

It Was Only a Dream!

LEARNING TO HONOR THE CREATIVE IMAGINATION IN CHILDREN

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The growing up process is basically a process of socialization for the developing child. There are a wide range of rules and regulations that need to be learned as well as subtler cues in respect to the personal needs of family and extended family members and other people and groups who are germane to the child's world.

The process of socialization varies greatly in different families and different cultures, so the rules may vary and the intensity with which they are given to us may vary. The principle remains the same however, and at very early ages we are developing primary selves out of which we live our lives and the unconscious starts knocking at our door trying to show us the other side of us, the one that was forced out of the picture by this socialization process. These disowned selves live within each of us, often for the whole of our lives. If we are married to our primary selves, which is the fact of it, then it is very difficult to discover this, let alone start the process of separation from these primary selves.

If the primary self of a family system is basically very rational and rejecting of dreams and other aspects of the creative imagination, then the child grows up either identifying with this viewpoint or eventually rebelling against the rationality and over-identifying with the unconscious and the world of the dream. A marriage to either side isn't good news and so it is that the idea of the Aware Ego emerges to embrace these opposites. There are a multitude of scenarios when it comes to selves and what we

do with them. This is only one possible scenario.

There are two considerations that determine which dreams come knocking at our door at night. There are, first of all, the rules/primary selves that we live by and secondly there is the emotional intensity that attaches to the rule/primary self. The more emotional intensity that the rule carries, then the stronger is the disowned self inside of us. All of these considerations have an effect on the kind of dreams that appear and the strength of their emotional content. The stronger the disowned selves that a child is carrying, the stronger will be the emotional content of the dream.

One other basic consideration is very important in understanding the dream process in both adults and children. Whatever is chasing us in our dreams is a disowned self of the dreamer. Whatever frightens you in a dream is a reflection of a disowned self in the dreamer and the stronger the disowned self the stronger the fear or panic and hence we move towards the nightmare kind of dream, something that is very common in young children. A nightmare type dream simply means that the disowned self system has reached a more extreme place and thus manifests as nightmare, with strong emotional content.

Now let's take a look at how this works in a real life situation. Jimmy is a very active four year old who has been somewhat over-protected by his mother who fears very often that he will come to harm. One afternoon Jimmy is playing

outside after school and he comes running into the house crying and sobbing and yelling that his friend Steve had hit him and that he had run away with his ball. Steve's mother, Sally, is upset by this. Her worst fears center around the possibility that something bad will happen to him. She embraces him and quiets him down and then she suggests to him that he stay with her while she is cooking and cleaning and they can talk together. Jimmy is only too happy to not have to face going out into this dangerous world that he feels increasingly he lives in. His mother supports his fears because she shares his fear of the world and his emerging sense of being a victim to life. She doesn't know all of this in a conscious way but it is there to do its work nevertheless. So for the rest of the afternoon the two of them have a lovely and intimate time together and the outside world of scary Mongol warriors riding their horses on missions of destruction does indeed feel far far away from them—but not too far away once we are asleep.

A few hours after Jimmy goes to bed that night he wakes up screaming and sobbing. He has had a nightmare. He is being chased by a lion and he can't get away from it. Sally tries to comfort him. She is very well intentioned, but since she herself is essentially a rational woman, she has no connection to the unconscious. The life of the dream world has never opened for her. So she says to Jimmy—"Jimmy—This is just a dream—Nothing more. Come, I'm going to look under the bed with you and in the closet with you and you will see that there is nothing there." She doesn't know how to honor the dream just as she didn't know how to honor his instinctual energies that were badly in need of support when his friend punched him. She didn't support his inner lion, his natural aggression, his capacity to fight when necessary. She herself had been over socialized in growing up so any

kind of fighting was dangerous to her. Without meaning to and without understanding anything that we are talking about now, she had stifled the budding warrior in him that needed to emerge at this time in his life. When this natural instinctual energy is blocked, the unconscious brings the next best thing that it can bring. It brings to him his lion but his lion is chasing him. It is angry at him. This is how our lions behave when we betray them in this way. They chase us and keep trying to get our attention and we keep running away from them.

