

## Dreams in Group Psychotherapy: Theory and Technique.

### INTRODUCTION

**Robi Friedman, Claudio Neri and Malcom Pines**

#### **How the book was born and took shape.**

The idea for this book was born during a meeting on a Roman terrace one sunny afternoon after a congress about "dreams and the group". The three future editors of the book, - an Israeli, an Italian and an Englishman - relaxing with drinks in hand, chatting about this, that and the recent scientific meetings concluded that the congress had been very interesting. But our strongest impression was that we were starting rather than ending an exploration journey.

It was clear to us that although the dream-theme strongly links group psychotherapy to Freud's psychoanalytical tradition, dealing with the dream in the group context goes far beyond psychoanalytical paradigms. Already the most ancient traditions addressed dreams in order to decipher the future as representing a DIFFERENT level of "reality" essential ~~to recover in order~~ to live contemporary social life in a richer, more creative way. Shortly afterwards - Friedman, Neri and Pines - found themselves with paper and pen in hand, planning the outline for a book. The plan was to cover different aspects of the complex relationship between group, psychotherapy and contemporary reality, in a very organised construction. The result - the actual book - is very different, much less organised, but much RICHER ~~more rich~~. This dream-book-~~dream~~ did not FINALLY stage a handbook, but as happens with daily residues, A ~~this~~ volume collecting contributions from psychotherapists and researchers from three continents and seven nations.

We constantly communicate and discuss about the book together from distance. Without e-mail, we can hardly imagine the possibility to achieve the task. This new way of communicating, easily sending and receiving messages showS a strong resemblance to magical processes. For us the almost instant interaction and feedback from such distances was a dream come true.

The next physical meeting took place a year later in Haifa, on another terrace, overlooking Mount Carmel National Park. Following Jerusalem's IGPA congress we gathered in order to talk and tour the Jordan Valley and the northern part of Israel in a still peaceful situation. The quite of the Lebanon border and Israeli-Arab and Palestinian country through which we travelled, seem now wishful thoughts waiting for new thinkers to become reality again.

#### **Neglected Perspectives**

The book draws attention on long time neglected way of understanding and use of dreams. The dream's function has been considered as individual, for many centuries - increasingly forcing its communicative functions for groups or the community into the background. From our contemporary perspective, some of these very ancient approaches are worth to be recovered.

The individual approach to dreams interpretation was described already by Artemidorus (of Daldia) living in the second century B.C.] who like Freud wrote A "The Interpretation of Dreams" almost 2000 years apart. Commenting on similarities between them, L.W. Murray (1999) thinks that both applied assumptions leading to an individual rather than a communal approach to dreams. Needing expertise to interpret the personal unconscious and decode condensation and displacement resulting from intra-psychic "day's residues" was one among the main contributions to this trend.

**The similarities between Freud and Artemidorus are many. «Both Artemidorus and Freud assume [the existence of a] cleavage of the subject (conscious/unconscious) [...]. Both [...] privilege allegorical dreams [...]. And both recognize the notion of the "day's residues," already a topos in Epicurean literature. As Artemidorus puts it: "A man will not dream about**

**things to which he has never given a thought." (Wilson 1993, p. 60)» I STILL THINK THIS PART IS FRAGMENTED AND NOT CLEAR.**

«Within the urbanized world of the classical Mediterranean [- Mesopotamia, Egypt, Israel, Greece - ], dreams became items for individual attention rather than group concern. [...] They were regarded as messages to individual dreamers. [...] Previously influential or transparent within the shared living of the group, the language of the dream now became obscure: the dream bore a significant message, but if that message were to be understood, an interpretation was needed. So emerged dream specialists [...].» «[...] Dreams are no longer a vehicle of unconscious attunement within the group, possibly requiring collective response, but rather they reveal the fate of the individuated dreamer.»

Before the change that took place in Mesopotamia and Egypt, and still now in many tribal cultures, «Dreams like myths, are to be told. [...] Dreams are not only told on a regular basis... but are earnestly discussed to ascertain what they "mean"; what event or development they augur, or what state of the spiritual surround they reflect. Because the group shared so much in the way of symbols, language, and culture [...] its members were able to "read" the significance of a dream without specialist assistance. [...] Their ritual specialists [...] were aware of the multi-vocality of communal symbols, but their interpretive discourse was not to disenchant but rather to accentuate, illuminate, integrate, and elaborate by poetic resonance [...]. Phrased more abstractly, dream interchange facilitates the adjustment of group members to each other, and so can be especially beneficial in those areas where cooperation and interdependence must proceed easily, unreflectively, harmoniously, as among the small band who collectively confront a harsh world and must live, hunt and, on occasion, fight as a unit, entrusting their lives to each other.»

