

## DREAMT INTO EXISTENCE.

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It seems that originally humans did not make a conscious separation between nature and cosmos, the self and the unknown, dreaming and waking life. Although it is impossible to understand how humans experienced such a consciousness in which awareness of an individual self was merged with an immediate sense of space and time, it is worthwhile to at least try to imagine how they viewed the world they lived in. We can never truly know the reasons for our personal feelings and actions as an adult without being aware of our early impressions as a child. Similarly, we can never truly understand the effect of consciousness on our system's organisation, especially in regard to the most basic functional dimension or dynamic matrix, without knowing how our earliest ancestors perceived their known and unknown world.

For example, to hunter-gatherers everything was experienced through highly developed physical instincts. Survival depended on eating or being eaten. Even the *unknown* was part of this physical environment; its appearances randomly and instantaneously tasted, smelt, heard, seen and felt. It was in the plants, the animals, the thunder, rain, fire and darkness around them. Their conscious awareness, or lack thereof, was inescapably linked to the immediate space they lived in, and changed with every movement and adaptation they made. Everything emerged from this close relationship with nature as it is. People saw themselves as part of their surroundings, neither more nor less important than the animals, the plants, the rocks and the rivers. All inanimate objects had lives of their own – stone, water and fire. They could understand and talk to humans, a relationship that was based on bodily instinct and a knowledge that resided inside all matter.

People therefore relied on bodily relics of familiar ancestors and on the spirits that resided inside the surrounding stones, plants and animals to communicate in an immediate and practical way with the hidden and unknown aspects of life. They would rarely ask *why* something happened, merely *what* happened. Things just happened, and people dealt with the results in a physical manner. Conscious awareness included a vast repertoire of nonverbal communication, which for them was the main source of mythical interaction with the unknown. For example, they would mimic a death or a task such as hunting with ritualistic dancing while using masks and body adornment to develop a potent image and memory. In so doing, they could at least reduce some of the control that the unknown had over their daily lives.

This occurred in a social environment where people lived in small groups such as extended families which needed little communal organisation. It was thus the *outer natural world* that shaped their identity instead of highly organised social structures. Over time, however, and maybe because hunting and foraging in larger groups became more complex, people started to evolve from this conscious state where pure '*form*' defined their known and unknown world to a greater awareness of change in space and time. Whereas interpretation of the world up to now had been exclusively based upon immediate sensing, they began to expand their consciousness to include the ability to understand and plan beyond immediate physical experiences by also observing the rhythmic changes in nature and in their bodies. With more sophisticated hunting tools which could kill over a distance, and greater ability to use a consciously memorised strategy to find food, space became

less threatening. Their conscious interpretation of the unknown started to include a concept of 'space' which they could not feel, see or hear; their known world became more than that which they could see, hear, smell and touch in the animals, plants, wind or fire that they randomly encountered.

Although this brought them to the point where they could also imagine an unknown that included 'space' beyond their immediate senses, it is important to realise that to them it was only the physical world that was alive and swirling with energy. People's sense of self was still totally *immersed in the substance of nature*. This means that communication between different aspects of nature, and therefore also between everyday reality and the unknown, was direct and practical. It was all about the tolerance of change, based on 'wonder' and a sense of complete oneness. There was no moral law involved, neither was there any obligation based on future guilt.

If we accept that their interaction with the unknown was similar to the innate way in which we still experience our own physical dimension of organisation, and is thus part of our unconscious inheritance, it is worthwhile to use the repetitive principle of bio-analysis to amplify our own awareness of this crucial layer of our multidimensional identity.



### *dreaming the truth...*

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*"The dream is to see the truth at night...the dreams are the truth because the ancestors never deceive their children."* Nguni saying quoted by Vera Buhrman.

What we discuss here, we can merely deduct from the art, myth and cultures of the few places on earth where people have, until recently, live an adapted form of tribal lifestyles. For example, in the African countryside, many people still live according to mythical patterns and shamanistic interaction with the unknown that could match the world view of late hunters and foragers better than that of agriculturists. Although their interpretation of dreams can help us to imagine the world of early hunter-gatherers, in the end it is all guesswork. Fortunately, however, there is the possibility that our imagination, if scrutinized with analysed reason and intuition, can tap into the inherent archetypal knowledge from the deep past we all still carry within us.

