

# DREAMER'S GUIDEBOOK

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Dream work is intentional dialogue between the conscious part of ourselves and the multiple unconscious aspects of our inner world. As we work with our dreams, we move deeper and deeper into the realm of relatedness, meaning, creativity and mystery.

The primary goal of dream work is to open ourselves to deeper relationship with ourselves, with others and with creative resources that lie beyond the conscious ego. Dreams guide us to become the unique persons we are created to be in the fullness of relationship.

Dream work is participation in a process of renewal, reconciliation and transformation. As we dialogue with our dreams over time, we experience a compelling movement toward completion and wholeness. We experience growing synthesis between the opposing fragments of inner life.

Dreams use the language of symbol and metaphor to bridge the gap between what we know and what is still hidden. The symbols and metaphors bring insight into the unconscious parts of ourselves, revealing hidden aspects of personality, attitudes, feelings and patterns of behavior. They also show us new possibilities of which we are unaware.

Dreams always carry simultaneous multiple meanings that often seem contradictory to one another. Paradox pervades.

All dreams, especially nightmares, call us to respond to input that will help us to heal and grow. Dreams bring not only insight but the energy that is needed for responding in new creative ways.

There are many ways to dialogue with the dream: symbol appreciation, Active Imagination, art, movement, meditation, prayer, ritual, and journal writing are just a few. Reentering the dream through guided imagery is a creative technique for transforming and integrating the dream. Sharing with a partner or group adds new dimensions of insight, intimacy, communion, and community.

## **Major Findings from the IASD Cancer Project, 2006-2011**

\* When cancer strikes, both patients and caregivers often report an increase in vivid dreams and nightmares.

\* Many survivors report that before diagnosis, dreams informed them that they were becoming ill.

\* All dreams and nightmares offer insight and energy for personal growth and healing. They put the dreamer in touch with whatever is out of balance in their lives and also show them their deepest strengths and hopes, offering possibilities for moving through the dis-ease.

\* Because dreams speak the language of symbol and metaphor, most dreams do not depict the cancer situation in a literal way but instead refer to the cancer in symbolic ways. However, before and after diagnosis and during treatment, dreams often offer guidance for making decisions about choice of doctors, treatment options, and lifestyle changes.

\* Because every dream holds multiple meanings, every dream offers potential for healing on many levels: mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical. The dreams of people facing cancer tend to emphasize the need for emotional, relational, and spiritual resolutions.

\* The dreams of people facing cancer often re-activate past personal traumas and use past experiences in symbolic ways to remind the dreamer of enduring strengths and capacities for moving through present illness and future crises.

\* Over time, as cancer survivors confront the conflicts and fears stirred by their dreams, they report an evolving transformation of both symbols and emotions that lead into a sense of resolution, hope, and meaning.

\* Guided imagery with dream symbols becomes a powerful, targeted approach for directing healing energy wherever the dream has indicated imbalance. Research demonstrates that the practice of guided imagery can help bring about a sense of well being, a sense of meaning and hope, as well as help alleviate side effects of treatment including pain, nausea, and fatigue.

\* Guided imagery with personal dream images is an effective way to transform the images and energies of nightmares.

\* Because research shows that guided imagery can enhance the functioning of the immune system, guided imagery with personal healing dream images can be a particularly effective way to boost the body's innate healing systems.

\* Survivors and caregivers who work with their dreams over time find that they are participating in a process of renewal, reconciliation, and transformation. They find that dream dialogue is a creative practice for becoming an active participant in the journey through cancer.

## **Tips for Improving Dream Recall**

Think about dreams; read about dreams; talk about dreams with other people.

Imagine yourself dreaming, remembering, and recording.

When you get in bed, focus on your desire to be in touch with a deep source of insight and wisdom. Focus on remembering your dreams. Hold this focus until you fall asleep.

Have paper and pen or pencil close at hand so you don't have to get out of bed to write. There is an easy way to make a lighted pen. Many people use a tape recorder.

When you realize you are waking up, lie very still. Immediately re-imagine the dream and begin to tell it to yourself in words. If the dream starts to fade, roll into the position you were in while you were dreaming. Don't get up to write until you are reconnected to the dream.

If it is the middle of the night and you feel you can't write the whole dream, simply jot down key words and phrases. These may help you to remember more of the dream in the morning. Even one image or phrase can be a rich source for dream work.

