

## Self-Analysis

In this paper I want to describe various aspects of my therapy experience with Alec Skolnick, a psychoanalyst in San Mateo CA from March 1974 to March 1984. My main goal is to let other therapists, especially young ones, have a picture of the kinds of events that can occur in such therapy. I'm a rather "square" person, good-natured, but without much imagination. When I got on the couch I found through my dreams that there was another dimension to my mind of which I had never been aware.

I had known Alec casually for the previous ten years that I had been in practice in San Mateo. When I first started practice I was advised to meet some of senior people in the community, of which one was Alec. He had me share some lunch with him at his home which was nearby his office. I don't recall much about this meeting. In further contacts I felt that he was grumpy, or perhaps gruff. His office was upstairs in a former home and another analyst, Milt Lozoff, was in the adjoining office. Milt seemed more pleasant and in my search for a therapist I went to him first. He told me he didn't have room for me in his practice and suggested I go to Alec. I talked to another analyst in San Francisco who said he looked for "congruency" between himself and his patients and didn't find it with me. He suggested a psychiatrist in the East Bay who was interested in working with geriatric patients! I was a bit insulted that he thought at age 47 I was in the geriatric range. I decided that Alec was the right person for me. If I found him grumpy I'd just have to learn to deal with it. And his office was only a three minute walk from mine.

On my first visit I described my dilemma. (Please see my paper on Back Disorders in which I have described the conflicts that had led me to seek therapy.) He said he had time for me and asked what my father was like. We agreed on a two hour a week program. On the next visit he suggested I get on the couch and I did. Then I proceeded to talk. I don't recall how the talking went in the first month. What I recall is several dreams. In most of my life previously I had no recall of dreams. Now I had very clear dreams and easily remembered. (Later, one that really blew me away.) Early on Alec had my wife come in. It seemed like he might want to work with both of us. I then had a dream. I was at a urinal. A friend of mine, an analyst, wanted to get at the urinal and I wouldn't let him. My wife liked Alec very much, but I took the position that she had had two years of therapy previously and now I wanted a therapist for myself. She later found a psychiatrist in Palo Alto plus a group in San Francisco.

I found that Alec liked to keep his hands busy during our hours. He did knitting or bargello. Occasionally he would say something, trying to be helpful. But I had a negative reaction. I told him I felt tense and guilty at his comments, though I knew they were well intended. So he kept quiet. Two years later I told him he could make comments but by then his silence had become a more productive way to proceed.

In another dream I was at a beach. An enormous wave was approaching and I felt very threatened. Then I realized that I could go upstairs in a house on the beach and I would be

safe. To me the wave represented an overwhelming depression and the refuge was Alec's office.

In another dream I was with the President: he was going to arrange for me to have sex with his wife. I was grateful. This seemed to relate to the fact that life seemed dismal to me if I didn't have a romantic partner. It also included positive feelings for my therapist.

Then after about eight visits I had the major dream. I was a physician in an autopsy room. Lying on a morgue table was a trusting young man. Across the table from me was a senior physician. The plan was to exsanguinate the young man. Then we would collaborate to saw the fellow in two, a bit above the pelvis! Then the dream shifted. I was observing a kitchen in which a young housewife was at the sink. Next to her sitting on the counter was a naked 1-2 year old little girl. The woman was planning to cut off the girl's skin in strips and sauté them! As I mentioned above, this bipartite dream really "blew me away". The young man on the table was a version of me. The senior physician across from me was Alec. Exsanguination related to my feeling I was "talked out" to the point where I felt I had nothing more to say. Then my testosterone area was to be removed and sexual urges would no longer be a problem. This seemed fairly evident. The next part of the dream about the housewife seemed to be about my wife and infant daughter. I could connect my waking feelings to the first part of the dream, but I was devoid of waking feelings about the second part, though I knew that my wife had had ambivalent feelings about being pregnant from conception.

I was astounded by this dream sequence and could hardly wait to tell Alec about it the next day. I recited it eagerly in my session. Alec said nothing. I waited and waited. Finally I sat up abruptly on the edge of couch, sobbing, and telling Alec "you don't care, you just don't care". I think he tried to reassure me. The session ended.

When I came into the next session he suggested that I might want to deal with him face to face. I said "Heck No. Since this sort of process could lead to such eruptions from my unconscious, I definitely wanted it to continue". I complained that his silent handwork during my sessions reminded me of Madame Defarge in "Tale of Two Cities." She sat at the guillotine and knit and watched the heads roll. I eventually was mollified and we carried on. Also, I had been very surprised that I was crying about being cared about. I wouldn't have been surprised by concern about being liked, but caring is of another dimension.

We then settled into a ten year process of my having dreams and then trying to decipher their meanings. This process is what I am terming a "self-analysis". But it couldn't have been done without Alec and his inexhaustible patience. In this process there was an emotional evolution toward being increasingly relaxed. After each hour I would feel very relaxed, similar to way I felt after my physical therapy sessions. In the early phases my dreams of contemporary events were about two days after the event. Over the years I became able to dream of very current matters. My abdomen no longer tensed up as I drove, approaching a changing light. I felt relaxed stopping and waiting or driving in the slow or middle lanes.

There were at least two types of dreams that kept recurring. The first, as mentioned above, concerned water. I didn't again dream of being over-whelmed by a wall of water. There was a progression. Several months along it would be chest high. Eventually it was

around my ankles. The most problematic dreams concerned my feeling of having to urinate and trying to find a toilet. In the early dreams I would be in an attic and there was just a maze of pipes. Very frustrating. Later, 2-3 years, I'd be at a room in a house and enter to find it bare. No toilet. After another 2-3 years I'd find a toilet but it was in use or it was in the open with no privacy. In later years I became successful in finding and using a private toilet. There would be many years, between each toilet dream.

After two or three months of therapy I could no longer tolerate being deceitful with my wife. I told her of my affair. She was shocked but her emotions took several weeks to really gel. At that point she told me I had to move out. I didn't argue. For the next nine months I lived in a studio ten minutes from home. This separation turned out to be very therapeutic for both of us. During that time I increased my therapy to three hours a week. For the third hour I had to drive to his country home an hour away. When I eventually moved home I decided to have my own room. For the next five years I would sleep alone during the week and with her on Friday and Saturday nights. For the next 37 we've slept together.

Regarding transference, early on he was the President. Then over the years there was seldom a reference to a male figure. My main association was to a loving parent or grandparent keeping watch over a preoccupied child. No particular gender, just a matter of basic caring. But one day in the ninth year I dreamed of a political figure. When I came to the office I announced "You've been promoted!" And he immediately said "Disraeli?", and he was right!

By 1984 it just felt right to stop the therapy. On my last visit I gave him a hug, but it was rather tentative. He said "We can do better than that" and we then shared a proper bearhug!

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