

## LIVING WITH OUR DREAMS

Kruger, D (2005) **Dreams and how to understand them**. Cape Town: Double Storey Books. ISBN 177013 037 3. Pages xii + 113.

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Dreyer Kruger's concise book is a welcome addition to the books by South Africans that are addressed to our problems and conditions. It is, moreover, more enlightening and humane than many more conventional texts. Kruger is one of South Africa's veteran psychologists, and one whose humanist-phenomenological perspective is sadly missing from most psychological teaching and practice.

**Dreams** is a timely exploration of our dynamic, active inner lives at a time when too many psychologists have retreated into either an anti-human cognitive-behaviourist approach or into some equally impoverished form, often a socio-cultural reductionism.

Kruger was for many years a psychotherapist, and his book "presents a variety of dreams along with the life context of the dreamer, followed by interpretations" (2005:3). Kruger emphasises that dreams are not merely phantasies but are meaningful. Meaning is given to them by the psychotherapeutic work of helping the dreamer to understand them in terms of the dreamer's waking life. In South Africa, perhaps more openly than in other less dramatically changing societies, the many tensions of the emerging socio-political context may make it difficult for the dreamer to realise how personal and socio-cultural influences interact in everyday life. Kruger sensitively refers to, or suggests how, the inner and outer worlds of the dreamer collide or collude to produce the dream.

The dreams are concisely reported and are divided into groups. The *Repetitive* dreams often reveal a central theme in the dreamer's life; the *Diagnostic* dreams may suggest clues to dynamics of the present state of life of the dreamer; *Journeys in dreams*, *Where am I?* dreams may relate to the persistent preoccupations about the dreamer's problems of change and development. Kruger suggests that the first dreams in psychotherapy may reveal the future problems of psychotherapy. *Dream series* often reveal or hint at the progress of psychotherapy – or the lack of it. Boldly, Kruger has a chapter on *Understanding our own dreams* that is no popularist Do-it-Yourself flippancy but counsels readers to think about their dreams as "a message from the unthematized aspects of our lives to the thematized style that we are living" (2005:71). Dreams may go some way to reintegrating our present experience and experiences with the future –

and as a Freudian, I add, with our past. Dreams have meaning and are metaphors or analogies that may help the dreamer to make sense of their ongoing lives.

Kruger's topical and imaginative book is, for some psychologists, to be provocative because of its deceptively common-sense style and approach. But those of us who practise psychotherapy should be well aware of the sometimes insoluble problem of relating an individual psyche to the socio-cultural world in which it has lived and is now having to cope with. The book ends with two unusual and thoughtful chapters: Kruger reworks the Biblical story of Josef, son of Jacob, as a classic of dream interpretation. Readers may be encouraged to find and explore a 'classic' dream for themselves. Finally, in a movingly perceptive interview, Dreyer Kruger reflects on his long working life as a psychotherapist and defines psychotherapy as "a tool for living". Too few of us are so fortunate as to have access to such a valuable tool.

Who then should read this unique and original book? Not only students of psychotherapy and their teachers, but all social scientists who are involved in the practicalities of making sense of the intricate interactions of individuals and their social worlds – worlds that psychologists, like other people, strive to understand, interpret and live happily within.