



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *The Art of Memory for Dreams*

**W**hen I first got interested in dreams I couldn't remember them at all, no matter how hard I tried. That was a lucky break in a way, because it introduced me right off to the mysterious ways of dreams—a hard breed to catch in the forest of the mind. The extreme difficulty I had trying to remember my dreams gave me a certain reverent attitude toward dreams generally.

I kept a notebook by my bed for over three months before I remembered my first dream. With that first dream I was hooked and I then spent a whole summer devoted to discovering the secrets of remembering dreams.

I will share with you these techniques. If you follow my suggestions, you'll be remembering your dreams in far less time than it took me.

#### **Attitude Counts**

My first secret is that attitude is more important than technique. Learning to recall dreams is similar to learning any other skill. It requires motivation, pre-

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paredness and practice. Yet an attitude of confident patience is especially helpful.

I believe that it also helps to have a respectful attitude toward dreams. Respect their value and respect their fragility in your memory.

Curiosity about our dreams can help us try to remember them. We may wonder what our dreams mean and what role they may play in our lives. But many dreams may disappoint us by appearing mundane or trivial and hardly worth the effort required to recall them. Other people's dreams may seem more intriguing and imaginative than our own. Consequently, curiosity is not enough to sustain our efforts to acquire a proficient memory for dreams.

We may gain a better appreciation of the value of dreams by considering how people have found them to contribute to their work.

Many creative persons respectful tribute to inspiration. Dreams, often the medium of such inspiration, have enlightened artists, philosophers and scientists.

What is the source for the evident creative potential of dreams? Perhaps it is that dreams have access to long-forgotten memories and to perceptions which were originally only vaguely noted. Perhaps it is that dreams combine elements of experience in novel fashions, using bizarre imagery and/or powerful symbols. It is not only the especially gifted few, the creative geniuses, who find that they can sometimes be outdone by the dreams. We all have had dreams which seem to surpass our daytime talents. Our experience tells us, then, that dreams bear a creative potential for everyone.

In short, dreams show that we are special, we are more than we seem to be. By respecting our dreams, we respect an important part of ourselves. Anything that important is certainly worth waiting for, if necessary. So however you can get there, being able to appreciate the value of dreams is the best attitude for getting ready to recall them.

- Be Patient.
- Be Persistent.
- Study books on dreams to keep motivation high.

### **Dreams Challenge Our Memory**

Having a positive attitude helps, but even attitude needs a practical pair of shoes to go off on a trek for dreams. Dreams are slippery and they challenge our attempts to learn to remember them. They happen in a different state of consciousness than our ordinary waking frame of mind. They hardly fit through

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the door of our waking mind as we try to bring them across the threshold into the daylight.

As we arise to confront the pressing duties of the day, we can dismiss easily any lingering dream fragments so quickly that our task will sometimes seem impossible. Dreams invite such neglect for they usually appear disjointed, meaningless and alien to our waking life. No wonder, then, that the dream is often rejected as incoherent nonsense and that it slips from our memory as we engage ourselves in the day's activities. Our memory system is not designed to retain nonsense. Being already overworked, it has little time to digest the strange forms of dreams, especially when they seem irrelevant to the needs of purposes of the day.

To make matters worse, we forget dreams not only after we awaken but also while we sleep. In the sleep laboratory, scientists can harvest an abundance of dreams by wakening subjects right after they dream. Even though these dreamers can recall their dreams when awakened in the middle of the night, by morning they've forgotten most of what they'd recalled that night.



### **The Power of Auto-Suggestion**

A positive attitude about dreams will mean you will plant suggestions within yourself constantly through the day:

“My dreams are important.”

“I’m going to remember my dreams.”

As you give yourself these suggestions, visualize yourself waking up in the morning with a dream on your mind. And when you go to bed at night, practice the routine of recalling a dream. Imagine yourself waking up in the

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morning, lying very still, with your eyes still closed, and recalling a dream. Then reach over to your bedside table and reach for your tablet or dream journal. Practice this sequence in your mind as you get ready to fall asleep.

If you don't have something to write on nearby, then beware! It will be difficult for you to record your dream, and you may forget it—they're slippery! But more important, you may be giving yourself a negative suggestion that you aren't going to remember a dream. Having a tablet within reach, already dated and marked "MY DREAM THIS MORNING" is a good suggestion. It shows you mean business.

