

## ARE THEY PROPHETIC DREAMS?

SONDRA GREENBANK AND R. K. GREENBANK

Dreams, their meaning and interpretations, have fascinated mankind since the dawn of time. Of all the dreams that have challenged men, perhaps the prophetic dreams are most valued. It was common among ancient cultures from Africa to the Druids to have someone skilled in the interpretation of such dreams. Such art, being highly prized, was passed on, shrouded with much mystery.

Modern man, after a long period of scorning dreams as irrational nonsense, has more recently begun to study sleep and associated phenomena. Many studies have been done on the physiological properties of dreams and much knowledge gained, but the interpretations and the possibility of prophecy remain scientifically largely uncharted areas.

There have been many records of prophetic dreams. The Bible makes mention of various dreamers. Probably the most well-known is Joseph's rescue from prison to warn of the seven fat years to be followed by seven lean ones. The Delphic Oracle was frequently consulted for dream interpretation and often major political decisions would rest on the outcome.

A more recent, and for many a more difficult to brush aside, account of a seemingly prophetic dream is the one told by Abraham Lincoln to a friend, Ward Hill Lamon. Mr. Lamon wrote "Lincoln kept this dream secret for a few days, until one evening at the White House, in the presence of the writer, Mrs. Lincoln, and one or two others, he began asking about dreams and let himself into telling the late one that haunted him. Lincoln proceeded to tell of the dream by saying, 'It seems strange some sixteen chapters in the Old Testament and four or five in the New in which dreams are mentioned; and there are many other passages scattered throughout the book which refer to visions. Nowadays, dreams are regarded as very foolish and are seldom told, except by old women and by young men and maidens in love.' Mrs. Lincoln remarked: 'Why, you look dreadfully solemn; do *you* believe

in dreams?' 'I can't say that I do,' Lincoln replied, 'but the other night I had a dream which has haunted me ever since. I am afraid that I have done wrong to mention the subject at all, but somehow the thing has got possession of me, and, like Banquo's ghost, it will not down. About ten days ago, I retired very late; I was weary, fell into a slumber and soon began to dream.' The dream:

"There seemed to be a death-like silence about me; then I heard subdued sobs as if a number of people were weeping. I thought I had left my bed and wandered downstairs. There the silence was broken by the same pitiful sobbing, but the mourners were invisible. I went from room to room; no living person was in sight, but the same dreadful sounds of distress met me as I passed along. It was light in all the rooms; every object was familiar to me; but where were all the people who were grieving as if their hearts would break? I was puzzled and bewildered; what could be the meaning of all this? Determined to find the cause of a state of things so mysterious and so shocking, I kept on until I arrived at the East Room which I entered. There I met a sickening surprise. Before me was a catafalque on which rested a corpse wrapped in funeral vestments. Around it were stationed soldiers who were acting as guards; and there was a throng of people, some gazing mournfully upon the corpse whose face was covered, others weeping pitifully. 'Who is dead in the White House?' I demanded of one of the soldiers. 'The President,' was his answer. 'He was killed by an assassin!' Then came a loud burst of grief from the crowd, which awoke me from my dream. I slept no more that night; and although it was only a dream, I have been strangely annoyed by it ever since.'

"Afterwards referring to this dream, Lincoln quoted from Hamlet, 'To sleep; perchance to dream! ay, there's the rub!'"<sup>1</sup>

After the assassination of John Kennedy, Lincoln's dream was remembered by many, along with the seeming prophetic hints and words of Mr. Kennedy himself in Dallas. The President is frequently quoted as attempting to dispel the anxiety felt about the trip by those in his party by jokingly saying, "Bang bang, you're dead," as he held his hands to represent a man shooting a rifle!

European literature reports many prophetic dreams but there seems to be less mention of this in American journals. The present authors have had a long-term interest in this particular kind of dream and have reported<sup>2</sup> two others which we will summarize briefly. These dreams relate to psychosomatic events.

