

DIVE INWARD TO AWAKEN



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“Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.” — Carl Gustav Jung

Prologue

“It’s as if I’m in Turkey. At night, two pistol shots ring out. The police come up to me and ask me to give a statement about what happened...”

That was how one of the last dreams in this story began. By then we had been working together for about a year. The man telling me this dream was no longer the person who had walked into our first session — but neither of us knew yet that this particular dream would become the proof of how far we had come.

Inside the dream, he catches himself thinking: what if those were his rounds, left over from the war? What if he is to blame? A psyche that once knew only one way to react — to search for its own guilt — this time behaved differently. Instead of pleading guilty on the spot or scrambling to justify himself, the man, inside his own dream, begins to check the facts. What ammunition could I even have had? What did I use in the war? Could I ever have handled a weapon of that caliber?

And he finds a contradiction.

If you heard only this scene — brief, a little strange, breaking off mid-sentence — you would probably make nothing of it. Nor could I, hearing this client’s first dreams a year earlier, have imagined that this was the ending they would lead to. The man sitting across from me then had come back from a war, and for him the whole world was split into friend and foe, danger and safety, guilt and excuse. Between the dream you have just read and the man he was when our work began lies an entire story. A story of how the psyche, given time and left undisturbed, can do more than console or explain — how it can return to a person something far more fundamental: the ability to explore his own life for himself.

This is the story I want to tell. We will come back to that dream — in full detail, and in its own time. But I suggest we start at the very beginning. With the question I am asked more often than any other.

Chapter 1. Working with Dreams: Not Mystical Interpretation, but the Clinical Language of the Unconscious

People often ask me, “Maksim, do you work with dreams?” I do. But in my practice, working with dreams has nothing to do with mystical readings, one-size-fits-all dream dictionaries, or attempts to predict the future. To me, a dream is a language — the language in which the unconscious speaks of inner conflicts, of defense mechanisms, of the hidden resources of the personality, and of the direction in which it is trying to grow.

My work rests on Carl Gustav Jung’s analytical psychology, on contemporary psychodynamic understandings of the unconscious, and on a method of my own that has taken shape over years of practice. One of the defining features of this approach is that I almost never interpret a single dream in isolation. One dream can suggest a direction for reflection, but it is a series of dreams that reveals far more: the inner logic of the unconscious, the shifting of archetypal images, the dynamics of the defenses, and the gradual transformation of the personality.

Over the course of therapy, the unconscious rarely speaks in random symbols. It creates a language of its own, in which the same motifs recur, develop, disappear, and return in a new guise — and it is precisely this sequence that holds the greatest value for the analyst. So I am less interested in “What does this symbol mean?” than in a different question: why has the psyche chosen this image now, and how does it change as therapy moves forward?

Taken one by one, dreams give us nothing more than a set of possible interpretations. Read as a single sequence, they reveal a process that no single dream could ever show. The unconscious stops looking like a chaotic fountain of images and emerges as a system with an inner logic of its own. It is no accident that Jung placed such weight on dream series: he stressed more than once that an individual dream rarely allows reliable conclusions about a personality, whereas a sequence of dreams shows the direction of psychic development far more accurately.

I have seen this borne out in practice many times. A client comes in with anxiety, with guilt, with the aftermath of trauma. The conscious mind tells this story in words; the unconscious tells the same story in symbols — and the two stories by no means always agree.

This is the place to explain something I held at the start of the work more as an intuition than a formed thought: why dreams, of all things, became the main material in this particular case. Anxiety, guilt, and hypervigilance lend themselves perfectly well to ordinary conversation. But a dream has a property that no other material in psychotherapy shares: it belongs to the person — and at the same time it doesn't. It is unquestionably part of his psyche, yet he did not choose the plot, did not invent the images, and is not answerable for what happened there. That is why a dream can be looked at from the outside, almost like a story about someone else — while one knows with certainty that it is the truth about oneself.

This rare combination proves especially valuable in places the conscious mind is afraid to go on its own. Ask a traumatized person directly, “What do you blame yourself for?” — and the defenses fire almost instantly: shame, justification, minimization, denial. But if the same conflict has already been lived through and told in a dream — as if it were someone else's story that simply came in the night — consciousness gains access to places a direct question would never have let it into. A dream works as a kind of airlock: it allows the exploring part of the personality to look into rooms the psyche ordinarily keeps locked, because looking into them directly would be too frightening. The unconscious seems to choose this form on its own — the safe distance of a story rather than a direct confession — precisely when the defenses are still too strong for an honest conversation in waking life, yet the person is already ready to explore what lies behind them.

For the client this book is about, it proved to be a remarkably precise solution. His capacity for self-observation was high even before therapy, but guilt and constant inner mobilization kept him from looking at his own conflicts head-on: the defenses kicked in too fast, and his mind rushed too quickly to accuse or to excuse. The dream released this tension almost mechanically. It offered material he did not have to answer for here and now — and that is exactly why it could be explored calmly. All the work that followed was built on this simple observation: it was not we who led consciousness into the depths by force of interpretation; it was the psyche

itself that, through dreams, gradually opened the way there — whenever it judged it safe.

That is why dream analysis in my work is never a stand-alone method. It is part of a broader analytic process — clinical conversation, the exploration of attachment, of defense mechanisms, of traumatic experience, and of the ways the psyche tries to keep its balance. The goal is not to “decode” a dream “correctly,” but to understand the language of the unconscious well enough to see the process of change taking place in a person.

In this book I want to show exactly such a process — not a collection of interpretations or a dictionary of symbols, but an account of long-term work with one client, in the course of which it became possible to trace dozens of consecutive dreams over the course of about a year of therapy. All personal data and biographical details have been changed to protect confidentiality, but the sequence of the dreams, the logic of the analysis, and the dynamics of inner change have been preserved in full.

I invite you to look at the unconscious not as a riddle to be solved, but as a companion in conversation — one who patiently, step by step, leads a person toward greater inner wholeness. This book is about that journey.

Chapter 2. A Clinical Case: When the Unconscious Begins to Speak

In the spring of 2024, a fifty-two-year-old man came to see me. He had a war behind him. By the time of our first meeting he had already been demobilized, had moved to England with his wife, and was trying to start a new life. Outwardly, that life was indeed beginning. Inwardly, the war went on.

He did not come with dreams — he came with anxiety: constant inner tension, emotional exhaustion, depressive states, and a heavy sense of guilt that accompanied almost every decision. Although his service was over, his psyche went on living in a state of high mobilization: every new event registered as a threat, and his sense of responsibility for what happened far exceeded anything one person could actually carry.

It soon became clear that combat was not the only cause. As so often happens in trauma work, the war turned out to be not the beginning of the story but its continuation. His history revealed an emotionally troubled childhood marked by a pronounced lack of secure attachment. Early on, he had learned to hold back his feelings, to grow up fast, to take on too much responsibility, and to orient himself toward survival. His emotional needs were gradually crowded out by the need to be strong, useful, and no trouble to anyone. This way of organizing the personality worked beautifully in extreme conditions, but it also cemented a lasting conviction: if something bad has happened, then one way or another it is my fault. Over time this conviction became the bedrock of chronic guilt, and the traumatic experience of war fell not on stable ground but on a belief system already in place — only amplifying what had existed long before it.

At the same time, from our very first meetings, another quality of this client stood out: for all the intensity of his distress, he had an unusually high capacity for self-observation. He discerned his own emotional states with great subtlety, noticed the slightest shifts in his inner world, and kept a genuine interest in exploring his own psyche. His empathy, his reflectiveness, and his desire to understand what was happening to him were well above average — yet for a long time they remained out of his own reach, buried under chronic guilt and constant inner mobilization. It

was this combination — severe trauma, a high capacity for reflection, and a genuine wish to understand himself — that determined the choice of an analytic approach.

At first, dream analysis was not a technique in its own right — just one tool among others, alongside conversation and the exploration of his life story, his defenses, his inner conflicts, and the aftermath of trauma. But fairly soon something happened that changed the whole course of therapy: the client began writing down his dreams in detail. At first it looked like an ordinary observation journal. After a few months it became obvious that the unconscious was steadily building a story of its own: the same symbols returned again and again, gradually changing their meaning. Images of war gave way to water; then came height, airplanes, keys, elevators, tunnels, borders, documents — and later still, the ability to think consciously inside the dream itself.

