

# The line of the least resistance method in working with dreams

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**Summary.** This paper's ideas are the result of a years' long practical work with dreams through integrative, systemic-eclectic approach and a wide theoretical interest in the field of theories of sleep and dreaming starting with first classical psychoanalytical ideas and going to the nowadays new neurocognitive theories. The main ideas in the paper are around the searching of the authors for some common ground between psychoanalytical theory of dreaming and neurocognitive theories of sleep and dreams, mainly through the idea of authors that the common ground is so called personal meaning of dreams. There is also a practical goal – exploration of integrative method for working with dreams named – *a method of the line of least resistance*. In fact this paper main mission is to show and explore this approach in working with dreams and this is done through a complete and structured approach supported with templates and sheets that are used in this practical work.

**Keywords:** Working with dreams

## 1. Introduction

The dream always existed like one side of the coin called the state of sleeping. The dream is the most psychological connection to sleep as another pole of the pair, dreaming – wakefulness, as one of the most crucial circular dimensions in general in the human's life reality. In the world, through evolution there is a chain of cycles that persisted with time (the cycle of day and night, the season's cycle, the month cycle, the menstrual cycle of 28 days etc.). In this way, one of the fundamental cycles is the cycle of change of the level of quality of consciousness – sleep and dream. One aspect of sleep as a physiological aspect of a different form of consciousness is dreaming, which results in a bizarre story called a dream. The dream is a psychological aspect of sleeping and as no other mental scenarios confirms the uniqueness and the connection of the mental and the physical. Long decades through the psychological knowledge, the eyes were pointed on two big groups of theories, neuropsychological and psychoanalytic theories. That is to say, after the appearance of Freud's dream theory, a series of research and theoretical conceptions emerged, that were contrary to his work. Psychoanalysis stated – The dream is a pure and deep psychology! Neuropsychology claimed – The dream is nothing, but a pure neurology and biology. These statements remained vague until the appearance of the modern bridging between these two polarities. Which one has the primacy of the absolute truth for the reality of

the dream? While some were right for stating that the dream is a product of unconsciousness, others were right saying that the prefrontal cortex, the amygdala and other parts of the brain determine the quality of the dream's scenario. If 2,000 – 3,000 years ago it was believed that the dream was a vision given by God and a message of the Almighty covered in mystification, 1,000 years ago the dream was considered as something dark and magical. Nowadays the dream is described without any form of mystification and there's one thing that's sure – the whole scientific knowledge takes the dream as a product of the dreamer! So, we are going to present the method called Line of Least Resistance for work on dreams in psychotherapy.

## 2. "The Line of Least Resistance" Method

The author developed this method spontaneously through his many years of group work on dreams, where he begins with the insight that the common basis between neurocognitive and psychoanalytical dream theories is evident even in the first steps of psychoanalytical interpretation of the narrative structure of the dream. The idea for this original term came unexpectedly with the author's insight that the method emerges only if we begin with the type of dreams so called – ordinary dreams. They are mostly related to the explanation of the interconnection of both theories, through personal meaning. The author recognized that the theories interconnect one with another exactly on the place of the interpretation of these dreams that give comparable and similar material that is recent and comes from a recent awake experiences of the dreamer day before dreaming (ordinary dreams). Some authors (e.g., Hunt, 1987) claim that even since old age, people in the tribal units called these dreams plain or secular, but there are claims that at the same time there were somatic or medical dreams (Hillman, 1979). The former remind us of Freud's ordinary dreams, while the later of neurobiological understanding that the dream is an organic-neural product, and not a psychological one. After realizing the place of interconnection, it was easier and

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Submitted for publication: September 2017

Accepted for publication: October 2017

more logical to develop the actual method that is used in the analysis of all the dreams, with which the author support his thesis. The term "The Line of Least Resistance" was coined from a famous proverb, used for people who want to reach a goal easily. In this kind of situations we say that someone takes the line of least resistance! This means that during the analysis of this type of dreams, the author realized that it is the best to use a method that doesn't allow to invade the deepest and infantile unconscious sources of dreams that lead deep in the personal (and even in the collective) unconscious, but rather stay with the recent repressed elements of the real/ conscious life.

