
UNIT 2 MIND AND DREAMS

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you will be able to

- Recall and state some quotes on dreams.
 - Define dreams.
 - Discuss the dynamics of sleep.
 - Analyze the relationship between sleep and dreams.
 - Describe the dynamics of dreaming.
 - Relate the salient contributions of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung in the context of dreaming.
 - Explain the role of mind in dreams.
 - Recognize the contribution of Aristotle to the study of mind and dreams.
 - Interpret the relationship between religious thought and dreams.
 - Analyze and compare the interpretations pertaining to the concept of mind and dreams in various religious thoughts.
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2.1 INTRODUCTION

To dream is natural; it is a universal experience. All people of all cultures enter into this dream state when they sleep. As sleep, research has shown even animals dream. How we regard the dream, however, varies from culture to culture and from person to person. Humans have always attached great importance to dreams, which have been variously viewed as windows to the sacred, the past and the future, or the world of the dead.). Dream reports range from the very ordinary and realistic to the fantastic and surreal. Dreams have provided creative solutions to intellectual and emotional problems and have offered ideas for artistic pursuits. A type of cognitive synthesis that facilitates conscious insight may occur subconsciously during dreaming. Human thought differs from the mechanical processes involved when computers compute. Emotion colors thought. Indeed dreams and schizophrenia hint at two kinds of thought: a rational process involving the cerebral cortex, and “emotional thoughts” going on in the brain’s old, inner, limbic system. Perhaps the simplest overall definition thought is “active uncertainty.” Each night we switch off conscious, rational thought, and switch on streams of zany mental images. An average person spends 20 years of life asleep, experiencing at least 300,000 dreams. Plainly, sleep and dreams matter to us, though people have survived years with little sleep. But

until recently, scientists had few clues to how sleep works or why. Now we have begun to grasp its mechanisms and its roles. To understand the about dreams, we need to understand the dynamics of sleep first.

2.2 DYNAMICS OF SLEEP AND MEANING OF DREAM

Like consciousness, sleep is an active process of the nervous system. When darkness falls, the eyes indirectly inform a biological clock-the pineal gland deep inside the brain. The pineal gland then yields melatonin-a hormone that affects brain cells which use melatonin - a hormone that affects brain cells which use serotonin. This is a sleep-related chemical transmitter concentrated in the raphe nuclei aligned along the brain –stem behind the reticular-activating system-the part responsible for consciousness. In sleep, sensory input to this last system is reduced and the electrical activity sweeping from it up through the cerebral cortex drops below the level required to keep the individual awake. Yet a sleeping person's brain by no means switches off. What are the stages of sleep? What happens in your brain when you sleep?

Sleep involves repeated cycles of activity, each marked by several stages. In Stage One, the individual relaxes and drifts in and out of sleep. In Stage Two, the eyes start to roll slowly from side to side. The slightest noise may jerk the individual awake. In Stage Three, the body grows still more relaxed, and a loud noise would be needed to rouse the sleeper. Twenty minutes after sleep began, the deep sleep of Stage Four sets in. Then the cycle shifts into reverse: back through Stages Three and Two. Instead of exactly re-experiencing Stage One, the sleeper enters first of several phases of so-called paradoxical or rapid eye-movement sleep(REM for short).In this stage, noradrenalin cells in the pons-the middle section of the brainstem –fire off a battery of signals that spread to nearby cells and then affect the cerebral cortex. According to activation-synthesis theory, the cortex draws on “memory-banks” to help to build a pattern from these cells, and the bizarre result is what we call a dream. Meanwhile, the eyes rapidly shift to and fro beneath closed lids as they scan dream images created in the mind. At the same time signals from the brain paralyze the large muscles, so preventing violent movements of the limbs.

Each sleep cycle lasts some 90 minutes, and most people experience four or five cycles per night. The need for sleep and dreams can be explained in several ways. Deep sleep stimulates growth hormone that heals and repairs body tissues. It is said that REM sleep considerably restores the weary brain. In Freudian psychoanalysis, dreaming (incidentally not all of it confined to REM sleep) expresses repressed sexual desires. More modern thinking favors dreams as harmonizing the sleeper's inner world with his environment; rehearsing genetic patterns of behavior; or helping the mind sort and file the day's experiences.

