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Solutions In Dreams

Even animals dream. The family dog is asleep, yet its feet are flinching and it may be making small yelps or whimpers. Is it chasing something, or being chased? Only the dog knows what the dream is about and whether the experience is pleasant or not. When it wakes, is there any memory of this imaginary event, and might the recall dictate subsequent conscious actions? Does it really matter? It really must, otherwise there would be neither dreams, nor dreamers.

There is no denying that everyone needs sleep, preferably uninterrupted and relaxing. A good night's rest recharges the body and, perhaps more importantly, refreshes the mind. During this period of relative physical inactivity, the thought process continues, but in a more meditative fashion. Without the need to effect movement and action decisions, the brain can contemplate possibilities, sort out the jumble of information gathered during the day and prepare for the one to come.

And so to bed. That's the easy part. Getting to sleep, however, may require more than simply closing the eyes and counting the obligatory sheep. Worry and concern tend to hang around, despite there being little that can be done about them at that time. They generate the kind of thoughts that keep the mind buzzing, sometimes causing uncomfortable physical reactions – those “feelings” again. With luck, the mind will eventually tire of constantly skipping from one problem to another and will switch to simmer-mode, permitting the advent of sleep.

Once the initial tossing and turning is over, the body seems to accept this well-earned state of total rest. There is little if any movement to begin with and the sleeper appears to have gone “out like a light”. Later, sometimes within minutes, this depth of sleep changes to a lighter, semi-conscious level called the REM (rapid eye movement) state. Eyelids flicker as if the subject is on the verge of waking, or is trying to. There is also an overlap of internal and external stimuli. The mind is contemplating all of those issues in the memory bank that still need attention but, at the same time is receptive to ambient sensations. Sounds can be heard, taste and smell continue to be effective and the sense of touch is unimpaired. Even bright light can be experienced through closed eyelids.

Here is where dreams are born. Many are assumed to be imaginary fantasies which, if recalled later, seem totally unrelated to anything current. However, they are all, in fact, directly connected to present thoughts often influenced by immediate surroundings. The dream-theme may even be triggered by an actual occurrence close at hand and picked up by one or more of the senses. For example, a violent storm raging outside the bedroom window could start the dream off in an Arctic wasteland, or on the deck of a ship being tossed by a hurricane. A more bizarre interpretation could find the dreamer clutching to the wing of a jet plane in mid-flight. It is very likely that the subject has had no personal experience in any of these situations yet, for some reason, disbelief in the virtual reality of the happening is suspended. This is because memory, as the gallery for pictorial images, recalls everything seen, whether witnessed first-hand, or in the form of a rendition as with scenes in a movie. It is not surprising then, considering how realistic they appear, that the locations and drama of a recently-watched video can be borrowed for personal use in a dream.

To dismiss dreams and nightmares as an emotional reaction to something unknown, or merely the lingering after-image of a spooky movie, is to ignore their value as guides to setting things straight in real life. Always assuming all or part of a dream can be remembered, analysing the components can unravel the reason for having it in the first place. Being able to accept this clever montage as a fictitious invention of the imagination not only sets it apart from reality, thus reducing its power as an agent of fear and confusion, but also clears the way to study it as an abstracted analogy of something real and perhaps important that is concerning the dreamer.

The reason for the dream will be found in thoughts and memory, an issue that is unresolved and will not simply go away, despite being constantly pushed aside, or overshadowed by more immediate circumstances. The essence of it lays in the type of challenge the dreamer has to deal with. Frequently, running is the action the dreamer performs, suggesting the matter in question needs to be tackled soon before it gets worse. Running from something indicates an undesirable event or situation which is coming close and needs to be avoided or left behind. Running towards seems to place the objective in the wish-to-have category. The fact that neither escape nor achievement are realised in the dream passes the resolution back to the conscious. In other words, unless the problem is fixed in reality, it will keep coming back in dreams.

Although the scene within which the dream is enacted may have been sparked by an external stimulus such as the stormy weather outside, it is still pertinent to the interpretation. Returning to that example, the icy wilderness could relate to the dreamer's feeling of isolation, perhaps loneliness, because they are convinced they must tackle the problem on their own. Being surrounded by vastness and desolation endorses this and adds a hopeless factor – there is nothing out there to help, either with the solution, or in making the right decision towards it. The storm-tossed ship, on the other hand, as a more restricted environment, brings the issue closer to understanding and suggests a degree of safety. The ship could represent home and family, the work-place, or an institution of which the dreamer is a member, while the storm poses a threat from outside, perhaps something specific, or the way of life in general. The third example – hanging onto the plane-wing – underlines the belief that support while deciding how to resolve the problem is there, but is tenuous. The only thing to do is to stay in touch with the speeding jet.

None of this, however, helps to uncover the problem itself. The guide to that may lay in the dreamer's actions within the scenario. Standing literally or metaphorically frozen to the spot and merely gazing out across the never-ending glacier suggests despondency and the conviction that a solution is beyond the reach and capabilities of the dreamer. Here is a matter of concern that may have been around for some time and frequent attempts to resolve it have failed. On board the ship, however, if steps are being taken to personally steer or trim the vessel, control over the situation has not been abandoned, so the problem is likely to be on-going and finding the answer is still deemed possible. It will be somewhere on the to-do list, but may not yet have reached the priority stage. Out on the plane-wing, the clue could be not so much in the action of the dreamer as in the threat of dire consequences if any move at all is made. Whatever the trouble, it will worsen unless the status quo is maintained. The fact that it is in the dream seems to suggest that the dreamer wishes for the ability to take action and thus win back control over personal destiny.

The above examples and interpretations are extremely simplified and, of course, subjective. There are as many unique dream scenarios as there are dreamers. Their meanings, although obscured, are definitely there to discover and act upon. Individual understanding of a dream and its reason requires insight and honesty. An individual must know and admit to who they truly are and the perspective from which they see life. Every intelligent being's world is a combination of reality and fantasy, each a product of the other, both providing the balance necessary for rationalisation and inner peace. Neither should be taken for granted.

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