

2 - Having Dreams

“Dream content in general is continuous with waking conceptions and emotional preoccupations.”

- G. William Domhoff (2001). “A new neurocognitive theory of dreams.” *Dreaming*, 11(1).

We remember dreams when it’s useful and normally don’t because it isn’t. Following that logic, this chapter is less about remembering dreams and more about making memorable dreams useful.

Dreams

What might be more useful about having dreams you don’t remember than having dreams you do? The answer lies in our recollection of dream’s and in one of their primary aspects: our sense of powerlessness. Being aware and powerless generates anxiety, and it is that feature, I suggest, that allows dreams to better achieve their purpose of measuring, comparing, arranging, and integrating experience when we are absent. We don’t like anxiety, and the exploration of things that make us anxious is better done when our anxious selves are absent, which is when we’re in the dream state.

Imagine the anxiety you would feel witnessing a surgical operation on yourself. The sense of risk and helplessness would cause more trauma than good. A dream is a rearrangement of our psychic organs, and it proceeds more expeditiously without our being witness. Forcing dream recollection is akin to barging into the operating room. Most likely, the operation is concluded, deferred, or abruptly postponed.

Our efforts at recall or lucidity hardly affect our dreaming, as we’re dreaming for most of the night, and exerting our efforts to remember during a small part of it. As such, dream recall hardly invades but a small fraction of our dreams. And when we do remember our dreams, what we recall rarely encompasses more than a few minutes, sometimes no more than an instant. Chemically speaking, the brain chemicals necessary for remembering are in short supply during dreaming.

To better remember our dreams, stop trying to catch them and, instead, come into allegiance with them. Work to create a conscious dream-compatible state. It is the difference between capturing and communing with the wilderness; between experiencing raw nature and wishing to domesticate it. To authentically experience nature truly you must live in it and be in harmony with it. So too, with your dreams.

Anxiety

It is hard to sustain anxiety without an internal dialog. Verbal dialog is notably absent in most dreams. In these dreams we do not reflect on the reality of the dream we’re having. In dreamtime, we are hypnotized observers.

We normally think of dialog as something verbal, but there are other kinds. Visual dialogs occur in scenes without words, where situations are compared in contrast or pantomime. Kinesthetic dialogs occur where there is a play of the senses, as in tennis, sex, or in reflecting on the turning of the seasons. Dreams are rife with nonverbal dialogs. It seems we have exhausted verbal dialog in waking life. I suggest the first step in dream recollection is removing all of our dialog – verbal and nonverbal – and in that way dispelling the anxiety that could otherwise frighten us from the full experience.

A waking, nonverbal dialog is mindful or contemplative. We describe it as dreamy. Consider this as an approach to sleep and to lucidity in particular: to live a dreamier life. This leads to greater dream recollection, as you are in a state more consonant with dreams. Setting your intent to observe and participate, rather than record and analyze, helps you enter the flow of dreams. The purpose of the dream is in what's happening and what you feel about what's happening, not embedded in an analysis of feelings and events separate from the experience.

Ego

Ego is an irregular porous boundary of the conscious self whose purpose is self-protection. It acts first as a presentation, second as a filter, and third – when there is time to reflect – as a judge. Most of our “free will” is directed toward how we present ourselves; it's debatable how much control we have over the course of events. Much of the ego's filtering is automatic; a minority of its decisions are considered.

It might be fair to say that dreams patrol the ego, repairing, rebuilding, and replacing behaviors and attitudes to maintain consistency. Dreams create the landscape of our emotion. But the dream process does not have direct control. Dreams can make you anxious, ambivalent, or inclined, but your ego still has the authority to act.

In a contest of inner wills, emotion wins over intellect, but one's inner mind is a medieval court of confederation, intrigue, and collusion. The ego governs action, but the subconscious governs perception and emotion. There is always some conflict, though one hopes it is creative. Destructive inner conflicts can manifest psychosis. Approach dreams with respect for the powers at work.

Think of ego as a membrane between your outer and inner self with keyed portals for through-passage. Biological membranes have myriad portals responding to unusual keys. Just as we thought we understood membranes – and we think we understand our egos – it turns out we understand neither.

As the biochemistry of cells interact, employ, and allow passage through membranes under different circumstances, so the ego, normally seen by us as the shell of our personality, has unexpected passageways between the outside world and our inner consciousness. There are backdoors, trapdoors, towers, moats, drawbridges, cellars, and dungeons.