Dream

Dream is a mental activity associated with the rapid-eye-movement (REM) period of sleep. It is commonly made up of a number of visual images, scenes or thoughts expressed in terms of seeing rather than in those of the other senses or in words. Electroencephalograph studies, measuring the electrical activity of the brain during REM sleep, have shown that young adults dream for 1 1/2 to 2 hours of every 8-hour period of sleep. Infants spend an average of 50% of their sleep in the REM phase (they are believed to dream more often than adults) a figure which decreases steadily with age. During dreams, blood pressure and heart rate increase, and breathing

is quickened, but the body is otherwise immobile. Studies have shown that sleepers deprived of dream-sleep are likely to become irritable and lose coordination skills. Unusually frightening dreams are called nightmares, and daydreams are constructed fantasies that occur while the individual is awake. Studies have demonstrated the existence of lucid dreaming, where the individual is aware that he is dreaming and has a degree of control over his dream.

Pioneering Work on Dreams

Freud, Sigmund, an Austrian psychiatrist, founder of psychoanalysis in his pioneering work *The Interpretation of Dreams* was one of the first to emphasize dreams as keys to the unconscious. He distinguished the manifest content of dreams –the dream as it is recalled by the individual from the latent content or the meaning of the dream, which Freud saw in terms of wish fulfillment. The most famous theory of the significance of dreams is the psychoanalytic model of Sigmund Freud. Carl Jung Gustav, a Swiss psychiatrist who is the founder of analytical psychology held that held that dreams function to reveal the unconscious mind, anticipate future events, and give expression to neglected areas of the dreamer's personality. Another theory, which PET scan studies appear to support, suggests that dreams are a result of electrical energy that stimulates memories located in various regions of the brain.

Why do we dream?

Life of all of us is changing and moving so fast that it tends to engulf us in its movement. You may have felt many a times that you might fall by the wayside at some point in your life! At the same time, you may also be having a strong faith that someone or something will always help you. Recall that in your mind or dreams, you may have been doing things that you are afraid to do. Say, public speaking. In your mind or dreams you may have seen yourself speaking at a function in your community- being very brave and speaking confidently in front of a huge gathering. You immediately found ways to attract public attention with your power speech. You may have seen yourself as an optimist and a fighter ... and then you found the cute little stuffed dog ... which may be symbolic of your deep inner and childlike feeling that you can trust something, your higher self, god or your friends to help you face the audience. All in all, it can be said that you had a great dream going here, and it can be said that your mind was processing all your little fears about life and how it is going ...and the outcome is great. This is because you are now confident, full of positive energy and thoughts as well and surrounded by loving people and friends! Shall we say that it is nice to dream within limits? It helps you tide over a crisis by providing you solutions probably in your mind. That is why, Rene Descartes, a famous French philosopher has said Desire awakens only those things that are thought possible.

Dream and Sleep

A dream, although temporary in its occurrence, is a factual experience of the dreamer and cannot be considered as false. We all have dreams and this fact cannot be denied, because dreams are a by-product of the sleeping process. But the visions that we see in dreams have nothing to do with the reality of an awakened person. They are just our mind's imaginations. If a dreaming person identifies himself with the dream body and considers the dream to be reality that is certainly an illusion. Similarly a mirage in the desert is a factual occurrence of nature and cannot be stated as false, but to consider the mirage as reality and seeing water in a hallucination is certainly an

illusion. In the same way, this material world is also a temporary effect of nature and cannot be stated as false. But, however, to consider the temporary appearance of nature's manifestation to be the only reality and to misidentify oneself with the by-products of matter is certainly an illusion.