That was when it became clear that what lay before us was not a set of separate dreams but a continuous process of inner restructuring. Before turning to the analysis of this series, I need to lay out the overall map of these changes — a map that only came into view after a considerable part of the therapeutic work had been done.

Chapter 3. A Map of Personal Transformation

When we first began, I — like the client himself — treated each dream as a separate event: one seemed important, another strange and almost meaningless, a third so realistic that it looked like a continuation of daytime life. Trying to give every symbol a definitive interpretation at that stage would have been a mistake. A single dream rarely reveals the whole process, and the unconscious almost never delivers information in a straight line: it returns to the same themes again and again, gradually changing the symbols, the emotional coloring, and the structure of the plot.

Only after several months of continuous work did it become obvious that we were dealing not with a collection of individual dreams but with a sequential process of inner reorganization — and only then did it become possible to reconstruct an overall map of that process. It is important to understand that the map was not devised in advance, and the client's dreams were not bent to fit a ready-made theory. It was exactly the other way around. First, dozens of dreams. Then, a recurring symbolic sequence. And only after that did the logic of inner change slowly begin to emerge. In essence, this map is an attempt to describe the language of the unconscious in motion: not what this or that symbol means, but what work the psyche is doing at each stage of its recovery.

As the analysis went on, it became apparent that the unconscious was steadily changing not only its symbols but the very way it engaged with consciousness. In the early stages, it warns. Later, it accompanies. Then it begins to teach. And finally, it becomes a full partner in an inner dialogue.

For ease of the analysis that follows, I have provisionally identified several successive psychic organizations — each with its own emotional tasks, its own symbolic language, and its own function in the recovery of the personality.

Stage	Psychic organization	Dominant affect	Core symbolic sequence	Central task
I	Survivor	Fear	War, tunnels, weapons, pursuit	To stay alive

II	Warrior	Control	Assault rifles, missions, fellow soldiers, borders	To protect oneself and others
III	Explorer	Curiosity	Water, depth, underwater tunnels, a shark	To begin exploring the inner world
IV	Navigator	Search	Airplanes, elevators, roads, height, bridges	To find a direction for further growth
V	Master	Competence	Billiards, cinema, a training session, a pull-up bar	To take pleasure in one's own mastery
VI	Keeper of the System	Order	Keys, documents, panels, cleaning, mechanisms	To restore inner organization
VII	Investigator	Awareness	Codes, police, checking the facts, guided thinking	To test reality and loosen the grip of guilt
VIII	Integrator	Wholeness	Recurring symbols begin to merge	Dialogue between the conscious and the unconscious

An important caveat: this is not a rigid sequence of stages, nor a classification of personality types. All of these organizations exist at once, but in different periods of therapy one of them takes the lead, shaping the client's emotional state, the content of his dreams, and the way he engages with the world. That is why the analysis in this book follows not a chronological principle — “dream after dream” — but the development of the personality's inner organization. This is how it becomes possible to see

what is almost impossible to notice when dreams are read one at a time: not only how the images of the unconscious change, but how, little by little, the person himself changes.

Chapter 4. How to Read a Dream Series

Before moving on to the step-by-step analysis, I want to add one note. Throughout this book you will more than once catch yourself with the natural urge to ask, “What does this symbol mean?” What does the water mean? Why do the weapons appear? Why does the psyche keep taking this man back to the war? What do the airplanes, the keys, the elevators, the documents stand for?

It is a fair question — but this, I believe, is exactly where this book begins to part ways with most writing on dreams. As the work went on, I became less and less interested in individual symbols and more and more in the relationships between them. Not the meaning of water, but why, after months of war, the unconscious first began to speak in water. Not the meaning of the airplane, but why it appeared precisely after a series of dives. Not the meaning of the key, but why it emerged just when the inner world had begun to take on structure.

Gradually I came to sense that the unconscious has a sequence of its own: it does not simply produce symbols — it changes its language. Each new image does not cancel the one before; it becomes the next way of describing inner reality. War gives way to depth, depth to space, space to movement, movement to mastery, mastery to order, order to understanding. This observation was possible only because we had before us a long sequence of dreams, recorded almost without gaps over many months.

So in this book I propose setting aside the familiar question “What does the dream mean?” and asking three others in its place.

The first: **what is the person going through right now?** This is the level of the client’s conscious life — events, relationships, conflicts, losses, hopes, the tasks of the current period of therapy.

The second: **what is the psyche doing?** This is a question about the unconscious. Is it protecting? Compensating? Exploring? Giving structure to experience? Creating a safe distance? Mastering a new psychological function?

The third, which gradually became central to all our work: **how does the psyche think?** We are used to assuming that thinking belongs to consciousness alone, but this series of dreams made me doubt that familiar view. I came away with the impression that the unconscious has a logic of its own — it simply expresses it not in words but in space, in movement, in the relationships between images, in emotional tension, in the shifting of plots. I do not offer this as a finished theory. It is rather a working hypothesis, born of long work with a single clinical case — and it is this hypothesis we will be testing throughout the book.

If it is even partly true, then a sequence of dreams lets us see far more than individual symbols: it lets us watch how the very way in which the psyche helps a person restore inner wholeness is itself changing. So the chapters that follow are best read not as a collection of interpretations but as the diary of a shared inquiry — an inquiry in which the client was learning to trust his unconscious, and I was learning to listen closely to the language in which it told the story of his inner recovery.

Chapter 5. Why Does the Psyche Change Its Language?

After several months of work, I noticed something strange — or rather, at first it wasn't even an observation, just a feeling. I was finding it harder and harder to consider each new dream on its own. Rereading the client's notes, I kept catching myself thinking that the unconscious seemed to be picking up yesterday's conversation rather than starting over.

At some point I laid out all the notes in front of me in chronological order — simply to read them through, one after another, without any analysis at all. And something happened that I had not expected: the individual dreams almost vanished, and in their place a story appeared. It was as if until then I had been examining single frames of film, and now someone had switched on the projector. I saw movement — not of the plot, not of the person, but of the psyche itself.

It is easier to explain with an example. Imagine a child learning to talk. A single recorded word tells you little about how that child is developing — but record the child's speech every month, and gradually you begin to see how the very way of thinking is changing: first separate sounds, then words, short sentences, and later the ability to tell stories. Something similar was happening here. The unconscious, too, seemed to be developing a language of its own. First came images of war — entirely to be expected in a man only recently back from the front. But then strange changes began. Instead of the battlefield, tunnels. Then depth, water, height, airplanes, elevators, ascents. Then more and more mechanisms: keys, documents, codes, putting things in order.

At first glance these images have almost nothing to do with one another. But the more closely I looked, the stronger my sense that the psyche was not changing the subject — it was changing the way it talked about the same thing. That was when a thought first came to me that would later become one of the central hypotheses of this book: what if the unconscious develops not chaotically, but by gradually moving a person from one way of experiencing life to another? I had no answer, and to be honest, I still regard this idea more as a working hypothesis than as an established fact. But it

was what made me reread the entire sequence once more — this time looking not for symbols, but for change.

I stopped caring what the airplane meant. What mattered was why at first the man is a passenger, then watches the flight from outside, then steps into the cockpit, and later still takes the controls of an airliner himself. I stopped caring what the water meant. What mattered was why at first it frightens him, then becomes depth, then turns clear, and later begins to draw the explorer in.

The questions changed — and with them, the entire analysis. The main object of inquiry was no longer the symbols themselves but the moments of transition: those barely perceptible inner shifts when the psyche stops using its old way of organizing experience and cautiously feels its way toward a new one. In this book I will call such moments **psychic transitions**. In the chapters ahead we will watch them step by step — not because we know in advance where they lead, but because this is how the work itself unfolded.

Part I. When the Psyche Doesn't Yet Know the War Is Over

There is something about psychological trauma that no textbook can make you understand: a person may know perfectly well that the danger is over, and yet that does not mean his psyche knows it. After the war, the client was already living in England. His wife was beside him; there were no explosions; he no longer had to assess the threat every second. His conscious mind understood all this. His unconscious, it seemed, went on living by other laws. Contemporary trauma psychology describes this state well: the nervous system does not always reorganize itself at the same pace as outward circumstances change, and the experience of extreme danger can go on shaping a person's inner picture of the world for a long time.

