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Chapter 8

## MARC BREGMAN AND A PUNCH IN THE GUT

*Morrisville, Vermont, June 2001*

I drove Route 15 east out of Johnson, Vermont, in a deeply shadowed valley of the Green Mountains. The road keeps climbing, and along the way I saw big open fields, and the beautiful flowing Lamoille. The French named the river for the seagulls—*les mouettes*—that glide over on their way west to Lake Champlain. But some old mapmaker crimped the vowels and uncrossed the t's, and rewrote “La Mouette” as “Lamoille,” which in French means nothing. Another defeat for the image (seagull) by the word (misspelled).

I passed a cemetery just outside Johnson. In the side of a grassy hill is a bricked-up wall with a door.

But the door in that wall doesn't take you to an angel. It takes you to a cold vault. They stack dead bodies in there in wintertime because the ground is too frozen to bury them.

I love the greenness of the Vermont summer, especially when the gray clouds threaten and the grass gleams with a strange light. But Vermont in the summer deceives you. Everything you see—the roots of dandelions, the peeling hardware sign, the dogs and cows—has survived mountains of snow, tons of ice, and acres of frozen air. The ground is soft with tufts of green, but tougher than it looks. So was Marc Bregman, whom I was on my way to see about my dreams.

I stumbled onto Bregman by accident. All that spring and summer I'd kept busy tracing the lost revelation dream. I saw it as a detective story. *The case of the disappearing dream.*

What is the case? Simply, today we no longer believe in revelation dreams. We lost that, really, a long time ago. Yet there's a contradiction. Privately, individually, dreams still change many lives. Even though we might think it embarrassing to say so out loud, many cherish the memory of a special dream, a dream that carries a message, or makes a promise.

Why and how did we lose the ability to incubate such dreams and use them to grow and to heal? How could a tradition that gave us the dream of the ladder end up essentially "phobic" about the revelation dream? By day, I was investigating these questions when I met Bregman, with piles of books on my desk and stacks at my feet.

**B**ut by night I was on a personal search. I was writing down my dreams. I wrote down dozens that June. I was living at the Vermont Studio Center, an art colony in Johnson, Vermont. I had time to dream.

At first I had trouble remembering. Many mornings I woke with the faint sense I had dreamed, but little more. The memory trace slipped out of my hands and finned off into dark waters. With practice, I fished up fragments: an old boot, a rusty hook with line wound round it. Then, more practice and whole dreams swam into recollection, live, lithe, with sharp teeth, and shiny sharp scales from head to tail.

The more attention I paid, the more dreams repaid my attention. Recollection improved, though not the content. My dreams were gruesome catfish, muddy bottom feeders. They weren't keepers. In content, they were pointless wanderings in cars, meaningless treks on foot through strange cities. These were not the beautiful visualizations of Colette. I was compiling these dreams for a book, but they were embarrassing. I wouldn't show them to my dog.

Dreams carry accusations you don't like to hear, plunge you into embarrassing circumstances. You might show up in your underwear, or worse, in your hypocrisy.

I see a famous politician. In waking life, I despise him. But in the dream, I walk up to him like a fatuous ass and shake his hand, just because he's famous.

I see an ex-husband of an old friend of mine. He's slipped and fallen on the ice. I don't really care, but I run over to him and express concern because "it's the right thing to do."

I see some folks in wheelchairs. I feel sorry for them and invite them for tea. But I know I don't really mean it. When they say yes, I weasel out of it.

I'm lost in a train station, frustrated by clerks who won't answer. I get furious at them, but when I wake I realize I didn't really know my destination.

Where was the ladder? Where the door? I had read all the spiritual books, Jewish and Buddhist. I had the privilege of meeting high lamas and brilliant rabbis. I had lectured on religion, taught high ideals and concepts. I had practiced meditation and prayer. I even thought I'd been "close to God" a few times. I may not be the holiest guy on the block, but I'd gotten somewhere. Except in my dreams.

In dreams, policemen stopped me and asked for my ID. That was a good question: Who was "I" in these dreams? Because the "I" that I was seeing couldn't be me. The person who regularly starred as me nightly was dishonest, a hypocrite and worse. He was far from kind, though he always wanted to look kind. He sure wasn't enlightened.

I wondered about this huge gap between who I thought I was in waking life and how I showed up in my dreams.

Thanks to Colette, I'd seen the door in the wall; I'd passed through and heard an angel sing my new name. But that was just a temporary visit. Where was that angel now? My dreams accused me of spiritual fraud. They were all parking lot and no angel, all wall and no door. These dreams stung more than Colette saying my arms are too short.

My reaction was, The hell with these dreams.

I was beginning to understand for myself the long-standing "phobia" about the dream that Joel Covitz describes.

As the bad news of my dreams swam in night after night, I disposed of them conveniently by the usual method: trivialization. Oh well, I said to myself, they are *only* dreams. Why should I judge myself based on my behavior in my dreams?

**M**y dreams exposed a gap I'd been reading about between personal psychology and spiritual teaching. Our spiritual teachings address in a general way the highest aspirations of humanity: equanimity, enlightenment, goodness, kindness, the desire to know God. They provide practices for reaching these goals: study, prayer, meditation, chanting, yoga. But individuals have personal issues that get in the way: traumas, phobias, anxieties, rage, sexual urges, egotism. They come into spiritual groups and are told: Meditation is the answer. Prayer is the answer. Yoga is the answer. But their personal questions never get answered. All the answers are supposed to come from the teachings, but psychological problems are sometimes papered over. The prescription doesn't match the sickness.

Soul healing has to be one-on-one, heart-to-heart, and many spiritual teachers don't go there anymore. It was a priestly function in Temple

times and through confession in the Catholic Church. The great rabbis of Hasidism also practiced it. The *yihud*, or personal one-on-one relationship with their followers, is what made these rabbis "rebbe." Nachman of Bratzlav, for instance, demanded a personal confession from his *Hasidim*, a complete baring of the soul. From that place he could begin the work of spiritual elevation.

But few spiritual groups work that way today. The great divorce between "psychology" and "soul healing" began over a hundred years ago with the rise of psychotherapy. In the Jewish Buddhist dialogue in Dharamsala, Rabbi Jonathan Omer-Man told the Dalai Lama, "We have a very big problem in the West. The work of transformation has been stolen from us by the psychiatrists. The work of transformation, for us, is a holy path. But more and more people who seek transformation, and who are stopped, don't go to a rabbi or a priest. They go to a psychiatrist who will teach them, not enlightenment, but self-satisfaction."<sup>1</sup>

The divorce between psychotherapy and soul-healing has left many spiritually hungry and emotionally incomplete, a result lamented by a number of authors in recent years.

Dr. Mark Epstein, a psychotherapist and vipassana meditator, addresses the failings of Buddhist meditation in *Thoughts Without a Thinker*. He cites a paper by psychologists who "found, to their surprise, that meditators were just as anxious as anyone else.... Meditation on its own is not particularly effective in solving people's emotional problems."<sup>2</sup>

It seems equally true to many experts that psychotherapy is incomplete when it fails to address spiritual growth. *Psychology* at root means "the study of the soul." Dr. James Hillman, a prolific neo-Jungian thinker, has led the charge for a restoration of "soul" to psychology.

In *Insearch: Psychology and Religion*, Hillman addresses the role of religious counseling in the task of "reclaiming the lost area of the soul."

"The religious moment," he writes, "is an experience and that experience takes place in the psyche."<sup>3</sup>

This is why I was looking for a practical teacher who could use my dream as a "religious moment."

Such a teacher could go one-on-one like a therapist, but move past the level of personal problems to the soul.

I was living that summer in Johnson, Vermont, at the Vermont Studio Center, a terrific refuge for writers and artists founded by painter and architect

Jon Gregg and his wife, Louise von Wiese. I met Lou Albert there, a painter and Buddhist meditator. One morning at breakfast, I shared with Lou my plan to visit the Tibetan Buddhist dream master Tarab Tulku in Copenhagen.

Lou said, Well I've been seeing a dream teacher.

—Where is he?

Morrisville.

I was surprised. Here I was, flying all the way to Copenhagen, and Morrisville is the next town over from Johnson.

—Is he a psychologist?

No, Lou said, he's a postman.

Lou told me that Bregman was so loaded with clients, morning, noon, and evening, that he took new calls only after 9 P.M. I had no great hopes for him, but thought meeting this postman for an hour would make an amusing chapter in a book on dreams. I called Bregman that night. A gruff voice answered after a couple of rings, with a Philadelphia accent I immediately recognized.

Yes, he could see me. In the first session he would lay out his whole dream theory and then work with my dreams. There was no chitchat; his abrupt phone manner was like Madame Colette's.

He gave me directions to his place. Then he said, When and where were you born?

—What do you mean?

I'm going to cast a chart.

—Jeez, I thought after I hung up, a postman—and an astrologer, too.

**M**orrisville is small but not quaint. The road in from the west passes two homely shopping centers and then you twist left over the river and then right uphill toward the main drag, past a single movie theater, the Bijou, and a couple of outdoors shops, and a tae kwon do storefront dojo. Not exactly prospering, not falling apart. Fishing is big in Morrisville; hunting, kayaking, bicycling, shooting animals is very big. Morrisville is sturdy and dowdy, not as poor as some Vermont towns, not as prosperous as others, but hanging in

there. I like Morrisville. There are evangelicals among the native folk; there are rednecks but also a few ex-hippies.

Another twist and Route 100 has finished its job as Morrisville's Main Street, and you are in the countryside pointing toward Stowe, a tony ski resort with quaint Alpine lodgings, ski shops, and the big mountain looming above.

I passed a dairy farm, a small airport, a golf course, a giant evangelical church shaped like a barn. I'd heard from Lou that Bregman's wife is a minister there.

I pulled into Bregman's driveway, greeted by a large white barking dog. I opened the car door slowly as the dog—who looked part wolf—glared at me. There didn't seem to be anyone around. I stood with my back against the car and talked to the dog, explaining carefully that I was going inside and meant no harm. He growled. I walked slowly down the drive, then waded through a rich planting of day lilies.

Bregman's house is homey and folksy, a large, solid, sturdy place, a Vermont farmhouse. I stood at the door and knocked, but no one answered. I waited, and the dog eyed me. So I pushed the door open and went inside.

Mail was strewn on a dining-room table, and beyond that I saw the entrance to the kitchen. A wood stove for the long winters, and framed needle-point samplers on the wall. Bregman came through a door and told me to come in.

I sized him up. In his fifties, not too tall, but solid, too, like the house, with a graying beard and hair brushed straight back. His hands are big, and I noticed damage, a knuckle missing. Behind his wire rims were intense blue eyes. He wore a checked flannel shirt and jeans. He led me into his office and sat me down in a leather chair. He sat behind his desk.

The crazy white dog trotted and prowled around. The office is full of cuckoo clocks, and a few strange paintings that I later learned were gifts from his clients. One showed a woman held between the paws of a giant dreamhound. I saw a kitschy pageboy Jesus on the wall and a 3-D *Last Supper* on the coffee table and lots of books: Jung and Hillman, but also, surprisingly, a Zohar, the medieval masterpiece of kabbalah. Bregman can be a Jewish name, but since his wife was a minister, I marked him down with a question mark in the religion category.

Bregman asked why I'd come. I told him I wanted to trace the history of the revelation dream beginning in Genesis and find out why it disappeared. He took that in without much comment. I brought a printout of dreams I'd

fished up that week—short dreams, long dreams, fragments. I was curious to see what he would do with them, because they made no sense to me.

He took a half hour to explain his theory in general, and some of his words engaged me intellectually, but I thought, Who is he, anyway? In my mind, he was a postman with a nice farmhouse. Maybe my arms were short, but I figured they were longer than his.

How do you know when you've met the teacher of your dreams? By which I mean the spiritual teacher you trust. It's not an intellectual decision. At that level, as Bregman told me his theory, I reacted to his words with words of my own, those gummed strips that come continuously flying through your mind one after the other: *yeah he's got a good rap, a great rap . . . but he's a postman. And he's got my astrology chart there . . . what's with that?*

Then he stopped the theory talk and went to my dreams, and for a time the chattering stopped, replaced by a shock bigger than any Colette had ever dished out.

**T**here's a difference between information and transformation. Plenty of teachers can give you information, but how many can change you in a deep, electric way? Colette had her formidable gift of making brilliant images that spoke back to your images; she had her poetry and her special powers of close listening and seeing—her keen eye for the tiniest physical malformation, her exquisite sensitivity and precision of language, her memory of every time you used the word *anxiety*: An eighty-seven-year-old woman who could define metonymy on the fly as “the unique becoming the One”; she was simply astonishing, quick and brilliant.

Bregman didn't work like that at all. He sometimes used simple words and phrases incorrectly. Every time he did, the English teacher in me winced, and I heard Madame say, “*My students should be more precise . . .*”

I am a word man, so it took a long time to figure out: what Bregman has isn't about words. At least not the way I am used to thinking about words. His point of view was so much based in dream that he heard language from the dream point of view. He'd take a term like “selfish” and hear it as “the self of the fish”; “complaining and blaming” became “comblaming.” He was making up his own language out of dreams. He was so deeply rooted in image that words were molten in his mind, not hard bullets like in mine.

But the first hour, I didn't know that. I just knew what he had to offer when he stopped explaining his theory altogether and started working directly with my dreams.

People have different approaches to recording dreams. Some elaborate and explain; some make drawings. I can't draw, but I recorded every detail precisely, because I didn't know yet what was important.

When Bregman asked me to read one of my precision dream accounts, he didn't exactly seem to be listening at all. His mind was tilted sideways and he was listening to a slant off the words, not the words themselves. He ignored many details. He asked me questions that sounded obvious. Or he'd ask, repeatedly, who is so-and-so in the dream, which I'd already explained, and I'd think, I just told you that. . . . You just asked me. . . .

There'd be long pauses, strange pauses, then boom—. . . . He told me later, "In this work, we don't interpret; we let the unconscious guide us."

I didn't understand what he meant. Wasn't I bringing him my dreams so he could interpret?

The way he responded to dreams was from intuition. He'd ask a question, and it was just what you were thinking. He had a way to reach into you, to feel into the reality of another person.

I felt that power and resisted. But then he gave me a shock. It was not "petit."

William Domhoff, the sociologist of dreams, wrote that "75 to 100 dreams from a person give us a very good psychological portrait of that individual. Give us 1000 dreams over a couple of decades and we can give you a profile of the person's mind."<sup>4</sup>

But Bregman didn't need one thousand dreams or even seventy-five. Just three, and a glance at my horoscope. It's a trick he's done with others many times.

I was horrified by the astrology part.\* I don't know what he was doing with the horoscope on his desk—something to do with Dane Rudhyar and Jung. He's patiently explained it a few times since, and each time I've practically fallen asleep with boredom. But he could nail you with a horoscope and three dreams.

He had a way of weaving the dreams of a session together into a single convincing story. Three quick dreams. One was about crickets, the second a fight in a London bar. The third was about a cop who stops me while I'm riding a bicycle. The cop asks me, "Do you have a license for that thing?" I get angry. Then the cop says, "Is this your lawn mower?"

\*I'm still uncomfortable with it.

I didn't know what the lawn mower symbolized—or the bicycle, for that matter. I told Bregman I'd been taking up biking lately. I was baffled by that dream; Bregman wasn't.

The cop makes a joke, he said, but you don't have any humor about you because you are pretty scared.

—It was funny.

Right. He makes two jokes. You don't get either. He calls your bike a lawn mower, and he asks for your driver's license.

—Right.

If you could have said to him, *Where do you get off?* you two could have had a good belly laugh.

—Yeah I see that now. But I didn't get it in the dream.

What the cop is trying to do is say: What the hell are you scared about? He's trying to deal with your fear and play with it. To get you to see the idea that maybe it's all right for you to be you. He's making fun of you and you don't get the joke. Because you don't trust that you are all right with him.

It was a curious way he was talking; as if the cop in the dream had a motive, as if I had a choice in responding. As I took all that in, Bregman went for the kill.

Did you have issues with your father about being accepted?

—Both ways. I didn't accept him and he didn't accept me.

Oh. Okay. So basically that tied you to your mother.

—Yes, and that was her strategy also.

Because she wanted you to not be with him. She was competitive.

—Absolutely.

Oh boy.

—She won. . . .

And you lost. You lost your father.

Boom. A punch in the gut, a blow to the belly. I'd been opened up like a cheap safe and all my cash was on the table. I couldn't believe he'd gotten to this core issue so quickly. It hurt and stunned, but I knew that what he said was true.

As far back as I could remember—and there was no sponge to wipe it clean—I'd always felt distant from my father. Until Bregman said it, though, I'd never thought of it before as losing him.

What made it powerful was how Bregman hooked his point into that silly dream. He was right. The cop was being funny and just kidding me guy to guy, but I completely missed it.

I realized that the dream was showing me a very familiar scenario. It was something I knew about myself but had never been able to finger before: something missing in how I related to men in authority. It was the story of every male teacher I'd ever subverted, every potential mentor I'd found flaws in, every male acquaintance I'd failed to connect with as a friend. It was a template for all my failures to relate to men, and behind it was this huge loss of a father I hadn't realized was a loss.

So Bregman gave me a big shock. He told me later that he liked to get in quick, the first session, because, he said, "the pathology is listening in," and that way, the pathology knew that he knew.

He hadn't won me over completely.

I felt the blow to the stomach, yes; but the stronger the blow, the more I doubted. I set in on his theory; I seized on his words. What did he mean—emotions versus feelings; aren't they the same? What was all this talk about pathology? I found that term difficult, even offensive. The counteroffensive was already beginning, for Bregman was also a male mentor, and the pattern of opposition didn't quit just because he'd pointed it out.

But when he asked me at the end of the session, "Do you want to come back?" I knew the answer was yes.

The words kept coming. But the blow to the stomach had also happened, and even though I had no idea where it would lead me, the journey in dreams was now happening.

I went back to my stacks of books, to Genesis, to my study of the disappearing dream. I tried to go back to normal, but I was shaken.

Every week after that he'd ask me, "Do you want to come back?" Every week I'd say yes.

One night, two years after that first encounter with Bregman, I dreamed....

## Chapter 9

### THE BOOK OF K de G

*...it was dark in my study but the computer screen was lit.*

So many times in the waking world, I'd come to this room lined with books, sat at my blue chair, typing, sometimes knowing where a sentence was going, other times trusting that the right words would come in the right rhythms.

*I came into the study to write. But a large blue book blocked my way, propped against the monitor. Four feet tall, six inches thick. Embossed on the cover in gold were mysterious initials, "K de G."*

I'd seen books like this before, books that opened from the back, old Hebrew books of knowledge, the "seforim" collected by eager scholars with trembling hands. You feel that excitement bubbling around books in certain ultra-Orthodox enclaves in Jerusalem. Books are sold in small shops but also spill out onto the streets. On a small card table at a street corner, two thin men rummage through a mad pile of books, glance at a few pages, put them down, pick up another. There people fiercely believe that a book--this book, the next book, some book--will contain the word that will set all the other words on fire.

The devout believe that a book can change your life. So do I. It may be one book for me and another for you; it may be poetry or physics, philosophy or history—but we believers in the word are all, one way or another, people of the book. For us, books are holy. They are how souls travel, how the spirit of one person enters another. Who ever says, "My life was changed by a DVD"? We still say, though: a book changed my life.

*There's an e-mail from my father. His friends have met the teacher who wrote this book. They say the teacher is entirely "natural, warm, and human."*

*Intrigued, I open the book from the back. It appears to be a commentary on the book of Genesis.*

How nice, because I was writing about the revelation dream in Genesis, and now a dream came to help.

*Rabbi K de G is very literate, very modern. He quotes a poem by Shakespeare. He says, "The poem appears twice in the same play. Once in the mouth of Cleopatra. Another time in the mouth of a second character."*

In the dream, I thumb through the book of K de G. I'm fascinated by this nonsense about two poems in Shakespeare, which in the dream I believe is true.

When I wake, I get the joke. In the dream, I come into my study to write. But I am not writing. I am reading.

It is a funny dream, with an exact sense of humor. It fits my brain like a glove fits a hand; it fits my life. A dream is never off-the-rack. A dream is always sewn with your exact dimensions in mind, your humor, your obsessions. A dream fits.

When I began to study my dreams closely, I noticed how exquisitely made many are, how difficult to communicate that exquisite beauty to another because in most dreams the exquisite is idiosyncratic. Each dream invents its own beautiful language, and something always gets lost in translation. My dream was made for me as your dream is made for you.

A dream provides an exact tincture of the soul, a strong whiff—ammonia or perfume—to wake us from a faint-hearted life.

Was the dream really just a joke? I thought about an interpretation: the big blue book, a commentary on Genesis—propped against the screen. This seemed to say, Beginning is hard. Originality is impossible. Writing about dreams is surely impossible. The best you'll ever do is a commentary.

Before every new book stand all the other books. Before every word is the history of all the words ever written or spoken, and the confusing reverberation of how they are read and heard. And the perverse way words are manipulated, twisted away from the world of truth to the world of power and lies. The Jewish mystics say, "The world is wrong names." This is a profound understanding. All the names we use to describe our world are somehow wrong. It's like this: someone has washed all the jars, and the labels slipped off; now the right names can't be read or they've been re-pasted on the wrong jars.

Abstraction is the problem. Every word, even the most abstract, begins life as an image, but as words become mere words, the images die inside them

and all we are left with are the shells. The word *is*, for instance, once meant "to breathe." Being is breathing—how lovely.

Once words lose anchor in the sensual world, they drift inevitably toward the world of lies. It's not the fault of words; it's how they come between us and things. The word *abstract* means "to draw away"; our abstractions draw us away from the world. Then we forget their sensual origins. For every word once grew out of the five senses and everyday life. If you brush off the ignorant dirt that covers it, a word is a potato—with deep roots in the soil, and even eyes that grow underground.

If the images in our dreams are "sovereign in the mind," as Colette insisted, then the poor words we bring to them after we wake can be only second-best.

