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Seeing Through the Dreams of Children

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“Mom! Vera should look at me!” My wife Eva woke up to this dream and knew what to do. We’d planned to go to the swimming pool with our two daughters and when Júnia jumped into the water, she told her: “Hey, see how Vera is looking at you!” Júnia’s face shone happily. This dream reminded us of something we all know but sometimes forget: kids need to be looked at.

The main reason for sharing my personal experience here is to emphasize the pertinence of looking at kids (whether your children, grandchildren, nieces/nephews, of your friends . . .) in what I think is the most profound way we can do it: through their dreams. I believe this is transcendent; not only for their psychological growth, but perhaps also for the adults that accompany them and for the future of the human species.

DREAMER APPRECIATION

Some time ago you were a child, had your vision of the world, your desires and fears . . . and your dreams. You may remember some, maybe the one you had during some turning point in your life, like an internal rite of passage; maybe also the one that you were sure was special

because an adult reacted to it. Since those reactions weren't commonplace in our society, you may also remember feeling overwhelmed as a kid by the richness of your dreams, wishing they would be valuable to the people you loved. Because, instinctively, you knew they mattered.

My daughter Júnia is nearly seven years old and, though she prefers being awake to dreaming, she knows her dreams matter. And not because we interpret them; children don't give a damn about exploring dreams analytically. Listening attentively and recreating them creatively is much more effective. When Júnia has a dream, she knows we will take care of it, so she knows her inner world's worth.

There are many ways we can relate to the dreams of children. If they have recurrent nightmares, it is good to talk about them and see if there's something in waking life that is causing distress— Does the monster resemble someone in daytime? If she gets lost in her dreams, is she feeling isolated at school? Etc. But we shouldn't wait for a nightmare in order to talk about dreams. We can incorporate them in the games we play. A favorite one at our home went like this: one of us thought of a simple image (snow, lemon, poop . . .) saying only its colour, and the other tried to guess what it was. The results were astonishing, so I decided to try a variation: telling a dream but skipping some parts:

“I dreamt of Laura how do you think she feels in the dream?” “Sad” “Why is she sad?” “Because her mother got hurt?” “No, can you think of any other reason?”

This game might help develop psi abilities (kids' and ours), and it sure makes us aware of dreams in a funny and constructive way. And it usually brings about debating over important issues. After the dream of Laura, for example, we talked about the necessity not to depend on the opinion of others as this can make us very sad.

LITTLE PEOPLE HAVE THE POWER

Kids seem sensitive to the power of their imagination. Maybe that's why they usually evolve the dream story to make it nicer. Sometimes, when Júnia doesn't like her dream much, she makes up a part of it. If I ask her if some specific details are imaginary, she admits it without hesitation:

thinking up part of the dream doesn't feel like a sham. It is legitimate to fix the dream to finish it up and she does it shamelessly. This attitude may build on the intuition that the psyche can heal through imagination, a conviction we dismiss as naïve when we grow up. In my opinion, if kids don't spontaneously change what they don't like about their dreams, we should suggest they start doing it.

Making up a new ending might be an excellent option for nightmares. They're like good friends who tell us something is going wrong, so I don't think we should erase nightmares— but this exercise can help kids feel safe in an uncertain world. Statistically, nightmares seem natural and frequent in young kids; which is understandable if we consider the amount of baffling stimuli and new challenges they find through the day. However, Júnia has very few nightmares. The reasons can be many: stability at home, not many emotional upheavals; but also the relationship we have established with the nightmares she has had. We have listened to them carefully and have invited her to recreate them artistically, but we have also deactivated their alleged power. Many years ago, I received some little dolls as a present. They were called Quitapenas (“Sorrow relievers”), and are traditionally used in Guatemala, placed under the pillow to ward off bad dreams.



Inspired by them and the Native American Dreamcatcher, my wife made a rag doll we called Lluna (Moon). Whenever Júnia had a nightmare, she made a drawing and put it in Lluna's pocket for her to find. Sometime after that, the doll would eat the paper: a sign that the nightmare would never come back.



