

INTRODUCTION

C. G. JUNG SAID, "A dream is nothing but a lucky idea that comes to us from the all-unifying world of the psyche."^{*} It is not necessary that we accept his statement on faith, or even understand it. Instead we can all look to our own experience of dreams. We know when our understanding of a dream hits home; we can feel it. When we pay attention to our dreams, we open windows to unfiltered parts of ourselves. By allowing the dreams to penetrate our waking consciousness we enable parts of ourselves to stitch back together; we begin to feel a little more whole. Although people throughout the world and across time have been fascinated by dreams, their ways of understanding them vary as widely as do the cultures of the dreamers.

In this book I have brought together a variety of perspectives on dreams so that you, the dreamer, can discover what is helpful to you. Some selections are specifically about dreams; others are about how symbols can be helpful in understanding dreams. How did the founders of psychoanalysis suggest we work with dreams? What have contemporary psychologists contributed to the study of dreams? Does scientific sleep research provide helpful information? What insights do indigenous peoples offer for understanding nightmares? In what way have spiritual traditions addressed dreams? We can learn from all the ways that people before us have used and understood dreams. Mine them all for answers to your own questions.

It is not my intent to present a balanced sample; rather, the selections that follow are those that have moved me or been helpful to my clients. Because of my affinity for Jung's ideas, there are a considerable number of

^{*}From Carl Jung's essay "The Meaning of Psychology for Modern Man," in *Civilization in Transition*, trans. R. F. C. Hull.

selections from him and those psychologists and thinkers who have been inspired by him. Myth, religion, philosophy, and literature have always explored dreams and the psyche, and I have included selections from these as well. Provocative writings on dreams are everywhere—so much the better for us all.

The Table of Contents can direct you to general topics and authors of interest. The book's first four sections contain selections from the pioneers of psychotherapy, then samples from ongoing developments in psychotherapy, the science of sleep and dreaming, and historical philosophers. These sources tend generally (but not exclusively) to rely on observation, theory, and logical inference as the basis for dream work. The last three sections—with selections from indigenous peoples, myth and religion, and writers and artists—tend generally (but not exclusively) to rely on intuitive understanding of dreams and dream work. Throughout, the individual selections are broken into “bite size” pieces so you can get a taste from an author and try it out for a night's dreams without getting more than you can digest at one time.

Choose an area of interest and read until you find an approach that strikes you. How would you apply it to a dream that you remember? Or, if you have trouble remembering dreams, look up “remembering dreams” in the Index for some ideas about how to recall dreams when you awake. Some selections give insight into the nature of dreams or dreaming, rather than serving as aids to interpretation. Even these, if you find them interesting, will inspire your dreams and dream work in experiential ways.

I have used many of these selections and quotations as catalysts for work in dream groups. As we turn dreams over in new ways the group's vitality and creativity heightens. Some perspectives, such as noting the dramatic flow of the dream, will almost surely help you (see “The stages of a dream,” by Marie-Louise von Franz, p. 25); others may stand out for a time and be forgotten. When you find something that stands out, you may want to delve deeper into the original source or author. Those that do not strike you today may be the key to a dream tomorrow.

You will find few answers in these pages about the specific meaning of your dreams. Instead, you will find much about the process of dream

work, different approaches or points of view, and ways to formulate questions that can lead to the discovery of dream meaning. It is certainly possible and worthwhile to work alone with your dreams, but be aware of one common pitfall: when each of us looks at our own dreams, it is easy to bring the preconceptions of the waking mind to our interpretations. For example, if I am embarrassed by my weight in waking life, I may be horrified and self-critical when seeing a dream image of my body, even though my loved ones in the dream seem unconcerned about this characteristic. To avoid this kind of misreading, approach the dream with an open mind, asking what new image your psyche offers (Gendlin on bias control, p. 72). Particularly when starting out, it's also helpful to share your dream work with someone you trust, someone who can share their own questions, body-reactions, emotions, and associations. Trust the questions, your own and others', to lead you to connect with the dream. And of course, if working with your dreams doesn't lead toward health and healing, or gets you in trouble, back off and find someone you trust or a professional counselor to help.

I believe you can trust your dreams. Our unconscious offers us dreams as messages that relate to our lives right now. Accept the dream as a gift given by your Self to yourself.

NOTE TO READER:

At the opening of each section of the book, I comment (in italics) on the selections to follow. I also comment (again in italics) before and after some selections. To the extent that you and I are similar, the comments may resonate with you. In the ways that we are different, you may find your own insightful ways into the reading.

By providing direct quotations from original sources I give you access to the authors' voices and styles as well as their ideas, even when they include vocabulary that we now find to be insensitive to gender or race.

Footnotes from the original sources are numbered continuously for each selection; for distinction, my footnoted clarifications to excerpts are within brackets, italicized, and designated by symbols (* and †).