A dream is only real in so far as it is part of the dreamer's consciousness. But the dreamer is not only eminent in his dream creation but he also transcends it. On awakening he can distinguish between reality and the illusion of the dream world. Just as the dream personality and the dream objects lose their appearance of reality when the dreamer wakes up, similarly this material existence, which is compared to a dream, loses its apparent reality when the heavily obscured self wakes up to his spiritual identity. The spirit soul is actually transcendental to the modes of nature and has nothing to do with the temporary appearances of this material world.

2.3 MIND AND DREAMS

We all dream. Every night – as we dim the light of consciousness – we enter the realm of the dream. In this dream state, our imagination runs free with little or no interference from our conscious mind. In the morning, when we wake and return to consciousness, we may bring with us a recollection of the wanderings of our imagination – we remember the dream. The 'visuals' in a dream are usually symbolic or metaphors. But the 'emotions' are usually real, so if you can see how you "felt" in your dream you can then see what your mind is trying to sort out. Aristotle, a Greek born in the Ionian city of Stagira (384-322 B.C.) was one of the first writers to attempt a study of the mind and dreams in a systematic way. Although in his early years Aristotle followed the Platonic belief that the soul and the body were separate entities, he later formulated the non-dualistic idea that the body and soul (soul in Greek thought was one's personal consciousness, personal memories and experiences) were polarities of one thing. In his treatise *De Anima*, part of his mature writings, he defines the soul as that which animates the body, that which quickens it to life. The soul is that which also directs the process of the body's growth and survival. So the soul is the blueprint that directs the purpose of the material side of human nature. To quote from *Search For The Soul*, 'The oak tree is the purpose that the matter of the acorn serves.'

This concept, without of course detailed knowledge of DNA, is not unlike the present day view of the non dualistic view of body and mind, both linked not only to the blueprint from our genetic material, but also that our being is constantly a dynamic interrelationship between all parts. Aristotle deals with the subtleties of sleep and dreams in three great treatises – *De Somno et Vigilia*; *De Insomnis*; and *De Divinatione Per Somnum*. (On Sleep and Dreams – On Sleeping and Waking – On Divination Through Sleep.) The views on dreaming are developed out of Aristotle's concepts of mind and imagination, and his observation of how people deal with sleeping and waking. For instance, he saw imagination as the result of sensory and subjective perception occurring after the disappearance of the sensed object. Recognising that the human mind can form powerful and realistic 'afterimages' of things no longer present, Aristotle carried this insight into the realm of sleep and applied it to dreaming. He added to this the observation that while awake we have the easy ability to distinguish between what is an external object and what is our imagined object. In sleep however this faculty disappears or is almost completely absent. This produces the sense of enormous reality we have in dreams, and the feeling that we are facing actual events and people. It is what Freud called the hallucinatory property of dreams.

Dreams were therefore, in Aristotle's observations, not sent by a god – even animals could be seen to dream – but the product of experiences had while awake, and then used by our imagination during dreaming; or else arising from internal but perhaps subtle sensations such as the symptoms of illness. Because our 'common sense' faculty that usually distinguishes between fact and fancy is absent during sleep, we are thus prone to the amazing fantasies of dreams, beyond correction of our judgement or evaluation. However he does qualify this slightly by making one of the first historical references to the faculty of lucid dreaming, by saying, 'often when one is asleep, there is something in consciousness which declares that what then presents itself is but a dream.' Many authorities quote Aristotle as the first to mention lucidity in dreaming. However, this seems to be part of the mistaken Western sense of superiority. Buddhism, founded in 500 BC, had lucidity as part of its basic goals. Yoga, an even older practice, gave methods to wake up in sleep.

Given here are two actual life experiences of two great people to help you form your own interpretations of the subject being discussed here. Winston Churchill (a British politician and statesman) reported an extraordinary vision experienced during anesthesia. During it he reached a state of mind in which he felt that his awareness encompassed all that existed and was to be known. In this exalted state he was gradually aware there was another horizon forming beyond his present knowledge. Then he broke through to this new realm, gradually reached the point of once more feeling he encompassed it all, only to find another horizon. On going into or emerging from anesthesia some people report the remembrance of dreams that had occurred in the past, or the recurrence of a nightmare which had been previously experienced. In the latter situation the nightmare is usually one which expresses some traumatic past experience, such as an actual battle scene or motor accident. Such experiences during anesthesia possibly represent or suggest a link with a self-regulatory process active in the psyche.

