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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF WISH FULFILMENT

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"IF wishes were horses beggars would ride" is a nursery saw which, in the light of recent developments in psychology, has come to have a much more universal application than it was formerly supposed to have. If the followers of the Freudian school of psychologists can be believed—and there are many reasons for believing them—all of us, no matter how apparently contented we are and how well we are supplied with the good things of the earth, are "beggars," because at one time or another and in one way or another we are daily betraying the presence of unfulfilled wishes. Many of these wishes are of such a character that we ourselves can not put them into words. Indeed if they were put into words for us we should straightway deny that such a wish is or was ever harbored by us in our waking moments. But the stretch of time indicated by "waking moments" is only a minor part of the twenty-four hours. Even during the time we are not asleep we are often abstracted, day-dreaming, letting moments go by in reverie. Only during a limited part of our waking moments are we keenly and alertly "all there" in the possession of our faculties. There are thus, even apart from sleep, many unguarded moments when these so-called "repressed wishes" may show themselves.

In waking moments we wish only for the conventional things which will not run counter to our social traditions or code of living. But these open and above-board wishes are not very interesting to the psychologist. Since they are harmless and call for the kinds of things that everybody in our circle wishes for, we do not mind admitting them and talking about them. Open and uncensored wishes are best seen in children (though children at an early age begin to show repressions). Only to-night I heard a little girl of nine say: "I wish I were a boy and were sixteen years old—I'd marry Ann" (her nine-year old companion). And recently I heard a boy of eight say to his father: "I wish you would go away forever; then I could marry mother." The spontaneous and uncensored wishes of children gradually disappear as the children take on the speech conventions of the adult. But even though the crassness of the form of expression of the wish disappears with age, there is no reason to suppose that the human organism ever gets to the point where wishes just as unconventional as the above do not rise to trouble it. Such wishes, though, are immediately repressed; we never harbor them nor do we express them clearly to ourselves in our waking moments.

The steps by which repression takes place in the simpler cases are not especially difficult to understand. When the child wants something it ought not to have, its mother hands it something else and moves the object about until the child reaches out for it. When the adult strives for something which society denies him, his environment offers him, if he is normal, something which is "almost as good," although it may not wholly take the place of the thing he originally strove for. This in general is the process of substitution or sublimation. It is never complete from the first moment of childhood. Consequently it is natural to suppose that many of the things which have been denied us should at times beckon to us. But since they are *banned* they must beckon in devious ways. These sometime grim specters both of the present and of the past can not break through the barriers of our staid and sober waking moments, so they exhibit themselves, at least to the *initiated,* in shadowy form in reverie, and in more substantial form in the slips we make in conversation and in writing, and in the things we laugh at; but clearest of all in dreams. I say the meaning is clear to the initiated because it does require special training and experience to analyze these seemingly nonsensical slips of tongue and pen, these highly elaborated and apparently meaningless dreams, into the *wishes* (instinct and habit impulses) which gave them birth. It is fortunate for us that we are protected in this way from having to face openly many of our own wishes and the wishes of our friends.

A few years ago when this doctrine was first advanced by Sigmund Freud, the noted psycho-pathologist at Vienna, it raised a storm of opposition, not only from the staid, home-loving, every-day men and women, but from scientific men as well (objection to the view seems to stand in almost direct ratio to the amount of repression the individual possesses). The truth of the matter is that Freud wrote mainly for his medical colleagues, but his words were taken up and bandied about by the press and by men who had not seriously studied them. This unjust treatment of Freud led a few physicians in this country, who had had personal contact with him, to champion his cause and to go so far as to say that they alone, with Freud, knew how to interpret dreams. Freudianism thus became a kind of cult, and the only devotees allowed openly to worship at the shrine were those who had had personal training under Freud. Fortunately science is objective, and whatever good there is in one man's work can usually be verified, although in the process of verification modifications are usually made which lead gradually to a satisfactory working basis. This belief in the objective nature of science has led many psychologists in this country who have not been fortunate enough to have personal contact with Freud to try out his methods and to attempt to verify his findings for themselves. They can do this without necessarily putting themselves on record as being

interpreters of Freud. The psychologist's interest in this movement lies in its possible usefulness in analyzing character. The analysis of personal character, like the analysis of emotions, has always resisted the efforts of the psychological laboratories. I believe all psychologists will agree with me when I say that no laboratory-developed test has ever enabled us to tell whether a man is at heart a liar, a profligate, or a coveter of his neighbor's wife.

