Imagination and Dreams
(One of four imagination techniques)

by Andrew Schneider

http://www.thesouljourney.com

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Email: support@thesouljourney.com
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1. Introduction

Behind all things manifest, and at the core of our identity, love is present as soul. In our process of learning to respond to this love, and to express it without condition, we periodically, or frequently, lose sight of it. This love that makes life worth living is sometimes lost from our conscious awareness. But when it is lost from living awareness it doesn’t leave us, just as the soul cannot leave us. The love goes underground and expresses through symptoms and dreams. However, when it reveals itself from these unconscious levels it often does so in ways that are not immediately recognized as manifestations of love.

“Dreams are self-luminous: they shine of themselves as gods do… Dreams are private myths. By finding your own dream and following it through, it will lead you to the myth world in which you live.” -- Joseph Campbell

Dreams will also lead to what is meaningful to you, and therefore an expression of your soul – and eventually to love.

We are all searching for a place of bliss. This is not an escape from reality, but a place where we more fully embrace Reality. The dream is always part of that search and so it must be followed. But the journey must not be a mere fantasy. The fertility of the dream must fill our imagination with possibilities, not escapes, and must nourish our creativity.

Dreams are bridges between the unconscious realms and the conscious realms. Dreams reveal past, present and future of both the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious.

Dreams teach us, impress our consciousness and guide us. But they never dictate action. They only reveal what is going on in terms of energy at deeper levels of our being.

Dreams present themselves in our astral body through images. These can be at lower astral levels where they will tend to reveal subconscious content and our desires. Or they can occur at higher astral levels where they reveal the soul activity within us as individuals and within the group soul(s) we are part of. Dreams can emerge from the individual unconscious as well as from the collective unconscious. However, for the most part, they convey what is going on at some level of our personal being.

The reason dreams are often difficult to understand is, first of all, because the greater part of what they reveal is unknown to us. And second of all, they are difficult to understand because they are not usually linear and objective as is our rational mind. Dream language is essentially symbolic. The more we see reality, including objective, linear reality, as symbolic, the easier it becomes for us to read and understand the symbols of the dream. And while the content of the dreams might be personal, there is a certain quality of detachment about them – essentially ego-detachment – even when they are highly
emotional. This is because the ego has not previously become attached to this content, and in fact has probably previously detached from it, or even repressed it.

2. Facts about Dreaming

1. Most people dream in color.
2. Dreams are essentially visual. Taste, smell and touch seem to be deactivated.
3. Dreams are more frequently disturbing and unpleasant, rather than pleasant.
4. Dreams usually involve motion and action.
5. We dream approximately 5 to 6 times per night, mostly – but not exclusively – in REM sleep. The average REM occurrence is every 1½ hours. (REM = rapid eye movement)
6. During the night, the dream sequences get progressively longer.
7. In sleep studies, 80% of people that were awakened when in REM sleep reported to be dreaming.
8. The general duration of dreams is 10-60 minutes.
9. A prematurely born infant dreams 80% of the time that he/she is sleeping.
10. A child born after full term of pregnancy dreams 50% of his sleep time for the first few weeks of his life.

3. Attention to the Psyche

Our psyche is our inner world through which the universal enters the particular, the particular being us as individuals. While there is a collective psyche, since we are one humanity, there is also the individual psyche since we are individuals. The psyche demands our attention, for what passes through it from the universal must be attended to in order to be individualized.

Attention is the primary psychological virtue, for without it we cannot develop our potential and grow. Attention means attending to, giving tender care, watching, waiting, listening. (Attention tends to decline as we age because of diminishing brain capacity and diminished production of acetylcholine.)
When symptoms occur (problems, illnesses, etc.) they are a sign that the psyche will no longer take abuse, or will no longer tolerate our lack of care and attention. The psyche first tries to get our attention through thoughts or feelings, dreams and/or fantasies before any corresponding symptoms appear. It would do us well to give our loving attention to the messages before they need to present themselves in extreme ways.

4. Dreams and the Ego

As the ego develops from childhood on, it assumes more and more control over the psyche and over what it allows into consciousness. As it does this it becomes increasingly able to achieve what it wants through focused attention and action. However, a price is paid for this achievement. That price is some degree of automatic repression of psychic elements. Much unconscious psychic activity is kept in the darkness of the subconscious.

