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“SETH” ON DREAMS



Among the books donated regularly to The Dream Institute, I recently noticed some from the “Seth” series. I had never read much of this channeled material received by Jane Roberts and carefully recorded by her husband, Robert Butts, when it was first published during the 1970s, but the word “dream” in two of the titles caught my eye, and I took them home to peruse.

I was stunned to discover how sophisticated, psychologically and spiritually, the ideas presented were. *The Seth Material* stands as one of the most comprehensive tracts of contemporary wisdom literature. These ten books, plus Roberts’s own books on psychic phenomena, her poetry and fiction, and her correspondence and journals are archived at Yale University Library. Much of the Seth material has been reprinted, and most have indexes by which commentaries on dreams and dreaming can be found. What I offer here is a cursory overview, with the recommendation that you take a further look at this intriguing material.

Divided States

Seth challenged the firm distinction we make between waking and sleeping, conscious and unconscious, saying that it arose as *Homo sapiens* separated itself “from the

fountainhead of your own psychological reality.” He suggested that many of our misconceptions about the nature of reality are directly related to this sharp distinction: “The unconscious, the color black, and death all have strong negative connotations in which the inner self is feared; the dream state is mistrusted.” The body, he said, is denied the frequent rest it requires and conscious stimuli are over-applied. In a *natural* body-mind relationship, the sleep state operates as a “great connector, allowing the free flow of conscious and unconscious material,” so there is a spontaneous blending of the two. Seth suggested that an abbreviated sleep program of four to six hours at night plus a daytime nap would bring about greater intuition and “a transformation in which it is obvious that dreams contain great wisdom and creativity.” (Roberts, 1974, 259-67)

An Inner Universe

The conception of the dream world that Seth offers is astonishing in its breadth and depth, and corresponds to experiences I have had about dreaming as an entry point or portal to non-ordinary realities:

“When I speak of the dream world, I am not referring to some imagi-

nary realm, but to the kind of world of ideas, of thoughts, of mental actions, out of which all form as you think of it emerges. In actuality, this is an inner universe rather than an inner world.” (Roberts, 1986, 159)

This universe is like a laboratory in which possible scenarios for life are considered:

“The dream world operates as a creative situation in which probable acts are . . . laid out in actual or symbolic form. From these you then choose the most appropriate for physical expression.” (Roberts, 1974, 387)

This idea corresponds to the contemporary theory about dreams being rehearsals for life. To illustrate this fundamental process, Seth described how children crawl and walk in dreams long before they can perform these tasks physically; language, too, is practiced by infants in the dream state, where they are secure and can develop faster than via physical experience. “Children’s dreams activate psychological mechanisms, and at a time when their age makes extensive physical knowledge of their world impossible. In dreams they are given information regarding the environment . . . without

dreaming there would be no learning, nor would there be memory.” (Roberts, 1979, 188) Recent research in neurology and evolutionary psychology corroborates this function of REM dreaming.

Seth refers to a method similar to what we call dream incubation: “It is quite possible to take your waking ‘I’ into the dream state” where it will “provide you with a preliminary stage in which working hypotheses can be creatively formed and tried out.” It is in the dream state that we have “greater freedom, trying out certain ideas and beliefs in this more plastic framework.” (Roberts, 1974, 389-93) In the tone of eloquence and expansiveness found in Seth’s proclamations, he said, “Often in the dream state you become truly awake, and grab hold of your spirituality and creaturehood with both hands, so to speak, understanding that each has a far greater reality than you have been led to suppose.” (Roberts, 1979, 30)

This metaphysics is resonant with that found in various spiritual traditions, namely that our individual, personal reality “rises out of the immense productivity that occurs in the dreaming condition.” (Roberts, 1977, 207) Seth emphasized that although modern sciences often do not acknowledge an inner reality, it

is not only “as valid as the exterior one, it is the origin for it.”

