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# Introduction

Greetings! As a dream specialist, I wanted to acquaint my clients, students, and fellow dreamers with what I think are the most important “basics” in the field, including some spiritually and therapeutically related understandings which are often overlooked. For those who want to read more, well-known references are provided. Whenever I think my own views differ from that of most other dreamworkers, I say so.

Although I have a thorough respect for the empirical studies which have helped us understand them, I believe the metaphysical dimension of dreams is more significant. They represent more profound, spiritual levels of communication shared by all human beings—deeper than this or that culture, deeper than linguistic conditioning, deeper than individual personalities and agendas—and essential for everyone getting along on the planet. I hope this booklet helps and encourages you to better record and understand your dreams, and therefore, to get in touch with more profound aspects of who you really are.

DBL  
Flourtown, PA November 2017



## 1. WHAT ARE NIGHTTIME DREAMS?

Dreams are perceptual events that occur while we are asleep. They usually make little sense because their content is mostly symbolic. They have definite psychobiological functions, and also reflect our spiritual nature. My own definition of them is: *Internal perceptual episodes from our ordinary psychic and spiritual faculties.*

Some people have extraordinary gifts, such as clairvoyance; but everybody dreams, even if we can't always remember them.

## 2. WHY DO WE DREAM? WHAT PURPOSES DO THEY SERVE?

There are biological theories, cognitive theories, psychodynamic theories and spiritual theories. Dreams have definite CNS/brain maintenance functions whose nature is not entirely understood. Studies long ago demonstrated that if people are not allowed to dream, they more or less fall apart within a couple of weeks and lose their ability to function. After those experiments ended, the people involved experienced a compensatory “rebound” effect in which they dreamed a lot more than usual for a while. From this, we can surmise

that the spiritual dimension of who we are—our “dream body”—seems to require it’s own period of activity during the 24-hour day, just like our physical body does.<sup>1</sup>

Of course dreams are also important for what they offer our personal and spiritual growth (which I think are the same thing). Most all experienced dreamworkers agree—and it has been people’s experience all over the world as well—that dreams represent our Higher Self not only trying to *tell* us specific important things, but also, through images and feelings, providing the key to resolving difficult emotional issues relating to past traumas as well. This booklet discusses the *meaning* aspect of dreams more than the feeling aspect, since the latter is more experiential and is best accessed through individual therapy. The best dreamwork, however, utilizes both at the same time.

As human beings, we all have an inborn capacity for spiritual direction—what I call our *dreamsight*. The potential knowledge that dreams gather is “on offer” all the time. All we have to do is be interested.

### **3. YOU SAY THAT DREAM SYMBOL LANGUAGE IS “UNIVERSAL.” CAN YOU PROVIDE AN EXAMPLE?**

Not really. You can’t perceive such a symbol in and of itself. You can only see manifested instances of them, when they show up in dreams.

For example, take the word “father.” That term has many different things associated with it: a) a male human being or other animal, b) “elders” with whom we associate wisdom and perspective, c) some religious clergy, d) God or some masculine spiritual entity, and e) all the general things usually associated with fathers: work, masculinity, supervision, protection, etc.

On top of that, however, are the infinitely varied experiences which define “father” for the individual dreamer who was raised by one: loving, strict, compassionate, abusive, hardworking, alcoholic, or what have you. As a result, everyone’s perception of “father” is at least slightly different.

From all this we can see how culture, subculture, community, family, era, specific past experiences as well as the dreamer’s current issues and problems all go into shaping how God/Self chooses to represent “father” to the dreamer, if that symbol is appropriate for the message(s) being communicated.

In basic dream theory, all important objects in the universe exist as *archetypes* in higher reality. “Father” is one example.

### **4. ARE DREAMS REALLY PSYCHIC?**

There are different perspectives on this. Some Jungians, for example, would probably say, mostly not: many future events, for example, can be reliably predicted based on accumulating, subconscious knowledge that we pick up unawares. For those Jungians, dreams often project scenarios that would logically manifest at some point in the future.

