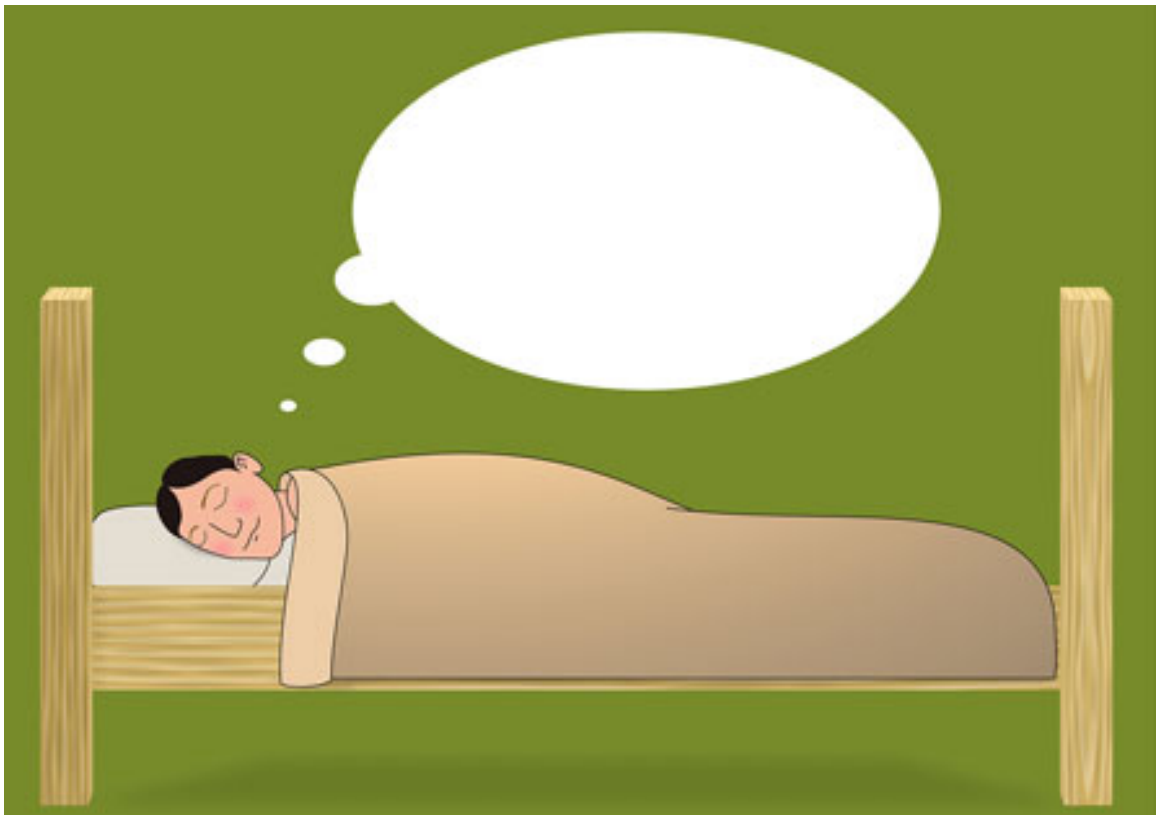


Eight Practices to Increase Your Dream Recall



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Introduction

The latest in dream research tells us that if we live to be eighty years old* we will have spent twenty years dreaming. In fact, sleep experts now tells us we are dreaming even when we are awake; we just don't realize it because of our conscious focus. But the increasing number of multi-taskers out there may realize we do think of several things at once, and images and ideas arise and break through to consciousness without summons. So just how, in a digital world of seemingly shrinking hours, can our hyper, over-extroverted, action-oriented culture ever slow down enough to remember something as ephemeral as our nocturnal dreams?

My mentor, the Dutch Jungian Analyst Robert Bosnak, renowned founder of "Embodied Dreaming" believes our consciousness actually visits a dream environment with its own "energy field and ecosystem." Bosnak says it's "not a movie, not a novel," but something that happens somewhere which presents itself to us as real, as if we were awake. To quote Robert again, "Psyche is a reality. You are in soul and soul is everywhere around you."

When we dream we experience a multiplicity of images, which are all various parts of ourselves. When we imaginatively embody them, different emotions emerge from the images that we can locate in the body. This "network of different states" can be observed objectively and experienced subjectively. Through this

process we find meaning in our dreams. Still, we have to be able to remember them first, write them down and commit them to memory. Then when we slow the narrative of dream events down and participate in them, we can connect them to repressed feelings that are presenting themselves in our current lives. Once we make these feelings conscious, we can create new responses to the old issues that trigger those hang-ups in our present lives.

Dreams can also offer us knowledge from the collective unconscious, i.e. the unconscious of the history of the human species. We can dream of symbols we did not consciously know the meaning of and then discover the significant, personal meaning of that symbol for us in our present life. I once dreamt of a dwarfish character named "Odin" and I had never heard of the Norse God named Odin. When I read who he was, I immediately saw the relevance to my situation. The unconscious does not exist in linear time as we know it, therefore we can indeed dream of the future as well as the past. There are many gifts, suggestions, solutions, answers, encouraging supports, as well as reflections, warnings, and mirrorings of our troubles in the unconscious.

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Here are my eight tips to improve your dream recall. As you pay conscious attention and give some time to respecting your unconscious mind, it will respond and deliver to you. If you brush it

off and dismiss it, it won't present itself as vividly. So a *prerequisite step* to dream recall is to *honor your unconscious*.

