

## Working with Your Own Dreams

**Working with your own dreams is a process of curiosity and inquiry. As dreams come forward enter into a relationship with them in a variety of ways to honor what is coming forward.**

The more support we have for our Inner Work, the more meaningful our process will be. We can seek out others who give encouragement and act as witnesses for our growth. We can find groups, attend workshops, and put ourselves in situations that foster our real development. We encourage you to seek out a trusted counselor or therapist who honors dream work as part of their practice. Arrange to meet with this person at least monthly. The more deeply you engage the dream, the more you may expect to be shaped and transformed by it. As one of our analyst/teachers at the Haden Institute, Pitmann McGehee, frequently reminds us: "I alone must become myself; I cannot become myself alone." Find someone you trust and respect and begin listening together to enhance your journey into the life in your dreams. In between your meetings with a trusted dream witness you may want to do some personal work at home.

### Here are a few suggestions to get you started.

Three basic principles to remember:

- 1) *There is no such thing as a dream with only one meaning or level of meaning.*
- 2) *No dream comes to tell you, the dreamer, what you already know.*
- 3) *All dreams come in the service of health and wholeness.*

- **First and foremost, keep a dream journal.**
  - Pick a journal that speaks to you. It doesn't matter if it's an expensive leather-bound book or a spiral notebook from the dollar store. Dedicate this journal to your dreams and use it for nothing else. Keep your journal with your dedicated pen at your bedside so it is the last thing you see at night and the first you notice in the morning.
  - Each night before going to sleep ask the Divine Source for a dream, an image or story, to be given, offering you information that you need at this time.
  - Upon awakening, try not to move, keep your eyes closed, and do an internal scan of your body - noticing if there is any tension in any particular part. Stay with the tension for a moment, focusing on it, allowing an image to emerge. Trust your intuition.
  - Now, record your dream. Write the dream as a story in first person, present tense. If time is too limited to write the entire narrative, jot down the images and emotions that have the most power along with the setting of the dream.
  - Give the dream a title and date it.
- **Associations:** Write down an image from your dream. Now, ask yourself what words or ideas come to mind when I think of this image? What emotions rise up when I think of this image. Anything that you spontaneously connect to the image is an association. All associations should directly relate to the original image. You will probably have multiple ideas that arise. Write down everything that arises without editing your thoughts. Do this with multiple images in your dream. Once you have completed the process for multiple images. Go back and see which associations seem to "click" or resonate strongly. Then consider how the associations that click relate to one another and to your waking life. Rewrite the dream substituting your associations in place of the image itself.
- **Working with dream characters:** write down one or two people or animals from a recent dream. What are they like? What do you admire about them or what do you dislike about them? What are their personalities like? Quickly write down the first things that come to mind about them. Don't edit your thoughts. Write down three words to describe them. What emotions arise for you when

you think about this person/animal? Now, go back and ask yourself, “How or where in my own life am I like this in some way?” How is this character a metaphor for one of your own inner characters?