But as most any experienced dreamworker knows, there are innumerable instances of communication in dreams concerning things that the dreamer could not possibly have known about. These include unexpected deaths of people at a distance but known to the dreamer, rescue scenarios in which dreamers are notified of people in trouble, or (most commonly), inconsequential things such as the model and color of a friend’s new car which he shows you two days after you dream of it. Such experiences are legion—when they happen repeatedly, dreamers become convinced that we all have psychic faculties which regularly access higher-dimensional knowledge, even if it is usually clothed in symbolism which few of us are interested in.

### **5. HOW DO DREAMS GET THEIR INFORMATION?**

Unlike our brains, our thoughts and feelings don’t just exist inside our heads. They occupy higher dimensions, often across space and time. These mental phenomena comprise our “auras,” which don’t just extend six or eight feet out from our bodies. Anyone or anything whatsoever that we have some sort of mental connection with—or will have a mental connection with when we become aware of it—are part of our “extended auras,” so to speak. And these auras are always interacting. Our psychic faculties pick up this information, and automatically formulate dreams in order to indicate ways to greater possible harmony and fulfillment.<sup>2</sup>

(“How well” all this works seems to depend on our level of interest in deeper aspects of spirituality. Who are we really? Are we really just especially intelligent animals who eat, sleep, reproduce, bring home the bacon, and do our best enjoy ourselves? If so, we’re

just like any other species. But mystical spirituality says: focus more on the things that make us unique as a species: our capacity for meaningful joy, love, charity, enlightenment, ethical harmony with nature and the brotherhood and sisterhood of humankind. That is what the Dream Source wants to help us move towards.)

## **6. WHAT DO WE DREAM ABOUT MOST OF THE TIME? ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF DREAMS?**

Survey studies show that for most of us most of the time, dreams are about mundane things that more or less mirror what's going on in our daily lives ("day residue"). The majority of the time, there is also something in their content (for example, not being able to control a car) that is at least mildly difficult or troublesome for the dreamer.<sup>3</sup>

Although there are formal and technical classification schemes in the field, most dreamworkers use the general vocabulary out there by which different types or major motifs are known (chase, falling, visitation, prophetic, etc.) At the most basic level, perhaps we can distinguish between *ordinary* or *regular* dreams, *big* dreams that are especially significant for the dreamer, and *negligible* dreams which are perhaps too vague or indistinct to bother thinking about.

## **7. WHAT ARE SOME COMMON DREAMS, AND WHAT DO THEY SIGNIFY?**

Many dreams simply reflect normal psychological tensions and desires that most of us experience in daily life. Dreams involving being chased (ignoring an issue or responsibility), falling (in over your head), being undressed (feeling insecure and defensive), losing your teeth (frustration over waning capacities), meeting a celebrity (connecting with a positive aspect of yourself), driving a car recklessly (being out of control), flunking a test (feeling incompetent about something), being pregnant (a new idea or project germinating within yourself), dying (part of yourself incapacitated, or an impending rebirth of transformed feelings and attitudes)—all these and similar things are normal themes of life to which most of us are subject, at one time or another.

The words in the parentheses above are meant to only suggest what these symbols and motifs are typically about—the specifics will vary with the individual. The main message is usually: we don't *need*

to feel as incompetent, insecure, or frustrated; we don't *need* to be as anxious, out of control, or whatever. There are things we can do to improve those things and be happier.

## **8. CAN DREAMS HELP ME WITH MY HEALTH, CAREER AND LOVE LIFE?**

Yes. Quite often they offer practical advice for addressing or better understanding the various issues in our lives. Dreams meet us where we are at, in the context of the particular life we are leading. They will reflect whatever incremental understanding we need in order to take the next step toward greater fulfillment and harmony—if we care enough to look.

