"Dreams and Telepathy"

Introduction to Freud on Dreams and Telepathy

In "Dreams and Telepathy" Sigmund Freud discusses the strong connection between dreams and telepathy. He says that there is a strong connection between the two, but that he does not believe this; he believes that they have little to do with each other. Freud is a strong believer that dreams tell people something about what is in their unconscious. He goes through two more patients and discusses their stories and probes his point through analysis that telepathy has nothing to do with the dreams. Again here, the reader does not get a real sense of whether he believes in the occult or not.

In "The Occult Significance of Dreams," Freud talks about the occurrence of telepathic and prophetic dreams. This saying that dreams could possibly be events that occur in the future as well as dreams that have been transferred from one person to another. He states that he has heard many different instances where people have admitted to both of these types of dreams. He does not shut either idea down, but instead states that both of these types of dreams could possibly be true.

The Cases in "Dreams and Telepathy"
Case I:
The dreamer in question had a dream about his wife giving birth to twins, though the sex of each was unknown. The next night was of a dream where the dreamer’s former wife, now deceased, gave birth to forty-eight newborns.

At this time the dreamer’s daughter gave birth early to twins, one boy, one girl.

A Reader’s Analysis
The deceased mother had a fond love of children, the more the better, and the daughter, as the dreamer believes, must have thought of this when she gave birth to two children, which would have pleased her deceased mother. The thought is that the daughters thinking somehow transferred into the dreamers dreams.

Though key points of the dream are off from reality, do the dreams still carry some telepathic significance?

Freud points out that technically nothing telepathic is happening at all. Nothing unknown ever happened. The father knew that his daughter was going to give birth, and she did. Had her pregnancy been a mystery to him, the dream would have been more unusual and thus prophetic.

Analyzing the dream alone, we find that the father has a natural interest in his daughter, whom he loves, so regardless of what she bore his dream is not surprising, rather a subconscious desire for his daughter to be more like his second wife.

Case II:
This dreamer, female, health problems as a child, healthier as an adult, and shy, has a history of odd visions, distortions in reality. Seeing people that aren’t there, to hearing her brother calling “Mother, mother,” even though he was on active service. Her own mother heard the same call. Shortly after he died. There are many other ghostly examples.

The dream is of the dreamer hanging onto a palm tree on a small island surrounded by water. She grasps the palm tree and reaches out towards the water, to a man trying to swim towards her. Upon waking, the dreamer falls out of bed.

For a long time she tried to identify who the man was, thinking it could be a husband, but later discovering it was that of her doctor.

A Reader’s Analysis
The dream is of birth. Pulling the man out of the water might mean she wants to be his mother, or that she wants him to make her into a mother. The palm tree is, of course, a phallic symbol, but all of these sexualized themes came about even at an age where birth and all that surrounds it were a mystery to the dreamer. The falling out of bed is a representation of child birth.

Other dreams are analyzed from her first dreams to her current ones, most of which show “tenderness for her father, of contact with his genitals, and of death-wishes against her mother, the outline of the female Oedipus complex is sketched in.” (214)(1)

We have to surmise that even though she eventually recognized the man in the water as her doctor, in the past, as a child, the man must have been her father, and this lead to the dreamer punishing herself when she awakens, falling out of bed, for desiring such a taboo affair with her own father.

This also suggests that her dreams are not as reliable as we’d like them to be, and have been altered along the course of her life, as these things tend to do. It’s possible that her mother was the only person that received the message of her son calling out “Mother, mother,” but the dreamer felt she had to make that assumed telepathic moment her own, since she has hidden rivalries with her mother.
“But I have never had a ‘telepathic’ dream. Not that I have been without dreams of the kind that convey an impression that a certain definite event is happening at some distant place, leaving it to the dreamer to decide whether the event is happening at that moment or will do so at some later time.” (197) (1)

And, as quoted, we see that Freud is doubtful of his own telepathic abilities in dreams, we read on to discuss whether or not anyone is capable of making certain prophecies in dreams, or whether every occult like dream can be broken down into much simpler, more rational parts.

