

COMMON BOUNDARY  
July/Aug. 1999, pp. 14-22

Reprinted with permission from the author.

A BRIDGE BETWEEN WORLDS  
by Pythia Peay

No Longer Relegated Solely to the Realm of the Unconscious, Dreams Are Now Seen As Offering Valuable Advice As Well As Spiritual Direction.

In a dream, Carl Jung is seated at the foot of my bed, his back half-turned toward me in dark silhouette. In his hands he holds a large flask filled with coffee.

In a dream, a cowboy gallops confidently across a field, master of the horse he's riding.

In a dream, I am at the South Pole, in a landscape of snow and ice. Seated on the edge of a crystal-clear lake is a supernaturally large woman. A sea wolf rises up from the water, urgently trying to get her attention.

These are only a fraction of the images, stories, and ongoing narratives recorded in the dream journal I began 12 years ago. Like the cryptic images that comprise Egyptian hieroglyphics, I study these dream pictures for the meanings that they might reveal. With help from a friend or my analyst or through my own efforts, I am able to garner insights into deeply buried emotional complexes, receive practical advice on everyday affairs, and, perhaps most intriguingly, experience realms of existence that lay beyond my conscious awareness.

In fact, amid life's confusing maze of sudden twists, abrupt halts, and never-ending turns, dreams are surely one of the most resourceful inner navigation systems available to humankind. In centuries past, dreams were thought to be direct messages from the gods as well as actual events taking place in other realms. From the ancient Egyptians, Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans to the indigenous tribes around the world, the healing and prophetic power of dreams has been held in great awe.

But with the rise of secularism and rationalism in the Western world, dreams slowly became regarded merely as superfluous churning of the mind. However, the publication of Sigmund Freud's landmark work, *THE INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS*, a century ago this year, restored these nocturnal images to a place of importance. As a pioneer in the new science of psychoanalysis, Freud emphasized dreams as expressions of the unconscious, which placed them in a radically different context: as disguised messages of irrational impulses otherwise deemed unacceptable by the dreamer's censoring mind. Although today many of Freud's theories on dreams, such as wish fulfillment, have fallen out of use, his evocative description of dreams as the "royal road to the unconscious" ushered in a remarkable new era of interior exploration. For instance, Carl Jung, Freud's one-time heir apparent and a psychology pioneer in his own right, ultimately saw dreams

as less about repressed instinct and more as a path toward "individuation," the integration of the individual ego with the transpersonal Self. In addition, it was Jung who postulated the existence of the collective unconscious, a repository of universal patterns, or mythological archetypes, which underlie the symbols in dreams.

Various schools of Freudian and Jungian approaches to dreams as well as methods devised by psychologists including Alfred Adler, Erik Erikson, Fritz Perls, Medard Boss, and others burgeoned over the years. Indeed, as Robert L. Van de Castle has written in his book, *OUR DREAMING MIND*, it would "require a 10-volume series" to sum up the work of the theorists who have built upon the original foundation laid down by Freud and Jung. The steady stream of books, magazine articles, studies, and dreamwork groups, both in the "real" world and in the virtual world of the Internet, attest to the fact that dreamwork continues to be a dynamic dimension of individual psychological and spiritual development.

So where is the field of dreamwork as it enters the twenty-first century? All indications are that it has come full circle, arriving at the place from which it first began. Just as the shamans of Paleolithic cultures turned to their dreams to get specific guidance on the next day's hunt, there is growing acceptance of the notion that dreams are an untapped source of practical information regarding one's job, family, or friendships, and that they may even have a precognitive function, warning of impending danger. The functional applicability of dreams--or the way in which they can be used as a kind of invisible radar to help steer individuals through the labyrinthine difficulties of the "daylight" world--has become as important an area of research as interpreting them for their hidden, psychological content. In addition, just as the Egyptians and Greeks believed that they had received actual visitations from the gods in their dreams, so too do some modern-day dreamers believe that they may have communicated with a departed loved one or a spirit guide, or journeyed to another dimension. Lastly, just as our forebears once shared dreams among themselves, so growing numbers of lay people are organizing dream groups to help in the interpretation of their nightly odysseys rather than relying on the expertise of a professional elite: analysts and psychotherapists.