- (1) Before going to sleep, ask your unconscious to send you a dream and **set an intention** to remember it. You needn't make a ritual out of it but at the beginning you might want to formally write down your intention.
- (2) **Keep a dream journal nearby.** You may want to have a small night light available to turn on in order to write, or a lighted pen, but the lower the light, the more likely you will capture the dream. You can also use a tape recorder. I used one for years and was able to catch many specifics I might not have otherwise. You needn't even open your eyes, just grab the recorder from the night table and begin speaking. Be prepared to decipher some gibberish as you will sigh and mumble and punctuate your narrative with many *ums . . .* and *ahs . . .* But if a tape recorder is too cumbersome for you, a dream journal and a pen nearby will do.
- (3) As soon as you are conscious of being awake, **Don't change position. Stay in the position you were sleeping in and *don't open your eyes.*** *In a relaxed state*, try to recall an image from your sleep. Sometimes just one image is enough to pull after it a big chunk of dream. You may remember it out of order, no matter. We tend to impose linear narrative in order to write our stories in scenes.
- (4) **Record the images in scenes.** Bosnak speaks of our dreams as a "memory theater." Think of yourself as a playwright or film director. You can put images down hurriedly so as not to lose any, such as - *mountain—deer— I follow a man—lake--he gives me stones--one is red.* You can fill in the details later. As you write out the dream, you may remember more. Trust what is there, even if it is just one image . . . "I am dancing by some trees." So much can come from one image. (I often keep my eyes closed while writing, leaving big spaces between lines so I don't write over

what I've written.) You may hear a voice in your dream with no visual image; simply record it as a quote.

- (5) **Don't dismiss anything as "day residue"** or what happened yesterday. Dreams are like computers in that they will download key images that were stored but don't let that fool you; they often speak in a symbolic language that we must translate emotionally and a familiar image can have a meaning totally other than its surface meaning. (For more on "day residue" See my blog "From Banal to Beneficent" at www.blog.intuitivegateways.com)
- (6) Make a note of your **emotional orientation**. If you have captured an image, try to *feel* your response to it from your own point of view in the dream . . . "I'm angry" or "surprised" or "scared." Sometimes there is only a feeling once you awake, consider if there is a setting for that feeling, often an image will arise.
- (7) If you can't help yourself from interpreting, **list any associative ideas** in your mind that happen to drift into your head. But keep these tentative. Intellect tends to want to define everything reductively, more likely, there are layers of meaning that only slightly relate to your immediate thought. C. G. Jung said in a film interview, *"The unconscious is really, really, really, really, really, really, really, really, really, really unconscious."*
- (8) When you are fully awake and have your notes to look at, **write out the dream in a linear narrative**. Don't worry if you haven't got it exactly right. Trust that you've remembered as much as you need to. I've worked with just one image for over an hour in my dream process. (For a demonstration of that process see Chapter 2 of my memoir *The Future That Brought Her Here*.) You can observe the image as a hologram; each angle you consider may yield more details. Take time to memorize the dream and honor

it even if you have no idea what it means. This respectful attention will give you more and more returns as you become more habituated to the technique of recall.

Concluding Remarks

It's important to realize if you haven't paid much attention to your dreams, it may take a while before you get one down. Using this practice even with snippets will offer you more eventually. There are many universal motifs that appear in everyone's dreams such as *The Divine Child, The Wise Old Man or Woman, The Trickster, The Hero, The Shadow, Fair Maiden and Devouring Feminine*. After a while you will see patterns in your private mythology of symbols.

I used to know a disheveled, scruffy-bearded taxi driver who always came into my bookstore and special ordered the heaviest philosophy books. I'd ask myself "Why am I dreaming about him?" True, he was someone I'd see on a fairly regular basis. But when I realized he was not what he seemed, I saw that he represented a trickster character to me. (In my narrow mind I'd thought most taxi drivers don't read complex modern philosophy.) As a trickster, he would often appear in my dreams when I was not reading a situation correctly. I learned to decode him as someone who warned me when a troubling situation in my present life was probably not what it *seemed* to be.

Drawing the dream or writing it as a piece of creative writing will also help you feel it emotionally. The next steps to finding meaning will be to ask certain questions of the images.

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All dreams have significance even if they are fragmentary and alien to our ego mind. Dreams tell the truth and sometimes our familiar ego state is a little uncomfortable with their messages.

For this reason they speak in code. Although there are prophetic dreams, *most* dreams are about our own personal complexes.

Dream work in groups helps us to see how we all share the same fears and often project them onto others. Imaginative dream work heals. If each of us can become more conscious, we have a chance of improving our world.

Everyone dreams. Socrates said, "Know thyself." Freud said, "Dreams are the royal road to the unconscious." Our dreams are gems offered freely and it is only right that we should study them as we study anything else. That more people don't realize this is unfortunate. To quote from the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas: "If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you." Be patient and kind with yourself. That monster you dreamt of is most likely long buried fear or anger and it is important that it find some expression. Once aware of it, you're forewarned and won't act it out in your everyday life.

Our dreams keep us sane by balancing our ego consciousness. By studying them we can discover great treasures and strengths we

aren't aware we possess. If we each allow ourselves an active inner life, we can use these precious, god-given gifts to grow.

- *Note:* Quotes from Robert Bosnak are from a dream intensive seminar at Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge MA, October 2005. Also see Bosnak's books *A Little Course in Dreams*, *Tracks in the Wilderness of Dreams*, *Embodiment*, and *Christopher's Dreams*.