Dreams explore the boundary of ego making ego uncomfortable. Dreams don't welcome the

ego's interference, making lucidity potentially unhelpful, although it depends on which of your personalities is, or at what level of awareness you are lucid – an important point we'll explore later. There are ways for the ego to suggest dream content, and this is only natural. It can be done co-creatively in a way that is neither overbearing nor disruptive.

The spectrum of dream involvement begins with dream recollection – not to be dismissed as a minor affair – which we approach casually. Few know how to use dream recall for insight, but we will find much to make use of. Like first contact with an alien life-form, dream recollection is a Rosetta Stone for self-knowledge, far deeper than mindful self-contemplation. After all, we are talking about entering the land of visions.

Awareness

We're told we're conscious of 5% of our identity, and this is an overstatement. Like little boys bragging about their manhood, we are obsessed with thinking we're intelligent. I doubt we could even be aware of any more than a microscopic part of ourselves, but that may be irrelevant. What is relevant is the positive change we can foster in ourselves by becoming more aware of our ego's reality-filtering process.

The first step to enlarging awareness is to become comfortable in altered states. Forget the childish notion of linear lucidity, of there being a "more" and a "less." Focus instead on alternative forms of lucidity: what one is lucid of, and who is lucid, and how it is sustained. It is a common psychedelic experience to feel oneself lucid only to repeatedly have the bottom fall out and find yourself at another "level". Being lucid is a relative experience.

Focus on being present. Curtail the dialog. Dispense with the dichotomy. Aim to be an appreciated and well-behaved guest. Consider your dream as having the power to allow you to become lucid, rather than your having the power to awaken yourself in your dreams.

You will often be encouraged, in lucid dream tutorials, to get into the habit of testing your reality while awake and to let this habit of waking life bleed into your experience while dreaming, so testing is a normal thing you do. But real lucidity is not about waking up in dreams. Your subconscious will not accept this habit, if your ego's goal is self-entertainment. Reality testing will become habit only as a participatory process not an autocratic one. Aim to be an artist.

In our normal state, we distinguish ourselves from others and move to improve our position. In contrast, becoming more aware is a process of recognizing less difference, more similarity, and becoming more involved with what's around us. In the external world, we seek protection and advantage; in the internal world, risks and gains are different. In our internal world, advantage exists in relationships and understanding, not material things. Becoming mindful in the internal world involves courage and patience. We're looking for keys to the portals in the membrane of ego to open a passage to process and change.

Human consciousness is like dream recollection. It has been suggested that non-human consciousness is like our dream state, as it is without recollection or lucidity. That is to say, an animal's waking experience of reality is like our experience in dreams: everything is

unquestionably real, everything is emotionally strong. Lucidity, and by association recollection, are highly organized processes within the prefrontal cortex – a process not in evidence when one is not lucid, in dreams, or otherwise.

The consciousness of animals with a cerebral cortex but lacking a prefrontal cortex – which are non-primate mammals which excludes birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians, and simpler classes for whom the discussion is more complex – is like our dream state. We can conjecture these non-primate mammals experience states of present awareness without ego, analysis, or a sense of past, and future. This is a state lacking both reflective and projective self, as well as lacking a sense of environmental control. Just to be clear: we're making a statement about the consciousnesses of primates and some non-primates – the ones with and the ones without a prefrontal cortex. I'm not saying anything about the consciousness of the other non-primates.

Human subjects with a propensity for lucid dreaming have a larger frontopolar cortex than humans subjects who don't. The frontopolar prefrontal cortex (Brodmann's area 10) is the frontmost area of the brain. It seems to contain the human brain's most advanced features, as it's twice as large, relative to the size of the whole brain, as similar areas found in other primates. Having the presence to explore one's dreams, either during or after the fact, is likely unique to primates. More than that, it appears to be something we are still in the process of evolving.

Clarity

To continue the parallel to waking life, self-reflection and stability are critical to lucid dreaming. Self-reflection is focused measured awareness of the state of things. Stability is maintaining that state and letting distractions pass.

Having clarity doesn't necessarily entail lucidity, if lucidity is defined as taking control of the dream. That is not the target. We're aiming for insight and – as you know or may soon learn – excessive control is not insightful. Exerting less force often results in a more positive outcome. Yet, hands-off does not mean disconnected or uninvolved. The actions that yield the most positive results are felt, engaged, and intentional. To achieve this, one must develop and maintain clarity.

Developing clarity as a habit results in greater perspicuity and control in waking life, though that may not have been the original motivation. Once this habit is ingrained – so the theory goes – it will carry into your dreams. The result will not be greater control, but a more positive outcome within the existing limits of one's control.

