

Dream Reflection in Logotherapy: Facilitating the Psychotherapeutic Process and Case Studies

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Logotherapy or Existenzanalyse is a treatment orientation developed by the late Viennese psychiatrist, Dr. Victor Frankl. Frankl's orientation places primary emphasis upon helping the client to notice, actualize and honor the meaning and meaning potentials in his or her life. This helps the client to "shrink" his/her existential meaning vacuum, and the symptoms and problems that grow and flourish in this existential vacuum. In this article Frankl's treatment orientation is briefly outlined, with a focus on the use of dream reflection to facilitate the Logotherapeutic process which is illustrated through case material.

INTRODUCTION

In Viktor Frankl's (1959, 1969, 1975) Logotherapy or *Existenzanalyse*, it is believed that many (not all) mental health problems and symptoms result when a client's *will to meaning* has been disrupted and/or frustrated. In Frankl's (1955, 1967, 1978) view, a disruption in the will to meaning creates an existential vacuum (i.e., existential unconscious) in which symptoms and problems develop, grow and intensify. In Logotherapy, it is the function of the psychotherapist to help clients discover meaning potentials and opportunities in their lives, to actualize these opportunities in the "here and now," and to remember, re-collect and honor those meaning potentials previously actualized and deposited into the past (Frankl, 1955; Lantz, 1974, 1989, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1996). This "shrinks" the existential-meaning vacuum and associated symptoms and problems that grow and flourish in

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this vacuum (Frankl, 1959; Lantz, 1996). This article describes a Logotherapy approach to dream reflection that utilizes the dream as a method of stimulating both dynamic and existential reflection during the psychotherapeutic treatment process.

A LOGOTHERAPY VIEW OF DREAMS

In Logotherapy or *Existenzanalyse* (as in Freudian psychoanalysis and Adlerian individual psychology), the dream is considered to have psychological significance (Frankl, 1975; Lantz, 1989, 1993). To Frankl (1955, 1975) and other Logotherapists (Fabry, 1979, 1989; Lantz, 1996), the dream often presents the dreamer with hints and clues about meaning potentials the dreamer has repressed and pushed into the existential unconscious (a.k.a. the existential vacuum); the dream also presents hints and clues about previously actualized meanings that have been forgotten, repressed and “lost in the past.” A third significant aspect of the dream, from a Logotherapy point of view, is that the dream often gives the dreamer hints and clues about his/her own problem solving pattern strengths and weaknesses and how such problem solving patterns could be used or changed to actualize and make use of the meaning potentials in his/her life (Frankl, 1975; Lantz, 1996). Figure 1 illustrates this author’s understanding of dreams and dream reflection from the perspective of Viktor Frankl’s (1955, 1975, 1978) Logotherapy.

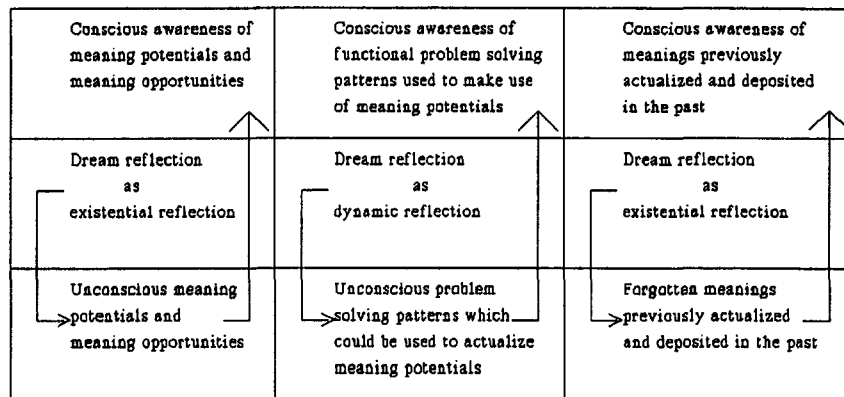


Fig. 1. Model for understanding the concepts of dream and dream reflection.

