



Dreams and Foggy Thinking

To become more reflective and self-aware, become “dream-minded.”

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“I only know that I know nothing.”

— Socrates

Recall

The keys to dream recall are gaining awareness of the dream while the dream is occurring, and applying a sufficiently quiet level of awareness so that your retrieval of the dream is not derailed by your thoughts. I want to focus on the second of these: learning to think quietly.

People think differently. Obviously, they think about different things, but, even so, the way they process thoughts is different. If you consider all the different ways one can come up with uttering a given

sentence, then you can appreciate how many different trains of thought can arrive at the same destination.

Thoughts fill our minds like groundwater seeping into a well. Some wells are spring-fed and others are fed by a myriad of small cracks in the bedrock. For some of us, and on some occasions, thoughts rush in unbidden and fully-formed. At other times we draw a blank, and then, after a while, we come to conclusions.

Dreams are a way of thinking and, while different people have different dreams, all dreams share a way of thinking that is significantly different from that of our conscious mind.



Stream of Consciousness

This is a misnomer; it should be referred to as “stream of subconsciousness.” Our unbidden thoughts do not come from our conscious thinking, but from somewhere else. They “arise” into consciousness, but they are certainly not flowing along the surface like a stream—it’s subterranean.

When we review a dream, it seems to flow into our consciousness, but it flows from thin air. We are not intentionally forming ideas nor are we encouraging any idea in particular; they just seep out, or rush out. We have little role in writing the plot and, as our dramas proceed, we find ourselves clothed in a seemingly random set of ideas and images as if we put on whatever came out of the dryer.

This is how we dream, and we don't think as we dream, but there are similarities. In thinking consciously, we decide on our actions and directions, and we keep our thoughts and actions going in a straight line, logically speaking. But are we really in the driver's seat, or are we just being led by the road we're on?

If you scrutinize your thought process, you'll admit that you don't make a lot of life-changing decisions. Most of your decisions are navigations around immediate obstacles. Your long-term goals and strategies have been handed to you as a kind of programmed thinking, as if someone hypnotized you, put thoughts in your mind, and told you that they were yours.

Clearly, your mind is not going to accept just any old thoughts, and in hypnotherapy we say, "You can't get someone to do something that is against their nature." The suggestions that hypnotherapists give people are small weights that tip an otherwise indecisive course of action. And we're choosing between near equal alternatives all the time; even big decisions often boil down to little more than which of our preconceived objectives we're going to pursue first.

Dreams are a window in the process of considering alternatives. Most of these are emotional considerations rather than rational deductions. They are considerations based on memories and reflexes that we rationally justify after the fact. And in order to explore these memories and reflexes we must engage them, we must simulate or live through them. This is how we come to emotional conclusions. This is what dreams are, and we can learn to navigate closer or farther away from the wellspring of our thoughts, if we try.

Daydreams

The closer we get to the casting of our attitudes, the more liquid becomes the metal of our thoughts. If you're not going to analyze every thought, feeling, memory, and emotion, then how are you going to reach a comfortable conclusion? You must be doing this, but where is it happening and what does it look like? It's happening in your dreams, and it's a messy process.

Daydreams are usually the closest we get to dream thinking with our conscious minds, but daydreams have their own range of possibilities. If we daydream in an authentic dream fashion, then we'll let ideas emerge without judgment or direction—we'll just let them assemble without stopping them to ask questions.

You can practice daydreaming. You can become more adept and thinking in a deeply dreamlike way. That means thinking without putting thoughts together, without judging, encouraging, or cleaning up after them—being open to all thoughts and holding on to none.



The better you are at doing this, the better you will be at remembering dreams, because you will be using your mind in the same fashion while awake as while dreaming. Just as you must match the speed of a moving vehicle in order to jump aboard, so, too, you must synchronize the focus of your mind with that of the dream you wish to remember.

Practice free-form thinking in a daze. This will be easier for people who are more broadly focused, which means less precise in thinking. To recall dreams better, practice thinking broadly, metaphorically, creatively, and nonsensically.

The morning period when you're waking up is called the "hypnopompic period." This is the time between waking and getting up. We typically rush this period, and we should not. It is a unique period in which our minds are naturally loose and imprecise. Our personalities are more malleable and we tend to be more receptive. This is also the time during which we're most likely to remember our dreams.

Cultivate your thoughts during this time to better remember dreams. Wake up slowly, making sure you have plenty of time to work with whatever dream bits you can recall. Even if you set an alarm for the purpose of arousing yourself during dreams, settle into an open-minded meditation that lets thoughts blow in and out of your mind.

Hearing Voices

Develop the skill of "abstract self-expression," like that expressionist school of painting. Those painters of the 1950s, like Jackson Pollock, organized chaos into patterns that were just barely discernible to people who were expecting a still-life. Abstract expressionism is the juxtaposing of thoughts and images in suggestive ways, letting emotions emerge. There is no goal or measure here. You are not

better for it, nor can you measure some results as better than others. It's a listening skill of picking out threads of meaning from a chaos of sounds.

Dreams are a chaos of sound of this kind. They are drip paintings or collages of visual, emotional, or conceptual material. More important, dreams are usually sparse. Be more open to wider, thinner dreams, with less obvious form and less clear connections, and you'll be better prepared to follow their tracks. And while you will perceive ideas in their raw and uncooked formlessness, you will also be on hand to witness and, with skill, to play a role in the origin of your ideas.

Become "dream-minded" by spending time in stream-of-consciousness contemplation before going to sleep and after waking up. You will become more reflective and self-aware, and it will likely result in your remembering more of your dreams.

“A busy mind is full of thoughts, a blissful mind is full of ideas...
a conclusive mind cannot be a creative mind.”

— Amit Kalantri



Stream of consciousness.

By Lincoln Stoller, PhD, CHt, <https://www.mindstrengthbalance.com>

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