

Worth / Not Worth Dreaming - Phenomenology of Dream Experiences, Sleep as a Prospect of Borderline Experiences

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ABSTRACT: A dream is an important space in our lives in terms of how much time we spend sleeping, but also in a way how it expresses our experiences and mental involvements. In the text, I bring a borderline perspective of the dream experience, paying attention to the activation of the trauma and the reports on this subject of former concentration camp prisoners, which memories were collected by me personally. The introduction to the text is a case study of a Mauthausen prisoner. I describe the long conversation with him in detail, because in this description there are data on the unexplored post-camp syndrome – a dream within a dream. Due to the importance of the subject, the entire context of the conversation is crucial, especially the respondent's reaction. The text has a profile concerning social and medical science - it is important for psychiatry, but equally important from a philosophical perspective.

KEYWORDS: Yet unexplored dream within a dream syndrome, traumatic experiences and sleep.

Introduction to the subject: The case of Józef Rosołowski, a prisoner of the Mauthausen concentration camp - researching the undiagnosed dream within a dream syndrome through a case study

Józef Rosołowski, prisoner of Mauthausen, Warsaw Insurgent, Baczyński's neighbor - explained that the poet did not want to associate with his younger colleagues and ignored them.

Report from the meeting:

2006, Pro Vita et Spe Clinic

I reported to the nurse the purpose of my visit to the clinic. Many former prisoners of concentration camps are treated here. She connected me by phone - as it turned out to Mr. Józef. He was very nice, he showed up at the clinic after an hour. He said it was his duty to convey the tales of the Holocaust to young people, as he often does.

I was alone with Mr. Józef in the office. He warned me that he and his friends around the camp were not normal and never would be. I asked him to share his memories of the camp. He talks for a long time about the fact that he enjoys life and does not understand old people his age, how sad they are. He sees them depressed in the parks, and yet they live, as life develops around, the world is free (he did not think he would live to such a good times). He explains that he did not think he would live to the 21st century. A very vital, influential, educated man, incredibly intelligent, bright despite his years, sharp, erudite, economist, very active socially. Suddenly it starts to change in the middle of a conversation. He says that he was beaten the most by the Poles in the camp, just for a bowl of soup, which could hardly be called anything suitable to eat. But it was about survival and the children encountered the same, ever weaker ones – he sawed as they ripped food out of children and the elderly. He talks about how he suffered clinical death and walked through the tunnel to the light. He emphasizes that it was like many people's stories. It took place in a transit camp. He said that he was so thin that he could be hurt when he was embraced. When taken out of the camp, he was on the verge of life, the skeleton protruded from him and the thin skin on top (he thinks his weight was around 27 kg –now he is a very well built man, broad, energetic and sociable. I find it hard to believe in the warning about abnormality, he seemed to me the most normal in the world, his voice was substantial). He explains that he was given blood and suffered shock, almost died, and that the transit camp was there so that the liberated would not attack the Germans for all that happened in the camp. They were afraid of retaliation. He emphasizes that he builds reconciliation. However, you can feel a great harm in him, a suppressed rage. He touches his own trauma more and more after numerous other stories. You can see that it is difficult for a strong man that the camp really changed him - he was broken. I am about to see his other face, the man destroyed by the camp.

The conversation takes a long time. An open window, summer, city in the sun (Krakow, Dietla Street). In this heat Mr. Józef feels a blissful atmosphere, says that you have to enjoy life, that he has grandchildren and a family. It is so important to him that he gives moments of respite - the family is for him now the most important thing and he wants to enjoy it Mr. Józef tells many facts from his life, he has no sense of smell, he has no taste. This is the result of a recent accident. He explains that it is his fault that he got in front of the woman's car. There was an accident, although on the crosswalk, but he feels guilty that he was not careful.

Mr. Józef says that he does not smell women's perfumes and he cannot praise me because of mine fragrance that is probably beautiful. Crazy kind of man. I tell him the voice recorder is jammed and I cannot record the conversation. He talks about forgiveness, that he forgave like other friends of his - they forgave, but they will never forget and it is as it should be. He explains that forgiving does not mean forgetting. You can see that the subject is difficult for him, that he is a kind, affectionate man with his drama. The camp made him have the personality of a mistreated man, absorbed in trauma.