When I try to interpret my own dream, the attempt fails miserably. It's like trying to catch a glimpse of the back of your head in a mirror.

Who is Rabbi K de G?

Why is K de G's book written from back to front?

Why does K de G write about Shakespeare? What does it mean? What does it all, if anything, mean?

All such questions are tendrils of weeds. *But I couldn't help asking them.* They are how the delicate flower of the dream hides itself in prickles and thorns. *But I didn't know that at the time.* I was still struggling against Bregman dream by dream. He spoke of facilitating the dream. But I wanted him to interpret the dream.

In the manner of Freud, I could make my own free associations to the book of K de G. Its mix of wisdom and poetry, Genesis and Shakespeare, recalls the admirable writing of Dr. Avivah Zornberg, a brilliant Orthodox teacher with a Ph.D. in literature whom I heard lecture in Jerusalem the summer I met Colette. Dr. Z. has herself written a commentary on Genesis, which combines traditional reverence for the Bible with a wide range of literary references.<sup>10</sup>

So is Dr. Z. the prototype for the mysterious Rabbi K de G?

She mixes modern literature with respect for the ancient word. That is a very attractive sort of presentation for me, for others—one foot in the contemporary, the other in the ancient world, arms and legs stretched out wide.

But it's also easy to fall in that position.

We so much want the old truth and the new to match that we stretch and stretch, modifying the old words or reframing our new experience until sometimes something—truth—has to give.

This is the problem of all established religion. Old words stiffen into dead dogma. Fresh revelations don't fit old paradigms. We interpret and reinterpret to fit it all together until the words seem stretched out of shape.

Dreams, in particular, can be terribly irreverent. They challenge received wisdom. A dream offers private revelation, not public religion. A dream can offer a glimpse of life from an entirely unknown perspective, a lightning flash—of self-exposure.

Such clear-cut dreams are rare. The more run-of-the-mill dreams, the dreams most of us have—lost in the parking lot, looking for a purse or wallet, desperate to find a bathroom—these common dreams seem easy to dismiss.

But dreams offer a deceptive surface: we have to navigate very carefully to arrive at the true point of view of our dreams and what they are showing us about life. Actually, the more banal the dream, the more powerful a statement it can be.

The boring parking-lot dream conceals its intent because dream thinking is completely alien to waking consciousness. The dream hides its message in the obvious; it recycles images from waking, but the images aren't about waking. You need someone to sort the confusion. Bregman went for what he called the belly button: the cop was making fun of my bicycle—but I couldn't see why.

If understood rightly, a dream has a unique attitude toward our daylight experience—a destructive attitude, one might say.

Once I dreamed I was on my deathbed reciting my résumé. What an absurd image to wake me from the sleep of daily life.

Now, that was a distinct message, and if looked at from the correct angle, the point of view was bitterly ironic. That's clear when you examine how they made the dream, what the materials were they used, how they twisted them with a certain mockery.

If you ask, Who is "they"?—I understand.

Bregman often spoke of THEY when we first met. He'd ask, "Why did THEY send you that dream?" I chalked it up to his outlandish way of talking. It intrigued me, but it also gave my doubts ammunition.

What could he mean, "THEY"? Now that science sticks electrodes into the dream, how could anyone speak of THEY?

But that is how this postman spoke. I decided to humor him.

My research suggested that the ancients were on Bregman's side. The oldest cultures of the Near East that we know of—Sumer, Babylon, Egypt—saw

the dream as coming from outside the dreamer. This was the reigning theory almost everywhere you looked for thousands of years in the ancient world—from, say, 3000 B.C.E. in Sumer to the end of the cult of Asclepius in the sixth century C.E.\* Before the hiding of God's face, there was no trouble believing dreams came from a divine realm beyond the consciousness of the individual. The dream lived its own mysterious life, independent of the dreamer.

Bregman spoke from that ancient view. If you accept "THEY," even provisionally, then a dream can no longer be dismissed quite so easily as a chance by-product of the undigested egg foo yong I ate last night. Nor as the battlefield report of those two great Freudian antagonists the ego and the id. Nor as the random activation of neurons from an overactive hippocampus, as Hobson theorized.

No, the dream has its own right to exist. Every other theory, modern or ancient, implies that a dream is my product; that, mind or brain, I am the sole creator of my dreams.

That misses something subtle. Certain dreams don't feel that way. They seem too well made, too brilliant; they speak from a knowledge I don't have, of worlds I don't know and of perspectives I can barely grasp in waking consciousness. It is what Freud spoke of as "the uncanny," the strange knowledge dreams can have. They challenge too many of my assumptions to have come only from me.

In the ancient world, it was natural to speak of THEY who send the dream. THEY could be angels or demons, gods or goddesses; Enki or Apollo or Hades; the angel Jibril, who dictated the Koran to Muhammad; or the angel Gabriel, known in Hebrew as the "master of the dream." These supernatural dream masters had many names, but the common belief was that anything this beautifully made, this brilliant, complex, and powerful, must have come from a realm beyond the limits of the personal.

To the Greeks this seemed obvious. "Dreams" are demigods with wings who roost in a tree outside Hades. "Dream" has a body, walks around your house, stands at the head of your bed, reminds you you're asleep. You catch a glimpse of Dream stealing out of your chamber as you wake. The Greeks must have felt at one time that the dream is independently real.

\*In the temples of the physician-god Asclepius, the healing god appeared to the sick in dreams.

Now we think real only what we can see and touch.

We divide the world: brain versus mind, body versus soul, reality versus dream. We have no THEY.

**S**o, to ask Bregman's question: Why did THEY send me this dream of K de G?

Were THEY trying to help me write? Or chide me for my chutzpah? Did THEY want me to study the great blue book? Or remove it from the monitor and start typing?

THEY are very playful, these masters of the dream, and I couldn't solve this puzzle quickly. I could only live it.

In general, dreams present to the imagination the thorniest of philosophical issues: What is real? That is why Nietzsche traced the origin of all metaphysics to dreaming.<sup>2</sup>

The Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu asked, Do I dream of a butterfly or does the butterfly dream me? Is a dream real or less real than waking life? Surreal or unreal? The dream questions reality as much as reality questions the dream. I am open to these questions and want to stay open to them.

So I come back to live the images of K de G. These were my images, not Colette's, not anyone else's. I was entitled to my own quandary.

A blue book blocks the computer screen. That's where I do my writing. If the monitor represents my writing, the book gets in the way.

"I think yes the book is all the intellectual stuff that gets in the way. So pick up the fucking book and throw it out the window." My painter friend at the Vermont Studio Center hates books, believes devoutly that words and concepts are useless to him.

"Right," I say to my painter friend. "But I can't. And I don't. In the dream I'm fascinated with the book and also somehow the book comes from my father and there's some connection to my father."

"Or to the fathers," someone else at the table says. "The forefathers."

Yes, to the forefathers, to the ancestors, biblical and literary, Genesis and Shakespeare, the rabbis, the authors, the mentors—all of that. I am drawn to them.

It's not so easy to throw this fucking book out the window. It is way heavy. It carries the weight of my whole life.

**S**o, even though I think my painter friend might have a good point, I can't do it. I am just too fascinated with this book of K de G, with books in

general. Surely that fascination is good. Surely there must be a reason why THEY sent the giant blue book in a dream. Surely THEY want me to open the book and read it.

In my study, my desk is stacked with books about Genesis. (Sometimes they do block a view of the monitor and I have to shove them aside to type.) I have a tea-stained bookmark in *Visions of the Night*, Joel Covitz's translation and commentary on seventeenth-century Rabbi Shlomo Almoli's kabbalistic work on dreams. I am studying the Talmudic discussion of dreams, the so-called rabbinic dream book. I am digging into the history of the revelation dream. I also want to learn how and why it disappeared.

Before meeting Bregman in our regular session, I landed on a provisional interpretation of "K de G" that I found very pleasing. After so many lousy dreams of cops chasing me, at last THEY have sent me encouragement. THEY are showing me the book I am to write, a commentary on Genesis.

I even began to think I'd cracked the code of K de G. The G stood for *Genesis*, and the K for *Kamenetz*.

As it turned out, my celebration was premature. I didn't have a clue who THEY were or what THEY wanted to show me.

## Chapter 10

## YOU ARE A DEAD MAN

*Dumuzi and Abimelech*

To begin at the beginning of the revelation dream, I should go back further. For Genesis is not our oldest story of dreams.

There are much older stories from southern Iraq, where the Sumerians built their civilization over five thousand years ago, prospering on the agricultural plenty of the flood plain of the Tigris and Euphrates. They learned to build storehouses for grains, and towns and cities. They learned how to build tall towers of brick; the ziggurat of Ur is the prototype for the Tower of Babel. They also invented the wheeled chariot, prototype for Ezekiel's vision. Around 3400 B.C.E., they invented writing, inscribing clay tablets with a stylus—the writing we know as wedge-shape, or cuneiform.

Among the oldest cuneiform writings is the dream of Dumuzi, the shepherd king, culture hero, and god of Sumer.

*In ancient times . . . the shepherd lay down, he lay down to dream. He woke up—it was a dream! He shivered—it was sleep! He rubbed his eyes, he was terrified.*

Dumuzi tells his terrifying dream to his sister, Geshtin-anna:

*"A dream, my sister! A dream! In my dream, rushes were rising up for me. . . Tall trees in the forest were rising up together over me. Water was poured over my holy coals for me, the cover of my holy churn was being removed, my holy drinking cup was torn down from the peg where it hung, my shepherd's stick disappeared from me. . . The churns were lying on their side,*

*no milk was poured, the drinking cups were lying on their side, Dumuzi was dead, the sheepfold was haunted."<sup>1</sup>*

This is one of the world's oldest recorded dreams, and it's a nightmare. The shepherd stumbles through his former life and sees everything he owned broken, destroyed, or vanished. It's a dream of being exposed, the ancient ancestor of our modern nightmares of being stark naked in a classroom or business meeting.

Except Dumuzi's dream is worse: he sees the world from the point of view of his own death. No wonder he panics when he wakes. He cries out for his sister, the dream interpreter:

*"Bring, bring, bring my sister! Bring my Geshtin-anna, bring my sister! . . . Bring my wise woman, who knows the meanings of dreams, bring my sister! I will relate the dream to her."*

But Geshtin-anna offers no comfort:

*"My brother, your dream is not favorable, don't tell me any more of it!"* Reluctantly, she tells him that malevolent demons will destroy his life.

The people who inscribed this story on clay knew about dreams and their corrosive power to strip you of your old life and its pretensions, to show you the one thing you don't want to imagine, your own death. This is revelation with a sting: the Sumerians believed that dreams were implacable omens. A dream like this just can't be interpreted away easily.

Sumerian nobles also practiced dream incubation, deliberately cultivating dreams in sacred settings to receive visions and guidance from their gods and goddesses.

To incubate a dream, a very pious royal person would sleep in a ritual hut of reeds. There he could deliberately seek a dream to bring down a message from the divine realm. That's how the Sumerian Noah (Ziusudra), listening through the thin walls of his hut, overheard the gods decree a worldwide flood.

"Evidently," writes Dr. Curtiss Hoffman, a student of dreams in the ancient Near East, "the Sumerians made a distinction between clear dreams which require proper preparation and obscure symbolic dreams which come to everyone else."<sup>2</sup>

In my obscure symbolic dream of K de G, every word, every letter, demands interpretation. I play both parts: dreamer and interpreter, brother and sister, Dumuzi and Geshtin-anna.

In the one-hundredth year of our Freud, this is the game we love to play with our dreams. We want to solve the dream puzzle on our own. Despite all the debunking of Freud in recent years, he has not been dislodged from my mind. His beard, his cigar, his couch—they still haunt me. He shapes how we think about thinking. He's the interior designer of my mind: here's the unconscious, there's the ego, this is the id. To think about dreams without him is impossible. My whole effort to trace the history of interpretation would lead inevitably to him, but I did not know how I would get past him.

Suppose, though, as Bregman insisted, dreams do come from a THEY. Suppose all the details—the big thick book, the “K de G,” Shakespeare, Genesis—are bait to mock the proud intellect.

Yet this clever mouse goes for the cheese every time, because I, like everyone else, buy into a central idea in Western culture about dreams, an idea Freud did so much to revive.

Dreams are meant to be interpreted.

This idea did not begin with Freud, but lodged itself much earlier in the mind of the West, where my dream pointed: the book of Genesis.

For that reason, although the Sumerian dream stories are oldest, and Homer could claim some rivalry in the matter, Genesis remains our primordial dream book in the West.

Not that we read actual dream reports in Genesis, any more than in the clay tablets of Sumer. We read dream stories. But for millennia these stories framed how we think about dreams—and every subsequent theory answers to them.

Genesis gave us the promise of revelation, and initiated the tangled history of our response to dreams.

Genesis also bequeathed us those two great heroes of the dream, father and son, Jacob and Joseph.

Moreover, hidden in Genesis are three very usable patterns for the revelation dream. I call them the warning dream, the essential image dream, and the dream journey. But we have seemingly forgotten these gifts.

In fact, the very first dream in Genesis is one most of us have forgotten.

That may be because the Bible's very first dream implies the outlook I had so much difficulty accepting from Bregman. An outlook that sounds quaint, odd, superstitious, or credulous.

**W**here does the word “dream” first appear in the Genesis narrative? We read of no dreams in Eden, for Eden is itself a giant dream, where Adam

and Eve and God and talking serpents mingle freely; where, with odd surrealism, the voice of God can be heard *walking* in the cool of day.

No dreams enter the biblical story line until human beings have lost all innocence, gone through the flood, and screwed things up again with the Tower of Babel. God communicates to Adam and Eve, to Noah and Abraham, by voice.\*

The first dream in Genesis comes as an incident in Abraham's story. He has received his call from God and is on his way to Canaan with his wife, Sarah. In the southern desert, he has a run in with a petty king, Abimelech.

“Sarah is my sister,” Abraham tells him. He fears that Abimelech will take his wife, which is exactly what happens. But that night, God appears to Abimelech in a dream and says, “You are a dead man, because of the woman whom you have taken; for she is a man's wife.”

Abimelech defends himself: “Didn't he say, She is my sister? And she even she herself said, He is my brother. In integrity of heart and innocence of hands have I done this.”

God says, “Yes I know you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her. Now therefore restore the man his wife for he is a prophet and shall pray for you, and you will live. If you don't restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours” (Gen. 20:1–6).

The story assumes quite casually that God warns people in dreams. That's a belief ancient Israel shared with the entire Near East—with Sumer, Babylon, and Egypt—and with ancient Greece as well. We find this in literary form in the tales of Gilgamesh, the book of Genesis, and the Iliad and Odyssey of Homer. To the skeptical mind it seems all too simple and very unlikely. To the heart it has implications that challenge everything we think is real.

The first hour, Bregman made clear that he is an ancient, too. He told me, “A dream is a net cast by the divine to bring us back to ourselves.”

**G**enesis is a book woven of many strands, with tales from different eras redacted by later hands. Abimelech's tale may belong to an older strand of oral legends.

In the ancient Near East, it seemed obvious that dreams can be divine messages. In the information age, Dr. Crick says dreams are only spam.

\*In Genesis 15, the Lord speaks to Abram in a “vision” and again after an overpowering sleep, but the word *dream* is not used.

Perhaps our dreams seem like "garbage" because we don't show them the proper respect. Perhaps if we really want to hear God speak to us in dreams, we would have to sleep as the Sumerians did, in a reed hut open to the wind, or at least in a tent in the wilderness, far from the harsh static of civilization. Maybe then we'd get a clear transmission into our busy minds through our thick skulls.

Our dreams are rarely clear warnings like Abimelech's. We aren't easily granted such revelations. Few would claim to hear God speaking directly in sleep. (Even my friend David could not remember what God said to him.)

Those who do believe that God speaks to them in dreams are usually classified in psychiatric categories. It would be crazy to take dreams that seriously, to take them as warning messages from God, as Bregman did.

Wouldn't it?

Even if we wanted to believe it possible, our dreams are commonly muddy and confusing. We tend to dismiss their warnings if we hear them at all, or we forget them easily. If a dream breaks through our indifference or amnesia and scares us to death, then, like Dumuzi, we cry out—for a therapist: Dr. Geshtin-anna. "Bring my sister! Bring my wise woman, who knows the meanings of dreams, bring my sister! I will relate the dream to her."

Suppose, though, the problem isn't with the dream, but with us. Suppose dreams try to scare us because we are so stubborn. Our dreams may know our faults better than we do and try to provoke us until we admit what's wrong, the way the motorcycle cop tried to tease me about the bicycle.

Our dreams tease us and bait us and humble us with their red herrings and their blue cheese, their embellishments, their K de G, their Cleopatra—but we don't get the joke.

If I do not feel that a dream can warn me, I cannot change my life as Abimelech did—before it is too late.

Yet I knew for a fact that dreams had changed me. At two different points in my life, dreams fished me from the waters of oblivion, jerked me up into consciousness sputtering like a man nearly drowned.

True, I did not hear God speak in my dreams as Abimelech did. But they brought me twice to the borderland of life and death. Once I saw my dead grandfather, and he gave me courage; another time I heard from my mother after her death. These were eerie, lucid dreams, where you know that what you are seeing is impossible but you see it anyway. My dead ones spoke to me in the dream as though very much alive, though I also knew very clearly that they were not. I've never forgotten what they told me.<sup>3</sup>

To a scientist looking at the brain level, these dreams may have been, as the Nobel laureate biologist Sir Francis Crick proposed, no more than the "recycling of neuronal garbage." But that's not how they felt in my life.

How did Abimelech feel when he heard, "You are a dead man"?

Certain dreams carry a grain of terror. During the first year of seeing Bregman, I would occasionally have out-and-out nightmares.

My tennis shoe sticks to an icy sidewalk: I leave behind five bleeding toe stumps. A sadist surgeon performs a gruesome operation while I watch in horror. Skinheads in a London bar threaten me and corner me in an alley; I wake screaming. Dangerous criminals chase me through city streets; I'm fearful, I'm in panic. But if these are warnings, I don't yet understand what's being revealed.

Dumuzi lives in a Sumerian realm of implacable and relentless demons; he cannot escape his doom. Abimelech's dream comes in a new moral framework, where the terror is not absolute, where there is hope for justice. It's possible for Abimelech to avoid his fate, but only if he changes his behavior. His dream comes as a warning, not a death sentence.

Bregman, likewise, sought to facilitate the warning . . . so you can change the behavior. To do that, he had to persuade you to face what the dream is trying to show you. You have to face "the fact of the dream."

The first revelation dream in Genesis is a pointed warning, full of fear. The second is a promise: Jacob's ladder is the most important dream story in the West.

## Chapter 11

## JACOB, THE HERO OF THE REVELATION DREAM

Jacob's dream of the ladder is loved by mystics, by dreaming children, and by anyone with a dreamer's soul. It makes a promise to us all.

At the top of the ladder, God tells the dreamer something we'd all want to hear if we could only believe it: "I am with you . . . and I will be with you where you go. . . . I will take you where you are going . . . I will not leave you."

If Abimelech's warning dream comes with fear, the promise dream shows the face of love.

Jacob receives a promise rooted in a special knowledge: he sees a whole heavenly world revealed. Yet such knowledge is difficult to live with. Jacob is one of the most human figures in the Bible. We see in the story of the dream and its aftermath how revelation feels, how Jacob struggles with its implications, how he loses grasp of it.

He is on the run from his past. Under the influence of his mother, he has just deceived his father and cheated his brother. He flees the consequences, sleeps out in the wild, alone and frightened, his head on a heap of rocks.

A powerful painting in the Prado by José de Ribera pictures Jacob as a strong young man with a beard, with his eyes shut, sleeping on the ground. Ribera's Jacob is so full of life and youth, vigorous flesh and blood, that you feel you could touch him. But the angels in the dream are limned in a very bright yellow, against a white sky, so they barely can be seen.

Ribera vividly paints two worlds meeting, one substantial and grounded, the other etched in air.

Jacob dreams of a ladder between earth and heaven, angels walking down it. He sees God at the top. What face of God he sees we do not know. The

story avoids the issue by emphasizing God's voice. God promises Jacob and his descendants, "I will be with you."

Seeing is believing; seeing is knowing. Isn't this exactly the seeing Moses yearned for when he asked to see God's face, the glory the chariot riders sought in their visualizations? Of all the characters in Genesis, only Jacob seems to see God, and when he wakes from this dream, he looks around in awe. The very rocks he laid his head on, the ground at his feet—all have been transformed. "How awesome is this place," he says, for this is the place of God.

For the moment, the dream has transformed his reality instead of the other way around.

His words capture the uncanny quality of waking from a revelation dream in the light of its truth. The revelation of an entire new reality is a knowledge different from the secondhand knowledge in books. In English we don't make the distinction generally, but in Greek there is a separate word for direct knowledge: *gnosis*.



Jacob's dream gnosis sets him on the path that will eventually change everything about his life, even his name.

While I demanded interpretation from Bregman, Jacob does not interpret his dream. Instead the dream interprets him.

That is, the dream asserts through powerful images a reality more real than the ground on which Jacob rests. That reality challenges the ordinary sense of what is real by making vivid the existence of another realm of consciousness.

The dream is not only real; it alters Jacob's reality. That is why Jacob says, "How awesome is this place." Certainly, this stony ground where he lay his head did not appear awesome before the dream. What's changed is his gnosis: he now knows what he "didn't know" before; he has seen the realm of the invisible.

Jacob's initial response of awe feels right. It suggests Freud has everything backward when he writes, "Dreams are derived from the past in every sense."<sup>1</sup> The ladder dream doesn't come to tell Jacob something about his past. It comes from the future. Dreams are not the fruit of reality, but the stem.

Such dreams demand a response different from mere interpretation, if interpretation means recalling events or memories tied to the dream, as Freud suggests. Bregman would show me a different way to respond, but it did not come easily.