The essence is that there was little dispute about not being personally responsible for the content of dreams - people wholeheartedly accepted that whatever knowledge was sent in dreams was *'from nature as it is'*. In other words, because the unknown was never seen as separate from the real world, dream images would also be interpreted as if originating from the familiar forces of nature and similar to everything which people experienced in their waking physical world. For example, dreams were direct communication from a known ancestor, or a totem animal or the

north wind. There was no division between matter and self, between body and mind.

Because of their decidedly sensory form of conscious understanding, people probably used a sensory interpretation for dreams – responding to dream images by searching for the same food that was in a dream, or by walking the same distance in their waking life as was seen in a dream. This also meant that there was little separation between the dream and the dreamer, and the world of a dream was as much part of everyday reality as any experience during waking consciousness. Dreams not only portrayed real life, but actually created the real life of individuals. In fact, it seems that many of the early creation myths were based upon the assumption that the whole world was 'dreamed' into existence.

In other words, because dream images were directly felt, the people inside dreams were also part of an undivided social life. Dreaming was the closest a human being could come to a comprehensive reality that included both their conscious everyday life as well as the hidden or unknown world personified by ancestors and spirits. Ancestors and nature spirits was therefore part of a living invisible world that was indistinguishable from daily life. The authenticity and meaning of their messages were never questioned. In dreams they were taken literally and obeyed, not only by the dreamer, but by the family and tribe as a whole. If a person dreamt about moving to a new location, it was accepted and done.

Since there was no distinction between physical being and mental image, and because the whole person and tribe were afflicted when someone fell ill, dreams were also fundamental indicators of health and disease. Shamans or healers used dreams as a main component in their healing rituals. And often such healing involved the whole community, because a dream did not only reveal what was wrong in the individual, but also what the whole community needed to do in order to bring healing and prevent future illness.

***So, let us look at a few examples of cultures where, until recently, the undivided accord between individual consciousness and nature's unknown sustained people's lives as well as their handling of dreams.***



*amathongo...*

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*"Once the dream message has been made clear and indicates what is required of the individual, the family or the clan, it must be acted on to prevent serious illness or misfortune" (V. Bührmann 1977a: 18).*

Not more than a few centuries ago, in some traditional African villages, people lived a lifestyle that included many aspects of such an undivided sense of self. Dream interpretation was part of daily life and dreams showed the way for everyday

survival, explained hardships and guided everyone towards their natural destiny.

Dreams were therefore to be taken seriously. Advice in dreams had to be acted on to prevent illness, and those who stopped dreaming were without guidance and could easily fall ill. The same was true for excessive dreaming, which not only indicated mental problems, but would also make the body ill. Especially symptoms such as aches and pains in the neck, shoulders and back as well as problems of the urinary and reproductive systems were associated with dream disturbances. Although these symptoms would fit well into the modern definition of stress-related diseases, in a traditional environment illness was never based on such a one-dimensional view. In other words, it was not only mental stress that caused dream abnormalities, it was also a disturbed relationship with the ancestors combined with the forces of nature inside and outside the body that caused the stress and illness in the first place.

It was the ancestors who gave guidance to the dreamer and the healer about an illness and its treatment. The ancestors used the dreams to give explicit direction; direction on which the healer and patient usually acted. Ancestors appeared in dreams as human beings, both known and unknown, as animals, domesticated or wild, or simply as voices giving advice and instructions or making requests. This could never be mere fulfilment of

the dreamer's desires, but was always based on the wishes of the ancestors who took charge of the well-being of the group as a whole; of evolution as such. In other words, ancestors were personal, evolutionary forces that demanded dedication and understanding. Through dreams they could change the world.

Therefore, all communication with the ancestors via dreams was done with reverence and discipline. The world of the ancestors had a language of its own. It could bridge paradoxes, and the symbols used acted as pockets of energy clothed in the images of everyday life. That's why, says a Xhosa healer, we should always use the right senses, because "*...there are things you can never put into words*".