Neurobiological theories rely on the same notion about significance of the recent sensations from a day before sleeping, i.e. that these sensations are the essential part of the dream scenario. According to it, the dream is a product of neurological processes during sleep, and consists of images, narration and sensations that remained in the short-term memory; it is a product of the instantaneous, conscious life of the dreamer, and his conscious/ wakeful experience (the day before sleeping). The difference is that psychoanalysis explains this phenomena with the claim that these sensations, images and impulses are repressed in the unconscious, from where they emerge as an unconscious message, which consists of unfulfilled wishes, using the processes of the so called "dream work", whereas the neurobiological conceptions explains dreams as a neurocognitive realities.

### 3. Narrative structure of dreams

Proclamations of the dreamers would be impossible without the script of the actual story. If we identify the dreams with theatrical plays, or biographical novels, we will encounter without fail, a specific, strict, idiosyncratic, individualized storyline. There are no two individuals that can dream a dream with the same storyline, under the same circumstances and experiences. This confirms the personal phenomenological thread of the dream the original and authentic product of a unique personality of the dreamer. In this regard, the term storyline implies the rational development of the story, incarnated in its visual, auditive, tactile and of course, neurological aspects. The script represents the narrative aspect of a dream, as a product of the so called dreaming state, generally in the REM phase of sleep. The factors that give the dreams their script, and story-like characteristic, especially in this phase, are widely elaborated, primarily by the neuropsychological theoreticians. Besides the sense illusions in the dreams, ensured by the previously mentioned brain functions, there are certain cognitive aspects of the script, like thoughts, opinions, judgements which complement the sensations giving them a higher psychological quality, and making them analytical, complex and intellectualized. Thus, in the dreams, the Ego has not only sensation effects, but cognitive and analytical ones, and it can be said that besides its paradoxicality it has a sense of logic, often bizarre and atypical, but still existent and original. The story in a dream wouldn't be complete if there was not an emotional aspect of the story. There are almost no typically emotional, or completely cognitive dreams. It is a common law that in every dream there are great number of intensive emotions, mostly unpleasant, which invade and even overflow the dreamer's ego. If we examine these facts through psychological-psychoanalytic perspective, they lead to the conclusion that emotions build the narrative con-