The promise of a dream is difficult to realize. The solid earth gives way reluctantly to the insubstantial etching of a dream. The idea that a dream comes from a divine realm—from a THEY, as Bregman put it—is too challenging, too strange and fantastic, too contradictory with respect to all we think of as real, to be easily accepted. We have to do a lot of work to accept the fact of the dream. Keeping faith, abiding with the dream, not interpreting it—this is the path Jacob eventually took, but not without a hard struggle.

He stumbles often. Jacob is very much flesh and blood, just as Ribera painted him—a man of doubts and conflicts. He is very human to us, with all his flaws and pain. He struggles greatly between his earthiness and his soulfulness. We can identify with him as he wakes in awe, and identify again as he falls away from the promise of the dream, in withdrawal and retreat. I could identify with him in my struggles with my own dreams, which I tried to interpret in practical terms, as if the ladder in Jacob's dream had been purchased the day before at the hardware store.

Jacob builds an altar at his dreaming spot. But then he makes a strange, halfhearted vow: if God will protect me, I will do this and that in return. Gnosis yields to calculation. He turns a brilliant promise into a mere bar-

gain. As the rabbinic commentators note: "Jacob vowed and lost."<sup>2</sup> He made a vow he need not have made.

Because he doubts his dream, Jacob will strive with those of a similarly pragmatic cast of mind, like his father-in-law, Laban. He must wrestle with himself and his doubts, and it's not until he wrestles the angel that Jacob acquires the name Israel, signaling his real transformation. *Jacob* means "the heel"; he grabbed his brother Esau's heel in the womb. Jacob remains a heel to his father and brother, and this is his main predicament in life. But *Israel* takes all his struggling to a spiritual level, for it means "one who contends with the divine," and that is the true situation of his soul.

Part Jacob and part Israel, we live halfway between the predicaments of waking life and the promise of our dreams, and we have difficulty moving from one to the other.

It's naive to think one dream can instantly change the mental habits of a lifetime, the carefully constructed mask of the outer personality. Nor can the images of the dream, however sovereign, withstand the barrage of doubts that follow inevitably when we wake. We return from the clarity of the dream to the confusion of life, from the clarity of image to the welter of words. To reorient oneself completely to a revelation dream would require major changes in personal psychology, if the narrative that follows Jacob's dream is any indication. Jacob knows that the place he dreamed is awesome, yet he can't seem to stay in this place of awe. His wavering is something mystical teachers have always understood. As Rabbi Kalonymus Shapira wrote in *Conscious Community*, "When we are truly moved and awake, we understand, without any conscious effort, that God's presence extends from the unreachable heights right down to us."

"In our own way, in this elevated emotional state, we understand how exquisite is the moment."

But, "it is difficult to stay on this level and hold on to this state of awareness."<sup>3</sup>

Shapira, the last great Hasidic master of Poland, died tragically in a concentration camp. He was a devoted educator who lived near Warsaw and wanted to raise the spiritual level of people who had to balance practical life with a life of the soul.

In *Conscious Community* he writes of the dilemma of ordinary people who might attain very high levels of consciousness in their meditations, but who also must then return to the business of daily life. We let go of the moment of revelation, the rebbe writes, for two reasons:

*First stress and sadness crop up and this causes emotional contraction. Second, the habitual mind returns, looking for descriptions and explanations. This mental level cannot contain the higher dimensions of thought. It is pointless to try to decipher this experience in your normal state of mind.<sup>4</sup>*

To illustrate the idea, the rebbe tells a parable of a dream:

*A pauper, God help him, goes door to door, begging. He dreams one night he has become the king, but in the morning he is upset and he cries: "Just to keep my family alive, I have to beg door to door. Now that I am promoted to king, the whole royal entourage is dependent on me. How will I ever have the strength to beg all over the world?"*

*He views his kingship through the prism of his poverty. He supposes that he will have to support the army by begging, just as he supports his family now. He cannot transcend his poverty long enough to realize that as king, his whole means of sustenance will be qualitatively different.<sup>5</sup>*

The rebbe uses the parable of the pauper's dream to explain how we lose grasp of the moment of enlightenment. The difficulty of holding on to an inner vision in the face of the pressing demands of mundane daily life applies not just to individuals, but to communities and whole traditions. Not only have we lost the memory of last night's dream; our culture has lost the promise of the ladder. We need a way to work with dreams that come by night, so as to keep their promise in our days.

That is why whenever I asked him to interpret, Bregman answered that he was "facilitating" the dream instead. He asked me to do "homework," which means: to visualize key images in the dream, to keep them alive hourly in consciousness. This homework recalled the imaginal exercises of Colette, though with additional power, because the images, after all, came out of my own dreams. Through homework my dreams became meditations exactly tailored to my spiritual condition.

Sometimes these homework images were very difficult and challenging: they touched on profound feelings and stirred up the depths. In other cases the dream was really a warning, only I couldn't feel it because I was too numb.

In fact, K de G proved to be a warning dream—not as dire as Abimelech's, but a warning all the same. If I had the strength to accept it.

Jacob's story also shows him struggling along the path of living with and from his dreams.

But this is not the main path of the biblical tradition. There is an inner and outer history of dreams: the history of our dreams, and the history of how they are received. That outer history begins with Joseph, the paragon of all dream interpreters.

## Chapter 17

## SIGMUND AND IRMA

*The Secret of Dreams Revealed*

**G**enesis is the first great dream book of the West. *The Interpretation of Dreams*, by Sigmund Freud, is the second. But like Genesis, Freud's book proves ambivalent about dreams.

Freud is the father of the modern dream, and like any pioneer, he made mistakes. But it should never be forgotten that he opened the territory and put the unconscious on the map.

He was so confident about the significance of his dream book that he had the publisher deliberately alter the date of publication on the title page from 1899 to 1900 so as to dramatically mark a new era. In a letter to his best friend Wilhelm Fliess, he shared a fantasy of a marble tablet at Bellevue, the house where one night he had a most significant "specimen dream," the dream of Irma.<sup>1</sup> The tablet read:

In This House, on July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1895  
the Secret of Dreams was Revealed  
to Dr. Sigm. Freud

Freud's pride and audacity are extraordinary. To discover "the Secret of Dreams," and to compose a book around it! He called it simply *Die Traumdeutung* ("The interpretation of dreams"). He was consciously setting himself up in competition with all the hundreds of dream books of the exact same title through the millennia, in Greek and Latin, Arabic and Hebrew. The *Oneirocriticon* of Artemidorus is one—and Rabbi Almoli's *Pitron Chalomot* another.

Freud cites Artemidorus and knew of Almoli's sixteenth-century kabbalistic work, but he was certain his book would sweep its predecessors aside by establishing dream interpretation once and for all on a scientific basis.

Fittingly for such an important project, he composed the book very carefully. The opening chapter, he wrote to Fliess, is like a walk in a dense woods. The woods are thick with theories of the dream, fighting for the light. He points out each idea, literary or scientific; discusses its merits and its failings; guides us past them all, leaving us almost in despair that the truth will ever come out of such a dark tangle of contradictory opinions and evidence.

But when we turn the page to a new chapter, we come to "[a] cavernous defile through which I lead my readers—my specimen dream with its peculiarities, its details, its indiscretions and its bad jokes."<sup>3</sup>

This is the "specimen dream" of Irma. With it, we have left the woods. "We find ourselves in the full daylight of a sudden discovery."<sup>4</sup>

Freud carefully fills in the immediate background. He had been treating Irma for "hysterical anxiety." But they broke the treatment off because she refused Freud's proposed solution.<sup>5</sup>

The morning before the dream, his friend and fellow physician Otto pays a visit. Otto has just recently seen Irma's family. "I asked him how he had found her and he answered: 'She's better, but not quite well.' I was conscious that my friend Otto's words, or the tone in which he spoke them, annoyed me."

To make matters worse, Freud's wife is planning a party, and she has invited Irma. With these thoughts in mind, that night Freud dreams:

*Dream of July 23–24, 1895*

*A large hall—numerous guests, whom we were receiving. —Among them was Irma. I at once took her on one side as though to answer her letter and to reproach her for not having accepted my "solution" yet. I said to her: "If you still get pains, it's really only your fault." She replied: If you only knew what pains I've got now in my throat and stomach and abdomen—it's choking me. I was alarmed and looked at her. She looked pale and puffy. I thought to myself that after all I must be missing some organic trouble. I took her to the window and looked down her throat and she showed signs of recalcitrance like women with artificial dentures. I thought to myself that there was really no need for her to do that. . . . She then opened her mouth properly and on the right I found a big white patch; at another place I saw extensive whitish grey scabs.<sup>6</sup>*

Now he calls in several colleagues to examine Irma in turn: a senior colleague identified as "Dr. M." also his "friend Otto" and his "friend Leopold" (both physicians and former associates of his). Dr. M.'s diagnosis confirms Freud's; however, he makes very strange comments. Then we learn that Otto has given her an injection of a concoction of chemicals, "a preparation of propyl, propyl... propionic acid... trimethylamin."

In his presentation, Freud emphasizes the strangeness of the manifest or surface content of the dream.<sup>7</sup> "No one who had only read the preamble and the content of the dream itself could have the slightest notion of what the dream meant. I myself had no notion. I was astonished at the symptoms of which Irma complained to me." The second part of the dream seems to him even more inscrutable: "Toward its end the dream seemed to me to be more obscure and compressed than it was at the beginning."<sup>8</sup>

Overall, Freud sees the dream as a difficult puzzle to be solved, like Pharaoh's dreams. His first step is to double up the dream into manifest and latent.

The manifest dream is simply the dream as reported by the dreamer, with all its images and incidents. But hidden below the surface, Freud believed, is the latent dream, which expresses an unconscious wish. Only the latent dream will reveal "the Secret."

Is this doubling into manifest and latent a real feature of dreams, or an artifact of the act of interpretation? In her signal essay "Against Interpretation," Susan Sontag notes that interpretation "presupposes a discrepancy between the clear meaning of the text and the demands of (later) readers. It seeks to resolve that discrepancy. The situation is that for some reason a text has become unacceptable; yet it cannot be discarded."<sup>9</sup>

This critique applies to Freud. His dream of Irma seems unacceptable at face value because, he claims, it makes no sense to him. Therefore, interpretation must uncover the latent dream.

To Freud, "The dream which the dreamer recalls, the 'manifest dream,' does not picture the real wish, but masks it. The essential cause of the dream, the trigger which sets the process in motion, is the hidden, unacceptable wish."<sup>10</sup>

Freud spoke of the dream work as the unconscious process of confecting the manifest dream out of the latent. Interpretation undoes the dream work to uncover the latent dream and its wishes.

The dream work models for him the workings of the unconscious. Neurotic symptoms, he argues, are like dreams: both make no sense at the mani-

fest level but can be explained as the distorted expression of a hidden wish. The secrets of the dream are the secrets of the unconscious.

Freud looked forward to our own time, when it would be possible to investigate the dream in the laboratory the way Dr. Hobson and Dr. Kahn do, directly measuring changes in brain activity during dreams. Lacking EEGs and PET scans, he saw the dream as nonetheless providing indirect evidence of brain processes that ultimately would be understood better, but for now could be described as psychic processes—namely, the ego censoring unacceptable wishes and urges. In the meantime, he also endeavored to ground dreams on as scientific a basis as he could by studiously tying the dream back to verifiable events in the past.

In keeping with this plan, Freud insists that "a dream begins with the event of the previous day that set it in motion."<sup>11</sup> "This view is confirmed by every dream I look into whether my own or anyone else's."<sup>12</sup> (This view has not, in fact, been confirmed.)

Freud also uncovers more distant memories in dreams. The important point for him is to relate every event in the dream to a memory, near or far. For Freud, a dream event has no immediate reality of its own, but only insofar as it recalls a memory or registers the pressures and distortions of one of his theorized psychic forces, such as repression.

Freud, in a loose way, is often compared with Joseph, a comparison he slyly encourages in his landmark book. (Joseph the interpreter, of course; not Joseph the dreamer.) Yet Freud, as a "firm atheist," has no interest in Joseph's statement that interpretation comes from God and is "not in me." Instead, Freud asserts that the ultimate authority is science.

For Joseph, dreams are always messages about the future, but not so for Freud. "And the value of dreams for giving us knowledge of the future?" he writes at the end of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. "There is of course no question of that. It would be truer to say instead that they give us knowledge of the past. For dreams are derived from the past in every sense."<sup>13</sup>

Freud is closer to the spirit of his rabbinic predecessors than he is to that pillar of faith Joseph. Scholar Ken Frieden argues that Freud's dream theory owes a lot to the rabbis.<sup>14</sup>

He clearly subscribes to Rabbi Hisda's idea that "a dream uninterpreted is a letter unread," that a dream is essentially a text. His focus on words rather than image is very striking in many of his dream analyses.

Also, his style of dream analysis closely follows the style of rabbinic midrash. The rabbis took considerable freedom with a biblical verse. Instead

of commenting on it as a whole, as we might do, they often took the verse out of context and broke it into small phrases and responded piece by piece, or *ad locum*.

This is exactly parallel to Freud's procedure with the images in dreams. "I put the dream before [the patient] cut up into pieces." The dream is considered *en détail* (in detail), he says, not "*en masse*." He then asked his patients to free-associate to the pieces, further removing the interpretation from the original context of the dream. The patient gives a series of associations to each piece, which Freud believed corresponded to the "background thoughts" of that particular part of the dream.<sup>15</sup>

Freud did not associate his *ad locum* method with midrash, which it so closely resembles. To give his interpretive approach a scientific air, he deliberately uses terminology from chemistry, such as "the day residue" for memories that lie at the bottom of the dream like substrate in a test tube. He sees himself performing analytical chemistry on the strange and bizarre material of the dream, sorting out the elemental substances out of which it was composed. This shows his general tendency of viewing the dream as inscrutable and bizarre, a baffling mixture that required clever operations to be sorted out.

I once tried the same Freudian chemistry with those mysterious letters "K de G" to determine where they came from, what portion of my daylight hours they emerged from.

One day it clicked. I belong to a marching society in New Orleans, a Mardi Gras krewe—the Krewe de Jieux (the crew of Jews). Every year we parade on foot through the streets of the French Quarter in absurd costumes with exaggerated rubber body parts. We give out bagels we have decorated by hand. We bake the bagels hard, paint them gold or silver, then sprinkle glue and glitter. "Krewe de Jieux" is too long to fit on a bagel, though.

I always paint on mine "K de J."

So if Freud's approach is right, the great rabbi of my dream was once blue glitter on a bagel.

Freud's method of free association is very fertile and in itself can actually enhance the power of the dream, but only if it does not distract from the main point.

Through free association, every dream accumulates a huge raft of memories. If you can bring your whole life into the dream, the dream can move your whole life. Bregman follows Freud in seeking associations, but for a different purpose.

The goal of Freud's free association is to find a path out of the manifest dream to the latent dream. Critics today, including William Domhoff, ask why a free association conducted after the dream should necessarily lead to the thoughts that produced the dream.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, however, Freud does not always use free association, because in many cases—forty-seven in all—he interprets his own dreams. In these cases, he searches his memory for the background thoughts so as to theorize about the hidden wish that he thinks lies at the bottom of every dream.

Freud assumes that the dreamer creates the dream down to the smallest detail and does so to serve his own egotistical interests. Discussing Irma's pains in her throat and abdomen, for instance, Freud asks, "I wondered why I decided upon this choice of symptoms in the dream."<sup>16</sup>

Freud answers that these odd physical symptoms express his wish to be exonerated. If she is physically ill, it's not his fault if Irma is "not quite well," as Otto had said that morning, because Freud is not treating her for an organic illness, only for hysteria. His dream, he concludes, expresses a hidden wish that gets Freud off the hook.

He admits: "I had a sense of awkwardness at having invented such a severe illness for Irma simply in order to clear myself. It looked so cruel." He invents the illness; his ego is the sole proprietor of his dream. The logic of Freud's charming rhetoric is that the more dastardly and egotistical his confession, the more valid his theory of repression seems. After all, why repress a wish unless it is nasty or embarrassing?

Freud now analyzes the second part of the dream: "I at once called in Dr. M. and he repeated the examination and confirmed it." Otto and a third doctor also examine Irma. All the doctors agree: she has an organic illness.

The dream gets "more obscure and compressed," says Freud; the doctors say and do absurd things. Dr. M. says not to worry, dysentery will cure Irma's white patches. Otto confesses he gave Irma that weird concoction of chemicals. Propyls . . . propionic acid . . . trimethylamin. Freud's wish to be safe from criticism has already been fulfilled, so why, Freud asks, does the dream continue?

Freud must necessarily uncover a second wish.

It is revenge on Dr. M. and on his "friend Otto" for annoying him. Again the dream is solely Freud's product: he has both doctors spout nonsense to humiliate themselves.

Freud writes with satisfaction, "When the work of interpretation has been completed, we perceive that the dream is the fulfillment of a wish."<sup>17</sup> Exoneration in part one, revenge in part two. With that, we have "the Secret of Dreams . . . Revealed." The puzzle is solved.

Or is it? Suppose the dream is not so bizarre. Suppose Freud was wrong, right from the start, about his "specimen dream."

## Chapter 18

### THE TWO BELLY BUTTONS

To approach Freud's dream as Marc Bregman would, you would not be ranging far and wide for obscure memories or digging for hidden wishes. You would not suppose there is a latent dream. Instead, the meaning of the dream—the white spots on Irma's throat, the doctors spouting nonsense—appears right on the surface.

Nor would you break the dream into fragments, *ad locum*, or free-associate from them. Those interpretive procedures, however wonderful for creating imaginative elaboration, would tend to destroy the wholeness—the gestalt—of the dream and take you further and further from its intention.

Instead, the manifest dream is clarified to deliver its message. The noise is reduced so the signal can come through. The dream is not the distorted product of a dream censor's struggle to conceal hidden wishes of the dreamer. Therefore, it doesn't necessarily require extensive free association just to uncover its secret. The meaning is often right on the surface even if the dreamer is the last one to see it.

The direct power of Bregman's work derives in part from his simply taking the dream seriously at the manifest level.

The dream is not a creation of the dreamer. It's a blunt message, like Abimelech's dream, that wants to be heard, though the dreamer doesn't always want to hear it. Facilitating the dream means breaking through the clutter of details, looking for wholes (gestalts), not parts (*ad locum*).

The question becomes, Who is Irma, and what is she trying to tell Freud in-the-dream?

Freud assumes, without question, that Irma in his specimen dream refers to Irma in real life.

It's a subtle error. Freud sees Irma, so he thinks the dream is about Irma the patient.

It's not necessarily true that Irma in the dream is the same as Irma the patient, though Freud especially insists on it because he claims that most dreams come from the events of the preceding day.

Who is Irma-in-the-dream, or "Irma" for short? Who is "Freud" for that matter?

Within the precincts of his dream, the character "Freud" is not necessarily bound to behave as the very accomplished physician and psychoanalyst Freud knows himself to be in waking life. Dream-Freud has more freedom of choice than that.

"Irma" tells "Freud" that he ignores her pain. "Freud's" response seems logical to Freud, but to Marc Bregman it is a highly significant error, and the "belly button" of the dream.

Freud, interestingly, uses the same term. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* he writes, "There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable—a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown."<sup>1</sup>

He elaborates on "navel" on another page of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. "There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure. This is because we become aware during the work of interpretation that at that point there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unraveled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown."<sup>2</sup>

Freud's navel and Bregman's belly button are not the same. Freud's navel is the dead end of the elaboration of free associations, whereas for Bregman it is the main point of the dream.

By "the unknown" Freud means that the net of possible associations to any given point in the dream—the "tangle of dream-thoughts"—is so complicated that the recondite meanings can no longer usefully be tracked down. Freud locates the navel of the Irma dream in a very different spot than Bregman. The navel is Irma's "recalcitrance" when her throat is examined, which leads Freud to recall a second patient who also suffered from symptoms of hysterical choking. This speculation in turn, Freud writes, leads too far afield for him to continue to trace it out. Therefore, he's arrived at the end point or navel.

For Freud, the navel of the dream is where you give up interpreting. But for Bregman, the belly button is the most important part of the dream because it leads to a choice that requires feeling.

When dream-Irma says to him, "I am choking," dream-Freud has the choice of responding with feeling. But he does not allow himself to feel. There's an emotional blank spot.

This numbness can be found in many of Freud's dreams.

"Irma" is saying, You ignore my pain—you are choking me—you are cutting me off.

What part of "I am choking" does "Freud" not understand? Yet he doesn't take "Irma's" complaint to heart. He can't respond in the dream as a human being.

"Freud's" response is to look down her throat. If you think of this as two human beings trying to talk about their feelings, then "Freud's" response borders on the insane. But he sees it all backward:

"I took her to the window and looked down her throat and she showed signs of recalcitrance like women with artificial dentures. I thought to myself that there was really no need for her to do that."

"Freud" is puzzled that she resists. He doesn't get the irony. She won't open her throat. But he won't open his eyes. The meaning is manifest, not latent. The dream does not fulfill a wish; it holds up a mirror to his own behavior.

"Irma" comes to him with her pain. But to Freud, "Irma seemed to me foolish because she had not accepted my solution." In a footnote to this he adds, "I was forced to admit to myself that I was not treating either Irma or my wife very kindly in this dream; but it should be observed by way of excuse that I was measuring them both by the standard of the good and amenable patient."<sup>3</sup>

"Good and amenable." But "amenable" means taking the doctor's advice. (Even if, as he admits in the footnote, it is sometimes at the cost of his patient's life.) Good—to Freud—is amenable.

Good is what is good to Dr. Sigmund Freud, a male physician of the Viennese high bourgeoisie with a superior attitude toward his wife, wives, women, patients, especially women patients.

But my point is not only feminist; Freud has received his drubbing on this point at better hands than mine. The point is that most dreamers make the same mistake, at least in the early stage of doing the dream work. It's what I kept doing with my dream of K de G. For Bregman this defines a first stage of dream work: what's good in the dream is bad, and what's bad is good.<sup>4</sup> Freud is clearly such a stage-one dreamer, though that's not surprising. Most of us naturally are.