This does not mean that the psychological or symbolic approaches to dream interpretation pioneered by Freud and Jung have been abandoned. Rather, contemporary dreamwork has expanded to include perspectives that can deepen self-knowledge or connect the dreamer to the body, the environment, and the spiritual dimension. As anyone who has spent time decoding dream language knows, however, such divisions are arbitrary. A dream that foretells an actual event in outer life, for example, can simultaneously be "read" for the symbolic message it may also contain. Likewise, an "intrapsychic" dream revealing an emotional complex may help a person see where they are being blocked in outer circumstances--or how it may be making them physically ill.

To Jungian analyst Sylvia Brinton Perera, coauthor with Edward Christopher Whitmont of *DREAMS: A PORTAL TO THE SOURCE*, the dream process is vividly represented by Celtic design motifs that "interweave, interlace, and spiral," forming intricate patterns that can illuminate our relationships in the outer world as well as in physical, emotional,

and spiritual dimensions. Thus like an enchanted needle in a fairy tale, dreams, it seems, weave meaning out of the chaos of life, both embroidering a mythic narrative of the soul's journey, spinning wise counsel for everyday life, and creating a beautiful work of art in the process.

## HOW DREAMS HEAL

Ernest Hartmann, professor of psychiatry at Tufts University School of Medicine and director of the Sleep Disorders Center at Newton-Wellsley Hospital in Massachusetts, has spent 30 years examining both the biological basis and psychological function of dreams. He is author of many books on the topic. His latest book **DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES: THE NEW THEORY ON THE ORIGIN AND MEANING OF DREAMS** articulates a new model for understanding how dreams heal. It is based on his study of series of dreams from patients suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to experiences such as having been raped, having witnessed a murder, or having been trapped in a fire. Although he honors Freud and Jung for uncovering how dreams reveal both emotional complexes and collective unconscious patterns, Hartmann writes that his real area of interest lies in "the extremely important art of **MAKING USE OF DREAMS.**"

The best way to conceptualize how the brain works, Hartmann says, is as a computer model made up of a network of connections. Because the "cerebral cortex is made up of several billions of neurons" that form a weblike structure of intercommunication, asleep or awake, "connectivity is just about all there is in the brain," he writes. In dreams, says Hartmann, we "make connections more broadly and inclusively" than we do in waking states of consciousness. According to his clinical studies, this is because dream states avoid the "less tightly woven, overlearned portions" of the brain that are devoted to activities such as reading or writing. Instead, dreams appear to activate the visual/spatial part of the brain that creates metaphors. In other words, our dreams see the larger picture behind events that the ordinary waking mind does not.

Furthermore, this connection-making function can serve an important healing function. Like skin that gradually heals around an open wound, dreams "reweave" that part of the psychic net that has been ripped apart by severe trauma. They do this, explains Hartmann, by providing a context for emotions in the form of pictures and metaphors. These images are not random, but appear to follow a purposeful pattern. For instance, victims of terrible accidents or natural catastrophes may initially have dreams that replay aspects of their trauma. Over time, however, other metaphors may appear. If, for example, a person was caught in a fire, she might dream, somewhat ironically, of being overcome by tidal waves. What this means, Hartmann says, is that such victims "are making up a picture about the way they are feeling; that is, they are overwhelmed and terrified." As the psyche continues to process the original trauma, dream images may progress from picturing emotions of terror and vulnerability to guilt or shame. This was the case of a young boy who survived a fire in which his brother died; he subsequently dreamt of being hurt while his brother was safe. Over time, however, what had seemed unbearable gradually becomes integrated and, like an ocean that calms after a storm, the turbulent

psyche subsides into a peaceful state. Indeed, the psyche may even be strengthened and better able to bear future trauma and shocks. In this way, Hartmann says, dreaming can function like good psychotherapy. "Even if we don't remember our dreams, they are still going on in the psyche, making connections," he says. "But if we remember our dreams, then it gives us a chance to make even more connections--working on dreams in therapy increases this potential even more."

Hartmann also points out another similarity between dreams and psychotherapy: that of "making connections in a safe place." In other words, in dreams, as in therapy, the patient refrains from "acting out" emotional conflicts in real life and instead works internally on these issues. In dreams, however, the natural state of paralysis that the body undergoes during sleep creates the safe container. Jungian analyst Robert Bosnak, author of *TRACKS IN THE WILDERNESS OF DREAMING*, agrees with Hartmann, saying that although it may seem paradoxical, it is in this state of paralysis that the motor functions of the brain become highly activated. "Therefore the body experiences a great deal without moving."

