

Dreams and the Philosopher

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It is generally agreed among philosophers and those in the social science that in Plato's Republic the training of the philosopher king includes such topics as arithmetic, geometry, harmony, astronomy, and the dialectic, but only a few know that there is another necessary study that Plato says reaches truth. The truth he refers to is not a general kind of knowledge as with those other studies but a knowledge personal and particular to the individual. Those studies of the philosopher, even the dialectic, do not bring him any closer to the Delphic "know thyself". Thus, after these general studies are mastered there is still the need to learn personal things about oneself the ignorance of which can have tragic consequences.

The study of one's dreams is that study that completes the education of the philosopher king. It is through such a study that elements of one's past, present, and future can be known. Before discussing this study it is interesting to know that even a casual reference to Platonic literature will not find references to this curious study, it is all but ignored.

It is individual, not general knowledge, is stressed in this study and this parallels the purpose of The Republic. When Socrates accepted the challenge to show the effects of both justice and injustice on the soul of man he found it necessary to construct a State that would be analogous to the individual soul because as he says it would be easier to find justice there "written large" and only after seeing it in the state would it be possible to find it in the individual soul.

The importance of this study is stressed in Book IX of The Republic, a book that explores the ignorance of the tyrant and traces his tragic fate to his inability to gain insight into himself and what drives him. Thus, it is there that we find Socrates urging that the philosopher must "search out his own inner most thoughts", and to ponder and reach out to that which "he did not know, past or present or future", and if one proceeds in this endeavor properly then it is in dreams that "the state of the soul touches truth." The need to study dreams and to prepare for dreams is the means to purify the psyche of one's ignorance of oneself.

The task of the contemporary philosopher is to discover what method of dream work would be consistent with Platonic thought and The Republic. Research in this area is new because Plato's Republic has been traditionally taught for some years as if Plato's aim was to develop a political model of the state instead of its stated purpose as a model for personal growth and development. Clearly, for such a dream theory to be Platonic it would have to be rational, non-interpretative, and directed towards uncovering false beliefs and the discovery of truths consistent with the Platonic corpus. Central to the Platonic vision is that our everyday life is like those prisoners who have been chained from childhood living in an underground cave who take as real the shadows they perceive on the wall of their cave. Reflecting on the second and third book of the Republic, we find that the beliefs taught to the young about the nature of oneself, reality, and the divine

are the false beliefs that bind and fetter the prisoners in the cave. Thus, to emerge from those beliefs they must become visible, be challenged, and rejected.

Now, let us examine what kind of knowledge is gained through dreams and see how it can fit into a Platonic framework. First, let us recall that what is worthy of wonder is the masterful way dreams draw the material for the drama of our dreams from our past experiences, the characters within it, and for the setting itself. The skill with which these elements are woven together is masterful, but when we reflect that it has been brought together for the attention of the dreamer then we can say it is truly a wonder.

The systematic study of individual dreams discloses, again and again, how the states of mind that are explored in the dream, the conflicts, and struggles within the dream, are actually parallel to one's most recent experiences. Yet, what is strange about these dreams is that the events in the waking world that they direct our attention to are, for the most part, not recalled as significant and, so, are ignored by the dreamer. It is not until we reflect on these dreams that their importance to us is perceived. Clearly, there is something in us that sees and understands what is central to our growth and development but we ignore it, and so our dream is molded and shaped to remind us what we have ignored and forgotten. And, this something is awake in our waking world but we are both ignorant of it and what it knows. While we busily live out our lives, convinced that we are awake to our reality, we are not aware that there is something that is awake to what we ignore and, so, we are ignorant of the master of our dreams.

For the dream master is awake in our waking and awake in our sleep; he crafts our dreams, and presents them to us with such skill that we take it for our reality. This master knows our present and past so well that the materials he draws for the dream are uniquely appropriate to us. The dream requires no interpretation other than understanding how it relates to our present world, we need nothing else. In understanding the dream we learn how the dream communicates meaning and how it uses analogy, allegory and symbol. The same analysis that is used in philosophical midwifery guides dream analysis. The understanding that is developed parallels our becoming sensitive to the logos, it is the key to our dreams and unlocks the meaning behind the pathologos, a belief that produces suffering. The logos is the language of the dream master. When we participate in the language of the dream master, we participate in the mind of the dream master.

The dream master must, then, be awake to our present, past, and must have a concern for our future. Yet, no one can see this master either in the dream or when we are awake. The dream master has no marks, cannot be seen or heard, yet is fully conscious of the direction of our lives and seeks our benefit. The dream master has a personal concern for the transcendence of the self, has even bestowed enlightenment experience and profound insights into the nature of reality upon some. The dream master has a personal concern for our transcendence, in sharing what transcends the personal it demonstrates that it itself is beyond the personal, and in that very act we can grasp that while it may seem that each of us has a particular and personal dream master that in another way it functions, like a beautifully cut diamond, that reflects in its many faceted oneness the lives of each one of us. The dream master is an intelligible consciousness that lies at the core of our

being and is our very nature, it is consciousness. As we evolve we manifest its wisdom and participate in the divine, a divine that guides us to transcend the personal and individual.

Our existence is a dialogue that prepares us for a more profound existence. We play a pivotal role as co-partner and caretaker of ourselves and the universe since it is through our existence that reality turns upon itself to reveal itself. The different expressions of perennial philosophy, classic or contemporary, each in its own way contributes to the idea that the universe we behold unfolds itself to man as mind.

The teaching of Philosophy should highlight the role of dream work in The Republic and to ignore it would miss the coping stone of The Republic because it alone brings us to see that there is the personal side of philosophy that needs cultivating for our enrichment. Sharing in the most recent work on the study of dreams, contributing to it, students of philosophy can be brought to see that some philosophical traditions can continue to develop and mature through the efforts of those who understand that what we call profound must be continually tested in the moment to insure the enrichment of our tomorrow.