

A3 dd dream ambiv

P: Last night I had a weird dream. I was in a helicopter. My cousin was driving the helicopter and we're running into all these power lines and my feet kept getting stuck on the power lines. And it's like she kept getting so low and we kept almost hitting houses and kept almost hitting buildings, and it was so scary. The whole time I was just scared, like, "What are you doing?! Land this helicopter. I don't want to be in here anymore." And she kept saying, "This is the only way to get to where we're trying to go to." And I mean, it was horrible, and yet so real, every bump. I could feel the wind, I could see all the telephone lines. At the same time I knew we were flying into the wires and I kept waiting for the plane to fall, waiting for the plane to crash. And I was praying that this was just a dream. I don't remember much after that.

T: What are your associations to the dream?

One technique for facilitating exploration of a dream is simply to ask the patient about her associations to it, or what comes to mind.

P: What do you mean?

T: Well what comes to mind when you think of the dream?

P: [Sighs] I don't know. I was thinking I was running from something. Maybe I'm scared. I know it's got something to do with being scared because of the feeling that I got was so...I mean I was petrified...like every time I turned around I was like, "Oh my God, go up go up go up!"

One method for interpreting dreams is to identify the emotional response to a particular dream sequence. So the patient is providing a large clue to the dream's meaning by stating that she felt scared.

T: Are you scared a lot these days?

Emotion is the road in the unconscious that connects past to present. The therapist makes use of this to move closer to the meaning of the dream.

P: Maybe subconsciously I might be, because I'm getting ready to move...that's a big thing that's going on. I'm trying to get into housing and they told me it's a two-month wait. And...I know it's going to be a lot more responsibility for me.

The patient mentions that she is scared of recent uncertainties and responsibilities related to having to find her own housing, which suggests that the dream may be related to aspects of the recovery process.

T: Is it?

P: Yes, it is...because I'm going to be responsible for my lights and stuff that I'm not responsible for right now. My money is still limited, but all that I have to do, and the location of where I'm going to be moving to has been on my mind. Everyone is telling me not to move to this or that side of town. But I'm just trying to trust...I second-guess my trust because of the worrying. If I trust it, then why do I worry? These are questions that I ask myself.

In previous sessions, the patient had been showing evidence of ambivalence towards treatment and recovery. The dream provides a potentially useful metaphor for helping the patient to verbalize her ambivalence. If she is able to talk about her ambivalence, she is less likely to act on it, e.g. by relapsing or leaving treatment.

T: So...what about the power lines. What were you afraid would happen if you hit the power lines?

P: That we'd crash and be electrocuted. They were very durable though. They would go with us. It was horrible. It was a nightmare. And I'm talking about the buildings so close...and I could see us, [pointing upwards] barely missing the building, barely missing the building, barely missing the building. It was horrible. The more we went up, the more buildings we almost hit.

T: My association to it is similar to yours. You mentioned housing and so on, but I guess a lot of your description reminds me of how scary the whole recovery process might be for you...and you've had these close calls all the time that could, as you talked earlier, that could sabotage the whole thing. But also just, as the driver was saying, "It's the only way to get to where we are trying to go." The higher you go, the more buildings you almost hit. The whole thing, as you talked about it, seems kind of overwhelming. All of a sudden having all these responsibilities. The more you're into life and the more you have going on, the more things can go wrong. And so many things can derail the process,But one way to interpret the dream too is that you are all the characters in the dream, and so I wonder if in some ways you are the driver, as well as the passenger. And part of you is saying let's go go go and trust in the process, this is where we have to go...and the other part of you is saying, "Stop! I'm terrified. Just land this sucker!"

The therapist points out that another useful method of interpreting dreams is to think about all the characters in the dream as different aspects of the patient.

P: [Nods]. Yeah, because that's all I wanted to do. But another thing is, when we went to the store, I had a chance to walk away, but I didn't. I ended up getting back in the helicopter. The next thing I knew, we were flying again. And I remember asking myself, "Why did you get back in here? If you were so scared, why did you get back in the helicopter? You had a chance to walk away! You should have let her go by herself." But because I wanted to be there for my cousin and didn't want her to be by herself, I ended up getting back in there. And then it got worse! You know...we flew higher. We were safer from the power lines by flying higher, but the higher we went, the more buildings we almost hit. I don't know. It had me horribly terrified, but when I woke up it was like, "It's just a dream."

T: Well, dreams are metaphors for our different struggles and issues and fears. So, anyway, that's my association and I don't know if that's all it means or if that's even accurate, but it reminds me of the recovery process and recovery is a choice.

P: Yeah, just as you said. I could have been the driver and the passenger, because I felt like the driver too! I felt like I was somehow in control of the helicopter. When I told her "lower and lower," she'd go lower and when I'd tell her "higher and higher," she'd go higher, "faster and faster" and she'd speed up. I mean it was so real, the feeling of it, the noise of it, the...yeah.

T: If you go high enough in the recovery process, are you hoping the buildings will start to thin out?

P: Well, we didn't hit anything...that's a good sign! I take that as a good sign [nods her head]. I remember just waking up.

The patient is beginning to make good use of the dream as a metaphor for her ambivalence about treatment and recovery.

T: Well, you are still in the process.

P: That's right. You're right about that [nodding head].

T: Still on the ride.

P: And it's a ride too! On most days it's a good ride. But through the bumps and the hurdles I'm going through, I wouldn't have it any other way. This is the ride I'm willing to be on. I know it's going to all pay off at the end. Even with my struggles through school. If I just stick and stay, I'll be okay. I truly believe that, as long as I don't give up. Anything that comes hard to me, I've always given up and I don't want to give up anymore. I want to fight for what it is that I want.