

## DO WE DREAM TO LIVE?

---

*We no longer live on what we have, but on promises, no longer in the present day, but in the darkness of the future, which, we expect, will at last bring the proper sunrise. We refuse to recognize that everything better is purchased at the price of something worse; that, for example, the hope of greater freedom is cancelled out by increased enslavement to the state, not to speak of the terrible perils to which the most brilliant discoveries of science expose us. The less we understand of what our [forebears] sought, the less we understand ourselves, and thus we help with all our might to rob the individual of his roots and his guiding instincts, so that he becomes a particle in the mass, ruled only by what Nietzsche called the spirit of gravity."* C.G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*

All over the world, in known times, dreaming has been linked to the health and fate of human beings. Few personal experiences have ever been investigated and recorded with the same enthusiasm and respect as dreams. To understand the value of our own dreams, we have to understand what our forebears gained from their dreams. Nothing that we say about dreams today will make sense if not linked to the patterns laid down during our conscious development as human beings. Therefore it seems worthwhile to explore the history of people's relationship with dreaming and its use in health and healing.

Today we would like to believe that neuroscience is close to removing all mystery about mind and imagination, and thus to defining a biological purpose for dreams in place of the mythological enchantment of the past. There is also the possibility that present research may yield little more than new symbolic subtexts expressed in modern scientific language, which, on closer inspection, will merely reflect what was already known about dreaming during previous ages. It is important to realise, however, that throughout human history, healing and well-being have never been separated from the imaginary world of mythological interpretation. Medicine and religion have always intermingled, and nowhere is this more obvious than in the study and use of dreams. Through the millennia dreams have determined the course of healing at religious healing

sanctuaries as well as in secular practice. As long as we avoid the murky waters of outdated beliefs or the perils of one-sided scientific dogma, dreams can still link us to our past in ways that sustain our collective core as human beings and guide our instincts.

*the magic of myth...*

---

*"Myths are public dreams, dreams are private myths"*  
Joseph Campbell.



Since humans developed the ability to consciously interpret and control their environment, their inner organisation has used and developed an ability to

imagine the unknown. In other words, people have been able to utilise their imagination to get

some form of control over that which is mysterious and unpredictable. This imagination and its ordering into a communication system formed the basis of all mythical and religious belief systems. Even in modern times, when neuroscientists try to pin religiosity to a certain part of the brain, and scientific journals confirm the reality of modern life without gods, it is obvious that an individual and collective need for magic and mythological belief systems is far from obsolete. In fact, if we look closely we will notice that the subjective patterns of magic, myth and religion are still deeply ingrained in the language, theory formation and ritualistic procedures of modern health and healing, not only in the so-called alternative fields, but also in the practice of pragmatic medicine.

What then do we mean by magic and myth? A sense of magic implies something that transcends observation and reasoning and is able to change day-to-day experiences into focussed captivating moments. Magic also stimulates the need to explore and understand, and is the source not only of religious experiences, but also of scientific exploration; - what is now dismissed as magical superstition was the 'wonder of science' to our forefathers. But magical moments are short-lived and easily forgotten during ordinary daily routines. Humans need to create something which can string these magical experiences into patterns they can hold on to; patterns they can call up consciously when they need confirmation and encouragement in the face of the unknown. These patterns become myth and religion.

It is not difficult to see that the mythological world that humans have created over time strongly relates to the way in which they experience their inner world through dreams. It is therefore impossible to separate the history of dream interpretation from the history of myth and religion. Also, nowhere is a sense of magic more personal and explicit than in dreams. Dreams come to us in the form of amazing stories containing inconceivable descriptions which often reveal abilities that are impossible in waking life. In dreams we converse with the dead, we fly or walk on water and have feelings and emotions we would never allow in waking life. In dreams we also find answers to mathematical equations, compose music and create paintings that did not exist before. In fact, nothing since the beginning of time has inspired science, art and religion like dreams have.

It is therefore reasonable to expect dreams to have supported people when dealing with survival and healing in ways that pushed them beyond everyday boundaries. Through the ages it was in their dreams that people met ancestors and spirits and gained knowledge beyond the restrictions of time and space. Within all cultures we find descriptions of how people have left an ill body and returned healed. In fact, there is no place on earth where dreams have not been used by traditional healers to initiate a healing process.