It is easy enough to understand how and why dreams work in this general sense. Everyone *acts upon* the universe in a certain way, by thinking and doing all the things we do. As a result of that, in a certain sense we are always *saying things* to God/Self. The way we live our life poses questions to the universe. Dreams are simply part of the way the universe "answers," or *reacts back* upon us. Therefore, the only way we can get dreams to help us with our various issues is basically to care more about what we do and think in waking life—and to pay attention to our dreams. Much has been written on how to do all this.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, I want to emphasize here that, as I understand it, God/Self doesn't spoon-feed us anything. We have to do our part if we wish to understand the information we are always being offered by our dream faculties.

## **9. WHICH DREAMS ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT?**

Nightmares and recurring dreams are the ones to heed the most. They are often emotionally charged and therefore offer the best opportunities for resolving long-standing issues which may have hobbled the dreamer's potential enjoyment of life.

The first thing to understand here is that there is not really any such thing as a "bad dream." Most dreamworkers believe that the only reason nightmares are unpleasant is to *get our attention*, often concerning some issue that we've been doing our best to ignore. As far as recurring dreams go, in one sense they are fine, insofar as many of us have issues which will affect us all our lives. In another sense—

more to my own view—they are not: such dreams would not be happening if there wasn't something that we could be doing or thinking differently in some aspect of their life. A message is trying to get through!

If we ignore our dreams, our lives will turn out more or less okay, as most lives do in the normal course of events. (I do think God/Self means for us to be basically happy.) Short of enlightenment, however, there always exist possibilities for greater personal fulfillment. As I understand them, that is what the metaphysical dimension of dreams is all about.

## **10. IF I'M SCARED OF A DREAM, WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?**

There is one “psychodrama” lucidity exercise that works quite often: acting out what you want to do in the dream in real life.<sup>5</sup> For example, if you dream of being chased by a man with a knife, put together a scarecrow or some other effigy to represent the man, and set it up at one end of your living room. Then, physically rehearse what you would like to do in the dream. From the middle of the room, run away from the man for a few steps as you would do in the dream, but then turn around, resolutely approach him and say, “What’s going on? Why are you chasing me?”

If you do that, your body, as well as your mind, will learn what to do, and you’ll be more likely to remember it, if and when the dream happens again. If the dream assailant doesn’t tell you anything, the greater awareness you will have generated will very likely cause you to grapple with whatever issue or responsibility you were neglecting.

(Needless to say, PTSD dreams connected with traumatic military service and the like may only be alleviated by much more extensive therapeutic intervention.)

## **11. WHAT DO THE RELIGIONS THINK OF DREAMS?**

Because they come from deep within our minds, usually can’t usually be controlled, and often involve content which violates social conventions, at the orthodox or conservative levels of religion, dreams are generally regarded with suspicion. They may represent “demonic” influence, or at least our own capacity for self-delusion.

Needless to say, seekers in more liberal denominations and mystical circles think otherwise. Dreams obviously reflect the specific, individual nature of a person’s spiritual growth, and almost everyone can benefit from paying more attention to them. Dreams are a natural means we have all been given to deepen our spirituality and happiness in life.

## **12. HOW DO DREAMS FIGURE INTO MYSTICAL SPIRITUALITY?**

Mystical seekers agree that many, if not all dreams come from God/Self, and offer us information to assist our growth in some way. These seekers commonly get meaningful inner messages in their dreams, especially those who are dedicated to their practices (meditation, etc.) and who value living spiritual masters.<sup>6</sup> Also, *esoteric* spiritual paths exist, in which dream and dream-like states are unusually important. Instead of just having occasional “teaching dreams” with their Guru, deity or whatever, which ordinary mystical devotees get, esoteric devotees perform a greater variety of spiritual activities in dreams on a more regular basis.<sup>7</sup>

## **13. WHAT IS LUCID DREAMING?**

Lucid dreaming occurs when we are aware enough during the dream to direct it ourselves, instead of having the dream happen to us involuntarily. Although special techniques can be utilized to increase the likelihood that lucid dreaming will occur, studies show that much of the time it happens spontaneously, on its own.

