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GOOD USE OF BAD DREAMS TUNE INTO NIGHTMARES TO LEARN WHAT YOU'RE TRYING TO TELL YOURSELF

By ELIZABETH BROMSTEIN

Sleep is a freaky place where we may find both comfort and anguish. A lot of the time we don't know which we're going to encounter when we get there.

Anyone who has ever suffered from anxiety dreams or nightmares (or lived with someone who suffers from them) knows just how frustrating they can be. According to the Dream Foundation, more than half the population has had at least one anxiety dream or nightmare within the past month.

Some would argue this has to do with the type of person you are. One study found that art students were far more likely to have bad dreams than their phys. ed. peers, and another discovered that Republicans were more likely to have bad dreams than Democrats. And if you think I'm going there you're out of your mind.

Everyone seems to agree that your dreams are trying to tell you something, and those dream interpretation books don't work.

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

"Our spirit allies might bring a message to us through our dreams. If we're not paying attention in our waking life, they might access our dreams. Most of the time the images and symbols are not to be taken literally. We can actually go on a **shamanic journey** with the intention of understanding the meaning of the dream. The safest and easiest way is to journey to the beat of a drum or rattle. The sound changes our brain waves to a state where we are more receptive to our spiritual allies. We can ask the meaning of the dream. They might share the answers, which may be verbal, visual or in the form of feelings or sound. More often than not, in the first 30 seconds there is an answer to your question."

MARTHA LUCIER, [B.Ed.](#), graduate of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies

"A nightmare means we are neglecting something in ourselves, and the unconscious is only going to get more persistent. Wherever the scary bit is, people wake up, and that's the key. It's about needing to be aware or conscious. Let's say there's an intruder at the door. I'd **ask the dreamer** what the intruder looks like. Is it male or female? Why are you so afraid? The answers will reflect material the dreamer has repressed. There

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are elements of our personalities that parents and society find unacceptable, so we put them away. Over time they gain energy in the closet and want to break down the door and be integrated into our lives. There's a deeper wisdom in all of us that's trying to move us to live more fully in the world of who we are."

CHRISTINA BECKER , *Jungian psychoanalyst, Toronto*


"**Lucid dreaming** is the ability to become conscious within a dream. You can learn to confront some of your demons and difficulties and deal with them though dreaming. One technique I promote most is **meditation** . If you can learn to be more conscious and more present in your waking life, that carries over into the dream life. Let's say you constantly have a nightmare about being chased by a bear. Your unconscious reaction might be to run away, and it chases you until you wake up in a sweat. You can **choose to have a different reaction** . What would happen if you turned and faced it? What we find is that the figure, the antagonistic bear, transforms and becomes an ally. By engaging with your dark dreams, you're creating a larger territory or set of resources with which to navigate your life."

TOKO-PA TURNER , *dreamworker, the Dream School, Toronto*

"If you eat steak and potatoes at 9:30 pm and go to bed at midnight, you're going to be tossing and turning because your body hasn't had enough time to digest the food. Your entire digestive system goes into complete shutdown within three to four hours of falling asleep, so your body prevents itself from falling asleep if there is too much food there. That state of imbalance can create nightmares. **B6** is your dreaming vitamin. If you think you're not dreaming or not getting any guidance from dreams, we consider that to be a common [result of] B6 deficiency. B vitamins are incredibly important for digestion, so there could be a correlation."

TRACY McBURNEY , *holistic nutritionist, Toronto*

"Your sleeping life is not that different from your waking life. You have daydreams when awake and night dreams asleep. You need to tap into both your conscious and unconscious mind to understand better what your symbols represent. Everyone has his or her own dictionary, or lexicon, so the exact same nightmare narrative can have different meanings for different people. Symbols are related to culture, environment and personal experience. Dreaming about a white snake might mean nothing to some, but to some Chinese it can be very symbolic, as are certain numbers. Lucid dreaming training attempts to control one's dream themes and outcomes, but at best it's only temporarily effective."

DOUGLAS FRAYN , *psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, author, Understanding Your Dreams, Toronto* 

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