



*Hokusai Baku*

# Dreams

Yasuhiro Tanaka

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## *The dream does not conceal but teaches*

Dream-analysis is a most highly focused technique in Jungian psychotherapy. In spite of this, Jung wrote only a few articles on the subject of dreams or dream-analysis.

Studying these articles, we find that one of the most central theses in Jung's dream-psychology is that "...it [the dream] does not conceal, but it teaches." (CW 8, par. 471). Of course, this can be regarded as an antithesis to Freud's famous thesis, "*The dream is the (disguised) fulfillment of a (suppressed, repressed) wish,*" that is, "the dream conceals."

Jung thought that the function of a dream is not to fulfill the dreamer's unfulfilled waking-state wish but to compensate the dreamer's conscious attitude. Herein Jung introduced the concept of *compensation*. Being quite different from *complementation* that designates a relationship in which two things supplement one another more or less mechanically (including *wish-fulfillment*), *compensation* means balancing and comparing different data or points of view so as to produce an adjustment or a rectification (See CW 8, par. 545). In other words, compensation is a kind of a *self-regulating system* within the psyche.

Also, with the concept of *compensation*, Jung envisioned that there are three possibilities in the relation between the dream and the conscious attitude; 1) if the conscious attitude to a life situation is in large degree one-sided, then the dream takes the opposite side; 2) if the conscious has a position fairly near the "middle," the dream is satisfied with variations; 3) if the conscious attitude is "correct" (adequate), then the dream coincides with, and emphasizes this tendency, though without forfeiting its peculiar autonomy (*ibid.*, par. 546).

In other words, Jung had the idea that the dream is a messenger, or medium, of information about the hidden inner life. Therefore, he also stated that, "Often enough they [dreams] appear senseless, but it is obviously we who lack the sense and ingenuity to read the enigmatic message from the nocturnal realm of the psyche" (CW 16, par. 325). In that sense, we may say that it is difficult for us to receive what the dreams want to convey to us because of our lack of understanding.

## *The dream is a spontaneous and natural occurrence*

For Jung, as such, dreams are none other than *spontaneous* and *natural* occurrences. For example, he defined the nature of the dream by quoting from the Talmud, "The dream is its own interpretation." Here again, Jung insists, "... there is no earthy reason why we should assume that [the dream] is a crafty device to lead us astray" (CW 11, par. 41). This means that

dreams should be regarded as a *whole thing*; if we think that there is something behind them, or that dreams have concealed something, then there is no question that we simply do not understand them (See *CW* 18, par. 172).

So, in Jung's view, the *incomprehensibility of dreams* is due to our own lack of understanding, and not to the disguising nature of dreams. Therefore, in order to grasp the meaning of a dream, we must first learn how to read it. There, Jung adopted the method of the philologist, far away from Freud's *free association*, and applied a logical principle called, *amplification*. Roughly speaking, this means seeking parallelism. Jung explains the method of *amplification* through an example of "how we learned to read hieroglyphics and cuneiform inscriptions" (*ibid.*, par. 173). In this way, *amplification* was the comparative method in the sphere of psychology, just like comparative anatomy in examining the human body or comparative analysis in deciphering ancient languages not yet comprehended.

### ***The nature of dreams is story-like***

In this context, we have another important idea included in Jung's dream-psychology - that the dream's definite structure is not unlike that of drama (See *CW* 8, par. 562); EXPOSITION, where statements of place are presented, the scene of action is set, the characters are involved, and often the initial situation of the dreamer is indicated; DEVELOPMENT, where the situation is somehow becoming complicated, and a definite tension develops because one does not know what will happen; CULMINATION, wherein something decisive happens or something changes completely; SOLUTION, wherein the final situation is shown, which is at the same time the solution "sought" by the dreamer. Jung attached great significance to this story-like nature of dreams. Moreover, Jung regarded lack of SOLUTION in a dream or a waking state fantasy narrative as especially problematic, as shown in his interpretation of the fantasy reported by one of his patients where the patient is watching his fiancée falling into a dark fissure and doing nothing to help her. (*CW* 7, pars. 343 ff).

