



Deep Canyon, by Paul Heussenstamm.



Dr. Marilyn Schlitz

In my own Anthropology studies, I became immediately aware of how studying diverse cultures as an outsider was the best, sometimes only way to gain perspective of our own cultural ways and psychological beliefs. Things that we took for granted as 'reality' were tested when it was discovered that other humans, with distinct concepts, myths and practices, saw reality in a very different way. Through anthropological research Schlitz has opened the study of dreams, and our interior world, to a broader world-based view. Most recently, with her study of the dream culture of the Achuar Indians of the Amazon, Schlitz was able to capture an idea of a collective dreaming that was part of a social whole, an idea that is quite timely. As we rethink our actions,

perhaps even re-establish the definition of 'The American Dream' and create a new possibility of a shared world future, Schlitz's study of the indigenous becomes a link of possibility towards a closer community of shared dreams. Talking with Schlitz, she explained some of her most recent research, upcoming events and how her work could affect personal and collective dreaming.

Vision Magazine: *How is dreaming and dream interpretation different in our culture versus indigenous cultures?*

Marilyn Schlitz: Dreaming is both individual in indigenous cultures, and very social. Indigenous cultures throughout the world have a belief in the veracity and the meaning associated with dreams. It's not just about dreaming for yourself, but actually gaining insights for the collective. For the Achuar Indians of the Amazon, every morning at dawn, they wake up and believe it is their social responsibility to share their dreams. In the same way we may get information in the morning from a newspaper about what happened in the world, they believe that their soul leaves the body, travels out into the world and gains information that is important for navigating in the future: should they go hunting, should they travel, will they be visited? All that information is communicated in dreams and each individual will get only a piece of the full story. So it is only by coming together as the collective and sharing the content that they can put together a composite. It is a pretty different model than we have here. In this culture, you would never want to interpret someone's dreams for them because it is believed that meaning is personal, idiosyncratic and that only the dreamer holds the key. In indigenous cultures, often times, it's an elder in the household unit that will help to craft the interpretation.

I think about it in the context of consciousness. In America, we have the first person direct experience of consciousness, the "I" statements of our own interiority, we have science which talks about the "it" objective world, but in this [indigenous] way consciousness is a "we;" it is a negotiated, shared experience and construction.

VM: *So is your thought that we should come back from our disassociated ways and move toward a collective dreaming?*

MS: What has happened in our culture is that we have become alienated or estranged from our subjectivity. Our emphasis is on the external world; that which we can see,

Dreaming Culture, Dreaming Truth

The Science of Dreams with Dr. Marilyn Schlitz

by Ryan Latimer

Dr. Marilyn Schlitz, Director of Research at the Institute of Noetic Sciences and Senior Scientist at the Complementary Medicine Research Institute at the California Pacific Medical Center, is one of the top-most experts on parapsychology, psychophysiology, consciousness healing and creativity, having conducted some of the most important research in her field. Originally trained as a medical anthropologist, her myriad studies reflect a distinctly cross-cultural viewpoint, as well as a deep respect for the methods of science. Equally analyst and rebel, Schlitz has pushed the boundaries of science by showing sound research with pioneering results.

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taste, touch, measure, dissect, has been privileged as a valid reality. If you look at science, this issue of consciousness had been subordinated. It's actually considered to be anathema to the scientific pursuit because of its subjectivity, but that's beginning to shift. One of the things we see about the dream experience is that it helps us to regain some sense of the importance of subjectivity and as we begin to work at the notion of the imaginal, playing with the ways in which the outside world interpenetrates with the inside world and how the changes that we want to make in the world are really going to be derived from our inner work. The more we can begin to appreciate dreaming and the imaginal, the better our relationship with ourselves, our families, with our society, the environment and ultimately our place in a broader sense of the sacred.

VM: *What research have you done that reflects the possible importance of dreaming?*

MS: The research we have done has touched on dreaming in different ways. We've been interested in the possibility that we are interconnected in ways that the dominant scientific model hadn't predicted. Extrasensory perception, telepathy, is really about empathy for another at a distance and under circumstances that evade conventional sensory exchange. In spontaneous case reports of people experiencing psychic phenomena, the vast majority of people describe some kind of altered state of consciousness, typically a dream state. So there are ways in which our dominate sensory awareness shuts down during dreaming and allows access to information that we are just not paying attention to when we are bombarded with so much external content.