The majority of the contributors to the book think that interpersonal work with dreams not only increases group's empathy and harmony. A dream told imposes a shared encounter. Joint work may facilitate hitherto stuck personal autonomic growth as well as enriching the group's atmosphere, its unconscious world and objects relations through a better digested coping effort with the "not-me".

**Freud's and later psychoanalytical contribution**

The theory of dreams "occupies a special place in the history of psychoanalysis and marks a turning point; it was with it that analysis took the step from being a psychotherapeutic procedure to being a depth psychology" writes Freud (1932, p. 7). In 1900, *The Interpretation of Dreams* disclosed the nature of unconscious mental processes. Dreams were treated as symptoms of a conflict with a hidden meaning, i.e. the disguised fulfilment of a wish - through which dreamers cope with drives and reality. Primary and secondary elaboration of latent into and manifest contents, mechanisms like condensation, repression, displacement and later symbolic representation became the "royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind" (1900, p. 608). Despite Freud's insistence on the dream as sleep keeper through wish fulfilment and his initial resistance to viewing dreams as problem solving, he also maintained at the same time, that "dreams endeavour to master the stimulus retrospectively" (Freud 1920, p. 32). This last approach to dreams as "attempts at better mastery and settling of traumatic experiences" (Ferenczi 1931, p. 238) is the forerunner for most subsequent considerations of dreaming as mental unconscious coping and part of "thinking". Neurophysiological evidence gathered by REM research corroborated much of these findings and are represented in this book by Peretz Lavie's chapter number X: "The Enchanted World of Sleep" and in Peter Shlachet's paper (See also Palombo, 1992).

Sharpe (1937) enlarges this approach by comparing dreams to children's play and drama, considering dream-work as self-revealing projections of the self. Winnicott's and Khan's contributions emphasized dreams as relatively protected transitional spaces in which a child stages creatively inner plays (Khan 1971). A "psychic envelope" (Anzieu, 1989) giving a safe boundary, is imperative to create and protect this playful spaces. This implies abilities of differentiation between sleep and waking life, between internal and external objects. Segal and Joseph regard dreams as coping processes through projective mechanisms by which the dreamer tries to get rid of unacceptable or unbearable feelings. The dreamer's psychic development is also represented by his

capacity to symbolize and digest conflicting emotions. Thus dreaming is also being evaluated for its contribution to ego development. Projective identification mechanisms during dreaming itself, using stored object-relations, may be a first step to further containment and elaboration of these difficulties (Friedman, in this volume). Bion's many important but fragmented contributions to the understanding of Dream Work have been uniquely synthesized for this book in Grotstein's chapter: Bion's legacy about Dreams.

### **Dreams as Communications; In-forming or Trans-forming?**

Two main perspectives of information flow are meant by "Communication": the message informing about the sender's state on the one hand, and on the other a trans-forming influence on both the receiver and the sender through the (largely unconscious) message. It may cast further order ascribing these aspects to a one- or to a two-person psychology, i.e. studying communication as descriptions of intra-psychic processes or interactions between people. Of course, these perspectives are more complementary than mutually exclusive categories. The dynamics of projective identification (or any other concepts of a similar interpersonal – inter-subjective process) help understand how information turns into transformation. Freud's view of the dream and its interpretation as the "royal way to the unconscious" of the patient seem to belong to the representation/information pole of an imagined communication continuum. Levenson (1991) who describes patient's dreams portraying dramatic situations paralleled by the interaction with the therapist, take a middle position on the communication continuum. The information helps analysts to deduce how to extract himself from neurotic interactions with the patient, leading patients to discover new coping ways. Joseph (1985) goes even further on the continuum, suggesting that dreams will have a tendency to be unconsciously staged and enacted in reality. She describes how "a dream can reveal its meaning in a fairly precise way by being lived out in the session" (p. 451). Ogden (1996) seems to go all the way to the continuum's end by implying that an analyst's understanding of a patient's dream is born in the "analytic third" (the intra-analytic shared space) through his inter-subjective experience.