The Dream Explorer

In *The Unknown Reality* Seth characterized dream exploration as a science and an art, and he considered art as much a science as biology is, only employing a different methodology: in art, one identifies with the subject whereas in modern science, one distances oneself from the subject. Individuals who are embarked on a study of dreams are working in a “dream laboratory,” like explorers searching for virgin territory in the physical world. The pursuit of this art-science “trains the mind in a new kind of consciousness—one that is equally at home in either existence.” Though anyone can become a satisfied amateur, according to Seth, the fulfillment of this art-scientist vocation takes years of training and dedication, as one becomes familiar with the symbolism in one’s own dreams and finds the signposts of inner meeting places or points of “inner commerce and communication.” (Roberts, 1977, 212–14)

Mass Dreams of the Future

Seth noted that just as, on any given day, the events in our personal lives fit within the larger pattern of world events, likewise on any given night, the intimate events of our dreams also exist in the greater context of the world’s dreams. (Roberts, 1981, 109–110) In line with Jung’s notion of the collective unconscious, Seth emphasized that we each have a “dream memory” as a species, with certain natural symbols. And even when shared dreams are not recalled, they nevertheless circulate

through our psychological system and “are responsible for the inventiveness and creativity of the species.” (Roberts, 1979, 186–87)

Just as in dreams we try out possible individual futures, the same dynamic takes place on a collective basis. Seth gave this example:

“The idea of nuclear power was first a dream—an act of the imagination on the part of private individuals—and then through fiction and the arts, a dream on the part of many people.” (Roberts, 1981, 194)

In an important clarification, Seth stated that there are many kinds of mass or shared dreams and although some appear to be precognitive, because events in them do later occur, they are not actually precognitive, because it is the dream universe that brings about the subsequent events.

The Inner Teacher

In the recently published *Red Book* C. G. Jung describes his dialogues with Philemon, who taught him about the objective reality of the inner world. Seth performed this function for Jane Roberts. She once commented that there was more than enough material from Seth on dreams to fill a book. At the start of their encounters, Seth explained the basic dynamics of dreams: how to recall them, how emotions and beliefs form themselves into symbolic images, how illnesses may be signaled prior to their manifestation, and how dreams can be re-entered. Since *DreamTime* readers are likely to be familiar with these fundamentals, I have focused

here on the more advanced topics Seth addressed.

Seth can be understood as a wisdom figure; from a shamanic perspective, a spirit guide from the upper world. By whatever face or name it presents itself, an archetypal wisdom figure stands in complementary relationship to the waking personality, or ego consciousness. The challenge in psycho-spiritual development is to establish a dialogue between these two aspects. Messages from the wisdom figure may, at first, startle, confuse, or frighten the waking self. Over time, the input from the wisdom figure tends to become less startling, more easily accessible, and contact may no longer require drumming, induced trance, or other seemingly altered states. The waking personality broadens to accommodate and incorporate the perspectives provided by the wisdom figure, a process sometimes symbolized in dreams as discovering new rooms or enlarging one’s house. The encounters become more natural, and the wisdom figure may even seem to fade somewhat as the waking personality has more direct access to the archetypal source behind the wisdom figure.

Caveat

The waking personality, however, may resist the messages from the wisdom figure. If this persists, the expansion process may come to a halt. This happened with Jane Roberts. Even though Seth conveyed specific information about her rheumatoid arthritis and encouraged her to take better care of herself, she turned from this advice. Writing about this in the final volume published, her

For further reading on mediumship, see:

Flournoy, Henri. *From India to Planet Mars*

Jung, C. G. “On the psychology and pathology of so-called occult phenomena”

Progoff, Ira. *Image of an Oracle*

husband Butts said that Jane had “kept her body down for years.” Seth explicitly stated that her condition was not life threatening. Yet Jane’s lifelong fears and self-blame increased, panic attacks ensued, and she became a bed-ridden invalid. After receiving another life-supporting exhortation from Seth while hospitalized, Jane told Butts, “I don’t want to hear about it. Turn up the TV.” A few days before her death, at age fifty-five, Roberts admitted, “I may have chosen death.” (Roberts, 1991, 347–61)

Though this may seem a distressing outcome for the life of an individual so gifted, it does not diminish the value and integrity of what a wisdom figure has to offer. It indicates the degree of freedom that our waking self may have. And it may serve as a caution for any of us who envy the glamour of having spirit visitors, restoring our commitment to explore more deeply the wisdom in our own daily dreams.

Books by Jane Roberts

The Nature of Personal Reality (1974)

The “Unknown” Reality (1977)

The Nature of the Psyche (1979)

The Individual and the Nature of Mass Events (1981)

Dreams, Evolution, and Value Fulfillment (1986)

The Way toward Health (1997)