

## Interpretation of Dreams chp 5

### Summary

#### Introductory Text

Freud reminds readers of the characteristics of memory in dreams:

- Dreams prefer recent memories from the days immediately before the dream.
- Memory works differently in dreams, focusing on unimportant or indifferent events instead of on the most emotionally charged events of the day.
- Dreams have access to memories of early childhood, even when the waking memory of these events is not clear.

#### A. Recent and Indifferent Material in Dreams

First, Freud considers where the remembered material that becomes the source of dreams comes from. He asks whether it comes from the day immediately before the dream or from some longer, vaguer period, such as a few days before the dream. He prefers to think the source of remembered dream material is "the day immediately preceding the dream—which I shall speak of as the 'dream-day.'"

In paragraphs added in 1911, Freud considers whether there might be a biologically determined period that is significant for dreams. He considers dreams of his about events from 28 days earlier, 23 days earlier, and 39 or 40 days earlier. Freud notes the 28-day span of time is "Fliess's female period" and the 23-day span of time is Fliess's "male period," based on the "theory of periodicity" put forth by his physician friend Wilhelm Fliess.

Ultimately, Freud finds a connection to events of the "dream-day" in all his dreams and decides Fliess's periods were not significant for dream material.

Freud concludes the question of length of time by remarking on the "instigating agent" of the dream—the thing that sets the dream going, its starting point. He says the instigating agent of every dream comes from the experiences of the dream-day. These events have not yet been "slept on." He proposes to prove this by analyzing one of his dreams, the "Dream of Botanical Monograph."

Freud dreamed of writing a monograph on a certain plant. The book lay open before him and contained a dried specimen of a leaf from the plant, similar to an experience he had had on the dream-day. Through a series of associations Freud recalls his wife's favorite flowers; his own writing on cocaine, a drug which is derived from a plant; other doctors associated with the investigation of cocaine; and a conversation the evening of the dream-day with one of those doctors, Dr. Königstein.

Through the interpretation Freud determines the dream is a wish fulfillment. Like the dream of Irma's injection, this dream justifies Freud as a good scientist and a hard worker. More importantly, Freud discovers another difference between the manifest content and the latent content of the dream. The manifest content of the dream has a connection to an indifferent memory from the dream-day: Freud glanced at a book in a shop. But after interpreting the dream, Freud sees a connection to an emotionally important experience from the dream-day: his hour-long conversation with his friend Dr. Königstein. That conversation is connected to important events in his career, such as his research on cocaine.



**Freud comes to a new conclusion about dream material. Dreams only seem to focus on insignificant memories from the dream-day. After the dream is interpreted, it is clear the latent content is connected to a significant memory from the dream-day.**

Freud describes one type of distortion: displacement, a process he will discuss later in more detail, he says. Displacement, in Freudian thinking, means transferring psychic energy from something important to something unimportant. Now the unimportant thing is emotionally charged and can "force an entry into consciousness."

Freud remarks on a tendency of dreams to fuse all the events that instigated the dream into a single unity. He then declares that an "internal" or mental event can count as an event of the dream-day. If the dreamer spent Tuesday thinking about the death of their spouse five years ago, and then dreamed about that death on Tuesday night, that counts as an event of the dream-day.

Freud summarizes his findings about indifferent material in dreams: "there are no indifferent dream-instigators—and consequently no 'innocent' dreams." He then analyzes several seemingly "innocent" dreams to prove his point. All of the dreams, involving both male and female patients, and including various images ranging from a disappointing shopping trip to an overcoat to a broken candlestick are analyzed for their images, symbols, and language and discovered to include latent sexual content. Freud concludes, "In all of these 'innocent' dreams the motive for censorship is obviously the sexual factor

#### **B. Infantile Experiences as a Source of Dreams**

Freud says when the dreamer cannot remember an event behind a dream, the dream may derive from early childhood. He then elaborates several instances in which a dream of childhood was independently corroborated. For example, a man dreamed of his childhood tutor in bed with his nurse (governess). The man's older brother confirmed: the tutor and the nurse used to share a bed in the presence of the three-year-old dreamer.

Freud adds that the latent content of dreams often turns out to have a connection to childhood experiences. He returns to his dream of the botanical monograph and uncovers some childhood experiences. He remembers being given an illustrated book "to destroy" when he was five years old. He finds a chain of associations that lead from the dream to the memory of ripping up the book: "cyclamen—favorite flower—favorite dish—artichoke; pulling to pieces like an artichoke, leaf by leaf ... herbarium—bookworm, whose favorite food is books."

Freud considers dreams that fulfill wishes originating in early childhood. He returns to his dream about R., N., and his Uncle Josef. The dream fulfilled his wish to be appointed a professor. Freud then says this ambition is "pathological" and "alien to me." He finds the source of this ambition in childhood, citing various predictions and other instances. Eventually, he finds himself identifying with the anti-Semitic minister, by viewing R. and N. as undeserving of their promotions for reasons other than their hereditary status. He calls this identification his "retaliation," and says he is "turning the tables on His Excellency with a vengeance!"

