

9 - Dream CRAFTING 1:



OUTSIDE OF DREAMS

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What Do Dreams Have To Do With It?

I have a lot to say about dreams, starting with why.

We steer our lives according to what our superficial mind thinks, but we map our lives by what our authentic subconscious feels. Dreams are an opportunity to connect our conscious and subconscious minds, and we need that for guidance. They are oracular.

“An Oracle does not give you instructions as to what to do next, nor does it predict future events. An Oracle points your attention toward those hidden fears and motivations that will shape your future by their unfelt presence within each present moment.”
– Martin Rayner, in Ralph Blum’s *The Book of Runes*.

Reality, for Practical Purposes

It is popular to believe that the past and future do not exist, and that we live only in The Now. I suggest the opposite: only the past and future exist, and that The Now does not exist as it can never be captured, examined, controlled, measured, or used by itself as the basis for anything.

The Now has always a duration of measure zero. The extent of what it contains can only be measured with reference to the past and future. If you have no memory of who you are, and no idea of where you're going, then you are entirely helpless. Knowing everything only about the present is entirely of no use. This may not be true mathematically, but practically it is.

Neuropsychology resolves this question using the notions of semantic and episodic memory. Think of semantic memory as a record of past events, and episodic memory as your personal path through time. The semantic is your record of what's happened, and the episodic is your record of where you were in it. How could you be who you are without both?

That question is answered by the story of Clive Wearing, recalled here in a 2009 article by Suddendorf, Addis, and Corballis, called "Mental Time Travel and The Shaping of the Human Mind":

"Clive Wearing is an English musician. As an acknowledged expert on early music, he had built up a musical career with the BBC when he was infected at the age of 46 with the herpes simplex virus. This effectively destroyed his hippocampus and left him profoundly amnesic. The nature of his amnesia illustrates the distinction between semantic memory, which is memory for enduring facts about the world, and episodic memory, which is a personal record of the past. Wearing's semantic memory is largely intact, as is his procedural memory. He retains a normal vocabulary, recognizes his wife and family, and can still play the piano and conduct a choir. His episodic memory, though, is profoundly impaired. He has sufficient short-term memory to be able to converse but quickly forgets about topics he spoke about or experienced just moments earlier. He is continually under the impression that he has just woken up, or recovered from being dead. His conscious experience is entirely of the present."

Clive Wearing remembers past history, but has forgotten who he was and cannot form an image of who he will be. It is also possible to forget the details of the past but remember who you are. In either case you need a history. You must be able to recall a past and construct a future. If you can't, then you have neither.

I suggest that all that exists are the past, the future, and your location in them. The past, responsible for all that is now, and the future, the sum of all that could be. The Now is the boundary between the two, with no length at all. It is where you stand.

We do not experience the past and the future as similar. They represent two kinds of reality, one that has happened, and the other that remains a network of potential. You think about the past differently from the future.

When you think of the past, you look for causes and their effects. You identify yourself as having traveled a path, and being at some point now. Your paths may be many and complex, but they can be traced and, the more you think about it, the more connections you find.

This describes you up to a point. And that point is the limit of what you can remember, what you embody, and what has been recorded. Beyond that you're not really sure what happened. And when you think about it – though it's hard to think at the limits of all that you know – there is a lot you don't know.

As an exercise, explain to yourself why you feel, how you feel, about anything. I expect in less than one hundred words you will run out of things to say, and realize that you've hardly said anything! And what will happen then? You'll go off into memories and ideas tangential to the issue. And, after another one hundred words, that line of thinking will taper off, at which point there will be another.

By the time you're finished – and you never will be finished – you'll have created a rat's nest of bobbins and buttons, scraps and pictures, pieces of this-and-that that will amount to a comfortable concoction sounding like the ravings of a lunatic. And that, I suggest, is an accurate presentation of how you feel, why you feel, about anything.

This description of the past, all woven from reasonable ideas, each thread with its own logic, is a fabric that barely holds together. A crazy quilt. Take your hands off it, and huge parts fall away.

Consider the future. How do you feel, and what do you feel, about any particular future path? Here you will create another story, built on will power and what might be, rather than what was or might have been, similar to your story of the past. In your future all possibilities are real, some are just more likely.

Your past and future stories are as different as can be. Birth is always in the past, death is always in the future. Nevertheless, both your past and future stories will be nests of reasonable ideas woven into a quilt of many directions. We are built of opposites, we think in opposites, and our stories are full of contradictions.

Which of these past stories is true in The Now, and which of these future stories will you follow going forward? You have to do something... right? Even doing nothing is doing something. Stay the course, or take an exit? Turn the page, or close the book. The scribe of time reaps every moment; opportunities come and go even if you're paralyzed.