The first concerns a female patient who reported this dream which occurred five months prior to beginning psychotherapy:

"I was sitting on the toilet in the bathroom and all of a sudden the floor was covered with blood. It had welled up and flooded from my

nose and mouth." The patient, in the dream, was wearing a pink nightgown and sitting on the toilet as though she were sitting on a chair. She was alone. The vivid dream awakened her.

The following morning: "When I woke up, I thought the dream was nutty, so I told it to my husband, and he laughed, and I laughed, because it was so silly."

One month following the dream and after a visit by her difficult mother-in-law the patient was hospitalized by a bleeding peptic ulcer. The details of the hospitalization closely followed the dream. She awakened one morning, felt ill and called her doctor. During his examination, she felt extremely nauseous and went to the bathroom clad in a pink nightgown. She cried out, while fainting, and her husband and the doctor found her on the floor covered with blood that had welled up out of her nose and throat.

This same patient had another dream, this one during the course of her psychotherapy in which she dreamed "she would have to enter a hospital for surgery." Within three days, she was bothered by a recurrence of an old Bartholin's cyst infection. The original problem was treated without surgery but she had been advised that a recurrence would necessitate an operation and, true to her dream, she was hospitalized and operated on.

The second summary involves a prophetic dream and premonition.<sup>3, 4</sup>

After arousing the concern of his roommate by bizarre behavior and moods, a surgical resident was seen by an intern on psychiatric rotation. The resident was Oriental and spoke little English; however, it seemed clear that this was an acute paranoid schizophrenic reaction. There seemed to be some possibility of harm to others but not suicide. The matter was referred to hospital authorities who felt the problem to be much less serious and that additional psychiatric aid was impractical. That evening, the resident asked his roommate to sleep in another room as "I am writing a letter." The letter, written in Japanese, said, "I am a disgrace to my profession; I have heard repeated profane and derogatory comments about me over the doctors' paging system; I, therefore, have no honorable choice open but to die." He then severed both femoral arteries and bled to death in his bed.

During the night, his roommate, sleeping in the room next door, had this dream: "I dreamed of a chicken with its head cut off flopping around the room; it was spurting blood all over. I was terrified." The intern involved was awakened at 4:10 A.M. for an emergency call in another part of the hospital, and while passing a bright red Coke machine had the thought, "What if I find the resident in a pool of blood."

Neither of the two doctors had been consciously aware of the possibility of suicide. However, on seeing the door ajar with the light on,

the intern went in and found the resident dead on his bed in a large red pool of blood.

Although not involved in dreaming, a dramatic picture was the product of another parapsychological event. It vividly shows the outline of an upraised human hand; the wrist is slashed and bleeding. The background is a variegated water-color wash with many small figures. At the same time the picture was painted, a friend of the artist was attempting to commit suicide by wrist-slashing. There had been no communication between the two people for at least two weeks.<sup>5</sup>

More recently, the authors have learned of still another seemingly prophetic dream involving suicide.<sup>6</sup> It was reported by a young, female teacher in analysis for mild anxiety reaction. The dream occurred about the middle of treatment and was quite unlike any of her other dreams before or since. The intensity of feeling produced was sufficient to awaken her fully and permit recall of the entire dream and the immediate association to it even some months after the event.

The dream is as follows: "I was having dinner with three men, two of whom I saw distinctly and recognized. The third man's face was never visible, but I clearly remember his physique, height and words. After dinner, we were all to spend the night in the house which belonged to this third person (the one described as strange to the patient). I go to sleep, am awakened once to feel that my life is in danger but go back to sleep. Then I reawakened with an intense feeling that the unknown man is going to commit suicide. In my dream, I get out of bed, search the room, and find an incomplete suicide note. This man enters my room, I hide the note, he gives me a \$20 bill and leaves. The scene then changes to the man's bedroom. He asks me for a rope, which I cannot supply. I knew he wanted to kill himself. Then I go to the door, stop and ask, 'Why are you doing this?' He answers, 'Because it hurts too much!'"