### **Beware The Morning Trickster**

Sometimes we will experience an annoying feeling that the dream we recall in the morning does not compare either in clarity or completeness to the dream we remember having had during the night. In fact, there may remain only a disappointing fragment which refuses to yield to even our most patient efforts to expand it. Don't be tempted to throw away that fragment. It could be a test of your commitment to dreams! Keep everything!

To arise, even slightly, from the relatively pleasant experience of rethinking a dream in our mind to pick up a pen and paper to make notes will seem to require heroic moral effort. A voice will tell you there is no need to write it down, that you'll remember the dream. Beware. Many dreams have been lost that way. So make it as easy as possible to reach for your pad and pencil.

The moment of awakening in the morning is the most crucial opportunity to detect dreams. It is also true that at this moment our dreams may be lost. Dream images from the night seem very faint in the strong light of day. The awakening thought, "What do I have to do today?" is their most dangerous enemy. Our first task, then, is to condition ourselves so that when we awaken in the morning our first thought is for our dreams. Being so prepared, we will often find that our vigilance is rewarded by the discovery that we were dreaming just before we woke up.

### **Fishing for Dreams**

Often it is the last part of the dream that lingers in our mind when we awaken. With careful attention to this fragment, the entire dream may be retrieved.

There is both a technique and an art to allowing a dream fragment to expand into an entire dream. Avoid distractions which may interfere with the fragile memory of the dream. And don't move!

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It's important not to disturb the physical context in which the dream occurred. Remain motionless, in the same position as upon awakening, and keep the eyes closed.

Get back in touch with the dream by reexperiencing the part that is recalled. Mull over the feelings evoked by the special mood of the dream as you examine each character and event. As we review a dream in this way, forgotten elements emerge. One part reminds you of another, often in a backwards fashion.

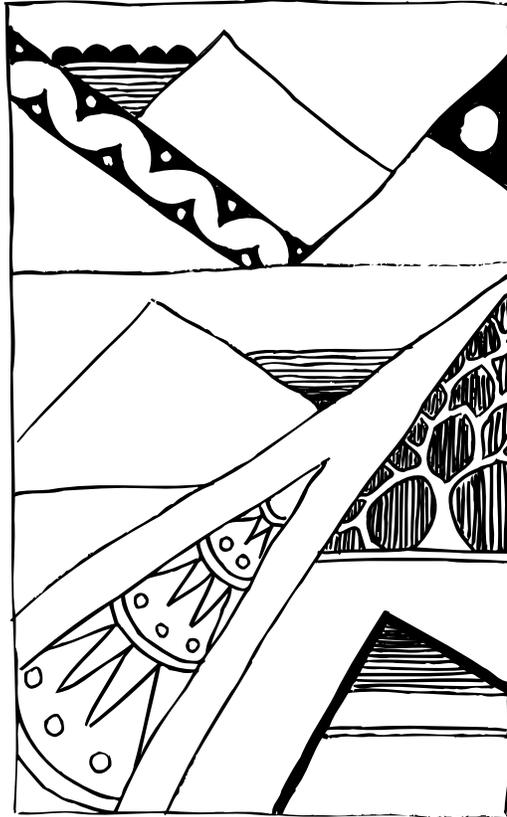
But dreams cannot be hurried. We learn that we have to wait for remaining memories to come on their own. Knowing how to wait is part of the secret of fishing for dreams.

On some mornings there'll be no clear feeling of a dream. Though we will probably be tempted to get up, we should, nevertheless, remain quietly in bed and wait. We might discover something to help us remember a dream.

We may ask ourselves, "What does it feel like to wake up this morning?" If there is a mood, get in touch with it, savoring its special quality without trying to pin it down with words. Often a flickering fragment will appear which can then serve as a hook to retrieve the whole dream. Or perhaps there is an image or thought which catches our attention because of its unlikely character. This may be a clue to a dream.

But often there is nothing special until the moment comes when we suspect the presence of a hidden dream. It is as if we accidentally stumble upon the right combination of the static of the mind that places us in momentary empathy with the feelings of the dream.

