Agamemnon, which undermined his authority“(Agee).

In this practice the sleepers actively attempted contact with divine beings. This practice reflects the Homeric view of dreams; according to this view “ the dream was not conceived as internal experience, a state of mind, or a message from the irrational unconscious to the conscious ego. Rather, it was an objectified messenger, a supernatural agent sent by a deity” (Parman pg. 18)“(Agee). Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, used dreams as adiagnosticaid. In the near East the dream was considered to be a source of divine inspiration.

Mohammed, the founding prophet of the Islamic culture, is said to have received much of what is written in the Koran through his dreams. In Christian tradition the dream was thought of as the word of God, or the work of the devil. The biblical legacy pertaining to dreams is very important. There are descriptions of forty-three dreams in the Old Testament, while in the New Testament there are nine (including apparitions and visions) (Sokolovskii, p.

27). St. John Chrysostom preached that God revealed himself through dreams (The life of St. John Chrysostom, para. 5, thenewarchive. om, p. 229), whilst other church fathers, such as Martin Luther, viewed the dream as the work, not of God, but the Devil. According to Luther it was the church, and only the church, which was the conduit of God's word. For Luther revelations made to people in dreams could only be diabolic (The Legacy of Martin Luther). In the Christian epoch the church and its scriptures supplanted the importance of the dream. The dominance of Christianity obscured the divinity of the dream, which was now considered superstitious.

The rise of rationalism andsciencefurther undermined the value of the dream. To this day skepticism toward the value dream remains the predominant attitude. In the early part of the 20th century, however, the dream was championed by two great psychologists, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. For Freud the dream revealed that which the dreamer would rather keep hidden. By exploring the dream one was forced to face that which was suppressed and rejected within oneself. Jung had another theory. Jung felt that the dream acted as a mirror for the ego - revealing that which was missing within the consciousness of the dreamer.

For Jung the dream acted as ateacherand guide on the road toward wholeness. With the work of both Jung and Freud the dream regained its status as a source of wisdom and healing. A series of dreams would develop, balance and refine the conscious awareness of the dreamer. Jung had rediscovered the age-old wisdom of the dream and its capacity to heal and make whole. Apart from healing, the dreams also seemed to be encouraging

and actively participating in the growth and development of thepersonality. Jung termed this inherent drive of the psyche as the force of individuation, the force by which we become whole and indivisible.

Freud, “ The Interpretation of Dreams”: The conscious element of the dream lies in its remembrance, the unconscious element lies in its mystery and perplexity. Half conscious, half unconscious, the dream acts as a bridge between the known and the unknown. Physiological Theories and Stages of Sleep So now that we know why we need sleep, we need to know what is the thing, that actually puts us to sleep. Some may recognize the name melatonin, because it is sometimes prescribed for jet-lag or sleep deprivation. But we also create this chemical inside our bodies, although it is in much smaller portions. Melatonin is a hormone secreted from the pineal gland in the center of our brain. “ It is released when our eyes begin to register that the sun is beginning to set and darkness begins to fall”. This is the hormone that makes you go to sleep and is also used in our body to regulate our sleep-wake cycles. If you wonder why older people tend to sleep less than younger people, it is because the amount of melatonin produced in our body seems to lessen as we age. Although sleep research has yielded a great deal of information on how we sleep, why we need to do so remains a mystery.

There are two prominent theories of sleep function. One -- the restorative model --assumes that sleep exists to service the brain in some way. According to this theory, non-REM sleep restores the relationship between the nervous system and muscles, glands, immune and other body systems.

REM sleep maintains learning, reasoning and emotional balance. Another -- the adaptive model -- holds that sleep exists as an adaption to our biological clocks. Because it normally takes place during times of reduced physiological functions it may be a means of preserving energy for the hours when it is needed (source Are you Getting Enough? HarvardWomen'sHealthWatch, 1070910X. March 94, Vol. 1, Is. 7. AcademicSearch Complete)

Cortical and neurological theories of sleep compete with the neurohumoral theory, developed in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The brainstem theory, formulated in 1962, was associated with the discovery of a small region of cells in the brainstem thought responsible for dream generation and the secretion of acetylcholine. It gave way in the 1970s to the cortical-brainstem theory (the production of dopamine in the lobes of the brain was associated with dreaming). It became clear, moreover, that destruction of this group of cells due to injury leads to the extinction of dreams but not of the phase of paradoxical sleep" (Sokolovskii, p. 17). This poses the issue of the presence or absence of dreams in animals. If animals do dream, their dreaming " is probably limited to what Freud called Tagesreste (residues of daytime impressions) and " childish dreams," the significance of which lies in the fulfillment of desires unfulfilled in the waking state"(p. 17).

The so called work of dreaming, which encodes the true meaning of a dream (condensation, displacement, symbolization, repression, and the other mechanisms of dreaming that make its content non-obvious and decodable only through interpretation), " is apparently connected with the presence of

developed language and with the play of signifiers and is conditioned by it” (p. 17). It therefore cannot exist in animals that do not have such a developed second signal system. A typical night's sleep consists of a number of cycles lasting about 90 minutes in length. Each of these cycles is made up of four separate stages.