Thus in his own work with clients, Bosnak works with dreams in an "entirely still state." As he describes it, he has the client close his or her eyes while sitting up (to prevent falling asleep), then, through questions, he gently concentrates the dreamer's focus on the physical details within the dream setting such as the quality of light. This process slowly lowers the threshold of consciousness, Bosnak says, until it is congruent with the unconscious mind. At this stage, the client hovers in between waking and sleeping. In this way, he explains, one "gets closer to the original environment of the dream itself."

Bosnak began working with dreams as an integrated "imaginal and physical" whole during the mid-eighties with AIDS patients. "Dreams are a parallel process to both the sickening and healing process. They serve a homeostatic function, as if to maintain some kind of balance." And though Bosnak has never successfully diagnosed an illness from a dream, he believes in the natural therapeutic function of dreams. "If you work on dreams in this very physicalized way I am describing," says Bosnak, "it has a remedying effect, with the potential to slightly improve the physical condition."

## **ADVICE, WARNINGS, AND INSPIRATION**

The year was 1959, and Rita Dwyer, an aerospace chemist, was working primarily with rocket fuels. One day there was an explosion in the laboratory. Dwyer was badly burned by the blazing inferno that surrounded her. A co-worker from another lab rescued her. Later, this man confessed to her that the reason he had been able to perform his brave feat was because he had, on several occasions, dreamt of carrying her to safety. It was this incident, says Dwyer who is currently Executive Officer of the Association for the Study of Dreams (ASD) and a former president of the organization, that was the catalyst for her involvement in the dream field.

Sylvia Perera gives another example of a precognitive dream that intervened to save a life. A woman who was interred in a concentration camp during World War II dreamt one

night that she was eating wonderfully nourishing food prepared by her mother. When she awoke, she felt so full from her "dream meal" that she passed up the thicker soup the guards unexpectedly were serving. As it turned out, the soup was filled with ground glass; the Nazis were hoping to kill the inmates before the Allies arrived.

Although such stories may seem dramatically out of the ordinary to the lay person, it is both natural and routine, says dream explorer Robert Moss, to dream about future events. For this reason, traditional dreaming cultures, he says, "looked to dreams as a navigational guidance system on everything that mattered." This Paleolithic, shamanic approach to dreams, says Moss, who is the author of *DREAM GATES* and other books on dreaming, is central to his own dream methodology. Indeed, he says, "Some shamans say that nothing happens until it has been dreamed. So in shamanic dreaming there is tremendous emphasis on one's ability to scout into the future--this is what kept human beings alive 10,000 years ago."

But while the daily concerns in the ancient world had to do with hunting and planting, today's survival anxieties have more to do with negotiating rush hour traffic or maintaining one's job security.

To illustrate how dreams work to help in even the most ordinary of ways, Moss tells a story from his own life. In advance of traveling abroad to give a lecture, he dreamt the following: "I'm traveling in another country. While giving a lecture, I'm aware that the fans are so noisy that the people cannot hear me talking." After this dream, Moss decided to call and inquire about the conditions of the auditorium where he was to speak. As it turned out, the air conditioning unit that would have been turned on during his lecture would have been so noisy that his words would have been drowned out. Thus Moss was able to change auditoriums in advance, intervening in his own future to create a better outcome.

Like many other contemporary dream practitioners, Gayle Delaney, a dream analyst who is the author of many books on dreams including the recent *ALL ABOUT DREAMS*, says she values dreams for their practical application to everyday life. "What I notice about dreams," she explains, "is that they help people get about the difficult business of living." Most dreams, Delaney believes, are not straightforward or precognitive, but metaphors that need to be interpreted for the useful advice they might contain. She tells the story of a woman who had a dream about a black cat on her windowsill that came in her bedroom and "ran around." After working on the dream with Delaney, the woman realized that the cat was her "aloof, independent" boyfriend who reminded her of unfaithful, disloyal men she had dated throughout her life.

Yet another woman who was dreaming of trying to "get off the ground," looked down and saw her husband holding onto her foot. She then realized how his refusal to let her go back to school was holding her down. Indeed, Delaney's real excitement in doing dreamwork with clients is seeing them "figure out the dream by decoding their own metaphor, then challenging the dreamers to use dreams to make a difference in how they are living."

Sylvia Perera says that she reads dreams both ways: for the very real advice they may be giving about outer reality as well as for the self-knowledge they convey. For example, she says, she once dreamt that her brakes failed; the very next day, her brakes did indeed go out. Because of the dream, she had been driving cautiously and wasn't surprised. She used her handbrake to stop. Yet, she says, "especially because the dream occurred synchronously both in the outer world and the inner dreamworld, it was a vivid message that I needed to work symbolically on myself about slowing down. Using something in a dream that is precognitive or that seems to refer to outer events will also have such a psychological dimension. I think we at least need to check that out."