Lucid dreaming is a huge topic about which much has been written and which continues to be intensely researched—along with its subcategories such as “mutual dreaming,” “group dreaming,” and the like. Another category of research, *psidreaming*, involves episodes which feature explicitly paranormal phenomena, such as telepathy, precognition, and the like. (Being symbolic, most dreams, in my experience, are *implicitly* psychic already.) A theoretical field, *cyberdreaming*, promotes the notion that real and dream realities can be understood as a kind of computer-derived “matrix,” and so forth.<sup>8</sup>

## **14. CAN LUCID DREAMING BE A SPIRITUAL PATH?**

Absolutely. Spirituality is about increasing awareness, and that greater awareness crosses over into dreams, so mystical seekers often experience lucidity while dreaming. Through meditation and the various trance, etc. techniques involved, lucid dreaming as a spiritual practice is to some extent open to everyone.

However, just like the esoteric devotees mentioned above, individuals who do an exceptional amount of lucid dreaming seem to have a kind of aptitude or predisposition for it. Seekers often say—it has certainly been my experience—that you don't choose your spiritual path: it chooses *you*. I mention this because, like other, more typical mystical paths, esoteric devotees are drawn to their practices out of inborn disposition, not because they consciously chose it. The only difference between devotees of established esoteric paths and more secularly oriented lucid dreamers seems to be that the latter go about their practices in a less structured way.

It is significant that, in different ways, both these categories of lucid dreamers end up receiving frequent spiritual instruction in their dreams, rather than directly from living masters in waking life.

## 15. HOW DO I REMEMBER MY DREAMS?

The first thing to look at here is your beliefs and assumptions about dreams. Do you really think dreams have value, or do you just give lip service to that idea? Are you afraid of what they would show you? Do you think you don't deserve to have them—that you're not spiritually qualified?

Also, take a greater interest in your spirituality—or perhaps go about it in a different way than you are accustomed to: meditation, study, service work, pilgrimage, retreats, etc. As a self-inquiry practice, analyze your issues in your journal. Write “unsent letters” to God.

And express this greater interest in some concrete way. *Incubate* dreams, as the ancient Greeks used to do: ritualize the latter half of your evening with some of these practices, leading up to a bedtime of “sacred sleep.” Invest in a symbol dictionary—a reasonably thick one, with lots of alternate meanings and scholarly references.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, as part of this new spiritual interest, get yourself out of your comfort zone. Do something new and challenging in your life,

to bring up some issues and get some thoughts and feelings moving around inside you.

## 16. HOW CAN I REMEMBER MY DREAMS IN MORE DETAIL?

First of all, *imagine* yourself remembering and writing down your dreams, and experiencing the resulting “ahas” of insight. Affirm to yourself out loud before lying down in bed, “I will remember my dreams.” Be interested in dreams. Reading a book about them—that can cause things to shift. Find or create a *dream circle*, in order to talk to a special group of people from whom you can derive support.

If you have a dream in the middle of the night and don't want to get up to write it down, rehearse the entire dream (all events and images) at least 5 times in your mind, before going back to sleep. That will imprint in into longer-term memory. And resolve to *reenter a dream* that you think is inconclusive—something that people are often successful at doing. Finally, it often works to put your body in the same position it was in when you woke up.

## 17. WHAT IS DREAMWORK?

Any occasion in which either an individual a group of people gets together to help each other understand their dreams, in a more or less structured way. Other people are essential for the best dreamwork—just as others see things about us that we cannot, they also inevitably come up with insights about our dreams that we could not have discerned on our own. To use one of Jeremy Taylor's phrases, “we are each selectively blind” to certain aspects of meaning which dreams offer us, forcing us to reach out to others for clarification (something I am sure that God/Self would like to see us all doing more of). There are many methods of doing dreamwork.

Dream analysis can also be pursued individually, to great benefit. It is important to realize that you don't need to have studied symbolism (although it helps), and that persistence and regularity are more important than getting it right. A straightforward method is 1) give your dreams titles and write them down in as much detail as you can, including what you were feeling, 2) list the motifs and symbols (objects, events, circumstances, etc.), 3) try to figure them out, considering what's been happening recently in your life, and 4)

write down your questions and frustrations (back to God) in your journal.