Sandor Ferenczi has probably been the pioneer of understanding dreams in a relational context: he locates their genesis in the inter-subjective space and dream-telling often as a communication to the audience. In his clinical diary he writes: "The patient feels that this dream fragment is a combination of the unconscious contents of the psyches of the analysand and the analyst" (Ferenczi, 1988, p. 13). Earlier in a short article with the poignant title of "To whom does one relate one's dreams" (Ferenczi, 1913, p. 349) he states: "One feels impelled to relate one's dreams to the very person to whom the content relates". Recently expansions on simultaneous and ambivalent dream-telling intentions became less rare. Some examples are dreams being both disguisers and communicators (Aron, 1989), communicators of frame violations (Langs, 1978), dreams as supervision of the therapist (Casement, 1991) and as a second chance to further elaborate unsuccessfully processed dream material through the help of the audience (Friedman 1999, 2000 and in this volume).

### **Dreams and Group Analysis**

A patient once remarked that when a dream is told it is as if a new member is introduced in the group. This volume is about addressing this "new member", understanding the complexity of its presence and its content using it for the well-being and growth of the individual, the group and society.

Group Analysis needs technical revisions in order to make sure that dreams are properly encountered, coped with and used for integration and further individual and group development. Telling dreams in a group may a priori not be an easy task for a number of reasons - i.e. already the sheer size of the group renders telling dreams and technically the work with them more difficult. Dreams, usually messages about intimate matters, may initially encounter neither a receptive audience nor a discrete one. Dreams' fate may be rejection, although intended as requests for

containment- resulting in potential narcissistic hurts inflicted on dream-tellers. Individual therapists may readily accept and even encourage the eventual inclusion of the inner world's most dreadful representations of the dream - whereas in a group no warranty of secure reception of such representations by group members can be obtained. Participants may not feel bound by contract to automatically contain every kind of material. Even dream material with strong relevance and relation to the group, may engender strong resistance because of the unacceptability of possible group-as-a-whole self-images.

While eventual difficulties in the work with dreams in groups are described, most of the articles emphasize possible advantages of the group's coping with loaded dreams. From a technical point of view, all contributors seem to agree unanimously that the therapist should build some sort of secure space by helping the group develop norms of associating to dreams rather than "interpreting" them.

### **About the various contributions**

While contributors in this volume hold differential views of the dream's presence in the group in common, most often than not their approaches to the work on dreams are complementary. It must be clear that a real differentiation between the contributors is at best, partial: clustering the articles is only around some central issues and not all of them.

Both Malcom Pines (United Kingdom) overall review and James Grotstein's (USA) summary of Bion's thinking on the work with dreams will help to introduce the main issues of dreaming in group therapy. Pines, in this volume, gives a "tour d'horizont" ranging from Foulkes' and his individual approach to dreams in groups, Trigant Burrows' effort to socialize the dream to Gordon Lawrence's "social dreaming" who's perspective is "multi-versal" and dream-centred (vs. dreamer-centered).

Another dimension in Pines' survey is the therapeutic value ascribed to dreams in groups. A continuum extends from a Winnicottian/ Kohutian empathic approach to dreams requiring attunement (rather than decoding), through Anzieu's intermediary place describing protective and holding membranous dream functions to Bionian approaches to the dream-story as a containing and elaborating, thinking opportunity. Interesting is also a distinction between different relational functions of the dream-story - from being "group-dreams" usually representing conflicts in the group to representing individual and narcissistic resistances. The dialogue between representational/informational and transformational functions of the dream is synthesized by Pines through the notion of the dream's contribution to "widening of vision". Pines believes that dreaming "in concert", as Samuel Johnson describes, large group and dreaming matrix together, are the next steps to the ecology of mind at the beginning of our next millennium. Implicit there are hints for the difficulties of Foulkes' approaches to the therapeutic dream: - suggesting the necessity to change its technical approach in order to make dreams more available to the participants work in Group Analytic therapy. Achieving such an improvement of the approach to dreams in groups may lead to great gains in the understanding and processing of their difficult dynamics and contents. As many of the clinical examples in the book show, there may often be an enormous gain in exposing the dream to a group echo, in comparison to individual therapy.

Grotstein great synopsis of Bion's venture into dreams and dreaming gives us a picture of some of his most original and far-reaching innovations of psychoanalytic thinking. Central is the concept of "dream-work-alpha" in Cogitations which marks the transition from a one-person psychoanalytical model to a two-person model, i.e., the "container/contained" unit. The analyst must dream the analysand and the analysand's "O," as must the mother earlier. Dreaming is continuous; they not only occur while we are sleep but while we are awake as well. The non-psychotic dream employs dream-work-alpha to transform beta elements (un-thought emotional experience) into alpha elements which are suitable for mental processing. Transformation of beta-elements (evolving "O") into myth-themes or dream/fantasy narratives is accompanied by a dialectical interchange between the Paranoid/Schizoid and the Depressive "positions". Bion's transformational approach cannot be done without dreaming as it is responsible for thinking, i.e., the "alpha-beta(a)-ization" of raw

emotion. Grotstein believes that this idea, even though incompletely understood by most analysts and therapists, was the main launching pad for the post-modern concept of inter-subjectivity. In other words, reciprocal dream work transpires between analyst and analysand.