We did a series of experiments, starting with dream telepathy, which led to a series of experiments called "Ganzfeld," a German word meaning "whole field." Essentially it is a simulation of a dream experience where you invite people to come into a laboratory, you put them in sensory deprivation, but their eyes are open, so people start seeing imagery, a dream-like experience. They see fairly disparate images, not one coherent story, but they free associate on ideas going through their head. Meanwhile you have a person in another room who is watching a short video clip, and the idea is to see if we could get aspects of the video clip incorporated into the dream of the Ganzfeld, and we had remarkably stunning advances in this.

For example, I did a research project with the Julliard School of Performing Arts in New York. Some of the matches were extraordinary. The sender was showed an all red screen, a corona sun and a lizard. The guy said, "Red, red, red," he described the sun, and a lizard opening and closing his mouth. After the whole experiment was over the person looks at four video clips, one real and three decoys and is asked to match one to their objective experience. We ended up with a highly successful study. You would expect 25% right on the basis of chance; the average population gets about 33%; over all Julliard students got 50% and if you looked at the classically trained musicians they got a 75% success rate. So there is something about the creative population and the ability to access inner experience as a way of connecting us to others, even at a non-local or non-physical level.

VM: *So you believe that consciousness can have a transpersonal capacity and that the mind can reach out and affect other people?*

MS: Yes, by using those parts of our psyche that aren't commonly relied upon.

During the day we privilege the rational intellect and yet there is so much richness in these unconscious states. We have looked at the area of lucid dreaming, where people have a dream and they become aware and then can manipulate the content of the dream or nightmare. Once you can control the unconscious mind you can confront the monster and become a more active volitional agent in your unconscious mind. We hear about this in the context of Tibetan Buddhist Dream Yoga, which is all about waking up to the unconscious.

VM: *So how can we become more conscious of our unconscious and dream for the collective?*

MS: It takes work, effort, surrender, looking, quieting, long enough that you can access insight. The data suggests that during these states we may actually be able to access a transpersonal connection to one another, so that the kind of divisions that separate us, or make us think we are separate, become illusory. One of the big problems in terms of transformation of society is that people feel very isolated; if people come together to share their visions and become more aware of their place in a larger collective they will be able to craft a collective vision for a different set of possibilities for the human condition.

VM: *You are now working towards the ChildSpirit Conference; how do children see dreaming and reality?*

MS: If you look at the imaginal life of children and you listen to their experiences of the transpersonal or the sacred you find them very animated, rich and full in their experiences of non-ordinary states. What happens as kids grow up they become acculturated out of those kinds of awareness. My son is five, his favorite thing to say is, "We were just thinking the same thing!" The connection is there for him and it is there for that age. ChildSpirit is about helping people to appreciate and nurture the imaginal in young people rather than thinking it is a developmental stage that children should grow out of. Our ability to create a better future is going to come from our ability to vision together a new set of possibilities for the human condition.

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Marilyn Schlitz's lifework has been to prove, to the scientific community as well as skeptics, that there is volition and importance to our dreams. In other studies she has shown dreams to heal, to bring communities together and change actions and beliefs. For many of us, this is not surprising, but hearing the scientific "proof" of these studies is comforting and timely. Perhaps through shared dreams, both awake and asleep, we will find the thread that will bond us as a family, a country and into one world.

To see more about Marilyn Schlitz's work go to www.noetic.org. Want to know more on how we can nurture the spirituality of our children? Join scholars, teachers, counselors, community leaders and parents in the exploration of the richness of children's spiritual nature at ChildSpirit 2004, Asilomar Conference Grounds, Pacific Grove, CA Oct. 7th-10th. For more information go to www.childspirit.net or call 707/779-8299. For Paul Heussenstamm's art visit www.mandalas.com.



Stone of Heaven, artwork by Paul Heussenstamm.