So Sally opens the lights and she and Jimmy look under the bed and they look in the closet and they look behind the curtains and sure enough, there is nothing there. It was just a dream—just as she had said. To hear the words—"It was just a dream"—is something that has always brought great sadness to me. There is so much of the world that still lives in this kind of consciousness, unable to hear the music of the dream world and begin to learn about all the treasures it can bring us. It certainly takes time to learn about this world, but the rewards are so very great.

Sally has done two things to harm her son, the last thing in the world that she would ever willfully do. First she was unable to support the deeper voice of her son's jungle heritage, his instinctual energies. That night she is unable to support the symbolic picture of those same energies. The dream image of the lion is only a dream—it isn't real. Sally is not alone. The vast majority of the world lives without any kind of objective understanding of, and appreciation for, the world of the dream. We do so at our own peril. To take dreams seriously, to realize that they are not "just a dream" is to discover the OTHER that lives within us. The other reality is the source of a profound intelligence that is just waiting to be awakened so that it can begin

to operate in our life and bring us a new way to look at ourselves.

Of course here we have yet another problem to be aware of and that is that our dream life is monitored by our primary selves. When most of us do remember our dreams it is our primary selves that think about them and reflect on them. This is why the process of separating from our primary selves is so intimately bound to our work with the dream process. If George Bush had a dream that a very cute Easter bunny was sitting at the right hand of God in heaven, his way of looking at the dream would probably cause him to think that terrorists were invading heaven directly and we would have a new Guantanamo Bay for Bunny Interrogation. (By the way, I am referring to Easter Bunnies and not Playboy Bunnies, though it probably wouldn't really matter to the primary self system.)

So Jimmy finally goes back to sleep and Sally goes back to bed and what happens an hour later? Jimmy is screaming again. The lion is back again but it's bigger. Of course it's bigger! The dream is like a fairy tale. Dragons grow heads and the bad guys and the scary guys of our dreams get bigger when they aren't dealt with, when we don't know that the enemy we think is out there is really our friend inside of us, waiting to come to our support in life.

Sally goes through her routine again and they search the room and of course there is nothing there. "It's only a dream Jimmy! It isn't real!" This time Jimmy gets a cup of hot chocolate and he goes to bed again. Soon Jimmy will stop remembering his dreams. They will only come back as an occasional nightmare or he will feel an unknown anxiety that becomes so natural to him that he doesn't even know that it is anxiety. Years later when he is a lawyer defending a client in a court of law, he will find himself shaking with fear and dread for reasons that are unknown to him. He is working against a killer lawyer whose lions roar in

extremis, a lawyer who is Jimmy's polar opposite and Jimmy is victim when he is anywhere near this man or any man or woman like him. Jimmy's lion has long gone to sleep as he pursued his path of intellectual excellence. There is nothing wrong with intellectual excellence so long as the lions and tigers are available to us on the other side. The really good news is the level of awakening that is starting to happen to so many people in the world as they begin to catch hold of these realities and begin to work with them.

Let us imagine a different scenario for Sally. Imagine that she was somewhat comfortable with the world of dreams and they are alive and real for her. Jimmy starts to scream and she runs in and comforts him and he tells her his nightmare. She might say to Jimmy—"What a wonderful dream. Your lion wants to meet you. Tell me what he looks like?" They begin a talk. She asks if the lion has a name and Jimmy tells him that the name of the lion is Jilson. It doesn't really matter what she does or says so long as she honors the dream and stays away from any kind of attempt to interpret the dream to him. Maybe she brings out a pad of paper and asks him to draw a picture and then she may ask him to tell a story about Jilson.

It is no longer "just a dream." **It is now the magic of the dream.** She is teaching Jimmy to dance with the world of his own creative imagination. She is teaching him how to build a bridge between the marvelous world of the rational mind and, on the other side, the magical kingdom of his creative imagination, the world of fairy tale and myth. She can even, if she wishes, make him a large cup of cocoa. Personally, I prefer coffee—but then I'm not four years old and Sally isn't my mother—or is she?

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