Dreams hate jarring alarm clocks. If you need an alarm, set it on soft music.

Get up gently and focus on the dream until you can write it down. Try not to think about or do anything else. The bathroom is a logical place to capture the dream on paper. Record in the present tense. This will help to restore the immediacy of the dream when you begin to work with it. You may want to draw simple sketches in the margin.

Consider finding a dream partner or group. Reinforcement through sharing has a significant impact on dream recall. It is as if dreams get excited when they know they are going to a party.

## Beginning to Engage With Your Dreams

- \* Relax into a meditative state of consciousness.
- \* Date each dream and leave a space to write a title after you record the dream.
- \* Record rapidly in a meditative state. Let the words flow. Do not edit or pause to think about style or “correctness”.
- \* Record in the present tense. This will evoke the immediacy of the experience each time you read it. Include as many sensory details as you can.
- \* Record feelings and shifts in feeling **IN** the dream as it progresses. Record actions.
- \* Record fragments. Even one image can be a rich source of insight and energy.
- \* Try drawing sketches in the margins. These will help you recall the dream and perhaps stir insight.
- \* After you record the dream, give it a title and write the title after the date. [In brackets, make short notes about important events and issues that are happening in your waking life.] It is amazing to watch the interplay between inner and outer life.
- \* After recording a dream, list the main elements: feelings, actions, people, animals, objects, settings. Describe and explain each one as if you are trying to communicate with someone who has no prior knowledge of your world. State your personal opinions and feelings about each element. Write down what this part of the dream means to you when viewed as a metaphor for part of your inner life.
- \* Ask yourself: What part of me/where/when/what in my life feels or felt like this?
- \* Meditate with key symbols and allow them to evoke emotion. Allow them to move and shift. Allow the dream to continue.

## DREAMS INVITE ME TO ASK QUESTIONS

“Why this dream now?”

C.G.Jung

To what issues is this dream calling my attention?

What might it be saying about my **body** and how I might move to greater health?

My **emotions**? Do the emotions in the dream limit or expand my life?

My **beliefs and attitudes in the dream**? Are they creative or limiting?

My **perspectives on a past or present situation**? Can they enhance greater possibility?

My **behaviors and interactions in the dream**? Are they creative or stifling?

In what way is this dream compensating or completing my conscious view?

In what kinds of situations do I feel like I feel in the dream?

How do the issues raised in the dream relate to my outer life? My spiritual life?

What is the insight, the wisdom, the gift that this dream is trying to bring me?

How am I going to respond? How can I integrate the insight and energies?

What can I do to honor the dream? What can I do to help the energies enlarge the way I live my life?

## SYMBOL APPRECIATION

Imagery is the natural language of the inner world. The imagery of dreams is composed of symbols. Symbols always carry emotional energy and simultaneous multiple meanings. Symbols arise in the psych as natural attempts to reconcile opposites and to transcend a sense of conflict. Symbols can serve as a bridge into an experience of wholeness.

\* Choose a dream symbol that carries a lot of energy for you. Close your eyes, be still, and reconnect with your symbol.

\* Write a **dictionary-style definition** for someone who has no idea what it is.

\* Describe all its possible functions. What does it do and how can it be used? **Make note of how this particular symbol is functioning in the dream.**

\* What **feelings** in the dream does the symbol evoke in you?

\* What **associations** does it evoke?

\*What **memories** does it stir?

\* What are all the things you **like and dislike** about it?

\*After each of the preceding questions, try to make a **bridge** to your waking, conscious life by asking **WHAT IN MY LIFE IS LIKE THIS?**

\*Describe how in the dream, you (the dream ego) are interacting and relating to the symbol. How are other symbols in the dream interacting and relating to this symbol?

What might the symbol want to **tell or teach** you? Where is the insight and energy for expanded life and spiritual growth?

# NIGHTMARES

Nightmares call for a more conscious, creative attitude toward whatever you fear.

- 1) A nightmare is a spotlight on an area of life that is in need of immediate attention. It is an invitation to create a new relationship with the fear.
- 2) The resolution of a nightmare requires conscious, intentional dialogue with whatever unconscious dynamic is symbolized by the nightmare experience.
- 3) When you begin to dialogue with your fear, the nightmarish experience begins to transform in a positive direction and energy is released for creative expression.