Sometimes, too, there appears to be nothing at all, and then suddenly a dream unfolds before us. Such is the mystery of dreams. And that special quality of contemplation which crystallizes dreams dissolved in the hazy fog of the awakening mind also becomes part of the art.



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Since memory for dreams is to some extent dependent on recreating the physical context in which the dreams occurred, it helps to try moving gently into each of the other positions in which you sleep and await additional dreams. It would seem as if the dream were stored in a code which is most intelligible when we are in the original posture of the dream.

You can try for yourself what they've found in the laboratory. Rolling over is a good way to erase your memory for a dream. You can also discover for yourself the importance of your body by comparing your ability to reexperience a dream in different positions. Trying to recall a dream while in an inappropriate position can feel something like trying to write left-handed. It is useful, therefore, to explore our sleeping postures, for each may contain unique dream memories. Moreover, dreams of the same night are often linked in subtle ways, so that dream images gained in previous positions can be reviewed as lures for other dreams. Still waiting is of the essence.

### **Tell Yourself the Dream**

Should you ever have the experience of remembering a dream upon awakening, so sure you've got it, only to get out of bed to go to the bathroom and, by the time you get there, you discover you've totally lost the dream! How could that be possible?

Your memory for a dream is best in the original context, which was in pictures, experience, feelings, your imaginative mind. It works best when your physical body is relaxed. When you get up, you engage your muscles, losing contact with the relaxed, imaginative body-mind. And you lose the dream in the process.

The solution? Tell yourself the dream. Put the dream into words. When you tell yourself the dream, even silently, you package the experience into a series of words. The dream story now has words, and words travel, even when you get up out of bed. If you'll tell yourself the dream, then later you can retell it to yourself--remember it--and you'll bring back the pictures and feelings, too!

### **The Seven-Day Recall Test**

Some people tell me they can't remember their dreams and assume that they are blocked in some fashion. Thinking about blocks comes from what we think we've learned about Freudian dream theory and censorship. We think that our dreams may have dark or worrisome secrets to reveal. That thought itself cre-

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ates a block. Usually the lack of recall is not a block, but rather the lack of time that has been devoted.

When I question people who say they can't remember their dreams, I learn that most of them give it about 15 seconds. If a dream is not there for them, right away, then forget it! And they do.

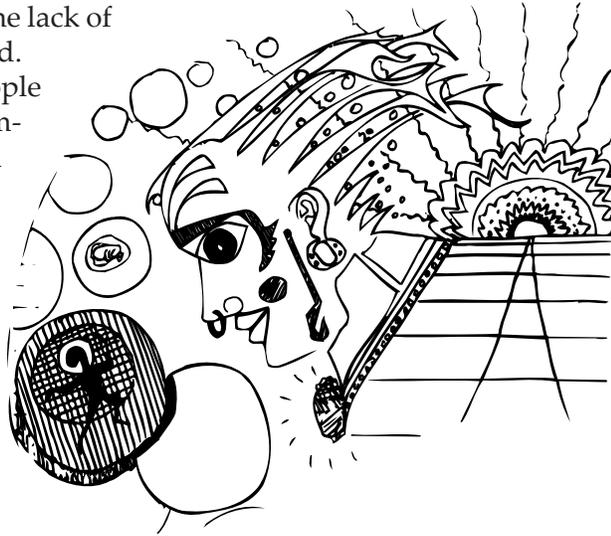
So I've devised this special technique. It's a way to test whether or not there is any kind of blockage or if it's just a matter of spending the time it takes to open the channel.

Make a commitment to yourself that each morning for a week, when you wake up, you will bring your tablet into your bed and write a page of stuff. It doesn't matter what you write, just write whatever comes to mind. Write stream of consciousness style. By writing out your feelings and ideas, you'll be inviting dream memories. You'll also be allowing sufficient time in bed to allow your dreams to surface. If you still don't remember a dream, then you can worry about "brain damage," as people often jest, but not before.

### Learning to Remember Dreams Opens A Channel of Creativity

Developing the habit of patient, quiet contemplation in the morning is vitally important to our learning to recall dreams. Our experience will show that if we spend some time lying in bed waiting, a hasty assumption that we have remembered no dreams will prove to be incorrect. It is, in fact, during such quiet, meditative efforts that we gradually realize the creativity inherent in the process of retrieving dream memories.