William James (an American psychologist and philosopher), when experimenting with nitrous oxide, reported a similar experience. During it he felt he knew the secret of the universe and all in it. On awakening however all he could recall in detail was the verse – '*Higamus Hogumus* women are monogamous – *Hogumus Higamus*, men are polygamous.' As he was an influential thinker for many years this led to the standpoint that such experiences were of little value. . Modern research tends to call this experience the 'ecstatic state'. Other terms for it are 'cosmic consciousness', vision or revelation.

Different cultures and ages have approached dreams and their interpretation in different ways. But one of the fundamental early ideas concerning what a dream meant has become folk philosophy. It has influenced thinking in regard to the mind and spirit to this day. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is that because many dreams place the dreamer in surroundings different to those in which they sleep, early thinkers were convinced this meant the human awareness or spirit left the body during sleep and travelled to far regions, or perhaps even to other worlds of the spirit. The idea of the person being able to leave the body gave rise to much speculation about the nature of human life. It became a fundamental belief that the mind or consciousness and the body were quite separate, but during life joined together in some way, perhaps like a letter in an envelope, or water within a tree. This view dominated the way personal awareness or consciousness was thought about for millennia, and was undoubtedly influenced by observation of such phenomena as out of body or near death experiences. In many people's mind

this duality is still a prime way of thinking about such phenomena of the mind as out of OBE's (out of body experiences) and NDE's (near death experiences). In fact, even with a much wider base of cultural viewpoints and philosophical and scientific debate and experiment with which to approach such phenomena, they are still not easily explained.

Some of our dreams emerge from the primordial in us, such as ancient psychological and cultural patterns laid down over millennia. Therefore, in our dreams we may meet with a rock, a tree or an animal that can speak to us. We face and have to deal with evil or benign spirits. We talk with our dead parents. We have warning or problem solving dreams. We are told by wise beings what will be the outcome of a situation. We experience landscapes or events that are awful or wonderful. All that has changed over the ages is the explanations given to such dreams, and the personal feelings involved. It may be said that we live our ordinary lives mainly in ignorance of our spiritual nature and this observation can be compared to dreaming people who are in illusion. To understand spiritual reality it is necessary to wake up to the process of self-realization. Briefly, it is our desire and attachment for worldly enjoyment, based on the conviction of the reality of this world, which supports the illusion in our waking life just as it is our conviction of its reality that supports the dream. In the dream our hopes of happiness and fears of destruction will never be realised because they are unreal. Through the process of yoga-meditation and self-realization, we should understand that this is true of the waking world also.

The temporary appearance of this world is not absolutely unreal. It has some reality behind it but we cannot know its true reality while we are desperately clinging to the false appearances of things. The material creations are manifested for some time as perverted reflections of the spiritual world and can be likened to cinemas which display a false reality of shadows and light. They attract people of less intelligent calibre who are attracted by such false appearances. Such foolish persons have no information of the reality of spiritual life, and they take it for granted that the temporary material manifestation is the all in all.

But more intelligent men with knowledge of self-realization understand the material manifestation to be nothing but the shadow of the Lord's spiritual abode. The Lord's external manifested energy in the form of material existence is only temporary and illusory like the mirage in the desert. In the desert mirage there is no actual water. There is only the appearance of water. Real water is somewhere else. Similarly, the manifested cosmic creation appears as reality. But reality, of which this is but a shadow, is in the spiritual world. The Absolute Truth is in the spiritual sky, not the material world. In the material world everything is temporary and relative truth. That is to say, one truth depends on something else. This cosmic creation results from interaction of the three modes of nature, and the temporary manifestations are so created as to present an illusion of reality to the bewildered mind of the conditioned soul, which appears in so many species of life. In actuality, there is no reality in the manifested world.