Peretz Lavie's (Israel) excerpts of his book on sleeping will highlight relevant neuropsychological aspects of dreaming.

Therapist who believe that representation, empathic tuning and cohesion are the main ways into change, as Martin S. Livingston (USA). For Livingston the dream is part of the playful and metaphorical communication between analyst and patient. In line with Kohut's Self-psychology the therapist (and the group) should attempt to remain close to the patient's subjective experience of the dream, the curative process considered to be empathic attunement. In order to both express and bind nonverbal tensions of "self-state dreams" (dreams resulting from traumatic over-stimulation or self fragmentation) the therapist functions as an "amplifier of images," expressing subjective experiences of his or her self and self-self-object relationships in the group. In order to create a play-space for processing dreams in group his task is making space for them, facilitating their appropriation and building the participants' synthetic or organizing functions in order to enable a balance between responsiveness and reaction - whose difference is worthwhile to understand.

In her comments on this paper Irene Harwood (USA), taking an inter-subjective sharing technical point of view, emphasizes the object of communication in order to better understand the aim of dream-telling. Therapists should help distinguish between the group's interpretations and projections and most importantly between self-state dreams who request organization and working through, and other (transference problem-solving, memory-evoking, etc.) dreams with more informational character.

Claudio Neri (Italy) describes Fabiana's long group analytic process with special focus on two dreams and one dreamlike event. Analytic group "work" transformS states of mind through gathering up, naming and giving sense + on the one hand, and the analyst's generosity, capability for affective investment and reciprocity. The analysts capability to cope with the unknown and play with "lack of sense" on the other, are enabled through fighting processes of impoverishment and by his Faith.

Stefania Marinelli (Italy) CONSIDERS starting an analytic group itself to be ~~considered~~ an act of violently founding a primary scene atmosphere and communicating inner distress through the phantasms from the past. "Dual-face" dreams - defined as those with less symbolic quality - are in need of a protective skin around them in order to better endure unprocessed pains and losses. The manifest dream represents the dreamer's individual features, the group's transference concerns as well as social political issue. Its transformational function is by facilitating "proto-mental" states of confusion and distinction that bring patients closer to the treatment of phantasy representations of somatic and psychic events.

Puget (Argentina) considers the presence of a told dream-scene, unfolded "elsewhere" an inclusion-exclusion challenge for all involved. Dreams have the power of generating unconscious material through their disorganizing influence and the defensive break in the moments between the dream-dream and day-life as a reaction to the dreadful suggestion of a irreducible otherness. The group's unconscious gradually also builds by encounters with the dream's incoherence and resulting anxieties of the unpredictable and fragmentation. The group may give an opportunity for the dream to be a new production and not only a repetition of something that is already existing. By regarding the dream space as an event, a start and through the group's attempts to complete the dream-thoughts and envelope the dream, a new organization may emerge. The group helps create new relations to the internal-external object of the dreamer, which is in real relation with the patient's world of objects. In contrast, in individual therapy, even if the analyst wants to be included on the basis of transference, he cannot always actively take part in the scene proposed by the patient's dream.

Ophelia Avron (France), holding to Freud's basic infantile drives explanatory model, group participants are described as trying to re-establish situations of primary satisfaction through hallucinatory representations. A "non-conscious capacity for basic energy reciprocity" is always

present in a group, furthering dialogue and co-operation in an interplay between Stimulation of a shared creation - the scenic exposition of the dream and its Receptivity. Scenic organizations are created by twofold intra- and inter-psycho activity, corresponding respectively to the mental energy of sexual desires and to the energy dynamics of inter-linking and unlinking and the therapist should understand them through his development of Scenic Thinking. Interventions are placed when the group loses its energy and the gap between inter-linking and expressions of individual desire may cause breakdown. Nightmares, expressing anxieties about unlinking or de-fusion and loss of identity, often are the focus of therapy. Avron approaches scenic structure and function as an active whole, and similar to individual who are pushed by the dream's sexual energy towards the object of their desires - it gives the group an impetus to new organizations of transference dynamics and inter-linking processes.