The reason why Jung considered that this was important and should be picked up is that there exists a kind of discrepancy between his idea that *the dreams do not conceal* and that *the nature of dreams is story-like*. This is because we can speculate that from the start, storytelling includes in itself a sort of *deception*. For, as Megumi Sakabe, a prominent Japanese philosopher points out, the Japanese verb *kataru* (to narrate) has exactly the same sound as the verb *kataru* (to trick). In other words, we can say that a kind of *trickery* is rooted in the very nature of narrating (storytelling); i. e., we unwittingly and inevitably practice *trickery* every time we narrate something.

This trickery is closely related to the *hermetic* nature of dreams. In the Greek mythology,

*Hermes* was a psychopomp, that is, a messenger among the Gods, or between the Gods and men. As Hillman (1979) showed us, ancient Greeks had the idea that dreams come from, or are inseparably connected with, the underworld. As a messenger, *Hermes* in his multiple guises quickly went back and forth between this world and the underworld; an elusive figure like the Unicorn. Therefore, it is quite natural that *Hermes* held a prominent place in Jung's thinking and his devotion to dream-analysis in his psychotherapeutic practice. That is because, as mentioned above, Jung thought that the dreams (as well as *Hermes*), should be regarded as messengers, or a medium, for conveying information about the hidden inner life.

*Mercurius* is another name for *Hermes* in Roman mythology. *Mercurius* represents both the *primal material* and the *end product* in the alchemical process, and has various aspects, some, or many, of which are even incompatible with each other. His elusive nature is well reflected in the term, "*Mercurius versipellis*" (CW 12, par. 53).

And thus, the dream narrative cannot escape the elusive, tricky (*Mercurial*) nature of the messenger.

### ***Releasing oneself into the incomprehensibility of dreams***

We now find ourselves uncertain about whether or not it is true that dreams do not conceal but teach. However, what really matters in psychotherapy may not be *how* to understand dreams psychologically, or whether dreams teach or conceal. What matters is the enterprise of *dream-psychology as such*. That is to say that, in our clinical practice, as psychotherapists, we have to forget about Jung's dream-psychology that I have attempted to describe here, and follow Jung as he confesses that:

In dream-analysis we must never forget, even for a moment, that we move on treacherous ground where *nothing is certain but uncertainty*. If it were not so paradoxical, one would almost like to call out to the dream interpreter: "Do anything you like, only *don't try to understand!*" (CW 16, par. 318, my italics)

That is because "The dream is its own interpretation." The dream does not intend to deceive us but it refuses to be understood *externally* by us, human beings. In that sense, the incomprehensibility of dreams should not be understood *either* as coming from our lack of understanding *or* from the disguising nature of dreams, but from the dreams' own *quintessence*. Dreams are *essentially* elusive, unidentifiable, and inscrutable like *Mercurius*.

We cannot reason away or escape the incomprehensibility of dreams in any way but, rather, we must be open to the dream by *releasing ourselves into* it, in the sense that Jung says, "Above all, don't let anything from outside, that does not belong, get into it, for the fantasy-image has 'everything it needs'" (CW 14, par. 749).

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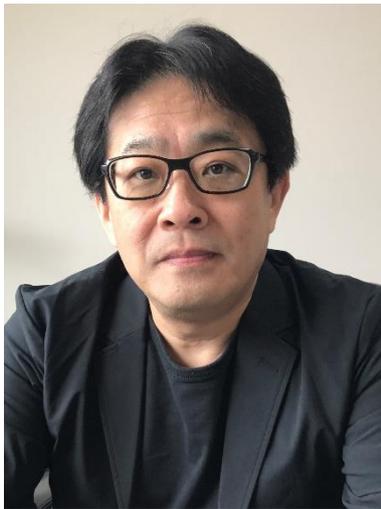
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