

## Why Work with Your Dreams?

By Tayria Ward, Ph.D.

The Talmud states that “An uninterpreted dream is like throwing away an unopened letter from God.” Whatever we call that intelligence that is bigger than us, it speaks to us in dreams. Every scripture, prophet and world myth has examples of people receiving important messages in dreams. Joseph received Jesus’ name in a dream. Buddha’s mother had a dream that prophesied his birth. Joseph in the Old Testament was treasured by the Pharaoh for his gift of dream interpretation. Einstein received his theory of relativity in a dream. Paul McCartney first heard “Yesterday” in a dream. The list goes on.

I have been consistently writing down and paying attention to my dreams for 35 years. Formerly as a minister and especially since seriously studying the ideas of C.G. Jung and receiving my doctorate in Depth Psychology, I have worked with other people’s dreams privately, in dream classes and in dream groups. A lifetime of experience has taught me that some of the most essential information we ever receive comes to us in dreams. If taken seriously and read symbolically, even the most seemingly commonplace dream has the power to produce invaluable insight into the events and issues of our lives. And as physicist David Bohm states, insight is an active substance that literally re-creates the brain. Brain function is improved by these insights.

Psychologist Robert Johnson says that every dream is telling you something you don’t already know about yourself and something relevant, something you need to know. In our present stage of evolution as a species, the conscious mind is able to register only the tiniest amount of information in the vast sea of all that influences us in any given moment. Global, national, ancestral and personal histories conspire to create ideas and attitudes that we unthinkingly accept as “truths”, which may not be at all. Unseen forces and energies that move the ocean and the weather are also moving us. We have access to vital information about these hidden powers not only through physical instruments, but often more accurately through instincts and intuition, as well as through dreams. Dreams are the visions of the night, the sight that penetrates the darkness of the unconscious.

Once I had a dream that I was wandering around my property and found a large cage hidden within an overgrowth of bushes. I tore through to see what was there, and accidentally rattled the cage. Suddenly an army of terrifying little monsters came flooding out and began chasing me. I ran as fast as I could back to the house and began leaping up a large staircase, three or four steps at a time. Suddenly something inside of me said “Turn around and just see what they want.” I stopped and sat down on a stair to face the monsters. One of them jumped into my lap and instantly became a beaming, adorable baby. So it is with any dream that is chasing or haunting us—no matter how mundane, numinous or terrifying it might be it is coming for a reason; and it promises to help in birthing greater wisdom and consciousness.

How do you begin to work with your dreams? The first step is to make an intention before going to sleep that you want to remember them. Keep a pad and pen next to the bed, and maybe a little pen light so that if you awaken with a dream, or even a dream

fragment, you can take notes on it without disturbing your sleep too badly. In the morning before your mind begins to move to what is ahead, stay still and try to capture any images you may have awakened with. Take notes even before getting up if possible. Then as soon as you can, write down the dream narrative in a dream journal. Just forming the words begins a relationship between your conscious and unconscious minds, and often messages start unfolding. What do those images, events or people mean inside of you? Jung would say that every aspect of the dream is a piece of yourself, a pattern in your own psychology. What is going on in your life at the time of the dream that these images come to you now? Try not to be dismissive of any aspect of the dream. Some say, “Oh that’s obvious, I just read about that, ran into that person, saw this on the news.” But it is showing up in your night vision as a symbol for something else. It wants your attention for good reason.

Dreams are a language of their own. If we hear a foreign language, it is impossible to understand what is being said until we study it. Dreams are the same way. They speak a language of symbols both collective and personal. Only the dreamer will know what each symbol means to him or her, but a gifted guide in navigating the terrain of the dream can be invaluable. Finding our own way in our dreams is generally difficult, almost like trying to see our own backs, as Marie Louise von Franz put it. The dream is telling us what we don’t know and can’t easily see. However, though I have worked with a dream analyst for decades, I also know that am richer for every dream I have tended to on my own by writing and reflection.

Talk about your dreams with friends. Draw them. Play with them. Honor them in whatever way you can think of. Entertain each one as a guest in the house of your consciousness. If the opportunity presents itself, consider joining a dream group or getting into private dreamwork with someone trained in working with dreams, someone you trust.

Carl Jung was once asked if he thought we would make it as a species, as we seem to be driving ourselves rapidly on a course of planetary destruction. His response: “If enough people do their inner work.” He said the world is hanging on a thin thread, and that thread is the psyche of mankind. I feel a personal urgency in working with dreams not only because I find them fascinating, insightful, delightful, healing and endlessly practical; but also because I believe they are a goldmine of critical information crucial to personal and planetary wellbeing. Dreamwork is something each of us can do toward the cause of awakening—mining messages from sleep that have the power to wake us up from the long, dark sleep of unconsciousness.

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*Tayria Ward, Ph.D. does private dream analysis by telephone or in person by arrangement. Call 828-627-0755 or write to [tayriaw@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tayriaw@sbcglobal.net) for appointments. If you would like to start a dream group, contact Tayria.*