

A NOTE ON THE UNDERSTANDING OF DREAMS

In "Beyond the Chains of Illusion" (1962) Fromm cites, amongst others, a statement of Marx which has also been his for the major part of his life:

"Nihil humanum a mihi alienum puto. (I believe nothing human to be alien to me)".

This is an essential root of all humanist thought, and therefore of Fromm's Humanist Psychoanalysis. It implies that there are common features in all human beings regardless of their race, their color, their creed, the time and the site where they were born. This does not intend to be an apodictic statement; the fact is that the subject has been amply discussed by many authors, and it is not the purpose of this paper to dissert on a subject so amply and ably presented.

But, though there is something common to all human beings (despite some differences inherent to age and sex), this does not mean that to know more about a specific, concrete individual we can ignore the context of his experience, i.e. the historical, geographical, social, political, economic and familial forces that mold his unique being. It only means that as like humans we can know, experientially, something about the rational and irrational, conscious and unconscious forces that move him.

In his "Recommendations to physicians practicing psychoanalysis" (1912), Freud makes these two statements: "To put it in a formula: he must turn his own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the transmitting unconscious of the patient". (p.115); and: "While I am listening to the patient, I, too, give myself over to the current of my unconscious thoughts". (p.134). Both these statements seem to refer implicitly to what this paper intends making explicit: in-so-far as nothing human is alien to us, it is possible for us to know quite a bit about the motivational forces of others. But if we are to know a unique individual, then we must garner detailed, specific material about him, those around him and his actual environment.

In reference to dreams, it can thus be said that there are two levels to the understanding of dreams:

- 1.- An experiential level, where we respond to those common experiences to all humans expressed in the manifest dream. Fromm in "The forgotten language" (1951) refers to our experiential response to an implicit mood in a dream. Tauber and Green (1959) state: "The message of the dream can be deciphered by the process of listening carefully and allowing the dream story to evoke images in the minds of listeners. Later Bonime (1962) writes of "symbolized" or "implicit" feelings in dreams; unfortunately he qualifies to this "interpretation by the analyst alone" as something that can occur "later in therapy", whereas this is always possible from the onset. Obviously, an experiential analysis gives us partial information, albeit a valuable one free from the

patient's defense mechanisms and, at the same time, presents us with significant channels of inquiry into the analysand's unconscious.

- 2.-- A specific, concrete, context level that attempts to reveal and relate all data pertinent to a given, unique, individual. Here we all have the well known techniques of dream analysis.

It is worthwhile repeating: the experiential analysis of dreams is one level of understanding them; valuable though it is, it must be ratified or rectified and amplified in the process of the psycho-analysis of a patient. By these means we further develop our capacity to respond and to be one with other human beings.

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