"Irma" represents a voice Freud needs to hear and know. She feels deeply, and she carries deep feeling. But he misses the opportunity. Instead "Irma" is suppressed, ignored, and condescended to.

"I at once took her on one side . . . to reproach her for not having accepted my 'solution' yet. I said to her: 'If you still get pains, it's really only your fault.' Freud admits, with some hesitation, that he may well have said these words to Irma in waking life.<sup>5</sup>

The dream tries to warn him against the extreme arrogance of such statements and offers him an opportunity to respond in a different way to "Irma" than he responded to Irma the patient. Instead of examining her throat, he is being asked to examine his life. This is a warning dream, like the first dream in Genesis, Abimelech's.

All of this is manifest content. It is right on the surface. Hidden in the obvious. All you need to do to see it is to strip away the preconception that "Irma" deserves the behavior she's receiving in the dream and that Freud-in-the-dream is required to respond purely as a physician.

That is, you have to strip away the professional arrogance of Dr. Freud. Then it's plain as day. Freud can't see it because he has a blind spot. He can't see "Irma" as a person because he can see himself in his dreams only as a doctor, an authority of some kind. This need to be always authoritative motivated Freud throughout his life, a clear pattern in many of Freud's dreams recounted in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

The so-called recalcitrance of "Irma" is his projection. It's "Freud" who resists her. Freud-in-the-dream misses an opportunity to be warned, and to change. When "Freud" fails "Irma's" challenge, the dream mocks his pretentiousness by sending in the clowns, those doctors with their silly diagnoses.

This is Bregman's explanation for the second part of the dream. Once "Freud" fails the moment with "Irma," the story goes haywire.

Marc Bregman told me, "You can trace a dream back to the point where you make a mistake: at that point everything goes to shit. Basically you can completely change your dreams just by being a good student. If you do the right thing, no matter how hard it is, if you do exactly what they tell you, you will grow."

The clownish doctors mirror Freud's own pomposity, making fun of him the way the cop in my dream made fun of my bicycle. But Freud doesn't get it any more than I did. You usually need someone else to show you your own blind spot.

Yet "Irma" continues to haunt Freud. Her voice resonates throughout *The Interpretation of Dreams*; the whole book is structured around his interpretation of this "specimen dream." It receives more attention than any other,

referred to in twenty separate passages apart from the chapter devoted to it. Remove "Irma," and the book loses its hidden muse.

Dream-Irma's voice secretly works on him while he artfully dances away from her with his dazzling arguments, charming apologies, and brilliant excuses. His interpretation allows him to ignore the real demand for change that she presents. In this sense Freud is also carrying out an amelioration of the dream. The real accusation of the dream is never faced or even heard.

True, in the course of his explanations he confesses to many dastardly egotistical motivations, but only in the wry manner of a sophisticated man of affairs.<sup>6</sup> He winks and nods to the reader, saying, in effect, "You, too, my good fellow, would do the same in my position." Irony, condescension, humor, charm—these are literary tools, but they are also how the ego blocks the door of the dream. The written word of interpretation triumphs over the "living word" of Irma. Instead of a secret being "revealed," a dream is ameliorated. Freud does not feel any call to change. He will not change: he is going to be, always, Dr. Freud, the revealer of secrets. In and out of the dream.

Who "Irma" is and what she might further teach Freud become more apparent if you apply Bregman's approach to look at other dreams, as we will see. But Freud himself never gets there. Instead, "Irma" will always be just a "female patient," and Freud feels entirely justified in shutting her up, lecturing her, peering down her throat.

Then, to make things worse, he hauls her into his book, where she gets to be a specimen. Dr. Freud the interpreter adds a self-justifying interpretation that doesn't deal with the surface of the dream at all, but instead imagines hidden wishes shaping the dream. A third layer is packed around that: the entire superstructure of his dream theory, with its initial division of latent and manifest, that takes us to increasingly abstract considerations of psychic forces. Freud is very good at describing the id, the ego, the dream censor, the dream work, repression, distortion—so much so that we still use such terms, though their scientific shelf date has expired. But all these ideas take him further and further from hearing the "living word" of Irma. A word intended for his ears.

Freud believed that all dreams are egoistic, or, as he put it nicely, that they have an "egoistic lining."

*I have spoken . . . of the egoism of children's minds, and I may now add, with a hint at a possible connection between the two facts, that dreams have*

*the same characteristic. All of them are completely egoistic: the beloved ego appears in all of them, even though it may be disguised. The wishes that are fulfilled in them are invariably the ego's wishes, and if a dream seems to have been provoked by an altruistic interest, we are only being deceived by appearances.<sup>7</sup>*

Though Freud backs off this point in later footnotes and additions, he was certain that the wishes fulfilled in the dream are the wishes of the “beloved ego.”

Freud would certainly reject the model of Abimelech’s dream. Dreams are not judgments or warnings, he believes; they are riddles. Only in the closing pages of *The Interpretation of Dreams* does Freud briefly address the question of their possible “ethical significance.”

“I do not feel justified in answering these questions, I have not considered this side of the problem of dreams further . . . would it not be right to bear in mind Plato’s dictum that a virtuous man is content to dream what a wicked man really does? I think it is best, therefore to acquit dreams. Whether we are to attribute reality to unconscious wishes, I cannot say.

“I think . . . that the Roman emperor was in the wrong when he had one of his subjects executed because he had dreamt of murdering the emperor.” To Freud, only “actions deserve to be considered . . . not the impulses expressed in dreams.”<sup>8</sup>

Freud knocks down a straw man. The issue is not legal, but how dreams can change you from within. I would learn from Marc Bregman that for a dream to change your behavior, you must treat it as if your actions in the dream are real, most especially those actions that are “ethically objectionable.”

For these embarrassments are shown to you for a reason. They dramatize powerfully the holes in your story, the blind spots.

To respond to the dream’s inherent moral accusation—Jung calls it “judgment” in his last great theoretical work<sup>9</sup>—you must take the feelings in it as seriously as if you had them when awake. You must act as Abimelech did, who immediately obeyed the voice in his dream. Only if you can do that can the dream change your life.

For the dream comes, as the archaic torso of Apollo came in Rilke’s sonnet, to say, “You must change your life.”

If you don’t feel remorse when you see yourself in the dream acting arrogantly or unkind, the dream can never touch you with its charge. Freud’s technique of association is useful in binding the dream to waking life. But

the dream is not subordinate to waking life; rather, the dream displays a template of waking behavior. Note the reversal of direction: instead of the meaning of the dream being tied exclusively to a memory, memory adds to the power of the dream. The belly button of K de G would prove to have nothing to do with bagels.

Working with a feeling of distaste for your dream behavior, you change from the inside out.

That is the gist of the work Marc Bregman showed me in stage one, though that simple summary tells you nothing about how difficult this work really is. I struggled against it mightily, using all my powers, including my own powers of interpretation, my education, my reading, my books. My ego was just as beloved to me as Freud’s was to him.

In a certain way, Freud believed that the dream was designed to ameliorate itself, for he wrote that the whole point of the dream distortion is to prevent “the generation of anxiety or other unpleasant affect,” which might disturb sleep.<sup>10</sup> In his psychodynamics, the dreamer’s id or superego expresses uncomfortable wishes, but the dream censor distorts and disguises them. So for Freud, the dream doubles up into manifest and latent. The latent-dream theory gives Freud an escape hatch to avoid what “Irma” and the doctors are trying to show him. Freud never sees the real belly button of the dream, which is not the end point of interpretation, but the genesis of feeling.

Carl Jung, Freud’s main antagonist, took a very different approach to the dream. He writes in his autobiography,

*I was never able to agree with Freud that the dream is a “façade” behind which its meaning lies hidden—a meaning already known but maliciously so to speak withheld from consciousness. To me dreams are a part of nature, which harbors no intention to deceive but expresses something as best it can, just as a plant grows or an animal seeks its food as best it can. These forms of life, too, have no wish to deceive our eyes, but we may deceive ourselves because our eyes are shortsighted. Or we hear amiss because our ears are rather deaf—but it’s not our ears that wish to deceive us. Long before I met Freud I regarded the unconscious, and dreams, which are its direct exponents, as natural processes to which no arbitrariness can be attributed, and above all no legerdemain. I knew no reasons for the assumption that the tricks of consciousness can be extended to the natural processes of the unconscious. On the contrary, daily experience taught me what intense resistance the unconscious opposes to the tendencies of the conscious mind.<sup>11</sup>*

Rosemarie Sand, a contemporary psychoanalyst who trained in the Freudian tradition, cites research that confirms the importance of the manifest content of a dream, meaning the dream as recalled and reported by the dreamer.

"[The researchers] . . . after summarizing results of a number of dream studies . . . noted that 'the manifest dream content carries a great deal of meaning. . .' [T]he weight of the evidence argues against viewing the manifest content as a largely meaningless conglomeration of camouflage devices, such as Freud spelled out."<sup>12</sup>

Sand concludes that the ancient theory of the dream is closer to the mark. The manifest content displays the message of the dream. It's a picture, a pictorial representation—that is, an image.

This is also true of the prophetic dream stories in Genesis: Joseph's dream of the sheaf, and Jacob's dream of the ladder. These dreams represent the real gifts of the dream in Genesis, and with them we can find the true "Secret of Dreams" revealed.

With Freud I can bring to a close the case of the disappearing dream. The trail begins when Joseph's brothers introduce interpretation into the story in their reaction to the dream of the sheaf. That is the turning point. All the dreams in Genesis before that did not require interpreters. All the dreams thereafter do.

Joseph as interpreter returns images to the realm of words; the rabbis follow in this path for the most part and add the idea of amelioration; the Church Fathers also indicate that dreams are so tricky that only saints can really discern whether a dream is from God or the devil.

The overall result is that interpretation of one kind or another has become the dominant response to dreams. Interpretations may well come, as Joseph's did, from God; but for most of us, the interpretation is just as likely to come from "Joseph's brothers"—that is, from our blind spots.

With Freud, this same struggle between image and word, dream and interpretation, reappears, not only in his personal conflict with Jung, but also in his division of the dream into manifest and latent.

Freud adopts many strategies of his rabbinic predecessors, frequently focusing on words and language in dreams more than images, and reading the dreams "*ad locum*," as the rabbinic midrash reads the Torah. He consciously assumes the mantle of Joseph the interpreter. "It will be noticed that the name Josef plays a great part in my dreams (cf. the dream about

my uncle). My own ego finds it very easy to hide itself behind people of that name, since Joseph was the name of a man famous in the Bible as an interpreter of dreams." Freud mentions Joseph three times in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.<sup>13</sup> He does not mention Jacob or the ladder once.\* For Freud, only interpretation matters, because only interpretation can establish the science of the dream.

So who should be accused in the case of the disappearing dream? Freud or the rabbis or the Church Fathers? Or Deuteronomy or Joseph's brothers? All are plausible suspects. Another answer is: the butler did it.

That is, Pharaoh's butler, who in distress begs Joseph to interpret his dreams. The butler personifies our fear of the dream's accusation, a fear that leads to one form of amelioration or another.

The butler did it. The whole history of dream interpretation is shadowed by fear and anxiety.

But fear is not the whole story of the dream in Genesis. There are also great promises and three great gifts.

First, there's the pointed warning of Abimelech's dream; then, there's the dream of the sheaf, which reveals an essential situation of his soul to Joseph; finally, there's the dream of the ladder, which indicates an entire new realm of consciousness. Those who respond by keeping "the matter in mind," who abide with the dream in life and dwell on its images, learn to heed the dream's warnings and change. They come to see their essential spiritual condition, and can explore the dream life of the soul.

### Dream Revelation in Genesis

DREAMER	DREAM	REVELATION
Abimelech	"You are a dead man."	Warning
Joseph	Dream of the sheaf	Essential image
Jacob	Dream of the ladder	Realm of consciousness

The merkabah mystics followed the text of Ezekiel to find a way into the same consciousness that Jacob experienced in his dream. When the secrets of the merkabah were lost, Jewish mystical dreamers continued to explore the

\*Interestingly, Jakob is the name of Freud's father.

world of the chariot by using the chariot of the dream. These explorations underlie the theosophy of the kabbalah, and the teachings of the original Hasidim.

What surprised me in working with Bregman was to learn that these ancient gifts of the dream could be rediscovered in our own time. They are hidden in the obvious, right on the surface of the dream, though often they can't be seen by the dreamer.

## Chapter 19

# BLIND SPOTS REMOVED WHILE YOU WAIT, AND THE BOOK OF K de G SPEAKS

To Freud, dream content seems distorted and "nonsensical," and requires interpretation to unearth the dream's secrets.

Not in Bregman's approach. For him, the manifest dream may offer an obvious message, but not one the dreamer is willing to see. Because he wrote about his own dreams, it was harder for Freud to account for his own blind spots.

Admittedly the dream can feel confusing. Especially because, as Freud shows so clearly, any moment in a dream can lead to an immense tangle of memories and associations. Once you apply the intellect to all this tangle, you can produce a very elaborate interpretation, but you may have missed the main point.

Suppose, however, that in dreams you take the road less taken, that other path Joseph took with his dream of the sheaf, the path of abiding with the images in the dream. You stay with the manifest content instead of looking for a hidden explanation. You give yourself time to see the images in the dream. It's not something you can do easily for yourself. But a good guide can point out exactly what you're not seeing because of your blind spots. Then the manifest dream begins to acquire power and consistency. Then it seems that, contrary to Freud, the real "Secret of Dreams" was never hidden in the first place, but simply overlooked.

Dreams may ultimately lead to a spiritual journey, but the path begins where you are. And where you are will remain the issue of your dreams until you allow the dreams to teach you certain facts about yourself that may, at first, be unpleasant to acknowledge.

After several years' apprenticeship with Bregman, I became a student teacher and began to work on dreams with clients. One was William T., a fifty-year-old professor who came to me initially because he wanted to return to his early love of painting, which he had abandoned in his twenties.\* He'd been a talented painter who won prizes, but he thought there was just too much competition in that field. As a practical matter, he put up his brushes and went to graduate school in art history. He is a very successful academic who teaches at a prestigious college on the East Coast, with a large number of books to his credit.

But he's not happy in his academic work. He'd like to start painting again but can never find the time. His success has gotten in his way. He's got too many lectures and commitments.

In his dream William is on the beach—always a happy place for him. He loves the beach; swimming is his greatest pleasure. He sees a little girl about eight years old, who walks up to him, holding a crayon drawing. When I asked him, he told me he liked her very much and loved her drawing.

A man in a business suit comes walking along the beach. He asks William to come with him, to look at a new museum on a college campus. Without hesitation, William abandons the little girl who'd won his heart and trudges off with the man across the sand.

—Why did you decide to go off with him? I asked when we had our session on this dream.

Because when I go traveling to give lectures, if my host wanted to show me a new building on campus, naturally I'd feel obliged.

—So your obligation to him was more important than the little girl with the drawing?

Yes.

\*I have changed certain details to disguise his identity.

He didn't see anything wrong with that. But Bregman stresses that the choices you make in dreams are important. In this case, my client William thinks he has good reasons for choosing the man.

And it's a big mistake.

At first William's response seems logical enough. He's making a choice in the dream exactly as he would make it if he were awake. He operates from his waking reality and from his practical considerations. He goes off with the man in the suit without even thinking about making a choice. He leaves the little girl behind.

I've left out a little part of this dream, and it's somewhat significant. It's what Bregman calls the "hole in the story." When we were discussing the little girl, William T. told me that after looking at her drawing he became anxious because he couldn't find the girl's parents.

I asked why.

Again he applied waking logic: If you saw a little girl all alone on the beach, wouldn't you be concerned?

Fine. But then here comes the hole. As soon as the man in the suit shows up, William T. dumps all that "concern" and leaves the little girl behind. Which seems to indicate that concern wasn't very important.

William T. doesn't see that hole because he's so convinced that going off with the man in the suit is the practical thing to do. What about his feeling for the little girl with the drawing—that initial delight and joy he felt just seeing her? Feeling is our guide in the dream, and William feels something for her, he acknowledges. It's just not strong enough—in this dream—to overcome the pull of the practical. She is his heart's delight. If he can't choose her over Mr. Practical in his dream, when can he choose her?

I want to say such dreams are true in the sense that they expose us as we truly are. Certainly you could use the dream as a sort of diagnosis: William T. is too obsessive about his work. Or you could start trying to figure out why he did this, what incident in childhood led him to be so practical and so shut down to his feelings.

But the dream doesn't work that way. The dream presents the drama in a three-character play. William T. has probably been in this sort of dilemma every day of his life. The dream portrays vividly how William chooses what's important to do—whether to make a painting or give a lecture, go with his feelings or obey his obligations. Dreams show us beautifully the flavor of a person's situation in life.

That is how manifest dreams begin to be revelations: they manifest the truth about us. This is a very remarkable thing, and not at all expected. That dreams tell the truth about us is a powerful argument for contemplating their images and dramas instead of throwing them away.

However, dreams are tricky—not because some of them come from demons, but because the dreamer is often the last one to get the point. Based on his long experience, Bregman distinguishes dreamers by stages. He says the beginning or stage-one dreamer is characterized by a persistently backward response. For stage-one dreamers, what looks bad is good and what looks good is bad.

**I**t's best not to make a hard and fast category, because confusing what's good and bad can happen to any dreamer—but the stage-one dreamer does it fairly consistently.

As a result of this confusion, the stage-one dreamer will often overlook or dismiss the very character who is most important, as "Freud" did with "Irma."

A second dream illustrates how this dismissal can seem perfectly justified to the stage-one dreamer even when it is strikingly inappropriate.

Olivia, a piano teacher from a small town in Missouri, was beaten and kicked by her father as a little girl. She also received very little support from her mother as a child. She is wracked with a constant feeling of worthlessness, even though she is an accomplished teacher with many successful students.

Olivia dreams she is sitting in a café with her daughter. She's feeling panic because she doesn't have enough money to pay the bill. She looks out the window and sees two women wheeling a bloody man tied up on a dolly. They've practically killed him. "He's looking at me. I see his bloody eye. I feel he's done something horrible to them and deserves whatever he gets."

The bound man pleads to her with his eyes, but she reacts negatively. To justify her reaction, she says that she "knows" he's committed crimes. This is a good example of how projection hides within a blind spot. Projection fills the holes in the story with a fantasy—in this case, a dramatic story that justifies her reaction.

When asked by Bregman gently, "How do you know?" Olivia answers with exquisite illogic that once she was assaulted by a man in a coin laundry. Therefore, she assumes that these women wouldn't harm him if he hadn't hurt them first.

Sometimes in life we do just know, but in a dream such knowing more often indicates projection from a blind spot. To get someone to reconsider this prejudice, Bregman often uses the technique of treating the dream existentially; he applies real-life tests to the situation. He asks Olivia, If you saw a bloody man wheeled down the street on a dolly, what would you actually feel?

Clearly, it would be a disturbing sight. Yet even though the man appeals to her with his eyes, the communication does not lead anywhere further. She does not allow herself to feel anything for him, at all. The bloody man is in her blind spot.

Olivia feels that her assessment of the man on the dolly is the only correct assumption, and this carries over into everyday life. She mistrusts men in general in exactly this way. The underlying emotion driving her is shame, a sense of worthlessness. That comes out in the first part of the dream when Bregman gently probes. "Is it true," he asks, "that you are so broke you can't afford a cup of coffee?" Olivia laughed, but Bregman had made the point.

Her emotion at not having enough money stems from her lack of self-worth. So does her reaction to the "bloody man," for reasons that would become clear in later dreams.

The bloody man is her "Irma." She won't let herself feel his pain. Later she'll learn how her shame keeps her from responding to him. For now, the manifest content of the dream simply shows where she's stuck. Unless she can work through her shame, the dream will be the script she follows again and again.

Emotions run Olivia and William T. in dreams and in life, reactions and projections. Feelings are missing or muted in these dreams. Finding the feelings and feeling them more strongly is the thread that leads out of the dream labyrinth of stage one.

The first day we met, Bregman had told me that emotions and feelings are the signposts of the dream. I laughed to myself; I had so much condescension toward him. I thought, The words are synonyms. What kind of signposts can they be? I went into a whole huff about this dyslexic postman and his misuse of language. I didn't understand yet, because I hadn't experienced the difference clearly in my own dreams.

Yes, in ordinary talk we use those words interchangeably, something Bregman knew full well. But from the point of view of the dream, feeling and emotion are completely different experiences.

Emotions drive; feelings lead. Emotions are reactions, usually set routines and stereotyped behavior. Feelings lead us away from such stereotyped

reactions. So they are liberating. A stronger feeling for the little girl in William's dream might have allowed him to explore more deeply who she was and what the creative joy she represented was, instead of trudging off in the sand to meet yet another obligation.

I don't want to underestimate the difficulty of making the right choice in a dream. The pragmatic or practical or ego-adjusted sensibility doesn't disappear just because my head is on the pillow. It persists within my dreams.

It's easy to talk about someone else's struggle, but I knew from experience that the distinction between feeling and emotion is subtle and has to be worked out dream by dream. We are not used to thinking this way, and our everyday language is inadequate. Each person brings a different life to the dream, and Bregman's work is subtle and particular. He lets the dreams guide him.

To Bregman, "Everything in a dream is a reflection of a feeling or an emotion. Every dream is full of clues as to which is which."

Following the clues is key, because Bregman's work is empirical and interactive. The dreams of Freud, Olivia, and William T. show us dreamers driven mostly by emotional reactions, who never get to genuine feelings. In each case there's a blind spot. In each case they can't see or hear or respond to other persons in the dream who do carry feeling. "Irma" feels in Freud's dream much more than he does. The bloody man is full of pathos and suffering in Olivia's dream. The little girl in William's dream expresses pure child-like creative joy.

But because of blind spots, these figures full of feeling are ignored, overlooked, rejected by the dream-ego, the I-in-the-dream.