If dreams were included in the school curricula, I guess children would feel more secure about their inner struggles. But we really can't encourage our kids to explore their dreams if we don't do it ourselves. For them it is important that we lead as examples as we are their main reference, especially during their first years. Doing it could bring along some interesting situations. I had an example recently, when my wife made an incubation asking her dreams how to obtain the energy necessary to raise our six months daughter Vera. Occasionally, she had received some nutrition guidance but, this time, she had a very especial dream: a winged dragon came down from the sky and, despite the fear she felt, she jumped on it; when she did, the dragon looked at her and gave her a loving lick on the face; thereupon, took her flying. She woke up impressed and thankful, and decided to draw it. When Júnia saw it, she wanted to trace it and paint it with her own colors

because, she said, she wanted to have her own dragon. It looked like Júnia was connecting with the strength she inherited from her mother and, after making it clear, gave it her personal touch. That night she had a dream of a unicorn, coming down from the sky and covering her with golden dust. Of course, she decided to ride the unicorn and flew away on it.



RECREATING THE COLLECTIVE PSYCHE

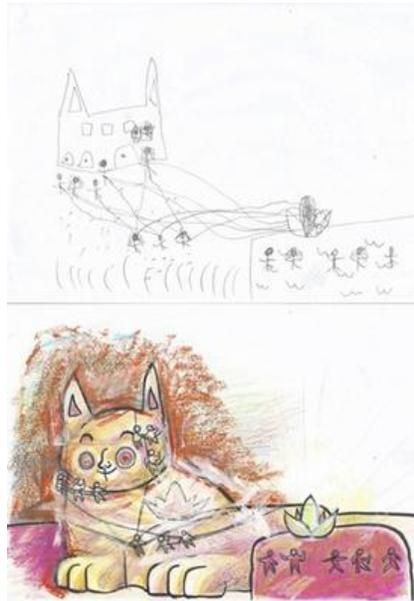
In “The Little Prince,” the Aviator contacts the Child after falling asleep in the middle of the desert, and the kid invites him to recover his imagination, creativity, and capacity to love. In one passage, we read: “I may become like the grown-ups who are no longer interested in anything but figures. It is for that purpose that I have bought a box of paints.” Every now and then, the little prince inside of me tells my adult clients to draw some of their dreams. The dreamer usually sees some details which were not apparent in the dream narrative. Maybe we should recover the habit of drawing our dreams not only to expose what is unconscious but also to facilitate their taking the place they deserve.

At home, we always have our pencils ready and sometimes we mix the elements of our dreams together on the same piece of paper, as a way to celebrate the connection we have with our children. According to Jungian analyst, Laura Gutman, kids tend to express our Shadow. That is, with their behavior they reveal what we don't see in ourselves. This makes children masters and something like our living dreams. Hence, parents are our first teachers, who give us their vision of the world and, with it, gifts and challenges to overcome; but, later, other teachers might arrive to remind us of what we are in essence. Often we seek the Inner Child in our dreams, the archetype of the sacred that talks about our original innocence, curiosity and power. But why not look for that in our Outer Child?

Sometimes I have accompanied my daughter to honor her dreams. One morning she woke up excited: "Daddy, I had the most beautiful dream!" She was on the mountain with her friends and found a map. Following its instructions they arrived at a big tree. After entering their hands through a crack in the bark, colored elastic cords fell from the branches and all the girls swung rising skyward. A beautiful princess appeared and told them they could go there whenever they wanted to. Parents arrived, but—a significant detail—instead of telling them to stop and go home, parents told them they could continue swinging, which amplified the pleasure they were feeling. As Júnia was so happy I suggested we go to a nearby park where there were swings hanging from trees. I proposed she closed her eyes when she swung and imagine she was in her dream tree while the princess was watching. But, when we got to the park, I decided I would do that too; swinging quietly, unhurriedly, just observing my feelings. The experience, needless to say, was wonderful.