***Could this be because people instinctively know that it is when they dream that the reality of a living, vulnerable body becomes one with the magic of timeless existence?***



## *symbols of instinct...*

*"Nights, through dreams, tell the myths forgotten by the day." C.G. Jung.*

It is still a mystery why we, as humans, have such an uncanny ability to shape our inner and outer unknown into symbolic images which, although they portray a multitude of personal detail, also stay remarkably consistent over time all over the world. It seems as if we are able to reach beyond our conscious awareness or rational knowledge and create imaginary templates that have a remarkable similarity in all cultures; outlines that form a basis for mythological or religious communication between people. These patterns are

visible in the dreams of individuals and it is as if they are inherent to the inner organisation of all human beings.

We can explore these shared symbolic templates in terms of health and healing by using the concept of **archetypes** as defined in analytical psychology. Archetypes are here seen as primordial images that translate the survival issues that our system has to cope with, especially in

Similar to the way in which the anatomical structure of organs indicate the evolution of our inner organs and body shape, we can use synoptic exploration of archetypal imaging to follow the essential tendencies in our system's organisation with regard to more subtle dimensions of our inner world. If we assume, as we do in modern neuro-science, that the human brain is the source of the psyche and thus also of archetypes as seen in dreams, mythology and religion, we also have to accept that archetypal patterns supply the developmental guiding lines of how our system has dealt with this aspect of its evolution over time.

the face of the unknown, into recognisable patterns. They are thus patterns of instinctual behaviour that have a strong effect on our system's organisation. Consciously, however, they are only available as imaginatively portrayed ideas in dreams, fantasies, myths and religious systems. Yet, it is important to understand that this does not reduce the potency of archetypes when it comes to coordinating the unconscious organisation of our system with our conscious interpretation and response.

In other words we can see archetypes, as defined in analytical psychology, as "*collective structural elements of the human psyche*" similar to the "*morphological elements of the human body*" (as described by Jung in *Essays of a Science of Mythology p102.*) Here archetypes carry the vestiges of conscious development in a way similar to the physical remnants of previous stages in mammal evolution that are still visible in our body, especially in organs such as the brain. Thus, if we see the body and psyche as merely different aspects of the same inherent organisation of a biological system, then archetypal patterns and the way they affect our outer and inner organisation are crucial in the understanding of health and healing.

An archetype and its representing images are not mere passive representations of a particular

instinctual drive, but carry the adaptive energy that motivates the response that is necessary for survival and evolution. It can push our system to adapt in ways that sometimes ignore our conscious desires or understanding. And it is often those health problems that ignore the rules of present microscopic and chemical knowledge and tend to be called “*all in the mind*” that relate to the energy shifts based upon archetypal patterns. Although all aspects of our subjective imagery express some degree of archetypal influence, it is especially dreams that make a direct connection to such archetypal material and give it individual potency.

***So, if we accept that archetypes carry energy and that dreams portray and even trigger archetypal energy shifts in our system, understanding dreams should be an important part of health and healing.***



*layers of understanding...*

---

*“Furthermore, we have not even to risk the adventure alone; for the heroes of all time have gone before us, the labyrinth is fully known; we have only to follow the thread of the hero-path. And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god; where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence; where we had thought to be alone, we shall*

*be with all the world.” Joseph Campbell.*

According to modern neuroscience, dreaming at night addresses the adaptations that our system has made during the day by restructuring them into a coherent whole. This is highly individual and immediate and we can expect that dreams would use only images that relate to a person’s own experiences in a specific day. However, when working with the dreams of many patients over a length of time, I couldn’t help noticing that dreams and their effect often stretch beyond individual and even cultural associations. As unpopular it may seem to modern science, there truly appear elements of the collective design that has simulated the conscious evolution of the whole of humanity.

It is therefore not surprising that a journey through the history of dream interpretation picks up patterns of ordering that are reminiscent of the functional dimensions that we observe over the lifetime of a single individual. As mentioned before, it is as if our individual conscious development confirms the outline of collective human evolution. Or, more likely, that both the collective conscious evolution of humans over time and the unfolding of our individual conscious organisation recognise the same basic pattern of ordering. So, although we learn much about the development

of human consciousness through archaeological findings, it is the trail left by people's imaginative explanation of their survival and adaptation that tells us most about the evolution of consciousness.