Even after we rise in the morning we should continue to be on the lookout for dreams, for it is not unusual for a dream memory to flash into the mind later in the day. Although the reason for such a sudden appearance is not always clear, it seems that an object or an event similar in some way to an element of the dream, or which evokes a reaction in us similar to a reaction we



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### **What's Your Attitude Toward Remembering Dreams?**

The ten factors in the questionnaire below may be among the most significant for you. This questionnaire gives you a chance to measure some of the variables that contribute to whether or not you remember your dreams. You must decide for yourself how influential each factor is in your own recall habits. Then enter a rating, from 0 to 4, with higher numbers meaning greater influence.

For example, Item 1 is, "Waking up at the right moment." Does the timing of your awakening make much of a difference in whether or not you remember a dream? If it makes little or no difference at all to you, score that item either a 0 or 1. If it is a very important factor, score it either a 3 or 4.

Now evaluate each of the ten questions in terms of your own recall patterns. For each, enter a rating, from 0 to 4.

Vital influence: 4  
Important influence: 3  
Moderate influence: 2  
Minor influence: 1  
No influence: 0

1. \_\_\_\_ Waking up at the right moment.
2. \_\_\_\_ How much I sincerely expect to remember my dreams.
3. \_\_\_\_ How emotional my dream is
4. \_\_\_\_ Giving myself a bedtime suggestion to remember a dream.
5. \_\_\_\_ Something the next day reminding me of a dream
6. \_\_\_\_ Placing my dream diary by my bed at night
7. \_\_\_\_ Being awakened by an alarm clock
8. \_\_\_\_ How much morning time I spend trying to remember my dreams
9. \_\_\_\_ How colorful, extraordinary, vivid, or bizarre my dream is
10. \_\_\_\_ How much time I have devoted recently to dream study

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Total up your scores separately for the even and for the odd numbered questions.

Total score for Even Numbered questions \_\_\_\_\_

Total score for Odd Numbered questions \_\_\_\_\_

Your score for the odd numbered questions reflects how much importance you place on factors outside your control.

Your score for the even numbered questions reflects how much importance you place on factors within your control.

We'll call your total score on the odd numbered questions your external score, as those factors are external to you, or outside your control.

We'll call your total score on the even numbered questions your internal score, as those factors are internal to you, or within your control.

If you don't recall dreams very often, perhaps the results of this little test can give you some clue for what you might change.

If your external score is higher than your internal score, then you are too passive with regard to dream recall. You believe more in fate than in your own efforts. You need to take a more active role in remembering dreams.

Rather than allowing external factors to play such a large role in whether or not you remember dreams, try to work on the internal factors.

Can you work to improve, for example, how much of an effect item #2 has on your dream recall? Reading about dreams and making a date with someone to discuss dreams the next day are two ways you might work on "expectancy."



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had in the dream, stimulates our memory. More often, the dream itself does not appear, but instead we encounter a vague feeling of being reminded of something. It is as if a dream were delicately balanced on the edge of the mind, almost about to roll into view. We need utmost care to tease it into consciousness, for it is as if the slightest jerking movement might jar it back into oblivion. Here again we find a use for the art of retrieving such fleeting images, for the phenomenon is so subtle that it is likely that we overlook many interesting instances because of our lack of attention.

### **The Daytime Attitude Towards Dreams**

Our desire to encourage spontaneous dream memories is just one of the reasons that during the day we should not forget or ignore our dreams. An often neglected aspect of developing a memory for dreams is the attitude that we have toward them during the day. The motivation that is necessary to our remembering dreams depends upon our respect for their potential values. If we do not properly value our dreams, our motivation for recalling them will slowly fade away. We must therefore conscientiously maintain an attentive, devoted, curious admiration for our dreams. This particularly fruitful attitude toward our dreams is difficult to express either in theory or action.

Perhaps we might say that it is as if our dreams were the appearance of an elusive, would-be lover. We cannot demand that she do our bidding or conform to our expectations. Even though she may frustrate or disappoint us, we dare not criticize her mysterious ways. So we allow her to come in any manner that she will and we are grateful when she visits us. What other way is there to win such a lover?

