

## **Book Review: 30 Years in Mind - Comments on the Reissuing of Ullman, Krippner and Vaughan's *Dream Telepathy***

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*Dream Telepathy*, by Montague Ullman, Stanley Krippner, with Alan Vaughan, third edition. 2003. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads. ISBN: 1-57174-321-9.

It is not the regular thing that a scientific publication is reissued thirty years after it has first come out. An exception to the rule is *Dream Telepathy* by Ullman, Krippner and Vaughan (1973/2003), as Hampton Roads publishes a third edition of this well-known work in their "Studies in consciousness" series. Being described as "groundbreaking" and "classic", this book has not only positioned itself as a milestone in the history of parapsychological literature – presenting apparently solid evidence for telepathic dreaming – but is also a frequently recurring meeting point in the present parapsychological discourse (as has been seen, most recently, in the omnibus *Psi Wars*, 2003).

As stated by the publishers, an objective with the reissuing of the book is to introduce texts of science and consciousness studies "to a new generation of readers". In my case, being a graduate student of psychology, just beginning to reconnoitre the field in question, I felt appropriately targeted by this appeal. So looking in the rear-view mirror, my starting point in writing this review was to try to outline some aspects of what makes *Dream Telepathy* a pertinent work still today and what it potentially has to offer in moving research forward. Considering that the studies themselves, carried out at the Maimonides Medical Centre in Brooklyn, New York, during the late 1960's and early 1970's, have been thoroughly reviewed already through decades (e.g. by Child, 1985; Radin, 1997; Sherwood & Roe, 2003), scrutinizing the scientific results and methodology is not the primary focus of my commentary here. Needless to say, since the Maimonides Centre closed in 1978, there is no additional empirical data from this research programme to account for.

The immediate question is of course what specifically has been brought new to the third edition. There are two new introductions, written by Ullman and Krippner respectively, in which the authors give brief personal accounts of how their work and careers have developed since the Maimonides programme first started, and how their findings relate to more recent scientific discoveries. Ullman reflects upon his continuous search for a theory that could help to explain the intriguing laboratory results and incorporate them in an intelligible framework. Not until he began to acquaint himself with the principles of quantum physics did he seem to find such prospects. The analogies Ullman draws between the nature of dreaming consciousness and the ambiguous manifestations of subatomic particles – the 'wavelike' characteristics of dreaming in contrast to waking life's 'particle' view of



reality – are captivating and well worth some consideration, however speculative they are. The same could be said about Krippner's attempts to relate telepathic ability to fluctuations in earth's geomagnetic activity. Although there is experimental data to nourish this "food for thought", it becomes apparent that parapsychology is still in need of more specific explicatory principles to bring about a true understanding of the anomalous phenomena. These factors are obviously hard or impossible to empirically control for, and theory testing remains a problem. At the same time, these ideas reflect the ongoing (or at least, wished-for) approach of modern parapsychology to other fields of science, and possibly towards a unified theory of what both Ullman and Krippner regard as the underlying "interconnectedness" of the universe.

Next to the contemporary introductions, there is the late Gardner Murphy's original foreword to the book. Seen in retrospect, one can only speculate about how Murphy would comment the progress made in psi and dream research since the 1970's – especially pertaining to his statement that "Dream telepathy ... is likely to be among the sparks which will be made into a science within the next century" (p. xxvi). I will cautiously claim that we are not there quite yet; however it may be argued that a greater impediment to Murphy's vision today, than technology or other resources, is the controversy of general academic acceptance for the research field.

In view of the role *Dream Telepathy* has played for reaching out with scientific facts about dream ESP to the general public the last thirty years, one has to consider not only the contents, but also the quite distinctive, almost narrative, tone and form of the text. It has been noted, by Child (1985), that the original Maimonides studies, summarized in the book, were not all published in conventional journals of psychology. As a result, many psychologists instead learned of the source studies from subsequent reviews, in which the results were in many cases distorted or misinterpreted, thereby casting a deceptive shadow on the quality of the work. (This may seem somewhat ironic, since the book had been written to be widely readable, presenting the scientific material as easily comprehensible as possible.) Hopefully, as far as misconceptions still remain, the reissuing of the book will help to clear up those past mistakes and bring back into the light the true, and indeed highly significant, findings. There is, just like in previous editions, also the opportunity for the interested reader to obtain more detailed scientific reports in the appendices.

Apart from the indisputable value of having these historical parapsychological studies back into print, I would suggest for future editions that Appendix A, "What the Experts Say", be revised. This section, mainly containing abstracts of letters from different parapsychologists discussing the implications of the experimental results, now seems very dated; the latest work mentioned is from 1972. It would have been fruitful with an update on this, relating the current status of dream ESP research, at the same time showing what concrete influence the Maimonides studies have had in present times.

To partly answer this last question, it seems fair to conclude, that despite decades of scrutiny, the results from the Maimonides laboratories stand remarkably strong still today. Besides, the studies have served as an inspirational source for many other, successful ESP experiments, such as those applying the ganzfeld technique for similar tasks. It is noteworthy that, in a recent review by Alcock (2003), the most cogent critique that was levelled against the Maimonides studies and some



replications of them, was “the extreme messiness of the data adduced” (p. 36). It might be added that the replications in fact were successful, however less so than the original studies. This fact, Alcock takes to mean that “lack of replication is rampant” – this would be a somewhat difficult standpoint for me to maintain without falling over.

The alleged difficulty with replication is probably the most common critique against the Maimonides studies. However, it should be kept in mind, that when Ullman and Krippner started their studies, the work was pioneering, and for a long time they were trying out different procedures and experimental conditions. Many of the single experiments are therefore to be considered pilot studies, rather than controlled experiments with established procedures that are suitable for replication. Today the situation is different, and dream telepathy, however still a controversial subject, can be studied in a number of ways with sophisticated methods. Experience says that attention should be given to, for example, the personal qualities of everybody involved in the experiment, creating an encouraging atmosphere and selecting specific types of stimuli material. Taking this and previous methodological shortcomings into account, dream ESP appears as a promising area for further research.

Finally, the importance of technological development to research during the last thirty years must not go unnoticed. As within all areas of science, computers offer enormous potentials for parapsychology, not the least when it comes to controlling for human error. The digital ganzfeld technique is one example, electronic sleeping masks used in lucid dreaming research is another. Lucid dreaming is a prime example of an “anomalous” phenomenon that has been psychophysiologicaly verified thanks to new technology. Reporting such evidence, LaBerge (2000) concluded: “Theories of dreaming that do not account for lucidity are incomplete, and theories that do not allow for lucidity are incorrect”. ESP might be just a step behind lucidity. The Maimonides studies allowed for ESP phenomena to show up in the laboratory. The next big challenge for parapsychology is, to establish their place in theory.

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