

Dreams and Emotional Healing

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I am not an expert on dreams or dream interpretation, but here are a few of my thoughts regarding dreams and emotional healing.

I. Defenses out of the way: My perception, from psychiatric and psychological literature, clinical observation, and from my own personal experience, is that our usual psychological defenses are significantly weakened when we fall asleep.¹ Dreams therefore provide a regular opportunity to gather clues about memories, emotions, and internal parts that are more heavily guarded when all of our defenses are “wide awake” and fully in place.

II. Dream interpretation: There are many books written on the interpretation of dreams. Psychoanalytic theory especially discusses the specific meaning of different dream images. My clinical experience is that dream interpretation is not an easy task, and that the meaning of specific dream images is not as consistent as some authors describe.

III. Focus on the emotions: My experience is that the meaning of specific details of dreams are often unclear, but the emotional content is consistently valuable. My clinical experience is that the emotional content of a person’s dreams is often rooted in memories carrying the same emotions as in the dream. If one focuses on the emotions from the dream, they will consistently lead to these important memory roots.

IV. Implicit memory emotions: For a number of months, I have been carefully observing my thoughts and emotions immediately on waking in the morning (before opening my eyes or turning on the lights). One of the most interesting patterns I have observed is that implicit-memory emotions (from both positive and negative past experiences) are generally more forward and connected when I wake in the morning, and this is especially true when I wake from a dream with emotions still present.² It is as if the implicit-memory emotions from past experiences are fully connected in the dream, and they don’t immediately disconnect at the moment of waking.

V. Internal parts: For people with internal parts, the internal parts are generally more forward and connected when the person wakes in the morning, and this is especially true when the person wakes from a dream with emotions still present. It is as if the internal parts carrying the dream

¹ “Truth serum,” or amobarbital interview, is simply adjusting the dose of intravenous barbiturate until the person is on the very edge of sleep – so he can still talk, but his usual “awake” psychological defenses are dramatically weakened. In this “almost asleep” state, the person can often access memories that are otherwise completely repressed and/or dissociated. See, for example, Kaplan, Sadock, and Grebb, *Kaplan and Sadock’s Synopsis of Psychiatry, Seventh Edition* (Williams and Wilkins, Baltimore, MD: 1994), p. 287, 293.

² All of the comments in this essay about waking from dreams in the morning are also true with respect to waking from dreams in the middle of the night. It’s just that we usually forget dream content from the middle of the night unless we take notes immediately on waking. (And it takes a lot of discipline/effort to do this – it’s so much easier to just drift back to sleep.)

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VI. My personal experience with dreams and emotional healing: I have experienced significant progress in my own emotional healing by following up on dreams that I wake with in the morning.³ When I wake with a dream, before getting out of bed, or even opening my eyes, I focus on the dream content and ask the Lord to show me anything He wants me to know about the dream. As mentioned above, the meaning of specific details in the dream is usually unclear, but the emotional content is consistently valuable. When I wake from a dream with negative emotions still present, I can usually perceive that my usual adult defenses are out of the way and that content from unresolved traumatic memories is present and connected. When I focus on the core dream emotions and ask the Lord for guidance, I usually eventually connect with the memory roots, or at least get a few more clues leading me closer to the memory roots.

VII. Increased dreaming, remembering dreams: A number of my clients, and also friends who are using the Immanuel approach to do emotional healing work, have reported a marked increase in dreaming and also in remembering their dreams after they begin their emotional healing journey. This doesn't surprise me, in that emotional healing work very intentionally reaches for the repressed and/or dissociated memories and emotions that often come forth in dreams. A person using the Immanuel approach is explicitly asking the Lord to bring these memories and emotions into his or her conscious mind. I am also guessing that our non-conscious minds and/or internal parts observe a new level of healing with the Immanuel approach, and begin to question previous decisions to totally repress and/or dissociate certain memories. For example, internal parts that previously believed it was totally unsafe to visit certain memories and emotions begin to wonder if maybe these deep places can be healed. It makes sense to me that increased dreaming and remembering dreams is often a natural result of this wavering resolve regarding repressed and dissociated memories and emotions.

VIII. Ask for the Lord's guidance in dreams: I now try to remember to pray each night for the Lord to guide me in my dreams, and my perception is that I have experienced an increase in helpful "healing ministry" dreams since beginning these prayers.

IX. Another special memory access tool: Deliberately cooperating with these implicit memory and emotional healing aspects of dreams provides another special memory access tool. (For discussion of other special memory access tools, see "A Case Study in Additional and Special Memory Access Tools: Working With My Own 18 Month-Old Separation Trauma," available as a free download from the "Kclehman.com Website Archives" section of www.immanuelapproach.com.)

X. Sample prayer: "Lord Jesus, please fill me with your Holy Spirit and surround me with your angels as I sleep tonight. I ask that You would speak to me in my dreams in any way You wish to do so. Please help me to understand and cooperate with Your presence and work in my dreams."

³ Again, all comments about waking from dreams in the morning are also true with respect to waking from dreams in the middle of the night.