Another analogy may be helpful here. Suppose that dreams were utterances of an infant learning to speak. We are delighted at baby's first words. Even though we can only guess at what he might be saying, we do not scorn or ignore him - nor do we doubt his potential future eloquence. Instead, we applaud his efforts, and, by our attention, encourage him to continue speaking. We even take special note of his words and are all too eager to tell our friends about his speech. Thus we should not ignore even the least dream fragment a seemingly insignificant, nor should we disregard our dreams as meaningless even though they may puzzle us. Rather, we should give each one careful attention and with each develop an appreciative familiarity. How else can we expect the child to say even greater things?

Not only do these two metaphors - the elusive lover and the speech of an infant - illustrate an attitude which will support our attempts to learn to remember dreams, they also suggest ways to actualize this attitude and warn us

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of some common resistances which we may encounter. The basic resistance, and it is one that may take many forms, is the tendency to reject our dreams. Although our reason for rejecting a dream is usually perfectly valid when considered on its own terms, through such rejections our dream recall is nevertheless inhibited. Therefore, we must periodically come to terms with the source of this resistance.

We may, for example, reject a dream outright. Upon awakening in the morning, we may say to ourselves, "Oh, that dream was nothing!" and carelessly toss aside a lingering dream image which otherwise might have provided a memory for a dream. When we are seriously trying to recall our dreams, such judgments are ill-advised. Later in the day a rejected dream fragment may seem to be quite interesting after all, but then we will be disappointed to discover that we can no longer recall the dream.

We may also disregard a dream on the basis that our memory of it is too incomplete or confused. We may fall prey to philosophical doubt concerning the basis for trusting memory itself and we will confuse ourselves with doubts as to whether we dreamed at all. The subjective certainty which typically accompanies the initial, spontaneous recollection of our dream will fade with time and as the dream is scrutinized. Thus, it is better to record the first memory of the dream and let it go at that. There will always be time for later editorial revision and the original evidence will have been preserved.

Another reason for rejecting a dream is that it seems to be disappointingly short and apparently trivial. We may conclude that the dream does not contain much of value. In another instance, a dream may repel us because of its seeming incoherence or absurdity, or perhaps even because its contents offend us. But we should set aside our judgments and remember the dream. Even though our reasons may be valid, our developing ability to recall dreams is jeopardized each time we devalue one of them. Each time we ignore a dream, we reinforce the auto-suggestion that our dreams are not worth remembering—in effect, an instruction to ourselves to forget our dreams.



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Still another source of our resistance is fear, a fear of what we may discover in our dreams. As amateur psychoanalysts we often assume that dreams can reveal only our negative qualities and serve only to destroy the convenient illusions we have about ourselves. But we should not allow this preconception to prevent us from considering the positive possibilities as well.

A more typical source of resistance arises from the demands of our daily existence. Our dreams may seem to have little relevance to our immediate concerns and we may feel that the time it takes in the morning to pay proper respect to our dreams interferes with our desire to get a quick start on the day. Therefore, it is important for us to reaffirm the importance of dreams so that they can effectively compete for our attention.

Nevertheless, in spite of our best intentions, there will be periods when we do not remember our dreams. One may speculate as to possible causes for cycles in dream recall. Sometimes a dry spell is the result of a temporary condition, such as the pressures of an external situation, or the need to divert energy from self-preoccupation. But when we are reunited with our dreams, our previous experience in recalling them will make for a speedy recovery.

### **The Commemoration of Dreams**

There are a number of ways to give attention to our dreams. First, maintaining a dream diary is essential. Having a special book for recording and preserving our dreams is a powerfully symbolic gesture of respect for them. A dream journal has the double advantage of sparing our memory the impossible task of storing all our dreams and at the same time providing us with a space in which to develop, by writing out, our realizations of the meanings in the dreams. As the book grows, it becomes more and more of a reference work. As someone once said, "The best book on dreams is the one you write yourself."

We may further wish to honor our dreams by giving them artistic expression. It is often a good idea when we record our dreams also to include illustrations and diagrams in the diary. Certain dreams or dream images may stimulate the production of a satisfying painting. But even doodles made in the dream journal while musing upon the dream may yield surprising results. It is also possible to create poetry and stories of fantasy from our dreams. Besides providing works of aesthetic value, creative writing from dreams can also promote a greater awareness of the significance of the dreams.