In other words, every stage of human evolution has had its own distinct belief patterns. These patterns of conviction were crucial to the immediate survival of humans. They not only explained the world, but also coordinated inner instinctual survival processes with the demands of the environment. Therefore it is the contents of the imaginary models of the unknown that humans have made through the ages that are valuable to us whenever we want to understand the inherent, unconscious defence mechanisms that our individual biological system uses.

***Nowhere are these imaginary models more thoroughly applied than when people try to deal with their dreams.***



*from ancestors to string theory...*

---

*"To me the world of perfect forms is primary (as was Plato's own belief)-its existence being almost a logical necessity-and both the other two worlds are its shadows." Roger Penrose.*

Think, for example, about the traditional hunter-gatherers who lived in small family groups where conscious and unconscious worlds blended together, and where shamans and elders directly used dreams to help troubled and sick members of all ages. The world of dreams was not separate from everyday reality, and the advice received from the ancestors and spirits while dreaming was followed in a concrete way. Life, conscious and unconscious, just happened, and human consciousness completely functioned in the realm of *wonder and acceptance*.

This coincides with the individual functional dimension where an undivided physical matrix is represented by a conscious understanding that there is no division between the physical body and its energy processes, no separation of matter and mind.

Over time people became more aware of an ability to observe nature as if it was separate from them. They were still completely dependent on nature for their survival, however, and their relationship with nature became that of a child to a mother. Everything: life, shelter food, and of course dreams came directly from this *'Mother Goddess'*. One moment she gave, the next she took. Here she protected, there she destroyed. The rhythms of the goddess were both revered and feared in an intimate way. What she communicated through dreams had to be followed, but also needed confirmation through sacrifice and worship. In other words, although humans became more conscious of the unpredictable changes that happened on earth and in their own bodies, they did not take responsibility for them.

Slowly, however, humans become conscious enough to challenge their own vulnerability in the face of nature, and they started to search for ways to influence their life for the better. They begin to find ways in which they could consciously not only comprehend but also use the rhythms of nature. Reasoning became more intentional, a development supported by an evolving model where the image of a mother goddess progressed towards sun and moon goddesses who allowed for greater interaction between human will and nature's spontaneous sequences. However, true to the temperament of these goddesses, the qualities of *wonder* and its more instinctive counterpart, *impulse*, still dominated human activity.

With a newly improved capability to plan ahead, people eventually started to live in ever larger communities and within secure city structures. They became increasingly able to consciously order their world so as to be less vulnerable to the rhythms of nature. Diverse gods and daemons now played out not only the forces of nature but also of bodily and emotional desires, and people coped by influencing these 'divine forces' with their evolving ability to set rules and plan ahead. The rhythms of the body, especially, with its emotional upheavals, could be subjected to complex religious systems aimed at moderating instinctual behaviour. Above all, they could use the content of dreams, in particular those of leaders and healers and redirect it into a ritualistic milieu to instruct personal and social conduct.

This stage in human evolution corresponds well to the individual functional dimension where conscious awareness is mainly channelled through our system's ability to use energy and rhythm in order to adapt to or resist unfavourable change.

For a long time human consciousness swayed to this awkward yet thriving beat in its choice between wonder and reason. Then, in the course of the previous two millennia, this oscillation flattened out into a linear

obedience to rule and intention, which, in many cultures, culminated in a situation where people preferred reason over innate rhythm and where rational thought took over as the functional dimension of choice for conscious organisation. In other words, humans have now developed the confidence

Human consciousness is an evolving entity. It develops and adapts according to the demands of the 'inner' and 'outer' environments of people, where the 'inner' environment requires not just physiological and chemical adjustments, but also mental and identity adaptation. It is easy to get some idea of how human consciousness adapted to outer physical influences such as finding food and safety. However, every adaptation also creates a network of 'inner' survival patterns that feed back to and from adjustments in conscious awareness. In other words, adaptation to the outer world is not only represented in the inner world, but is also influenced by other inner patterns that have evolved because of previous adaptation to environmental changes. These inner patterns of adaptation are open-ended and dynamic because the human mind has the ability to shape complex patterns of adaptation by using the past and the present as well as the ability to anticipate. It thus makes sense that the adaptations that we have made throughout the history of humankind would still be visible in the organisation patterns that our individual system uses to integrate new demands under present circumstances.

to influence both the structure and rhythm of nature with their own planned action and their rationally designed laws of culture and society. Although dream interpretation now became less crucial for physical survival, it also became more complex, because people also started to analyse the individual value of dream prediction, irrespective of whether they saw it as messages from a personal unconscious mind or from a transcendental impersonal unknown. Eventually, medicine

took this further and placed dreams in the rigid confines of random brain re-organisation. Reason has now taken the dominant position over wonder.