Curiously, the first dreams made no attempt to explain the war. They did not discuss its causes or look for someone to blame. The psyche seemed occupied with a different task — working out where its owner now was. Is it safe yet to stand down from constant combat readiness? Is the world around me safe? What, if anything, can I lean on now? That is why the earliest dreams are so full of motifs of journeys, ascents, searching for a way out, checking the space around, documents, transport. All of them, as it turned out much later, were answering one and the same question: how do you learn to live again in a world that no longer looks like war?

Looking back, I can see that in this period the unconscious moved very carefully. It was in no hurry to lead the man into the depths; it did not open up the heaviest experiences all at once or force him to relive the most terrible events. It seemed instead to be testing the foundation — was there enough inner stability yet for the next step? To borrow an image that will make sense later: the psyche behaved like an experienced mountain guide, never taking a person higher than he was able to climb himself. This was the first observation that made me reconsider my usual assumptions about how the unconscious works. Until then, like many analysts, I had seen dreams above all in terms of the compensatory function Jung wrote about. Now I had the sense that something more was going on: the psyche was not only compensating for the conscious attitude — it was gradually teaching the man a new way of being.

The First Dream: Tunnels

Let the first voice in this book belong not to the analyst, but to the unconscious.

“I’m back at the war. My commander and I are escaping pursuit through some kind of tunnels. At some point people appear ahead of us. For a long time I try to work out who they are — ours or theirs. I’m terrified of getting it wrong and accidentally shooting our own. Then I notice Russian uniforms and start firing.

“Then the dream suddenly changes. It’s as if the war is already over. I’m not serving anymore. There are lots of people around. They’re rejoicing, as if the war has ended. Everyone is smiling. Everyone is celebrating.

“And I’m searching the crowd for my wife.”

When a person brings a dream like this for the first time, there is a natural temptation to start hunting for symbolic meanings right away: the tunnel, the rifle, the commander, the crowd, the wife. But interpreting too early sometimes carries you away from understanding rather than toward it. So at the time, it was not the symbols that caught my attention. It was something else entirely.

Fear of his own death was almost absent from the client’s account. A man only recently back from the war spoke of pursuit, gunfire, and mortal

danger almost calmly. But at one point his voice changed: “For a long time I couldn’t tell — ours or theirs. I was so afraid of getting it wrong.” The words *getting it wrong* carried far more emotional weight than the word *kill*. I did not yet understand how important this observation would prove to be. Today, looking at the whole series of dreams, it is clear that from the very beginning the unconscious was pointing not so much to a fear of death as to a different conflict — a conflict of responsibility. For this man, the danger lay not only in being killed himself. Far more terrible was the possibility of harming someone he was meant to protect. This trait would show itself again and again — not only in his dreams, but in his relationships, in his working life, in the very way he experienced guilt.

There is one more detail in this dream that I barely noticed at first. After the battle scene, the plot abruptly changes course: peace arrives, people celebrate the end of the war, and the unconscious shows, for the first time, the possibility of a different reality. But the client does not stay at the celebration — he starts looking for his wife. I asked him then, “What did you feel while you were looking for her?” “I wanted to make sure she was alive,” he answered almost at once. At the time that answer seemed natural to me. Today I see it differently: this was where the unconscious first tried to say something important. It was not showing victory, and it was not bringing the war to a close. It was showing that even after the danger has gone, the psyche goes on searching for the people it feels responsible for. The war had ended in the outside world. It had not yet ended inside the man. This is not a metaphor — it is a clinical observation, and it is where our journey truly begins.

The Second Dream: The Elevator

“I dreamed I had to take an elevator up to the tenth floor. Someone warns me that it might be dangerous up there — some kind of beings, or something else — and asks me to be careful. But I go up anyway...”

That’s all. Taken on its own, the dream feels almost unfinished: no vivid plot, no resolution. At the time I didn’t make much of it. Yes, there was height, there was a warning of danger, and the man kept moving upward — but analysts hear dreams like this all the time.

In the session, what interested me more than the symbolism was the emotional side. I asked, “When they warned you, were you frightened?” He thought for a moment. “No... It was more that I felt cautious. As if the warning had to be taken into account — but it didn’t cancel the climb.”

That answer struck me as more interesting than the dream itself. A man who had recently lived under constant threat does not run from danger, does not even try to avoid it — he takes in the information about the risk and keeps moving. I drew no conclusions at the time: one good observation proves nothing; it might be chance, or simply an echo of recent events. We went back to the questions he had come to therapy with — the guilt, the inability to relax even in safe surroundings, the habit of constantly calculating threats, the sense that responsibility never ends.

Only later did I notice that everything we had been discussing on a conscious level was already present in the dream itself — just told differently. The psyche did not say, *I’m afraid*; it created a space in which danger exists. It did not say, *I’m going on living anyway*; it showed the elevator rising. The unconscious thinks not in concepts but in events. It rarely states an idea outright; instead, it builds a situation in which a person can live that idea through.

What struck me was the very fact of the ascent. Why does the psyche choose to move upward, rather than to flee, to hide, to dig in? If the unconscious were still living by the logic of trauma, surely it would seek safety. Yet the opposite happens: there is movement — voluntary movement, despite the warning. One line remains in my working notes from that time: *Interesting — why upward?* Looking back, I believe that this question was where our real inquiry began. Not with an answer. With a question.

One of the most common mistakes in dream work is the urge to name a symbol too quickly and assign it a ready-made meaning. But the unconscious rarely speaks in dictionary terms — it speaks in process. So after this dream, too, the right thing was not to draw conclusions but to wait: would the psyche come back to this theme? Would height appear again? Would the movement repeat? Years of practice had taught me exactly this — patience. Sometimes an analyst helps not by understanding

quickly what is happening, but by being able to stay beside the unknown long enough without filling it with theories of his own.

The unconscious did not let the theme go. It returned to it again and again: another ascent, airplanes, a construction elevator, a pull-up bar, a tunnel leading down into the depths. At first glance these dreams seem almost unrelated. But it was then that I first sensed the psyche was not repeating itself — it was continuing, as though each new dream were not a new story but the next chapter of one and the same book.

When the Analyst Begins to Doubt

If you asked me today when the real change in this work took place, I would not name a particular dream. The change happened not in the material, but in me. I caught myself feeling that I was asking the unconscious the wrong questions. Until then, like most analysts, I had tried to understand what each image meant — the elevator, the height, the danger — every symbol invited me to stop and examine it on its own. But gradually something like an inner resistance arose: the moment I decided I understood the meaning of the latest symbol, the next dream would shift the emphasis and draw my eye somewhere else entirely. It began to seem that the unconscious had no interest in my finding an answer quickly — that it was patiently leading me away from individual symbols toward something more whole.

One day something simple happened: I stopped reading dreams and started reading movement. I noticed that the psyche almost never returns to exactly the same point. It may use similar images, repeat themes, come back to the experience of danger — yet each time it subtly shifts the person's position inside the dream: the direction of movement, the distance from danger, the degree of freedom, the capacity to choose. The changes were so small they were easy to put down to chance. But when they repeated again and again, chance stopped being a convincing explanation.

I didn't yet dare to tell the client — not for fear of being wrong, but because I didn't want to impose my own idea on him. When an analyst names a pattern too early, there is a risk that the client will start seeing it not because it exists, but because the therapist has seen it. So I went on watching, and little by little I learned one more professional discipline: not to rush to

understand. We psychologists love a good explanation — it gives us a sense of order. But the unconscious kept dismantling that sense of order, showing that the picture was more complex than it seemed. Only many months later did I realize that the real work was not learning to interpret faster, but learning to stay beside the unknown for longer. In that period, the unconscious was teaching not only the client — it was teaching the analyst, too.

Part II. The Right to Move

The Material as Co-Author

Several weeks went by. We kept meeting and talked about life in a new country, about family, about the war, which, for all the thousands of miles between them, quietly made its way into almost every conversation — sometimes openly, sometimes behind everyday stories, sometimes in a guilt that needed no outside cause at all.

