

WORKING WITH DREAMS AND METAPHORS

Psychoanalysis employs free association where the client talks about anything that comes to mind, including describing their dreams. Free association is less often used in dynamic therapy but the dreams and metaphors brought by clients give the opportunity to explore unconscious material in a more direct way. The simple enquiry 'Tell me about a dream' can be enormously revealing. The skill is to avoid identifying objects and symbols and saying 'that equals that'. Freud's understanding of dreams was more subtle, and we need to find a way of seeing through the disguises they present. Helping clients make sense of their own dreams and the association or interpretations they make is important. For one teenage client it gave her a sense of agency that she could do something in the midst of the paralysis of her feelings.

CASE EXAMPLE 3.1F

Kim

Early on in my work with Kim she had a dream she remembered (normally she had no recollection). It involved animals going into Noah's Ark two-by-two, which she recalled from a wooden toy she had as a child. She loved playing with it. In the dream she saw herself bringing up the rear, alone, and Noah shouting at her and telling her off. She felt sad and burst into tears, but Noah just walked away leaving her alone. Kim woke up and found she had been crying in her sleep. I asked if the number two was significant. Kim looked up startled. 'Oh my goodness, I've just thought of something. It's a family secret and nobody ever talks about it. I was an identical twin but my twin died at birth.' The rest of the therapy explored how her mother may have struggled with loving her and experiencing loss at the same time. For her father, every time he saw Kim reminded him of being powerless, and aroused a grief he could not give expression to. Kim had internalised these 'bad' feelings and felt there was something wrong with her. As a consequence she was never seen, always overlooked, especially by men, until she learnt to 'hide'.