Collaboration

In *Inner Work, Using Dreams and Active Imagination for Personal Growth*, Robert Johnson lists four steps to achieve revelation through dreams:

- 1 - Associating dream elements with your waking experience
- 2 - Connecting dream elements with aspects of yourself
- 3 - Translating the dream's message into reflections on your life
- 4 - Taking action to set in memory the significance you feel

If you do these things, or some variation of them, you will better remember your dreams, because you are facilitating your dreams. If you don't do these things, then your relationship with your dreams will remain incidental, and your dreams will lose interest in you.

In my efforts at lucidity I engage in these steps, and this seems to match the degree I am lucid in dreams. I believe this is generally true: lucidity – like breathing – is not a gift but an obligation, and the degree to which you participate is measured by the degree to which you play a role. And like breathing, the more you are willing to learn from the process, the more the process will reveal to you; and because of this, the more power and autonomy you will be accorded.

Guidance

An essential difference between inner and outer journeying is the inner journey's lack of the familiar. Every inner journey approaches the unfamiliar, as even the simplest dream illustrates.

If we are to be constructively aware and involved, we need direction over terrain that's unfamiliar and deeply personal, social, moral, historical, and ancestral. We need guidance. Call it what you will: intuition, higher wisdom, ancestors, power animals, or divine assistance.

You cannot get this from someone outside of yourself. No one can give it to you. No one can substitute for it. How do you get it? Through a simple and universal exercise. Will you get it? Not always. You need to know what you're asking for, and you need to be prepared. The following hypnotic session provides preparation and opportunity for this encounter.

Hypnotic session

Magic Hands

In the book *Dreaming with the Wheel*, Marlise Wabun Wind says:

“In a time so long ago, most people forget it ever existed, we all lived in the dreamtime. It did not matter whether we were awake or asleep... We could fly, we could talk to animals... We could go to the gods; we could part the waters. We could love wholly and completely... We lived within the web of life. With our eyes open, we could see and feel as much beauty as most people only feel today when they shut their eyes in sleep.

“Then time passed. With its passage, change occurred. We began to realize we were singular... We began to think. Our thoughts drove even more distance between us, and we drew apart in a way we never had before. We started to categorize, to measure... We lost our ability to speak to the animals... We could no longer feel the plants, or the minerals, or the elementals... Thoughts were different from the communications we had before... Our unity was never quite the same.

“One day a young one did something with her words that no one had ever done before... She used them to tell others about her dream. She said, ‘Just close your eyes for a moment and remember.’ And they did... They remembered, and they spoke. As they spoke, they wove that other reality into the reality that had become their everyday life. Come now and allow this circle to help you remember.”

On the one hand, we knew what it was like to love wholly and completely, on the other hand, we think in words that keep us estranged. On the one hand, we could once recall deeper, older connections all around us. On the other hand, we began to awake to a future of our own construction that holds only what we have constructed. One hand sees inside and brings together, the other hand sees outside and sets things apart.

Now open your eyes and hold your hands out in front of you with the palms down... Think of the difference between your two hands, which we would otherwise think of as symmetric. There are small differences. The bend in your forearms, the angles of your wrists, the cant of hands, and the way you hold your fingers.

Can you feel the temperature in your hands? What is the extent of your sensations of temperature? Does one hand feel warmer and the other cooler... or is it the other way around? Move your palms. How does that affect the temperature of your hands?

Turn your hands over, palms up. Feel the temperature on the backs of your hands and on the palms of your hands? Which side feels warmer, the tops or the bottoms?

Consider the weight of each hand. Maybe one arm is stronger, so the hand on the stronger side feels lighter. Can you feel the weight of your two separate hands? Does one feel lighter than the other? Which hand is the lighter hand and which is the heavier?

Here’s a psychological question, a question you might have to answer intuitively as much as by thinking... If you could imagine that one of your hands represented your child self and the other your grownup self... which one is more like the child, and which is more like the adult? What do you think about that?

Now, raise your hands so that the palms are facing you, at the width of your shoulders, palms at eye level. Look closely at the palms of your two hands, the shadows, shapes, textures, and topology of each palm. Look at them as if you were looking at them for the first time in your life. You feel a certain detachment from your hands, comparing them in an unusual fashion, looking at them in an unusual way.