Dreams, says Perera, are also helpful in pointing out where we are conflicted and lack integration. She cites, for example, a troubling dream brought to her by a woman friend. In it, the woman had left her house to go for a walk, leaving her child behind. Suddenly she became terrorized, as she expected a tornado to come and ruin her home. In reflecting on the dream, the woman realized that the oncoming storm represented her fear of taking her newfound creative expression seriously. She saw that she was afraid that she would be "swept away" and lose deeply valued family life in a "creative frenzy." The dream put clearly, Perera says, "why she had been holding back from actually committing to the practice of her art." Working with this message, the woman began to wonder how she could balance these two aspects of her life. "She had created stability for herself as a wife and mother; now she had to learn how to integrate her creative capacity without terribly disrupting that security," Perera says.

While dreams can help integrate newly developing talents and interests into everyday life, they are also legendary as a source of inspiration for artists, writers, scientists, philosophers, and others. Dream literature is rich with examples of the inventive ideas that manifested through dreams. The sewing machine, the chemical structure of the benzene ring, the characters of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, even the shape of bullets, all stem from images that first arose in the dreams of their creators.

Psychologist and dream expert Patricia Garfield also sees creative dreaming as gestational, "where something is just coming into being--you can't understand exactly what it is, but something is beginning to take shape." When working with the creative insights revealed in dreams, she suggests sculpting or painting an image. "The act of painting dream imagery," says Garfield, "forces you to stay focused on the image. As you make the drawing, you begin to notice which parts you emphasize" and the creative idea begins to take form, she says.

She relates, for example, a dream she had just as she was on the verge of writing about dreams. In it, she was at a conference in which she stood up and said she would like to discuss "leaving"--which she interpreted as meaning leaves falling from a tree. Still in the dream, she went on to discuss the dreams she had had of a "branching woman" who had leafy branches growing from her head like antlers. Not long after this incident, her first book, CREATIVE DREAMING, was published and, she says, "everything branched out" for her.

The ancient technique of dream incubation--formulating a specific question before falling asleep--is also a method being used to help stimulate creativity and solve problems. Bosnak, for instance, is working in the areas of theater and science to understand better how the dreaming mind influences the creative process. Together with Janet Sonenberg, the director of the drama department at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Bosnak has developed a form of method acting based on dreamwork. To illustrate, he tells of an actor who had a problem getting into his role as an older man in conflict with a younger man. Just before falling asleep, the actor concentrated on getting into the consciousness of the physical condition of his character; that night he dreamt of a seductive woman. Working with this image by "feeling" into the dream-woman's body, the actor saw his problem as one of having been "too tight." But by playing his role in the body of this feminine dream figure, the whole scene "opened up" for the actor. Such an example, says Bosnak, shows how dreams don't usually give us literal answers to our problems as much as they create an attitude. "Basically what the dream does is present you with a state of consciousness that would make it possible to look at this problem from a different angle"—one other than that of the ego's limited perspective, he says.

## **THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF DREAMS**

Like the Chinese parable of the sage who could not determine whether he was a man dreaming he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming that he was a man, the visionary nature of certain "big" dreams stirs questions over their ultimate source. Whether in the guise of hellish encounters or excursions through heavenly realms, dreams are often visionary experiences of the soul's spiritual unfoldment. As archetypal psychologist James Hillman wrote in his classic work, *THE DREAM AND THE UNDERWORLD*, dreamwork ought to be "protective of those depths from which dreams rise, the ancestral, the mythical, the imaginal, and all the hiding invisibilities that govern our lives." Thus out of respect for the sacred origins of dreams, Hillman warned strongly against the literal conversion of dreams into the "ego's language" for use in the everyday world.

Given the current emphasis on the practical usefulness of dreams, Hillman's words, written 20 years ago, touch a moral chord. As Robert Bosnak, who trained with Hillman, explains, "One of the great dangers is that we come from a culture of colonizers; in our psychological work as well, there is the tendency to be imperialistic by making the unconscious serve the heroic ego. Dreamwork done in service of the heroic ego, for instance, knows exactly what it wants: self-improvement, positive relationships, and a better station in life. While this may be fine, it may not be at all what the unconscious forces as a whole want."