In practice, dreams were discussed with a healer. Most healers became healers in the first place by being called by the ancestors in a dream, a dream that was analysed and used in detail during the

A perfect example of a mythical image that was often linked to dreamt messages was the river snake *ichanti*. It was a dangerous representation of ancestral energy because it could change its shape dramatically and impose unexpected adaptation. Here the serpent invokes the double meaning of the serpent archetype – ensure renewal, but secure rebirth - as seen in the mythological interpretation of many cultures all over the world (see our essay on Archetypes and Symbols).

During my early years in medical practice I worked in an African traditional setting and quickly learned that by ignoring a patient's dreams I reduced my information about his or her condition by half. Asking about dreams not only increased my standing as a doctor in the community, but above all improved my ability to make a correct diagnosis and prescribe successful treatment, not in an imaginary 'mind-over-matter' way, but in a direct 'body-altering' way.

aspirant healer's training. Afterwards, in order to be able to work with dreams, it was also expected of the healer to undergo extensive training in self-knowledge through the study of his or her own dreams.

In a patient with serious disease, dreams were discussed daily until the patient recovered. All the

dreams of the healer, his apprentices and the patient were taken into consideration. On the healer's recommendation the dreams would also be discussed by the family and social support group. This ensured the necessary social support for the ill person, as well as intuitive and practical participation of others in the prevention of further disease. Dreaming was also often enhanced with the use of herbal extracts, which was supposed to "...open the mind to dreams and to the messages from the ancestors..."

***It is, however, important to understand that dreams were not rationally analysed as in modern Western analytical psychology, but were directly experienced and acted out. In this way, dreams brought immediate transformation and healing.***



*alchera...*

*"Those who lost dreaming are lost. Those who lose dreaming are lost." Australian Aboriginal proverb*

The Australian aborigines have one of the longest continuous cultural histories on Earth, a culture which has probably existed since 50,000 to 65,000 years ago. To them dreaming was only one aspect of an intricate but very immediate connection to the unknown. They lived according to a mythic spirituality, the name of which could roughly be translated as *dreamtime* or '*dreaming*'.

'*Dreaming*' in this context was the expression of the quintessence of spiritual experience. '*Dreamtime*' was the realm from where one was born and which one entered again after death. Although part of everyday life, it was also the beginning of all things; the world of the ancestors; the essence of life and death; the source of all of life's energy. The whole world was born in this realm of '*dreaming*' and the landscape they lived in existed as matter and spirit at the same time. '*Dreaming*' is thus a somewhat misguided translation for a concept that is actually an overall state of being, and is more than mere night dreaming, although, during sleep, a person did leave the body to wander in this realm of '*dreaming*' for a while to collect memories of the original time.

There was no priesthood or mediators between the people and the spiritual world or the world of ancestors.

Although healing mostly involved song, dance and spells with magical charms, dreams were also attributed with potent power. A traditional healer usually received his power from dreams or by using magical charms received from other potent healers or ancestors. When new narratives were

It is important to notice that the name '*dreamtime*' or '*dreaming*' is not mere dreaming during sleep. It is a word coined by early anthropologists who confused the word dream with the original word used by the Aborigines to describe the mythic world beyond space and time. '*Dreamtime*' does not refer to time, but more to a state of being beyond time; there is no separation from ancestors or between dimensions of existence. It contains the origin of the universe, everything that has ever happened since then, and ever will happen. In everyday life it informs humans how they should live and protect the earth.

introduced via dreams, such dreaming was always seen as more than mere night dreaming; it was also a trance or psychic state of direct communication with ancestral spirits and included all that could be drawn from memories, imagination and daily life.

In everyday practice, dreams facilitated all the significant experiences and their associated rituals which had to create a balance between the visible world and the invisible 'dreaming' or 'dreamtime'. They were therefore especially important during life cycle events such as conception, birth and death. Even the herbs necessary for the treatment of an illness could be 'seen' in dreams. By using dreams as the link to 'dreamtime', fate and illness could be known, even in family members who were far away.

