

A Series of Possibly Paranormal Recurrent Dreams

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Abstract—In 1986 Dr. Walter D'Souza, an Indian physician living in the United States, had a series of realistic dreams in which his deceased father, who had been buried in India three years earlier, appeared to be leaving his coffin and trying to communicate something to him. After Dr. D'Souza had had three of these dreams, a letter from India informed his mother that his father's bones had not been adequately disposed of. Dr. D'Souza then believed that his dreams had some connection with the matter of his father's bones. He urged his mother to go to India and attend to the burial, but she and his sister minimized the difficulty, and did not wish to spend money on a journey to India. Dr. D'Souza then had a fourth dream similar to the previous three. He told his family about his dreams and insisted that his mother go to India and attend to the disposition of the bones. She agreed to go and the dreams ceased. It seems unlikely that Dr. D'Souza before he had his dreams had any normal awareness that anything further needed to be done for the proper disposition of his father's bones. Paranormal interpretations of the dreams have plausibility. Attention is drawn to the quality of vividness in dreams as a possible marker of paranormality.

Introduction

Given the almost universal concern that humans have about the proper disposition of their bodily remains, we may note with surprise the paucity of paranormal communications with this theme. The literature of psychical research contains only a handful of such cases (Anon., 1930; Brackenbury, 1930; Haraldsson and Stevenson, 1975; Jones, 1928; and Perovsky-Petrovo-Solovovo, 1930). We could extend the list a little by including several children who have claimed to remember previous lives and who have grumbled about details of the disposal of the body of the person whose life they remembered. (I have included reports of two such cases in a forthcoming work.)

In this paper I report a series of dreams in which the dreamer saw his deceased father coming out of his coffin and trying to communicate something to him. The dreams had a nightmarish quality and so impressed the dreamer that he came to believe that they had been stimulated by an improper disposal of his father's remains.

Case Report¹

The Persons Concerned in the Case

The dreamer was Dr. Walter D'Souza, a physician and internist. He was born in Kenya on April 11, 1943. His parents were Henry D'Souza and his wife, Gertrude. They were Indians of Goa. Henry D'Souza was born in India (in 1906) and migrated to Kenya, where he joined the government service of the British Colony and eventually became a senior administrator. His wife was born in Kenya. Henry and Gertrude D'Souza had four children: Frederick, Walter, Thomas, and Elizabeth. When Henry D'Souza reached retirement age, he and his wife returned to India, where they lived on some ancestral property in a village of Bardez in Goa until Henry D'Souza died, on July 14, 1983.

After her husband's death, Gertrude D'Souza came to the United States, where her son Walter and also her daughter, Elizabeth (then Elizabeth D'Souza Fernando), were then living. She stayed alternately with her son and her daughter. They were all three living in one of the eastern states in 1986, when the case developed.

The Investigation of the Case

Walter D'Souza's recurrent dreams occurred in 1986, but he told no one outside his family about them until the late autumn of 1988. At that time he asked a friend, Dr. William Parson, whether he (Dr. Parson) thought there could, after all, be "anything to parapsychology." He then told Dr. Parson about his dreams and the profound effect they had had on him. Dr. Parson, who is also a friend of mine, referred the case to me.

On December 19, 1988, I interviewed Walter D'Souza in the city where he lives and tape-recorded his account of the dreams and his answers to my questions about details. On March 25, 1989, I had a similar (tape-recorded) interview with his wife, Dr. Susan D'Souza, who is also a physician. On April 5, 1989, I interviewed (taking notes) Walter D'Souza's mother, Mrs. Gertrude D'Souza. On April 13, 1989, I had a second interview with Mrs. Gertrude D'Souza and also interviewed her daughter, Elizabeth D'Souza Fernando (Walter D'Souza's sister). Gertrude D'Souza had preserved several pertinent letters from 1986, and these permit us to fix dates about which the different informants' memories showed some vagueness and discrepancies. She allowed me to borrow and copy these letters. On March 23, 1992 I had another, brief interview with Dr. D'Souza concerning details of the case.