A blind spot justifies itself as an instant reaction, the "of course" reaction. "Of course" "Freud" treats "Irma" as recalcitrant; she's just a patient. "Of course" William T. goes off with the man in the suit. "Of course" Olivia's bloody man deserves what he gets.

**D**"Of course" in my dream of K de G, I get lost in a book and forget all about who sent it to me . . .

One way Bregman gets you past your blind spots is to use a technique from Frederick Perls's gestalt therapy. Perls was a psychotherapist who attracted a wide following in the 1960s and 1970s after his workshops and seminars at the Esalen Institute made him well known.

*Gestalt* is the German word for "wholeness," and the aim is to see the dream whole, not cut up into pieces. Though Perls started out as a Freudian,

he became dissatisfied with the Freudian approach of fragmenting dreams to interpret them. For Perls, "all the different parts of the dream are fragments of our personalities. Since our aim is to make every one of us a wholesome person . . . we have to . . . put the different fragments of the dream together. We have to re-own these projected fragmented parts of our personality, and re-own the hidden potential that appears in dreams.

"Instead of analyzing and further cutting up the dream, we want to bring it back to life. And the way to bring it back to life is to re-live the dream as if it were happening now."<sup>1</sup>

In my work with William T., I asked him to talk to the little girl and ask her who she was and what she was doing in his dream. If Bregman were working with Freud, then Freud would sit across from Irma and hear at last what she had to say. This process is called, informally, "doing a gestalt," or "gestalting" the dream.

When Bregman worked Olivia's dream of the "bloody man," he got her to question her assumptions about him through a gestalt. She sat in a chair and saw the bloody man in the empty chair across from her. She had assumed he was tied up because he'd done a crime. Now she could ask him.

"Bloody man," she asked, "why are you tied up like that?" Then she switched chairs and, speaking in his voice, answered herself: "Because they are trying to keep me from you." Through that answer she came to realize her projection onto him and the fact that the women who were binding him were not the "good guys" in her dream, nor was he a "bad guy."

Sometimes such gestalts are very hard to do; at other times, the empty chair talks.

When I brought in K de G and we'd discussed it for a time, Bregman asked me to do a gestalt. In itself, my dream of K de G was technically harder to gestalt than Olivia's. There were missing persons in my dreams and also missing feelings. I'm a fairly solitary intellectual guy who spends hours every day musing over words and reading books. At least William T. had three characters on his beach; I had no one from my dream to talk to.

However, Perls had the idea that not only the people in dreams but the objects could be made to talk. A man dreams of a blue car at the bottom of a lake and sees a rusty license plate. Perls had that man speak to the license plate.

So Bregman asked me to talk to a book. I sat across from an empty chair. I spoke and then switched seats, and spoke back as the book of K de G.

Yes, I was sitting in his office having an interview with a talking book from my dream . . .

Here's how the dialogue went. Bregman supplied my lines, and the book answered back.

Me: Book, why are you being shown to me?

Book of K de G: *Because I fascinate you.*

Me: What are you trying to show me that fascinates me?

K de G: *You love what's doubled up. You love the commentary on the original.*

Me: What's wrong with that?

K de G: *There's nothing wrong with it if you're not scared, but it's keeping you from your destiny.*

Me: How?

K de G: *Because you get lost in it. Instead of starting from the beginning, telling your own story, you comment on somebody else's.*

Me: What do you mean, my story?

K de G: *It's your genesis. It's your origin.*

**W**hen I heard those words spoken by the book of K de G, I was surprised. Gestalts don't always work for me, because I get too self-conscious. But in this case I really felt that the voice of the book was saying something I didn't know. I could feel that in getting the book of K de G to speak out loud to me, I was being lured deeper into accepting the viewpoint of the dream. It was strange and magical. I felt that the dream was coming out into the world and speaking to me in its own voice. I could no longer stand outside my dream and interpret it, by searching for memories, or according to any fixed equation of symbols. Instead, the dream was now interpreting me.

Worse, according to the dream, I was falling short because I was looking in a book for the answer instead of looking within.

I had thought the point of the dream was that K de G stood for "Kamennetz on Genesis." That is how I did my own amelioration.

I thought the book of K de G was a friendly image of the book I would be writing.

The gestalt ruined these happy thoughts. Considering how much energy I'd spent tracing the history of dreams in Genesis, what the talking book said was anguishing but also funny.

Who was in charge here? Was I writing about dreams, or was this talking book from my dreams going to tell me what to write?

Who would win the battle, me or THEY?

The book of K de G asked me to choose.

Between Genesis and my genesis. Between my deep love of books and reading and—what? Or who? What was meant by "your genesis" and "your origin"?

For the moment I didn't know. The lesson I drew from Freud's dream of Irma applies to my dream of K de G. The I in the dream is not the I who interprets on waking. THEY—whoever THEY were—were showing me a path of transformation, a path to becoming a different I, someone I knew not of.

I had missed my own blind spot. The dream comes to us disguised in everyday concerns. My waking concerns were the book I was writing, *this book*.

I'd read the dream backward.

Looking into Genesis had been fine. But the dream hadn't come to reassure me. It's just THEY knew that writing the book was more important to me than doing my "work" in Bregman's sense, the work of spiritual growth in dreams. THEY got my attention the only way THEY could—through the image of a book.

The whole point was not Genesis but "your genesis" and "your origin."

For a dream to transform you, you must enter fully into its imaginal reality. You must endure the grip of the actual angel on your thigh—the pain in the dream must be your pain—and that sort of participation can come only with a long entrainment, an extended friendship with your dreams and a willingness to abandon your old words and ideas, and take seriously the images that come to speak to you.

Obviously I had a huge blind spot. My blind spot happened to be a big blue book. It blocked the view of my father, who'd sent it to me. The dream was showing me that my fascination with books is not entirely healthy because it was keeping me from knowing my father. That hurt to know. It hurt exactly like that gut punch from the first day.

## Chapter 20

## HOW DREAMS ABOLISH TIME, AND THE SECRET OF K de G AT LAST

Physicians speak of “guarding a wound.” It’s how the body adapts to an injury—with an involuntary tightening of muscles. In each of us is a wounded place, an eternal moment that reverberates in every other moment, seemingly permanent, unchangeable, unchanging.

It is our point of shattering. The dream teacher Tarab Tulku referred to it more dryly, in that Tibetan way, as “vulnerable self-reference.”

The wound seems fixed and forever, and though its traumas could surely be traced to a particular date or time, the pain lives on perennially—unless it is possible to go back to that past and change it.

And it is possible, because dreams abolish time.

So the dead mingle with the living in our dreams. The more mystical rabbis believed this. In one Talmudic tale, Raba asks his beloved teacher Rabbi Nachman, on his deathbed, to visit him in a dream after his death.

He does just that, and Raba asks Nachman, “Did you suffer pain?” “No,” Nachman answers gently, “as little as removing a hair from the milk.”<sup>1</sup>

To the mystical rabbis, dreams had no boundary of time or of space. They associated dreams with both ends of life. They likened the dream to the womb, where they believed you could see from one end of the universe to another.

Time and space, life and death, past and future—all meet in the dream.

Therefore, making a new choice in the dream changes the past. This is the incredible experience in the dream work. It is not a question of magic

or mystical belief. Simply, a dream brings an old moment vividly to life so it can be reexperienced as real. Then the old wound can be healed, the damage reversed.

Colette spoke of “reversing.” For people with traumas, she gave an exercise. You were to vividly visualize the painful incident and then slowly wipe the whole scene clean with a sponge—“always to the left,” she insisted, for she believed that was the direction from the present to the past.

That sort of imaginal exercise has difficulties. It is not so easy to recall a traumatic scene at will. The wound has been guarded too long, or it has been covered over with amnesia. There is a second-degree hiding of pain, too. Not only is the deepest pain hidden from memory, but it is hidden from us that it is hidden.

But our dreams take us back to the past and heal it. This is the astonishing power of “the work” in stage one. It’s something I saw happening to many people who worked with Bregman, and it happened to me.

In the dream you relive vividly what was once a frozen memory. By making a new choice in the existential moment of the dream, a profound amnesia or unremembering takes place. The wound no longer needs to be guarded. You unlearn an old hurt; you remake an old relationship. From that place one can heal. Through “the work,” I learned to feel a love for my father that I thought had been lost.

My distance from my father was measured in miles and years. All that first year with Bregman, I’d dreamed of my wife and children many times, my sisters and brothers, my deceased mother, but never once of him. He never appeared in my dreams. The first hint of him was the dream of K de G, and that was only an e-mail. I would have to do a lot of work before my father appeared and spoke in person in my dreams.

The important persons in your dreams approach gradually. Sometimes they are mentioned before they are seen. They might appear in a photograph, or a film. Sometimes they call on the phone, but the distance is measured by the faintness of the voice, or static on the line. It may be a long time before they truly stand before you, and even longer before you can see them as they truly are.

The dreamer gets distracted and misses the opportunity. I didn’t see that by focusing so much on reading the book of K de G, I was forgetting that it was a gift from my father.

Dreams probe the tender spots of your relationships; with father and mother, with brothers and sisters, with your wife or lovers, with your children.

In stage one, dreams are showing you what's wrong, what's missing. What's clear already in the dream of K de G is simply: my father is missing, and instead there is a book. What got clearer is how in dreams and in my life I'd grown up with books as a substitute for a father.

**B**efore I could see him in a dream, I had to get past the book, because whenever it appeared in a dream my fascination with the book became pathological. K de G was not the only book in my dream library; the entire collection could be filed under the Dewey decimal code for "anxiety."

*I mention to Famous Poet that his poem is in the book I'm holding. Famous Poet asks to see it. I thumb through the book, but now I can't find it.*

*The teacher has written a passage on the blackboard: God can save us from depression: we don't have to do anything. I don't even dwell on the meaning. Instead, I believe I am a fellow teacher, though no one says I am.*

*Since I'm not prepared to contribute, I figure I'll fake it by finding the statement quoted in a book. For some reason, I believe it comes from II Chronicles in the Bible.*

*Now I'm holding a book I think is a Bible. As I thumb through it, looking for II Chronicles, I see economics charts, and narratives of World War II. I'm tearing through the pages searching. There's not even a table of contents. I've forgotten the teacher and the teaching completely.*

My dream books get out of hand; they multiply; they mutate as I search them. It's an acutely anxious moment when I turn to a book for support and it starts to turn on me.

*I'm in a private house where my literary hero, the Argentine master Jorge Luis Borges, is speaking.*

*I open his Ficciones, and the first page describes a boat trip I just completed. The coincidence astounds me. I want to tell Borges all about it.*

*I raise my hand, and the master walks toward me. I thumb through his book to show him the passage I just read. But now I can't find it. Acutely embarrassed, I say, "It just fell open to the page before." As he stands over me, I am searching the book; ridiculous little slips of paper fall out. I lose all sense of his presence...*

Each dream boils down to the same absurd triangle: me, an authority—and a book. In each dream I make a choice: I choose the book.

Then my father appeared:

*My father and I were sitting at a long table with another father and son, who were studying a book together. (It was a text about two kinds of fish.) I thought to myself: two kinds of fish, how silly. But then on second thought, I felt that the love shared between the father and his son was more important than the text they studied together.*

*As for me, I looked down and saw a word I didn't understand: feffer. I looked up and saw my father across the table and felt he understood it, but I didn't say a word to him.*

"Why didn't you ask him?" Bregman said.

For homework, I was to see my father's face and ask him what he knew. I practiced seeing his face and asking. It was painful. My pride didn't like it. I had built my whole life as a man around not asking him for help—my father, or any father, mentor, or male rival. I found my own authority in books.

The homework was a meditation like Colette's but arising from my dream and pointing directly at my life. This is where contemporary spiritual practice so often failed people—in not engaging them at a specific enough level where a spiritual problem has its roots in a psychological issue.

How could I seek the face of God if I couldn't even see my own father's face? How can I relate to God as a father if I can't relate to my father? We need images of our relationship to God that touch the heart, but we are blocked from them because of the pain and trauma in our lives. Our spiritual questions are psychological, and our psychological questions are spiritual.

I called up the image of him sitting before me and felt my own stubbornness and pride. I did not know how to ask him for help. As far back as I could remember, I had always been too proud.

I did the homework and felt something melting. The answer could not be found by looking at the book, or staring at that silly word *feffer*. The answer could be found only by asking my father for help in the dream.

It was a breakthrough, and after this homework, my father became a regular in my dreams. Now I had a wonderful opportunity, which I thought I'd never have again in my life. The opportunity to repair and recover what had long been lost.

It still wasn't easy. There were still difficult feelings to work through, but now my father was in my dreams at last. No more e-mails. No more books in the way. Just him and me.

Sometimes I reacted to him in the dream just as I often had in life—with aloofness, distance, criticism. Once it came to rage; that was like a thunder burst. I woke shocked and chastened by my own stupidity.

That gave the dreams a new opening, and with that shift I could overcome the ancient distance between us that Bregman had touched on in our first meeting through the cop-and-bicycle dream.

In new dreams, I came to core feelings of hurt and sorrow—and I came in the end to love. It's strange to say, but over those months I renewed my relationship with my father, strictly through dreams.

With Bregman's help, I reached the point where I-in-my-dream was no longer the I that I had been. From the dream-side out, I'd changed the "ID" that those cops had been asking for in my first dreams. My dream-ego was no longer so defensive or angry; "I" grew younger, more a boy, a son who could admit he needed his father and call for his help.

I dreamed the walls of my house were collapsing all around me. I called out like a little boy, "Dad, it's a disaster!" I called out from my heart for his help, and he appeared like magic and saved the day.

It's remarkable that changing how you behave in dreams can change your waking life.

The inner work precedes the outer. The dreams sweetened my feelings for my father in the last years of his life.

It was an everyday miracle to Bregman; so many clients had recovered lost relationships with parents or with children, revived marriages or ended them, changed occupations, and renewed their lives. Bregman took no personal credit for this; he simply called it "the work." But the forces he was guiding had remarkable powers of healing and recovery, and he deserves more credit than he took.

Over years, my feelings about Marc Bregman also sweetened. In the beginning, he was another male rival to overcome, but over time I came to understand how to learn from him. The great teaching of so many of my dreams is how to be a student.

I'd come a long way from the guy who thought Bregman would make an amusing chapter in this book, from the scared guy on the bicycle who did not get the cop's joke, from the aloof son with his nose in a book.

I'd learned how to take the warning of the dream to heart, as Abimelech did. By changing my behavior in my dreams, I changed in my life. This was a huge gift already. But there was more to learn and further to go.

The personal work is wonderful, but there is a story beyond the personal, which Bregman spoke of as second-stage work.

The book of K de G spoke of it, too. The mysterious phrase "genesis and origin" refers to a deeper level of life than personal autobiography. It expresses the mystery I'd been wrestling with since I met Bregman: the mystery of THEY and their part in the dream life of the soul.

# 3

## DREAMS

*So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God created he him;  
male and female created he them.*

—GENESIS 1:27

*God created man WITH his image....*

—RASHI ON GENESIS 1:27

## Chapter 21

### THE THREE GIFTS OF THE DREAM

The interpretation of dreams is a stubborn reflex, with a long history, not easily undone.

As soon as I wake, I say, "That was a good dream," or I say, "That was a bad one." "That was an interesting dream." "That was boring." Those first thoughts are already interpretations, based on what some part of me thinks is good, bad, interesting, boring.

Which is not necessarily what the dream thinks.

Dream interpretation in the usual, popular sense represents an enduring victory for the word in its struggle with the image. How we react reflexively to dreams is consistent with how we think in general. The word strives to keep its place on top in the conscious mind, and awareness of the image remains partly or wholly submerged. The dream has its place and time at night and in private, but interpretation rules by day. The reflex is so strong that a powerful force must drive it. But is that force on our side? Dreams come to bring depth. But we resist. It is as if another person inside us wants to fend off the dream. A voice that says: Don't go there. Don't open that door. Don't look.

For now, let's call that force within "the opposition."

The opposition wants to keep the dream safely lodged in the darkness where it belongs, not out in the light of day. The opposition uses numbness to keep us unaware of feeling; it infiltrates interpretation with amelioration. We go along with the opposition because we don't want the images in dreams to stay active in daylight, gnawing at us, worrying us. Because these images

can be disruptive. They can pull us deeper when we prefer to stay "on top of things."

But to take dreams as a path to soul we have to learn a very different move. Take the images seriously, take them in, abide with them, suffer them, go deeper with them.

This is the move I made when I turned away from the books in my dreams to face the dream image of my father. It was very humble and simple—about feelings, finally, and not complicated or "doubled up."

I simply learned to love my father better in my dreams.

I think that was a lot. I learned that dreams can lead us to feel much more deeply.

But first the reflex of interpretation had to be broken.

In that sense, my history of interpretation is best understood as an exorcism.

I've cleared the busts of the dream doctors off the shelf—all those brilliant rabbis and Church Fathers who taught us how to interpret and ameliorate the dream, and most of all Dr. Freud, who remains, though slightly chipped, our little plaster god of dreams.

Once I swept them from the shelf, the descent into dreams began in earnest.

**W**hen I first met Marc Bregman, my intellectual concerns were with religion and spirituality—but my dreams showed me wandering lost in strange cities. What did such dreams have to do with God or soul or enlightenment?

On the face of it, nothing. But I was wrong, because dreams open a cellar door to depth. They show you how to shift from being driven by external events and internal emotions to being centered on your soul or psyche, which is rich, powerful, and generative.

In an age when so many are disillusioned with organized religion, this is the great promise of the descent into dreams: to go deep within yourself, to learn the tools to go deep, relying on what happens at night and finding a way to learn and grow. To find out where you are blocked from growth, to rediscover a nature that was part of you at one point and has slowly been lost. To be able to get back down to the source of your being and recover a grounding and honesty with yourself that's been gone for so long.

But the descent begins where you are. For most people, that's at the ground-

floor level of everyday conscious thoughts and emotions, worries and troubles. From that perspective, even the first dreams can seem puzzling.

A woman doing the dream work has various crises. Her husband is a gambler, and she just found out he's been stealing money from her bank account. Her son was caught driving while drunk and totaled the car. She's being sued for fraud, and she's having trouble sleeping. She's upset and anxious, but as she tells it, she's coping.

One night, she dreamed she was chained in the basement.

From her waking perspective, her dream seems bizarre and nonsensical. But as you feel into the reality of the dream, it opens into a larger drama. Why is she chained? Who chained her there? A man standing next to her chats casually. He's Bob Barker, the game-show host. Why a game-show host? What's Bob Barker doing in her dream? Is he friend or foe?

Then her teenage son comes downstairs to see her before going off to school. She says, Have a nice day.

Why doesn't she ask her son to unlock her chains? It turns out that she feels nothing at all about being chained. Not a thing. It just feels normal to her.

This numbness is the issue. It's even more bizarre than the chains. It's a failure to feel deeply or with imagination. A failure to feel her own pain. For many people, numbness is the barrier to depth.

A man dreams of a long needle inserted into his knee. He says, I didn't feel a thing.

The next night he dreams he's sealed in a space capsule, all alone. It's the same dream, really. He's hermetically sealed, isolated, headed for outer space.

The dream wants to show us inner space. It shows us our predicament, how we really live. But you have to be willing to feel something about your predicament, because there's no other way in.

The dream isn't speaking in a language that makes literal sense. The man is not an astronaut. The woman is not chained in her basement. These dreams do not speak in the language of the dreamer's daily concerns or preoccupations.

The dream speaks its own special language.

The special language of dreams is forceful, poetic, metaphorical—and for most people, very unfamiliar. It appeals to imagination and creates an imaginal space where eventually you can move around and explore. This is the move I'm talking about, and it's very, very different from interpretation as

it has historically been done, and as we usually know it. So different that I could call it "uninterpretation." But it's the only way to receive the gifts of the dream.

Interpretation cannot lead you to these gifts. Amelioration will only help you avoid them. Turning away from the manifest dream to the latent, as Freud did, only helps the opposition. In the chapters ahead I will sometimes return to Freud's own dreams to show opportunities he missed. But mainly I will use my own dreams to illustrate how I opened the three gifts of the dream.

The first gift: dreams reveal through powerful images and dramatic situations your predicament in life—where you are blocked, stuck, lost without even knowing it. You have to learn what causes your predicament and overcome it.

Then, deeper down, comes the second gift. You have a pivotal dream where you glimpse the situation of the soul. I call mine "the orphanage dream," but it would take a different form for each person.

As for the third gift, a whole sleeping world awakens for you that you carry with you always. It is the world of the soul and its encounters with the divine.

These three gifts correspond to three dreams in Genesis: the dream of Abimelech, Joseph's sheaf, and Jacob's ladder. In that sense they fulfill the promise of the dream made so long ago.

But before I can tell the story of how I received these three gifts, I have to rewind back to the start of my work with Bregman, long before the dream of K de G. That's when I had my own predicament dreams. The images I saw were not so dramatic as being chained in the basement. They were simply dreams of being lost.

I start with them not because I think these dreams so special or rare, but exactly because I think they are all too typical. They struck me as boring.

Yet that was already a mistaken interpretation that played right into the hands of the opposition—because it kept me from fully appreciating the predicament the images were trying to show me.

## Chapter 22

### LOST AND WANDERING DREAMS

#### *The Predicament*

**A**t first, it did seem better to forget my dreams. At least the ones I was having when I met Bregman.

It was not easy to begin. Because many dreams, when we wake, just feel boring. I dream of driving a car, looking for the address of a shop to buy a book. I find the right number, but it's the wrong street. Then I find the right street, but the wrong number. Now the streets aren't named or numbered at all. I get angry. I tell my wife, *They* should have better signage. It's all the fault of the city fathers, or the store owners. It's not my fault I get lost.

The dream, at this stage, is a contemporary labyrinth—roads that lead you in circles. That's a very common and mild form of the nightmare. You are driving your car, which is to say, you are in charge of your life. Whichever way you turn is wrong. Whatever you try to do to help yourself makes things worse. In classical literature, a labyrinth is a maze with a monster in the middle, but for a long time I do not see the monster.