Bosnak encourages an attitude toward dreamwork that both respects the unknown--what some may call fate, God, or the Divine--and sees value in what the ego may not, such as all manner of difficulties and confusion. Such states, he says, are landscapes through which the soul journeys. Through opening up to these transpersonal dimensions, rather than attempting to control them through our personal will, dreamwork can be a form of spiritual transformation in which "we partake in the energy of the gods."

Much as Bosnak describes, I remember a dream of my own following a professional setback. Feeling profoundly discouraged, I dreamt that I was visited by a Coptic priestess dressed in a golden robe. Placing her hands gently on my shoulders, she held me as I vomited out all my "doubts and fears." Upon awaking from this dream, I felt healed of the upset I had suffered as though, despite my outer failure, all was somehow "right with the gods."

For as Sylvia Perera reminds us, according to the Jungian framework, "the personal and transpersonal weave together. The way we handle our everyday problems affects our relationship to spirit because the issues we struggle with over the course of our lives are the raw material--the alchemical prima materia--of the process of life-long transformation." The metaphorical and symbolic images in dreams reflect this intrinsic connection between the personal and transpersonal, Perera says. A symbol of the transpersonal such as the tornado in her friend's dream, roots the dream in a dimension that lies in the world of spirit or soul. And it also represents the archetypal emotion that the dreamer felt. The image of the woman's house in the same dream, however, is both a symbol of her secure life and also a metaphor for a part of the personal psyche.

Others, as well, find dreamwork to be a luminous window onto the workings of the soul. As much as Robert Moss values the literal advice offered by dreams, he, too, sees dreamwork as a "valid, everyday path toward closer alignment with the Higher Self." And, much like the imaginal, archetypal realms of the Jungian worldview, so the shamanic approach to dreaming embraced by Moss posits the existence of spirit realms inhabited by animals, ancestors, gods, goddesses, angels, and other beings. The shamanic understanding, says Moss, is amazingly similar to that of the Platonic philosophers and Jewish Kabbalists, who saw existence as a series of emanations downwards. In this view, he says, "physical events have their origin in creative patterns that are first expressed at the subtle order of reality shamans call 'the dreaming.' Thus there is the understanding that not only are certain dreams very real experiences that take place on other planes, but in conscious dreaming you can enter the realm where events and patterns of physical reality are born."

Because our spiritual teachers, "lie in wait for us," Moss says, "dreaming is a good way to put ourselves into a state of readiness to receive their teachings." Faithfully recording our dreams each day with an attitude of receptivity to the wisdom they may contain and then thanking the source of our dreams, says Moss, is a wonderful spiritual practice. Indeed, he says, dreams are gateways to subtler dimensions where there are "temples and places of spiritual training and initiation." For example, Moss tells the story of a woman who, following the death of her husband from alcoholism, had a dream involving the Greek god Orpheus. In it, she underwent a journey through the underworld in which she overcame the fear of her own death, and ultimately became a guide to assist her dead husband in his transition to the afterlife.

In fact, dreams of the departed are an especially vivid aspect of spiritual dreaming. A topic explored in Patricia Garfield's most current book, *THE DREAM MESSENGER: HOW DREAMS OF THE DEPARTED BRING HEALING GIFTS*, she writes about the

distinctive patterns that she discovered in her research of over 400 dreams. These include images of a journey, dream gifts from the departed, a "soul animal" whose characteristics are associated with the departed person, and images of a "veil" or boundary that separate the living from the dead. Such dreams, she emphasizes, are an essential part of the healing process around mourning, providing comfort to the bereaved. But many who dream of their departed loved ones are also convinced that their encounter was not "just a dream" but a real experience--a phenomenon Garfield says that even she has experienced. Many of my own dreams of loved ones who have died contain themes similar to those in Garfield's study. After my father passed away, for instance, I dreamt of a large elephant covered in an emerald mantel, a winding road and a final destination where we would one day meet again, and, in what seemed like evidence of his "new life," my father with a new head of hair.

### **THE NEVER-ENDING STORY**

By all accounts, dreams are a rich bounty of imaginative wisdom and spiritual inspiration that nourishes and sustains our lives on every level--physical, emotional, and spiritual. For within our dreams exist poet, artist, statesman, therapist, and many other figures who, like a kind of composite Merlin, stand ready to offer magical assistance through the arduous journey of life. Just as in the fairy tale of the poor man who searched around the world for buried treasure only to find it in his own backyard, this wisdom is accessible to each and every one of us--if we do the hard work of "digging" it up through dreamwork. Indeed, even when Jungian analyst Edward Christopher Whitmont was ill and dying, says his life partner Sylvia Perera, he "worked on his dreams right up to the very end. His dreams helped him prepare and make the transition." In the same way, she says, all of us are always "dying to come into something new. Taking the symbolic reality of dreams and outer events seriously makes this essentially creative process so much deeper and richer." Thus dreams, like life itself, are a never-ending story.