The Death and Burial of Henry D'Souza

Henry and Gertrude D'Souza were Roman Catholics. They were members of the church of St. Peter in their village. They were conscientious in their conformity both to Roman Catholicism and to local religious practices in Goa. In contrast, their children, particularly Walter D'Souza, showed much less interest in religion.

The church of St. Peter has adjoining it a cemetery of moderate size. It is the custom there to bury a body in the cemetery and allow it to occupy a burial plot for three years. After three years the remains (largely bones) are dug up and disposed of in one of two ways. If the surviving members of a family wish, the bones may be placed in a niche in the cemetery wall. A tablet with inscribed information about the deceased covers the niche. If a family does not choose (or cannot afford) this option, the priest and sexton of the church put the bones into a well in the cemetery grounds.

Henry D'Souza emphatically wished to have his bones placed in a niche and not thrown into the well. He was a moderately prosperous landowner, and ample funds were available for the cost of the niche and its covering tablet.

On July 14, 1983, Henry D'Souza died of heart disease and was buried in the cemetery of the church of St. Peter. Walter D'Souza was then in the United States. The law in Goa, where the D'Souzas lived, required disposition of a body within 24 hours of death, and Walter D'Souza could not possibly have reached India in time for the burial; so he did not try to attend his father's funeral. As is customary among the Roman Catholics of Goa, the body was kept in its coffin in the house for some hours and then buried. Walter's brother Frederick and his sister, Elizabeth, took charge of the funeral arrangements. They paid 400 rupees to the officiating priest under the impression that this would cover the cost of the later exhumation of the bones and their placement behind a niche in the cemetery wall, which would be carried out three years later.

Gertrude D'Souza and her daughter, Elizabeth, were well aware that at some time soon after the third anniversary of Henry D'Souza's burial, his bones were to be dug up and placed in a niche. Walter D'Souza was much less informed about this matter. He knew that "it is customary after two years . . . or three years to dig up the bones and drop them in the well." He did not think, however, that this concerned him in any way, and he allowed it to drop entirely out of his consciousness.

Walter D'Souza's Dreams and Their Consequences

In the summer of 1986² Walter D'Souza had three dreams of a closely similar content over a period of about one week. In the dreams his father was rising out of his coffin which was in his (the father's) house in India and trying to tell him something. In one dream his older brother, Frederick, was present. In one of them his father walked as far as the front door of the house. Susan D'Souza remembered (from what her husband later told her) that in another dream, Henry D'Souza had walked as far as the gate to the compound of the house. All the dreams had in common the scene of Henry D'Souza getting out of his coffin and trying to tell Walter something.

The dreams were vivid and extremely unpleasant. Susan D'Souza recalled that her husband moaned and writhed on the floor when he had them. (He was sleeping on the floor at the time, because this helped a disorder of his back.) He would wake up and come into the bed with her. When Susan asked him what the

trouble was, he gave her an evasive answer that referred only to having bad dreams. After these dreams Walter D'Souza told no one their content.

At the end of August 1986, a letter, dated July 25, 1986, arrived from Gertrude's sister Josephine, who was then living in India. This letter asked Gertrude about the management of family affairs in India and included the following:

Please let me know about the bones being installed in the niche; whether you are coming for the ceremony or not, and if I should go ahead with the Vicar and get the bones dug. Please treat this as urgent as I have told him I will get it done in October. Please hurry!

Gertrude D'Souza found her sister's letter surprising. Several months earlier she herself had written a letter, dated May 9, 1986, to the priest of the church of St. Peter in which she had said:

I am writing this letter to request you that the bones of my late husband, Henry D'Souza, . . . be saved and interred in the niche for which I have paid about 400 rupees soon after his death . . . I am sorry to inform you that . . . I shall not be able to attend the death anniversary Mass or other ceremony. Please say a Mass on his death anniversary for the repose of his soul, bless the grave, etc . . . I shall pay all the expenses incurred in this connection.