Logotherapy Dream Reflection

In Logotherapy dream reflection is considered to be a process of dialogue between the client-dreamer and the therapist offering help (Frankl, 1975; Fabry, 1989). The Logotherapist's function is never to "tell" the client what a dream means or to directly point out unconscious material presented in a dream. The therapist's function in Logotherapy dream reflection is Socratic in that the therapist uses personal interest, curiosity, concern and Socratic questions to help the client focus upon the hints and clues in the dream that might help the client become more aware of repressed meaning potentials, problem solving difficulties and strengths, and forgotten meanings deposited in the past. As in psychoanalytic psychotherapy and individual psychology, the Logotherapist does not initiate or encourage dream reflection until the client and therapist have a strong and positive working relationship (Frankl, 1955, 1969; Lantz, 1974, 1996). Such a positive working relationship allows the therapist to help the client to use dream reflection to *notice* meaning potentials in the future, *actualize* and make use of such meaning potentials in the here and now and remember, *re-collect*, and *honor* meanings actualized previously and deposited in the past (Frankl, 1955, 1969, 1975; Lantz, 1974, 1991, 1995, 1996). The following vignettes are presented to give the reader a series of examples of how dream reflection can be used in Logotherapy to facilitate the psychotherapeutic treatment process.

Case Study 1: Noticing in a Dream

Bill presented the following dream during his ninth Logotherapy treatment interview: "I was working with a bunch of men in a coal mine. The men left me off at the ninth level and I went down a long tunnel to a wall of coal. My job was to dig out the coal so I used my pick ax and started to dig the coal. After a few minutes of digging, I heard a voice from behind the wall of coal. I got scared and then I woke up. I've had this dream about four or five times and I always wake up when I hear the voice. It's a very scary dream."

The following treatment dialogue occurred after Bill presented this dream. This dialogue was recorded on audio tape and has been modified somewhat for purposes of brevity and confidentiality. Bill has given permission to utilize his dream and the following dialogue in this article.

- Therapist* (T): Who were the men who left you off on the ninth level? Did you know them? Did you recognize them?
- Client* (C): No, I didn't know them.
- (T): Any feeling about who they might be?
- (C): Well, they were from my hometown. It's a coal town, you know. I don't know . . . maybe my uncles. Yea, it was probably my uncles. That feels right.

- (T): How about the ninth level? What's that about? Any ideas? (The therapist knows that Bill's father died when Bill was nine years old.)
(Long silence)
- (T): Any ideas at all?
- (C): No . . . No, not really.
(Silence)
- (T): O.K., so let's go back to the coal wall. What does being next to a coal wall mean? What could it mean? Who was the voice? Who comes into mind?
- (C): It just now popped in my mind. It's probably my father. He died in a coal mine accident. He died when I was nine. In some ways I've been hoping to hear his voice ever since.
- (T): So, any chance getting dropped off on level nine speaks to this?
- (C): *(Starting to cry)* Hell, yes! That's it! Level nine and I lost him when I was nine . . . God, that clear!
(Long period where client cries)
- (T): So look . . . these men who dropped you off . . . maybe your uncles. Like did any of your uncles take you up and give you time after your dad died? Any of them help you out?
- (C): Hell, no! . . . Hell, no! I was on my own . . . like they helped mom out with money and stuff till she could get a job and start working. But hell, no! . . . My mom started working and my uncles didn't spend time with me at all. Hell, no!
- (T): So this does not sit well with you . . . they left you off at level nine. No father and left off to "pick" for yourself.
(Long silence)
- (C): God, yes . . . shit. I bet it's my father behind the wall. I bet it's his voice.
(Long silence)
- (T): Maybe yes . . . maybe no. Who else could it be? Who else might it be?
- (C): Hell, I don't know . . . nobody. It's got to be my father.
- (T): Anyone else you know that has lost a father? Anyone else you think it might be?
(Client starts to cry)
- (C): Shit! It's my kids behind the wall. You're right. It was a child's voice! God . . . I'm a workaholic and I don't spend time with my kids. Damn . . . I'm doing the same thing to them that happened to me. Shit! *(Client starts to cry)*
- (T): Pretty good dream . . . real good dream . . . tough talking dream.
- (C): Yea . . . Hell of a dream. I'm becoming a dead man to my kids. I put them behind a wall . . . God, I've got to turn this around.
- (T): So the meaning potential in the dream is not being a dead man—a dead father to your kids, and the thing you need to do is to . . . ?
- (C): Spend time with them . . . stop being a workaholic! Start being a father!
- (T): Start being a father. Maybe take the opportunity your father never got. Do what your dad didn't get to learn to do.
- (C): *(Crying)* . . . Yea! That's it. It's a good dream . . . a tough dream! Shit . . . shit!