Mr. Józef remembers returning to Poland and wearing only his striped uniform. He changes his tone completely. He begins to say that he has nightmarish dreams, and that it is a great trauma. He dreams constantly that he is in the camp. He stresses how he is afraid then, as he is convinced that everything has revived. The camp is alive. Panic grows, a great fear of death. There comes awakening. But Mr. Józef says that after waking up he is back in the camp and what a drama it is, when he is afraid that he is back there. He is so sure of it, that the fear is paralyzing, as he feels it with his whole being. Everything in the camp comes to life, all the details. It's the camp again. This must be a deeper phase of sleep. Mr. Józef explains that it often lasts until the morning, that sometimes he screams so much, the family wakes him up (it is a great torment when nobody wakes you up as it is difficult to wake up by yourself). It is a great relief when he calms down, when the family explains that he is not in the camp, but he is shocked, thinks that he is still in there. He thinks that it is impossible, that the camp is gone. He explains that the fear and panic can make you jump out of an open window, as you cannot control yourself, and your screaming and crying... Józef Rosołowski says that this is a syndrome of dream within a dream, a thing unexplored. I guess that's the conversation of our lives. Mr. Józef has such a mood that he is a completely different person, once kind, open, enjoying life and taking full advantage of it, other times he is unavailable, unkind, has a voice that hurts the recipient, cuts the conversation, it is impossible to encounter... There is a warning against conversation in my head - "We are not normal and we will never be again"... Indeed - he was a victim and he controlled himself. I understood that he withdraws, sits at home when being bad and unpleasant in the relationship triumphs over him (defensive attitude against reaching the trauma). In times like these he rests with his family who understand and know how to behave. At the beginning, I believed that he could enjoy life (he can enjoy life when he can). He most certainly wants to, but the trauma bothers him and that is a setback, but he did forgive. Pain ate him, evil touched him, he did not want to hurt, but he already had a second self... It was terrifying, yes (he did not hurt, he did not meet when he could not)... But he wanted to teach a lesson of hope... I had one chance, I listened to everything he wanted to tell. It was difficult to get him out of the house afterwards. He felt induced by a nurse. He had to show up, he wanted to, he felt good in the clinic, he experienced a lot of soothing kindness. He wanted his courtesy to be seen, but as he closed the office door, I saw a mask of a tough man, preserved, incredibly strong and howling in pain, helpless, who wanted to stick a bad word in someone to relieve himself, but he didn't - he backed away. He isolated himself, did not want to appear in such a bad mood and did not want to hurt. He just wanted to stay with his family, where he was understood, safe. This is how he wanted to convey hope, the joy of life, which he called for enthusiasm. And he succeeded through his ordinary-heroic attitude... He felt that he was alone with what was happening, especially at night. He preferred not to talk rather than hammering bad words at me. Maybe even the family didn't know him like that...

The importance of dream in human life - an in-depth philosophical perspective

A dream can be a borderline experience. I support this statement in particular with the traumatic dreams of Holocaust survivors. I asked Halina Birenbaum about her dreams. She quoted me her poem, which argued that it is not worth dreaming after the Holocaust and added that she dreams, that she dramatically hides her children so that they would not be lost. She told me that in such dreams she screams incredibly, even yells sometimes. She was a girl in the camp. She lost the closest relatives (at night she waited for death in the chamber at Majdanek, but the gas has run out). Taking these experiences into account, I would like to consider dream as a **space of borderline experiences** in which an existential tragedy occurs, correlated with the same type of loneliness - existential, because dreams, especially traumatic ones, close us in the sphere of their being. We can suddenly wake up from such a dream or be awakened by others, but we must signal the situation to the environment in some way. It may be best to scream, but we are not always able to react that way and screaming is an involuntary reaction during sleep. Meanwhile, Holocaust survivors suffer greatly in traumatic dreams, struggling with panic fears. The reality of the camp comes alive in dreams. We did not help Holocaust survivors, we did not find an effective recipe for traumatic dreams, which is why the problem is so important. Traumatic experiences still generate traumatic dreams in many people.

We sleep about a third of our lives. So it's hard not to penetrate and explore what we experience in dreams. Sometimes dream is intertwined with other dreams. It is recognized that the study of human sleep will have a profound impact on scientific and philosophical theories about consciousness as well as the personality (or Freudian Self)¹. Freud noticed

¹ J. M. Windt, *Sny, świadomość i jaźń: perspektywa filozoficzna*, „Teoria literatury, krytyka, interpretacja”, nr 5, 2016, s. 338.

that the study of dreams is the perspective of getting to know the most intimate spheres of a being's personality, and what a person wants. It is pushed beyond the level of consciousness, mainly because these desires are sometimes embarrassing and intolerable by cultural patterns, however, they are very strong and lead to internal conflict. This is a very common piece of information from a theory that aspired to revolutionize therapeutic work. It turns out that dreams are a challenge for medical practice, as undoubtedly dreams of Holocaust survivors call for specialized interventions. Their intensity, the level of experienced, real suffering in these dreams indicate the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). I wanted to supplement these assumptions with specific conclusion from my research and study. For this purpose, I have talked with people who experience stress, mainly increased trauma. It turned out that the first known cases of human situations indicate that these people dreamed intensely about experiences (in various configurations, including unreal ones) that were a source of stress in their lives (current or earlier). How is experiencing stress during sleep manifested? I have explored the relevant information through the individual case study of individual subjects.