Knowing that she had written the above letter, Gertrude interpreted her sister Josephine's letter to mean that either the parish priest had never received Gertrude's letter or he had ignored its contents and was requesting Josephine to give him instructions. It was implied by Josephine that, without proper instruction for preparation of the niche, Henry D'Souza's bones would, despite his express wishes, be thrown into the common well. It was known moreover—at least to Gertrude D'Souza—that the church officials would not keep the bones, once they were dug up, more than a few weeks before disposing of them. They had to be put into a niche without delay or they would be put down the well.

Gertrude D'Souza shared the contents of Josephine's letter with her son, daughter, and daughter-in-law. Walter D'Souza now began to see an important meaning in his dreams. He urged his mother to go immediately to India and attend personally to the proper disposition of his father's bones. (He was not free to go himself at this time.) His mother and sister demurred. They said the matter could still be handled in correspondence and did not warrant the expense of the long journey to India.

Up to this point Walter D'Souza had not told anyone the content of his dreams, and he still did not do so. He then had another (fourth) dream similar to the ones he had had several weeks before. The repetition of the dream stimulated him then to tell the other members of the family about the content of his dreams. He now began to insist that his mother return to India to attend to the matter of the bones, and she agreed to go. In the end, she did not actually go to India until March 1987, but after she agreed to do so, Walter had no more dreams, night-

marsh or otherwise, of his father. Gertrude explained to me that she decided to go to India (and attend to the bones) "to give peace to Walter and do my duty by my husband."

Other Relevant Information

After Henry D'Souza's death, Dr. D'Souza dreamed about him, perhaps as often as once a month. These dreams were pleasant and the content usually derived from some experience father and son had shared. They contrasted with the recurrent dreams with which we are here concerned. These showed his father in a coffin, were more vivid than Dr. D'Souza's ordinary dreams and had an unpleasant, nightmarish quality.

Although Walter D'Souza insisted that he had forgotten all about the matter of his father's bones until he began having his nightmarish dreams, his mother had not. We have seen that she had spontaneously written in May 1986 to the parish priest in India to make sure that her husband's bones were properly placed in a niche. At this time Gertrude was living with her daughter, Elizabeth, in the same city where Walter and Susan D'Souza lived. At other times she stayed with Walter in his home. There were frequent meetings between Elizabeth's family and Walter's.

Elizabeth could not recall in 1989 that her mother had mentioned to her having written to the parish priest in May 1986. She and her mother agreed that her mother kept all her private affairs to herself. She would tell the family if she were going to make some extended journey, say to India, but would not tell them about such a relatively minor matter—as it seemed to them—as having written to the priest concerning her husband's bones.

As I mentioned, Gertrude and Elizabeth D'Souza believed that the 400 rupees paid over in 1983 would cover all expenses for the proper interment of the bones in 1986. In 1986, however, they learned that this money had paid only for the niche; it did not cover the expense of digging up the bones, placing them in the niche, and erecting a tablet covering the niche. This explained the need for Josephine's urgent letter of July 25, 1986. When everything needed had finally been done, in March 1987, Gertrude received a receipt for an additional 198 rupees, which she had to pay to the church.

Whatever their correct interpretation, the dreams had a profound effect on Walter D'Souza. He told me that before having the dreams he had considered himself a Christian, but believed in survival after death only in a vague way. The dreams gave him a conviction about survival after death that he had not had before.

Discussion

Defects in the Investigation and Testimony of the Case

Before discussing the several possible explanations for Dr. D'Souza's dreams, I must first remind readers that an undesirable interval of more than two years

occurred between the occurrence of Dr. D'Souza's dreams in 1986 and their investigation in 1988-89. Also, whether because of this delay or for other reasons, some discrepancies occurred in the statements of the different informants. I do not believe, however, that these invalidate the case, making it unworthy of further interpretation. Among interpretations, two normal ones and three paranormal ones deserve mention.