Suppressed Wishes expressed in the Slips of Every-day Life

In social gatherings where there is some slight emotional strain and the customary control over speech is off, we find numberless examples of the expression of the suppressed wish. If we were to make a tabulation of such slips met with in a single week, the list would be long. Most of the slips reveal too much to be put down in print. But I can mention some of the types usually met with.

An elderly bachelor, the friend of the family, squires his friend's wife to a dance. He introduces her as "Mrs. S." (giving her maiden name instead of her married name, "Mrs. J."). If taxed with possessing the wish that the woman were single so that he might have another chance, he would indignantly deny that any such thought had ever crossed his mind. This is probably true in the sense that had any such wish crossed his mind in his ordinary waking moments it would have been put down immediately—repressed. It is rather interesting to note in the above case, which is an actual one, that later in the evening the "Mrs. J." referred to, after having danced with a man other than her escort, shortly afterwards introduced her partner as "Mr. J." (her husband)! It is of course unusual to find material so readily as this. I noted another and common type of slip the same day as the above. A woman of my acquaintance had to go to the New York Central Station to meet three girl friends *en route* from Boston to Washington. She decided to buy some flowers for each of them. I went to the florist shop with her and to my surprise she purchased only two bouquets, saying: "*A* likes violets, but *B* is fond of orchids." When we reached the sidewalk I asked her why she disliked "*C*" so much. "Why do you think I dislike her?" she asked. "Because," I said, "you have done all in your power to annihilate her —you have forgotten to purchase any flowers for her." She showed confusion but gracefully admitted that I had saved her from making a serious *faux pas*. To take revenge, however, she gave me my just deserts by saying: "I can't bear to be around a man who has your view of life." (She afterwards admitted, however, that "*C*" had been for many years a thorn in the flesh.)

Slips are often expressive of wishes which bear on the pleasanter side of life. I mislay my cane and umbrella, both of which I prize

highly, and find that I left them at the house of a friend where I last had dinner and a game of bridge. The wish shortly to visit so pleasant a place again is very clearly implied. To take a single final example in this connection: Only a moment ago it was necessary for me to call a man on the telephone. I said: "This is Dr. John B. Watson, of the Johns Hopkins Hospital," instead of Johns Hopkins University. One skilled in analysis could easily read in this slight slip the wish that I had gone into medicine instead of into psychology (even this analysis, though, would be far from complete).

Slips of the pen are just as numerous and just as interesting revealers of hidden character as are slips in speech. It is in dreams, however, that we get our most interesting and valuable material for analysis.

The Dream as a Vehicle of Wish Fulfilment

According to the now generally accepted viewpoint we dream almost constantly. If we were to put the question: "Do you often dream?" to a group of men, women and children, the answers would be various. Most of the men would say: "I seldom dream, and when I do my dreams are meaningless and uninteresting." Some of the women would say that they often have wonderful and thrilling dreams while others would maintain that their dreams were few and had no interest. The children would tell us that they dreamed frequently and that their dreams were always interesting and exciting. It is difficult to convince most adults that if they do not dream constantly they do dream much more frequently than they are at present aware of. Even my own students are at first sceptical about the universality of the dream processes. I ask them to try hard to recall their dreams on waking in the morning, and if they awake in the night to jot down a sentence or two of their dreams so that they can recall the whole dream on awaking in the morning. In a short time most of them are convinced that they do dream almost constantly.