Your stories are built from two kinds of pieces: short, reasonable threads, and long, imaginative blocks. You stitch the two together and get a small tapestry. Small, because you don't have the time to create a huge concoction for every issue before you. And these tapestries, concoctions of sense and nonsense, are a collection of dreams.

Your dreams are a more accurate guide to, and representation of who you are, and where you're going, than any one story could ever be. Being in connection with your dreams is important: your dreams present to you the unseen elements of who you are.

The Importance of Illogical Thinking

I feel I must say things that sound metaphysical, as I suppose they are. Dreams take you beyond what you know, so have confidence in that territory. We need to talk about the process of learning what you don't know. Not the obvious of combining two known things into their sum, but finding understanding where previously none exists. That is the process of dreaming, and the more you embrace and indulge this, the more you find welcome and solace in sleep.

A key to the universe is understanding the difference between the illogical and the irrational. The world is largely illogical, which means we don't know the logic on which it operates. There are as many kinds of logic as there are behaviors and relationships. Logic is about consequence, necessity, and prediction. Here our abilities are limited.

The difference between logical and rational is that logical presumes you know the logic that governs a thing's behavior, and there are an infinity of different logics, because there are an infinity of underlying principles. Rational behavior does not require you to know the reason. Saying there is a reason doesn't presume you know it. Saying the world is rational, simply means things have a reason.

You are making a logical statement when you say all crows are black. You are asserting a rule. It is rational to say crows are black for a reason, and we may ultimately know what that reason is. But if, someday, a white crow shows your logic wrong, your reasoning remains intact. Before that day you might dream of multi-colored crows, illogical but not irrational.

Exploring beyond the known into the unknown is dreaming, and if you're comfortable doing this when you're awake, you'll likely be comfortable when you're asleep. Whether or not you are going to be comfortable with the issue will depend on what you are exploring. Thinking or dreaming about crows is not objectionable, but other topics may be. It pays to feel positive about where you're going.

And while you may not care, it is worth mentioning that both logic and reason allow for randomness. Things can be random and still have a reason. Logic and reason say nothing about whether or not the world is predictable. That's another story.

The point is, dreams are usually illogical, but not irrational. Dreams are where you look for the logic that you don't yet see. You do this by rearranging things and events in illogical ways. Many of these relationships may not be true, or only partly. Whatever the case, all dreams are a search for reason in an illogical world.

What A Dream Is

In an article titled "Envisioning the Future and Self-Regulation," psychologist Shelley E. Taylor speaks of creative visualization and says, "Like reality, a simulation involves a sequence of successive interdependent actions..."

But is reality a sequence of successive interdependent actions, or do we create the sequence and interdependence of the actions that affect us as time goes on? Our memories are mutable and our reasoning changes. If our vision of reality changes, does reality change?

Dreams describe complete pictures, not limited by grammar or syntax. The dream relationships are linked across space and time. Different dream events may be simultaneous, separate places may be coincident. The story is presented to us as separated and sequential because that's what our rational minds best understand. That's how we remember.

Dreams present the simultaneous, the interrelated, and views of the whole before us. These views may be disjointed, as this is how we look at the world, or they may be the complete work. This wide view is often what we're trying to find in our rational, sequential mind through art, music, and literature.

Numerous artists, musicians, and authors, as well as scientists, has found inspiration in dreams and, on occasion, visions of fully formed solutions, melodies, and structures. I would not be surprised if many more people who find inspiration would credit their dreams, if they were more practiced at remembering them. For more on dreams in art and science see Diedre Barrett's "The Committee of Sleep: How Artists, Scientists, and Athletes Use Their Dreams for Creative Problem Solving - and How You Can Too."

Holism is not a statement about dreams, it is a property of reality. An integrated reality is, by definition, a reality that does not separate things in space or time. We never see such an integrated reality in our waking state, but we can see this in dreams using our subconscious mind. The problem, then, is not remembering, controlling, or being lucid. The problem is understanding reality, and the communication between the parts of our subconscious that have this understanding, and the conscious parts that don't.

There is a long line-up of dream experts, and they have dozens of theories and interpretations. I won't bother you with them. Like a can, there are a hundred ways to open it, but all we want is what's inside. My aim is our empowerment, and my interest is in what there is to use.

I will give you one story, though, that comes from my physics background. In physics there has always been combat over which comes first, theory or experiment. Those who prefer experiment claim you cannot talk about what you have not yet seen, and those who prefer theory claim you cannot see what you do not know to look for. There is a kind of endless Punch-and-Judy, tit-for-tat between ridiculous extremes that wear each other down in productive ways.

But here we're in the realm of dreams, and that leads us to psychology, if you want to be intellectual. Western psychology continues this cock fight in less redeeming ways. I find all psychological theories implausible for their lack of logically connected propositions and, for this reason, psychological experiment and its evidence is not compelling. It does not determine anything.