Be regular—if you only have ten minutes a day, do all this in a very abbreviated form. It's worth it!

### **18. HOW DOES DREAMWORK RESOLVE ISSUES?**

This recalls Question #2 above. As far as the *meaning* aspect goes, when you understand enough about the issue you are dealing with, you can no longer maintain the fictions you had constructed for yourself around it. For example, if you are a man who was raised too harshly by your father, you may hold deep-seated resentments against anyone or anything that threatens your own self-image as a powerful, competent man yourself. You will use that image to cover up the grieving child inside who was never cuddled or spoken to gently and lovingly. Deep down, you are weak and frightened.

Especially if you have a conscious interest in your spirituality, again and again the Dream Source will be trying to alert you to this still-existing subconscious dynamic between you and your father. In a good dream circle, the moment you grasp this you will once again feel as that child felt when he was being shouted at and put down. But now, with your adult understanding, a whole raft of traumatically based ideas and rationalizations about why you should continue hating your father, etc., is suddenly wiped clean. You get your intellect out of the way for a second and resolve the issue with a more profound and positive understanding.

The same thing can happen more directly with the feeling aspect of the dream, by working with the images and the subtle feelings that surround them. Gestalt-like methods are used to probe the dreamer's immediate experience of the dream image and the real-life past traumas they may be connected with. Little, if any, interpretation is necessary—as the dreamer begins to encounter more powerful feelings in the process, the real meaning of the dream becomes apparent.



## Appendix

These are some of Jeremy Taylor's main principles. He is among the best-known and most respected expositors of dreamwork and dream-related scholarship in the modern western world. I include them because most dreamworkers seem to agree with him, and because for me they definitely correspond to the "mystical common sense" mentioned in Note 2.

1. All dreams come in the service of health and wholeness.
2. No dream comes just to tell the dreamer what he or she already knows.
3. Only the dreamer can say with any certainty what meanings your dream may hold.
4. The dreamer's "aha" of recognition is a function of previously unconscious memory and is the only reliable touchstone of dreamwork.
5. There is no such thing as a dream with only one meaning.
6. All dreams speak a universal language of metaphor and symbol.



## NOTES

1. It's worth noting in this connection that sleep remains a fundamental mystery for science, insofar as those maintenance needs are only little understood at this writing. The fact that we have a spiritual dimension is perhaps the main overall reason that sleep occurs at all.
2. I have no reference for this, other than what I would call "mystical common sense." I go into more detail in Chapter 9 of my book *Universal Spiritual Philosophy and Practice*.
3. This actually makes sense if we understand dreams as being messages from God/Self. Most of us have relatively little interest in spirituality, so our first lessons may indeed be about how our everyday priorities are often meaningless and ultimately disappointing.
4. See Chapter 11 in my book (see note 2).
5. I'm sure this method has been written up somewhere in a lucid dreaming book I have not looked at, to say nothing of the psychodrama literature in the larger field of psychology.
6. This is from my own observation and experience, having talked to and read about many seekers over the years.
7. Eckankar is perhaps the best know of these, although they occur in the mystical branches of all the religions.
8. The International Association for the Study of Dreams (IASD) is perhaps the best source of information on these activities.
9. See Acroyd's below.

## RECOMMENDED READING

Taylor, J. *The Wisdom of Your Dreams*.  
Waggoner, R. *Lucid Dreaming: Door to the Inner Self*.  
Garfield, P. *The Universal Dream Key*.  
Acroyd, E. *A Dictionary of Symbols*.  
Hoss, R. & Gongloff, R. (eds.) *Dreams that Changed our Lives*.  
Ennis, M. & Parker, J. *Get a Grip on Dreams*,  
Moss, R. *Conscious Dreaming*.  
Kamenetz, R. *The History of Last Night's Dream*



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