At this point the patient awakened and immediately thought of a friend of hers, Mr. M. She returned to sleep. She described the dream during the regular course of her analysis. Associations relating to her treatment, her childhood, her life history and the present-day situation were not remarkable, or apparently significant to the dream's prophetic nature.

A week later, the following information was provided by the patient and confirmed by newspaper reports.

The patient had been with her friend, identical in physique, height and manner of speech to the unknown man in the dream a few days before. They had had dinner together with the two other men in the dream. As she had purchased an article of clothing for him at his request, he gave her a \$20 bill. There was nothing in his behavior that

indicated any change from his usual dour disposition. The next evening, Mr. M., to the surprise of his friends, committed suicide by leaping from the bedroom of his New York apartment. He was pronounced dead at the scene at the precise hour of the morning in which the patient awakened from her dream, a week earlier, and on the same day of the week.

The patient could not recall any similar dreams in her life, as to content or intensity of feelings produced. She had not awakened as the result of a remembered dream since her childhood. Her usual pattern of sleep was quite sound.

She was consciously totally unaware of her friend's suicidal plans. This was also true in the cases of the other associates of Mr. M.

The dream and its suicidal content were never verbally or consciously communicated to the victim. In fact, the dream was deliberately kept secret from any other person except for its description to the psychoanalyst. It did not occur to the patient to discuss this dream with anyone since she was following the rule of psychoanalysis that material discussed in the treatment situation should not be discussed with people outside the office.

Psychoanalysis has been interested in dreams and their meanings for some time. Some of this interest has centered around the prophetic dream. E. Bergler<sup>7</sup> studied what he termed "uncanny" experiences in great detail.

One of Sigmund Freud's<sup>8</sup> works, *Dreams and Telepathy*, examines the interrelationships of dreams, telepathy and personality. He came to no final conclusions and other writers continued his investigations.

H. Zulliger<sup>9, 10</sup> studied several prophetic dreams and finds a basis for them in the dreamer's unconscious. He agrees with Hitschmann that "the assumption of mystical powers is nothing but a psychological attitude, projected into the environment."<sup>11</sup>

E. Hitschmann, in "Telepathy and Psychoanalysis," reports two prophetic dreams. However, on analysis of the dreamer, he felt that "Thus, on the basis of psychoanalytical knowledge, we can explain the phenomena of clairvoyance and telepathy without finding ourselves forced to make any radical alterations in the present-day position of psychology and the natural sciences. I would repeat here my challenge of 1910, that in cases of analogous telaesthesia the percipient should be subjected to a psychoanalysis. This method should be used in investigating the results of automatic writing, the observations of naive participants in spiritistic séances, and so-called veridical dreams."

As quoted in Ebon,<sup>12</sup> page 97, Jung was much interested in the concept of prophecy in dreams and relates a dream by a mountaineer who forecasts correctly his death in the mountains. Jung deals with the con-

cept thusly: "The occurrence of prospective dreams cannot be denied. It would be wrong to call them prophetic, because at bottom they are no more prophetic than a medical diagnosis or a weather forecast. They are merely an anticipatory combination of probabilities which may coincide with the actual behaviour of things but need not necessarily agree in every detail. Only in the latter case can we speak of 'prophecy.'

"That the prospective function of dreams is sometimes greatly superior to the combination we can consciously foresee is not surprising, since a dream results from a fusion of subliminal elements and is thus a combination of all the perceptions, thoughts, and feelings which consciousness has not registered because of their feeble accentuation. In addition, dreams can rely on subliminal memory traces that are no longer able to influence consciousness effectively. With regard to prognosis, therefore, dreams are often in a much more favourable position than consciousness."

But hardly has Jung given the dream a prognostic superiority over our waking self than he urges caution once again:

"Although the prospective function is, in my view, an essential characteristic of dreams, one would do well not to overestimate this function, for one might easily be led to suppose that the dream is a kind of psychopomp (someone, as in Greek mythology, who conducts souls to the place of the dead), which, because of superior knowledge, infallibly guides life in the right direction. However much people underestimate the psychological significance of dreams, there is an equally great danger that anyone who is constantly preoccupied with dream analysis will overestimate the significance of the unconscious for real life . . ."