Stress and suffering in the dreamer's perspective

Sometimes it may seem that when we sleep, we remain detached, perhaps even from ourselves. Our perspective is closed, but only external. What we have experienced, especially intense, not only recently but also in different periods of our lives - is manifested in the experience of sleep in a very intimate and accessible only to us. These are the conclusions from the aforementioned conversations that I had with several people. They were women and men, young and elderly people.

How is suffering manifested in a dream experience? A person feels tension (sometimes increased), experiences fear, anxiety, and these fears can be very strong and unpleasant. They concern what actually causes our fear. People dream that their loved ones are leaving, they experience a state close to crying, as it refers to the spiritual realm. It is a spiritual cry, the state of consciousness in a person is like in the case of ordinary crying, only tears do not always fall during dream, but the sensations are mainly the same (sometimes even more violent due to the lack of the possibility of an external physiological reaction). Dreams very much draw you inward. Sometimes physical reactions are completely limited, everything happens in deep stages of sleep or a person is stirred, wakes up, falls asleep and wakes up again. These are experiences that exhaust and point to the mental life of a person that can be described as strong tensions to cry out.

While we dream we are confronted with what we really want, our intensified needs, repressed in ourselves - manifest in dreams, and also what we anxiously avoid. The young woman indicated that dreams were repeated intensively, in which she realized her wishes as she wanted. She emphasizes that it is amazing that she is guided by consciousness, as she is very conscious while dreaming. She is in a specific space, often people who are in her daily environment are present in it. Also she can control her body seen in a dream, go to a specific house. She sees the surroundings of her neighborhood. Reality in such dreams is often very precisely mapped (partially or processed by unrealistic elements). The woman indicates that she directs her behavior according to the needs she feels during sleep (mainly it is about unrestricted fulfillment of sexual needs) and knows that she is dreaming (it is a light phase of sleep). She strives to draw from sleep as she wants, because she feels physically in sleep and knows that without consequences, a person is able to produce mental stimuli that affect the entire body.

I believe that dreams show our mental and even axiological condition. Dreams are not often a coincidence. In dreams, we struggle with the emotions that are released. They concern especially strong emotions. We don't dream about things that arise outside of our real experiences. Of course, there are traumatic dreams that result from the transmission of emotional trauma from our ancestors.

From the conversations I conducted, it appears that dreams very often make a person lose a lot of energy. I put forward the conclusion that the main function of sleep is to confront a person with his state of consciousness (so does sleep only give us rest, since we also consume energy is it?). Through sleep, we come to the knowledge that tensions are accumulating in us, which seek an outlet for the existential balance. Sleep (and a dream within it) appears as a real space of existence, as person is sometimes involved in his dreams. This activity shows its level of intensification, that the experience of dream is purposeful.

Probably the most difficult thing in the world is to explain the phenomenon of consciousness. Consciousness gives value and meaning to everything. If consciousness is a mystery to us, than we use only a limited part of its possibilities and resources, and it turns out that it is crucial for our life.

The state of mind determines the experience - the feeling of life. It happens also in the dream dimension. Consciousness works involuntarily, since the traumatic experiences of Holocaust survivors determine the activation of accumulated fears in various life circumstances. I think it is a positive thing that we cannot fully limit ourselves. There are involuntary reactions of consciousness, automatic reactions that release our tensions. It turns out that they can be very persistent, since people who have been severely traumatized dream about what happened to them all their lives. These