I find experiences with people most insightful, and here we can do away with theory. The fewer preconceived ideas I have, the better I hear and see. I am interested in direct experience, and what works for us.

Kinds of Dreams

I don't want to categorize dreams by content, I'm not interested in what I think your dream symbols mean. I'm inventing our own categories to mark the dream boundaries we travel across. What I'm setting out for dreams applies to waking reality as well. These categories are not limited to kinds of dreams, they are ways to engage yourself. They apply obviously when we're awake, where you're practiced in navigation. They are less obvious when you're dreaming, so these distinctions serve a greater purpose there.

Think of dreams as being of two types, and then each of those two having two types again. The first distinction is between reflecting and projecting dreams. The second distinction is between immersive and lucid dreams. I do not mean that all dreams can be so categorized, but that every episode within each dream can be measured as to its place on these dimensions: more reflecting or more projecting, more immersive or more lucid.

This nomenclature is my own, and I present it in order to use it. I don't claim it's absolute, real, or even true. Today I find it useful.

Reflecting

When a dream is reflecting, or reflective, you find yourself involved with familiar forces, times, events, intentions, actions, meanings, feelings, people, statements, situations, and levels of awareness. Unique and unusual events occur through your own eye, in the first person. You recognize yourself, and believe the experience to be real. Reflective dreams are an experience that brings novelty into what you think is real. Dreams are mostly reflective in character.

Novelty is new awareness of something that has emotional charge. What is often most real about a dream is how you feel about yourself. The dream may take place in a strange setting, presenting confusions and conundrums, but you feel and act in recognizable and familiar ways.

Reflective dreams rearrange things because you have encountered something in waking life that suggests you do so. Reflective dreams proceed plausibly, but unpredictably. There is something new that's out of order in a world you want to see as logical or predictable. Your encounter with novelty is an exploration, a learning experience.

These dreams may leave you feeling satisfied and in control, or they may not. They are your effort to resolve conflicts. They are your effort to better resolve the instability in the world. Appreciating disorder strengthens your options, many that you may not yet see. We create our social worlds to set and enforce order, but this is never fully assured.

Reflective dreams release tension by allowing instinctive responses we repress in waking life. They let us integrate opportunities and abilities through the dream experience, and indirectly through our interaction with dream characters who act out, or inform us.

Projecting

In a projecting, or projective dream you find yourself outside yourself, feel as someone who is not yourself, or act in ways that seem foreign to your nature. A dream could be entirely a projection of a new persona, or it could transition to a projection, or revert to being a reflection. Projective dreams confuse your reality by introducing a new self, a new goal, and a new set of limits. Projective dreams are an out-of-body experience where you're in a place unlike any you've ever been.

There is no sharp distinction between reflective and projective dreams, the distinction is more how you feel, than where you are. In a reflective dream you are bombarded by the familiar, while a projective dream creates a new perspective. Both may seem real to you at the time.

In a dream, I watched a middle-aged white guy in a short sleeve, button down shirt dance in place with his arms flailing. This scene turned into a large, black woman sitting in a chair speaking to me. I don't know what the man was dancing about, and I didn't hear what the woman said. The message was in the context of the emotions of the moment. I didn't see myself directly, I was a watcher in this projecting dream. The result is not stored as memory, it's in the posture of my shoulders. What I invent now to explain the feeling in my body is the meaning of this dream.

Most dreams start as reflective, and then complete, or transition to another. Recurring nightmares follow this pattern, struggling to find resolution in the familiar, or else waking you up if you can't. You may move the dream to another context, retaining who you are and move to a

new location. In the context of lucid dreaming, which we'll consider later, this is described as remaining within the script, which is contrasted with breaking outside of it.

In nonlucid dreams, which are the large majority, you have little sense of authorship, so transitions just happen. Your authorship is set by your intent before you fall asleep.

Immersive

To be immersed is to believe what's happening is real. This is our normal waking and dreaming state. We don't question it, as strange as it may seem. We have faith that the universe is our container, and it operates without our attention. If something strange should happen, we figure it's just the way things are.

Evocation of the strange we reserve for fantasy, and sometimes we call it art. We indulge in it with regularity in movies and music, happy or angry satisfaction. We distinguish this from what's real but, with a moment's reflection, the two always dance together.

When immersed you are at the mercy of events, though you have more control than a leaf floating in a stream. You may choose coffee or cappuccino, but can you decide when to take a break? Your control feels proportional to your preparation, as with a week's notice you may set your time, but the limits are that of the web you're in, which -- and you'd better face it -- is a web you have created. Immersive is enmeshed. You consider your options in a reality that you take for granted.

In a dream you have a short memory and your thinking is short-term. You're rarely planning for the next day as the dream's future is unpredictable you don't know how to arrange it. In an immersive state of mind, your decisions are determined by your situation. This is how you want it, this is a projection of your desires. You want your reality to unfold comfortably and without your effort.