During stage one, we are entering into light sleep. This stage is characterized by Non-rapid eye movements (NREM), muscle relaxation, lowered body temperature and slowed heart rate. The body is preparing to enter into deep sleep. Stage two is also characterized by NREM, this stage is characterized by a further drop in body temperature and relaxation of the muscles. The body's immune system goes to work on repairing the day's damage, the endocrine glands secrete grown hormone and blood is sent to the muscles to be reconditioned. In this stage, you are completely asleep. Stage three is just a deeper sleep.

Your metabolic levels are extremely slow. And, finally, the famous REM, or rapid eye movement stage, occurs about every ninety minutes of sleep. In this stage of sleep, your eyes move back and forth erratically. It occurs at about 90-100 minutes after the onset of sleep. Your blood pressure rises, heart rate speeds up, respiration becomes erratic and brain activity increases (source). Your involuntary muscles also become paralyzed. It is called in the mnemonic for medical students as an “ awake brain in the paralyzed body”, as opposed to stage one through three characterized as “ idle brain in the awake body”.

An EEG would record brain waves resembling those you would see when you are active. This stage is the most restorative part of sleep. Your mind is being revitalized and emotions are being fine tuned. The majority of your dreaming occurs in this stage. These stages repeat themselves throughout a night's sleep. (source) The following diagram shows our sleep cycle. The function of dreams is that by reproducing difficult or unsolved life situations or experiences, the dream aids towards a solving or resolution of the problems. Freud called dreaming " the royal road to the unconscious” Our personality as a whole, like every organism, is working towards its own fulfillment. ’ He connects this even more directly with the overall self-regulatory physical processes in saying ‘ There is in the psyche an automatic movement toward readjustment, towards equilibrium, toward a restoration of the balance of our personality. This automatic adaptation of the organism is one of the main functions of the dream as indeed it is of bodily functions and of the personality as a whole.

Dreams are the product of the unconscious mind . In the deeper state of Delta, our minds are resting even more fully and we are further distanced from the physical world. Perhaps it is in this state that we can receive cues from the energy of people and situations that we are connected with in waking life or from Jung's collective unconscious. Since dreams were a way of communicating with the unconscious, Jung felt that the imageries in dreams were a way of revealing something about ourselves, our relationships with others, and situations in our waking life.

Dreams guided our personal growth and helped to self achieve our potential. Often discussing what is currently going on in your life, helps to interpret and unlock the cryptic and bizarre images of your dreams. Jung’s sleep theories are closely associated with his f archetypes. Jung's theory divides the psyche into three parts. The first is the ego, which Jung identified with the conscious mind. The second part is the personal unconscious, which includes anything which is not presently conscious, but can be. The personal unconscious includes bothmemoriesthat re easily brought to mind and those that have been suppressed because of being painful or too difficult to accept as a part of reality for some people. But it does not include the instincts, or id – aggressive drives, that Freud would have it include. But then Jung adds the part of the psyche that makes his theory stand out from all others: the collective unconscious. You could call it your " psychic inheritance. " It is the reservoir of our experiences as a species, a kind of knowledge we are all born with. And yet we can never be directly conscious of it.

It influences all of our experiences and behaviors, most especially the emotional ones, but we only know about it indirectly, by looking at those influences. There are some experiences that show the effects of the collective unconscious more clearly than others: The experiences oflove at first sight, of deja vu (the feeling that you've been here before), and the immediate recognition of certain symbols and the meanings of certain myths, could all be understood as the sudden conjunction of our outer reality and the inner reality of the collective unconscious.

Grander examples are the creative experiences shared by artists and musicians all over the world and in all times, or the spiritual experiences of mystics of all religions, or the parallels in dreams, fantasies, mythologies, fairy tales, and literature of different cultures. A nice example that has been greatly discussed recently is the near-death experience. It seems that many people, of many different cultural backgrounds, find that they have very similar recollections when they are brought back from a close encounter with death.

They speak of leaving their bodies, seeing their bodies and the events surrounding them clearly, of being pulled through a long tunnel towards a bright light, of seeing deceased relatives or religious figures waiting for them, and of their disappointment at having to leave this happy scene to return to their bodies. Perhaps we are all " built" to experience death in this fashion. Quite a few people find that Jung has a great deal to say to them.

They include writers, artists, musicians, film makers, theologians, and, of course, some psychologists. Examples that come to mind are the mythologist Joseph Campbell, the film maker George Lucas, and the science fiction author Ursula K. Le Guin. Anyone interested in creativity, spirituality, psychic phenomena, the universal, and so on will find in Jung a kindred spirit. But scientists, including psychologists, have a lot of trouble with Jung.

Not only does he fully support the teleological view (as do most personality theorists), but he goes a step further and talks about the mystical interconnectedness of synchronicity. Not only does he postulate an unconscious, where things are not easily available to the empirical eye, but

he postulates a collective unconscious that never has been and never will be conscious. There is still a lot of work to be done to connect our knowledge in physiology andpsychologyof dreams.

The French neurophysiologist Michel Jouvet, author of the novel Le chateau des songes [The Castle of Dreams] (Jouvet 2000) and discoverer of the phase of paradoxical sleep, analyzed 6, 600 of his own dreams before concluding that two kinds of memory—long-term and short-term—were used in them. Physiologists have yet to reach a consensus concerning the mechanisms of sleep and dreaming.