were model experiences for our consciousness. Through them, aspects of consciousness are formed that are like new reflexes. Experiencing pain, a person lives with the awareness of how unpleasant it is. He is stressed by it. Through this experience based on fear, the person automatically repeats the reactions (through associations of the traumatic situation) and perpetuates the traumatic experiences. It's like a system error. How does such a mistake in human consciousness arise - the reaction is repeated as a result of experience which, by causing great suffering, impairs human functioning. These ailments can be treated, but when they are very strong like the traumatic dreams of Holocaust survivors, it is appropriate to talk about a new identity of consciousness (and about the needs of new methods of treatment - but will they not interfere too much with the human being in view of the depth of trauma and the changes made in the psyche?). A person has an inscribed experience that was so strong that it permanently formed a natural reaction to the pathological experience (and this reaction is triggered in situations associated with trauma in other situations). But these reactions, like traumatic dreams, release very strong emotions. Sometimes they are pushed below the state of consciousness we share in our daily lives. We are talking here about the mechanism of displacing unpleasant events into the unconscious, but various impulses can activate the past experience, inscribed in human emotional memory.

I think that science is at a stage where it is impossible to avoid the interpenetration of different disciplines in order to gain interdisciplinary approach in explaining various phenomena.

I drew attention to the statements of several people. The result is that people do not dream mainly about what is their sphere of dreams, but what they fear, what scares them, what they want to displace from their consciousness.

A dream makes us aware that we are beings characterized by the experience of suffering. A dream makes us realize that we are full of fears, doubts, pain of existence². In a dream we suffer, experience fear, and are defenseless in the face of our own consciousness. We are afraid in a dream.

Philosophy of mind is not an autonomous discipline; it is largely shaped by common knowledge³.

When a person experiences repeated dreams, he usually feels that he has not dealt with certain accumulating problems in his psyche. These dreams usually indicate that a person struggles with specific needs, usually dealing with stressful situations in life (or releasing stress accumulated during life - it turns out that he can remain asleep for a long time in the unconscious). In this case, we are talking about a specific sleep function.

People meet the dead in dreams. There are many beliefs and superstitions connected to dreams. Culture has become convinced that sleep enables one to connect with the world of the dead. A dream that happens in it is the way to experience that phenomenon from various perspectives, but it is difficult to examine it by specific scientific methods (showing the spirituality of the dream experience). Hence, it is so important to strive for portrayal of experiences. By themselves, dreams provide knowledge about man and the processes that take place in his mind.

Through research in the phenomenology of sleep, we learn that dreams of meeting dead people that we had known are common⁴. These dreams are such realistic experiences that there are people who believe through them that those who have died are in a different place and in other form of existence. Whatever we think of these dreams, can they not be labeled as transcendent, extending from real? This is a complicated issue, because in dreams, man experiences the totality of his being in an intimate way, confronts himself with himself shaped by all experiences that can be activated, and it would seem that a dreaming man is the most closed in himself to all interactions. How to deal with such experiences? Since there are common dreams about dead people that we had known, it is a kind of looking for a person, an attitude of openness, looking for a relationship, perhaps with those with whom we had ties and now are dead. Due to such a perspective in the most closed space of life, in which man faces himself fully - it is possible to speak about the philosophy of our own attitude. We reveal ourselves as social beings in our dreams and existential experiences. A dream is an existential experience in which we are social beings, and these dream experiences carry out our social nature. This may happen through the realm of dreams and desires, but they are our real experiences. I think that the subjects of dreams concerning deceased people, due to the fact that they occur commonly, should be thoroughly investigated. We should know what functions do such dreams fulfill and what are the results. A woman, just over 30, told me that she dreamed of deceased people with whom she had a strong emotional bond. Emotional bonds are maintained in dreams because the mind creates situations of communing with them. As I emphasize, this happens through meetings created by the mind, but this does not change the fact that such experiences reveal the social nature of man, his feelings (needs in this regard) towards the relationship with people who have already died.

² D. Chalmers, *Jak wyjaśnić świadomość?* „Filozofuj”, <https://filozofuj.eu/dawid-chalmers/> [14.09.2020].

³ M. Miłkowski, R. Poczobut, *Czym jest i jak istnieje umysł?*, „Diametros”, nr 3, 2005, s. 30.

⁴ J. Héring, *Kilka zadań fenomenologii snu*, „Folia Philosophica”, 2011, s. 28-29.

The concept of logic is very close to phenomenology. What we experience is real. It causes our emotions, thoughts, reactions (including physiological) to occur, so these are the effects of experience that affect our psychophysical condition. Phenomenological experience may be a more logical category than logic in mathematics. The logic of experience concerns the most rational category, which is certain - experience. Experiencing is a current perspective. We experience at a certain time, place, at this moment in which we live.