Case Study 2: Noticing in a Dream

Beth requested Logotherapy because she felt depressed, experienced anxiety attacks, had been “sleeping with every guy in town” and wanted to stop drinking. Beth initially had great difficulty talking during Logotherapy so she and the therapist used art and art reflection to help her talk. Beth stopped drinking and “screwing around” during the initial stage of Logotherapy and reported that using paint and “doing art” provided great relief. Beth continued to use art and art reflection throughout treatment and would occasionally bring in a dream to her treatment sessions for discussion and reflection. Beth provided the following dream at about the sixth month of treatment:

“I was walking down a street in my hometown and I went by some of my parents’ friends. They all hung their heads and wouldn’t look at me except for Mr. Jacks. Old man Jacks was always nice to me. He was my dad’s best friend and I liked him. Well . . . old man Jacks told me that they were going to dinner but I couldn’t come with them ‘cause I wasn’t clean. He told me I had to get clean before I could go to the table. I felt sad but I didn’t argue.”

After considerable talk and reflection about the dream, Beth decided that “old man Jacks” was not being mean but wanted her to go back to church and go to confession and then take communion. In that way Beth could “go to the table” (i.e., take communion) at her hometown Catholic church. Beth felt that the dream was telling her she was not “clean” because she had had an abortion after being raped during her second year of college. Beth believed that she was a “baby killer.” She felt that old man Jacks wanted her to go back to church and that he was “on my side.” Beth felt that “since old man Jacks wants me to go back to church, that probably means it’s time.” After this dream, Beth was able to “notice” her religious values and meanings and return to her hometown Catholic parish. She went to confession and then took communion for the first time since she had been raped. For Beth, the meaning potential to be “noticed” in her dream was to “go back to church” and receive “forgiveness” from her priest, God, her parents, community and herself.

Case Study 3: Noticing in a Dream

Sam requested psychotherapy because he was feeling “depressed” and was experiencing “confusion about my life.” Sam was a fifty-five-year-old widower who was proud to have raised “two wonderful children” who had both graduated from college. Sam worked as a comptroller in a company he had started, developed and eventually sold at age fifty. He was financially independent and could stop working and retire at “anytime.” Sam

reported that he was “tired of work” and had been thinking of retirement, but didn’t know “what to do with my time” if he retired. Sam reported the following dream during his fourteenth treatment interview:

“I was walking to work and I needed to get there by nine. When I came to Main Street, I turned left instead of going straight. I get to my office by going straight!! I couldn’t figure out why I turned left. The only thing that was left was my church, but it wasn’t Sunday. There was no good reason for turning left. When I woke up, I felt happy.”

Sam and the Logotherapist spent a great deal of time reflecting on this dream. Both believed that “turning left” in the dream was important, and the Logotherapist told Sam that he needed to “find out what’s in that direction.” After noticing that turning left would take him to his church, Sam reported that when he was young, he had wanted to enter a seminary and become a minister. He reported that he had given that up after he married and began to have children. Sam decided that “going left on Main Street” was telling him he should return to his former goal of entering seminary school now that he had the “time and money.” Sam did retire and eventually went to study theology at a seminary school. He got to study the material he didn’t get to study when he was a young man. For Sam, the meaning potential discovered in his dream was “turning left” and returning to school “after all these years.” Sam reported that his depression “evaporated” after his “Main Street” dream. It is interesting to note that Sam has moved out of the city to a small rural town and is now a deacon at a small Episcopal church.

Case Study 4: Re-Collecting and Honoring in a Dream

Eleanor was referred to this author for Logotherapy by a nurse who had attended a workshop presented by the author titled “Logotherapy as Reminiscence Therapy.” The nurse believed that Eleanor could use some help. Eleanor agreed that she felt “bad” and would be happy to have someone to “talk with.”

Eleanor initially responded extremely well to Logotherapy (most likely because she was receiving special attention from another human being on a weekly basis). Her symptoms of depression rapidly lifted. After a few weeks of treatment, Eleanor began to use Logotherapy for reminiscence therapy constructively. During Eleanor’s ninth treatment session, she presented the following dream:

“I was in a canoe with Betty and we were floating down Sundy Creek. It was summer. Betty was my best friend when I was young. We went to grade school and high school together. We both loved to swim and hike and to float down the creek

in that old canoe we had. We were laughing and probably talking about boys. That's the dream. Just me and Betty floating down Sundy Creek."

The following dialogue is presented in a somewhat altered form to ensure confidentiality. Eleanor has given permission to use her dream and this dialogue in this article.