On a personal level, this evolvement of a collective rational consciousness coincides with the dominance of the functional dimension where we consciously control the physical world as well our body's biological organisation - our outer and inner world - with a rational mind based upon absolute rules defined either by an all-knowing divine intelligence or the strict boundaries of empirical science.

Interestingly, with the help of the psychodynamic understanding of human motivation and consciousness that has developed over the past century, we now see the beginning of an era where people deal with the unknown as if everything depends on the relative or subjective interpretation of the human psyche. The human psyche, on the other hand, is seen as part of a functioning brain that originates in biological matter and the physical laws that support it. What is threatening or wonderful about nature is no longer 'out there', not in the spirits of nature, not in the earth or moon goddess, not in a transcendental divine principle, but inside the unconscious realm that is inherent to all biological systems. Dreams are now essentially part of a personal inner world and no longer messages from a collective life force beyond the body; they are merely an aspect of the inner organisation of an individual being. Some may see this as the final word on looking at dreams with wonder. I prefer to believe that a growing awareness of the complexity of matter actually brings us back to a point where our conscious experience of the physical world can refresh our sense of wonder about the inherent intelligence of all living matter.

***So, although it is still poorly defined, we now seem to understand that the essence of dreaming originates within a complex biological system which adapts in unique but complex ways to the demands of a multidimensional outer world.***



*inside all of us...*

---

*"That which the dream shows is the shadow of such wisdom as exists in man, even if during his waking state he may know nothing about it... We do not know it because we are fooling away our time with outward and perishing things, and are asleep in regard to that which is real within ourselves." Philipus Aureolus Paracelsus*

Our main task is therefore to explore how the similarities and differences in dream interpretation over time confirm that, although images in dreams are symbolic expressions of instinctual bodily survival, our relationship with dreams also expresses the development and adaptation of human consciousness through the ages. Even more crucial, we have to illustrate that we, as humans, have been consistent

in our use of dreams over time, albeit with somewhat different symbolic perspectives. In other words, although our perspective depends on cultural development and social worldview, it always reveals a recognisable basic and repetitive pattern in the background. The goddess who spoke in the dreams of our ancestors still demands sacrificial rendering of that which we value to secure health, irrespective of the outcome of our open heart surgery or cancer scan. The daemons in our nightmares still attack the vulnerable aspects of our inner organisation even when we keep our blood pressure and cholesterol low with medication.

Therefore, it does not really matter that the historical journey in the following essays is not representative of all cultures – an unfeasible task within the scope of our website. What is important is that we could create a bio-analytic slant, where readers can recognise a recurring narrative about dreaming in their own lives and use this greater awareness to colour the shadows in their own identity.

***In the end, it is by noticing this tendency to relive the history of mankind inside ourselves that we are able not only to analyse our own dreams with greater intuitive feeling, but also to objectively explore modern scientific perspectives on dreams, perspectives that express age-old common sense within modern symbolic structures.***

Images: my own and from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Pictures\\_and\\_images](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Pictures_and_images)

- Yggdrasil is an immense ash tree that is central to Norse cosmology and where the gods daily hold their courts. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yggdrasil.jpg>
- Female figure at the Tassili n'Ajjer mountain range, Algeria. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Femme-gravure.jpg>
- Stonehenge UK [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stone\\_henge1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stone_henge1.jpg)
- Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde from the stage adaptation opened in New York in 1887 and London in 1888. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jekyll-mansfield.jpg>

Also see

[Do we dare to dream](#)

[Dreamt into Existence](#)

[The Goddess Speaketh](#)

[Between Wonder and Reason](#)

[Daemons and Dragons](#)

[The Light of Reason](#)