This psychic activity is a healthy part of the individualization of universal archetypes – soul energies seeking expression. What the ego does not permit to surface in consciousness as valid and worthwhile in itself finds other ways of showing itself. This might be through fantasies, which the ego dismisses as “just fantasy”, or commonly in dreams, which the ego often also dismisses as “just a dream.” The ego’s attitude is that what it allows is what is real, and the rest is not real. From the ego’s perspective the dream is not real. However, when it does emerge strongly or when a fantasy persists, the ego’s response might be to act it out. This, however, is the not the purpose of dreams or fantasies. (Acting out is a sign of unconsciousness. What we act out has not been integrated, but it temporarily controls us, giving the impression that we are consciously choosing to act out.)

What is called the shadow is part of the unconscious, or subconscious part of the personality. Johnson describes the shadow and the ego’s relationship to it this way: “Usually the shadow contains qualities and traits, both negative and positive, that are a natural part of the ego-personality. But the ego, for one reason or another, has either failed to assimilate these qualities or has repressed them outright. Sometimes the qualities in the shadow seem embarrassing or primitive to the ego; one doesn’t want to admit that they belong to one. Sometimes the shadow has tremendous positive strengths that the ego won’t claim because it would mean either too much responsibility or a shattering alteration of one’s puny self-image.

“How the shadow appears in a dream depends on the ego’s attitude. For example, if a man’s attitude is friendly toward his inner shadow, and he is willing to grow and change, the shadow will often appear as a helpful friend, a “buddy,” a tribal brother who helps him in his adventures, backs him up, and teaches him skills. If he is trying to repress his shadow, it will usually appear as a hateful enemy, a brute or monster who attacks him in his dreams. The same principles apply to a woman. Depending on her relationship to her shadow, she may appear as a loving sister or as a frightful witch.” (Robert Johnson, Inner Work, p. 50)
As one gives attention to unconscious activity through dream work or other inner work, the ego is relativized. It is put in its place and not allowed to be the controller of one’s life. It has to move over and give inner space for other realities to be present. These realities are mainly directed toward self-understanding and to giving soul space within the psyche. This is the imaginative and psychic ‘work’ of creating a feminine, yin atmosphere within the psyche so that the greater reality (the universal) can be received by the individual, rather than manipulated by the masculine, yang ego.

In general terms, the ego is yang in that it is a doer, but this is not to take away from the unique masculine and feminine characteristics of male and female egos. What any individual man or woman will attribute to the persons of the same or opposite sex in dreams will vary, but there are some patterns that Johnson describes which might be helpful to know.

“Men have been traditionally conditioned in our culture to identify with the thinking and organizing side of life, to be heroes and doers. The unconscious often chooses a feminine figure…to represent a man’s emotional nature, his capacity for feeling, appreciating beauty, developing values, and relating through love. These are the capacities that in many men live mostly in the unconscious. Their appearance in a man’s dream in feminine imagery signals his need to make them conscious, expand the narrow focus of his “masculine” ego-life.

“The ego structure of many women is identified mostly with feeling, relatedness, nurturing, and mothering – qualities that are traditionally thought of as ‘feminine’. The feminine side of the psyche is also rational, but it uses feeling-logic, the rational processes that are based on feeling, on sensing fine differentiations of values. It “knows” by a different mode than does the masculine side – by sensing the whole rather than by analyzing. Women’s dreams therefore often use masculine figures to represent the other side of the psyche – thinking-logic, knowing by analyzing and differentiating, classifying, organizing, competing, wielding power. A woman may find that many of her attitude principles, such as her ideas about religion, philosophy, and politics, will be generated from the side of her psyche that is represented by masculine figures.” (Robert Johnson, Inner Work, p. 47)

We greatly short-change ourselves when we allow the ego to accept only those dreams or aspects of dreams that it finds pleasing or supportive of itself. The ego will often dismiss a dream as ‘not useful’ or ‘unimportant’.