I hadn't gone two steps deep. I was still centered in my waking consciousness and everyday life.

I had a variation of the lost dream, set in railroad stations. I'm supposed to catch a train, but I never catch the train. Something always goes wrong.

I'm not sure when the train is leaving or exactly where I am going, so I ask directions. A group of clerks in railroad uniforms—black coats with shiny buttons—sit at tall desks above me. They have nearly identical features, like wooden dolls.

I wait a long time at the counter, looking up and trying to get their attention, but they sit placidly at their desks, staring into space, and no one acknowledges me. Finally I shout up to the clerks, "Can one of you come to help me?" And I add in frustration, "You don't look like you are doing anything to me."

Nasty. But they are mild mannered. They don't pay me much mind. One clerk says, "You can talk to me." But how will I get to him? I look up, and the distance between us enlarges and expands. I climb up complicated narrow winding stairs, all the time wondering if I am missing the train. I am moving between the offices where these officials work. The offices are empty or the men in them ignore me. I go down corridors lined with blank walls. Finally at the end of a long corridor I find an official sitting alone in his office. I say, "Well, it must be you, you're the last one left." He shakes his head no.

I descend some stairs, and at the bottom I see another clerk sitting in an identical office.

Now that I've found him, I realize I don't know what to ask. Because in all my worry about missing the train, and all my anger about not getting answers, that's a hole in my story. Until I arrived at this last desk, I didn't realize it, but I don't know my destination.

I cover up because I'm embarrassed. I tell the clerk, vaguely, that I know the train I want is going north. (How do I know this? I don't know it. I'm making it up—lying, really.) "Maybe Vermont?" I add. (I'm just improvising.) I feel silly and humiliated and angry and put upon.

The clerk doesn't respond. So I say, "Well, can you just tell me the next few trains going north? I'm sure it's one of them." I feel better saying that, even though I have no idea if it's true. I'm trying to solve the predicament as best I can. I've come all this way through all these corridors to find this clerk, so now I want an answer. Maybe knowing when the train is leaving will help. The clerk takes a slip of paper and writes down "8," with "03" in smaller numbers beside it double underlined, and then he writes "13," with an "02" double underlined. He slides the paper across the desk. I think: well, they wouldn't want me to wait until 13:02. That would be one o'clock in the afternoon. Come to think of it, is it 8:03 in the morning or 8:03 in the evening? I really don't know. As I'm thinking, I look down below to the main floor of the station. Is that my wife? Maybe

she can help. But then as her face comes into focus I see it's a stranger, an old woman with distorted features. How can I have mistaken her for my wife?

Now other people crowd into the room to ask the clerk directions. I grab the slip of paper and say, "Well, it must be the 8:02," and the clerk says as I leave, "You must be in luck because that's right now."

I can't help feeling he is being sarcastic. Because I hear the whistle blowing as he speaks. I look at my watch. It's exactly 8:02. Panicked, I dash down the stairs, only as I run, the stairs multiply at my feet. The faster I hurry, the more turns and twists there are. Now the stairs fill with piles of folding chairs, which I have to leap over. At every landing I have to twist around bureaus and desks. Minutes go by, and when I arrive at the platform, I see in the distance the last car of the train leaving the station.

Not exactly a screaming nightmare, but certainly unpleasant, uncomfortable, frustrating . . . Yet when I deal with the officials, I am so sure I am in the right. I become immediately indignant when the clerks don't answer my questions. I'm certain they are holding something back from me, deliberately mocking me.

All that anger and frustration made me overlook a very important hole in my story.

I don't know where I am going.

I had these kinds of dreams often when I first met Bregman: the car dream where I get lost, the train dream where I miss the train, dreams of wandering on foot, lost in city streets. Silly stuff, dull nightmares, and easily dismissed. I say, They are only dreams.

But suppose these lost dreams are not really about the trivial events of daily life, like getting lost or missing a train. Suppose instead they hold a clue, not only to who I am, but why I am supposed to be here. Suppose it is possible for me to change so that I can get on the train I keep missing and that it will take me somewhere new where I need to go. Suppose being lost in the city is meant to lead me somewhere new, if only I'd let it happen.

Then again, why should I care? These dream labyrinths I'm wandering in at night—on foot, in the car, in the train station—don't mean what they seem to mean, do they? They can't mean that my life is that trivial, that frustrated, that stupid.

At times I became sick of it. I didn't want to record any more dreams. Bregman or no Bregman. I just wished these boring dreams would end. I didn't think these dreams were leading me anywhere. But I was wrong. They were leading me to an orphanage.

began with the predicament of being lost. Lost is where many begin the descent into dreams. There are variations: a lost car in a parking lot, a lost wallet, or a lost purse.

You dream of losing something, or being lost. It's a similar feeling either way. You've lost something—or you've lost someone, or you've lost yourself. Who is lost? What has really been lost?

I was having dreams of being lost when I first began work with Bregman. I had the train-station dream in many variations, but I never got on the train. Or I had the driving dream, where I looked for a store and couldn't find it. Or I had the dream of walking the city streets.

I wandered on foot in a strange city on vaguely familiar streets. The city was unfamiliar and then familiar, because it started out as one city and changed to another. I tried to stay on top of it, find my way, but I couldn't. The emotion in these dreams seemed to be increasing frustration, anxiety, sometimes boiling over into anger.

Ordinarily, I think, you dream such dreams and shrug them off. Just dreams, you say. You don't want to look closer, don't want to know: these dreams are a snapshot of the predicament of your life.

If the dreams are boring, perhaps it is because you have wasted the spiritual potential of your life. You are lost—but you don't know it. In your pride, you think you can eventually find your lost car, your lost wallet or purse, that you can find the road out of the baffling duplicitous city. But you don't see what's really going on.

The emotions in these dreams—dissatisfaction, anger, and frustration—are a very real undercurrent in everyday life. Thoreau wrote: The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. The lost dreams show that desperation inescapably, vividly, in living color. Not as some event in the past but as an inner predicament suffered and endured.

I kept having these "lost dreams" over a period of weeks. They represented my predicament in life. Many people have such dreams all their nights. They are bad news. That's why we try to forget them, or if we can't, we ameliorate. Probably in time, were it not for Bregman, I would have stopped thinking about them, dismissed them. "My dreams are boring," I would say if asked. They are about everyday events, trivial conundrums; there's nothing really important there.

But something else happened because of the patient way Bregman had me slow down and work the images. These dreams of predicament led some-

where eventually, to dramas where I had to make real choices. They challenged me to find a deeper way of seeing my feelings, of knowing myself. They opened doors. They led to spiritual encounters I couldn't get to as long as I tried to figure everything out for myself, and as long as I relied on "reading the signs" and interpreting them in my old way. As long as I tried to stay the same me in the dreams that I was when awake, full of pride and blame. As long as the opposition had the upper hand.

The lost dream morphed. This is part of how the descent into dreams works. You have a dream and then it repeats and varies, until the opposition weakens and you change your response in the dream, and then the dreams can change, too. And you take a step deeper down. It's a slow process: there's backing and filling; it's not smooth, it's not linear; you get stopped. But if you persist, eventually you do work yourself out of your predicament and go deeper.

In one of those changes, finally I saw a dream that meant a great deal. I went back to it again and again in my mind. I named it "the orphanage dream." The lost dreams had finally arrived at a destination.

I want to show how the orphanage dream felt and the gift that it led me to, the second of the three gifts of the dream, the situation of the soul. Through the orphanage dream I came in time to encounters with important persons, very important persons.

But before I can show how the orphanage dream felt, or introduce the VIPs I met, I need to clear some ground. I need to open up more completely a topic I've skirted.

It has to do with our internal resistance to our dreams, which so far I've called "the opposition," though it has other, more difficult names.

Because until you can see the opposition for what it is, the dream descent stays stuck near the surface. You remain in your predicament.

At first this opposition hides within the dream-ego and can't be seen. Then it appears dramatically in the open, as a separate character. When that happens, your life, and your dreams, change dramatically. Because then you can receive the first gift of the dream. You can unlock the chains, leave the space capsule, find your way home from being lost.

## Chapter 23

## THE OPPOSITION: GRAVEL GRANDMA

This is the hard part. Almost everyone who does this work with dreams comes up against a predicament, something unpleasant that has to be faced. You might see yourself chained in the basement or flying numb and oblivious into outer space. You might see your inability to feel or see yourself putting up with being violated. Or, as in my case, you might see yourself acting like an aggressive and presumptuous jerk. These are predicaments our dreams show us in.

The anger and blaming I saw in the railroad dream were an all-too-familiar reaction. The dreams simply threw me into a situation where this behavior was triggered, and made me starkly aware of it as a pattern.

Until you get through this part of the work, the dreams are unrelenting; they come at you with tremendous persistency and force, one after the other. And they work different angles of each issue, and once they've worked one issue they go to another. It's like a whole curriculum of basic faults. Here's a series on your imposture. Oh, here's a new series on your intellectual pretentiousness. Here's a series on your lies...

It doesn't happen for everyone, but if you have a strong ego to begin with—and lots of pride—then the dreams slice away and show you these pictures of your behavior.

I don't want to exaggerate my faults. For some dreamers this part of the work is much more difficult and shattering than what I've described because what's seen in the dreams is darker and uglier than they can bear.

But that's not the whole story. Because if a person is crushed and broken already, the dreams behave very gently and this stage of the descent is very

different from mine: the dreams can patiently build the person up for a long time before revealing the negative. The dreams seem to know exactly how much you can take.

I didn't need the building up, so I got the breaking down.

I got cops who kept asking me for a driver's license; they wanted to know "Who do you think you are?"

I got black folks. I first saw them in another train-station dream. I panicked at night in a dark parking lot just outside the station. I was in urban New Jersey, convinced some young black guys were going to kill me. When I talked about the dream, I was ashamed to admit it because it sounds so racist. I didn't like the idea that such stereotypes were running around in my unconscious. That is a good and interesting point, but it wasn't the point of the dream. Bregman told me: face your fear of these young black guys. And I did. In my homework, I saw myself in the parking lot of the train station again. I saw the young black guys standing next to a cab, and I looked into their faces. Something softened: I realized I had no reason to be afraid.

The homework took effect quickly. In the next dream, a black family—father, mother, two teenage kids—moved into the basement of my house. In the next dream, we were all living together, for I sat at the kitchen table with a mother and her son. These black folks in my dreams told me things I needed to hear. They weren't lessons about race: they were about me. I started listening. And as I grew closer to them, I started changing. I looked in the mirror and saw myself turning black. I had dreadlocks in one dream, and I got the pun: the locks on my dread had been broken; I had no reason to fear. Again the dreams were telling me: *Who do you think you are?* But this time they were also saying: *You are beginning to change.* I was being shown a new layer: below the arrogance in the other dreams was fear.

"Who do you think you are?" was the general theme. I've been teaching at the university for many years. So I think of myself as a teacher. I had a whole series of classroom dreams that led to a surprise.

I walked into a classroom. The students were sitting around a seminar table. I sat down and thought, I haven't really prepared a lesson. I decide I'll just start teaching and maybe figure out what the course is about. I say something I consider to be smart—but the students don't listen. They are still talking among themselves. I call on one, but he just looks away. I'm frustrated, but I figure I'll do my job, so I plunge ahead—just like I might in waking life in that situation—even though I don't have clue one what the class is about or what I'm supposed to be teaching.

As I'm talking, some of the students get up and walk around the room, look out the window. I get angry at these unruly, disrespectful students. "Wait a minute here, I'm trying to teach," I say. They ignore that, too. Several more drift toward the door and walk out. I am frustrated, confused, and angry. What's wrong with these students?

I had this dream in many variations. The opposition fought these dreams every inch of the way. I interpreted the dream as a reference to my everyday life. I said to Bregman after each dream, "Well, I'm a teacher. So naturally I think I am the teacher in the dream. That's what I do every day. I walk into classrooms and I'm the teacher."

He patiently went back to the dreams. He pointed out that the students didn't seem to be listening. He asked: "How come you don't know what the class is about?" He asked: "How do you know you're the teacher? Does anyone in the dream say so?" He didn't see the dream as a reference to my waking life. He saw it as being about my inner life.

The dreams kept coming. In one dream, as I spoke, the classroom slowly enlarged and expanded. Now it was a lecture hall. Once again I didn't know the subject matter, but I was casting about for something clever to hold the students' attention. I gamely blabbed on. The students ignored me. A bell rang. Students abruptly walked out. Other doors opened. Students trooped across the room on their way to other classes. My classroom had become a sort of corridor; the room was now enormous, an auditorium.

I felt insignificant and hurt. This was actually a significant change within me. Instead of reacting—turning out my discomfort and blaming the students—I turned inward and felt the pain of being abandoned and rejected. As homework, I replayed that bewildering moment as the students walked out.

Then the time came where I actually got it—in the dream. This was much later, but it finally happened.

I walked into the classroom and sat down at the table. I looked around at the faces of the students, *my fellow students*. I waited for the teacher as they had been waiting in my dreams all along. I was "just" another student. I didn't need a lesson plan because I wasn't supposed to be teaching a lesson. That was a great relief. I was there to learn.

The classroom dreams, I came to understand, were not really about my teaching career at all, though I kept trying to interpret them that way. The classroom was an interior space: the dreams dramatized an inner attitude I brought to nearly every encounter in my life, where I played a know-it-all. In any given encounter, I'm the teacher, so you're the student. The dreams bril-

liantly exposed this flaw. You could give it a name like "arrogance" or "pride." But the images were more useful than a label because I could work with the feelings they offered. The image of the students walking off was something I could replay in my mind and feel into more deeply. This is how dreams give you leverage to change.

I could ask, What is behind that? Why do I always have to be the teacher? Why do I have to offload blame? Why, if I didn't know where I was going, did I get angry at the clerks? The dreams indicated the nature of an opposition I couldn't yet see. The opposition that drove my interpretations also drove much of my behavior. It had to do with pride, intellect, superiority. I was helpless when it got triggered. In a tight spot, I blamed someone else. Or if I was lost, I tried to figure things out for myself; I didn't ask for help. I didn't allow myself to get vulnerable or to feel my hurt. There was the key to my predicament: I was seeing me and my father, me and Bregman, me and most anybody.

It wasn't enough to be aware of these patterns and try to correct them from the top down, which is the usual procedure when we run up against our flaws in a moral context: the "you should's"—you should do this, you shouldn't do that. Because that doesn't usually work; exhortation just doesn't do the trick. Shame and guilt make things worse.

Freud proposed a different approach, a clinical model. There is an illness—neurosis—and there is a cure: if you know the etiology of your symptoms—if you can find the smoking gun—you can eliminate them.

That approach may also work in some cases. But to reflexively reference every dream to actual events in the past, as Freud does, is to miss much of the profound work dreams do.

Bregman's approach is not limited to the personal domain, though he certainly includes it. But if you bring everything back exclusively to your autobiography, then you are stuck inside your story as your ego knows it. If you're a teacher in life, then you are a teacher in your dream; if you are a doctor in life, then you are Dr. Freud in your dream.

You are also stuck with your personal history. You can't change what happened in your childhood. Where does that lead you?

Personal history takes you back to a past you can't change. The diagnosis feels like a permanent stain on you that can't be erased. And that's not the whole truth of it. I had to go deeper.

What's really at stake is how these forces work within you now, and how they lead to your predicament: wandering lost or numb in outer space or chained in the basement.

The first step is to let the dream display the behavior so you can see it. What was in shadow steps into the light of the dream, and then you see it. In my case, I had to admit that the guy playing me in the dreams was a jerk.

It didn't come easy. You struggle to accept this first difficult gift of the dream. Because there's really no way to go deeper if you are dragging the opposition along with you.

Bregman helped facilitate the process by slowing the dream down, by asking me to fix on the image and asking me to tell what I felt in that moment: when the clerk didn't answer, when the students left the room.

The feelings deepen, and so does your conscious sense of aversion to the opposition. It may happen quickly, or it may take months of working patiently with the dreams before you step down through this dark fog.

What's whirling in it varies from person to person: every particle of the struggle, every step through the dreams, is different depending on your predicament. The amazing thing to me was how brilliant and knowing the dreams were about my faults.

It's a strange miracle: dreams tell you the truth about your basic predicament. To me this is most amazing. After all, dreams could be just random bits of misinformation, neuronal garbage, totally jumbled irrelevant nonsense. But somehow they aren't: somehow, if you learn how to feel them, they are very clear dramas of your life's struggle.

For some people the fog you step down through is really, really dark and thick. For some it's light gray. There are some people, Bregman says, who are "good to go" when they begin the dream descent. Maybe they are born with this clarity, or maybe they've already done work on themselves. There are those who move quickly on to all the good stuff. It depends on how you were conditioned and formed, abused or traumatized, or whether you have worked through this material in other ways. The dreams always begin the lesson where you are. Not where you think you are, but where you are.

They display your behavior straight up, like the Irma dream or my train-station dream. They make you wonder, Why do I always act like Mr. Know-It-All or Ms. Doormat or Ms. Indifferent? Why am I a numb astronaut flying into space? Why am I letting myself be chained in the basement? What's inside me that makes me do it? Because surely I don't want to be the person I'm seeing in my dreams.

At first this opposition may be completely cloaked within the I of the dream, the dream-ego, the dream-I. You can't see it in the dream, in the exact same way that you can't see it in your life. Something happens and you react;

that's all. (Or something happens and you fail to react.) But why you reacted, or why you remained numb—that you don't know. Or maybe you do know, but you don't like to think about it. Maybe it crops up in your intimate relationships, or you get a glimpse after you've been pushed or stressed.

Then you say: "I'm sorry, something came over me." "I didn't mean it." "I didn't know what I was doing."

What something?

Who meant it if I didn't?

Who was doing it if it wasn't I?

**N**ow, if this opposition could step out of the shadow, if it could acquire a body and a voice and a personality, then you could know the hidden force that you are reacting to. And that is exactly what certain dreams do for you.

They personify the opposition.

Instead of being hidden inside you, you see a man on the beach in a business suit. Or Bob Barker is standing beside you while you happen to be chained in the basement. You may not get it even when the opposition is personified. You may actually go off with the man in the suit, or be content to chat with Bob Barker while you are bound in chains.

But eventually, if the opposition keeps showing up, some dreams come where you get a stronger feeling of aversion for this opposition and the evil things it does to you:

I am sitting on a screened-in porch with my daughter, who is a young girl in the dream. I hear footsteps in the dark clumping across the gravel. My daughter is speaking intently to me in a way I love, but now abruptly I interrupt her—"Shh, she can hear you." An old lady appears on the porch. "Be nice to your grandma," I say. This is very strange, because this old woman is not anyone whose face I know.

Here the opposition comes out in the open and acquires a body. She clumps across the gravel. "Shh, she can hear you." Why do I react to her instantly and interrupt my daughter?

Then it gets worse: "Be nice to your grandma"—sounds like good advice, but is really just a way of telling my daughter to knuckle under to her the way I am knuckling under. That's a gesture destructive of our relationship. Whoever this figure is, she isn't anyone's grandma, and being nice to her is not a good idea.

The dream dramatizes inner workings that in other dreams are hidden from conscious awareness. We have these inexplicable automatic reactions

that seem natural: in the train-station dream or the classroom dream, I blame others when things go wrong. It's an instant reflex. I didn't realize the reflex had a motivation; I couldn't stand to look bad in front of gravel grandma.

When I'm not consciously aware of her, I'm still reacting to her. When she makes me feel guilty, I try to shift the blame onto someone else. More dreams fill in the picture, but the basic point is that the dream gives me a picture: I see the opposition clearly as a separate character.

What does gravel grandma want from me? How does she manipulate or control me? What emotions does she evoke when she appears? Guilt? Shame? Anger? Panic?

The dreams show me all this over time. But instead of a pejorative label like "pride" or "superiority complex" or a reconstruction of childhood history going back to one parent or another, I had something much more valuable: an antagonist in an inner drama, staged nightly.

To see what so often drives you personified as a distinct and vivid character is to more fully receive the first great gift of the dream. I liken it to the difficult gift Abimelech receives when he is bluntly warned in that first dream in Genesis. He is going to lose his life if he doesn't change.

In the same way, the dreams show you how a force within you is snatching you away from your true life. The fear of gravel grandma's disapproval led me to always seek to be blameless, and if necessary to cast blame on others. I figured it out eventually: I was trying to be perfect for her.

This made me seek out situations where I was sure that I was on top, the teacher to any student. It also made me highly competitive with male figures, like the cop in the bicycle dream.

The dreams gave me a perspective on my predicament by showing the hidden role of the opposition. Imagine, the one pushing my buttons all those years was really no more than an old lady clumping across the gravel. This is a liberating revelation. The opposition comes out in the open where it can be seen and dealt with. Then your predicament can change.

In my case the opposition acquired the body of an older woman, but for others it can be a seductive man, a cruel father figure, or a pliant woman. Each of these general types appears in different guises in various dreams, yet over time the consistency becomes clear.

Bregman calls the opposition a deliberately ugly name: pathology. Sooner or later these sorts of dreams show up and allow you to see who pushes your buttons in those moments when you feel, "This isn't really me."

This recalls a climactic scene in *The Wizard of Oz*. Dorothy and her three allies—Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Cowardly Lion—have completed their mission for the Wizard and returned with the broomstick of the Wicked Witch of the West.

Now they ask him to keep his promises to them, but he puts them off with a fearsome display: the giant head of the wizard floats over his throne, with smoke and thunder. His mighty voice roars, so that Dorothy and her friends are knocked off their feet. But then the little dog Toto runs to one side and pulls at a curtain. You see revealed an older man furiously working the controls of his machinery, which spews all that smoke and roar. When he sees that the curtain is open, and that he is exposed, he says into the microphone, "Ignore the man behind the curtain. I am the great and powerful Oz."