*A very interesting and related contribution to the therapy and supervision of a psychodramatic "dream group" comes from Greece: Tsegos and Tseberlidou analytic groups are treated through Dreams with a re-creational and «artistic» approach. In their experiential intersubjective therapeutic approach, Doubles or Auxiliary Ego are not used and interpretations are rare. The supervision procedure for this Oneirodrama consists of recorded formats of Presentation, Analysis and Synthesis, in which mirroring or resonance crystallize into Fantasies, Feelings and Main Topics. Every narrated dream, while being a product of the dreamer's (external and internal) relationships, ceases to be individual and converts into a social dream. Analysts should ask to whom the dream is addressed to, what for and particularly what kind of use is made of it. Narrated dreams belong to the heart of the communication network and nourish the group's matrix, promoting both its activity and creativity*

RenéKees (France) deals mainly with polyphony and inter-subjectivity in dreams (which are) either born from the *associative process in a group* or, interestingly, told by an *individual analysand* and whose manifest content stages a group. Traumatic events which had remained unthought (meaningless), are elaborated by one or more dreamers, at the crossing of their own dreaming apparatuses, through resonance with phantoms, de-personalization anxiety and confusion of identity.

Kaes' new proposition is that the dream is a representation of desires and of "conflicts" which cross the identification "composition" or the "code" of the subject: the conversations heard from different sources are woven in the texture of the dream. The dream is not a closed statement, it is acted and addressed: it is a transformation process.

Telling a dream is **for Salomon Reznik** (Argentina and France) a transference event always referring also to the analytic session. A child's dream pushing the therapist into acting exemplifies his approach: the analyst- "dream-interpreter" - should behave like an archaeologist discovering fragments of a disintegrated or not yet integrated language. Dreaming thinking is developed through understanding the dream stage grammar and the dream's theatre significance. The group *members* mutually help one another through Foulkes' "mirroring", by functioning as lead-backed mirrors proposing different perspectives on the "unavoidable problem" - from which the dreamer and the other patients try hard to escape. *Understanding and repairing* meaningful dissonance are considered to be the ingredients to the dreamer's and the group's therapy.

The use of the concept of "projective identification" by another group, including J. Scott Rutan (USA) & Cecil A. Rice (USA), Peter Schlachet (USA) and Robi Friedman (Israel) seems to be one main characteristic. It seems to emphasize influencing and transforming aspects of the dynamics of container/contained perspective on group therapy.

Marion Salomon describes Tavistock's characteristic Group-as-a-whole approach which places the individual's dynamic in the background. Conductors always try to describe the group's ongoing process in the here-and-now objectively, often focusing on Bion's basic assumptions and challenging participant's roles. For Salomon, dreams both represent these "common group tensions" topics adopted from the group's attention and not interpreted but stated.

Complementary aspects of social dreaming and therapeutic dreaming are discussed by Lawrence (Great Britain) and Biran (Israel). While group therapy takes place in small settings and focuses on the Oedipal, Social Dreaming expands the “sphinx”, i.e. thinking, knowing, arriving at greater systems consciousness and scientific knowledge. The first is Ego-centric and the second Socio-centric, Social Dreaming complementary centring on the dream instead of the dreamer. Both techniques use “Free association”, rather than on interpretations. The concept of “group” should not obfuscate the fact that in Social Dreaming “dreams are the currency of the matrix” and not the participants’ relationship nor the transference to the “takers” (conductors) of the matrix. Only the authority figures in-the-mind that are given flesh in the dreams” are important. In Social Dreaming one “has to enter a non-therapeutic state of mind” and to relinquish ownership over the dream. For Traveni & Manfredi’s (Italy) the Large Group itself holds some of the dream’s characteristics, namely non-exclusion of contents, loosing boundaries and the feeling of being invaded by the other person’s thoughts. In both there is momentary loss of identity, frightening but allowing access to a complex multi-dimensional representation of the “external” collective, the social unconscious and the individual’s experience. In the Large Group processes of social conflicts are activated together with intra-collective political movement of the psyche’s structure. The Large Group’s development is replete of paranoid anxieties, lack of trust and only the conductor’s diligence helps confrontation between interchanging opposites to phases of growing reciprocal influence. The may facilitate the founding of common thought through continuous recoiling of memory material, primary links and trans-generational belongings. The creation of a common language enables isolated participants to finally relate to Pandora, the Earth who, like the dream, gives “everything” to “everybody”. Establishing a “Working Memory” generates the possibility to change death into birth images. Inevitably the dream-like atmosphere of the Large group contaminates its description rendering it confused in its endeavour of expressing all the mosaic-like aspects of self.

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