If it is difficult to convince one that he dreams constantly, it is a Herculean task to convince him of the second step in understanding dreams—to wit, that his dreams are *not* at bottom bizarre and meaningless, but, on the contrary, that they are orderly, logical, and, if we know the history of the individual, almost predictable. We must admit immediately that if we take the dream at its face value, that is, read the words that the dreamer puts down as a true report of his dream, it is a creature of fancy in the wildest sense of that word. We get the reports in bits with no apparent connecting links. Fanciful words are put in. Names are mentioned which are the names of no individuals known to the dreamer. Places are visited which have never been visited by the dreamer. (Yet in almost every dream the starting point is some

incident—situation, person, place, or thing—met with by the dreamer at some time not twenty-four hours before the dream took place.)

We get our clue to the dream as being a wish fulfilment by taking the dreams of children. Their dreams are as uncensored as is their conversation. Before Christmas my own children dreamed nightly that they had received the things they wanted for Christmas. The dreams were clear, logical and open wishes. Why should the dreams of adults be less logical and less open unless they are to act as concealers of the wish? If the dream processes in the child run in an orderly and logical way, would it indeed not be curious to find the dream processes of the adult less logical and full of meaning?

This argument gives us good *a priori* grounds for supposing that the dreams of adults too are full of meaning and are logical; that there is a wish in every dream and that the wish is fulfilled in the dream. The reason dreams appear illogical is due to the fact that if the wish were to be expressed in its logical form it would not square with our every-day habits of thought and action. We should be disinclined to admit even to ourselves that we have such dreams. Immediately upon waking only so much of the dream is remembered, that is, put into ordinary speech, as will square with our life at the time. The dream is "censored," in other words.

The question immediately arises who is the censor or what part of us does the censoring? The Freudians have made more or less of a "metaphysical entity" out of the censor. They suppose that when wishes are repressed they are repressed into the "unconscious," and that this mysterious censor stands at the trapdoor lying between the conscious and the unconscious. Many of us do not believe in a world of the unconscious (a few of us even have grave doubts about the usefulness of the term consciousness), hence we try to explain censorship along ordinary biological lines. We believe that one group of habits can "down" another group of habits—or instincts. In this case our ordinary system of habits—those which we call expressive of our "real selves"—inhibit or quench (keep inactive or partially inactive) those habits and instinctive tendencies which belong largely in the past.

This conception of the dream as having both censored and uncensored features has led us to divide the dream into its specious or manifest content (face value, which is usually nonsensical) and its latent or logical content. We should say that while the manifest content of the dream is nonsensical, its true or latent content is usually logical and expressive of some wish that has been suppressed in the waking state.

On examination the manifest content of dreams is found to be full of symbols. As long as the dream does not have to be put into customary language, it is allowed to stand as it is dreamed—the sym-

bolic features are uncensored. Symbolism is much more common than is ordinarily supposed. All early language was symbolic. The language of children and of savages abounds in symbolism. Symbolic modes of expression both in art and in literature are among the earliest forms of treating difficult situations in delicate and inoffensive ways. In other words, symbols in art are a necessity and serve the same purpose as does the censor in the dreams. Even those of us who have not an artistic education, however, have become familiar with the commoner forms of symbolism through our acquaintance with literature. In the dream, when the more finely controlled physiological processes are in abeyance, there is a tendency to revert to the symbolic modes of expression. This has its use, because on awaking the dream does not shock us, since we make no attempt to analyze or trace back in the dream the symbol's original meaning. Hence we find that the manifest content is often filled with symbols which occasionally give us the clue to the dream analysis.

