**USE YOUR DREAMS TO IMPROVE YOUR LIFE**

**by Ann S. Klein, LMFT, MFCC**

**Not "Just a Dream"**

Our culture generally views dreams as entertaining but irrelevant. What if it's not "just a dream"? You dream about 1.5 hours each night, or over 4 years in an average lifespan: a significant chunk of your life. What if it's your own powerful private creative wellspring, one that you can use to improve any aspect of your waking life? It is that, and much more, as we'll see in this ongoing series about dreams.

There are three main ways to use your dreams to improve your life -- so let's explore the possibilities: natural dreams, intentional dreams and dreamwork.

**Natural Dreams**

This first way, everyone uses. Just let your dreams be as they are: let them do their natural healing, with or without thinking about them. Dreams let you process "unfinished business" from your daily life, as well as providing recreation and a creative outlet. No effort is required here, but you only get the minimum benefit. It's like appreciating the beauty of the ocean without realizing its immense depth or the boggling variety of ecosystems it supports, or its formative role in life on earth, all of which are just waiting to be explored.

**Intentional Dreams**

Intentional dreams are dreams you request in order to focus on a specific area that interests you. You ask your mind (and heart) to generate dreams to help you solve specific problems, answer personal, psychological or spiritual questions, or generate specific experiences that you desire.

This is not the same as "dream control," where you direct the details of your dreams but may thereby lose whatever deeper benefit and meaning they might have had for you. To the contrary, intentional dreaming merely sets an arena, a subject focus, and then invites your inner wisdom to provide dreams that give you further insight, depth and awareness in that area. In this way you can leverage your dreams as your own free personal coach, therapist and spiritual guide.

It's a simple but profound process that takes advantage of how dreams naturally work. You've probably noticed that what preoccupies you during the day often appears in your dreams. Intentional Dreaming is a way of creating a "preoccupation" on a topic of your choice.

The secret is simple: focus. Choose a topic, and create a short, concrete, active intention statement to dream on it. Then repeat the intention statement many times a day, linking it to activities that happen frequently in your day, so you don't forget. Say your statement again repeatedly as you fall asleep. If you awaken in the night, say it again and again as you fall asleep.

**An Example:**

The Topic:

I want to work on being more assertive.

Intention Statement:

Tonight in my dreams, I face my enemies!

When to Repeat:

At meals, at breaks, when the phone rings, etc.

Your topic may take several days to appear in your dreams, but if you keep your focus, it will appear. Usually, it will surface in multiple dreams over a period of time. Then you have two options:

* If the dream's meaning is obvious to you, take its message and use it. But beware: frequently even "obvious" dreams have valuable hidden levels of meaning beyond what you expect!
* If the dream is mysterious, or feels important, do dreamwork on it.

In either case you can continue to focus and invite more dreams on the same subject until you are satisfied.

**Dreamwork**

The most effective way to find out the hidden message of your dreams is to "become the dream symbols." That is, pretend you are each image from the dream in turn. Speak as the image, in first-person present tense, to "get into its point of view." It may sound strange, but it's really great fun, and very interesting results often emerge.

This dreamwork method is based on the idea that each image in the dream is meaningful, and that your mind chose it for the qualities and characteristics that are special to it. A bouncy Poodle is not the same image as a snarling Doberman -- and there's a reason in your life and your situation that caused your mind to choose one or the other.

Later articles will describe this process in more detail. See the biographical information below for further resources if you don't want to wait.

How Can You Use Your Dreams?

The possibilities are limited only by your imagination. You can apply these techniques to any and all of your interest areas. Here are just a few possible focus areas for intentional dreams. The process works best if you choose a specific goal, rather than a generic one:

Personal Growth: Reducing the inner critic, becoming calmer, more assertive, etc.

Career Empowerment: Presentation skills, confidence, technical skills, etc.

Skill Building: Sports, relationship, sexuality, communication, introspection, etc.

Parenting: Setting boundaries, respect (in both directions), understanding, etc.

Creativity: Artistic skills, perceptual skills, inventiveness, new ideas, etc.

**Ann Klein**, licensed therapist, has worked with dreams for 15 years. After asking her dreams how to be of service, she awoke with the idea for an interactive multimedia CD on dreams, dreamwork and journaling.