The client had a quality I did not yet know how to value fully: he watched himself very closely — not obsessively, but more like a researcher who had unexpectedly found himself inside his own experiment. Sometimes he would stop mid-sentence: “Wait... I think there’s something important here.” And almost always, after those words, something unexpected followed: a forgotten episode came back, a new dream appeared, or the very way he described what was happening shifted. He wasn’t interested in the question “What does this symbol mean?” but in another one: “Why is the psyche doing exactly this?” Gradually, that became the central question for me as well. An entry from my working journal of that period reads: *So far I can see only one recurring feature. The psyche does not present finished stories. It starts a conversation and then comes back to it. I’ve decided not to interpret anything until several connected dreams have appeared.*

I didn’t have to wait long. The next dream did not explain the previous one — it continued it. It was then that I first wondered whether the unconscious might have not a neurobiological memory but a particular kind of memory for conversation: as though it remembered where it had started and had no intention of changing the subject. Around the same time came a thought that felt almost sacrilegious against the usual understanding of trauma: what if the unconscious not only shows trauma’s consequences, but at the same time tries to lead a person beyond it? The thought seemed too beautiful to trust right away — and in psychotherapy, beautiful ideas are often the most dangerous. They explain what is happening so well that the analyst stops noticing the facts that contradict them. So once again I made the same choice: not to rush, and to wait and see whether the material would confirm the guess on its own.

That was when a comparison came to me that never left me afterward: this series of dreams was less like a novel and more like music. Hearing a single bar of a symphony, you are unlikely to grasp the composer's design — but gradually, theme by theme, repetition by repetition, the music gathers into a whole, and some themes become clear only when they unexpectedly return later in a new voicing. What if dreams work in a similar way — and each individual dream is not a self-contained piece but part of a larger composition? That would explain a particular feature of our work: the later dreams did not simply continue the earlier ones — they reinterpreted them, sometimes answering questions posed months before, sometimes forcing us to abandon an earlier interpretation altogether.

This was when I began to understand why classic dream dictionaries had stopped satisfying me: they try to explain a single note, but music is born not from a note — it is born from the relationships between notes. The main object of analysis was gradually becoming not the dream, not even the symbol, but the process by which the unconscious, step by step, rebuilds a person's inner world. The thought felt at once simple and dangerous. Simple, because more and more observations fit this picture. Dangerous, because any new explanation easily hardens into a theory that living material is then made to fit. A good analyst, as I was coming to see more and more clearly, differs from a poor one not in the number of interpretations he offers, but in his ability to wait — to stay with the unknown long enough to one day see a pattern that could not have been seen before.

Two Explorers

Looking back on those first months, I increasingly think that what met in that room was not a therapist and a client in the usual sense, but two people, each trying to understand something larger than his own experience — one living it from the inside, the other observing from the outside. Analytic work with dreams is built in such a way that no one knows in advance where the next step will lead: not even an experienced analyst can foresee what image will appear a week from now. And so it asks the same quality of both participants — curiosity.

The client had no interest in mystical readings, nor in what this or that symbol meant. His questions sounded different: “Why this dream? Why

now? Why does the psyche keep coming back to this theme?" Gradually I noticed a pattern. Every time we explained a dream too quickly, the conversation seemed to stall — there was a feeling of a full stop. But whenever we admitted that we didn't yet understand something, the unconscious would, a few days later, take up the same theme again, adding a new detail. At first this looked like coincidence, then like a lucky run, and then I allowed myself the thought that we were looking at one of the fundamental features of the psyche: it does not announce the truth — it gradually leads you toward it.

This thought changed the course of therapy. I began to talk less and ask more. The silences after he told a dream no longer needed to be filled with words — in therapy, a pause becomes a space in which something more important begins to sound. Once, after such a silence, the client said something I wrote down almost word for word: "You know... sometimes I think my dreams know more about me than I do." I only smiled at the time — not because I agreed, but because I did not yet grasp the full depth of what he had said. Of course, dreams don't "know" anything in the literal sense. But the psyche really does possess a way of organizing experience that is not yet available to conscious reflection: it does not formulate conclusions — it creates images; it does not explain — it shows; it does not persuade — it invites you to live something through.

That is why it sometimes takes a long time before a person is able to understand his own dream — not because the dream was too complicated, but because understanding it requires the personality itself to change a little. The usual order seems to be reversed here. We think that understanding comes first and change follows. But this series of dreams showed, ever more insistently, the opposite: first a person quietly changes, and only then becomes able to understand what the unconscious has been trying to tell him for a long time. If that is true, the therapist's task is not to explain the meaning of a dream as quickly as possible, but to accompany the person until that meaning can become part of his own experience. Then interpretation stops being someone else's knowledge and becomes an inner discovery. And good dream analysis ends not when the analyst says, "Now I understand this dream," but when the client himself says, "I think... now I understand why I dreamed it."

The First Decision

Several months into our work, the dreams were becoming more detailed. It seemed the unconscious had stopped hurrying and was now carefully building each scene. But the main change was not in the details — it was in the role of the man himself. In the first dreams he was inside events, only reacting to them. Now he began to make decisions.

One day he brought a dream that at first looked like yet another variation on the familiar theme of ascent. In the dream, together with someone much younger, he rode a construction elevator to the very top of an enormous building. The whole thing felt like a test; there were guiding lines on the floor that had to be followed. Eventually they came to a large window with a fire escape fixed outside it — and by the logic of the dream, that was the way they were supposed to climb down. There was no fear. “I wasn’t afraid of the height, wasn’t afraid of the test itself. I was ready to climb down,” he stressed more than once afterward. The fear came later, when he looked out and saw that the ladder was badly fastened and swaying — and that the people below trying to steady it could not make it secure.

And then something happened in the dream that had never happened before. On the edge of waking, he thought: *Wait... why did I decide I have to go down by this particular ladder at all?* The thought arose not as a protest or an attempt to avoid the test, but as a calm examination of the task itself: if the goal is to get down, who said there is only one way to do it? And a decision was born: look for another elevator. The test, it turned out, was not about getting down the dangerous ladder at any cost, but about finding a better way.

What struck me was not the detail itself but the fact that, for the first time, the unconscious had not only created a situation but also shown the man that the terms of the task could be questioned too. Until then, almost all of his inner conflicts had followed one pattern: there is danger, it must be overcome, you have to find the strength and keep going. Now a different way of thinking appeared. The man was no longer asking himself, *Do I have the courage?* — he was asking, *Do I understand the task correctly?* The difference between these questions seems small, but it is fundamental: the first is born inside an existing structure; the second allows you to rethink the structure itself.

It was then that I began to think the psyche was restoring not only emotional stability but, little by little, the capacity to think freely — which, after severe trauma, is far from the same thing. Traumatic experience almost always narrows the range of possible solutions, and a person begins, without noticing, to live as though there were only one way to act. In the dream the opposite happened: the possibility of choice appeared — not as an abstract idea but as an inner experience. So when, soon afterward, the client told me, “I think I’ve found the right solution,” I heard in it not a story about a dream but a conversation about a way of being. Perhaps it was from this moment that the inner transition began that would later lead us to entirely new dreams. For the first time, the psyche had ceased to be merely the keeper of traumatic experience. It was becoming a teacher.

At the Controls

Had anyone told me a few months earlier that one day the unconscious would put this man at the controls of a passenger jet, I would have been surprised — not because such dreams are rare, but because they did not fit at all with the picture we had seen at the start of therapy. Then, the man in front of me was someone whose life was largely defined by the need to constantly assess danger. He was used to calculating consequences in advance and scanning for threats — not as a character trait, but as a skill forged over years of living in an unsafe world.

In the dream he was not flying as a passenger or watching a flight from the outside — he was flying an enormous airplane. It lands safely, not at an airport but partway along the route, and now it must take off again. The client looks for a suitable stretch of road for the takeoff run. The first is too short; he calmly rejects it, turns the plane around, looks for another. It all happens without panic, without the catastrophic tone so familiar from anxious dreams — he is simply solving a problem. A difficulty arises only at the very last moment: he doesn’t know the exact takeoff sequence, so he opens ChatGPT to check it — but instead of an answer, some interfering program pops up on the screen. Only then does irritation appear.

When he told me this dream, I asked, “What did you feel while you were flying the plane?” The answer came instantly: “I liked it.” It was this short phrase I underlined in my notes — not the airplane, not the takeoff, not the landing. Until then, pleasure had been almost absent from the language of

his dreams. There had been caution, responsibility, tension, searching, sometimes interest — but pleasure in his own ability to act appeared for the first time. It was as though the unconscious was no longer testing his capacity to withstand danger, but his capacity to enjoy his own competence. And that is a world of difference: a person can learn to survive, but that does not yet mean he has learned to live again.