In real life, and as in dreaming, the immersive reality is not true. You are responsible for almost everything, and you are the one who maintains it. Others have created other lives, and they're not all that different from you. Their circumstances were different, but with the broadest understanding everything can be shaped. When you become aware, then you realize none of this has to be. That is the lucid state, and it is as unusual in dreaming as it is in waking reality.

Lucid

To lucid dream means to be in control and, at first, this distinction seems quite clear. Early, enthusiastic researchers thought lucidity was a separate state, but now it has been recognized as not so clear or separate. It's a matter of degree.

How do you know just how much "free will" you have in a world you've never before encountered, and will never experience again? What if your "free will" is based on memories

you had no hand in creating? And what is free will anyway, and is your memory real? You may “know” you’re dreaming, but that doesn’t explain what’s going on. These questions don’t plague you now, but if you’ve woken up five times, and each time find yourself still dreaming, you might start to wonder.

Lucidity exists on a spectrum. Psychologists might say, “reality is a spectrum disorder.” Dreams are similar to stage plays. There is an author, there is a theme, and there are actors, but it’s never entirely clear which is which. Are you the dream’s author or it’s actor? Are you playing a supporting role, or is the play about you? And if you feel free will, such as to declare “This is a dream!,” did you extemporise that line, or was it written in the script?

It’s not all that important to answer these questions, but asking them makes the experience richer. It can help you see the new possibilities. By the time you’re finished here, you’ll see many of the questions we cannot answer about our dream states, we cannot answer about our awake states either.

The Dream Conversation

In most courses on dream work this section would be called “How to Interpret Your Dreams.” I don’t think that’s useful, and I don’t want to call it “dream interpretation” because this is not a laboratory. Dreaming is a two-way process, a conversation, and there is as much for you to say through dreaming as there is for you to hear.

In quantum mechanics there is something called “the observer effect,” which is a fancy way of saying that you can never be objective in your examination of something that you create. There really is no clear separation between the examination of your dreams, and your creation of them.

That is not to say you cannot reflect on what you remember, but rather that what you remember will change as a result of your reflection on it. There is no fixed anything about dreams, and you don’t even want to go there. As you explore your dreams, or even just your feelings if you lack a clear recall, then they will talk back to you, and they will tell you how to understand them.

You don’t need a tourist’s guide, and you don’t need to speak “their language.” Your dreams are your deeper self, and if you don’t answer when they call, then they’ll leave you a message. Understanding the message is the issue, and for that you’ll need to do some work. You are the bug under the microscope, not them. If you don’t yet “get it,” then keep trying. It’s all about your being receptive, perceptive, ready and accepting. When you’ve demonstrated enough promise, and displayed enough intelligence, your inner mind will let you know what’s going on.

The Unimportance of Remembering Dreams

Now, you might wonder if you have sufficient dream recall, or if you dream at all. You should not be overly concerned. I never said dreams need to be remembered because, for the most part,

they are forgotten. You may have a dozen dreams each night and remember none, or one occasionally. Dreams do not need to be remembered to be effective because their effect is not on your memory, but on your character.

Dreams affect what you think, how you think, and how you feel, aspects of yourself always and immediately available. You don't have to "think" about how, or what to think, this just happens. You don't have to "remember" the stories contained in your dreams, just as you don't need to remember the meaning of words, you just use them. Your dreams take, consider, attach, disassemble, and digest information. They integrate and rearrange the concordances and causalities of your thoughts and feelings, and other such things that constitute who you are.

If you don't need to remember your dreams, why are we talking about them? Because they offer an opportunity for growth and better life. And, while we generally don't remember our dreams, we benefit from working with them, remember them or not.

What might it mean to work to effect something you can't recall? A sort of "pin the tail on the donkey" you never get to see. It's not really the dreams we're concerned with unless, like nightmares, they are a concern in and of themselves. We're concerned with how we think and feel.

Dreams are intermediate stages in the integration of events into our personality. If we can change ourselves by working with dreams indirectly, we accomplish what we set out to do. It may be all the easier to consider dreams as unconsciously as our digestion, to simply feed them, and they will do their work.

Remembering

I suspect you will begin to remember your dreams simply as a consequence of becoming familiar with the state of being in between. I make no special effort to remember, but my normal efforts put me in closer touch with my dreams than is usual for most people. On the other hand, dream recall does require some completion of your sleep cycle, and improves with the quality of your sleep. Presumably, given the topics of this course, you have problems with sleep completion and quality. If not a means for better sleep, then let dream recall be a goal.