## **Working with a nightmare**

Write it down in the present tense. Make a list of the key elements of the dream and write out a detailed description of each element as if trying to communicate to someone who has no understanding of your world. Note how each description might fit a description of something in your life or of some part of yourself. Do the feelings in the dream seem familiar? Where have you or where do you feel such feelings in waking life? Remember that the nightmare is trying to spotlight an area of your life that needs transformation in order that you can grow and be who you truly are.

## **Self-guided imagery for nightmare transformation**

- \* Relax into a meditative state of consciousness. In imagination, move into a place that feels totally safe and supportive. Invite Supportive Presence to be with you. Using all your senses, soak in the energy of support and safety.
- \* Reenter your nightmare in the company of Supportive Presence and observe it from a different perspective from the original dream. You might want to watch it through a protected screen or from a safe distance.
- \* Allow the images of the dream to begin to transform. If at some point you feel you want to interact with the dream, do so. Remember that confronting the nightmare is an opportunity to grow, to heal, and to enrich your life. The disturbing situation will change as your responses to it change.
- \* Revisit your nightmare in a meditative state until the experience no longer feels terrifying. New images will now be a part of a new dream.

## **\* Keep asking: What have you come to teach me?**

- \* Honor the new dream by integrating the new healing images. You can integrate and embody healing images through expressive art, meditative movement, writing, and by meditating with the imagery during medical appointments or in any situation in your waking life.

## DANCING WITH THE SHADOW

The parts of yourself of which you are unaware are called *Shadow*. These energies, both positive and negative, operate unconsciously and express themselves autonomously. All the characters who show up in your dreams can show you parts of yourself that are unclaimed and often unacceptable to your conscious ego. Every character who walks across the stage of your dream, no matter how scary or disturbing, has something to teach you that will enrich your life. You can learn from shadow figures about traits that you need in order to express your own wholeness.

- 1) Notice how you're feeling and interacting in the dream.
- 2) Notice how your feelings and interactions in the dream might be different from waking life.
- 3) Describe the essential characteristics of your character. If the traits are unclear in the dream, use your imagination. Re-visualize your character and write down what you imagine as essential characteristics.
- 4) Ask yourself if there are any parts of yourself that are like your description of your character.
- 5) Ask yourself how a quality or qualities of your character might help you if you could display this trait in a balance way.
- 6) Imagine taking on the traits that might be helpful and imagine yourself moving out into your life with the ability to express yourself in a new way.
- 7) When you go out for a walk, imagine that one of your dream characters is with you. Engage in conversation. Open your heart to what this dream figure has come to teach you.

## SIX MAGIC QUESTIONS IF THE SYMBOL COULD SPEAK

One imaginative way to gain insight into inner conflicts is to go into a meditative state and invite dream symbols to speak. Fritz Pearls, father of the Gestalt school of psychology, encouraged this approach.

1) List the key symbols of your dream and choose one that you will talk to. Inanimate objects often reveal particularly surprising insights.  
Example: a kleenex.

2) Relax, center, and hold your symbol in meditative reflection.  
Example: Contemplate the kleenex with all your senses: see it, feel it, smell it, even brush it against your mouth. Can you taste it? Feel the sensations deep in your body. Feel into the symbol. Become the kleenex as it becomes you.

3) Speaking with the voice of the symbol, answer these questions.

- 1) Who/what are you?
- 2) What is your purpose? (in general and specifically in the dream)
- 3) What do you like about who you are and what you do?
- 4) What do you dislike about who you are and what you do?
- 5) What do you fear most?
- 6) What do you desire? What do you want more than anything else?

Example: (The kleenex might reply)

“I am a kleenex and I feel soft and white and useful. I am always ready and waiting to help out when I am needed. My purpose is to wipe tears and runny noses, to wipe up spills and any kind of wet mess that happens. I like being helpful and comforting to those who need me. I dislike being balled up and thrown away with no sense of appreciation by the person who uses me. What I fear the most is that I will never be loved and appreciated - just used and thrown away. What I desire the most is that when I’m being used, the person will feel my desire to be helpful and will let me know that they know and care that I am there.”

Do any of your replies trigger an insight? How might you respond to and honor a new insight?

(Adapted with permission from *Dream Language* by Bob Hoss. Thank you!)

