

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

Stupid Dreams: 101 Reasons to Avoid Dreamwork

The dream is too long. The dream is too short. The dream is too vague or too real. I just don't like the awful way the dream makes me feel!

And the common beat goes on, providing multiple excuses to avoid dream work. It's boring, mundane, terrifying, ridiculous *or sooo* obvious. Alas, I add my own complaints about the dream nearly every morning. Consider the "nonsense" piece from last week:

I'm working with a small crew to clear weeds along a Pacific Grove road that leads to the ocean. I'm lying on my back on the road, completely naked. When people approach I pull fern fronds over my body. Everyone stops to chat with me, not noticing my nakedness. What will I do when it is time for me to walk on? I cannot take my fern blanket with me. As I ponder the dilemma, a man lays a fresh turquoise sheet on me. I get up and proceed, using it as a wrap-around dress.

I assure myself that chasing garden snails is more valuable than grabbing my journal to record such "bizarre" images. What is this resistance to the dream? Can it be overcome? Why bother, anyway?

First, remember that dreamwork is a revolutionary act committed to transformation. Therefore, the part of the psyche that is determined to protect the status quo is necessarily resistant to potential boat rocking and life tampering. After three dreams addressing the consistent abusive behavior of her sons and her husband, a woman identified her need to either leave dream work or confront the problem. She consciously chose to abandon her dreams, as she said, "to maintain my family myth." On the extreme end of this scale are clients who quit dream group when their dreams expose substance or behavior addictions.

A second resistance factor for many is the *work* aspect of *dreamwork*. Consistently using your dreams as a source of guidance and personal therapy demands time and the willingness to both hear and learn a "foreign" language. A friend reported this quote from a movie: "(Catching a dream) is like getting a call from Wollongong, Australia. The connection is not good, you miss every other word, and it doesn't make sense...)" A serious dream student must be willing to learn and use the metaphoric and symbolic language of the dream. To better understand this language, let's return to my "ridiculous" dream: *I'm working with a small crew to clear weeds along a Pacific Grove road that leads to the ocean*. Metaphorically, this is precisely what I do, professionally. I am committed to helping clients weed out the unhealthy beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that choke the life out of wanted growth. In dreamwork, this process leads to *the ocean*,

to the great collective unconscious. In this role, I am part of a *small crew* of professional writers and dreamworkers. *Aha!* The moment I catch the symbolic meaning of the first dream sentence, I'm hooked and resistance falls away with a hearty clunk.

Ego resistance and insufficient dream language development are not the only difficulties experienced by would be enthusiasts of REM sleep art. Several readers have requested suggestions for recalling those slippery images. Since long-term memory chemicals are absent during REM, the first order of dreamwork is developing a process for instant recall followed by memory training. When you awaken, remain still and examine what is on your mind. (When unaware of recall, shift to another sleep position and try again.) Pursue even the slightest image, feeling or concept. Hang out with it until more material floats into awareness. Resist the judgments exposed at the beginning of this article. Even a snippet is worth recording.

And recording, in some fashion, must be the next step or the dream will blow away in the harsh winds of the awake-world. Tape recorders are great tools. Lying motionless while transferring the dream from the right brain hemisphere to the left (applying descriptive words to visual images) may be enough to allow transfer to a journal or computer. Above all, value the material that has surfaced by avoiding those pesky rationalizations from your awake-self.

Back to the naked body on the street. Nakedness is the best way psyche can express a feeling of exposure and vulnerability. Naked in a bed is far different than exposure on a street, a collective or public place of movement. The street led to the realization that, because I am in a period of career transition, I do feel vulnerable and exposed in the collective arena. However, in the dream I *pull fern fronds over my body*. This suggests that what shields me during the present transition is a vital and healthy aspect of growth (fern). *Aha!* I am protected by the very growth that scares me. The dream continues but we have run out of space for this column!

So, why bother with dreamwork? Because every remembered dream call from down-under, though hard to hear and understand, may be the most important call you will ever receive.