And there is a certain strangeness in these questions and these examinations. A heaviness in their repetition that makes you feel relieved in letting your eyes relax. Allow your eyes to feel heavy and, with your hands still up in front of you, close your eyes, keeping a picture of your hands in your mind’s eye, aware of their location in space.

Now I’d like you to consider the question of how you might remember a deeper connection with

the world, and sense a deeper connection with the world... in your dreams. And consider which one of those hands is going to begin... really slowly now... to find its way onto your lap.

Consider actions you've taken, experiences you've had, dreams, memories, moods, or reflections you've had a deeper connection with when... your mind is open, and your thoughts extend to your whole awareness. And the intuition you have in knowing where to look and how to see things.

All of the connection you feel towards your inner self... the sense of allegiance and support... as if you were a team of different voices and visions, telepathically connected in thought, with respect and support... for the issues and insights of each part of yourself... reviewing and revealing to you, in sleep and dreams, the rhythm of things, and how they connect together.

As this hand continues to sink, what beliefs do you have about making a deeper connection? How has this affected you... through time, and how might it affect you in the future, and what you can do about deepening your connection. This one hand continues moving down to settle on your lap.

Let this hand relax comfortably in your lap, as you release whatever tension and sensation in the arm that held it up. Fully relaxed now, comfortable and limp, like a cat purring, resting, and pleased.

Allow the idea to enter into your other hand, the image, and the energy of how you might learn from, and act from the insight and wisdom that forms in dreams, in the dreamtime, in the messages from dreams... coming as insight, reflection, and clarity in your waking life.

And this other hand, now, slowly... very slowly... starts to settle down toward your lap. Be open to hear, and to speak with, in day or night-time dreams, images of people, and energies... The dreamtime is an ever-present world... real or imagined, felt or thought, seen or sensed, from the present, the past, or from nowhere at all.

As this other hand settles down toward your lap, resting now comfortably in your lap, recall someone from your childhood, a family member, a friend, or even an animal that gave you strength, meaning, and resolve. Someone who gave you confidence and comfort, who allowed you to play in safety. Imagine a presence of comfort, grounded in deep feeling, a feeling that gives you guidance.

See yourself now in a wild field, outside a wild wood, under an evening sunset sky, clouds tinged like rainbows. The woods filled with animals, and you can see them hidden – using your mind's eye. Feel the wind beneath your arms, beneath your skirts, and be lighter. So light that the breeze lifts you, first off the ground, and then, lifted by a dust-devil, raised to the tree tops to see the woods from above.

Ask your mind, in your inner vision, who might be your guide and comfort for inner journeys. What image first comes to you? Who made you feel or in what place did you feel deeply yourself when you were very young? Maybe it's a time or place, and return there, and look around and

see who is nearby. Be accepting, as in a dream, and let things come in any form, animate or inanimate, personal or impersonal, close, distant, real, or imagined.

Take this image of whomever, or whatever has come, and reflect on who was their guidance and who supported them. Now you must imagine, for sure, so let it form as an image assembled from feelings and fantasies: grandparents, ancestors, spirit animals, distant places, and peaceful moments.

See yourself now, here, in today's life, sensing what's around you, who's around you, and what's happening. Feel the wind beneath your arms and feel lighter to lift off the ground and to inject the free will to see beyond the walls of what you take for granted... the room, the building, city or town, toward the distant hills and quiet rivers... to have deeper understanding and a deeper connection with the world. And do this in waking life; a reasonable habit to acquire whatever sense of real you find or make for yourself.

Bringing yourself back slowly, but not altogether, leave parts of you in those cracks of deeper connection. Don't fail to remember the reality of what you imagine you can do. Remember the things you might think you cannot do that are only pictures of things you have not yet done but could, some way, some other way now, or as soon as you're ready to start. Solutions perhaps, but intuition by necessity. And what you dream you can, should, or might do is a form of insight with guidance. Things to dream up and to conjure or call when you next recognize that your dreams ask for your participation, for you to come in, and your guide to come with you.

When you're ready take a breath... inhale... exhale. Sense the stretch of your skin and the air around you. When you're ready, but not too quickly, regain your sense of direction, sense of balance, sense of time. Being ready to open your eyes. Counting to three: one... two... three. Loosely open your eyes... to be back... here... in this place.

“Dreaming is an unknown territory to many people. Historically, the dreamtime was as important to people as the waking hours. One of the reasons for the imbalance on the earth today is that so many people can't even remember, let alone work with, the material that comes to them in their dreams.”

- Sun Bear, Wabun Wind, and Shawnodese, from *Dreaming with the Wheel*.