One detail struck me in particular. Faced with a gap in his knowledge, he did not wait to be rescued or look for a more experienced pilot to hand the controls over to — he looked for the information that would let him finish the task himself. Not avoidance, not heroic struggle, but learning. A phrase appeared in my working journal at the time that struck even me as too bold: *It seems the unconscious is starting not only to heal the effects of trauma. It is starting to give the personality back to itself.* The man was ceasing to be only a survivor. He was becoming an explorer again.

A Light Aimed into the Depths

For quite a long time I assumed that every change in our work would come through upward movement — height, flight, ascent, the search for new space. But one day the unconscious changed direction. In the dream, the client found himself by the sea — calm, though of unknown depth. The most interesting thing was happening not around him but in his hands: before diving in, he switched on a powerful flashlight. Not because he was afraid — but because he wanted to see.

It is a simple detail, but it held my attention for a long time. Until then, the unconscious had almost always led the man through space. Now, for the first time, it placed an instrument of exploration in his hands — not a weapon, not a means of defense, but a source of light. When I asked what he had wanted to do when he switched on the flashlight, he answered at once: “See what’s down there.” Not *check whether there’s danger*, not *make sure it’s safe*. It was this difference that seemed important to me: interest was beginning to displace wariness. For a man who had long lived in the conditions of war — where the world inevitably splits into dangerous and safe, and curiosity recedes into the background — such a shift means a great deal.

Later I noticed similar shifts more than once, and they never happened abruptly. At first the unknown was experienced as a source of threat, then as a task, and now, gradually, it was becoming an object of exploration. Until this point, the man had mostly reacted to the world. Now he was beginning to take an interest in it — and that is a fundamentally different stance: reaction is always determined by what has already happened, while exploration reaches toward what no one yet knows. It is telling that the unconscious placed in his hands not a map and not a ready answer, but a source of light. Light does not illuminate the whole depth at once — only a small patch just ahead of us — but that turns out to be enough to take the next step. It occurred to me then that the flashlight was meant not only for the client but, in part, for me as well. Analytic work is remarkably like this dive: we never see the whole depth, only what is ready to be revealed now — and that is enough, not for a final answer, but for the next step.

When I reread the first dreams after this one, I saw clearly for the first time: the psyche had not simply been moving — it had been changing the quality of the movement itself. At first the man climbed because he had to. Now he was diving because he was curious. These are two different ways of being. An entry appeared in my working journal: *It seems the preoccupation with safety is gradually giving way to curiosity* — with a question mark. And, as usual, I decided not to rush: if the unconscious really had begun to speak a new language, it would return to this theme again, in different words. ##
Part III. The Right to Enter

Until this point, the dream series had been easy to read as a story of movement: ascents, flights, finding solutions, exploring the depths — each new image seemed to widen the space of psychic life. So the next dream stumped me at first: there was almost nothing unusual in it. The client described checking accounts with his older brother, reconciling payments, looking for errors in the records. No danger, no archetypal figures — utterly prosaic details.

My first impression was almost one of disappointment: after so many vivid images, this material seemed mundane. But here I had to admit my own haste once again. We love vivid symbols; an airplane seems more significant than a ledger, the sea deeper than a client list. The psyche, it seems, does not share our aesthetic preferences. It is occupied not with what makes an impression, but with what the personality needs right now. After

rereading the dream several times, I noticed: the man was not searching, not escaping, not fighting, not running. He was checking, reconciling, clarifying — bringing what ought to be into line with what actually was.

It occurred to me then that the unconscious had taken on a new task. Until now it had been restoring the capacity to move. Now it was restoring the capacity to put one's own inner world in order. These are different processes: movement brings a person out of a frozen state, but if inner experience remains chaotic, one can keep moving endlessly without ever understanding where one is going. In almost any deep therapy there comes a period that looks dull from the outside: conversations about household matters, documents, work, money. Many clients have doubts at this point — *it feels like we've stopped doing anything important* — yet this is often exactly when one of the deepest reorganizations takes place: the personality begins to reclaim its structure. Here, for the first time, I truly recalled — not just in theory — Jung's idea that individuation is impossible without a gradual ordering of conscious life: symbolic work does not replace reality; sooner or later it must take shape within it.

At first glance, the fact that the unconscious had traded grand visions for “bookkeeping” looked like a drop in the level of the dreams. Today I see it differently: it was a sign that the process was maturing. The psyche seemed to be saying: *you have learned to look into the depths; now learn to put in order what you have found there*. Perhaps this is one of the aims of therapy — not to make the inner world more extraordinary, but to make it more livable.

Keys and Dust

The next group of dreams grew harder and harder to read as separate stories. The attention of the unconscious had now settled on thresholds: a door, a lock, a key, a code, a document, a pass, a room that could be entered only under certain conditions. Each of these images, taken alone, seemed explicable, but once again the sequence would not let me settle for simple conclusions. A question arose that gradually became central: not *what does the key mean?* but *what is the man trying to gain access to?* The difference is enormous — the first question leads to symbolism, the second to process. The space through which the man had simply moved before was now beginning to answer him: opening, closing, demanding a code, checking

documents, letting him in or keeping him out. This was no longer a journey but a relationship — the psyche was ceasing to be a silent landscape and was entering into dialogue with him.

The first dream that made me think about this seriously had, on the face of it, a very simple plot. The client is in some kind of secret facility, looking for keys, opening locks, moving from room to room. There is almost no anxiety — only a sense that there is work to be done. The floor is covered with a thick layer of dust — not debris from destruction, not the traces of catastrophe, but dust — and he begins to wash it, not haphazardly but section by section: the next area opens up only once the previous one has been put in order. Beneath the dust, a completely different floor gradually appears — dark, smooth, gleaming; later the client would compare it to solar panels. The association seemed almost random, but the more I thought about it, the less random it became: a solar panel produces nothing by itself — it receives light and turns it into energy.

One question would not leave me: why does the psyche show not a ruined building, not wreckage, not the aftermath of war, but a perfectly preserved system that has simply been covered in dust for many years? These are entirely different stories. What is destroyed must be rebuilt; what is covered in dust needs only to be cleaned. This difference changed my view of therapy as a whole: what if the most important inner structures never disappeared, but remained in place all along, merely hidden under layers of lived experience — of pain, of guilt, of the need to survive? If so, the task of therapy is quite different. We do not create a new personality; we gradually open access to the one that already exists. That is why what mattered in this dream was not the keys or the doors as such, but the cleaning — slow, methodical, with no attempt to wash everything at once. The psyche seemed to be saying: *don't rush; every section needs its own attention; every door will open when the space in front of it is ready*. In therapy, too, we never tried to open all the doors at once. We went section by section, dream by dream, step by step.

That was when a comparison came to me that became one of the pillars of this whole book. Until then, I had imagined the psyche as something like an archive. Now it increasingly resembled a vast laboratory: some rooms long closed, some in need of restoration, some still running, even though the person had long ago stopped noticing they existed. But the laboratory is not

destroyed. It is waiting. And the task of therapy is not to build it anew, but to gradually give the person back the possibility of walking in again.

The Key Doesn't Open the Door

After several dreams in which doors, keys, locks, documents, and various ways of gaining entry appeared again and again, it became hard to see them as separate symbols — the unconscious seemed to be concentrating on a single task. In analytical psychology such images carry many readings: the key as knowledge or initiation, the door as a boundary between psychic spaces, the lock as protection or obstacle. All of this is true in its way, but something else bothered me: none of these symbols existed in the dream on its own — each time, something was being done. The key was searched for, the lock was being opened, the document checked, the code remembered, the floor cleaned, the door turned out to be locked or unexpectedly swung open. Once again, the psyche was showing not an object but a process.

I caught myself perhaps making the same mistake as many researchers — still trying to understand what the key meant, when the unconscious was probably not talking about keys at all. It was talking about access. If you mentally remove the objects themselves from these dreams, what remains is a man who keeps trying to get into a new space — whether by key, code, passport, or elevator. The means change; the task remains. Behind this lay not a symbolic but a functional structure: there is a space you cannot enter yet, but the possibility of entering has not been destroyed — it simply requires a certain inner readiness.