“If the ego is allowed to choose among the dreams, a subtle form of self-treachery begins, leading to one-sidedness and eventual inflation or depression.” -- (James Hillman, Insearch, p. 113)

Dream analysis is too often done using the ego mentality, which is always too rigid, too objective, too narrow, too serious and too oriented toward externals. “Despite all earnestness, the assimilation of dreams depends… upon playful acceptance of their incomprehensibility. Again, we have a paradox: arduous analysis of them coupled with
foolish submission to them. Though I must work at recapturing my dreams, without the playful feminine indirectness and patient feminine indecisiveness little will be assimilated. The integration of dream and consciousness takes something besides effort.” (ibid. p. 113-114)

“In most clinical uses of dreams, the aim is to help the dreamer see clearly the various forms of his or her own personality structure that are usually unconscious and simply acted out in the world, often causing the neurotic unhappiness that motivates a person to seek professional help. This work by the therapist is essentially similar to the natural spontaneous activity of dreams, for dreams are already attempting to lead the person out of his neurosis and into the process of individuation. Dreams are not dreamed to be analyzed and understood, but an understanding of dreams tells us where the unconscious is already trying to alter the ego-image in the direction of health and individuation.” (James Hall, Jungian Dream Interpretation, p.28)

Our dream life is a very intelligent dimension of our lives. This intelligence is pre-egoic. It is not the same as our conscious intelligence. Because it is a different intelligence the ego tends not to trust it. There is, within the psyche, an ability to direct, express and balance energies in a way that is consistent with personal need for balance and well-being, regardless of one’s awareness.

When we elaborate, or give associations to the dream images we often overvalue them. In most cases we learn more about the dreamer than about the dream. We are basically then learning the ego’s views and the way it sees itself.

**Truths for Transformation**

Your dreams heal you and awaken potentials if you pay attention to them. They are not your guides for living but stimuli for embracing life more fully.

5. Befriending the Dream

Our dream life exists in an inner world that is a real dimension of our being – a dimension that needs to be integrated into our consciousness. This integration is facilitated by befriending the dream world, which we do by:

- accepting its validity
- entering into its imagery and feelings
- understanding it
- becoming familiar with the contents (many of which are often repetitive over a period of time)
The more open you are, and the more willing you are to befriend your dreams, the less your dreams will resemble the trivialities of your outer life and reveal more of the psychic depths where the life myths are unfolding, and the fabric of the soul story is being woven.

Befriending the dream is far more than analyzing it. Befriending a person does not require analyzing the person. So too with dreams. We must be wary of other people’s interpretations of our own dreams, simply because dreams are symbolic of our inner world, not that of others. The meaning that others give will often be a projection of what the dream would mean to them if they had the dream. We must also be wary of interpreting our dreams with our unenlightened (but perhaps very clever) ego mind. Such interpretations are often rationalizations, projections or distortions.

Patricia Berry (An Approach To The Dream in: Working With Images – Benjamin Sells, Editor, p. 91-92) gives an example of a dream and seven different interpretations based on the particular bias of seven different therapists (ego-active analyst, relationship-feeling analyst, transference-oriented analyst, animus-development analyst, introvert analyst, feminine earth-mother analyst, process-oriented analyst). And these were examples of only Jungian analysts!

The dream must be left with its power. To the extent that we reduce the elements of the dream to specifics, we diminish its power and reduce the space of the psyche – thus narrowing the links to the universal, reducing the connections to the soul, and limiting the imagination. We are converting Eros into Logos, and thus eliminating the inner feminine power of the dream. An example of this kind of reductionism can be found by equating dream images to the meanings found in dream dictionaries: “that animal is your sex drive,” “that house is your body,” etc. In a sense, we are making the images into things, and thereby omit the feeling tone and the deeper links that the images convey.

It is a very difficult balance to strike between honouring the inherent life of the dream with its values in its own world (the unconscious), and integrating elements of the dream with conscious living. James Hillman emphasizes the former. “Dreams… are the best model of the actual psyche, for they show it personified, pathologized, and manifold. In them the ego is only one figure among many psychic persons. Nothing is literal; all is metaphor. Dreams are the best model also because they show the soul apart from life, reflecting it but just as often unconcerned with the life of the human being who dreams them…”

“Even if dreams have this “unreal” focus, they are no less valuable and emotional. But their value and emotion is in relation with soul and how life is lived in relation with soul. When we move the soul insights of the dream into life for problem-solving and people-relating, we rob the dream and impoverish the soul. The more we get out of a dream for human affairs the more we prevent its psychological work, what it is doing or building night after night, interiorly, away from life in a nonhuman world. This lifelong activity of nightly imaging is distinct from what we do in the day with these images, applying all the humanistic fallacies – egoistic, naturalistic, moralistic, pragmatistic. Dream activity
might better be conceived as soul-making…” (James Hillman, Re-Visioning Psychology, p. 175)

The first sign of befriending the dream is paying attention to it and how it feels. The second sign of befriending it is sharing it, telling it or writing it. In doing this, you give it its due, you honour its reality, you give it space within you. In telling the dream, more understanding comes. And each re-telling reveals more. You may wish to share how it felt in the dream, how it has affected you, what it has shown you about yourself.

