

## ***Dream Wisdom: Unlocking Messages of Wellbeing***

By Ryan Harrison, MA

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Everyone dreams...even those who claim they do not. The truth is more likely that they simply don't remember their dreams upon waking, which is fairly common (and may actually be tied to a B vitamin deficiency).

There are at least three states of consciousness confirmed and supported by scientific study and research: waking, dreaming and deep sleep. In the hours of waking consciousness, which make up the majority of our lives, we function in a dualistic, mostly logical world where there are rules and consequences, actions and reactions, true and false. This is the state of consciousness in which we go to work, pay bills, read magazines, and play with the kids.

Deep sleep, on the other end of the spectrum, is characterized by delta brainwave patterns that mark a lowered state of active consciousness. During deep sleep, we are more difficult to awaken. People who are roused during this state do not adjust immediately and often feel groggy and disoriented for several minutes after they wake up. In deep sleep, the mind is not engaged in using logic, symbols, or mental images.

The dream state, however, is entirely different. Somewhere, in that medial mental space between the alertness of waking consciousness and the stillness of deep sleep, the dreaming mind is alive, formless, and active. Robert Van De Castle, Ph.D., dream expert and author of *Our Dreaming Mind*, lists the various theories behind the cause of dreaming: "They might be visits from an external god, the wanderings of the dreamer's soul, a shift in dimensional planes enabling the dreamer to peer into the future, the reworking of unresolved emotional tensions from the preceding day, or fallout from some temporary disturbance of the brain or digestive system." Whatever the cause, whether physical, mental, emotional, spiritual or sexual, the fact of the matter is that *dreaming happens*, and when it does, people are moved, inspired, forewarned, and enlightened.

Can you harness your dreams, using them to further your journey of wellbeing? Absolutely!

Van De Castle explores the various ways that dreams have affected the world. His list includes dreams that have found expression as works of art, dreams that stimulated people into important political action, dreams that prophesied and warned, and dreams that touched ultimately on spiritual truths or moments of enlightenment.

The human mind, which recent research maintains reaches beyond the physical structure of the brain and connects with a larger "Consciousness" in the universe, has amazing capabilities. Dreaming is one of them, and it can be understood and used as a tool toward positive transformation and wellbeing. "Lucid dreaming" and the psychodynamic processing of dreams are two of the gateways through which we can move to unlock messages of wellbeing for ourselves.

Lucid dreaming is simply dreaming while knowing that you are dreaming. It is experiencing a dream with waking consciousness, and while this sounds contradictory, it's very possible. Within a lucid dream, the dreamer is able to access the conscious attributes of memory and willpower while still fully participating in the events and emotions of the dream.

For example, a lucid dreamer may find herself standing before a river that separates her from something of great importance on the other side. Because she is aware that she is dreaming and that all things are possible in dreams, she may "create" a bridge and walk across it, or decide to find a boat nearby that will take her to her heart's desire. Either way, she is actively involved in the dream, rather than simply *reacting* to it. This makes all the difference.

There are various ways to train yourself to dream with lucidity. One of the most effective is to repeatedly ask yourself during your waking day "*Am I dreaming?*" Repeating this question to yourself during the day will encourage your mind to ask the same question while you are asleep and dreaming. When you find yourself answering "*Yes, I am*" while in the middle of the dream, you will know that you are consciously aware of the dream. At that point, you may then exercise some degree of volition within it.

One of the aspects of lucid dreaming that make it such a powerful tool for encouraging wellbeing is that you can approach problems from your life from a different angle than the logical, dualistic point of view that typifies the waking consciousness. For example, in your dreams, your mind may present your recurring problem with being overweight by using different images. Perhaps it seems you are stuck in a large, unattractive building that you despise and which feels claustrophobic and overwhelming. If lucid in your dream, you would be able to re-decorate the building to your liking, knock down walls and re-model, or perhaps create a door where there wasn't one before, so you could leave the building and find a more suitable place to live.

Of course, it helps to understand the language of dreams so you know what your dream symbols are telling you. And that's where psychodynamics comes in.

The language of dreams is typically made up from a wide variety of information collected by your senses in waking reality and then presented in a new way during dreaming. Generally, there are two different kinds of dreams: literal and symbolic. Literal dreams present information that is directly parallel to your everyday life. For example, you dream that you're looking at a clock that reads 8:15 a.m. and you realize in your dream that you may have overslept and are late to work, waking to realize that indeed, this is the case.

While literal dreams are not altogether uncommon, most dreams contain a wide variety of symbols, which are images or objects that can be translated to mean different things to different people. Many psychologists acknowledge that the symbols and events in dreams can be considered important markers for the growth and state of the inner landscape. Dream symbol dictionaries abound and, while many of them share some "definitions" of common symbols and events, they may differ widely to the point that they become fairly useless.

An interesting way to approach dream symbols is to consider them as aspects of yourself. In some psychodynamic processes, anything that turns up in a dream – be it a villain, lover, object, or action – can be understood as some kind of mental projection of the dreamer. For example, the angry dog barking at your back door in a dream may be recognized as your own feelings of unworthiness that are being repressed to the point that you are actually “hounding” yourself because of them.

If working with your dreams seems intriguing or motivating, you should seek out a qualified psychotherapist who can actively participate in your “dreamwork.” Typically, such therapists will espouse a Jungian, Gestalt, Transpersonal or Integral psychological point of view.

Dreaming is a universal phenomenon, cutting across all social, economic and cultural lines. It is one of the few activities with which virtually every human being on the planet engages on a frequent basis. Dreams can be reflections of the life that you experience both internally and externally and through them you can contact a deeper sense of self and come closer to recognising your full potential.