If you want to be proactive in dream recall, the prescription is simple and direct: wake yourself while you're dreaming. This means you need to wake during one of your REM cycles, and these cycles become longer and more frequent as the night ends, extending to as long 40 minutes, separated by 10 minutes of light, non-dreaming sleep. During all these REM periods it is presumed you're dreaming, yet all you're aiming for is to recall a part of one.

If you're well slept, then waking up during the inter-REM periods is easier and less disturbing. Well rested people who extend their mornings will also have better sleep. Lacking the luxury of a leisurely morning, try using an alarm clock to wake yourself out of a dream cycle.

When waking from the alarm's disturbance, focus only on what you recall. Don't move or look around, don't think about your day or any of your concerns. Dreams are fragile and their traces quickly lost. Write what you recall in a dream journal, either as an outline or in detail. If you have the time, wake yourself repeatedly throughout the morning to recall multiple dreams.

Personally, I find more than an occasional dream to be a burden, like eating too much chocolate. I much prefer to fashion pre-sleep fantasies, and then savor as many dream wisps as I remember.

As I say, I don't make a special effort to do this, but because I often sleep outdoors I almost always wake up before dawn and move inside, where I return to sleep. When I do recall my dreams, it's not because I made an effort to, but because they feel important.

Exercise: Building a Dream

The boundary between being awake and asleep is not as sharp as people think. It's not air versus water, but more air versus cloud, and in between there is fog, and drizzle, and mist. Your senses can lift off the ground; your sight can see what is somewhere else.

You are already preoccupied with what's in your mind's eye, and your senses are already planted in a world that is not here. You are already built into a vision you have created with such fervency you won't release it. You've got a mindset that is way too narrow. You've made it hard to get to sleep.

You stand stretched, tiptoes, straining to grab the sleep ring. There are steps you can build, a step stool to reach those higher shelves. Don't be a jerk, learn to do it right before you sprain yourself!

First, don't stretch, relax. Relax your body, relax your mind. Are you comfortable now? Get comfortable. If you're on a bed or on a floor, in a reclining chair or sitting on a bench, find a pillow, straighten your spine, let gravity kiss the backs of your legs and the bottoms of your feet.

Relax your nerves at the top of your scalp, your temples, forehead, and around the back of your head where your second eyes are. Close those radar eyes and feel comfortable with what's behind you. Close your forward eyes and feel comfortable with what's in front of you.

Let a host of tiny fairies massage the muscles of your face to relax your cheekbones, eye sockets, eye brows, the hollows of your cheeks, the hinge of your jaw, and the gums

of your teeth. As if these little people were cleaning lichen off Mount Rushmore, let them smooth down the bridge of your nose, relax your tongue, and separate your teeth so that they can scrub your biting surfaces.

Pull the pins that hold up your shoulders, and let them settle just a bit. Open the valve and let your breath exhale all the way so that your ribs settle down, and you breathe from your stomach. Your arms relax and sink heavier, warmer... heavier... Grease your hip joints with the tingle of lubricant, so you can feel them vital and unweighted. All the way down your thighs and legs, in through your knees, and down to you ankles. Check the nerves on the bottoms of your feet. Can you feel your heels? Your arch? The sides of your feet? The balls of your feet? Can you feel your toes? Good, let them tingle, feeling warm, feeling heavy.

Let me count down, and you focus on how wide, deep, and relaxing feels each number. One hundred, one hundred and you're relaxed. Ninety nine, more deeply relaxed, more relaxed. Ninety eight, calm, wide, warm and relaxed. Ninety seven, serene, relax more deeply. Ninety six, comfortable, quiet, dreamy, drowsy. Ninety five, drifting, turning, rocking, releasing... Ninety four, all the way relaxed, just to be relaxed... Ninety three, all the air out, breathing deep and slow... Good.

This is where we want to be.

This is where we want to hold this conversation.

What do you do first when you lie down to sleep? Do you look at the clock, look out the window, drowsy eyes drifting from a television, at the blinking light on the ceiling, or close your eyes to try to see nothing? Is this the send-off you give yourself?

You won't remember most of your dreams, but that does not mean you didn't set their theme. Imagine your dream actors opening their lunch to find another peanut butter sandwich. Waking up to find themselves in the same neglected, dingy theater, to rail against the you, their landlord, with whom they can never get in touch.

You think you can loll, indifferent and just collect the rent while your dream theatres decay? Every night you struggle to sleep distracted, you create another crack in the foundation, a leak in your dream's roof.

Let me tell you how you should shove off into sleep's deep waters, you should do it right. You should first look deeply into the most beautiful and mysterious thing you can imagine. Something, or somewhere that holds everything for you. And that place or thing is always available, if you can imagine it. Imagine it!

Place yourself somewhere else entirely, in the nighttime warm sand beach, beneath a jewel encrusted sky. Enveloped in a deep armchair before a glowing fireplace. High on a mountain top above a wild and untamed landscape. Wrapped in weavings and painted silks, surrounded by a community of family and children. Swimming as a dolphin in sea below two suns. What does it look like, feel like, sound like, smell like?