This idea echoed the therapy itself. Sometimes the client would speak calmly about a memory, and a few weeks later we would return to the same episode: the facts were the same, but the inner experience had changed as though we were talking about a different event. It wasn't the memory that had changed — it was the person approaching it. Access is a property not only of the door but of the person standing before it. And if a door stayed shut, it was not always resistance — sometimes the psyche simply did not yet consider it safe to open. The longer the work went on, the clearer it became: the unconscious not only stores repressed material; it also knows the pace precisely — when a person is able to bear the next step. The key was never the hero of these dreams. The hero was always the man, gradually becoming able to enter where entry had once been impossible.

The Door That Won't Open

Some dreams are clear almost at once; others you have to return to many times. And there is a special group of dreams that seem to resist interpretation themselves — not because they are too complicated, but because they put to the analyst a question he has not yet learned to ask. The dream of the old elevator was one of these. The client remembered a remarkable number of details: an old elevator with glass doors through which everything outside was visible; an intermediate floor where the doors had to be pried open by hand; and finally the top floor, where the elevator stopped and the doors would not open. There was a keyhole in them, and a key sat in the lock — but it had been inserted from the outside, and from inside there was no way to reach it.

What interested me was not the symbolism of the elevator but what the client felt when he saw the key. “Not irritation — more like surprise,” he answered. “I half expected the elevator might get stuck. But I never expected the solution to be literally right in front of me and at the same time out of reach.” The phrase *the solution is visible, but you can't use it* stayed with me for a long time. Later I noticed more and more often that this kind of experience arises precisely when a person is already able to see a new way of living but cannot yet make it part of his inner experience — a state no longer like being completely lost, but not yet freedom.

It is worth noting that in the dream the client did not try to break the door down, did not look for an emergency exit, did not blame anyone for what was happening. He began to think — right there in the dream he asked himself, *What could all this mean?* At the time this detail seemed secondary. Today I see it differently: until then, the unconscious had mostly shown; now it seemed to be inviting consciousness to take part in the exploration — very cautiously, not yet intervening in the plot, but already offering something to think about. Perhaps the development of the psyche shows itself not only in the changing of symbols but in a change in the very way consciousness takes part in the dream.

This dream had one more peculiarity: on waking, the client remembered a numerical code — not completely; he wavered between two versions — but he was sure it was not a random set of digits, that the sequence mattered. I deliberately refrained from a symbolic reading — not because one was

impossible, but because it would have been premature. What interested me was the very fact that a code had appeared. Until then, the psyche had worked with space; now, for the first time, it offered a sequence — not an image or a plot, but a structure. From this period on, the dreams increasingly stop delivering ready answers — they begin to pose problems. Consciousness is still only watching the unconscious, but a conversation between them is already beginning. If the first dreams were like letters the unconscious sent one way, now come the first attempts at a real dialogue. And there arises a sense that the door which cannot be forced will one day open after all — not because another key will be found, but because the person standing before it will have changed.

The Old Passport

“It’s a strange dream,” the client warned before he began. “I’m not even sure there’s any meaning in it.” I had heard these words many times, and they almost always made me listen especially closely: it is precisely the dreams a person considers insignificant that often turn out to matter most.

In the dream he is collecting his old passport from a bank. In real life this was tied to an old story: after some financial trouble, the document had — as he believed — stayed at the bank for many years, and getting it back had taken no small effort. But when the passport is finally in his hands, what comes is not joy but bewilderment: it expired long ago, and besides, he has a new one. A question arises that he feels almost physically: *Why did I try so hard to get back something I can no longer use?*

We talked not about the passport but about time — about years that seemed to have dropped out of his life, about the sense that some inner tasks had been left unfinished not because they couldn’t be resolved, but because life itself had for a long time not allowed him to return to them. Later he said, “I suppose I didn’t need the passport itself. I needed to understand that this story was finally over.” It was then that I felt the psyche taking another subtle step: until now it had been exploring space; now it was beginning to explore time. Formally, the client already lived in another country, with a new job, a new home, new documents — but some of his inner processes remained tied to events many years old.

Notably, the unconscious did not suggest returning to the old life, did not say *use the old passport*. On the contrary, it showed clearly that the document was no longer valid: this past cannot be made present, but it does need to be reclaimed — not for use, but for completion. Sometimes in therapy we unconsciously try to bring back what can no longer be brought back: lost time, relationships that never happened, an earlier version of ourselves. The psyche, it seems, approaches the task differently. It does not return the past; it returns the right to include the past in one's own story. The old passport does not become a working document — it becomes evidence that this stage of life really happened. It is no accident that the client woke not with a sense of victory or defeat, but with a feeling of incompleteness. Sometimes that is not a sign of unfinished work, but a sign that the psyche has just uncovered another layer of its own history and is cautiously inviting it into the whole picture of a life. Documents that had once confirmed the right to enter were now beginning to confirm the right to remember.

When the Psyche Stops Trusting First Answers

One feature of this dream series did not become visible right away. At first it seemed the unconscious was simply widening the space of inner life — teaching him to move, to choose, to explore. But after several months, a new quality appeared in the dreams: the psyche began to doubt. Not literally, of course — but the dreams were increasingly structured so that the first answer was no longer final. The man would make a natural assumption, then discover a circumstance that forced him to revise his whole understanding of what was going on.

For someone who has lived through severe trauma, this matters a great deal. Trauma almost always demands quick conclusions: dangerous or safe, ours or theirs, run or stay. Thinking like that saves lives, but it makes it almost impossible to explore a complex reality, where not everything fits into simple opposites. The new quality of the dreams seemed to offer not a ready solution but a chance to test one's own solution — for the first time, the unconscious was creating not just an image but a space for testing hypotheses. Only later would it become clear that this very line was preparing one of the most unusual dreams of the entire series — the one in

which consciousness would, for the first time, begin to reason inside the dream itself.

Until then the man had been learning to live in a world that was becoming safe again. Now the psyche seemed to be inviting him to live in a world that was becoming complex again. At first glance this looks like a step backward — life among simple answers is calmer. But a mature psyche develops differently: it tolerates uncertainty better and better, and stops fearing questions that cannot be answered right away. Perhaps one of the most important signs of recovery is not the disappearance of anxiety, but the return of the ability to stay with a question for a long time without destroying it with a hasty answer.

Error as a Way of Knowing

Until now, the changes in the dreams had mainly been about widening possibilities: the man was learning to move, to make decisions, to explore space, to restore order. But gradually another quality appeared, barely noticeable at first: the man began to make mistakes — and the mistake stopped being a source of anxiety and became part of the exploration.

This was in sharp contrast to how the client had lived at the start of therapy. Combat rarely leaves room for error: in many situations a mistake means not failure but death, so the psyche inevitably strives for the fastest, most definite decision possible, and doubt becomes dangerous — there may be no time to check. All the more unexpected, then, was the appearance in his inner world of a space where a mistake was no longer experienced as a catastrophe. He would make an assumption, notice a detail that didn't fit — and instead of rejecting or ignoring it, he would rebuild his understanding. Here, for the first time, it became visible that the psyche was beginning to trust exploration more than an immediate answer.

Almost all the earlier changes had concerned behavior. Now change was beginning to take place in the thinking process itself. The unconscious seemed to be teaching the man not only to live differently but to think differently — and not through instruction, but through experience: through living again and again a situation in which the first hypothesis turns out to be insufficient. Looking back, I see in this a preparation for the moment when consciousness would, for the first time, work actively inside the

dream. Before he could learn to reason in a dream, the man had to regain the right to be wrong — because the ability to calmly let go of one's own hypothesis lies at the heart of any genuine inquiry.

The dream series was gradually ceasing to be only a story of recovery from trauma. More and more, it was becoming a story of the return of exploratory thinking. And if that is so, the psyche is doing something more than restoring emotional stability — it is returning to a person the freedom to change his own ideas about the world. And that, perhaps, is one of the deepest signs of psychological healing.

Part IV. When the Psyche Begins to Think for Itself

When the World Becomes a System

Looking back, I increasingly notice something that is almost invisible when the dreams are read one at a time: it was not only the plots that were changing, but the very way the man perceived what was happening. In the very first dreams the world was above all a place where one had to find one's way through danger — attention was drawn to height, speed, the chance to take cover. Later came tasks, then decisions, then exploration. Now something new was emerging in the dreams: the man was beginning to notice not separate objects and events, but the relationships between them.