Emil Gutheil<sup>13</sup> reports the present day psychoanalytic view of telepathy and prophecy in the dream:

"We are, in general, very short of scientifically observed facts as to whether we know more in the dream than we ever knew in reality, in other words, whether or not we possess the so-called 'sixth sense.' As judicious observers we have to take into consideration the fact that many neurotics and hysterics are inclined to believe that they have the mystic power of presentiment. Thus they will always attempt to establish a connection between real events and their preceding dreams. This is one of the various primitive reactions of neurotics, similar to the well-known 'belief in the omnipotence of thought.' In general, science rejects the idea of prophecy in dreams, though this idea plays a great role in the life of laymen. Of course, knowledge of the future corresponds to an old wish of mankind.

"The question of whether or not the dream has telepathic qualities can be answered only in connection with the question whether or not

there is any telepathy. Stekel answers this question in the affirmative, and Freud is of the same opinion. Freud says: 'Telepathy is no problem of the dream. We must not base our opinion about its existence on the studies of telepathic dreams. Submitting the reports about telepathic experiences (commonly, transference of thoughts) to the same criticism with which we combat other statements concerning the occult sciences, we retain, nevertheless, considerable material that cannot be easily disregarded. Besides, in this field, we succeed much more easily in collecting observations and experiences. This permits a friendly attitude toward the problem of telepathy but does not suffice for making a definite conclusion. One may establish the preliminary opinion that it may be possible that telepathy really exists and that it has the nucleus of the truth that many otherwise incredible conceptions have. One is right, indeed, in defending every position of skepticism stubbornly, retreating unwillingly only before the might of evidence. If there are telepathic messages, then we cannot ignore the possibility that they also reach the sleeping person and can be perceived in the dream.'

"Let us hope that the future of dream research will throw light upon this very interesting problem. In the following case we shall see, however, how easily our criticism can be biased by coincidences. A forty-six-year-old artist had to give his daughter a hundred schillings for a trip to Germany. He put a bill of one hundred schillings into his pocket and intended to offer it to her before she left. The daughter, however, postponed her journey for one day. When the artist looked for the bill in the evening, he found, to his great shock, that the bill was missing. He went to bed in a very depressed state of mind. That night he had this dream: 'My mother, who is dead, appears in my dream and says: "Don't worry, the money is in your brown trousers."' The artist jumped out of bed immediately and lo, he found the bill just where his mother had predicted in the dream.

"Telepathy? Not at all. The artist loved his daughter and was not very willing to allow her to leave for Germany. Besides, the sum of one hundred schillings was very large to him, since he was not earning much money at the time. Thus he 'repressed' the fact that he changed his trousers in the course of the day. In his dream the recollection rose into consciousness, driven by the emotion of despair over the presumptive loss of the money. (The situation 'mother-son' in the dream is nothing but a substitute for the situation 'father-daughter'). The dream shows what we could call 'pseudotelepathy.'

"The next dream may also be called 'pseudotelepathic.' The patient is a thirty-two-year-old physician. He reports: 'I dreamed that I was in a store where Persian rugs were sold. My mother and my fiancée were also present. We were buying a very large Persian rug.' Upon awaken-

ing, the patient was asked by his mother whether he had seen anything in the next room when he came home the night before. When the patient answered in the negative, his mother revealed to him that the day before, as a surprise, she had bought a Persian rug.

"The patient had not entered the room where the rug was, nor had he heard anything said about buying a rug. He remembered his dream about the rug only when his mother questioned him. And so it would seem, to all intents and purposes, that the dream was freely conceived and deserves to be considered telepathic.

"It occurred to me that possibly the 'Persian rug' was mentioned at the time the patient was in a state of 'decreased consciousness.' For example, if he were falling asleep or just awakening, the feeling of reappearing consciousness could have absorbed the words, yet not to such a degree that they could be remembered. My supposition rested on the fact that the patient seemed especially given to such states of decreased consciousness and, among other things, exhibited tendencies toward sleepwalking. I requested that he ask his parents, who slept in the next room, if they had used the words 'Persian rug' late at night or early the next morning. The affirmative answer corroborated my supposition. There was nothing 'telepathic' therefore, in this dream."