Smell is our oldest sense, even bacteria have it, it is the chemistry of our surroundings. So what does the most beautiful and mysterious thing you can imagine smell like? What is the sense of its scent? Take this as your brain's deepest trigger, one that will take you right to this place for certain.

Is it somewhere you are, have been, have known, or could ever get to? For me it is the deep night sky, because that's where I put it, and its scent is an open, clear, after thunderstorm. It could be your home, the ocean, the city, or the curve of the earth. Scents of cinnamon, hay, or salt water. This is where you want to be connected, which no one can take away, and is your creation.

Try this, next time you turn off the lights and paint your perfect place. Say to yourself, and enunciate quite clearly, "Please connect me with the characters in my dreams tonight," and then just wait, like you're on hold, until something happens.

You may think it odd, or quaint, to expect an answer in speaking to yourself, but it is how we make connections all the time: rumination, supplication, introspection, affirmation, declamation, determination. We're always talking to ourselves. And if no one else was listening, why would we ever bother?

Do you know where words came from in their written form? They were pictograms of life's meaning, objects imbued with spirit, and The Mystery spoke through them. And it still does because The Mystery is still listening.

Now, what exactly happens I cannot say. You could be shocked to hear a voice say, "Hello." Some images may just drift past in your mind. You may need to look and listen, and you may need to almost turn around to see. If you've not practiced this, the response may be fleeting, like a bad connection to a foreign country, but with practice the connection gets better, and you will find your call put through.

More than likely something will come to you. It usually does when you ask. You may not recognize these characters, and they may not recognize you're on the line. Hold on to those willing to be kept waiting, and pursue those who continue on their way, until you've got some characters, variously costumed in your mind.

Speak to them as if at a briefing, audition, or rehearsal. Tell them what you'd most like to accomplish, and request that they help you. They respond to your heartfelt emotion, so let them know how you really feel. They are not just actors but emissaries. They perform in higher roles. They have an "in" with forces that make things happen, and if you convince them to present your case, a higher focus will put your true intention in the spotlight.

Please suggest to these agents the scene and the setting, even if it seems outside their natural form. They are shapeshifters by their nature, and they have played many roles in your past dreams. Saints, monsters, heroes, and children, and they have connections with all the others. They can read your mind if you make the effort.

You have recalled a mysterious place of beauty. You have spoken of what you'd most like to do. You've gathered the attention of your agents, and a scene in which this might take place. Combine these in your mind: a mystery, a goal, characters, a place. Hold these all together with sense of duty to yourself and purpose. A meaningfulness that is not the least bit tired. Mate this with a deep relaxation, as if you have now done everything you can to make this happen.

Take a deep breath, and with your inhale place yourself in your sense of mystery. With your exhale, blow pixie dust on the actors, their setting, and the theme. Do this right and they'll smile at your good intentions.

One good turn deserves another as every actor loves a good script. Create for them the opportunity to play a deep and meaningful role, and they'll reward you with the performance of your life. It's a performance they do a dozen times each night, and roles in which they never tire. They can feed you energy that you never knew you had. When you focus on what really matters, your body answers the calling.

Let this become a mantra, a one-breath affirmation you can repeat. Deeply inhale the scents of mystery, exhale the actors and the theme. With your fading breath sink into the audience. And with the next inhale repeat the mantra. Keep repeating this cycle as you fall asleep.

You know, it doesn't really matter if they perform your play, or if you remember. The message is delivered whether or not you wake up for the performance. You have a dozen dreams each night, and you are lucky if you remember one. You are not even the intended audience. The show is put on for angels as it's they who shape the world. And don't be afraid of demons because they just twist the plot. Someone has to break the set, and they're always wearing black.

There are dark forces. I don't know their role. You cannot let fear stop you, most of it is false. And the things we really need be afraid of are things we really need to fix. There

are dirty, dangerous jobs, but those tasks wouldn't be before you if you were not the special one to perform them.

We all look for heroes, and some part of you is one. Certain things you didn't create you are here to fix regardless. Take on these tasks and reap the hero's true reward: to be spared the curse of credit, and the blessing of making other people happy.

You have a mantra. Use it. Refine it. Explore it. It's better than any sleeping pill. It may not always be effective, but you can never overdose. It's a powerful elixir, a spell, a charm, a prayer. You create what you focus on, and so what if you don't know what's most important, you can still look for it. And if you do, you'll find it's like a good leather shoe. It softens as you wear it and becomes a second skin. It will carry you through field and stream, city and jungle, to the highest accomplishments, and the deepest sleep.

Now I want to go to sleep. If you don't want to, then you can come back to your alert state. If you do want to sleep, then follow me forward as I continue with counting down.