## TRACKING INTERACTIONS IN YOUR DREAMS

**When you integrate the wisdom of your dreams, you will begin to see movement away from fear into confidence and strength, movement from fragmentation toward synthesis, from despair to hope, from rejection to compassion. You will discover an ever-deepening, ever-expanding sense of being in relationship, with yourself, with others, and with an infinite source of creative resources.**

As you record your dreams, make note of your feelings and the feelings of others in the dream. Make note of your perceptions and attitudes and of those of others in the dream. Look at your underlying beliefs and those of the others. Watch for transformations through keeping an ongoing dream journal.

- \* How are the interactions in each dream similar and different from waking life? What do you learn from this?
- \* What changes in the dream might bring about feelings of renewal or restoration?
- \* Where in each dream do you see clues that might point to an expanded way of living?

Keep in mind that every dream comes in the service of health and wholeness. Every dream can help you to

- \* deepen your sense of relationship with yourself, others, and with the source of the dream.
- \* understand and deal with conflicting feelings and moods.
- \* make creative responses in disturbing situations and relationships.
- \* respond with expanded consciousness.
- \* find a sense of connection and wholeness

## **ATTITUDES TO CULTIVATE AND NURTURE FOR DREAM DIALOGUE**

- \* Identify where you feel conflicted. Respect both sides of the conflict. Hold each in consciousness without judgment.
- \* Dreams offer insight and energy for holding and moving beyond the tension of conflicting emotions, attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, thoughts, concepts, beliefs. Dreams offer a pathway into a sense of balance and harmony. Cultivate patience.
- \* Dreams help stir a sense of unity and wholeness in the midst of paradox. Cultivate and nurture a sense of awe, amazement, and appreciation.
- \* When you allow tension of opposites, when you hold with respect both sides of a conflict, a new synthesis emerges. Cultivate and nurture gratitude.
- \* Enter the dialogue with willingness to let go old patterns, with the longing to grow and to live into an expanded life that you cannot begin to imagine. Stay open to the unexpected.
- \* Cultivate your longing for a sense of meaning and connection. Nurture longing for deep relationship. Cultivate curiosity, openness, acceptance, non-judgment, willingness to yield, flexibility. Cultivate active listening. Cultivate trust. Cultivate willingness to accept surprise and hold paradox.
- \* Accept that dreams speak on many simultaneous levels in the language of symbol and metaphor. Cultivate symbolic seeing and metaphoric thinking. Nurture the questions “What is/was like this? Where did/do I interact in this way”
- \* Every character in a dream has something to teach you. Cultivate a sense of humor and a sense of play so that you can explore with an open heart the gifts that are offered by even the most disturbing dream figures.
- \* Dream dialogue deepens a sense of being in relationship with yourself, others, and with Mystery transcending the conscious ego. Cultivate openness to the flow of Spirit.

**IF IT WERE MY DREAM**  
Projective Group Dreamwork Method  
based on work by  
Montegue Ullman and Jeremy Taylor

- 1) The group begins with an opening centering meditation.
- 2) Each dreamer reads or tells a dream using present tense. Each speaks of feelings in the dream but does not get into waking-life connections. No group comments at this point.
- 3) Group selects a dream and then asks questions to clarify the details of the dream story so that it becomes a vivid experience for each listener. (At this point, the group doesn't ask about the dreamer's metaphoric connections or personal associations. Just gets a clear feel for what happens in the dream.
- 4) The dreamer becomes the listener while group members take turns reflecting on the dream as if they had dreamed it. They begin each comment with "if it were my dream" or "in my dream" or "in my experience." Each person is making reflections and raising questions that are relevant to his or her own life, to his or her own journey. The group is not trying to interpret the dream for the dreamer. (It is helpful not to look at the dreamer as you speak. This helps you to know you're talking about yourself.)
- 5) After all the group projections, the dreamer responds, saying only as much as is comfortable, while all the rest listen. This is time for the dreamer to comment on symbolic connections and waking life issues that he or she chooses to share.
- 6) The dreamer and group now reflect on "what does this dream want?" What is the dream offering as insight and energy for expanded life and spiritual growth? How can the insight and energy be honored, kept alive, integrated into conscious living? Still using the phrase, "if it were my dream," group members comment on how each might honor and integrate the gifts of the dream.
- 7) The group closes with a an agreed-upon ritual.

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Healthcare project: [www.healingpowerofdreams.com](http://www.healingpowerofdreams.com)