**Here we see an unambiguous understanding that dreaming and waking life are two realms of the same physical world.**



*disgitisdi...*

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*"...dreams are the Esculapius and Galen of the whole country."*  
Jesuit priest, Paul Le Jeune, about the Iroquois in 1636

Native American tribes believed that dreams revealed the hidden 'wishes of the inner soul' or the messages from the 'spirits above'. To them, both concepts indicated that dreams could be used to perceive natural forces and to cooperate with nature.

They often attributed the origin of cultural artefacts such as the use of fire or hunting rituals to a dream that a tribal member had in the past. Such knowledge that originated from inner needs or outer spirits was communicated through an inner companion, an inner 'great man' who needed to be respected in order to supply supportive dreams.

Families began their day by sharing dreams, and family members would encourage the dreamer to seek purpose and actions according to their dreams. Dreams were also actively sought through fasting, adaptation of the sleeping environment or even suspension from poles and hooks. Dreams would then bring a better understanding about how to deal with a problem, or would improve the initiation for young people, or would merely indicate a good place to hunt.

Herbs are used in Native America to initiate dreams. They are mostly of the belladonna (*Datura*) plants. These hallucinatory plants are part of the folklore of every continent, although writers from all over the world have claimed their particular area as the place of origin. In the Navajo culture there is a traditional saying about these herbs: "Eat a little, and go to sleep. Eat more, and have a dream. Eat more, and never wake up."

More important is the role of dreaming in healing. Here, dreams were used to reveal a specific herb for healing, or one to remove evil from the body, or even to reveal those herbs which ward off illness in general. Many tribes also acknowledged the concept that anxiety and illness could stem from a subconscious lack of self-

realisation. This is reminiscent of the much later European concept of psycho-analysis, where information about unconscious needs was explored through what was portrayed in dreams. Dreams were therefore used to understand the underlying causes of mental and physical illness, to directly ward off existing illness and to indicate the kind of treatment that is necessary.

In the words of a medicine man: *"Every dream that takes place is certain to happen. Whenever the evil spirits influence it, it is certain to happen. Whenever we dream a bad dream we get a medicine man to perform, sing and say prayers which will banish the spirit."*

***Thus, as in most tribal cultures, dreams were shared with the medicine man and negative dreams reversed through cleansing and healing rituals which included chants, dancing, talismans and tokens.***



*dane korale...*

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*"In the drowsy dark cave of the mind, dreams build their nest ..."* (Rabindranath Tagore)

The Onge people of the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal discussed dreams of the previous night every evening before sleep to confirm that the dreams corresponded to what happened during that day. It was important to make sure that there was a corporeal network between dream reality and daytime reality as well as between past and present.

The dream world itself was seen as a spider's web; a network image bringing everything into context, inner and outer world, past and future, individual and community needs. The sense of smell, especially, was important to connect dreams to place, inner world to outer world and self to community. The *dane korale* or spider web dream-space changed all the time in the same way as a spider's web is constantly adjusted. This helped the people to cope with change. All they had to do was to keep their strategy in context with their dream content.

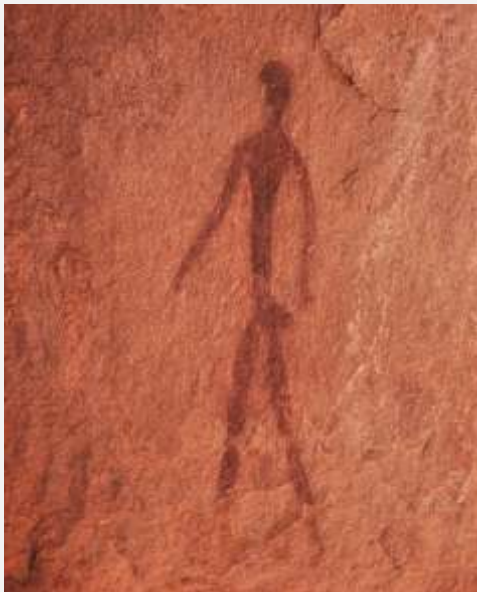
Dream discussion was a highly structured ceremony, even requiring a different pronunciation of words to initiate and maintain reverence. Both an individual and collective sense of self were reintegrated every evening during this formal ritual of dream interpretation. Everyone became redefined in the group according to the dreams that were discussed. During the discussion they also worked out how accurate the previous night's dreams had been in advising them about the findings and happenings of that particular day. The next day's activities were then influenced in a kind of ripple effect by the discussion of the dreams of the previous

To use their description, metaphorical to us, but tangible to them: *"The traditional healer when he dances is transported into the world of dreams. His body coils like a serpent and takes flight like a bird and pounces like a cat. In his possession he or she is everything that lives on earth."*

night. In fact, dreams even had an effect on what was remembered from the past.