Ninety two, relax.

Ninety one, calm, wide, warm.

Ninety, serene, relaxed, open, aware.

Eighty nine, comfortable, quiet, dreamy, drowsy.

Eighty eight, drifting, floating, rocking, releasing...

Eighty seven, all the way relaxed, just to be relaxed...

Eighty six, all the air out, breathing deep and slow...

Eighty five, heartbeat slow and smooth, center on your heart...

Eighty four, center on your breath, inhale... exhale...

Eighty three... deeply relaxed.

Eighty two... deeply relaxed.

Eighty one... done.

Exercise: Transitions

Find a comfortable position with both feet on the floor. Take a breath: inhale... exhale... and place your two hands atop your chest. Place one higher at your collarbone so that the fingertips of that hand rest at the center of the bone, just under your chin.

Place the other hand lower, at the bottom of your sternum, so that the fingertips rest atop the bone at the center of your chest. Touch, rub, or press these places as you feel comfortable. You'll use your fingers to tap them and to focus your attention.

This exercise is about making time for yourself. A time in which you can leave open a channel between your declarative, demanding self -- the self that accepts only what's

real -- and your imaginative, receptive self -- the self that invents what's real. This will be a time between feeling who you are, and who you could be. It's quite simple. All you need is the sense of both these selves as allies, and the commitment to give yourself some time.

Waking

There is a time between when you begin to wake, and when you feel you are awake, an in-between state. This is an important time, when you're between worlds. It is in this state, not just in the morning but any time of day, that we access strength and balance, and fuel our mental health.

In this time you can consider the blocks your subconscious fashions in your dreamtime. You don't have to do anything, just allow the two worlds to mingle free from the interfering judgement of your daytime mind.

This time, and times like these, connect to your individuality, and are key times in connection with yourself. This morning wake-time is held in reverence in all contemplative traditions, a time of prayer, meditation, and reflection. We will explore the power that lies in this time, so I'll ask you to create it.

You want the space between dreamtime, which you may or may not remember, and the daytime, which you'll certainly forget. Beyond the simple "being in touch" of memories and conversation, to the deeper "being in touch" with how and why you feel.

Be in touch with direction and inclination. The kind of direction familiar with road signs, parts, and meaning. Emotional triggers and auspicious events. Be inclined to span possibilities and reactions. Beyond the single questions of what, why, where, when, how and ask this of many feelings.

Go beyond a single pin-hole focus, and welcome the shifting, fluid texture of near and far term goals. You don't need detail or enumeration, just the questioning sniff of association and instinct. Stir ideas, not separate but brought together. Ask yourself directly, "What are the feelings I woke up with?" Listen to the answer you hear now.

Your memory is the barest of bones. What you recall is always clothed in the suggestions of your imagination. This isn't just memory, it's everything as most of what you see, hear, taste, smell, and feel you make up. The senses are just triggers. Memory is a shell, and imagination the powder. The two parts of recollection.

Watching

Recall how it is as you wake up this morning, and imagine you are just waking up now. Recall an image from the night, last night, any night, or whatever comes in this moment.

Watch your thought. Examine it. Consider your emotion. Sit with your feelings. Don't think too much, see or feel what comes first to your mind. This is the first idea, and that's what we'll call it: the first idea.

If your two hands are not on your chest, put them there. With one hand's fingertips on your collarbone, slowly tap together on that bone: TAP... TAP... TAP... And in alternation tap the fingertips of your other hand on your sternum. Alternate, tap above, tap below, tap above, tap below. Tap in the cadence with my words at double-time with your heart beat: TAP, tap... TAP, tap... TAP, tap...

Just keep tapping gently and I will tell you when to stop. It's just a way of triggering emotions from your body so that you can see them, like shaking apples from a tree. I want you to be open without expectation, just to watch yourself from the perspective of a thought.

As you're tapping, look forward beyond your feeling, and this can be in any way you take it, and how you take it won't matter because all these meanings are related. Explore the "more" of it, and the less. What shakes in this tapping from beyond that feeling? And if nothing yet, then relax further into the tapping, relax into the night feeling, idea, or sensation like a shaking apple tree, and step beyond it to find a second feeling.

Create a word or image in that second step, and when it's clear, stop tapping. Let your hands just settle on your chest. Keep them there for the moment, as we're about to tap again.

What emerges as your second idea? Tell me what it is, an image, word, or recollection. Whisper it out loud... Say it again... Sit with it without censure, measure, rule, or overrule. Open to a wider view and see what ideas enter from the sides that you don't watch. Accept and amplify that feeling, release your mind and muscles to whatever is dragged in.

Steep yourself in that place, or image. A recollection of what was or might be. Place your hands back on your chest, if you have moved them to somewhere else, although in truth anywhere that feels resonant inside you will shake apples from the tree of thoughts.