The dream then brings surcease from our maladjustments: If we are denied power, influence, or love by society or by individuals, we can obtain these desiderata in our dreams. We can possess in dreams the things which we can not have by day. In sleep the poor man becomes a Midas, the ugly woman handsome, the childless woman surrounded by children, and those who in daily life live upon a crust, in their dreams dine like princes (after living upon canned goods for two months in the Dry Tortugas, the burden of my every dream was food). Where the wished-for things are compatible with our daily code, they are remembered on awaking as they were dreamed. Society, however, will not allow the unmarried woman to have children, however keen her desire for them. Hence her dreams in which the wish is gratified are remembered in meaningless words and symbols.

Biological Basis of the Wish

Long before the time Freud's doctrine saw the light of day, William James gave the key to what I believed to be the true explanation of the wish. Thirty years ago he wrote:

> . . . I am often confronted by the necessity of standing by one of my selves and relinquishing the rest. Not that I would not, if I could, be both handsome and fat and well dressed, and a great athlete, and make a million a year, be a wit, a *bon-vivant*, and a lady-killer, as well as a philosopher; a philanthropist, a statesman, a warrior, and African explorer, as well as a "tone-poet" and a saint. But the thing is simply impossible. The millionaire's work would run counter to the saint's; the *bon-vivant* and the philanthropist would trip each other up; the philosopher and the lady-killer could not well keep house in the same tenement of clay. Such different characters may conceivably at the outset of life be alike *possible* to a man. But to make any one of them actual, the rest must more or less be suppressed.

What James is particularly emphasizing here is that the human organism is instinctively capable of developing along many different lines, but that due to the stress of civilization some of these instinctive capacities must be thwarted. In addition to these impulses which are instinctive, and therefore hereditary, there are many habit impulses which are equally strong and which for similar reasons must be given up. The systems of habits we form (*i. e.,* the acts we learn to perform) at four years of age will not serve us when we are twelve, and those formed at the age of twelve will not serve us when we become adults. As we pass from childhood to man's estate, we are constantly having to give up thousands of activities which our nervous and muscular systems have a tendency to perform. Some of these instinctive tendencies born with use are poor heritages; some of the habits we early develop are equally poor possessions. But, whether they are "good" or "bad," they must give way as we put on the habits required of adults. Some of them yield with difficulty and we often get badly twisted in attempting to put them away, as every psychiatric clinic can testify. It is among these frustrated impulses that I would find the biological basis of the unfulfilled wish. Such "wishes" need never have been "conscious" and *need never have been suppressed into Freud's realm of the unconscious.* It may be inferred from this that there is no particular reason for applying the term "wish" to such tendencies. What we discover then in dreams and in conversational slips and other lapses are really at heart "reaction tendencies"—tendencies which we need never have faced nor put into words at any time. On Freud's theory these "wishes" have at one time been faced and put into words by the individual, and when faced they were recognized as not squaring with his ethical code. They were then immediately "repressed into the unconscious."

A few illustrations may help in understanding how thwarted tendencies may lay the basis for the so-called unfulfilled wish which later appears in the dream. One individual becomes a psychologist in spite of his strong interest in becoming a medical man, because at the time it was easier for him to get the training along psychological lines. Another pursues a business career—when, if he had had his choice, he would have become a writer of plays. Sometimes on account of the care of a mother or of younger brothers and sisters, a young man can not marry, even though the mating instinct is normal; such a course of action necessarily leaves any unfulfilled wishes and frustrated impulses in its train. Again a young man will marry and settle down when mature consideration would show that his career would advance much more rapidly if he were not burdened with a family. Again, an individual marries, and without even admitting to himself that his marriage is a failure, he gradually shuts himself off from any emo-

tional expression—protects himself from the married state by sublimating his natural domestic ties; usually in some kind of engrossing work, but often in questionable ways—by hobbies, speed manias and excesses of various kinds. In connection with this it is interesting to note that the automobile, quite apart from its utilitarian value, is coming to be a widely used means of repression or wish sublimation. I have been struck by the enormously increasing number of women drivers. Women in the present state of society have not the same access to absorbing kinds of work that men have (which will shortly come to be realized as a crime far worse than that of the Inquisition). Hence their chances of normal sublimation are limited. For this reason women seek an outlet by rushing to the war as nurses, in becoming social workers, pursuing aviation, etc. Now if I am right in this analysis these unexercised tendencies to do things other than we are doing are never quite got rid of. We can not get rid of them unless we could build ourselves over again so that our organic machinery would work only along certain lines and only for certain occupations. Since we can not completely live these tendencies down we are all more or less "unadjusted" and ill adapted. These maladjustments are exhibited whenever the brakes are off, that is, whenever our higher and well-developed habits of speech and action are dormant, as in sleep, in emotional disturbances, etc.

