

**Kathleen Sullivan's
Dreams, Another Way of Knowing**

Wondrous Recurring Dreams

The modern dream movement was just starting in the early eighties when I began my career leading dream groups. Dream education based upon scientific and clinical evidence had not yet replaced superstition and folk tales in the public arena. Still a neophyte, I could be tipped off center by a vehement attack from a supremely rational dream-naysayer. My language skills and experience were insufficient in those early years to prove the profound value provided by dreams. My attempts to defend the dream were shrugged off as the pitiable hallucinations of a slightly demented Californian. So I gathered with those who experienced the power of the dream while seeking an effective argument for the doubting Thomases. Today, I present one such argument, the phenomenon of the *recurring dream*.

Singer/song writer Alan Berman created a wonderful song to reference his recurring dreams. I'll sprinkle his wisdom, in italics, throughout the article.

Here comes that dream again. The one that won't let go of me; I know there's something that it's trying to say. And here's that dream again. It knows more than I know of me, and it's not gonna' let me get away.

If you write your dreams every day for two weeks you will surely begin to note that certain symbols, places, situations or feelings are repeating. Other elements of the dream will alter while the same house, litter of kittens, aborted train ride, hike up the mountain, or episode of being chased, recur. Applying one common dream theory makes sense of this: dreams reflect awake-life issues that are likely to take more than a few days or months to resolve. In fact, when the dreams are not studied and the issue is not addressed in other ways, the series may continue for decades.

One familiar form of the recurring dreams, post-traumatic stress dreams, is understandable even to those who insist that other dreams are nonsense. Persons who survive horrific experiences report the repetition of memory/images/sounds/smells of the event, both awake and asleep. Whether a flashback or a nightmare, we appreciate the need to process a traumatic event, working it out of body and mind with each return to the episode. I vividly recall the need for most Californians to tell earthquake stories for nearly a year following the Loma Prieta quake. In the same way, our recurring dreams continue to present what needs to be cleaned up, shifted, processed, and released.

As any serious dream student knows, every problematic element of his personality will be addressed as the years unfold, filling volumes of dream books. The timid are encouraged by dreams of heroes and heroines. The bully, tyrant, abuser and all around victimizer will show up, over and over, until we recognize the energy or behavior that exists within us that must be healed and altered.

Sometimes I'd rather turn away. I'm not too hot about a lot of characters presuming to be me. Sometimes the things they say can undermine my fantasies about the guy that I pretend to be. But if I just roll over and forget them; and act as if I hadn't seen their faces, they'll just say goodbye for now, then rearrange themselves somehow, and show up other times and other places.

In addition, the recurring theme may not represent a problem but instead the development needed for the dreamer. For example, a guy about thirty told of dreams from age fifteen about missing the train he was supposed to take. In the beginning of the series he was panicked as he saw the train leave without him, fearing the trouble he would be in. As the dreams progressed he became aware that he was, in dream fact, on time for the train but he simply did not board. Again, he was assailed by guilt and shame. When he came to work on the series Joe had some dream education but couldn't put the dreams together until he recognized the following important chronology.

At age fifteen, Joe began rebelling against his parent's assumption that he would take over the family business after college. He adamantly refused, quit high school and left home to pursue his passion for travel and spiritual exploration. During the next ten years, Joe studied with gurus and shamans in three different cultures. At that time, his train dreams began to change. He suddenly recognized a thrill when he refused to take the train, a sense of power and rightness. Instead of waking with a dream hangover of dread, these dreams left him elated.

The AHA hit when Joe saw *train* as *training*! At fifteen he refused to comply to his parental script and *training*. He would not climb aboard the expectations that threatened to imprison him. As he followed his own inner knowing, his dread from missing the train transformed to the delight of the hero on his individual journey.

So here's that dream again. And if I pay attention I will know there's nothing that I need to fear. A dream is like a friend, who's not afraid to mention things in spite of what you might not want to hear.

Since 1981, Kathleen Sullivan has been a dream professional, counselor, and life coach in the Monterey Bay area. She is the author of *Recurring Dreams: A Journey to Wholeness* and *Recurring Dream Symbols: A Map to Healing Your Past*.
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