



Ariadne Abandoned by Theseus slumbers beneath the winged Hypnos.

Collaborative Dreaming

Dreamwork will have a greater impact on relationships than talking.

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“If a little dreaming is dangerous, the cure for it is not to dream less, but to dream more, to dream all the time.”— Marcel Proust

Thinking Differently

Dreams involve a different way of thinking. We don't get far by applying conscious thinking, which is linear, causal, and rational, to the holistic presentation that dreams employ.

Because dreams are so different, it serves little purpose for us to remember them, but we can benefit from them if we think differently. First, dreams don't have a goal, they are a process. And second, this process does not have meaning, it's an exploration of meaning. Dreams are abstract arrangements of associations looking for meaningful combinations.

Despite our not remembering dreams as messages or parables, they are still serving their purpose, which is to solidify our memories and attitudes. We forget the dreams, but not their result. And by forgetting them we are less confused.

Dreams As Art

Dreams are a series of stories without a plot. Like visual art, they conjure associations without making statements. These associations are the foundations that support your attitudes and decisions. Revisiting them is like walking through a museum containing the work of strangely familiar artists.

What we remember is a series of scenes from a phantasmagorical journey. We have to reassemble the journey from these vignettes without explanation. In a psychological sense this journey is more real than waking life because all of its locations are meaningful. There are no irrelevant details in our dreams.

The key to making greater use of dreams lies in finding more associations in them. Imagine that the people who planned this trip were smarter than you are. I don't mean they're more analytical. In fact, they're less analytical. They don't need explanations, they are more sensitive.

All of what appears in your dreams—all the places, people, and details—are fabricated. The point of dreams is not to craft a story line, but to explore the conclusions of all the storylines suggested by life at the moment.

A dream well remembered consists of a collection of abstract scenes. Every night you make up dozens of these. You would be hard pressed to come up with one or two in your conscious, waking state, but it is by creating and reflecting on these stories that your subconscious mind “thinks.”

Remembering Dreams

You have one to two hours of vivid dreams each night, as well as several more hours of less visual dreams. You will remember dreams when you wake up when or before they are finished.

The vivid dreams occur at the end of a normal night of sleep. The less vivid dreams usually occur during the beginning and middle of the night, but not always. The less vivid dreams provide less recognizable material.

Nightmares and repetitive dreams are of a different sort. They are issues that your subconscious mind has not resolved. In those cases, you are being called to be more engaged.

Normal dreams, the kind you typically won't remember, can be recalled by adopting an altered perspective, having the intention, getting sufficient sleep, and using some memory techniques. I'm now finishing writing a book on how to use dreams for guidance and clarity.

A book I previously published, called *Becoming Lucid*, is about different awake and asleep states and lucid dreaming. Simply recalling your dreams involves some of these skills, but it's easier and it's not as disruptive to the dream.

Intention

One step in remembering dreams is to want to. It's that simple. As you're falling asleep, remind yourself of this. You may also think of what you would like to dream about, but it's unlikely that you will. Still, thinking about what's important to you is a step in the right direction.

I would suggest you think about pleasant things. You don't need to remind yourself of unpleasant things, as they will appear as necessary regardless of your intentions. Most likely, your dreams will be the combination of what's meaningful to you plus what recent events have set you thinking about. Not the events, but your thoughts about them. Appropriate topics will seem to click into place in your conscious mind.

You will awake at the tail end of your morning dreams when you get enough sleep. Many people don't. I have a different book, *The Path to Sleep*, that addresses insomnia. Sufficient sleep is essential for health and it makes dreamwork much easier.

Notes

Another step in remembering dreams is taking notes. A few notes, jotted down legibly during the night, can bring back large portions of a dream, and ruminating on these parts often brings back others. You must make some notes because without some starting point the whole fabric of the dream dissolves.

To take notes, have a light by your bed that's positioned behind you and easy to reach, and a notebook and pen by your bedside. It's enough to clearly state the start of each scene as that's sufficient to remember the rest. But dream scenes don't develop logically, so it's easy to drop an episode.

If you're waking up during the night, resist the temptation to go into detail as that will make it harder to fall back to sleep. If you're waking up at the end of the night, move only a little upon waking and give yourself 15 minutes to recall your dreams.

Moving, planning, or thinking about the coming day are like a hurricane to the fallen leaves of dreams. Once you get up, physically or mentally, the memories of your dreams are blown away.

A Dream's Meaning

There is none, but there is perception, and there is meaning in the parts. The images are evocative and the combinations are suggestive, but these is no one message encoded in the drama, there are many.

Dreams are perceptive and perception is a form of awareness, but this is not meaning, as meaning is an intellectual creation. Dreams may reflect something you perceive but are not consciously aware of. Dreams provide indications, which is different from meanings.

This is recognition, not interpretation. Dismiss anything you've heard about dream interpretation as these are thoughts after the fact. The dream has no more meaning than a voyage through memories and associations, but these may include things you are not aware of.

A dream may reflect an illness or imbalance in your system. This could be a fear or a sensation. If it's a sensation, then it might seem premonitory though it is actually a presentation of sensations in the present.

Dreaming you have an illness may be a true perception of what exists but you are presently unaware of. In contrast, dreaming of mechanical failure of a car or airplane on an upcoming trip is a presentation of your current attitude. In this case, the attitude is real and present while the premonition is unreal and misunderstood.