6. Dream Relating, Dream Interpretation

There are several generalizations about the significance of dream contents that might be helpful in feeling and recognizing what is going on in dreams. The following are some suggestions to help you approach the dream in a way that will least distort it and still give you meaning or message.

1. Pay attention to where you are. The setting or context of the dream itself is significant for what it represents. It may refer to a time in your life, a feeling, an aspiration, a desire, a particular state of consciousness, etc.

2. Pay attention to whom you are with. If there are many people, they represent some collective reality or theme. If there are specific individuals with whom you interact, pay attention to each one for each represents something specific.

3. Pay attention to the dream sequence. It follows a pattern. There is a development from beginning to end, just as in any good story, although it might not be obviously linear. Notice where the dream begins. The beginning of the dream makes the opening statement or presents the main concern of the dream. Follow the tensions and dynamics through the middle part. Then be aware of the climax or resolution, which may come gradually or suddenly. Some endings are dramatic, while others just trail off into nothing.

Often there is no resolution ready to be received by the conscious mind. This means that there is more awareness needed, more work to be done with the issue involved. In other words, there are still some unresolved unconscious issues that need to be dealt with before a resolution is possible. When the dream presents a resolution, this indicates that the issue is resolved at unconscious levels.

4. Let the dream speak to you. You can engage it in dialogue, but let it tell you what it wants to say and the feelings it wants to convey. Listen closely to it rather than getting into the analyzing of it. As you engage the dream in this way, you allow it to reveal more than what could initially be remembered from the dream, perhaps even more than was portrayed in the dream itself for there is a psychic depth behind every dream. Just as the dream itself is a yin state, I am also
emphasizing being in a yin state to relate to it as it is. By the way, this approach also helps to develop intuition.

Dreams have a compressed quality to their communication. “Like poetry, psychic speech is condensed and distilled… Condensation heightens and intensifies significance. So do the other terms Freud used for describing dream speech: distortion, displacement, over-determination. These are not merely inferior kinds of thinking… but ways of speaking poetically, rhetorically, and symbolically.” (James Hillman, Re-Visioning Psychology, p. 85)

5. **Be aware of unnatural images.** This is what is called *opus contra naturam* – that which goes against ‘nature’. Examples of this might include flying snakes, a book in a pot, a lion in the bathtub, etc. Such images are highly significant and represent something of ‘higher’ value. The images are usually paradoxes, and therefore are representative of inner paradoxes that reveal truth.

6. **Connect with the feelings.** Image and feeling are often closely related because they both exist in the astral body. The relative value of the content can often be determined by the feelings associated with the images. Attempt to discriminate the nature of the feelings – sentiment, resistance, longing, nostalgia, expectation, etc. Also recognize the emotions involved either in the dream itself or in your reactions to the dream.

7. **See the dream as a unified whole,** rather than a collection of parts. All the elements of a dream are interconnected. Let the whole dream convey to you its message, its reality.

8. **Relate to the dream as a subjective reality.** There has always been a tension between the subjective and objective nature of dreams. A dream might at times refer to one’s objective reality, even seen to predict what will happen externally in one’s life. Recognize when this might be the case since there are inner ‘rehearsals’ or preparations for many things which will be externally experienced. What we will experience physically appears in different ways earlier in the more subtle bodies. Even when a dream refers to objective reality, there is always a subjective component to it, for it shows one’s inner attitude or feeling about that which it portrays.

9. **Relate to the dream as a personal reality.** Many dreams have a relationship to the collective unconscious and the universal archetypal realms. But to over-emphasize this aspect can disrupt the personal sphere or perhaps create a pathway of escape from the neuroses of the personal psyche. Use discrimination in referring to the archetypal connection.

“The individual ego can lose its way in either the archetypal images of the collective unconscious – particularly when they are used as an escape from tasks in outer life – or in the archetypal forms embedded in the institutions of collective...
consciousness and culture” such as in politics or religion. (James Hall, Jungian Dream Interpretation, p.115)

The individual psyche is the means whereby archetypes or soul energies are manifested, so it is in this personal realm that the work has to be done for the most part. Of course, the relationship to the universal is of great spiritual significance.