As we consider such an item as the teacher's dream of Mr. M. and its prophetic quality, we must, to be scientifically accurate, evaluate other explanations for the phenomenon. Among these are (a) simple coincidence, (b) fraud for gain, (c) the well-known unreliability of the witnesses, and (d) the usual distortion of memory that occurs with the passage of time.

If any of the above factors can account for an allegedly prophetic event, then it cannot be considered to be in the area of legitimate interest to the parapsychologist. Of course, the psychologist may find value or interest in the events surrounding the dream or its telling, regardless of any parapsychological phenomenon.

One can never exclude simple coincidence, especially in a single event. If a person were to toss a thousand pennies on the marble floor of a bank and all came up heads, one could not *prove* that anything except chance was at work. However, if this occurred most statisticians would probably want to look at the coins! But if a person said, "I'm going to throw these pennies at random on the floor and they will all come up heads," and they did, I suspect we would have a very interesting phenomenon to investigate. It would, however, still be wise to see if all the coins had both heads and tails.

Fraud for gain, either conscious or unconscious, often occurs. In cases of violence that come to public knowledge, the police are often bothered by a variety of people confessing or indicating involvement in



the event. In some cases these people become well known to law-enforcement agencies as "confessors." Careful evaluation almost always shows that their involvement in the crime occurred after the event. The psychological meaning of such acts may vary with the person involved.

Witnesses, especially those under considerable stress, have been shown to be quite unreliable. When the possibility of seeing an event twice occurs, we have an excellent opportunity to check our own poor perception. Seeing a movie twice or an immediate playback of a televised football game will demonstrate this point easily.

How our memory becomes distorted with time is also common knowledge. How many parents are greeted with the shock of seeing their own childhood report cards uncovered by their children's exploring in grandmother's attic trunk. Incidentally, seldom are the grades written down found to be better than the parents remember! Memory distortion usually makes the situation favorable to the reporter.

If we remove each of the above factors, then we are faced with the possibility of finding deeper explanations. Let us now consider the dream of Mr. M.'s suicide under each of these categories.

First: Simple coincidence. Again this cannot be excluded absolutely. However, the fact that the patient never reported a similar dream before or afterward makes the situation novel at least. The patient had never known any other person who committed suicide. Thus the chances of the two events, dream and suicide, occurring together within the same week by chance alone are rather small (statistically, less than one in a million).

Second: Fraud for gain. Not all gain need be for money. We can recognize the gain that the patient feels in pleasing her psychoanalyst. It is probable that this would be present in most patients in any case, especially where treatment was progressing well, as it was in this case. If all the details were known only from the patient, this gain could not be completely excluded. This is particularly possible since, as a given psychoanalyst publishes papers in any area of his interest, it is possible for an intelligent patient with access to a library and enough curiosity (seldom lacking in patients) about her doctor, to discover what he is particularly interested in.

In this case, the fact that the dream was dreamed and reported prior to the event's occurring, would seem to rule out such fraud. Newspaper reports confirmed the accuracy of the dream and the details of the various people involved.

Third: The unreliability of witnesses. It may well be true that the dream as reported was not the same as the actual dream. This is something that we have no way of checking at the present time. But our

inability to do this is not crucial. If there was distortion, then the dreamer's mind performed the distortion. Also, one cannot absolutely exclude distortion on the part of the psychoanalyst as he recorded the dream. However, his relative lack of strong emotional involvement and greater training would tend in the direction of reducing such inaccuracy.

Fourth: Memory distortion. The fact that all events were reported the day after they occurred should serve to minimize to some degree the effect of the passage of time.

In understanding an individual phenomenon such as this, it is crucially important to compare this unique occurrence with the observations reported by others of similar events.