“Telepathic messages – if we are justified in recognizing their existence – can thus make no alteration in the process of forming a dream; telepathy has nothing to do with the nature of dreams ... the essential nature of dreams consists in the peculiar process of ‘dream-work’ which, with the help of an unconscious wish, carries the preconscious thoughts (day’s residues) over into the manifest content of the dream.” (207) (1)

Freud is saying here that telepathy has nothing to do with the dreams people have. After analyzing the man who had a dream about having twins, Freud decided that it was wish fulfillment. There is no room in his analysis for telepathy. On the other hand though, in “The Occult Significance of Dreams” Freud describes that telepathy through dreams is possible. Why does Freud contradict himself here? His idea of dreams being repressed memories makes sense, since he assumes that our dreams have much to do with our unconscious. The reader gets a sense that this Freud truly believes that dreams are from people’s unconscious thoughts, instead of any type of telepathy.

Discussion Questions

- The contradictions Freud makes with himself from article to article are interesting. What does Freud really believe?
- Are these patients experiencing telepathy within their dreams? Is this believable?
"But since dreams themselves have always been mysterious things, they have been brought into intimate connection with the other unknown mysteries." (135)

Freud makes a connection between the mystery of dreams and the mystery of telepathy. He separates dreams into two categories: prophetic dreams and telepathic ones. Freud immediately states that there is "no doubt that there are such things as prophetic dreams" (135-6). He believes there is no evidence to support the idea that these prophetic dreams show the dreamer any picture, accurate or inaccurate, of the future. Part of his defense of this position is the fact that there are too many ways to falsify prophecies, and that an individual may occasionally be right, but only through pure luck.

The opposite is true of telepathic dreams. Freud suggests that there is a strong possibility that telepathy is a real phenomenon. He does not, however, restrict telepathy to dreams. In a story about a woman’s encounter with a fortune-teller, Freud highlights the possibility that telepathy may not need dreams to function, but just the subconscious of an individual. The woman’s "strongest unconscious wish...had made itself manifest to the fortune-teller" through direct transference while she was distracted by the performance (138). Based on his own experiments, Freud believes that “strongly emotionally coloured recollections can be successfully transferred without much difficulty” (138). Because telepathy operates on the subconscious level, there is no reason it must restrict itself to dreams. The idea that telepathic messages may be transferred to someone in a dream cannot be ruled out either. Freud postulates that “telepathic messages received in the course of the day may only be dealt with during a dream of the following night,” reinforcing the idea that telepathy works on the subconscious level (138).

Discussion Questions

- Freud emphasizes the link between telepathy and the subconscious. Why would the subconscious be the only way through which thoughts could be transferred through telepathic means?
- Is there any suggestion that an individual can control their telepathy?
- Why is Freud convinced there is no such thing as prophetic dreams, but seems fully convinced of the existence of telepathic dreams?

“I am inclined to draw the conclusion that thought-transference of this kind comes about particularly easily at the moment at which an idea emerges from the unconscious, or, in theoretical terms, as it passes over from the 'primary process' to the 'secondary process.'” (138)

Here Freud is hinting at the fact that he might believe thought-transference is possible. He states that an idea being transferred throughout the day could be suppressed until it comes out in a dream. This would mean that Freud believes that telepathy within dreams is possible. This contradicts with what he said before in “Psychoanalysis and Telepathy” and “Dreams and Telepathy.” The reader never really gets a sense of whether or not Freud actually believes what he is stating in this article. It does seem to lean towards the idea that telepathy and prophecy dreams do exist.

Discussion Questions

- Is Freud correct in considering the fact that telepathy can occur through dreams?
- He states that there is a possibility that these telepathic messages can only be dealt with in dreams. Is he parting from the idea that telepathy can occur outside of dreams and the subconscious?
References