10. **Record or tell the dream as literally as possible** without interpretation and without judgment. Don’t skip out details. But don’t get lost in the details either. Record or tell the dream before making any attempt at interpretation or understanding.

11. **Acknowledge the healing nature of dreams.** All people are neurotic in one way or another in that we are all in some way disconnected from our authentic self and are, at times, avoiding our appropriate life tasks. There are thus inner conflicts between who we are and who we pretend to be, and between what we need to be doing and are in fact doing. These conflicts need to be healed, to be reconciled within our psyche. This reconciliation is attempted by the psyche both in terms of inner dramatization which can manifest as dreams, and through presenting the nature of the conflict in dreams to the conscious ego so that it can be consciously dealt with. Whether or not we are conscious of the dream, the inner healing and balancing is going on.

12. **Find the connections between dreams.** There are themes that we are always working on in terms of personality development, individuation and expansion of consciousness. These themes usually surface in a variety of dreams, but seldom, if ever, in the same way with the same images. The psyche is rich with an infinite array of possible ways to show itself. It is up to us to recognize what is being portrayed. If we do not ‘get’ the message, or if we do not understand the dreams, new dreams will be presented as an attempt to communicate what is happening at another level.

13. **Be aware of the dream symbols.** Dream contents are never only symbolic, as they have a reality in themselves. However, one dimension of relating to the dream is on a symbolic level. Sometimes you would be better off understanding your own personal meaning of the symbolic significance of what appears. At other times, having an understanding of the universal significance of specific symbols would shed added light on your understanding.

One way of giving personal meaning is to ask yourself what this particular image means to you. For example, if the symbol is a horse, ask yourself what a horse means to you, what it represents to you. You might answer that to you a horse is a vehicle, a means of moving about with speed, ease and lightness; it is something of beauty, grace and skill; it is a cooperative friend or companion, etc. Any dream symbol can have multiple meanings, referring to different levels or different aspects of one’s life. Therefore it might be helpful to consider the meaning in
terms of both personal associations and objective associations such as you find in a book of symbols. But never rely on a book’s interpretation as a substitute for your own.

14. **Be aware of the compensating nature of some dreams.** Dreams can serve as positive or negative compensation in an attempt to balance the psyche. For example, if you experience unhappiness in daily life, you may have a very happy dream. If you experience a success in your daily life, you might have a dream about failure. Consciousness development requires the embrace of the opposites in all things. If we deny one side of an opposite, positive or negative, the psyche will attempt to compensate for this lack, which can show up as a dream as well as in other ways.

15. **Pay attention to the assimilation process of dreams.** Often when a person has experienced a trauma or some deeply disturbing occurrence, there is a strong power to reject or suppress it in order to avoid the pain and fear that it triggers. There is a need, therefore, to re-experience it in sufficient depth and without the resistance of the conscious ego, in order to assimilate what needs to be assimilated. The trauma itself is a manifestation of some need that is not being attended to, and therefore the full assimilation will awaken one to the need.

16. **Notice any associations between the dream and what might be messages from the body** when there is something to attend to with regard to one’s health or well-being.

17. **Be aware of puns, specific words and images** as they are often individually significant.

**Truths for Transformation**

*Everything that you experience in any state of consciousness is always seeking to become integrated in your consciousness of self and of life.*

**Exercise: Dream Questions**

Choose a dream that you recall and ask yourself the following questions:
1. Where does the dream take place?
2. Who are the characters in the dream?
3. How does the dream begin? What is the opening statement or main concern?
4. What are the tensions, conflicts, contradictions or paradoxes in the development of the dream?
5. Are there any “unnatural” images?
6. What is the feeling of the dream, or specific parts of it?
7. What do the images convey to me?
8. What is the overall theme of the dream?
9. What does the dream say about me?
10. What are the possible archetypes being presented in the dream? What significance do they have?
11. Does the dream address an immediate issue or an overall life issue or theme?
12. Does the dream address some need which I have been ignoring or am not aware of?
13. What have I learned from this dream?
14. What can I do outwardly that would be an appropriate conscious response to the dream?

7. Dream Interpretation Procedure

The following is a brief outline of a possible approach to relating to a dream if the notes and questions above are insufficient. For further explanations see Robert Johnson’s description on The Four-Step Approach in Inner Work.

