

Dreaming (& Waking) Lucidity and Healing
Comment on Strephon Kaplan William's Article

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Contrary to Strephon Kaplan William's assertion, the definition of a lucid dream is simple and clear: it is a dream in which the dreamer is fully conscious while remaining asleep and dreaming at the same time. Why belittle this experience by calling it "only a dream?" The dreamer's consciousness, no longer fettered by the delusion that it is experiencing an external reality, can open itself to a full, free communication with the intensities, challenges and pleasures of the dreaming Self. If Mr. Williams believes that this kind of involvement is not beneficial, I would ask him to produce some evidence - rather than simply waving vaguely at "hours of clinical experience." If his method does work, which I do not dispute, does that necessarily invalidate every other method?

The claim that in order to receive healing benefit from an experience one must remain deluded about its true nature is perhaps the most disturbing part of Mr. Williams' argument. "The dream ego must not know that it is awake in the dream . . . The dream ego must feel and interact with the material as being quite real." Where is the proof of this necessity? Our experience seems to show that if the dreamer is aware of his state, the dream can become a much more useful tool for self-exploration. The dream state can become a laboratory for testing new behaviors safely.

Delusion about the true nature of experience is a kind of mental prison, limiting our effective range of action. Mr. Williams seems to be uncomfortable with this image, calling Dr. LaBerge's use of it to illustrate the condition of the non-lucid dreamer "prophet-like" and "religious". His complaint is remarkably incongruous when viewed in connection with the religious overtones of Mr. Williams' comments about his own "dream parable". From his dream - which happens in a prison - he draws the "wisdom or life principle" of "accepting things as they are by being totally in the moment." He seems to assert that the dreamer is able to perceive "things as they are", despite the dreamer's deluded condition! How can one be "totally in the moment" if one has a confused understanding of the conditions of the moment?

The image of the prison of delusion is neither "religious", nor "prophet-like", nor new. It has often been used to describe the shackles of habit and fear that prevent us from realizing our full potential. Mr. Williams asks in his report, "Who then was the prisoner and who the imprisoning?" I would like to offer the following story as an alternate answer to this question (Shah, 1973):

Prison.

Visualize a man who has to rescue people from a certain prison. It has been decided that there is only one promising way of carrying this out.

The rescuer has to get into the prison area without attracting attention. He must

remain there relatively free to operate, for a certain period of time. The solution arrived at is that he shall enter as a convict.

He accordingly arranges for himself to be apprehended and sentenced. Like others who have fallen foul of this particular machine in this manner, he is consigned to the prison which is his goal.

When he arrives he knows that he has been divested of any possible device that would help in an escape. All he has is his plan, his wits, his skills and his knowledge. For the rest, he has to make do with improvised equipment, acquired in the prison itself. The major problem is that the inmates are suffering from a prison psychosis. This makes them think that their prison is the whole world. It is also characterized by a selective amnesia of their past. Consequently they have hardly any memory of the existence, outline, and detail of the world outside.



The history of our man's fellow-prisoners is prison history, their lives are prison lives. They think and act accordingly.

Instead of hoarding bread, for instance, as escape provisions, they mold it into dominoes with which they play games. Some of these games they know to be diversions, others they consider to be real. Rats, which they could train as a means of communication with the outside world, they treat instead as pets. The alcohol in the cleaning-fluid available to them they drink to produce hallucinations, which delight them. They think it would be sadly wasted, a crime, even, if anyone were to use it to drug the guards insensible, making escape possible.

The problem is aggravated because our malefactors have forgotten the various meanings of some of the ordinary words which we have been using. If you ask them for definitions of such words as 'provisions', 'journey', 'escape', even 'pets', this is the kind of list which you would elicit from them: Provisions: prison food. Journey: walking from one cell-block to another. Escape: avoiding punishment by warders. Pets: rats.

'The outside world' would sound to their ears like a bizarre contradiction in

terms:

'As this is the world, this place where we live,' they would say, 'how can there be another one outside?'

The man who is working on the rescue plan can operate at first only by analogy. There are few prisoners who will even accept his analogies, for they seem like mad babblings.

The babblings, when he says 'We need provisions for our journey of escape to the outside world,' of course sound like the following admitted nonsense: 'We need provisions - food for use in prison - for our journey - walking from one cell-block to another - of escape - to avoid punishment by warders - to the outside world - to the prison outside...'

Some of the more serious-minded prisoners may say that they want to understand what he means. But they do not know outside-world language any more...

When this man dies, some of them make of his words and acts a prison-cult. They use it to comfort themselves, and to find arguments against the next liberator who manages to come among them.

A minority, however, do from time to time escape."

Reference

Shah, Idries. (1973). *Caravan of dreams*. London: Quartet Books.