

Dreams, Another Way of Knowing

Dream Coaching. Say What?

From the perspective of depth psychology, dreams speak for our personal and collective development. They may show us the way but we must commit to following. As Marsha Sinetar writes: "Identifying your enthusiasms requires courage and heroic creative vision. You have to believe that what you want is possible for you." And we dreamers have to learn to trust that what the *dream* wants for us is not only possible but also valuable. In my work, that is a given.

After 24 years of professional dreamwork I've come to the place where *understanding* the desires of psyche is not enough. I hope my clients will move beyond *awareness* into *action*, using whatever resources are necessary to change mind and behavior patterns in response to the dream. I call this next step of dream work *dream coaching*, based on the premises and procedures of the burgeoning field of Life Coaching.

To launch this concept, I'll describe a bit about the coaching process. A primary notion is that accomplishing both long and short-term goals is a great deal more probable and less complex with a trained, experienced and knowledgeable partner/ally. In part, a Coach's responsibility is to discover, clarify, and align with what the client wants to achieve. This is accomplished, in part, by encouraging the client's self-discovery, eliciting client-generated solutions and strategies and by holding the client responsible and accountable. Great. But is this model applicable to dream work, an essentially ephemeral, vague, slowly unfolding, often paradoxical and frequently confusing process? Here are some reasons I'm convinced that it is.

Serious dreamers trust the dream to uncover and clarify the changes that are needed to move closer to wholeness, to living a truly authentic life, to individuate. Healing past wounds that have left gaping holes in both soul and personality is a major element of this transformational work. Parallel to that are the dreams that unfold the future self: the attitudes, self-concept and behaviors that create the consciously chosen life.

I have been blessed with an ongoing dreamwork practice since 1981. On average I work with clients for more than six years, and more than three-dozen clients for ten years and counting. During that extended time we have seen the dream patterns that unfold, the movement of psyche from dream to dream and year to year. Sometimes considerable progress is seen in personal growth with resultant life changes. But all too often, the urgings of the dream, repeatedly and patiently presented, are not sufficiently embraced by the dreamer to shift from neutral into

high gear. Thus, recurring dreams that present similar images, feelings, and unsatisfactory endings continuously bug us, determined to get our attention so that we will create change. The dream can only show the way. The conscious dreamer must then commit to small and deliberate steps necessary to accomplish the curriculum psyche has provided.

Ann Conrad Lammers writes: “Ethical life...requires conscious engagement of the ego with the events that meet it—inner or outer. Dreams provide raw material for the ego to confront and assimilate; but confronting their *imagery* does not automatically create wholeness.” Psyche can confront but, if we wish to appreciably transform, we must not only assimilate but also commit to conscious alteration. Without this, we usually see the repetition of problematic dreams and difficult awake life experiences.

This reminds me of reading an old journal or diary and recognizing that my comments and complaints from twenty years ago are the same today. Clearly, being aware enough of the irritation to write about it or discuss it with friends has not resolved the issue. When tired enough of the same old story, I will choose to focus my conscious attention and the present resources of my ego to transform this irritating grain of sand into a pearl.

Not all recurring dreams carry a negative feeling. A client is presently dreaming about the need to be on stage, center stage, performing in a variety of ways. We are waiting for subsequent dreams to develop the theme. I’m guessing that the series is leading to her Golden Shadow, to ways for her to perform in the world. If she chooses to hear and follow the voice of psyche, the dreams gods will celebrate.

Dreams frequently introduce us to our highest potential. And just as frequently we reject the offer. It’s like receiving a magnificent pair of running shoes sculpted specifically for your feet to invite and encourage you to run. You show the shoes to everybody you know, express your delight in the gift but never put them on, choosing to study them instead.

Alternatively, the shoes can be embraced and fully worn. This is happening with a middle-aged female client who has been repeatedly dreaming of horses. The first horse arose from the ocean and thundered onto shore where she greeted it without fear. Thus alerted to her willingness to accept a source of power without anxiety, Martha decided to very consciously cozy up to and use this power. She began dream coaching, hoping to more consciously activate her power in relationships. Her “horse power” increases with every dream and subsequent sessions.

Another middle-aged woman committed to dream coaching before her dreams developed a series to prod her into action. Her readiness is obvious for, after only a month, she has followed the directions of her dreams to design and construct a chicken coop entirely alone. During this empowering process, Ann has also signed up for a thirteen day vision quest in Colorado, ready to “fully experience my souls yearnings and wisdom to the fullest.”

In weekend coaching retreats I have seen people relinquish years of nullifying behaviors, patterned by well-worn family and cultural scripts. Experiencing that kind of breakthrough and watching the subsequent behavior/life change that occurs is the

most thrilling level of dreamwork I know. And it brings a sense of relief from the struggles presented to me during the research for my book, *Recurring Dream Symbols: A Map to Healing Your Past*. Nine of the fourteen participants who studied long-running dream series recognized that writing their series dreams when they occurred brought neither clarity nor relief. Simply studying the series *did* bring awareness for all but significant attitudinal or behavior change for only six. Given the state of the world in the new millennium I'm not satisfied with

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