Where a door had once been simply a door, it now mattered why it was closed, who had the right to open it, what lay on the other side. Documents stopped being mere papers — they became part of an order, along with keys, codes, passes, rules of access. The space looked less and less like a random set of rooms; there was a sense of inner architecture, as if every part of the dream were an element of a larger system. We are used to saying that a person sees symbols in a dream, but perhaps that is only the first level of observation. At the second, he begins to see the relationships between symbols, and then the very organization of the space in which they exist — just as in any real research: first you gather individual facts, then you notice patterns, and only then does the structure of the system as a whole come into view.

In our sessions the question “What does this dream mean?” was heard less and less, and “Why did the psyche decide to show this now, and in exactly this way?” more and more. The difference between them is fundamental: the first looks for meaning, the second for the logic of a process. This shift changed not only the client but me as well: I felt less and less like an interpreter and more and more like an observer. A psychotherapist is constantly tempted to explain what is happening, but this series of dreams showed again and again that a good explanation is not always the best help. Sometimes it matters more to keep the capacity for wonder — because it is wonder that keeps an inquiry from ending too soon.

When Exploration Becomes an Inner Need

If I had to describe the change of this period in a single sentence, I would put it this way: the man was trying less and less to find the right answer, and more and more to understand how such an answer could be found at all. At the beginning of our work, this way of framing things would have seemed too abstract to him — his psyche was solving the problem of survival, not of exploration. But gradually, after each new dream, he stopped asking, “What do you think it means?” and began saying, “Let’s try to figure out why the psyche showed exactly this.” The difference is small to the ear but fundamental in substance: the first question is addressed to the analyst’s knowledge, the second to a shared inquiry.

The familiar division of roles — one brings the material, the other understands it — was gradually disappearing. We came to resemble not doctor and patient, but two researchers facing an unknown phenomenon: one observing it from the inside, the other from the outside, neither holding a ready answer. This freed the therapy from a dangerous illusion — that the analyst knows the unconscious better than the person himself. The further we went, the more obvious the opposite became: the client was noticing changes in himself that could not have been derived from any theory. A good analyst, as I was coming to see ever more clearly, is distinguished not by the number of interpretations he offers, but by the number of questions he is willing to leave open.

The dreams, meanwhile, were no longer experienced as something that happened only at night — they began to live between our sessions. The client would recall fragments of them on a walk, notice how a detail of a dream connected with something he felt during the day, see how a new dream answered a question posed a few days earlier. He stopped waiting for the next dream as the source of a ready-made message and began to experience it as the continuation of an inquiry. When a person stops seeking a final answer and begins to trust the process of searching itself, the psyche finds itself in a different position — it no longer only communicates; it collaborates.

It was then that a hypothesis took shape that stayed with me to the end of the work: perhaps the most important task of the unconscious is not the transmission of content but something deeper — the gradual restoration in a

person of the very capacity to explore the unknown without destroying it with hasty explanations. If that is true, the meaning of individual symbols recedes into the background, and what becomes central is the development of the exploratory function of the personality. Then the whole series of dreams ceases to be a chain of messages and becomes a process of learning — not specific answers, but a particular way of meeting reality. What we were witnessing was perhaps not simply recovery from trauma. We were witnessing the return of one of the most fundamental human capacities — the capacity to wonder at the world deeply enough to want to understand it again.

When the Psyche Starts Asking Questions Before the Person Does

There is a moment in long-term therapy that is hard to notice without detailed notes. It has nothing to do with symptoms disappearing or anxiety easing. The change runs deeper: questions that used to arise in conversation begin to appear first in dreams. Sometimes a dream would raise a question whose meaning became clear only weeks later. Neither the client nor I understood why this particular image had come at this particular moment — but later, when new changes took place in therapy, it turned out that the unconscious had, as it were, marked out in advance the direction in which the man still had to travel. I deliberately avoid the word *predicted*: this is not about foreseeing the future, but about the fact that the psyche sometimes begins working on changes before they become accessible to consciousness. Perhaps a dream is not a message about what has already happened, but part of a process still under way.

During this period the client increasingly said, after telling me a dream, “Strange... I feel like this dream isn’t over yet.” At first I took this as a metaphor; later I realized it was an exact description. Some dreams really did not end in the morning — they went on living in his thinking, came back as unexpected associations, linked up with events of the following week, found their continuation in a new dream. I had the sense that the unconscious thinks not in isolated episodes but in long cycles of inquiry.

The idea seemed almost fantastical, but the more material accumulated, the harder it was to ignore. Almost every important inner transition unfolded not within a single dream — it took weeks, sometimes months, as though the psyche were methodically examining one and the same theme from

different sides before moving on to the next. It was then that I stopped treating an individual dream as a complete unit of analysis. The real unit became the process.

One day, rereading my notes, I caught myself in a simple thought: we are still talking about the content of the dreams, but perhaps the most interesting thing is happening not in the content, but in the sequence of questions the psyche chooses to explore. First — safety. Then — movement. Then — choice. Then — responsibility. Then — exploration. Then — order. Then — access. Now, more and more, the questions were not about what the man was experiencing, but about how he understood it. The psyche was beginning to explore not only the world — it was beginning to explore its own way of exploring.

If this was really so, a new level of psychic organization was gradually emerging before us — not simply the capacity to experience, and not simply the capacity to make sense of experience, but the capacity to observe how understanding itself is born. It is this line, as we will see, that leads to the last dreams, in which conscious reflection becomes, for the first time, part of the dream itself. No great change arrives suddenly. First the psyche spends a long time preparing the conditions for it, and only then takes the next step. The final dreams will seem exceptional, but in truth they begin much earlier — at the moment when the unconscious first stops merely answering a person's questions and begins to ask questions of its own.

The First Doubt

The most important changes happened not when new symbols appeared in the dreams — far more important was how the man's way of handling what he saw was changing. One day, discussing yet another dream, we ran into a situation that at first seemed completely insignificant. The client offered his own explanation of one of the images; we talked it over a little; everything looked convincing — and then he stopped himself.

“No... I don't think that's right.”

“Why not?” I asked.

“Because then this detail doesn't fit...”

He went back to the beginning and retold the dream — adding no new events, but re-examining the connections between facts he already knew. To an outside observer this was almost imperceptible. To me it was one of the most interesting moments of the entire therapy: for the first time, the man had changed his hypothesis not because the analyst had offered a different interpretation, but because he himself had found an internal contradiction. Until then, the psyche had been helping him find new ways of acting. Now, it seemed, it was developing in him the ability to test his own understanding of what was happening.

A short entry appeared in my working journal at the time: *It looks as though he is beginning to trust the facts more than the first version that comes to mind.* Only later would it become clear how important this observation was. It was precisely the ability to give up a beautiful but false explanation that prepared one of the most unusual dreams of our entire work — the one in which consciousness would, for the first time, begin to check its own conclusions inside the dream itself. This path began not with a new symbol and not with a new archetype. It began with the appearance of the first real doubt.

Part V. The Investigator and the Integrator

The Investigator Inside the Dream

And so we have come back to the dream with which this book began.

It came a few days after the dream of the door where the keys and codes would not match — and it turned out to be the dream for which, as it seems to me today, the psyche had been preparing the ground all through the preceding year.

The client told it differently from his earlier dreams — not as a memory, but almost as a report.

“It’s as if I’m in Turkey. At night, two pistol shots ring out. The police come up to me and ask me to give a statement about what happened. And from there, it’s as if I start steering the dream myself. I realize these might have been my rounds — from my rifle, left over from the war — and that if so, I could be punished. I come up with an explanation: there was a dumpster on fire near the house, the shots probably came from there, I heard them myself. Maybe I’d been cleaning up recently and threw the rounds out with the trash by accident, without noticing. But then I stop: the shots were from a pistol. And I never used a pistol in the war — I simply couldn’t have had rounds like that. And I wake up. I had the feeling I wasn’t sleeping an ordinary sleep — that my rational mind was steering the dream, leading it toward a goal.”

What interested me in this dream was not the plot but how consciousness worked inside it. The client noticed this himself and put it more precisely than I would have: the dream was not running on its own; his rational mind was stepping into it and building a logical version of events. It cannot be called a fully lucid dream — it was rather a borderline phase, in which consciousness had already partly switched on and begun to take part in the plot.

