

Kathleen Sullivan's Dreams, Another Way of Knowing

Hairy Dreams: Getting to the Roots of the Matter

Although it is uncommon to see yourself in a dream, occasionally you may catch a glimpse of your image in a window or a lake. Or you might study your image carefully in a dream mirror. The reflection is often startling due to an alteration in hair color, length or style. These types of dreams are intriguing and may herald, or suggest, significant changes in self-image, personality or beliefs.

Jane, a middle-aged woman dreamed: “*My hair is cut sharp, edgy, straight. The top layer is indigo blue, the color of a Man of War, so that I look like I’m wearing a helmet.*” The first word tackled by her dream-group was *edgy*. This is an interesting psychological term suggesting reaching the edge of a comfort zone or of conscious awareness. Jane said that she felt as if she was being drawn to an *edge*, as if she were about to enter new territory. She defined *sharp* as *pointed, direct*. That led us to consider hair not as persona (role, guise, personality) but as what grows from the head/intellect. In that case, hair often represents beliefs or concepts. In addition, the color of the top layer of the hair is blue. Blue may symbolize the fifth chakra or throat center, which is, in part, related to self-expression. Thus, Jane recognized a need to express herself *sharply*, in a *pointed* and *direct* style, a process that is difficult for her. That would be *edgy* for her, demanding connection to her *masculine process* of rational, goal-oriented thinking. That led us to the *Man of War*, a powerful sea bird probably chosen by psyche to show the need for strength and valor as Jane transcends her vagueness by stepping over her edge.

Blue hair carried a very different meaning for Sarah after her beloved dog and constant companion was stolen at a campground and later found dead by the side of the road. During the months following the event, Sarah’s emotions were often clearly exposed by her dream hair, blue when she was deeply depressed and flaming red as she experienced her justified rage at the dog-nappers. As her grieving and healing progressed, the colors of her dream hair faded. When psyche chooses and uses a symbol over and over, the meaning becomes part of the dreamers internal symbol system and, years later, can carry a meaning similar to the original. Two years after the horrible incident with her dog, Sarah reported dreams in which her hair was tinged in either red or blue, usually reflective of her emotions regarding incidents unrelated to the loss of her precious pet.

What if your dream hair is the style you wore as a teenager? When such an image appeared in Susan’s dream, she realized that the insecurity she had recently felt while serving on a church committee replicated a sense of social and intellectual inadequacy from which she suffered throughout high school. This awareness kept Sue from quitting the committee under the pretense that she could not tolerate the chairman. Recognizing the problem as her own allowed her to work through it. Admitting and owning a hard truth is surely one of the great benefits of dreamwork.

What about dream hair cuts? What might need to be gotten rid of, shorn, shaped anew? If hair represents thought or beliefs, long hair may suggest attitudes that are very old. This example came from a woman, age 29, who had recently moved to California from a small town in Kansas. The dreamer, and all the other members of her large family, lived within 20 miles of each other until her unprecedented move. Since she had not attended college nor traveled beyond the mid-west, this woman had never really challenged the beliefs of her family, held strongly in place by a dominant patriarch, her father. The third dream she presented in counseling deeply bothered her. In it, she is lugging her "mile-long" hair, wound into a beehive shape, in the old *family* red-wagon. She cries as her struggle to haul this infinitely heavy load is painful and allows her no freedom. Clearly, moving through the world as her family always had (red wagon), was no longer a choice for her. The dream affirmed her move to Santa Cruz as her symbolic flight to freedom. At the following counseling session, the dreamer's actual hair was cut stylishly short, to honor the dream and visually mark the beginning of her chosen individuation process.

A 27 year-old male was greatly disturbed by several dreams showing his head nearly or totally bald. Since he was proud of his mane, and his relatives were rarely bald, the he hoped the dreams were not "precognitive."

Again, considering hair as thought processes showed him what he needed to recognize; that he was going through a profound spiritual process that was stripping away his former paradigms, leaving him, like a freshly shaved monk, bald and ready to sprout new thinking forms and a new persona.