Another practice extremely rewarding for me as a parent is telling stories at night. After some time reading those tales we had at home, I decided that I'd make up my own. So I asked Júnia to tell me what she wanted me to include in the story (usually elements found throughout the day, some dear friends and, often, herself). I invented a story each night with those elements as guest stars, and that stimulated my creative mind. But I also made a delightful discovery: when you flow while explaining a story, the story comes to meet you. I felt surprised, watching how the narrative was building itself, getting all the pieces together, without any effort from my side.

Then I decided to take the experiment one step beyond and improvise a story recovering elements from last night's dream. Sometime afterwards, I realized that those stories inspired by my daughter's psyche, were also significant to me and I could relate to them as I did to my dreams.



THE PRE/TRANS FALLACY

Of course, I'm not saying the dreams of my daughter have the same meaning for both of us. Júnia dreamt she entered "a castle with good people to get bad people out of it." In the exercise of tracing her drawing, I remembered some of mine, and had a mixture of emotions and thoughts. But for her, most probably, this dream expressed a simple wish: that everything was all right. Kids need to feel that they're living in a secure and stable world, that right and wrong are clearly distinct, so they can grow old and build a solid ego. Later, when that ego is healthfully established, they will begin the next adventure: transcending it. Only then begins another quest which may end up acknowledging the Source we all come from. But we must not forget that before we kill the ego we should build one that is adequate enough.

So when I talk about connecting to children I am not advocating a regression. It's not that we have to act like children again. According to Ken Wilber, that would take us to a prepersonal state (before ego building). I am suggesting that relating to their dreams can help us build the

path to a transpersonal state (the transcendence of ego). Just as we don't have to live in a cave in order to be aware of our nature, we don't have to become kids again to regain our original spirit and integrate it consciously, keeping an adult attitude.

One of the reasons why I like relating to dreams of children is because I don't have to think too much. In my work as a psychologist I always consider devoting enough attention and time to a dream before analyzing it. This is what I call the "Nocturnal Sea" phase, when we allow the dream to bring all the gifts it has for us. If we make a hasty interpretation we can block its energy and wisdom, and consequently our inner growth, by reinforcing our egoic vision. Children accept dreams naturally, with openness, without trying to explain what they mean.

I try hard not to convey my beliefs to my daughter. I never told her what dreams are for me nor what I think their purpose is (she hasn't asked yet). But I listen mindfully whenever she gives her opinion on the subject: "It's like thinking" she said once "when we dream, we think and see what we think." I was surprised by that thought, which coincided with a highly accepted theory. I was surprised too, when after a synchronicity, I said "Life is weird, isn't it?" "It doesn't look weird to me," she said "it's just perfect." Seeing through children's eyes allows us to be amazed all the time by novelty but, as happens constantly, we feel that being amazed is paradoxically normal. This may explain why Júnia thinks it's not strange that, while we sleep, sometimes we share the images of our dreams; or that when she woke up one night, she saw me "floating near the roof and transparent, while your body was also on the bed." These kinds of experiences may be more frequent than we would expect. Clients usually ask me how to deal with such episodes and I always give the same advice: don't tell your children your theories about what is happening (unless they ask), because you could constrict their horizons, and they're innately prepared to go beyond you.

DREAMS OF THE FUTURE

Kids must get ready to manage this world. Their dreams are helping: they are displaying archetypal ideas in the scenario where gods fight their battles; they express the challenges they'll face collectively and keep them in touch with the nourishing Source, so they will transcend those

challenges creatively. As far as they keep connected to their dreams, they'll develop a conscious way of living, linked to other human beings and merged with Life itself. Although I'll only tell Júnia when she asks me, I believe we dream to evolve and preserve Life on Earth. But I'm an adult and I'm still learning. One famous passage in "The Little Prince" says: "Only with the heart one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." Kids are less conditioned by their innocent eyes and their dreams less affected by egoic issues, so maybe they can see the essential more easily. Attuning mindfully and lovingly to the frequency of their dreams may be one of the best things we can do for them, for us, and for the future of humanity.

What is your experience in listening to the dreams of your children or other kids? Have you ever observed them change the ending of a nightmare in order to improve it? Have they ever put you in touch with extraordinary experiences? Have you had a hunch about your life or about essential human issues after listening to their dreams? I'm looking forward to listening to your experiences in this thread!

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