



How to Remember Dreams

By Sheila Hollowell, MA

● **Invite, Don't Hunt**

Recalling dreams can be elusive. Try NOT to think of a dream as something to be hunted, captured, or controlled. If you do, it will be like trying to catch your own shadow. The faster you run, the faster it moves away from you. INVITE dreams to come to you, rather than pursuing them. Try to think of them as a friend or an ally who is willing to teach you something if you allow and encourage it. Work to cultivate this attitude of "inviting" and "welcoming" your dreams.

● **Plant a Seed**

Before going to sleep, tell yourself that you are going to dream. Keep a positive, inviting attitude. Think about and write down (1) the important issues that are on your mind for that day, and, (2) the kinds of things you would like to dream about. Read over what you wrote. Keep that idea in the back of your mind as you fall asleep. Don't analyze or think too deeply about it, just hold it lightly in your mind.

● **Reflect Upon the Dream**

When you wake up from a dream, in the middle of the night or in the morning, lie still for a moment and turn your mind inward toward the memory of the dream. Invite the various pieces of the dream to come back to you. Be patient. It may take time for the different parts of the dream to surface and come together. Even if only fragments of the dream return to your mind, that's okay. Don't strain to remember. Let your mind be light and easy. Allow the dream pieces to surface on their own. Gently repeating the dream over and over in your mind may allow new pieces to surface.

● **Write Everything Down in "Rough Notes"**

After you've reflected on the dream and seem to recall as much as you can, write down everything you remember. Don't trust your memory. You may sometimes think "Oh, I'll definitely remember THIS dream! It was a doozy!" But there's a very good chance that you won't. Dreams are elusive. Have paper and pen ready by your bedside. Maybe even keep a flashlight next to your bed too, so turning on the light won't disturb others.

Using a voice recorder is another possibility. Whatever method you choose, record the following types of information:

- anything you can remember about the dream, even fragments;
- small details in the dream, even if they seem insignificant;
- the feelings or sensations you experienced during the dream;
- events from your life that come to mind when you think about the dream; (even if you're not sure how those events are related to the dream)
- the thoughts that were on your mind when you were falling asleep;
- Any other thoughts, feelings, memories, or sensations that arise as you are reflecting on the dream.

Don't worry about how to put getting items in order. In general, don't worry too much about the grammar, spelling, or logical flow of what you write in these "rough notes." These notes in fact may be a kind of "free association."

● **Your Dream Journal**

An ongoing dream journal can be a good way to stimulate your recall of dreams. The more attention you pay to your dreams, the more your dream life will "open up" to you. Whereas the rough notes are your immediate "off the cuff" recall and reactions to your dreams, the journal can be a place for more detailed, in-depth, systematic thinking and exploring. Use the rough notes as fuel or as a springboard for ideas that you investigate in the journal. You may also use the journal to try out the various techniques for working with a dream.

● **Daytime Dreams**

Sometimes the memory of a dream may spontaneously pop into your mind during the day. Try to write it down as soon as possible. Also write down what you were thinking about, where you were, and what you were doing when the dream came to you. All of this information might be clues to the dream's meaning.

If you find yourself daydreaming or fantasizing during the day, treat them as if they were dreams. Write down what you were thinking about, as well as where you were, what was happening to you, and what thoughts, feelings, or events might have triggered the fantasy. Daydreams in many ways are similar to dreams. Exploring them could enhance your understanding of your nocturnal dreams. Exploring them could help open up your dream life.

● **Be Patient and Optimistic**

You will go through periods when you just can't remember dreams, or only recall small fragments. That's OK! Be patient. Try to remain optimistic and inviting. Don't dwell on frustration or "failure." In your rough notes and journal, describe any your thoughts, feelings, and sensations you do have upon awakening in the morning. What things *do* you remember about your sleep? Write about your thoughts and feelings about not being able to recall dreams. Explore those thoughts and feelings with curiosity and acceptance.

● **Meditate**

Taking even just a few minutes during the day to meditate may open your mind to your internal world, including your dreams. There are many different meditation techniques. Find one that's right for you and practice it on a regular basis.