The meaning you may look for and find is not in the dream, but in what the dream means to you now. You can find more meaning in your dream's associations if you remember more of the details and are less analytical in trying to put them together.

A dream is a jigsaw puzzle of pieces that don't make one picture and don't fit together. Each scene recalls its own associations, and there will be different associations between different scenes.

There are missing associations, the scenes that don't connect or don't make sense. These are elements that lead to new attitudes or ideas, they may be confusing, or they may be beyond your current ability to understand. Most likely, what's missing combines all of these. We could say the same of most opportunities.

Collaboration

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Just as dreams need to be approached without judgment, collaboration does too. Successful collaboration certainly requires a context that's relevant and intentions that are in alliance. There are plenty of unattractive collaborations that we work to avoid, but even the best collaborations involve conflicting elements.

Start by defining what collaboration is possible. I have two ex-wives and their collaboration is limited or obsolete. That's not to say these relationships are useless or irrelevant, they're just not pleasant or productive. Given the inherent difficulty of dreamwork, I suggest you look for pleasant and productive collaborations.

A collaboration in dreamwork will require both parties to engage in their own dreamwork and then, with something in hand, to see how the separate stories can be combined. Your goal is to both gain

additional feedback into your dreams, as is offered by someone who knows you and whom you can trust, and also to find new insight into inscrutable dream associations.

Place yourselves back-to-back, as it were, and share your separate dreams. If this is done without censorship it will result in judgments and reactions. It can also be done with some curatorial skill, collecting similar ideas.

Since we're aiming for similar associations, it might help to collaborate before going to sleep. Even if we cannot plant the ideas that bloom in our dreams, we can coordinate our intentions or, as might be equally useful, our conflicts and concerns.

Less Certainty, More Material

Being nonjudgmental is important when exploring one's own dreams and it's extremely important when exploring another person's. Just as you cannot be certain of your own dreams, you have even less insight into the dreams of another person.

What you do offer is waking state insights and subconscious resonances. You know how you're affected by another person's dreams, but you have no business projecting your feelings on them.

In some cases, another person's dreams will trigger you. If infidelity is an issue, then you'll have to understand that dreams pay little heed to boundaries and do not express anyone's intentions.

Nevertheless, we have boundaries and we have issues and these should be made clear so that they can be placed in context.

Most likely, you should censor your dreams at the start, at least until you know how well your partner understands you and themselves. You cannot take dreams at face value and you cannot take them personally.

Conflict

Dreams will not respect your personal boundaries and they certainly will not respect those of another person. This is what makes collaborative dreamwork valuable. It enables you to cross boundaries that you otherwise would not cross.

If you have the patience and fortitude to deal with these issues, then this is how you make progress. If you don't have the patience or fortitude, you can rest assured that these issues will come up anyway, maybe when you're more prepared but probably not.

Collaborative dreaming gives you the opportunity to go farther and faster than you would consciously feel comfortable. To the extent that you can be fully open about your dreams, it will take you into territory that talk therapy will not reach.

We say that the therapeutic alliance is at the core of progress in resolving conflict, but fully unleashed dreams respect no boundaries. This is why it's all the more important to establish your alliance at the

start. This means more than just being empathetic, it means accepting negative projections and insensitive attitudes for the purpose of amplifying differences and inviting support.

Therapeutic Support

Collaborative dreamwork is made easier with the help of a therapist, in much the same way that a boxing match might need a referee. Maybe there will be no conflict, in which case the therapist should just keep quiet, but conflicts are very much the point. You can't resolve them until you bring them to light.

I'd like to think that a therapist is unnecessary. The nature of dreamwork essentially creates its own additional voices in the form of the memories and associations the dreams evoke. Just as these emotionally sensitive voices can be thought of as more intelligent than your analytical self, they can also be more collaborative than the analytical you.

Given how direct dreams can be, how important are the topics they bring up, and how difficult dreamwork is from the start, I don't think collaborative dreamwork poses much risk to a relationship. It can and should bring differences to light, but if you're uncomfortable dealing with these conflicts using dreams, then you probably won't share them. You either won't feel compelled to share these dreams or you won't remember them.

Opportunity

Crisis may equal opportunity, but opportunity doesn't require crisis. The opportunity collaborative dreamwork offers is transcendental. It's important that you understand this, and many people do not.

I often ask the clients I work with to tell me what love is for them. This is somewhat of a trick question because love means so many things that it is difficult to describe. The trick is that authentic love defies description. It's a state of mind and emotion that borders on an obsession. Once deep love has been established it roots it's hard to dislodge.

Dreams go right to emotion. As such, they can take you to levels of feeling you'll never reach by talking. I feel relationship counseling is useless in as much as it's based on talking. You cannot talk your way to love, commitment, or meaning, but you can dream your way there.

The great opportunity in collaborative dreamwork is that you can reach places that are inexpressible. As with any powerful tool, this comes with risk. We'd like to say that this can do no harm, but I'm sure it can, I just don't know what.

I believe collaborative dreamwork can be more powerful than talk therapy. It is essentially a way to explore altered states, similar to the use of psychedelics but also similar to trauma.

There is good and bad trauma and we'd like to think that we can choose. It seems that some bad traumas are unavoidable, like death, and that we strive to create good trauma. If so, then we'll get

better with practice. Altered state work offers this practice, and collaborative dreamwork is another way to this.