What we learn from the above discussion is that we have an innate tendency in our dreams to portray the world around us, even if it is a rock, as having consciousness and intention. Other ways of putting it are that we project meaning onto the world around us, or that we have powerful emotional and thought associations with all that we experience. Of immense importance also is that we create an image of things we sense 'out of the corner of our eye' but cannot or do not have a clear concept of. In our dreams, these obscure perceptions probably

appear as definite images or beings with which or with whom we have a relationship. It is necessary and important in this Unit to discuss the importance and interpretations accorded to dreams by some of the prominent religions of the world to understand the relationship between mind and dreams.

2.4 RELIGION AND DREAMS

Over the centuries, many civilizations around the world have used dreams or rather their interpretation to control the functioning of the community. Dreams and their interpretations were a part of various religions. Various religions have given a lot of thought to this topic. In olden days, a priest of high order interpreted the dreams. However, there is no evidence to prove whether realistic interpretation was given to dreams. Let us take some of the discussions and interpretations here.

Hinduism and Dreams

According to Hindu Thought, dreams are real and caused by the Supreme Brahman. The earliest references to dreams are found in Rig Veda which are mystic than symbolic. It is said that dreams are manifestations of evil spirits in this holy book of Hindus. There are verses on dreams in Atharva Veda which speak about *swapna* in two-fold characteristics, namely, the state of sleep whose Lord is Yama and what it (sleep) contains. The second one is about dreams which are in nature of retributive justice done to the dreamer by Lord Varuna, the Lord of Rta – by praying whom one can get the evil dreams transferred to the evil-doers. The word *shakunam* indicates that dreams are speculative. Coming to Upanishads, there are many references to dreams in a number of Upanishads. Not all dreams are prophetic. With an increase in one's morality and Divine consciousness, one would not dream at all. For an individual, the dreams are of true nature, occurring in real life. Most dreams are retributive in nature having an ethical justification.

Jainism And Dreams

A very strong concept of dreams exists in Jainism. Jain religious texts throw light on the importance, types and consequences of dreams. Some dreams may not be fruitful, but some can be fruitful. Some scriptures say that Queen Trishalā had sixteen dreams. Jain philosophy talks about nine causes for the occurrence of dreams in humans. However, of these only three are believed to be fruitful. These are: a) Contact with the spiritual world (gods-goddesses); b) Spiritual acts; and c) Karma-Performance of human deeds. In Jainism, contrary to the views of psychologists like Freud and Fraser, dreams are not just an imaginary expression of ideas and feelings but are an indication of our past experiences and future events.

Christianity and Dreams

In many parts of the English-speaking world, Christianity is known for not valuing dreams. By and large, dreaming disparaged today in Christianity. In the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas played a role in the transformation from a dream-loving Christendom to dream-fearing one. Specifically, Koet addressed the assumption with many Christian historians that Saint Jerome is an even earlier naysayer of dreams. According to Koet, St. Jerome may have admonished against

seeing pagan dream interpreters, or even admonished against interpreting “your own” dreams without a proper Christian interpreter. **Biblical Interpretation of Dreams:** The old testament of the Bible reveals God would communicate through dreams and visions. Like other religions of the world, Christianity gives significant importance to biblical dreams. There are mainly two types of dreams - Prophetic dreams and Warning dreams. **Prophetic Dreams:** The prophetic dreams concern with the things of direct relevance to the dreamer. The Bible says anyone could have a prophetic dream from God. The Bible calls the prophetic dreams "dark sayings" and these dreams belong to God (Genesis 40:8). Remember, the only other person who knew about the dream is the God. **Warning Dreams:** Christianity interprets warning dreams as the ones which warns the dreamer. Christianity interprets the dreams concerning the will of God as the warning dreams. The Bible has a verse that talks about God warning people through dreams. The Bible states that God may encourage you through dreams. According to the Bible, multitude of physical or mental business causes dreams. It is also not correct to interpret every dream as messages from God. The sources of dreams or premonitions that you experience are not always clear. In case of bad dreams causing fear or illness, it is best to seek God's help.