Notice the structure: shots, a demand to explain them, and the very first thought — *what if this is because of me?* — a highly characteristic reaction for someone who has long carried a disproportionate burden of responsibility. But then something happens that had almost never happened

in his dreams before. He does not automatically start justifying himself. He tests the hypothesis: what rounds could I even have had, what did I use in the war, did I have a weapon of that caliber? And he finds a contradiction. The inner process runs not along the path *suspicion* → *guilt*, but along the path *suspicion* → *verification* → *conclusion*. That is a very big difference.

The fate of the “cover story” itself is telling. He invents the version about the dumpster — quite convincing; one could live with it — but he himself discards it, because it does not stand up to the facts. The psyche seems to show two modes at once: the old one, which demands an explanation right away, anything to relieve the tension, and the new one, which first asks: *what actually happened?* And the second one wins.

Set this against the earlier dreams and the trend becomes unmistakable. Where solutions used to be found through action — shooting, running, rescuing, taking off, diving — they are now increasingly found through analysis: working out a code, understanding why a door is locked, finding the right strip of road for the plane’s takeoff run, checking where the rounds came from. The psyche relies more and more confidently on thinking as an instrument of safety — not instead of action, but before it.

It was here that I first saw the Explorer — the psychic organization we had met much earlier in this story — grow into something more precise. The Explorer looks at the world with curiosity. But what was happening now was more specific: out of that curiosity, the work of the Investigator was emerging — not replacing the Explorer, but growing out of him. Not an investigator in the police sense, but in the sense of someone who is in no hurry to draw conclusions, checks the facts, tolerates uncertainty, and changes his mind when new evidence comes to light. This is an extraordinarily mature way of thinking, and the fact that it first appeared not in my office but inside the dream itself struck me as one of the most important events of the entire therapy.

When I asked the client what he had felt most strongly on realizing that the rounds could not have been his, I expected to hear about relief. I heard something else: interest — interest in the fact that he had been able to reason like that at all, right inside a dream. This is telling. His attention went not to the shots, not to the police, but to the process of thinking itself. Guilt always says, *It was probably me*. The Investigator says something

different: *Let's first find out what actually happened.* These are two different psychic positions, and the shift from the first to the second is perhaps the most precise description of what happened to this man over a year of work.

The Integrator

The dreams that followed no longer needed such detailed analysis — not because they had become less significant, but because what was happening in them had become transparent to both of us without lengthy explanation. The psyche, which had once spoken in separate languages spread out over time — first war, then depth, then height, then order, then access — was now increasingly gathering them into a single image.

In one of these dreams the client moved through a gym with ease and pleasure — not fighting, not fleeing, not defending himself, but training: physically confident, supple, at ease with being watched. Nothing in common with the tunnels and dives of the first months of our work. Where movement had once been a descent inward — into danger, into the depths, into the past — here it had become a movement outward, into a world in which one can be seen without fear. The Warrior, the Navigator, and the Explorer, each of whom had taken the stage in turn in earlier series of dreams, here acted together for the first time — not because one had defeated the others, but because the personality no longer needed to choose between them.

This, I believe, is the work of the last psychic organization, the one we called the Integrator. Its task is not to create new symbols or to solve new problems, but to hold together what had already been gained at earlier stages: the capacity to move, gained by the Navigator; the capacity to take pleasure in one's own competence, gained by the Master; the order established by the Keeper of the System; the sober checking of facts taught by the Investigator. Before, each of these organizations of the psyche had appeared in turn, as if stepping onto the stage with its own role. Now they began to work simultaneously — in one and the same person, in one and the same dream.

This became especially evident in our conversations about the dreams themselves. The client, who at the beginning of therapy had almost never asked about how his own psyche worked, now asked not only “What does

this dream mean?” but also “How does the psyche actually work?”, “Why this particular image?”, “Is there a pattern here?” He had become interested not only in the result but in the mechanism itself. In other words, the exploratory function — which the unconscious had so long and patiently restored, dream after dream — had finally passed fully into the hands of consciousness. It no longer needed the analyst’s constant watch: the man began to use it himself, in everyday life, whether or not he had dreamed anything the night before.

Conclusion. The Function That Heals Itself

When I decided to write this book, I thought it ought to end with a powerful final dream — an image that would beautifully close the long road from the tunnels of war to the cockpit, from the dusty floor of the secret facility to the flashlight aimed into the depths. But the more closely I reread the whole body of material, the more clearly I understood: the ending of this story is not an image. The ending is a function.

If I try to compress about a year of work and hundreds of pages of journal notes into a single thought, it would be this: the psyche healed this man not by prompting him with the right answers. It healed him by gradually giving back to him the capacity to look for those answers himself.

At the beginning of our work, all his psychic energy was taken up by survival. Anxiety, guilt, and constant combat readiness left no room for anything but an immediate reaction to danger. The exploratory function — the part of the personality that is able to stop, to wonder, to doubt, to check the facts, and to change its mind under their weight — develops in most people from childhood, together with a sense of safety. In this client it had formed early and was real: from his youth he had been able to observe himself with great subtlety. But trauma — first in childhood, then in war — kept this capacity buried for years, because exploration requires time and the right to be wrong, and survival forgives neither.

The whole series of dreams we have followed in this book is, in essence, the story of how the unconscious, step by step, gave this man back the right not to hurry. First it tested whether he could bear any movement at all — and brought the first dream of the elevator rising upward in spite of the warning. Then it showed that movement could be voluntary, even enjoyable — the airplane whose controls turned out to be a pleasure to hold. Then it turned to the depths — and placed in his hands not a weapon but a flashlight, an instrument not of defense but of curiosity. Then it took up things that looked dull at first glance — accounts, keys, codes, documents — because freedom without inner order turns into chaos. And only after all these capacities — to move, to choose, to explore, to put things in order — had taken firm root did the psyche take its last and riskiest step: it let conscious reasoning into the dream itself. The dream of the shots and the

rounds is not just one more interesting plot. It is proof that the exploratory function, which the unconscious had nurtured on all kinds of material, had at last grown strong enough to work even where once only reflex and guilt had ruled.

It seems important to me to say plainly what I had until now expressed only as conjectures scattered across different chapters: this is what the psyche works toward when we give it time and do not get in its way with hasty interpretations. Not to suppress a symptom. Not to replace one story about oneself with another, more comfortable one. But to give a person back an instrument he can use for the rest of his life — without an analyst, without a dream journal, without special training: the ability to meet the unknown not with dread and not with a ready-made verdict against oneself, but with a question: *What is really happening here?*

That is why this kind of therapy was bound, sooner or later, to come to an end — not because the material ran out, but because the need for me was naturally beginning to fade. The man who at the start of our work would bring a dream and wait for me to tell him what it meant would, a year later, sit down across from me and say, “I think I understand why I dreamed this. Do you mind if I try first?” At that moment the analyst’s role changes for the last time. Not from interpreter to observer, as it did in the middle of this book — but from observer to someone who is gradually no longer needed in his former capacity, because beside him there is now a person able to carry on, on his own, the same conversation with his unconscious that the two of us used to carry on together.

I am far from thinking that one clinical case proves a general theory. But if even part of what I observed over the course of this work is true, then trauma therapy has a landmark more reliable than the disappearance of anxiety or an improvement in mood. That landmark is the moment when a person stops being only a survivor and becomes, once again, an explorer of his own life. From that moment on, healing continues without us. It becomes what it perhaps should have been from the very beginning — not the result of therapy, but a property of a healthy psyche itself: the capacity, again and again, when faced with the unknown within, neither to run from it nor to judge oneself for it too soon, but to ask, patiently and with interest: *What is really happening here — and what can I understand from it?*

And perhaps it is now clear why this path became possible precisely through dreams. The dream turned out to be that very safe airlock I spoke of at the beginning of this book — a realm a person experiences as unquestionably his own, yet can look at from the outside, without having to answer for it right away. It was this particular distance that allowed the exploring part of the personality, month after month, to go where consciousness — frightened and weighed down by guilt — would never have dared to go on its own. The unconscious was not simply telling a story. It was opening a door for consciousness into itself — exactly as far as the person was ready to enter. And perhaps that is the whole secret of how the psyche heals itself: not when it is forced, but when it is finally allowed to be an explorer in its own home.