- Therapist* (T): Sundy Creek. So you grew up in Athens County. Is that right?
Client (C): How did you know that?
 (T): My family is from Jacksonville and I know the area. So were you from Glouster, or Chauncy, or Jacksonville? Which one?
 (C): (*Laughing*) None of them. I was from Shawnee and we would go to Glouster and put the canoe in there and my father would drive down stream to Chauncy and pick us up there later in the day. It was nice.
 (T): I know Shawnee. My great uncle was from there . . . his name was John Lantz . . . did you know him?
 (C): O my goodness . . . you are one of them Shawnee Lantz's! (*Laughing*) You always seemed so nice. You can't be related to them. (*Laughing*)
 (T): I'm afraid so. My family moved away . . . to get away from coal mining and lots of them moved to Columbus. Even some of the ones from Shawnee.
 (C): My goodness . . . you know about my hometown!
 (T): So when did you move to Columbus?
 (C): When I got married. We moved so we could go to college. And then we had kids. But I still loved my hometown!
 (T): Do you ever go back?
 (C): Not for years and years.
 (T): What happened to Betty?
 (C): (*Starting to cry*) She died about ten years ago. She lived here at this nursing home for a while. I still miss her.
 (T): So tell me more about you and Betty and Shawnee and about growing up in Southeast Ohio. Go ahead . . . I really would like to hear.

At this point Eleanor really initiated the process of reminiscence therapy. Over the next few months, Eleanor told the therapist many wonderful stories about growing up in Southeast Ohio, about moving to Columbus, about raising her kids, and about work and friends. Eleanor enjoyed reminiscence but felt guilty about ruminating on the past. Eleanor had apparently been told by some of the nurses at the nursing home that ruminating on the past was "bad." The following dialogue re-creates how the Logotherapist helped Eleanor to understand that reminiscence is not bad. The therapist's comments are based upon Frankl's (1955, 1967) therapies.

- Client* (C): This was a wonderful session. I enjoyed talking about these things ever so much . . . even though it's bad.
Therapist (T): Bad? . . . Bad? . . . How so?
 (C): Well, the nurses tell me I shouldn't spend so much time in the past. That it's bad for me.
 (T): Really? I don't agree with that! I think they're wrong. I really do!
 (C): Why? . . . please tell me!

- (T): It's that the things you told me about today are real. You did them. You and Betty and your father and your family, you did them. And you put these things into the past. You made them forever real. It's like you put them in a bank. They are yours and you have every right to take them out and remember them and look at them and enjoy them again. That's your right, you did these things! . . . You made them real, and when you remember them, it's like you are "honoring" them. I really don't think that the nurses understand this . . . I think it's good for you to remember and be proud of the memories you made. I like the canoe memory best . . . just floating down Sundy Creek. That's a good one . . . I want to hear more!
- (C): (*Crying*) O . . . that makes so much sense. Thank you . . . thank you so much.

Case Study 5: Actualizing in a Dream

All of the previous material has illustrated dream reflection as existential reflection used to "notice" meaning potentials in the future and to remember, re-collect and "honor" meanings previously actualized and deposited in the past. In the following clinical material, Logotherapist and client used dream reflection as dynamic reflection about client functioning patterns that were disrupting the client's ability to "actualize" and make use of the meaning potentials in her life. During her sixth Logotherapy treatment session, Joyce shared the following dream:

"I was in a taxicab. I was going to a job interview. When we got to the office building where I was to be interviewed, I tried to open the taxicab door, but it would not open. I asked the man who was driving the taxi to help but he told me that he wouldn't help. So . . . I didn't get the job."

After considerable reflection about this dream, Joyce decided that the dream "reported" her long-term pattern of trying to get other people to "do things for me." Joyce reported that she was "especially good" at getting men to "take care of me" and that she was disappointed that the therapist was not overly eager to "solve all my problems." Joyce decided that this dream gave her "permission" to tell the therapist about her "methods of getting by" that she "might use in therapy." Joyce and the Logotherapist were able to use this dream to reflect upon their relationship, Joyce's repetitive and consistent "dependency" transactional patterns, and to develop a treatment contract about what was "Joyce's job" and what was the "therapist's job." The dream helped to point out the dependency patterns Joyce used to disrupt her ability to actualize the meaning potentials in her life.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In Logotherapy or "Existenzanalyse," dream reflection can be a useful way to facilitate the psychotherapeutic treatment process. In a Logotherapy approach to treatment, the dream is understood to be a method the client can use to help material in his/her existential unconscious to rise to the conscious level of awareness. More specifically, the dream and dream reflection can help clients more completely become aware of the unconscious meaning associated with their distress, as they become more aware of healthy functioning patterns. Using dream reflection to help a client notice, actualize and re-collect the meanings and meaning potentials in his/her life will also help the client to manage the existential-meaning vacuum and the symptoms and problems that grow and develop in an existential vacuum. Case material has also been presented to illustrate this Logotherapy dream reflection treatment approach.

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