

Healing Through Dreamwork

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There is a powerful healing potential within our dreams if we are willing to take notice and listen to their wisdom. The word for “dream” in Hebrew is *chalom* and is derived from the verb meaning “to be made healthy or strong.”

Ed Kellogg, Ph.D. in biochemistry from Duke University, a proficient lucid dreamer, has a long-standing interest in the phenomenology of dreaming. As part of the recent online PsiberDreaming Conference of the International Association for the Study of Dreams he presented a paper and workshop that looked at three kinds of healing dreams: diagnostic, prescriptive, and curative.

Diagnostic dreams point to a developing situation in the body, something that has already begun or something that might develop in the future, sometimes years before the person has any outward physical signs of disease. The mind-body connection within us is so strong that our sleeping mind senses imbalances long before we become conscious of such, then brings the situation into our consciousness through dreams.

These dreams can be literal or metaphorical. In a metaphorical dream, one’s car or house may have a problem. The car or house can represent the dreamer’s body; therefore its problem refers to something wrong with his or her body. If one has been working with dreams and is aware of his/her personal symbols, one might understand the dream well enough to seek help from a physician in time to prevent a full-fledged illness or forestall serious complications. In a literal dream a woman may dream of finding a lump in her breast, which leads her to contact her doctor.

Prescriptive dreams can suggest a form of medical treatment for an illness or beneficial diets and health practices for the dreamer. If foods are mentioned in a positive context, the particular food is likely to be beneficial if included in one’s diet. If presented in a negative context, the food might best be avoided.

People experiencing curative dreams are healed “directly, through a mind-body-spirit integration effect, partially or completely. However, in most cases a curative healing dream only begins a process that will take time to complete,” according to Kellogg.

Some people awaken healed or much improved following a healing dream. This is reminiscent of healings experienced centuries ago by people in ancient Greece who visited the temple of Aesclepius, where they might receive information in a dream to aid healing or even be healed directly.

Kellogg reminds us that dreams may belong to one, two, or all three of these categories. “For example diagnostic healing dreams may also show the cause of a developing condition, which if eliminated might well halt or reverse the dis-ease process.” It is up to the dreamer to make the choice to do what is best after considering all the facts given by doctors and one’s dreams.

I would like to add that someone may be “healed” even when not “cured.” This statement is based on the distinction between the meanings of the two words. The verb “to heal” is etymologically related to the Old English *hal* (whole); thus to heal, to restore to health, is to make whole. “To cure” is more accurately used as a medical term meaning “to get rid of a physical illness.” Healing can take place even when a cure is not possible. Therefore terminally

ill patients may have healing dreams which help them understand themselves and peacefully accept their situations, and thus in a real sense become more whole, before they die.

The discoveries in the 1980s of Candace Pert, Ph.D., a biophysics and physiology researcher, confirmed an intricate biochemical communication network between the body and mind. Since emotions play a major role in the mind/body phenomenon, Pert emphasized that for maximum functioning of the immune system it is important to free blocked emotions and find constructive ways to express them. Dreamwork is a way to do this. It is a complementary therapy that has been overlooked for too long.

Wendy Pannier and Tallulah Lyons, members of IASD and founders of the Healing Power of Dreams Project, for the past decade have used dreamwork with cancer patients at The Wellness Communities in Philadelphia and Atlanta. They report: “We have seen how powerful dream imagery can be. We believe our work with dream imagery has application for other types of illness too—and for anyone seeking a fuller sense of wellness in life. We use the recognized and proven modality of visualization/active imagination techniques and take them to the next level by customizing them with the individual’s own dream imagery. This work falls into two primary categories: Transforming negative dream images (such as those from nightmares) and reinforcing positive and healing dream images by using them with imagery work in combination with other integrative medicine modalities.”

A survey of their dream group participants found the following: Dreamwork brings about (1) decreased feelings of anxiety and stress, (2) an increased sense of connection with others, (3) an increased sense of connection to inner resources, (4) increased understanding of healing at multiple levels, (5) an increased quality of life—particularly emotional, social and spiritual, (6) increased feelings of control over life and health issues, (7) increased feelings of hope, and (8) an understanding of how to live fully now, despite cancer.

There are many techniques for exploring dreams. All methods emphasize the importance of experiencing the feelings in the dream and of connecting the feelings to waking life. Joining a dream group is the best way to explore one’s dreams.

As a facilitator with the Project, I am working with Lyons and Pannier to introduce and encourage the use of dreamwork as a complementary therapy in the Charlottesville area. Dreamwork is beneficial for everyone, but can be especially helpful for persons experiencing serious illness. We are offering to conduct introductory workshops for interested healthcare groups with the potential for establishing an ongoing dream group, a special kind of support group. Dreamwork can become a journey toward recovery, toward wellness, toward wholeness and true healing.