Many but not all of these "wishes" can be traced to early childhood or to adolescence, which is a time of stress and strain and a period of great excitement. In childhood the boy often puts himself in his father's place; he wishes that he were grown like his father and could take his father's place, for then his mother would notice him more and he would not have to feel the weight of authority. The girl likewise often becomes closely attached to her father and wishes her mother would die (which in childhood means to disappear or go away) so that she could be all in all to her father. These wishes, from the standpoint of popular morality, are perfectly innocent; but as the children grow older they are told that such wishes are wrong and that they should not speak in such a "dreadful" way. Such wishes are, then, gradually suppressed, replaced by some other mode of expression. But the replacement is often imperfect. The apostle's saying "When we become men we put away childish things" was written before the days of psycho-analysis. We do not put them away—we replace them, but they never for us completely lose their impulsive power. Parents who show excessive emotional reactions towards their children—overmuch fondling of them—often encourage these wishes. The children take on more and more the wished-for forms of attachment. Later on in life such wishes may show themselves in dreams and occasionally in more objective ways. Now and then we find a young man whose mother has long since

died who can find little attraction in the girls with whom he associates. He is totally unaware of the cause of this apathy and would probably be the first one to scoff at the true explanation. In a similar way adults may become too much attached to children. This is often seen in the case of a woman whose husband has died leaving her with an only son. The son becomes substituted for the father, and her reactions which she looks upon as those belonging merely to a devoted mother, soon take on certain characteristics of those she would show to her husband. (The mother usually objects to the marriage of the son—on the grounds usually that the girl is not "suited to him.") Again from a moral point of view, as we ordinarily understand the term, her actions are exemplary. When I have expressed these views I have been often indignantly asked if parents should not caress their children. Of course I answer "yes"; but certainly if Freud has taught us anything, it is to give heed to our relations with our children. Overindulgence in caresses is far worse for their future happiness and poise than is overindulgence in material things.

The analysis of dreams is a field which belongs to the specially qualified physician—the psycho-analyst. It sometimes takes weeks, months and even years, to give genuine analysis of a dream. Special psycho-analytic methods are necessary to the unraveling of dreams, as well as special skill in handling the subject. Hence the dream will probably never mean any more to the ordinary individual than it does to-day. The crass analyses of friends and neighbors are worthless, nor should one be disturbed over a dream because someone has told him that Freud would say such and such things about it.

Dream analysis when made by experts has been of almost unbelievable service in treating the functional nervous diseases (neurasthenia, psychasthenia, hysteria, etc.). The dreams of such patients reveal their past in sections: the physician gradually joins these sections and can tell the patient where the trouble lies (that is, tell him the wishes around which all his dreams revolve). Knowing the cause of his distress, the patient, assisted by the physician, can form *new sets of habits which do not conflict.* Cures are thus effected without the use of drugs. The cures, however, smack not at all of the mysterious.

I have already expressed the wish that technical psycho-analysis may lead finally over into genuine character analysis. Many men high up in the business world, the diplomatic service, and in government positions generally, often have enormous responsibilities put upon them—there are times in the lives of such men when they are put under terrific strain from the outside: such men should be relatively free from strong inward conflicts and repressions. It seems fantastic to say that such persons ought to be selected only after careful psycho-analysis, but the whole essence of the psycho-analytic movement strongly suggests such a procedure.