Changing

You want to move beyond this second image to a third image or feeling, an opposite that's more or less. Tap again in alternation, one hand and then the other: TAP, tap... TAP, tap... TAP, tap...

Amplify your second thought by focus, and then attend to it's shadow. We're made of contradictions, so we always create opposites of any focus. Just sinking down to relax into feeling, emotion, or association. Looking for road signs and symbols, your own collage from costumes your have known.

Tell me the next word, the third word, image, vision, or idea that becomes present, sense, or sensation now open, time slow, gliding almost horizontal. What's that feel like? Who is your personality that says it? What is their motive? What is their landscape? What comes next in a flash or quiet presentation. Is it full, or is it empty?

In the learning process, what comes first comes from outside. Say it to me in a whisper. Whisper it with feeling, and watch it float like a balloon above the treetops... like spilt milk across the floor... water burbling under the bridge... a horse cantering out of the barn. What ideas and images wait in the wings, on the horizon, over the rainbow, to hang under the harvest moon?

Sit with this third idea and let your hands rest. We're done with tapping now. This little exploration of transitions, transitions that happen all the time, always transitions of one focus to the next. Relax and let your arms settle to your chest, your lap, the arms of the chair, or down beside you.

Where are you now? You've gone two associations from where you started with the night vision you began. What does this feeling now share with what started? Is this progress, regress, getting older, or younger? Have you moved forward, sideways, parallel or perpendicular? Might there be no difference between all of these, as they're all states of you? Is what you were, are, and are becoming really different, or is it just like the rising of a cake? A metamorphosis, or a ripening? Bigger or different, which would you prefer?

Frustration

Take this as an example. Today I wake up feeling frustrated and, lying in bed after waking, see one of my hands missing the first digits of two fingers. My hand is not cut or bleeding, all intact but parts missing. The injury was old and had healed long ago. I know I really have all my fingers, so I ask myself, "How could this happen?" I ask myself, "When did this happen?" As these thoughts and images fade, I feel my frustration between my fingers.

Before these images it's a foreboding. Afterwards it feels pre-existing. Taking more time to drift, I refocus and settle myself. I am carrying it already, not something in the making, and I am relieved. I draw a boundary to contain it, to enforce it.

Frustrations emerge variously in my day, and I project what would have been my frustration onto my images, which are only somewhat real, and my mood remains composed. I wonder, as I might not if I didn't have an image to separate from, if this injury is perhaps quite old, more of a shadow I cast, than something in the present.

Something Else

These images and textures, gossamer things -- don't call them dreams -- they are transitions. You have a finger on the pulse of this dreamstate always, you just don't have the time to focus on their lost themes facelifted into the present.

Let this under-dream process go on all day, at all times, in the background. The night dreams are only bigger because your censor mind's off-duty. Associations come thicker when your mind processes them bigger, and the drill sergeant of what's now at attention has gone away.

You know reverie is sometimes inappropriate, and others won't allow you to entrance them. "Wake up!" they'll urge when you are lost, almost scared you'll take them with you. Too obvious and they may see you as spacy, to rigid as heartless. You want to make some space behind your personality. Expand for yourself in a bigger flexibility.

Last year, in a restaurant I was in, someone just checked out. She sat at the table staring and unresponsive, lost somewhere no one could reach. The repeated attempts of her companion broke the the surface of social rhythm, as a fear spread through the room. Fear of a different reality, far from the mostly empty normal banter, and you could feel the disquiet settle over the room like a quiet snow.

An emergency was called, and some others came to attend. After a while she came back and, escorted by her companion, walked assisted out of doors. You can imagine the relief the strangers felt!

Just for a hair's breadth of attention, a moment gone too long. And just how fragile are you, or under orders you can't recall, that you're forbidden to call timeout when the muse knocks at your door?

Come Back to Normal

Inhale to gather your deeper feelings as you left them just before. Here is the deepest idea you found, two sets of tapping from the first. Three ideas connected, perhaps appearing unrelated. Take a breath and relax into that space that makes your background. Exhale those ideas back into your muscles and your joints.

Inhale back to the second idea, the level to which your first tapping brought you, if you can remember where that was. It was the idea in between where you started and first

peeking out the top. Take a breath from that space. Inhale... honor the idea as a transition, even if it's only held by travelers. Exhale... a platform on which only vagrants sleep.

And last, inhale yourself back to normal: present, whole and clear-headed. Back to cordial conversation and thoughts that don't lead too far, so you always have the space you need for attention to the details, and engage the alert response.

There is only so much you can do awake. We think it's where our life is, but it's only a time we use for filling. Coloring in last night's emotions, and collecting the new beach shells of the day.

Back now, energy in hands and feet, attention to outward motions, organized and pleasant. Breathing as normal. Complete, ready, ears attuned, and eyes open.

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