text of the storyline. This means that the quality and quantity of emotions give the dream storyline its vivacity and reality. The supposition is that without this part, dreams would be experienced as vague copies of reality, and wouldn't be of personal importance. The narrative context designates the whole structure of meanings, due to the emotional influence. It is important for the analysis of the method of *The Line of Least Resistance* to mention the fact that it goes back to the first associative processes, that usually lead to the most authentic interpretation derived from the unconscious, that was filtered through a number of defensive mechanisms of the Ego being in that way the closest to resolve the latent, actual message of the dream, derived from the integration of associative meanings of the given elements, as symbols of the manifest content of the dream. In fact, the dream storyline simply cannot exist on its own without the affective touch of the story. If we combine these findings with the functions of the limbic system, especially the amygdala in the REM phase of sleep, we come to the answer why emotional aspects are always present. On one hand, there is neurological reality during sleeping, which means that there is significant neurological activity in CNS during this phase of sleep, and on the other, they complement the personal meanings of the dreamer's storyline, and without them the analysis of the actual dream would be vain and irrelevant. This confirms that on one hand, psychoanalytic and other psychological dream theories, and on the other, neurological and neurocognitive theories connect and are similar exactly on the site of personal meanings derived from the storyline's affectivity. No matter which point of view we take, the conclusion is that only this type of integrative psycho-neurological theory concept can explain the complexity of the narrative structure of the dream. We can conclude that emotions merely complement the story in respect of the visual and theatrical aspects of the narrative structure of the manifest dream. In fact, emotions predict and paint the story, but randomly, spontaneously and unexpectedly add up to the storyline. From this perspective, we can say that those emotions that only stick to the visuals in the dreams are not of great importance for the personal meaning of the dream. Even if it is true that these emotions are random and caused by the storyline of the dream, ultimately the personal importance of the visual plot of the narrative structure (that is strictly individualized and relate only to the dreamer!) will contribute to the meaning of the emotions. Again, in this instance, it is not clear whether the emotions occur irrespective of the storyline of the dream and receive a psychological meaning during the analysis, or the emotions aren't at all by chance, but spring from the experiences of the dreamer and according to this are caused by an emotional reaction. So, the question arises whether the visual aspect of the storyline occurs in the length of time, followed by the affectivity, as a reaction to the high neural activity of the amygdala in the REM phase of sleep, or whether they appear simultaneously. As mentioned previously, it is not possible to understand the dream narrative solely through the analysis of the discourse, i.e. through the interpretation of the dream scenario. In fact, there is a need of defining the narrative structure, which is much wider than the storyline concept. It seems that the storyline is just one of the important aspects of the whole narrative structure of the dream. In this sense, the narrative structure as a phenomenology, and as a structure of the occurrences in the dream, can be defined as: *complex, unrepeatable, individual, original, meaningful, and*

Table 1. A working sheet for use of the *Method of the least resistance*

Method of Least resistance Working sheet	Full Name (or Initials)	Date and Time of the Dream	Duration of the Dream	Type of Dream
<p><b>Storyline</b>  <b>WHAT?</b> (Tell the storyline in the dream! What happens? To what extent can you attach the storyline to actions and events prior to the sleeping and dreaming, and what it means to you?)</p> <p><b>Thematic Context</b>  <b>What theme?</b> (Which is/are the main theme/s in the dream? Is this theme familiar to you? Is it personal? Does this theme repeat itself, and if so, does it remind you of something?)</p> <p><b>Physically-Organismic</b> (Give a description of the body and the organisms of the characters in the dream! Which parts of the body/organisms are displayed, and whether they remind you of something?)</p> <p><b>Emotional context</b>  <b>How?</b> (How do you feel regarding this dream, and whether it remind you of some feelings in the wakeful life, right before the dream, How did you experience the dream? Which emotions are dominant, and can you associate them with something?)</p> <p><b>Cognitive context</b>  <b>Why?</b> (What kind of message did you receive from the dream, can you associate it with something, and where does it lead you? What is the dream trying to tell you? Which thoughts are dominant in the dream, and can you relate them to something? What is the meaning of the particular elements in the dream, for you, personally? Where does it lead you? What is/are the meaning/s of the dream according to you?)</p> <p><b>Motivational context</b>  <b>From where?</b> To what? (What are the wishes, motives, desires, ideals, of your Ego, in the dream? Where do they lead you? Does it remind you of something? What are the motives and intentions of the other characters, and does it remind you of something?)</p> <p><b>Spatio-temporal context</b>  <b>When? Where?</b> (Where does the action take place? Do you know the place? What time (period, hour, year, date etc.) and does it remind you of something?)</p> <p><b>Personal context</b>  <b>Who? Whom?</b> (Which characters are present in the dream, and do they remind you of someone? How are they portrayed? Where does that lead you? Does it remind you of something? Are you present in the dream, and in what way are you presented?)</p> <p><b>Socially-Relational context</b>  <b>With who? Among who?</b> (What kind of relations did you come across among the characters in the dream? Does it remind you of something? Were monologues or dialogues present in the dream?)</p> <p><b>Collective-Unconscious context</b>  <b>To what extent is it universal?</b> (Were there any archetypal symbols, and what were they Archetypal symbols? Can you associate them with something? To what extent is the message of the dream universal? Does it remind you of something? What is/are the personal meaning/s of the archetypes?)</p> <p><b>Universally-Spiritual context</b>  <b>To where?</b> (Were there universal elements or symbols, or transpersonal images of your Ego, or other characters in the dream? Do they remind you of something? Were there any spiritual symbols and meanings that are important to you? Do they remind you of something?)</p> <p><b>Short content, essayistic display of the dream interpretation</b></p>				