Islam And Dreams

The dreams of the Prophets are *wahy* (revelation) for they are protected from the *Shaytaan*. Dreams marked the onset of Revelation (al-Bukhaari, 3; Muslim, 231). Dreams are of three types: *rahmaani* (those that come from Allah), *nafsaani* (psychological, they come from within a person) and *shaytaani* (those that come from the *Shaytaan*). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Dreams are of three types: a dream from Allah, a dream which causes distress and which comes from the *Shaytaan*, and a dream which comes from what a person thinks about when he is awake, and he sees it when he is asleep.” (al-Bukhaari, 6499; Muslim, 4200) Dreams have disturbed many great people, and other dreams came as glad tidings to many others. Slaves of Allah! Dreams have had great importance in people's lives before and after Islam. Islam and its scholars have followed the prophetic path in dealing with dreams, and have judged dreams according to the *Qur'aan* and the *Sunnah*. They have ruled that true dreams are from Allah, some warn and others bring glad tidings.

Buddhism and Dreams

There exists a special practice called "dream yoga." The techniques of dream yoga are ancient and extensive in Buddhism. The dream yoga is a high meditation practice which is performed by the practitioner within the so-called lucid dream state. In the dream state, as well as in the deep meditation state, perception and cognition are united. That is to say, the five sense consciousnesses and the sixth-sense consciousness operate naturally in union in the dream/meditation states of being—implying a natural basis for uniting body/mind and subject/object. A body doesn't work without a consciousness, and a consciousness doesn't work without a body. In the dream state and deep meditation state, we also have/are a body. However, the dream body and the body in the deep meditation state, often named the subtle body, are not of coarse physical nature, but are energy bodies, and have therefore the ability to go beyond the ordinary limitations and bondage of the physical body, i.e. beyond space and time fixations. An energy body can be characterized as a unity of the basic energy of our physical body and the basic mental energy of consciousness.

Tantric Tradition on Dreams

In any Tantric meditation, we try to awaken and train an energy body through awakening the energy in the chakras, etc. There is a specific Tantric practice in Tibetan Buddhism where you train the "illusory body." The illusory body is a very subtle energy body, which can be established through deep meditation. Through meditation practice, one can leave the rough physical body, enabling one to use the subtle body without interference. In general, when we try to awaken and train our energy body from the waking state, the physical body constantly interferes. Because the dream state naturally occurs in every sleeping period, the Tantrics therefore make use of the dream state in order to develop and practice use of the subtle body. So in order to be aware of and be able to use the abilities of the dream state, we need to train our dream body and dream consciousness.

However, what the above accounts from various religions tell us is that people different walks of life do seek refuge in the dream world. It is evident that most religions see dreams as a source of salvation and in uniting with a supreme power termed as God by some. Still, the fact that people have an interest in controlling their dreams suggests that they have an interest in learning about consciousness and the way the brain works. Human curiosity about dreams inspires us to confront issues of reality and fabrications of the mind. Even though an individual may not explore lucid dreaming through a spiritual lens like in Buddhism, it inevitably is a way for individuals to escape from reality as they perceive it and explore themselves without any outside stimulation.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

Philosophers have rejected that dreams have any meaning at all and claimed that dreams result from the reactions which take place in the body and reflect the state of mind. Dreams are the reflections of the stress in your life. You might have experienced the phenomenon of your problems getting solved through your dreams. The fact that the dreams of many ancient peoples included confronting gods or demons need not seem strange to us considering our present day dreams which, too, are sometimes about seeing an apparition, a ghost or about an animal talking in one's dream. It was believed that God talks to people through dreams. During the ancient times, people believed that God communicated to men of God and prophets through dreams. Psychoanalysts maintain that the cause of dream creation lies in the suppressed desires of the dreamer. They argue that an individual cannot create dreams as they like by suppressing desires? Whereas the Vedatins utilize the experiences of the three states viz., waking, dream and deep sleep and then draw their conclusions.

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