Two Normal Interpretations

One or the other of two interpretations of the case involving normal processes may be correct. First, Walter D'Souza may have remembered more precisely than he afterwards thought he did that something further was to be done with his father's bones about three years after his father's burial. According to this interpretation, he would have had an unconscious timer running in his mind from July 1983 with an intended signal due in the summer of 1986. At that time the mental timer would stimulate nightmarish dreams about his father that would incite him to do what was needed for his father's bones. The case would, on this view of it, be parallel to cases of post-hypnotic suggestions *A longue échéance*,³ except that Walter D'Souza would have been his own hypnotist or, leaving hypnosis out of this, his own timekeeper. This explanation would allow us to understand why Walter, even before he revealed the content of the dreams to anyone else, had connected them with the matter of his father's bones. The explanation does not, however, account for the intense, vivid, and nightmarish quality of the dreams; nor does it explain why he had a fourth dream after his mother and sister tried to belittle the problem with the bones and say that everything could be handled by mail.

A second normal explanation supposes that Gertrude did tell Elizabeth about the letter she wrote in May 1986 (even though Elizabeth could not later remember her having done so), that she and Elizabeth afterward discussed the matter of the bones, and that Walter D'Souza overheard them doing so (even though they never mentioned the bones to him directly). The case would thus be one of cryptomnesia; but this explanation also seems not to account adequately for the vivid quality of Walter D'Souza's dreams and for the fourth one that followed the attempt by Gertrude and Elizabeth to minimize the importance of attending to the bones.

Vividness as a Possible Marker of Paranormality in Dreams

Because my inclination to reject normal interpretations of Dr. D'Souza's dreams derives in part from their quality of vividness, I should say something about the relationship between this quality and evidence of paranormal cognition in dreams. In a study of 125 precognitive dreams in 56 (45 percent) the dreamer described the dream as vivid (sometimes using another word, such as "realistic") (Stevenson, 1970a.) In a survey of psychical experiences (of all kinds), Palmer (1979) found that among 622 persons surveyed 229 (37 percent) claimed to have had some paranormal communication during a dream. Of these 229 respondents

no fewer than 184 (80.5 percent) said that such paranormal dreams had been especially vivid. Prince (1921, 1922) studied reports of 449 dreams described as vivid that were about the death of someone known to the dreamer about whom the dreamer was not then anxious; 35 (8 percent) of these dreams coincided with the death of the person dreamed about. Most dreams are not vivid and most vivid dreams are not paranormal; but the data I have just mentioned suggest that vividness in a dream is a marker of paranormality. This apparent connection deserves further investigation.

Three Paranormal Interpretations

We need to consider next three paranormal interpretations. The first of these supposes that Walter learned about the complication of the bones by reading his mother's mind telepathically. Her letter of May 9, 1986, shows that she was very much aware of the forthcoming third anniversary of her husband's death and of the need to remove his bones to a niche. It also shows, however, that she believed that she had paid for everything in advance—with perhaps some small additional sum for a Mass still to be paid. Her letter certainly betrayed no sign that anything was amiss. Her sister Josephine's letter (of July 25) came to her as a surprise, almost a shock. It follows, therefore, that Walter's great concern about his father, reflected in his dreams, could not have derived from his mother's thoughts about the matter up to the time when Josephine's letter arrived. By that time Walter had already had three of his dreams.

Dr. D'Souza might also have obtained information relevant to the matter of his father's bones by telepathy from his Aunt Josephine, who was certainly aware before other members of the family that a crisis was at hand. Dr. D'Souza, however, had no close relationship with his aunt; he never corresponded with her and never saw her except on his infrequent visits to India. Given the tendency of spontaneous paranormal communications to occur most often between persons having close emotional attachments (Green, 1960; Stevenson, 1970b) Josephine Kapadia seems a less likely agent for the dreams than her sister Gertrude, Walter D'Souza's mother.