*personally important, discursive union, which is distinctly organized around its structural elements.*

After a painstaking analysis, the authors came to a conclusion that there are eleven structural elements of the narrative structure: **1. Storyline of the dream:** (its story, action, content. It gives an answer to the question: What?); **2. Thematic context:** (the specific theme/s that appear in the dream. Which theme/s is/are dominant? It gives an answer to the question: Which theme?); **3. Physically-Organismic context:** (the presentation of the physical in the manifest dream, physical look, movements, physiology, visions and body functions, the presentation of the organs, the physical and physiological functions in the dream etc. It gives an answer to the questions: Which physically-organismic aspect, and how is it presented?); **4. Emotional**

**context:** (the affectivity of the narration, emotional tone, feelings in the dream, phenomenological plot of the story. It gives an answer to the question: How?); **5. Cognitive context:** (the essence of the dream, meanings from intellectual perspective, values, goals etc. It answers the question: Why?); **6. Motivational context:** (hidden needs and motives in the dream, wishes, ideals, tendencies etc. It answers the questions: From where? and To what?); **7. Spatiotemporal context:** (the time and space, the location of the action, it answers the questions: Where? and When?); **8. Personal (individual) context:** (characters, personal meanings of the dreamer, correlation with other characters, positions of the Ego in the narrative etc. It answers the questions: Who? and Whom?); **9. Socially-Relational context:** (relations between the characters, monologic and dialogic types

of the discourse. It answers the question: With whom? or Between(Among) whom?); **10. Collective unconscious context:** (archetypal symbols in the narrative. It answers the question: To what extent is it universal?) and **11. Universally-Spiritual context:** (symbols and elements of the universe, transpersonal Self, spiritual elements in the dream. It answers the question: To where?)

#### 4. One example of practical use of Method of the Least resistance

All of the above mentioned facts and elaborations, regarding the narration in the dream, can be used as an instrument for practical work on dreams, incorporating the Line of Least Resistance Method, either in the form of individual work with the dreamer, or as a part of a group analysis of dreams, or if need be, as a guide for self-evaluation and interpretation of the personal meanings of the narrative of the dream, from the side of the subject itself. In the Table 1 there is an example of one form of possible working sheet for practical use of this method.

#### 5. Conclusion

The sheet needs to be filled out by the psychotherapist him/herself through a process of questioning the client-dreamer for all the aspects of the narrative structure of a particular dream. This sheet provides us with a possibility for recording important dreams and its analysis in a therapeutic work process and also provides us with important material which could be scientifically quantified and used in various qualitative and quantitative researches. This process starts first with a detailed exploration of the dream scenario directly from a dreamer as it was remembered immediately after awakening. Then we lead the whole process through a questioning our client for each separate element of the dream narrative structure. During this we correctly write down all the statements and answers of the client in the sheet in appropriate place. Given the fact that this method is a complex and multidimensional one, we expand the interpretation with several additional questions, insights, associations and/or amplifications in each place in the narrative structure that is not clear and/or demand special attention. This depends on the experience of the psychotherapist and his capability to have insight in a deep and personal meaning of the dream. After finishing whole sheet with a various questions, we ask the client/dreamer to make a short essayistic conclusion, display of the dream interpretations. The main goal of this activity is to make integrative short report about personal meaning of the dream for the dreamer. These insights, interpretations and conclusions build a dreamer awareness which integrates in a whole therapeutic and counselling process of the individual.

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