**Freud recalls a dream that leads him to childhood experiences of anti-Semitism.**

**Freud recalls another experience of anti-Semitism in his childhood regarding his father. He felt his father behaved "unheroically" in response to taunts on the street.**



**He concludes, "the deeper one carries the analysis of dreams," the more one finds childhood experiences connected to the sources of the dream's latent content**

Freud comments if a childhood experience is alluded to in a dream's manifest content, often the only access to that childhood experience is through dream interpretation. This is different from Freud's memories of Hannibal and his father, which are his conscious memories. These other childhood experiences are too early to be consciously remembered. Instead, the experience can be "inferred" from the evidence of the manifest dream content. Freud says the correctness of this procedure "is provided by a whole number of factors in psycho-analytic work, which are mutually consistent and thus seem sufficiently trustworthy." Freud relates four such dreams.

In the first dream, a woman dreams of being in a hurry and falling down. This is associated with a childhood game of saying words so fast they turn into nonsense. Freud says the memory of this innocent childhood word game stands in for "other, less innocent" experiences. In the second dream, a woman dreams of "an orthopedic institute." Clues lead Freud to her childhood experience of soiling her bed and being punished for it. In the third dream, a man dreams of seeing boys fighting in the street. A chain of clues leads Freud to an interpretation of the man's excitement as a young boy at glimpsing female genitals. In the fourth dream, an elderly woman dreams of falling down in the street. Freud remarks, "If a woman dreams of falling, it almost invariably has a sexual sense: she is imagining herself as a 'fallen woman.'"

This complex dream leads Freud to many childhood associations. At age seven or eight he went into his parents' bedroom and urinated in their chamber pot while they stood there, shocked. His father scolded him and also said, "The boy will come to nothing." Freud thinks, "this must have been a frightful blow to my ambition," because this scene is "constantly recurring" in his dreams, where it is connected to a listing of his "achievements and successes." Freud concludes such dreams are his way of saying to his father, "You see, I have come to something."

Freud then interprets the blind old man in his recent dream as a figure for his father, who was blind in one eye due to glaucoma. In the dream the tables are turned; the father is reduced to urinating in front of Freud. What had seemed humiliating in the dream's manifest content—handing the old man a urinal—is the dream's proudest moment, revenge on the scolding, judgmental father.

**Freud offers a conjecture on dreams: "every dream was linked in its manifest content with recent experiences and in its latent content with the most ancient experiences."**

He concludes with a final remark on the nature of dreams—they have more than one meaning. They can contain several wish fulfillments, either next to each other or "superimposed on one another [stacked up], the bottom one being the fulfillment of a wish dating from earliest childhood

**Lesson 2: The content of our dreams originates from three different sources. We often dream about what happened on the same day or the one before, but real-life events are just one of three sources of dream content:**



- **Recent, real-life events.** Anything that happened in the past 24 hours or even the last week. If you bumped into Mr. Gartner, maybe he'll show up. These often connect to other memories too, so you might dream about a garden you once visited, because Mr. Gartner's name sounds similar.
- **Childhood memories.** If we dream about it often enough, we might be able to identify definite, distant memories that ended up defining who we are. Freud's dad told him he wouldn't amount to anything when he was really young, so with each new success and award ceremony, dreams of embarrassing moments would come back.
- **Bodily stimuli.** If you've ever had a wet dream, you've experienced this. But any physical influence on your body will transcend into your dreams while you're asleep. **For example,** if you sleep on a plane and it starts shaking, you might get dizzy in your dream.

**Lesson 3:** Your mind structures your dreams by condensing, displacing and coherently arranging their contents.

Maybe you've heard the expression of "weaving dreams." Given the three types of "wool" used to create them and how your mind puts them together, that's actually not too far off. Your dreams get their structure in three ways:

**Condensing.** Half a page of writing down your dream's timeline might require six pages of written interpretation. That's the power of compression. For example, if you see a new sports car you like and watched a spy movie three years ago, your dream might combine both and turn you into a racing super agent.

**Displacement.** Important matters are often represented in trivialities in dreams. You might be bored and unengaged at your job, but in your dream the only reference to that is that the license plate of your sports car reads "BORING."

**Coherence.** No matter how different the actual events and memories, your brain will always bring all your dreams' elements into a logical sequence. It might feel strange to dream about a fellow racer riding on a lawnmower, but if those are the two elements, your mind will connect them in the most logical way.

When you look at where the elements of a dream come from and how they're pieced together, you can now understand why dreams are often surreal and so hard to interpret.

### The dream-work

If censorship does not allow the mind to become conscious, the dream uses the process of **condensation**. For example, for the image of the similarity of different people, a new unit is created from one person, in the appearance of which there may be features of people being replaced by him. The most clearly condensation is manifested in the formation of words and names, when comical and bizarre combinations of speech are produced as a result of the connection, displacement, and substitution.

**Displacement** is the replacement of the colorless and abstract content of the thought underlying the dream with a more plastic and concrete expression. Displacement and transfer of meaning from more important elements to less important ones is a distorting work of the dream. The main purpose of distortion is to avoid censorship, to allow the desire to penetrate into consciousness.

Condense and displacement are methods of the same repression, which avoids the use of a word with a direct meaning. In this case, new, bizarre and incomprehensible words and sentences are formed. Such formation occurs in neurosis, paranoia, hysteria or obsessive manifestations.

The technique of analyzing a dream is to treat the dream not as a whole, but separately each of its elements. The dream contains only thoughts, not the connection between them. To connect several thoughts, the dream uses a form of simultaneity, when all the material is presented in the form of one event.

To express contradictory relationships ("on the contrary"), the dream uses the reversal of the element in the dream. A dream can also distort the time when the final event is placed at the end, and the cause is at the beginning of the dream.