1. Making associations with the dream images.

All the dream images are symbols. They represent different things and different energies. But what they represent is contained within the unconscious domains, so we want to let these unconscious associations arise within us rather than imposing a purely rational association.

“Write down the first image that appears in the dream. Then ask yourself, “What feeling do I have about this image? What words or ideas come to mind when I look at it?” Your association is any word, idea, mental picture, feeling, or memory that pops into your mind when you look at the image in the dream. It is literally anything that you spontaneously connect with the image.” (Robert Johnson, Inner Work, p. 52)

Write down the associations that come to mind with each image, staying with the same image until nothing more comes. Go from image to image in this way.

This is not a process of free association in which you make associations with the previously made associations. Nor is it a stream of consciousness process. Every association is to be with the original dream image with which you are working.

Do not censor what is written at this stage, nor judge the validity of what is written. You are simply letting the unconscious make the associations it wants to make through what surfaces in your mind/imagination.
At some point in this process you will likely feel that one of the associations fits better than the others. It “clicks”, as Jung said. When it does, then you can move on to the next image. If it doesn’t, just let it be until you get a sense of the overall energy of the dream.

At times we get the feeling that the dream is more about soul than about subconscious personality realities. We might then want to use archetypal amplification. In this method we would look for universal symbols such as one would find in myths, fairy tales and religion – for example, the Wise Old Man, the Great Mother, the Virgin, the Fool, etc. personified in many different ways.

Even when the dream is archetypal in nature, it still is individualized by your own personal psyche, and has specific meaning for you that would differ from what it would mean for others. You would never be able to find out this meaning by looking in a dream dictionary. As Jung said: “No dream symbol can be separated from the individual who dreams it.” (Jung, Man and His Symbols, p. 53) No matter how universal the symbol might be, its significance is known unconsciously if not consciously by the individual, and is therefore accessible within.

2. Finding the parts of ourselves represented by dream images.

Here we explore and attempt to identify what aspect of ourselves is represented, or presented, by each dream image. We explore each image starting from the beginning of the dream. “For each image, ask: “What part of me is that? Where have I seen it functioning in my life lately? Where do I see that same trait in my personality? Who is it, inside me, who feels like that or behaves like that?” Then write down each example you can think of in which that inner part of you has been expressing itself in your life.” (Robert Johnson, Inner Work, p. 65)

What is going on at an unconscious level may be a healing of a wound, a new strength emerging, a fear surfacing, an inner sub-personality expressing itself, a surge of anger, an animus/anima expression, or any number of events. The dream may also be referring to one’s external life, but would still represent one’s inner attitude or feeling about the external events or situations to which it refers. Either way, the bottom line is that all dreams are about the processes of becoming aware, moving toward integration, developing soul consciousness and ultimately becoming whole.

We can approach the dream world with great understanding if we realize that our outer life is not the primary reference point, and that there is a much more real inner world that is primary and is the immediate cause of what we experience externally. When the dream presents a particular energy it often does so in an extreme way; it often exaggerates. This often occurs when what it presents has been denied or repressed and there is some urgency for it to be known.

When a person appears in your dream, you might ask yourself what traits you have in common with the image: What are the main characteristics of the person in the dream?
How would you describe his or her character and personality? Where do you find those same traits in you?

Much of our unsatisfactory living is due to limiting beliefs and attitudes. The vast majority of these are unconscious or semi-conscious. Our dreams can show us these very clearly. In fact wherever we have limiting notions of ourselves or life, the need is to deal with those, and our subconscious will from time to time present that to us. Often these limiting beliefs or belief systems are represented by a character who would typically portray or represent such attitudes.

Once the dream message is understood, we choose what the best course is to follow – the ego position or the dream message. “In practice, neither the conscious attitude of your ego nor the unconscious attitude of your inner self is the final answer. The attitude that is true to your character lies somewhere in between. In fact, if your unconscious attitude seems exaggerated, it usually means that the unconscious is compensating for an equally off-balance, exaggerated position in the ego…. The unconscious attitude is always off-center exactly to the same extent that the ego attitude is.” (ibid., p. 75)

Values are also represented in our dreams. We are not consistent in our values, and have contradictory values – conscious and unconscious. Some of our values have been accepted unconsciously at a very young age, and are in conflict with values adopted as we mature. At some point in our journey we need to become aware of the value conflicts within us and resolve those conflicts. We can see the inner values portrayed in our dreams. When they are acknowledged and we want to work with them we can do Active Imagination.