But it's too late. Dorothy and the others have seen him for the humbug he is. The pathology doesn't like to be exposed like that. Because when it is, it loses a certain power over you. And you gain freedom, the freedom to say no or refuse to listen. You don't have to be intimidated by the Wizard of Oz or the Wicked Witch of the West. A pull of the curtain, and he's exposed; a splash of water, and she melts.

When the opposition shows up personified, whether it's a grandma or a seductive movie star or a cruel, demanding man or a glib game-show host, there's a chance to win your freedom right there in the moment of the dream.

You may miss that opportunity, too. That's more or less what happens in one of Freud's dreams where the opposition appears as an older woman. Not gravel grandma, but a staircase maid. Understanding what she does to Freud makes clear how the opposition blocks further growth, and what you gain by separating from it.

## Chapter 24

## THE OPPOSITION: FREUD'S STAIRCASE DREAM

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud interprets forty-seven of his own dreams. Among them is "the staircase dream":

*I am very incompletely dressed, and I go from a flat on the ground-floor up a flight of stairs to an upper story. In doing this I jump up three stairs at a time, and I am glad to find that I can mount the stairs so quickly. Suddenly I notice that a servant-maid is coming down the stairs—that is, toward me. I am ashamed, and try to hurry away, and now comes this feeling of being inhibited; I am glued to the stairs, and cannot move from the spot.<sup>1</sup>*

Freud explains the setting: his apartment is upstairs from his office. When the workday is over, he's accustomed to pulling off his collar and tie on his way up to his apartment.

Freud emphasizes that in the dream he's in an even "more advanced" state of undress. This unbuttoned quality—really nakedness—signals that he's not the serious Dr. Freud of the Irma dream. He's not just running up the stairs; he's jumping three steps at a time. The workday is over; it's time to let loose. There's a boylike joy. Just then, a mysterious female figure steps out of the shadow on the landing—and immobilizes him.

Who is she? Why does she have the power to paralyze him? Why does he feel so ashamed? How much does fear of her drive him in his life?

None of these questions come up in Freud's interpretation. As is his typical procedure, he relates the dream to events of the previous day, when he

unbuttoned his collar on the way up to his apartment. But that doesn't explain his shame or his paralysis. Instead, Freud searches his memory for other maids, other incidents on staircases.

All of this association could be very valuable preparation for going deeper with the dream; it's something Bregman uses all the time. But by itself, this widening of the interpretative circle from maid to many maids, from staircase to many staircases, distracts Freud from the core truth about the opposition. It's as if she doesn't want him to know who she is.

Because the maid is clearly very powerful, and if she can remain hidden inside him as the opposition, she remains capable of paralyzing him anytime she pleases should he decide to act a little too unbuttoned or boyish.

How does she have such power, considering she's supposedly just a maid, and according to Freud "elderly" and "curmudgeonly," "surly, and by no means attractive"? If the I in the dream is the same as the I on waking, how is it that Dr. Freud who faces down a thousand intellectual opponents in the world could be "inhibited" by a maid on the staircase?

It's clear she, whoever or whatever she is, is in opposition to the half-naked, carefree fellow vigorously skipping up the steps. She won't let him act the boy.

Freud's interpretation leads him very far from any of these considerations. He ends up discussing his smoking habit and how it might be causing a heart condition. He talks about this maid resembling a maid in the house of a woman he's treating. He talks about spitting on the staircase and pharyngitis and everything but the main point.

What he doesn't talk about is his pain. His interpretation doesn't touch on it, and it's clear he doesn't feel his own pain. This is another important way the opposition can assert control: it numbs us.

The image is vivid: he is "glued to the stairs." He doesn't seem to feel enough about this extraordinary paralyzing power of the maid. His interpretation even takes her side and gives reasons why he ought to be ashamed.

But suppose the "old maid" in the dream isn't someone to side with. Suppose she's there to stop him from going any further in this running-up-the-staircase, half-naked, "unprofessional," happy way of being. She doesn't like that sort of thing in him at all.

The staircase dream gives us a peek inside Freud's "dream-ego." It shows the hidden mechanism that drives his arrogant behavior in the Irma dream.

You can imagine that the staircase maid doesn't want him to listen to "Irma" or care about her pain. She wants him always to be fully suited up as

the supreme authority, the über-doctor who is always right. If "Irma" refuses to open her throat, why then, she's being recalcitrant. He can't acknowledge "Irma's" pain. The staircase maid doesn't allow him to acknowledge his own.

Freud is seeing in his staircase dream the opposition within him to feeling more deeply, which Bregman calls pathology. In the Irma dream the pathology hides within his dream-ego and he's not aware of it. But it's out in the open in the staircase dream—because the pathology has acquired a body. As she comes out of the shadows, the effect on him is clear enough: she inhibits him. This is an image of what happens within Freud's dream-ego in the Irma dream.

### Does everyone have an opposition, a pathology?

Most of us do, though the opposition takes many different forms or shapes and degrees of darkness, individual to each dreamer. In Freud's case it's personified in a female form; for others it's male. In some cases it's highly sexualized; in other cases it's about ego and pride. Sometimes it's a controlling older woman, as in my dreams or Freud's; sometimes it's a seductive philandering male or a harsh father figure or a compliant mousy woman. Yet over time, in looking at a person's dreams, certain characteristic figures appear with an impressive consistency, though in many disguises and variations.

Is the opposition an actual person in your past, from your childhood, a mother or father, or mother figure or father figure that has somehow been internalized? In some cases the origin of the opposition is very very clear in the dreamer's childhood history and becomes the subject of dreams. In other case, it is murkier. It's inevitable and tantalizing to locate the origin of the pathology in family dynamics. It's not wrong; it is important, and it needs to be understood. It's how we obsess about it, often how we feel it. "My mother didn't love me." "My father overlooked me." In some cases it's just inescapable: I was abused, I was exploited sexually, I was abandoned. But finally, the past is not the focus of Bregman's dream work.

The dream isn't coming only to show you history, but also presence. You see how the opposition operates in you now, regardless of how and when it was installed. That's dramatic and powerful—when you see it step out as a character and you have to confront what it's doing to you, how it keeps you apart from those you love. How it keeps you from your heart.

Occasionally, in a voodoo mood, Bregman calls it the "demon." And the dream work can feel like an exorcism—driving the demon out. Bregman is a skillful teacher and varies the terminology depending on the person.

How does he know that a given figure in a dream is pathology? You have to look at how it behaves in the dream, how it relates to other characters. A character in a dream who lies is most likely to be pathology. Stock characters commonly associated with dishonesty—a used-car salesman, or the glib game-show host in the basement dream—are likely to be pathology. A character who paralyzes you, numbs you, makes you feel guilty or ashamed—who one way or another freezes you in your tracks emotionally—is likely pathology. A sarcastic guy who scoffs at feelings and talks in intellectual abstractions is likely pathology. If you have a friend with these qualities, the pathology may appear in the guise of that friend. A character who seduces you, or who separates you from those you love—likely pathology. Any character who separates you from a child—very likely pathology.

There's no hard or fast rule, though. Every person is different, so recognizing pathology in a dream requires skill and experience. The dreamer is often the one most easily fooled.

*Pathology* is a term Jung borrowed from clinical medicine. To a physician, pathology is simply a disease process. However, for most laymen the connotation feels very negative.

In *Re-Visioning Psychology*, James Hillman offers another take when he examines the etymology of the word *psychopathology*. He points out that *psyche* at root means "soul," *pathos* means "suffering," and *logos* means "meaning." Therefore *psychopathology* is the meaning of the suffering of the soul, or how the soul suffers meaning.<sup>2</sup>

The soul suffers; it suffers in this world, and as it suffers it throws off symptoms in waking life, and images in dreams.

When the pathology appears in a dream, it steps out of the shadow where it's been hiding. We have a chance to see it in three dimensions and as a living character. We see that it's unpleasant and that the name "pathology" fits. It feels like some disease process, a foreign growth we wish we could remove. The word *pathology*, as Bregman uses it, is almost deliberately painful. It can put people off, be disturbing, but that's just the heat that's needed to cook up change.

The good news is, the dreams give an opportunity to weaken the influence of pathology in the psyche. This is to receive the first gift of the dream: knowing the cause of one's predicament in life. I call it the gift of Abimelech because the dreamer not only hears the warning in his dream but, like the king, heeds it.

Bregman is very skillful with pathology, which he views as a wily, tenacious opponent. First, he helps you see the pathology in your dream behavior. You

may defend it initially, but over time you feel a deeper and deeper aversion. You feel ashamed, embarrassed, sick at heart, and worse. It depends on what the dreams are showing.

In the next phase, you see the pathology in action, as I did in the gravel grandma dream. I could see her effect. "She" made me feel instantly guilty and then pass guilt on to my daughter. As dreams like that accumulate, you become more and more averse to the opposition because of your awareness of how it separates you from your soul. At your peak of anguish over how horribly pathological you are, Bregman makes his jujitsu move.

He says very simply, "The pathology is not you."

It's not you. Even though for a long time, maybe all your life, your behavior has been pushed by it, the pathology is not you. It's foreign to you and your interests. Even if you've been friendly to it and have identified with it, the pathology is not you.

This becomes clear because the pathology is now appearing more and more in the dreams, personified, embodied. You can see her freezing Freud in his tracks; you can hear her clumping across the gravel. You see the cruel dark male or the mousy repressed prude. Seeing the dynamics of the process displayed instead of having it hidden within myself, obscured, I gain separation. It becomes a separate character. I see that indeed the pathology is not me.

Over time, as that awareness takes hold, the pathology is forced to change how it appears in the dreams. This is an amazing thing to see. It weakens. It may appear limping or diseased, or its voice on the phone may fade out to a hoarse whisper. It may appear with crutches or in a wheelchair as if to tell you, "I am losing force." In one dream I saw it falling apart, collapsing on the ground, unable to stand up. There are a hundred ways the dreams can show you the pathology losing its strength as the balance shifts. As you become freer in the dream, the pathology loses freedom.

It's forced into forms that are more and more obviously unpleasant, which the pathology does not like at all.

In some cases it may appear as an animal—for instance, an alligator. When you see those snapping teeth in the water, you get an idea of how dangerous this force actually is. In one dream I saw two rotting snakes wound round each other, their flesh falling off as they snapped at one another. Many people feel strongly attached to their pathology at first; after all, they've been living it with all their lives and have given it sweet names. They will defend it, but not when it appears in such a loathsome form.

That is its true ugliness, but you can't understand that fully until you discover the great richness the pathology has been keeping you from, which comes in further work.

The label "pathology" is painful and ought to be to an extent, to reinforce the aversion. It's a flinch word. We hear it as a sickness or a sin, a medical problem or a spiritual defect. Something to cure, or transcend. But in the dreams it is simply someone we see.

When you do see it, him, or her, as it resides within you, you gain freedom. More of its habitual lies and contradictions get exposed. You have the opportunity to make different choices. The old automatic power it has over you weakens the more it is forced to step out of the shadows.

In the drama of the dream, pathology is an evolving, shifting character. It hides in the blind spots. (Bregman says the pathology occludes the dreamer.)

When it hid in the shadows, you reacted to it reflexively: you were thrown into panic or spoke cruelly or skulked in shame or acted out of guilt and had no idea why.

I don't want to underestimate the trickiness or shiftiness of the pathology even as it begins to appear in the open. It has many wiles and tricks, and it knows you very well. Just when you get rid of it, it can come back in a different form. It's a shape-shifter. It knows how to fascinate you; it knows what you like. The work of separating from pathology can be subtle and painful, like uprooting a tumor that's thrown its tentacles around a vital organ. It feeds on the life of you. Its roots have to be skillfully snipped dream by dream, as a delicate surgery.

Sometimes—often—the person feels he or she is being attacked by the therapist, because, to the extent that I identify with my pathology, I feel its pain, or its fear. I may be fearful because it is fearful. This is a very deep process and not necessarily easy. This opposition or pathology can feel like a cherished part of you; in many ways it may be who you think you are. The pathology may wrap itself in good deeds, good acts, or great career moves.

That came out vividly in a discussion with William T., the beach dreamer. Through the dream process, he became more conscious of his pathology. He admitted what he saw in the dreams. But he wanted to compromise because he thought his pathology gave him benefits.

Although he knew he was neglecting his real feelings and that success came at the cost of his family relationships, William T. liked it that the pathology drove him to write book after book. It was the same pathology that appeared

as Mr. Professional Obligation, a man in a suit who separated him from the little girl on the beach.

He understood how driven he was in that dream and could connect that to his everyday life. He admitted, "At any given moment I have a thirty-page to-do list."

But as we talked about it, I could almost hear the pathology defending itself.

"Isn't there a danger here," William said, "that I won't be creative anymore? If I would succeed in correcting this pathology . . . what's left? What else is there?"

—Your heart.

All right. It's possible that . . . In other words, I've lost touch with my heart and replaced it with a driven pathology.

—You haven't done it. It's done it to you. It wants to appear useful.

Isn't it possible that it is useful? Let me ask you this. I have thirty books. Would I have thirty books if I didn't have this pathology? What is William T. without those thirty books? Nothing. Do you understand?

He was getting pretty intense. And I said, "Yes—who is William T. without his thirty books? That's exactly the question we are trying to unravel—because the real you is who the dreams are trying to bring out. The pathology you made a deal with is not you."

He wasn't entirely convinced. Nor do I want to underestimate his struggle or mine. When the pathology is "marbled in," it's hard to separate. But in time, depending on how stubborn it is and how willing you are to follow your dreams, the separation happens.

The moment when the tables turn, when you no longer get sucked in, is a triumph. One time in a dream gravel grandma sat beside me on the plane. This time she took the form of a well-dressed middle-age woman, very articulate and sophisticated. She began to talk with me about a dictionary; she knows my fascination with books and language and words. Maybe in the past I would have been fascinated, but not this time. I knew what was up. I leaned forward and spoke to my wife, who was sitting in the row in front of us. At the end of the trip, the dictionary lady and I were standing outside the plane. She said, "Don't forget to call me about what we were talking about." I looked

at her and said, "I'm sorry, I don't remember." I really didn't. She seemed to wilt, and she said in a weak voice, "Echoes in an empty room." That's all she had left of her voice, an echo. I walked away down the tarmac with my arm around my wife, and left her behind.

This moment came after months of work. It was just a moment, and there were more to come, but I was on my way. I had changed inside the dream, and this indicated changes in me—period. I'd received the first gift of the dream, Abimelech's gift. Now I knew not only my predicament, but the pathology behind it—and I was able to free myself.

The first effects I'd gained were a new way of relating to others without the pathology getting in the way. I was becoming more the student and less the teacher. I was less willing to follow the impulse to blame others. I was more patient with imperfection and perhaps even a little more kind. I was more open and vulnerable and receptive, in life and in dreams. That vulnerability was a very important gain. It allowed those I might have overlooked before—the student, the child—to become more distinct and prominent.

Pathology had driven me in circles, kept me lost and aloof, wandering in train stations and in city streets. That was about to change.

Now along with the dream-ego, and the pathology, there comes a new actor in the drama, and one with huge personal significance, for the child brings the second gift of the dream. I saw him clearly in the orphanage dream, though I did not recognize right away who he was to me. But with him, the lost dreams finally found their destination.

## Chapter 25

## THE ORPHANAGE DREAM

*The Situation of the Soul*

**A**t first, when I had dreams of getting lost on city streets, I responded as I would in life: by trying to figure things out for myself—a move Bregman calls “problem solving.” It’s applying your intellect where it has no traction.

I didn’t notice any people on the street. But if there were, I ignored them. I didn’t ask anyone for directions; I was too proud. Instead, I tried to find a familiar landmark. I would figure this out for myself. I looked closely at street signs. But as I gazed up at the letters, they wrinkled before my eyes; they seemed to be written in Arabic or Sanskrit.

I was reading street signs, reading in my dreams—and that reading was being defied and mocked in the same way K de G and the other dream books mocked me when they doubled and redoubled, or when I couldn’t find a passage I was certain I’d just seen. But I didn’t see the mockery of street signs that changed as I tried to read them, or of streets that began as familiar parts of Baltimore but turned into parts of other cities like San Francisco.

I kept having these “lost in the city” dreams over a period of weeks. Many people have such dreams all their lives. But in my doing the work with Bregman, eventually, slowly, something shook loose.

My dream-ego was changing, softening. I was feeling more. The work of outing the pathology had helped. I’d seen it first in my behavior in some dreams. Then I’d seen it step out of the shadows, and just seeing it personified began to change me, though the decisive struggles were still ahead.

I was a little more open, more willing to be vulnerable. More receptive.

I was trying to piece out where I was in San Francisco, because I was pretty sure I was in San Francisco, but I couldn’t place the street. In other dreams,

I would have kept walking alone, trying to figure it all out. But this time, I noticed a black woman and her boyfriend across the street. This woman began to sing beautifully, spontaneously, and I was moved by the rich beauty of her voice. From across the street, I sang back to her in an impromptu duet—something I might not have done in “real life.” It was just in my heart to do it. We finished together, “I Left My Heart in San Francisco”—belting out in harmony the old Tony Bennett finale.

*When I come home to you, San Francisco,  
Your golden sun will shine for me.*

Singing with her gave me a feeling of exhilaration.

Then she stepped inside her house. Who she was, I didn’t yet know. She was one of those mysterious important persons sometimes encountered in dreams, and I would learn more about her in other dreams. But for now she’d moved inside, and now I, too, found myself inside a huge institutional building many stories tall. I recall a rough-hewn stone structure like an old church or ancient hospital. The place was packed with boys. Boys everywhere. I climbed staircases looking for a door out, and on each floor I saw boys, playing ball, laughing, chasing one another. They were about eight or nine years old.

At first, I felt out of place. What was I, a grown man, doing among all these boys? But I was too proud to ask for help, and everyone working there seemed too busy to notice me.

Then it must have been getting into evening, because I saw attendants coming into the hallways and gathering the boys to their dormitories. I peeked in one room and saw them dressing in pajamas, brushing their teeth in the bathroom. For some reason, this sight ratcheted up my discomfort. I certainly didn’t want to stay overnight with these boys. I have to get out of here, I thought, just have to.

I didn’t think of asking anyone for help. I ran down hallways, up and down stairs looking for a door. I was convinced as always that I could figure a way out for myself. But in this massive stone building there seemed to be no exits. Now the discomfort built into inexplicable fear. I absolutely had to find a way out. It seemed a matter of life or death.

Just then a Hispanic kid appeared. He said, *You’re going to need some help.*

He told me his name was Miguel. I had never seen this kid in waking life; he was completely a stranger, and yet oddly familiar. I liked him immediately.

Miguel showed me a vertical folding metal door, like one on a loading platform. Miguel pulled a chain and the door lifted. I looked down to a fifty-foot drop.

"I can't get out here."

Miguel answered, "*This is the way out.*" I looked again, and this time the drop was only a few feet. I stepped out. It was raining heavily. Funny, it had been bright and sunny before. The door slammed down behind me.

This was a pivotal dream, as it turned out, but also very puzzling, and I would go back to it frequently in my thoughts until eventually, through other dreams, I learned how to take it in. But I knew it was special at the time even though in certain ways I hadn't recognized in the dream where I was or what I was doing. I was no longer alone, or facing anonymous faceless clerks or students. A new character had emerged distinctly, and he had a name, Miguel.

When children appear, there's an invitation, Bregman says. Yes, but it's easy to miss the invitation. There was a lot I misunderstood. I didn't understand what it meant to see all those boys. I didn't know why bedtime at the orphanage panicked me, or who Miguel was or what Miguel meant by saying, *You're going to need some help.* Or what the help actually was. Most of all, I completely misunderstood the door. That is, I misunderstood which side of the door I was supposed to be on. I was still enough influenced by pathology to look at everything backward, including the door.

But later, when I had the chance to explore this space more carefully, I thought back on the scene with Miguel and knew that it was a very significant encounter. It came in the middle of a long series of dreams about boys, and marked a turning point.

You are essentially an orphan, the dream seemed to say. But I didn't recognize myself as an orphan. You belong in the orphanage, the dream seemed to say, with the other boys. Miguel is trying to help you. Not help you out that door, but help keep you in until you find the courage to stay. Because this is where you belong. You are one of us.

The fearsome drop was meant as one last obstacle to keep me with the boys. But the panic was too strong.

In time, I would understand. The orphanage was not a place to run from. It was where I belonged. I hadn't left my heart in San Francisco. I'd left it with the boys in an orphanage. My pride and adult way of thinking kept me apart from them. I just wasn't ready for that truth, that gift, at that time, in that dream. I just didn't know how to accept the invitation for change that Miguel offered.

Such missed opportunities are scattered all over my dreams, your dreams, anyone's. They are difficult to pick out unless you've been on the road, seen more of the landscape and inscape, the dreamscape... but in time, your eyes get accustomed to the light and you begin to pick out who is who. Not by any intellectual discernment or rule book; you navigate by heart.

I don't blame myself for blowing it; there's no need for blame. Eventually it got clearer and clearer who was who, who was my friend and who was my foe, and that inevitably led me to an understanding of what is meant by soul.

This dream had absolutely no reference to any experience in my life: never been to an orphanage, never sang on the streets of San Francisco. This was not a dream about my "predicament."

Everyone has what are called archetypal dreams. We see strangers with strange appeal like Miguel or the singing black woman, but we don't know who they are to us or what they mean. Weakening the hold of pathology helps us recognize them. As long as I was unable to admit I needed help, no one could help me. So it's significant that when Miguel says, *You're going to need some help*, I admit that I do.

Maybe in an earlier dream I would have dismissed this kid out of hand. I might have looked for some adult official or authority, the way I did with the clerks in the train station.

But at this point I'd been wrong enough times in dreams to admit that, yes, I need help. I knew my own panic and fear.

In my dreams and in life I'd become more permeable, more vulnerable. All those classroom dreams had made me more willing to be a student in life. And a whole series of dreams where I'd encountered children had led up to this as well. Now I was a little freer and looser, more open to hearing the song of the black woman, and that openness opened the door to the orphanage, too.