A fascinating aspect is the importance of smell in their dream interpretation, confirming the passionate attention to sensory experiences in dreams. Messages were brought to the dreamer through smell, and what was dreamt or not dreamt was described in terms of smell. The Onge people described it as a process where the internal self (*enteeah*) goes out in the night to collect odours which are relayed in dreams. For example, someone who dreamt of the smell of a certain fruit would go out the next day to search for that fruit. He or she would be supported by the others until they found the fruit and the place in the outer world that corresponded to what was smelled in the dream. One's personal smell was also believed to be a vital element of the external self (*mateeah*). To conserve the personal odour and avoid its depletion and consequent illness, the spirit or soul associated with the person's odour would come out during sleep and go to each spot that the sleeping person had visited during the day in order to collect the scent and bring it back to the body. To wake a sleeping person and interrupt the collection of his or her personal scent during dreaming was a mistake and could cause a serious illness.

***To them, forgetting dreams was forgetting the future. This meant losing the context of life. The whole community was dependent on its dreams and its ability to create a strong dream web for the future.***



*I am because I dream...*

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*"The answer is dreams. Dreaming on and on. Entering the world of dreams and never coming out. Living in dreams for the rest of time." Haruki Murakami*

Although we have looked briefly at only a few 'tribal' cultures, I am sure that the reader will notice a particular kind of relationship with nature and the unknown. This is visible in all comparable cultures over time and across the globe.

So, what does it mean when we say that dreams are created in the realm of matter, and what is the effect on people's lives? The most important aspect is the notion that there is no separation between dreamer and dream in a physical dimension of self experience. Anybody who still maintains, or again manages to restore, such a close interaction with nature will agree to authentic and unconditional trust in the messages from nature, inside and outside their bodies. This means that whether dreams are seen as the immediate voices of nature spirits or ancestors, or experienced as a personal bodily experience, they are always felt as an inherent part of nature as it is. People and places in a dream represent reality and as such dreams often have diagnostic and healing properties. In other words, dreams can supply objective information about inner and outer worlds.



For those who live in a cultural environment where this dimension of conscious interaction is dominant it literally means that a woman will become pregnant because an ancestor in a dream has announced her pregnancy, or the hunter will have a successful hunt because of what he dreamt, or a person will become wealthy because he found treasures in a dream. The reality in the dream is the greater reality. The symbolic language of dreams is thus not saying 'as if', but stating natural physical facts and options. All the interpreter has to do is to put the facts in the dreams into their real context and they will happen factually.

Most people in a modern society have lost this immediate form of association with dreams. From a bio-analytic viewpoint however, such a direct correspondence between dreams and practical everyday life can still be valuable if it brings our conscious self-identity closer to the organisation of our system's dynamic matrix. However, the symbolic structures should fit a modern worldview, because talk of ancestors, wandering souls and spirits will no longer work for many patients. In other words, we should now see dreaming as part of the direct relationship between conscious awareness and basic bodily processes. In fact the modern neuroscientific attitude that dreams are by-products of our brain's restructuring during sleep could well fit into such a world view. Maybe eventually it will be possible to express bodily sensations, symbolic images and feelings during dreams in terms of how they relate to blood flow in specific areas of the brain, and from that we could predict immune responses or metabolic changes in the body.

***All that is necessary is an understanding that the conscious experience of our biological self cannot be different from or more than the unconscious biological self that creates, and is created in, our dreams. As in traditional cultures, we have to accept that we are as much our dreams as we are our body.***

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Also see:

[Do we dare to dream](#)

[Do we dream to live](#)

[The Goddess Speaketh](#)

[Between Wonder and Reason](#)

[Daemons and Dragons](#)

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