

Your Personal Coach

By
Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I've been having lots of interesting dreams lately – including the same one almost every week -- and I'm wondering what they mean. My husband says to forget about them. He says that he only dreams when he's had too much spicy food close to bedtime. But I can't get away from the feeling that my dreams are trying to tell me something. What do you think?

-- Stephanie

Dear Stephanie,

I think that dreams are a window to the soul, and an important way to access a rich inner life. And I'm not alone in that belief. Throughout time, human beings have been drawn to dreams as ways to understand life and to connect to spirit.

In most Native American cultures and other tribal societies, dreams were believed to come from a divine source, gifts to humankind that guide us toward enlightenment and wisdom.

The Ancient Greeks venerated dreams as pathways to wisdom and healing. According to classical mythology, Aesculapius, the Greek God of healing and a son of Apollo, cured illness by having sick people sleep in the temple until a significant dream occurred.

Buddhist, Jewish, Islamic, and Christian traditions all address dreams as containing enlightened information, instruction, or guidance that is not available in a waking state. All of these wisdom traditions believe that we grow psychologically and spiritually by paying attention to our dreams.

Both the Old and New Testaments contain multiple instances of God speaking to the prophets through the language of dreams. Remember Joseph predicting seven years of plenty and seven years of famine for Egypt through his interpretation of Pharaoh's dream of seven fat and seven skinny cows? Pharaoh was so impressed that he granted Joseph authority over the whole land.

In the New Testament, a different Joseph accepts Mary's pregnancy as being of divine origin, is instructed to flee into Egypt, and then instructed to return, all on the basis of his dreams.

In Islam, the Prophet Mohammed was instructed of his divine mission in a dream. The Jewish Talmud reflects on the importance of honoring and working to understand the symbols of our dreams when it says, "A dream that has not been interpreted is like a letter that has not been opened."

The famous Swiss psychologist Carl Jung believed that dreams are a self-dramatization of the actual state of the psyche and the unconscious. Just as an X-ray or CAT scan can look into the workings and state of health of the body, dreams reveal what is happening in your inner psychological life.

There are many modern theories about what dreams actually mean. There is the computer model, that dreams process information and clean out our mental “hard drives” to psychological models, that dreams access the deep reservoir of our collective unconscious.

But one thing is clear: Whether we remember them or not, we all dream. In fact, scientific sleep and dream research have demonstrated that all human beings and all animals that have been studied dream between five to seven times every night.

Dreams can help us to access creativity and solve everyday problems. As a teenager, Albert Einstein dreamt he was riding on a sled as it moved faster and faster down a hill. In the dream, he watched in amazement as the sled approached the speed of light and the stars distorted into beautiful patterns and colors. In his later life he observed that his entire career including his Theory of Relativity could be viewed as an extension of that dream.

Robert Louis Stevenson dreamt the plot for *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner, Schumann, and Billy Joel (how’s that for mixed company?) have all said that the inspiration for much of their music came to them in dreams.

In spite of all this psychological and spiritual support for the importance of dreams, lots of people with strictly logical views of life, think its wacky to pay attention to them, and that trying to discern the symbolism of dreams is a waste of time.

But, hey, Billy Joel is selling millions of records with songs based on dreams while your husband is up eating tacos at midnight. So, who are you going to believe?!

Most importantly, don’t listen to your husband and don’t listen to me. Trust your *own* instincts. You feel drawn to pay attention to your dreams – especially the recurrent one. So you should do that

Here are some ways to better understand your dreams and remember, the more you work with your dreams, the more you will begin to understand their “gifts” of meaning.

First, keep a pen and paper on your night table. Dreams are like smoke, they disappear into thin air once we get up and start moving around. As soon as you wake up, write down everything you remember. And I mean everything. Details are very important in understanding the richness and meaning of the symbols.

Second, sit quietly and reflect on the images in the dream. Remember that dreams are always multi-layered and if you immediately think you know what everything means, you probably don’t. Ask yourself: “Does this ring a bell?” “What does this remind me of?”

Don’t be too serious. Instead, be patient and play with the images, let your imagination soar, and then write down all your thoughts and associations.

Third, ask yourself how this dream may relate to something that you are facing in your life right now. Have you ever felt like you did in the dream? Do you feel some of those same things now?

Read some books about dreamwork (but avoid those that claim to tell you what every symbol means). Consider working with a counselor who understands and respects dreams as a path to self-growth. Get involved in a dream group. If you can’t find one, start one with some friends who are interested in learning from their dreams. Lots of interesting things happen when we give voice to our dreams, and trusted friends can offer their honest and gentle thoughts.

Most of all have fun with your dreams. They can pave a remarkable path to self-growth.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com, call 473-4004, or direct questions to the Outer Banks Sentinel, P.O. Box 546, Nags Head, NC 27949

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