

Listening to your Dreams

By Alice Carlton, LCSW

When you wake up in the morning, do you remember your dreams? Or do they slip back into the foggy recesses of your mind before you can hold them? Dreams shine a light into the vast inner landscape you don't always take time from your busy life to explore. They reveal aspects of yourself or your life that you are not necessarily aware of in waking life. They can offer guidance with decisions you are struggling with. They can even predict the future.

As a psychotherapist, I encourage clients to tell me their dreams. Then, like children at a sandbox, we sift through them together in search of hidden gems.

How can dreams help guide decision making? Let me tell you about Annie, a divorced middle-aged woman with serious doubts about the man she'd been dating for several months. He had a close relationship with his ex-wife. Even though they had been divorced many years, he continued a degree of involvement with her which made Annie uneasy. He spent time at the ex-wife's house making repairs, he took her and their young grandson out to dinner, and even took her and the grandson home with him to visit his mother in another town. When Annie raised her concerns, he assured her they were just friends and that Annie was the woman he loved. He told her if she would just let this go, everything would be fine. Although she wanted to believe him, she still felt uncomfortable.

She then had the following dream that she relayed to me: "I'm at an indoor pool to swim. Friends are there with me, women friends. He is there also. Then he's not there. I find him in bed with his ex-wife. When I enter the room looking for him, she points him out to me. They're on opposite sides of the king-sized bed not touching. I go to him. He's asleep." Annie's dream

shows a truth she was only getting hints of in her waking life. Her love interest is not fully aware of the situation: he's asleep. He may not be intimate with his ex-wife but he is still involved with her--in bed with her-- in a way that forecloses the possibility of being fully involved--awake in bed-- with another woman. When Annie shared this dream with me, she had an *ah-ha* experience.

A subsequent dream sealed the deal for her. The second dream ran as follows: "I'm to sing a duet with a man. I'm to play the piano. We have a book. But when the time comes to perform, I can't find the right page in the book. I keep turning the pages sitting on the piano bench while the audience waits. Then, when I find it, it's a solo, not a duet. I can't find the part the man is to sing." When she woke from this dream, she had no doubt of the dream's message: she was not meant to "duet" with this man. For the time being, she would sing solo. She broke off with him.

Dreams can even seem to be a window into the spirit world. A twelve-year-old girl whose grandmother had just died relayed the following dream: "I'm at my grandmother's house. Other relatives are there also sitting around in the living room, den, kitchen. Then my grandmother appears. She's clearly alive and in solid form, not a ghost, but I'm the only one who can see her. I know if I tell the others, they will think I am crazy so I don't. But I know what I see. Grandmother looks like she always has, standing tall and looking happy."

This dream comforted the girl. Her grandmother's death was the first significant death she had experienced in her young life. Her mother was so sad that the girl hesitated to tell her about the dream. But she marveled at it and wondered if her grandmother's spirit had really visited her in her dream, offering reassurance that she was in a good place and doing fine.

Another woman had a dream that seemed prophetic. She was about 30 and had begun to

date a man who was newly separated, a fact that she refused to admit could be a red flag. She described the dream: “I’m at a party waiting for him to arrive. He’s late. Even though there are lots of people at the party, I can’t enjoy myself until he arrives. Tension builds inside me as I wait. Finally, he arrives and ignores me. I explode in anguish and distress.”

A few days after she had this dream, they had a date to go to a party. He called that afternoon to say he was having car trouble and would have to meet her at the party. Remembering her dream, she said: “No! I’ll come pick you up.” He agreed, they went to the party, but nothing much developed between them. She avoided the intense distress of her dream but learned its message was still true—he wasn’t ready for another relationship.

You say you never remember your dreams? Try taking 50 mg of vitamin B6 at bedtime. When I worked in a hospital psychiatric unit, one of my nurse friends shared this tip with me. That night I tried it and—lo and behold—I remembered *five* dreams in that one night. Another method to facilitate dream recall is to keep a notebook, pen, and flashlight by your bed. The dreams that awaken you at 2 am are likely to be lost to you in the morning light. So roll over, turn on your flashlight, and jot down a bit of your dream in your notebook before you go back to sleep. Even if you only record the opening image, that may be enough in the morning to help you recover the entire dream.

Learning how to listen to messages from our dreams can be very valuable. Just writing them down in a journal in the morning is sometimes enough to reveal the meaning, or you can share them with a therapist or with a friend. If we take time to listen, dreams help us to plumb the deep riches inside us .

Alice Carlton, LCSW, is a Clinical Social Worker in private practice in Chapel Hill with 29 years experience. She specializes in hypnotherapy, Imago Relationship Therapy, and relationship coaching for singles. Visit www.alicecarlton.com to learn more. Contact her at alice@alicecarlton.com or **919-942-3494**.