### **DREAMWORK TECHNIQUES**

The first three dreams I describe in the opening of the article can be used as examples of how dreams can deepen our understanding of different aspects of our lives. The first dream, with Jung, was a significant "life" dream that initiated my exploration of the uncharted regions of the unconscious. The second dream of the cowboy reflected an "attitude" of easy-going acceptance within myself that I needed to strengthen in order to handle a situation that was causing me anxiety. The third was a warning dream relating to an urgent situation with one of my children.

As clear as these symbolic scenes may appear to me today, however, I was not able to decipher their messages immediately upon awakening, but only after a great deal of thoughtful reflection. Although the obscure, puzzling images so common in dreams can seem overwhelming, dream decoding is a skill that, with practice, most of us can learn. The following suggestions address some common concerns.

If you don't remember dreams, don't worry. Dream research shows that everyone dreams, so the problem is that you are not remembering them. To sharpen your memory, most experts recommend starting a dream journal, then maintaining the discipline of writing down your dreams the first thing each morning. In a forthcoming pamphlet that Cynthia Pearson authored for ASD, "Writing Down Your Dreams," she suggests that one way to "prime the pump" before sleep is to give yourself the suggestion that you will remember your dreams. Other tips include: setting an alarm clock for the middle of the night or drinking a glass of water before bedtime so that you have to get up in the middle of the night; keeping a notepad and pencil on a nightstand to record any dream fragments; and, upon awakening from a dream, asking yourself "Where have I been?" "What was I doing?" or "What was I just thinking about?"

But it's only about a trip to the hardware store or my car being towed. People often disregard the small, fleeting dream images of daily life as unnoteworthy, says Robert Bosnak. But, he says, "A dream is like a mermaid with a tail, the top may be obvious, but when you get into the tail it spreads out into the ocean." Gayle Delaney's interview method is ideal for decoding a dream metaphor. The idea is to approach a dream image, whether an object, place, person, or feeling, then feign ignorance--pretend you're from another planet and have never seen a cat, been to Connecticut, or heard a train whistle, for example. Ask yourself, "Could you explain what it's like?" This simple question, Delaney says, encourages a person to "come up with the relevant words to fit their visual imagery. Because if we don't put things into words, we don't process information."

Finally, a key technique recommended by Moss for decoding dream metaphors is that of summarizing a dream in one line. For instance, a person in one of his dream groups dreamt of having her car towed by police because her car was parked too long in the wrong place. When boiled down to the phrase, "I'm in trouble because I've been parked too long in the same place," Moss says, she had an instant recognition "of a couple of places in her life where she had been stuck and needed to get moving."

Is it precognitive? According to Moss, the above dream could also refer to a real situation with the woman's car. Indeed, "I've never seen more time wasted in dreamwork," he says, "as when people avoid the very simple step of asking whether or not whatever is in their dream could be playing out in ordinary reality." Thus he recommends that one of the first steps in dream interpretation be that of running a "reality check."

Act on the dream message. Whether literal or metaphorical, most experts say that it is essential to take action on our dreams. Says Sylvia Perera, "We need to take the messages in our dreams into life--not just sit on them, but ask ourselves what our responsibility is to live the dream forth." Garfield agrees. "Most dreams don't fix a problem, as much as they tell you what the situation is. Thus they encourage us to face reality, then challenge us to either stay in our rut forever or do something about it."

Work on dreams alone or in a group. Without exception, all of the dream theorists in this story said that the dreamer was her own best expert and final authority on her dreams. However, all also agreed that working on dreams in groups or with a friend was an

important aspect of dreamwork. Says Perera, "Because we are often stuck in our ego position and can't see our own blind spot," it helps to have another perspective. Hartmann, in fact, hails the rise of dream groups across the country with a hearty "Viva la revolution." Even as a psychoanalyst, he says, "I don't feel that one has to go to a trained guru to work with dreams. Only when a person is having significant problems or has suffered a trauma," he says, "is it best to consult a professional."--Pythia Peay