It remains to consider the possibility that Henry D'Souza, having survived death, had continued postmortem to be as concerned about the proper disposal of his bones as he had been antemortem. In that case he might have tried to stimulate action among his surviving family members. In offering this interpretation I am not suggesting that Henry D'Souza appeared *ipse praesens*, so to speak, in his son's dream. The unrealistic detail of his getting out of his coffin would alone eliminate this interpretation. He might, however, have acted as an agent to stimulate his son's dreams. Their details were then created at unconscious levels of Walter D'Souza's mind. Examples of symbolic elaboration in dreams that are telepathically stimulated are so numerous as hardly to require citation of individual cases. I will, however, mention one parallel case. It is that of a man who, while away from his home, dreamed that a favorite cat appeared to him badly injured, with an ear almost torn off. The cat was dressed in the uniform of a vol-

unteer soldier of the Spanish Civil War. (The dream occurred in the 1930s, at the time of this war.) In fact, the dreamer's cat (at his home) had been badly injured with an ear nearly torn off at almost the exact time of the dream. The dreamer had clothed the cat in a volunteer soldier's uniform because he had, before going to sleep, spent the evening with friends in an animated discussion of the Spanish Civil War (Haynes, 1961).

Why Did Walter D'Souza Have the Dreams Instead of Another Family Member?

If we believe that Henry D'Souza may have stimulated the dreams which led to the proper disposition of his bones, the further question arises of why Walter D'Souza received the essential stimulus from his father when none of Henry D'Souza's other three children (or his wife) did so. At least two other members of the family, Gertrude and Elizabeth, were more immediately concerned in the funeral arrangements than he had been. Gertrude in fact had often dreamed of her husband after his death; but her dreams were pleasant and had nothing of the insistent and unpleasant quality that Walter D'Souza's dreams had. Three items of evidence show why a discarnate Henry D'Souza might have selected his son Walter as the vehicle for his communications. First, for reasons that I need not here explain, Walter was the favorite of Henry's three sons. Second, Walter had a record of taking action when a need arose; while others in the family would debate the feasibility of doing something, he would do it or see that it was done; and third, Walter seems to have been noticeably more sensitive to paranormal communications than other members of the family.

When I asked Susan D'Souza whether she could give me examples of this paranormal sensitivity on the part of her husband, she quickly mentioned two exemplary episodes. On the first occasion, Susan was in the United States and pregnant, while Walter was on a visit to India. Susan had a miscarriage, but it was a minor matter for her, and she managed well by herself with the help of her obstetrician. She did not notify Walter that anything untoward had happened. Suddenly, however, he appeared at their home. Asked why he had come home early, he explained: "I had this terrible feeling that you were quite ill and that things were not going on well." He then came home immediately.

At the time of the second episode, Susan was again pregnant, this time almost at the end of the pregnancy. She was actually in labor and so near delivery that her obstetrician decided to spend the night sleeping in a room of the hospital close to hers. Walter had been at the hospital, but because he was tired and the labor was slow, the obstetrician sent him home to sleep. The next morning at about 6:00 a.m. Walter suddenly appeared in Susan's room at the hospital. He arrived there before the obstetrician and explained that he had dreamed that he had a son. A few minutes later Susan gave birth to a son.

Endnotes

1. Dr. Walter D'Souza and Mrs. Gertrude D'Souza read this report and confirmed its accuracy according to their memories and available information.

2. Elizabeth D'Souza Fernando placed Walter D'Souza's dreams several months earlier than other evidence suggests. She said that around Easter (March 30) 1986 Walter D'Souza began to ask her querulously whether she had really arranged for proper disposition of their father's body. She believed that Walter began his complaints to her after he had had his first dreams. Walter himself, however, thought he had his first dreams about two weeks before news of a problem concerning the bones reached the family. And this news came in a letter (from Gertrude's sister Josephine) dated July 25, which, because of delays in forwarding, did not reach Gertrude D'Souza until near the end of August. According to Walter's chronology, his first dreams occurred at the end of July or early in August 1986. He could not remember any discussion with his sister about their father's remains several months earlier.
3. I believe that one year is the maximum duration of time observed in such experiments with posthypnotic suggestion (Liégeois, 1889); but that does not preclude a similar effect over a longer time.

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Reprint Requests

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