It is in the unconscious beliefs, attitudes and values that we find the patterns that determine our external behaviours. We might consciously believe that we act in certain ways, but in fact we might act quite contrary to the way we think we act because of unconscious contradictory beliefs, attitudes and values.

In mythology, the gods and goddesses were originally known to be aspects of life and of the psyche, but in order to be able to relate to them they were personified. The danger of personifying is that you can forget that you are dealing with symbolism, metaphor and myth, and take the personification literally. But as long as you stay within the symbolic realm, personification helps greatly to relate to the energy or quality that is personified.

Even the anima and animus can be personified. And in the process of personification it is often helpful to make up a name for these ‘personalities’.

It is not enough just to identify the dream persons, but also to discover where and when these characters show up in your life.

Places in dreams can represent specific environments with identifiable feelings or qualities, a personal position (where you take a stand), a sphere of influence, a specific status, a level of consciousness, a set of circumstances, a specific mood or tone, etc.
Animals in dreams usually refer to our level of animal soul with its instincts, drives, physical nature and other primordial aspects of consciousness. They can also represent certain qualities that we have projected onto them in our culture or personal life. Animals can also appear in a mythical form, and in this case would invariably refer to specific archetypes.

3. Finding the meaning of the dream as a whole.

This is the stage of interpretation. Here you weave together all the parts you have focused on to this point. It is a coherent statement of what the dream as a whole means to you.

At this stage you ask questions like:

- What is the central, most important message that this dream is trying to communicate to me?
- What is it advising me to do?
- What is the overall meaning of the dream for my life?

You want to reduce the overall meaning to a single insight that the dream is attempting to communicate.

When you work through the first two stages above (#1 and #2), the meaning begins to take shape. To go to this stage (#3) without doing the work of the previous two stages results in pure guess work most of the time.

Write down your interpretation of the dream. In writing it, you will more easily see if your interpretation is the most valid one, or which is the most valid one that fits the dream. You might discover that you are attributing a meaning to it because of something you are aware of in your life. The interpretation and meaning must be inherent in the dream, rather than taking the dream as a springboard for other speculations.

“Because your dream is composed of energy systems, a good test for an interpretation is whether it has energy behind it. If the interpretation arouses energy and strong feelings in you, if it suddenly gives you insights into your life, if you suddenly think of other areas of life where this interpretation makes sense, if it offers insights and liberates you from patterns you’ve been stuck in, all of these are signs that there is a tremendous energy behind this interpretation.” (ibid., p. 90)

Johnson gives four very good principles for validating one’s interpretations.

a.) Choose an interpretation that shows you something you didn’t know.
b.) Avoid the interpretation that inflates your ego or is self-congratulatory.
c.) Avoid interpretations that shift responsibility away from yourself.
d.) Learn to live with dreams over time – fit them into the long-term flow of your life.

(cf. Ibid., p. 94-96)
4. Making it real.

The dream came from unconscious levels. It presented itself in the astral body. You approached it with your conscious feeling nature (astral body) and interpreted it for understanding with your mind (mental body). Now you must anchor the fruits of this inner communication in your physical life. You must find some way of demonstrating your willingness to change behaviour or implement the meaning of the dream. You need to do some physical act.

Through ritual and physical action one consciously impresses the subconscious, and also creates or strengthens the channel of communication between conscious and unconscious levels, flowing in both directions. This speeds up the integration and growth processes in one’s life.

(For an elaboration of this step, see Johnson’s *Inner Work*, p. 97-134)

A dream is a piece of reality whose origin is personal but obscure, whose meaning is pregnant but uncertain and whose fate in the world of the waking-ego lies in our own hands. If we treat it with respect and concern, it serves us in many ways. If we disregard the dream, it moves us in any case, working its alchemical transformation in the depths of the psyche, seeking the same goal of individuation with or without our conscious aid.

Dreams are mysterious entities, like messages from an unknown friend who is caring but objective. The handwriting and the language are at times obscure, but there is never any doubt as to the underlying concern for our ultimate welfare – which may be different from the state of well-being that we imagine to be our goal.

*Humility is necessary*. No dream is ever fully understood; future events and future dreams may modify what seemed to be a perfectly complete interpretation. We must always be aware of the mysterious nature of dreams, which exist at the border of our understanding of brain and mind, conscious and unconscious, personal and transpersonal life.

~ James A. Hall, Jungian Dream Interpretation, p. 117 ~