Dream phenomenology

We deal with various creations of entities through dreams. They are creations of our being, our form of experiencing the world, even if the dream experiences concern unrealistic things. However, this experience is very real because these sleep projections result from our experiences and cause specific reactions in the body - at the physiological and emotional-cognitive levels. So how do dreams condition our health? As I indicated, dreams reveal our condition, they give us the possibility of a deeper insight into ourselves. These dreams are one way to increase human self - awareness.

While dreaming, we live, we experience life. Since we spend one third of our lives sleeping, how does this fact determine our quality of existence? How we live in a dream determines our awakened lives to some extent.

Sleep is sometimes compared to death, and I think that it is a largely inaccurate association. But dream often reveals the richest and deepest mental experiences of a man. Experiencing oneself, people and the world in a dream should be a broadly discussed category. However, dreams are often lost, forgotten and there are also those that are difficult to forget and cause discomfort to a person, remaining in memory. A dream appears here as a difficult, real experience that has an impact on mental life and emotions.

The problem of contemporary sleep disorders is considered in the context of civilization changes. The quality of sleep determines the quality of our functioning. The quality of sleep tells about how we live, and what I want to emphasize - our overall condition.

In dreams in which people commune with the dead - they do not feel fear, they mostly have positive dream experiences. Those dreams reveal our social nature, the nature of emotional ties with others, which are characterized by perseverance, sturdiness and define our being continuously, regardless of death.

It is very important to research the existential experience of dreams in order to be able to answer the crucial philosophical question of who we are. I believe that a dream can tell us a lot about what is happening inside us, what our consciousness is and who we are, as entity and as a community.

When considering a dream, one should not only contemplate experience, existential, transcendent aspect, but also the more basic dimension - neurobiological and sensory. In medical science, sleep is considered in the category of reduced physical activity and reduced responsiveness to stimuli⁵. However, during sleep, we are influenced by other types of stimuli that come from ourselves, from our body, mainly from the mental areas. I would put the problem more broadly, in the context of the whole spirituality and philosophy of dream in terms of experiencing it. Such extended conclusions indicate that our inquiries about the dream experiences recorded by medicine are shallow. After all, dreams are so intense that they engage many human muscles and a person can be very stimulated. This is a phenomenon because, nonetheless, we are in a state of rest.

We discuss the functions of sleep in terms of mainly simple, physiological dependencies, while dream has its own spirituality. It manifests the intensity of our thoughts - mental, sensual and emotional life, reveals our social nature, bonds with others. It also reveals our needs, fears, and living condition.

Dream gives me important answers to who I am, what experiences I have in myself, what I fear and how it shaped me. Therefore, a dream defines me, my being, defines my needs, fulfills a number of functions for my existence. Sleep is an experience not only related to rest. So dream is related to work, experience, relationship with oneself, but also with others. A dream is based on experiences largely related to confronting a specific culture.

Phenomenology of adream and its practical life implications

A dream is my experience. Its peaks a lot about me. A dream is based on what is inside me. I don't dream about what is beyond me⁶.

A dream has a substantial, not a magical meaning. I dream with the images of my consciousness and the associations taking place. I say "I am dreaming" when I think of our human experience which is essential to phenomenology. It turns out that dreams are dear to us, that we often dream about the same. It is worth mentioning that dreams in which we encounter known deceased people are very important. The universality of these dreams is one evidence of our

⁵ W. Szelenberger, *Neurobiologia snu*, „Via Medica”, www.pia.viamedica.pl [15.09.2020].

⁶ M. Miłkowski, R. Poczobut, *Czym jest i jak istnieje umysł?* „Diametros”, nr 3, 2005, s. 30.

human nature, which is similarly constructed on mental basis. Dreams of the dead prove our social nature. I think dreams call for thorough research. They are very deep material that tells us a lot about the philosophy of life, not necessarily about psychology.

Environmental factors are some of the selections that influence our dreams⁷. Our mental life is critical to our dream experiences. Our mental life is primary, as we experience reality, which affects the nature of the dream experiences.

A dream concerns the sphere of our being in the dimension of existence. You could say that you are what you dream. It seems more important than saying that you are what you eat (a dream tells me what I eat spiritually, emotionally, socially, and this way of formation translates into our attitude, way of thinking, mood and behavior). There is nothing in a dream that does not exist in human consciousness. We create our dreams through our experiences that cause certain emotions, and they are expressed in our dreams, affecting us. In dream, consciousness is released, as it opens to us.

Lack of sleep is the result of damage to specific areas of the brain. It is not important which, but it is a brain dysfunction when we are incapable of having dreams. It is a kind of disability, so it can be regarded as an incomplete brain function.

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