We wish to stress the fact that individuals have much greater awareness of the world around them than comes to our conscious awareness. This is essential, it would seem, for sanity and effective concentration on the necessary activities of life. If we noted consciously all sounds, smells, vibrations, sights, tastes and other variations in our environment, we could really do very little else. We must separate what seems to be essential from the apparently nonsignificant. We may be wrong, but we are forced to exclude most of what we receive.

But the fact that we are not aware of all our sensory receptions does not mean they have not been registered in our mind. Accordingly, they may also be used, although not usually deliberately, in arriving at better conclusions and more mature decisions about life. This may well be one of the bases of intuition, feminine and otherwise.

This dream may therefore possibly represent a result of the patient's unconscious thought processes leading to an accurate, but unconscious, conclusion based on her opportunity in the past of observing her friend, Mr. M. This, of course, must remain a supposition in this case, which can neither be proved easily nor disproved. Since this is the case, it is also possible that phenomena of a parapsychological nature may be involved.

The teacher's dream contrasts sharply with a previously reported dream<sup>14</sup> by this writer where there was absolutely no contact between another dreamer and another suicidal victim for a considerable time prior to both dream and suicide.

With these discussions in mind, we can consider the two psychosomatic dreams<sup>15</sup> reported by the present authors. It would seem unlikely that dreams such as these which were so striking in their nature, so unusual for this patient, and consisting of so many exact details, would be simply coincidence.

Considering fraud, there seems little to be gained for the patient in relating this, since it in no way affected her treatment. The patient was

consciously unaware of the psychiatrist's interest in this type of dream. She is a very reliable person and has not been known to distort other descriptions. She explained her memory of the first dream: "I used to pay very little attention to my dreams, but this one was so peculiar I remembered it."

The discussion with the husband separately, both husband and patient remembering the dream vividly and accurately, would indicate that retrospective falsification is unlikely. One might say that this patient remembered the dream only because it was confirmed, otherwise she might have forgotten it.

In the first psychosomatic dream analytically considered, it is possible that the patient unconsciously was aware of gastrointestinal symptoms which would prophesy future bleeding. She was not consciously aware of any gastrointestinal problem. However, X-rays showed scarring, which indicated that the patient must have had asymptomatic ulcers previous to the one which bled.

The patient showed no awareness of bleeding as a symptom of an ulcer and did not think of an ulcer at the time she vomited blood. Her reaction was, "It was pretty frightening, because I know that you don't bleed that much without something being seriously wrong, and although I had no idea of what it was, I feared for my life."

In the second psychosomatic dream, it is not difficult to imagine that the prodromal infection was known to her unconscious mind. This led to the dream prior to her conscious awareness of the infection. The dream may have served as an attempted solution to the problem of keeping the unwanted awareness of pelvic infection from consciousness. By dreaming of already being in the hospital, she attempted to avoid the need of facing a reality she feared. It apparently served its purpose, until reality demands became overwhelming. Accordingly, the most probable explanation seems to involve knowledge in the unconscious of pathological developments in the body.

In regard to the cases relating to suicide<sup>16, 17, 18</sup> the following observations can be made. The Oriental doctor's suicide case is understandable if it is assumed that there is non-verbal and non-conscious communication of emotional feeling between individuals. This is reasonably accepted.

It is difficult to account for the phenomena on the basis of coincidence alone, especially in the suicide of the artist's friend since the artist had not drawn violence before or after the single water color described. The most striking point is the knowledge of the exact moment the suicidal action took place, as well as the method. The reliability of the information in both cases is felt to be very good.

It is difficult to visualize much in the way of "secondary gain" for the

people involved. The fact that the events were reported within a very short time of their occurrence should help minimize the effects of memory distortion.

We find, then, that there is much more known today concerning the explanation of prophetic dreams than there was in the past.<sup>19</sup> We have accumulated evidence which has increased our scientific sophistication and objectiveness. This has greatly reduced the number of such events that are unexplained. In the last analysis, however, we must admit that there do indeed remain some of these events for which no present explanation seems adequate. It remains for further research to provide us with the full answer to these problems.

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