

DREAMS: A GIFT YOU GIVE YOURSELF

By Ginger E. Blume, Ph.D.

We all dream, every single night. In fact, we probably have three or four dreams each night, depending upon the depth and length of our sleep. Some people never recall their dreams, while others value and remember their dreams each morning. I believe our dreams are a wonderful resource for helping understand our secret fears and desires. Dreams connect us with our innermost selves. Some dream experts believe that dreams are gifts from our unconscious.

Our ability to recall dreams is partially effected by our physical health, our psychological motivation to remember, whether we're using medications or alcohol that interferes with the dream cycle, how deep our sleep pattern tends to be, etc. If there is no physical or chemical cause that is blocking access to your nightly dreams, the best way to begin remembering your dreams is to establish an intention to remember. Each night before falling asleep, suggest to yourself while lying in a relaxed state, that you will easily remember a dream in the morning. Invite the dream to reveal itself to you. Then, when you awaken, while still lying in bed with your eyes closed, focus your mind on your dream. Take several deep breaths and allow your mind to search. Perhaps, imagine fishing for your dream in the emotional depths of your unconscious. As soon as you recall a dream, write it down on a pad you keep next to your bed. If you wait until later in the morning, you're more likely to forget it. Continue this pattern for several weeks and you will soon be rewarded with a frequent awareness of your dreams when you awaken.

Dream Significance

But what do these “movies in your head” signify? Why do some people dream in black and white and others dream in techno-color? Are dreams just random firings of our brain's neurons or are they truly significant messages from our unconscious? During graduate school at the Un. of Florida, I conducted my doctoral research at the NASA sleep laboratory headed by Dr. Wilsie Webb. My dissertation eventually showed that the unconscious mind is highly consistent in communicating with the conscious mind, whether an individual is awake and making up a story, simply day dreaming, or dreaming during the night. This consistency is so remarkable, that even an untrained person is capable at a greater than chance level, of identifying someone's dreams, stories, and reveries from a large assortment of various people's unconscious material. This research helped support the theory that dreams are meaningful and not random mental images.

A person's unconscious communication is highly symbolic, visual, and appears non-linear and illogical. When the conscious mind is ready to acknowledge what the deeper, innermost self already knows, communication often occurs in the form of a night dream or a day dream. Sometimes, the dreamer is too emotionally close to the dream material to interpret its meaning and may require the assistance of a therapist who is trained in dream interpretation.

There are many popular books on the market that suggest dream images are always symbolic of one “particular meaning.” However, this is not always true, since we all have unique associations to various images. For instance, an old, worn out shoe might represent “loss of value and the aging process” to one person, and “comfort that comes with experience” to another. Our life history and experience colors the meaning of various symbols in our dreams. Speaking of “color,” those who dream in color are

usually more aware of their emotions and less fearful of acknowledging them. People who repress their emotions and engage in chronic denial tend not to recall their dreams and have dreams that are “colorless.” After all, a colorless world is not very exciting, just as a life without attention to one’s feelings is rather empty.

One of the most peaceful cultures I’m aware of (the Senoia) is a culture that values people’s dreams. These island people treat dreams as sacred communication. If an individual dreams of harming someone, the next day, they make an effort to apologize to that person in their waking state. While the Senoia experience a full range of emotions, including anger, aggressive behavior is absent in their society. Now you understand why I believe dreams are truly, gifts we give to ourselves, as well as to others.

© Copyright, 2003 Ginger E. Blume, Ph.D.