Another important way of giving attention to our dreams is simply to think about them during the day. As we ponder what we dreamed during the night, we will often find it stimulates further dream memories and sometimes new ideas emerge. Thinking about dreams is often a good way to test and

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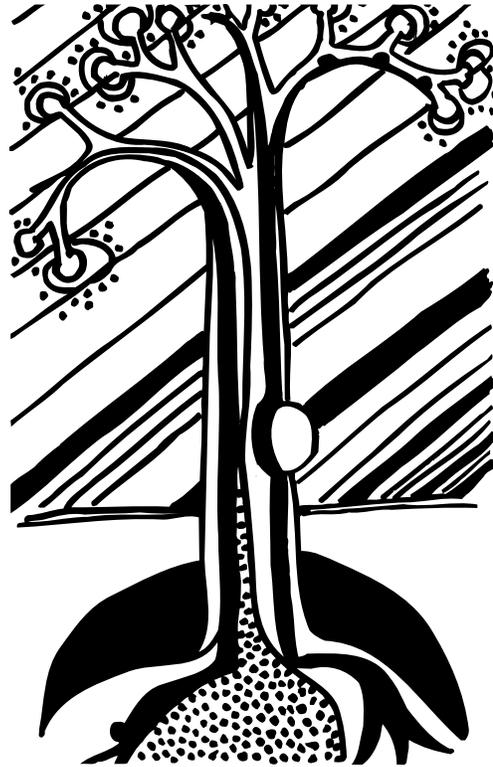
develop our memory for them, for we will find it easier to recollect (without aid of our dream diary) the dreams we recalled that morning and on previous mornings, even dreams of the most loosely connected sort.

By keeping our dreams in mind, we invite our daytime experiences to remind us of our dream images. It's no accident when we are reminded of a dream. We gradually discover the natural associative context of our dreams and we find that our past dreams provide us with frequent metaphors for our ongoing experiences. These spontaneous, meaningful coincidences often lead us along a natural path of dream realization.

Another aspect of giving attention to dreams is the practice of occasionally talking over, or simply telling, our dreams with friends. Discussing our dreams helps us to overcome

any shyness we may have about them and it also serves to give them an added importance. The opposite can also be true: a dream kept purposefully a secret develops a special value all its own. Yet if we dream of a friend, discussing that dream with the person gives us an opportunity to add a further dimension to our friendship. Although it might be true that we dream mostly of ourselves and that the friend in our dream represents some aspect of ourselves, discussing the dream with the other person may nevertheless yield some surprises.

The care we take to retrieve and reflect upon our dreams pays us rich rewards. Yet the creative potential in our dream life will develop in reality only to the extent that we take our dreams seriously enough to act upon them. As we gain appreciation for our dreams, they will cease merely to entertain us. They will begin to provide us with a source of hypotheses about ourselves and our environment. But only when we test these hypotheses by daily experimentation can we expect to exhibit the vitality that our dreams require in order to help us most. Like the difference between having an idea and making it work, living the understanding the dream brings is the crucial test in the art of remembering dreams.



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The use of the term “art” might seem overdrawn unless we consider the nature of the creative process. Creativity is sometimes described as the ability to combine common elements into novel relationships. It is the ability to suspend for the moment our usual working assumptions so that new thought patterns can form that constitutes the essence of creative functioning. Even though these new patterns appear vague and remote, entering into an empathic relationship with such potential sources of inspiration until they can clearly manifest is itself a creative act.

Creativity is also the process of bringing to light those invisible, autonomous promptings, the daemons of the dark, which normally hold us in their secret sway. Dreams are the daemons’ playground, and our days are subsequently affected by their nocturnal activity. Remembering your dreams, then, becomes a creative process which offers us the opportunity to participate with increasing consciousness in the drama of life.

Each dream is a creative act. Dreams habitually disregard our everyday logic and typically surprise us with their juxtapositions. It is not only their tendency to dissolve rapidly, but also their alien quality that makes them elude retrieval. Remembering our dreams, commemorating them in our lives, then, is a creative art in which we can all become more or less proficient. It is worth the practice. At the very least, it offers us a way to develop our potential for creative functioning and it may offer us more than that. It has been said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. ✨