But as to what the orphanage really meant, why of all the places I might have dreamed as my soul's home I'd ended up in an orphanage, it would take time to be with that image and really live there before I would know. For the time being, I'd met Miguel, but by jumping out the sliding door I'd missed the opportunity to learn more.

Freud also had dreams where he saw children, and they were likewise invitations to go deeper. Freud had his own way of understanding and interpreting such encounters. As the genius who reopened for modernity the territory of dreams, he could never be blamed for overlooking features of the dreamscape, and yet certain of his dreams make you wonder what would have happened had he taken up one of his own missed opportunities.

One dream in particular haunts me—and I think it haunted Freud, too, based on what he writes about it in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, though I wonder if he finally knew why. He called it “the dream of the fleeing children”:

*On account of something or other that is happening in Rome, it is necessary for the children to flee, and this they do. The scene is then laid before a gate, a double gate in the ancient style. . . . I am sitting on the edge of a well, and I am greatly depressed; I am almost weeping. A woman—a nurse, a nun—brings out the two boys and hands them over to their father, who is not myself. The elder is distinctly my eldest son, but I do not see the face of the other boy. The woman asks the eldest boy for a parting kiss. She is remarkable for a red nose. The boy refuses her the kiss, but says to her, extending her his hand in parting, “Auf Geseres,” and to both of us (or to one of us), “Auf Ungeseres.” I have the idea that this indicates a preference.<sup>1</sup>*

In his self-interpretation, Freud focuses on the parting words of his son, which are nonsense syllables in German. Attempting to solve the puzzle of “the absurd and unintelligible verbal form,” he spins out brilliant and reconcile associations, with “salted and unsalted caviar,” and with Hebrew words. He discovers references to the play he saw the night before; he refers to the psalm “By the waters of Babylon we wept” and to the leavened and unleavened bread of Passover. His analysis is a literary exercise in intertextuality but can also be seen as rabbinic, not only because of the Hebrew references but because of his focus on the spoken words at the end of the dream. Of all the many details, these puzzle words in dreams most often command his attention. To someone familiar with the form, his analysis reads very much as a midrash on a sacred text.

Freud is a master of persuasion. But for Bregman, the dream is all about feelings. When we discussed Freud’s dream, he zeroed in on the belly button. He noted that the whole atmosphere of the dream is terribly sad: the children are fleeing Rome. Freud is “almost weeping.”

“If he can weep,” Bregman said, “he’s involved with his feelings. So if he were a client, we would work on the weeping.”

In his self-analysis Freud mentions “by the waters of Babylon we wept” as an association, but Bregman said, “He doesn’t take the step to connect it to himself: ‘What about this weeping is my pain?’ There’s nothing. It’s gone. He’s totally in his head.”

Freud reads away from the dream, not into the dream. He seems averse to learning why he’s “almost” weeping. In particular, he doesn’t think about the relationships between the characters in the dream.

One fleeing child is his own son. Yet strangely, Freud sits apart—on the edge of a well—and passively watches the nun hand him over to their father, who, Freud notes, is “not myself.”

So there are two fathers in the dream. But why?

There are also two sons:

“The elder is distinctly my eldest son, but I do not see the face of the other boy.”

So who is this other boy in the dream whose face he can’t see?

Freud knows he is not the father. Is it possible that’s because he is the son whose face he can’t see?\*

To Bregman, “That’s the whole problem.

“Like in the Irma dream he is the doctor. When does he stop being the doctor and be the human being? When does he ‘be’ in his feelings? When does he acknowledge anything of his deeper sense? There’s a traumatic door opening up to his pain, the children have to flee . . . What are those feelings? Well, he is feeling something, he is feeling along with these people who are leaving and trying to feel his own pain, his own loss.

“If you gestalted Freud, you’d gestalt the boys who are leaving. That’s where you could find out about Freud’s feelings. Because in the dream, Freud remains on the outside of his feelings, wondering what’s going on. He’s weeping—but just ‘almost.’ There is some great trauma or tragedy happening, and the way into this dream is through his feelings. Which he doesn’t quite feel.”

Freud doesn’t see that the feeling of “children fleeing the city” is about his own loss, his own separation from “the boy” whose face he can’t see.

So also, I didn’t see that my panic in the orphanage is about my feeling separation from the boys and Miguel. But I was more fortunate because I did see Miguel’s face and even learned his name.

In general, the pathology or opposition separates the dream-ego from the child.

So gravel grandma came between me and my daughter on the porch. But the reverse is also true: separating from pathology can bring you much closer

\*This recalls my friend David’s dream, which I described earlier: there are two Davids. Is it possible there are two Freuds—one by the well, the other the “boy” whose face he can’t see? It also recalls my own dream of two fathers and two sons.

to the feelings of the child. And this is a very good thing, because it brings you closer to the essence of who you are.

These two movements work together. The more you separate from the pathology, the closer you can come to the child.

At first, the approach of the child may be only partially successful or, in Freud's case, abortive, and that's realistic, because there's an internal struggle in the dream-ego against feeling what the child feels.

This is how you penetrate below the surface, how you break into the space capsule of your isolating numbness—by allowing yourself to feel what the child feels.

Whatever internal wall separates you from the child in your dreams is a barrier to renewing yourself. To live in your feelings instead of in your head requires becoming again a child. This is the experience I fled by jumping out the door of the orphanage.

It's the boy consciousness Freud is very separated from in his sad fleeing-children dream. The boys fully feel the sorrow the adult Dr. Freud can "almost" feel.

If we put this dream together with the staircase dream, the picture gets even more compelling. The force that separates him from the boys is the same force that freezes him when he's bounding up the steps. She—the "staircase maid"—doesn't want him to feel the vulnerability of a boy.

In some dreams, we see all three of these actors in the dream drama: the dream-ego, the pathology, and the child. I've mentioned the gravel grandma dream. Another example is William T.'s dream of the beach. He has to choose between the little girl with the drawing and the man in the suit. She is the child; the man is the pathology. The dynamic is clear: the pathology wants to separate the dream-ego from the child. In this particular dream, William feels much closer to the pathology than he feels to the child.

But as the dream descent goes on, such missed opportunities become real opportunities. Then the dreams take you deeper. It's not enough merely to see the child as I saw Miguel—or even to feel what the child feels.

Ultimately the dreams show you how to be the child. Only then could I really understand the answer to a question that truly puzzled me: Why, of all the types of children there are, was I being shown an orphan? What did that mean about the situation of my soul?

## Chapter 26

### BECOMING THE BOY

#### *The Pins and the Desert*

To return to the orphanage, I had to feel my way back to the child.

Early on in a long series of dreams, I got a glimpse of what becoming the boy is all about. It was one of those tricky dreams where you think you've just awakened.

I get out of bed, walk into the bathroom, and look in the mirror. I see pins in my face. Little white pins with black heads, like the pins used to attach a paper pattern to a piece of cloth. One pin is stuck in my right eyelid. I carefully remove it, hoping not to stab my eye. Another pin is stuck in my cheek, another in my upper lip. I remove them as well.

Where is my consciousness in this dream? What is the thinking of my dream-ego? I am actually thinking: *I can't go to work with these pins in my face.* I am centered in the waking workaday adult consciousness.

Only now that the pins are removed I notice something unusual in the mirror. My head has become smaller. Yes, it is decidedly smaller, and also I see that my hair is cut very short, just like when I was a boy and used to come back fresh from the barber's electric razor. I have that close-cropped look. My head is smaller; my hair is shorter; my head also seems to have a slightly different shape. It's a queasy feeling at first.

But then the queasiness gives way to wonder.

Do our dreams come to restore wonder, or is the wonder there all along, just waiting to be awakened?

Now the dream shifts. The setting changes, and the style. I am standing in the desert—somewhere in Arabia, a land not on any map. It is the end of the night. People move purposefully in the freshness before dawn. Tents and

tables are being set up for a bazaar. An Arab merchant invites me to sit down at a small table. From a leather pouch, he spills out several polished stones: jade and picture jasper. He does not speak. He seems to tell me a story, pointing to the stones as symbols, but I don't understand. Some are just smooth pebbles; others are carved little white skulls the size of my thumb. An old woman steps out of the tent, and he gives her a stone. My eyes are wide open: I am new here.

That's it: I am new here. That's the overall feeling. I want to take in everything going on as when first arriving at a fascinating foreign land. The man gets up and borrows a metal teapot from a tea salesman. They bow to one another; I watch them closely. Then he returns and pours fresh clear water in my cup.

But now a boy standing a few feet away draws all my attention. He is about five, with blond hair and bright blue eyes. A man and woman—his parents?—stand behind him. He wears a simple white robe with fringes. He is laughing. There is a slight radiance to his face, a subtle rosy reflected light. Did I mention that he is extremely beautiful? My view of the landscape expands: a desert stretches away from my feet; at the horizon I glimpse a first glint of the rising sun. I have this thought before I wake—a vow: "I'll stay up until dawn, my first dawn since I changed."

Then I woke. I got out of bed. I walked into the bathroom. I looked in the mirror. No pins in my face. Nor did I look younger. But that dream of dawn presaged the change that would follow as the child came to light in my dreams and in me.

It's a recentering, a shifting away from adult attitudes to the boy.

The opposition lurks in the dream, hidden in the practicalities of the adult consciousness embarrassed by the pins and concerned about going to work. The opposition likes to cloak itself in such practical concerns.

But in the dream, the opposition is overpowered by a flood of wonder. That huge feeling transports me magically to a foreign landscape, foreign to my superficial way of living in the world, because it unfolds a hidden life within—a whole interior space full of strong, simple images: the vast desert and the rising sun. A space peopled with important strangers I feel deeply drawn to, like the Arab man with his stones—and the shining boy. I did not know yet who this boy was to me.

I had been descending through a dark fog, struggling to separate from the opposition, detaching from the ironic, verbal, sophisticated, bookish adult attitudes of the "dictionary lady" that make up the face I show the world.

With the pins removed, I could see the changes underneath: I had a new face.

As the darkness turns to dawn, a new depth in the descent comes in the engagement with the child. After the dark fog of pathology, a region of deep interior light opens. You see how the opposition has been keeping you from great wonder and delight.

The wonder of the descent into dreams is difficult to express. Another person's ecstasy is easy to distrust and discount. I need to risk expressing it because, having come to it after much struggle in the dark, this interior dawning feels more real than realism. It's emotionally powerful and convincing, a cup of clear water to draw on as the descent deepens. Underneath all the struggle with your predicament, this development has been going on—a development that leads to the soul.

**A**lot that I got the significance of my new face or the shining boy at first, or easily. But with more dreams, the outline of this process of change grew firmer. First the opposition acquires a dream body where it gets exposed for what it is. Now in a countermovement, a deeply original part of you emerges into view, with the face of a boy or a girl.

It was the first glimpse of what the book of K de G must have meant in the gestalt by "your genesis and your origin."

I could watch the child born in a sequence of dreams, and feel it born in me.

First, dreams came where my wife is pregnant; then a dream where she nurses an infant. I dreamed my wife and I are adopting a baby boy. My father-in-law says, "There's no room in the house." But I answer, "We can make the house larger."

The "father-in-law" played the opposition with his pragmatic talk. But the optimism associated with the boy had the final word.

In these dreams there was still a subtle barrier between me and the child. That is, I saw the child as my child and saw myself as the child's parent. I was still interpreting from without to within, from the waking point of view. Though being a parent expressed my closeness to the child, it was still inaccurate. There was more to learn, and other dreams worked this issue from a different angle.

I see a woman and her rambunctious toddler. The child runs right into the wall, bounces off, and laughs. I laugh, too. "This kid is really amazing," I say to her. I feel joy and admiration for this child but have no sense of our true connection.

I am eating at a restaurant with a school principal and his son. It's a business meeting of some kind. In the middle of the meal I push my chair back and leave the principal. The boy and I walk outside and toss a football on the sidewalk. It's not clear to me why I do this. It feels right, though from a waking point of view it would be fairly strange.

Another dream in a restaurant. This time I'm with a Japanese businessman and his son. Again I abruptly leave the table to go off to play with the boy; we are laughing together on a green lawn. I tickle him under the chin. The boy asks me, "Would you like to come to my house?" I promise I will.

These encounters were positive, but in others I turned away from the child or let my adult attitudes dominate. I would condescend to him, or be patronizing. The dream work is hardly linear. There is zig and zag, approach and avoidance.

A woman is staying at a hotel with her mother and her son. She wanders through the halls and hears the sound of music. She opens a door and sees a three-year-old girl playing the piano. She sits down to listen, entranced because the child is playing so beautifully. It would be good to listen for a long time, but a pathological impulse grabs her. She wants to tell her son about this child. She gets up and leaves her. And just that quickly, she loses her.

The rest of the dream devolves into an angry encounter with her mother and a scolding of her son. With these distracting emotions, the pathology has reasserted control, and the piano child has been forgotten.

But she can remember her again: her homework is to stick with the little girl and the piano. Once an hour, for just a moment, she sees the child and the piano, and feels what it is like to be with her. It's like one of Colette's imaginal exercises, but pulled directly from the dream.\*

The homework has a practical benefit, because the dream is not simply an inquiry into the past; it's talking about how she "loses the child" in her life now, how she strays from feeling and is easily pulled away from her true self by the opposition.

I had a dream where I see a boy and his father arguing. The father wants to give money earned from tobacco stocks to a college. The son says that selling cigarettes is wrong because smoking kills people. He speaks as a boy: straightforward. I intervene, and feel the conflict between them as something

\*Catherine Shainberg told me that this is precisely how Colette worked with the dream images she brought to her.

I want to resolve. Instead of taking the boy's side, I try to find middle ground, a compromise. I make some complicated argument to justify the father's actions to the son. Clearly in this dream the adult and the child represent two sides of me. When I wake I realize I admire the boy's simple honesty and feel ashamed of my own complicated rhetoric. I'd always been proud of my dexterity with language and argument, but here I see that what's great for the ego is lousy for the soul.

The child shows a face in the dream so that we might be drawn to her (or to him), because the child represents very much who we might be—and once were.

"Generally," Bregman teaches, "children are an invitation. It's like the soul saying, 'It's time to come down here to encounter me. You've learned enough about your predicament. Now it's time to learn about who you really are.'"

Bregman identifies the child with soul, and I can accept that. The soul is my "genesis and origin," the original part of me that's ever young, ever renewing, ever refreshing.

Everyone knows moments of letting loose; it doesn't matter your age. It might be with friends, listening to music, dancing, playing softball or riding a motorcycle, or just taking an early-morning walk in the woods. You feel very alive, fresh, invigorated; you've shaken off the cynicism of the everyday. You say, "I feel like a kid again."

If this capacity exists in us—to be a child—why and how does it go away? Where does it go, in fact? When does it first get compromised? How, sometimes, does it return momentarily in a playful mood, in the intimacies of a love relationship, or in the company of a child?

The term "inner child" has become a cliché, but the experience it points to is powerful. Bregman calls the child in dreams "soul," and that seems to me a wiser name. When soul acquires a voice and body in dreams, it is the body of a child, a little boy or a little girl. There are many basic feelings and attitudes that come with the child: wonder, beauty, simplicity, honesty, directness . . . but now the origin and genesis of these feelings is no longer hidden or inaccessible. Soul emerges and has a face in your dreams. Seeing the pathology leads to a separation. But now, upon your seeing the child, there is a counter-movement: the goal is not to separate, but to merge.

In the dreams that followed, I no longer see a boy because I am the boy.

I go to a school meeting without wearing a shirt. Others criticize me, but I feel they have it wrong, that it's okay not to wear a shirt. This seems obvious

to me in the dream. I forget adult proprieties and norms; my dream-ego is shifting boy-ward. It's not that I know consciously I am the boy. There is no dream mirror to see my new face in. It's just clear that I'm acting like a boy and responding like one.

In another dream I find myself on a train. This was the first time I actually boarded a train in a series of dreams going back to those faceless train-station clerks.

The train is the "soul's means of transportation," Bregman says, because to board a train meant surrendering control to an unseen conductor. As a strong ego I had lots of trouble getting on board. Driving an automobile in a dream represents autonomy, but can also represent pride and arrogance: "The ego is always at the wheel," as the poet Delmore Schwartz wrote.

My failed train-station dreams formed a long series. There'd been dreams where I search for a ticket counter and fail, dreams where I follow my grandfather and daughter to the tracks. They board a train, but for some reason I'm terrified and refuse.

Now I am sitting in a coach compartment beside my favorite teacher. Looking out the train window, I see huge white clouds billowing in a perfectly blue sky. I think, "These are the clouds of the first day of creation."

Here's the strange part: I am in my underwear. That's just fine with me. As a young boy that feels natural. My homework is to "be the underwear boy," to see myself sitting in my underwear on that train, next to my teacher.

Now I had a new understanding of dreams of being undressed in public like Freud's staircase dream. The issue isn't the nakedness, but the shame. Young children aren't embarrassed about being half dressed or undressed. The way out of the predicament is to learn to feel as a child feels and stop being so uptight.<sup>1</sup>

Children aren't embarrassed by their appetites, either. The boy is open about them; he wants what he wants.

I dreamed I'm in a bakery and my eyes skip over the health bread and go right to the pastries. They are luscious, bulging at the edges with raspberries and cream. I say to the baker, "They look like pastries my grandmother used to bake, folded into a triangle." The baker says, "Naturally, to keep the treasure inside." He is amused as I pick out several large pastries and gobble them on the spot. No money changes hands.

In another dream I follow two other boys as we wade into a river. A fisherman is standing near a giant blueberry "tree." I eat several blueberries the size

of plums. Pure fantasy, but something fantastic is going on here that has to do with the expansiveness of the boy consciousness.

The style of the boy dreams shifted. I start off in a realistic-enough setting, a hotel room in a big city. I'm looking out the window at the night sky; I seem to be in a penthouse. Then I get this idea—and here the boy slips in: I crawl out the window. As soon as I think it, I do it. I stroll along the pediment, and now I'm walking on the roof.

The roof is a beauty, I notice—a strange construction of brilliantly fitted, exquisite curves of iridescent copper, like overlapping scales of a fish. I see everything as I look slowly, carefully around. I see the night sky, the glinting of the stars, tall office buildings and hotels with their windows lit up, the skyline against a backdrop of rugged mountains. Now I gaze out at the gleaming lights of the harbor, and the ships spread out in the bay. This is the beginning of a new kind of knowing, a sensual knowing, and along with it an ecstatic slowing down of time. This new quality of time becomes more prominent in my dreams.

I could stay forever on the roof in the night air, high above the unknown city.

But then comes a flicker of adult mind: I'm on a roof. It's dangerous. I might fall. Instantly, three workmen appear at the window.

One calls to me, "How did you get out there?"

I inch back slowly to the workmen, for I'm very afraid. I notice for the first time that the roof is curved and slippery and there are no hand rails. I see how easily I could have fallen off. I'm all about the danger now. There's huge fear. My heart is racing; I'm panicked. One worker in blue coveralls reaches out his hand and guides me back inside the window I crawled out of.

As the dream ends, I'm still shaken. I think: I must have been crazy to crawl out there like that, maybe suicidal. Am I going nuts? Am I secretly wishing to kill myself? The ecstasy has tailed off into fear, and doubt is rushing in as I wake—doubt about the dream, doubt about the work with Bregman. From the point of view of the waking ego there's this fear. From the point of view of the soul, the boy, everything is serene and beautiful. In time I calmed down; my thoughts went back to the ecstasy, the beauty—what came before the fear.

Bregman gave me "homework": once an hour to see myself as the boy on the roof, to stay in that place of wonder and awe, feeling the ecstasy.

By rehearsing the "boy" feelings in homework, I cultivated them and had the opportunity to encounter them again in dreams. I was learning this new consciousness, this new way of being and knowing, as the boy.

I was also learning about this deep layer of fear and panic, and how easily these weapons of the pathology could control me. Just because I was becoming more boylike didn't mean the pathology was done. The fear of death was mixed up with the fear of being the boy. I knew I needed help to overcome the fear. Of all the buttons the opposition has to push, fear is the big red one, the panic button. It can scare the child out of you.

Yet on the other side of the fear, the dreams that followed were visiting and revisiting a whole set of feelings: sensual delight, a lack of shame, courage. The assertiveness, playfulness, ease of the boy became a template for a new ease in life. There was another benefit, too. As I began to feel the boy in me, I felt the child in others. It was a new way of knowing people more deeply, intuitively, heart to heart, child to child.

Generally speaking, Bregman observes that the boy and the girl represent different sides of the soul: "It may be if you're a boy in a dream you're learning how to take on desires because boys are more demanding about their needs. If it's a girl it may be a part of the self that relates to relationship and sensitivity."

Being the child is the way to continue the exploration deeper, but it's also part of a revival of feeling in life. "Just as when you were four," Bregman says, "and saw your daddy you'd run up to him as if it were the most important thing in the world. Can you possibly feel that way again as an adult? Absolutely. You can go home again. It's not easy, but you can. You can feel those feelings that allow you to be open with love."

It is not easy to remain the child in dreams, or out of them. The instability, the flickering of consciousness, feelings of ecstasy followed by fear and panic—the alternation continues in dreams and in life.

What's noticeable in all this is that certain figures—also strangers—seem to know about these fears and they respond to your vulnerability, as the workmen rescued me on the roof.

As I looked back I realized I'd seen friendly figures like this in my dreams all along. Strangers who seemed to be helping me even if I missed who they were. They had been coming at me right from the start, but as long as I was shadowed by pathology, these were missed opportunities. Like the cop who stopped me on my bicycle; he was actually challenging me in a good way, but I didn't get it.

I might take for granted or even be frightened of these very important persons because the opposition doesn't like them and views them negatively.

But as I became the child, I trusted them more, and these allies and friends of the soul became more prominent.

They helped stabilize and support the shift to the boy. They came as a male or a female or both. The closer I came to the consciousness of the boy, the more aware I became of them as they helped take me deeper in the descent into dreams.