- **Use collage as a way of inquiry:** Take your dream image into an art journal. Sit quietly and bring the dream to mind. Notice what has energy for you. Take three deep breaths and allow yourself to enter into the collage process openly. Do not attempt to illustrate your dream, rather let your inner self choose images that will show you something you don’t already know. As you leaf through images listen for the ones that call to you energetically even if they do not seem to have relevance to your dream. Trust that as Meister Eckhart says, “*When the soul wishes to experience something she throws an image of the experience out before her and enters into her own image.*” Now create a collage from the images.
- **Notice synchronicities:** As you continue to record your dreams begin to notice synchronicities between the dream world and what you encounter in your waking life. Make note of any synchronicities in your dream journal.
- **Amplification:** Choose an image from your dream that seems to draw your attention. Let the Image Speak - Go back into the dream and bring the image (that thing or person in your dream) to your mind’s eye. Take 3 deep breaths bring the image closer and on the 3rd breath imagine yourself as that thing in your dream. Now speak as the dream image would. Answer the following 6 magic questions with the first thing that comes to mind. Try not to edit your thoughts. Record your statements. Speak in the first-person present tense, using “I am” statements.
  - Who or **what are you or if a person who are you** (describe yourself and how you feel): I am ...
  - What is your **purpose or function** (what do you do)? “My purpose is to....
  - What do you **like** about being that dream element? “I like....
  - What do you **dislike** about being that dream element? “I dislike ....
  - What do you **fear most** as that dream element? “I fear ...
  - What do you **desire** most as that dream element? “What I desire most is to ...
- **Use creative process to embody your dream.**
  - Write the dream in a non-linear form such as a spiral, circle or other simple shape. Use a variety of colors and sizes of script as you write.
  - Use paint freely to capture the energy of the dream in color.
  - Write a poem or haiku about the dream.
  - Draw a circle and create a doodle within the circle, not attempting to illustrate the happenings of the dream, but to allow yourself to embody it in movement and form.
  - Put on some music and move or dance the energy of the dream.
  - Take the dream with you and walk a labyrinth
  - Have a dialogue with one of your dream characters.
- **Consider the meaning of the dream:** What is the central, most important message? What is the dream advising you to do? What is the overall meaning of the dream for my life? Don’t expect to “figure it out” first in a coherent form. Just jot down your ideas and keep journaling until some sort of clarity emerges.
- **Rituals:** Imagine a physical act that would affirm the message of the dream. It may be practical or symbolic. Use the body to bring the dream into the here and now. Even if you can’t think of an act that matches the dream do something: make a gesture that seems to embody the energy, of the dream, take a walk consciously honoring the dream as you move, open your journal, speak a few words about the dream and light a candle, do something.
- **Compensatory Function of Dreams:** *Compensation* occurs when the unconscious symbolically images an attitude which is different in some way from our conscious attitude. Compensation is one reason why dreams appear so unusual: they show us through images a side of ourselves that we are not familiar with (and sometimes are afraid to acknowledge) and invite us to learn from it. Read your dream and consider the following.

- What does the *dream ego* need to learn/do differently in order for this dream to resolve? [The dream ego is the “I” in the dream—usually like our waking self, but sometimes a character with whom we strongly identify or a perspective through which we see the dream.]
- What might this dream mean if it were showing me a way to bring my life into balance?
- Is a quality that I embody in waking life *exaggerated* by something in this dream?

*Adapted from C.G. Jung, “On the Nature of Dreams,” in Dreams (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pgs. 67-83.*

**Death in Dreams:** Personal growth is a constant cycle of death and rebirth. As we grow and become more ourselves, we must sacrifice attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors which are no longer true to us. Rebirth and new psychic life only follow the death and transformation of what was. Sometimes we must be the agents of change, and other times we must simply wait for the unconscious psyche to transform itself. When a death occurs in our dreams it oftentimes feels disturbing and powerful. This an important time to bring in your trusted dream counselor or witness. In the meantime, consider the following when you have a dream that includes death of any sort.

- Might this image represent a part of me that is changing or poised for change? Has an assumption of mine been challenged? A relationship as I know it ended? An aspect of my way of life been brought into question?
- Is the image sick or rotting because of neglect, or simply because it must pass away? How do I feel about it—Guilty? Afraid? Accepting? And how do others feel about the change?
- If the death is a murder, who or what is performing violence in my psyche, on whom? Does this suggest an act of repression, or a dramatic act of transformation which could have a positive outcome?
- If the death is a suicide: How am I participating or being invited to participate in my own transformation? What might the image of suicide say about my ability to change my own life, or submit to changes that are occurring in me?

#### **Resources for working your own dreams:**

Here are a few resources for working your own dreams that will get you started. The reading list for the Dream Work training program provides a more extensive bibliography for your reference.

- Johnson, Robert A. *Inner Work: Using Dreams and Creative Imagination for Personal Growth and Integration*
- Hoss, Robert *Dream Language* (available for free download at <http://www.dreamscience.org/>)
- Mellick, Jill *The Art of Dreaming: Tools for Creative Dream Work*