

GOLDEN GARDEN

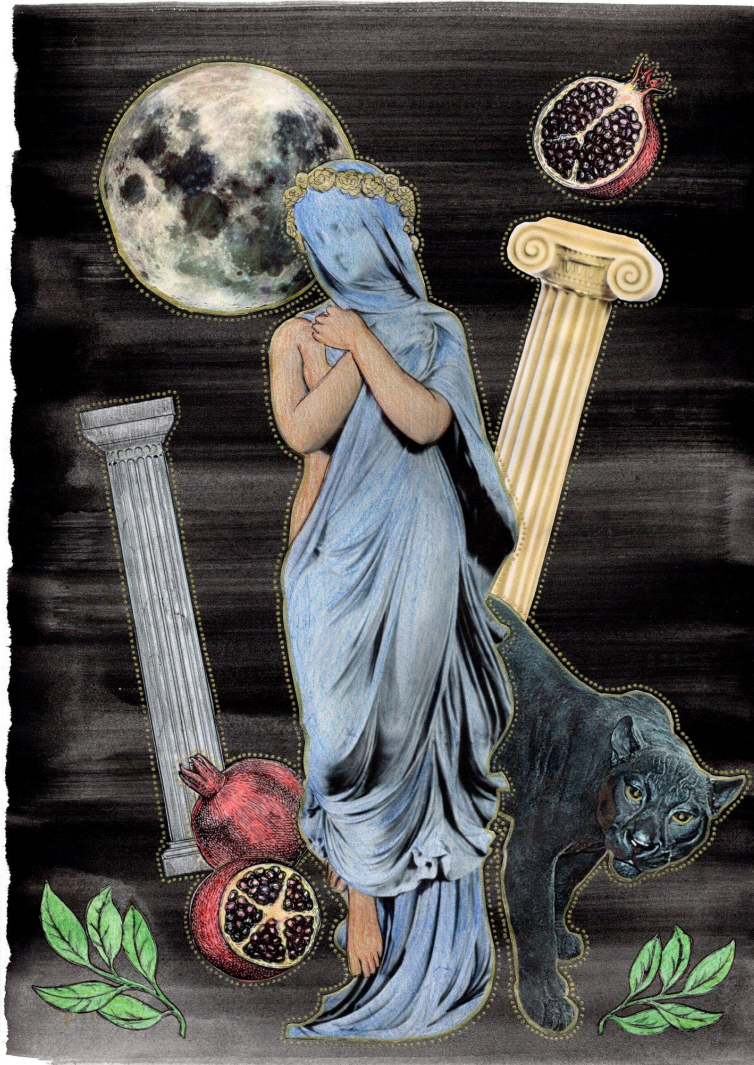
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“The dream is a little hidden door in the innermost and most secret recesses of the soul...”

- C.G. Jung, *Collected Works 10*



DREAMWORK BASICS:

Getting started with Dreamwork

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DREAMWORK BASICS: WHERE TO BEGIN?

Despite a long history of interest and research into our dream life, no one knows for certain what dreams are, how they are made, or if they have a purpose. Of course, I have my own ideas I have gathered, and evidence points to dreams very much having a purpose, however, I do not know for sure. There are many things that I do not know for sure, and in life we must leave room for the unknown. Dreamwork offers an opportunity to learn about ourselves and if you are reading this, no doubt you will have already made that connection.

This is not a definitive guide to Dreamwork. I do not think there ever could be one. There are so many methods to working with dreams, and for as long as dreams captivate dreamers, these methods will only continue to grow and develop. There are plenty of books, articles, lectures, courses and podcasts about Dreamwork that are going to be useful for you (and I will be compiling a list of these), but for now, what I am going to share with you is how I began my personal practice, and what worked for me.

The whys of dreaming and their function are less important, what is paramount for me is what we can learn from them and how we can apply that learning to our lives in practical and useful ways.

So let us begin, and let us keep things simple, by getting down to basics.

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Firstly, my understanding of the following points has been foundational:

1. **Pay attention.** To me, this applies to EVERYTHING. Everything in life and in the processes of doing the inner work. Whether you are faced with a dream, an artwork or a Tarot card, notice what it inspires in you. What emerges from within you? Do you have any seemingly “random” thoughts, feelings, sensations or knowings that appear from “nowhere”? For me, sometimes this sounds like, “I don’t know why but I feel like...” or, “For some reason that reminds me of...” Take note of them all, the big things, the small things, the weird, the wonderful - ALL OF IT.
2. **Everything is significant.** A dream is a work of art, masterfully created by the unconscious. Just like a painting, a poem or a film, everything is significant. If this can be “scientifically” proven, I do not know, and frankly, that is not what matters. Joseph Campbell once said, “*I don’t have to have faith, I have experience.*” All the evidence I need is right here within my own experience.
3. **We all dream.** You may have a hard time remembering your dreams from time to time, but I can say with certainty that you can remember your dreams. The fact that you want to read this is all the proof you think you need.
4. **Energy flows where attention goes.** I think that might be Tony Robbins who said that and perhaps you have seen that line floating around inspirational pages on social media. But it is true, and especially with dreams. If you want to be in touch with your dreams more. Give them the attention they deserve. Think about dreams, read about them, talk about them, create a space for them in your life.

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CREATING A SPACE FOR DREAMING AND DREAMWORK

Begin a ritual

This does not have to include crystals, candles and all the mystical accoutrements, but it can, and probably if you are that way inclined, it would be most effective.

My ritual is as simple as going to sleep with the intention to have dreams, and to write them down. If you have a hard time remembering them, this probably will not be enough. The more consciously you address dreams (or lack thereof) in your daily life, especially before bed, the more likely you will dream. You might find it helpful to prepare for the morning's dream entry by putting in the date before you go to sleep. This creates a nice little mental note, that you intend to dream and to record it.

I cannot stress this enough, **as soon as you wake up**, get down as much as you can. None of this, "Oh I will remember this in the morning" business... Most likely you will not remember the dream in all its glory when you do wake up in the morning. So much is lost if it is not recorded immediately upon waking.

Oftentimes I will wake up in the morning and still remember a dream I have recorded in the wee hours of the morning. I will look back over it and discover so much more than I had remembered. So if you are going to trust me on one thing, it is this. **Get the dream down.** Even if it is just short sentences or key words. If you cannot remember a single thing. Simply record that. Intention, attention and persistence is key.

I am dedicated to my dreams, and I am of the nature to prioritise my Dreamwork over my sleep quantity and its quality, therefore I write them out with as much detail as possible.

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Paradoxically, having adequate sleep is also going to be beneficial. It is possible to dream even when you are napping, but with longer and deeper sleep we are able to move through each of our natural sleep cycles. Plus, the more sleep you have, the more dreams you are going to have, you do the maths.

Your morning ritual will also make a difference. Wake up as slowly and as gently as possible. I use an app which records the sound of me sleeping so that it wakes me up within a half hour window when it believes I am coming to the end of a sleep cycle. I cannot stand being jolted awake by alarms when I am in a deep stage of sleep.

You are also going to obviously need time in the morning to record your dreams. So if you are always in a rush in the mornings, you will have to make a commitment to honouring your unconscious and its offerings, and wake up earlier.

Most people would be put off by now. No one really likes putting in the effort, but if you want to get really acquainted with your dreams, the best bet is to take it seriously, especially in the beginning, while you are forming the practice and making it a ritual.

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Start a dream journal

We all know this one, and that is because it is non-negotiable. I wish I could say I am one of those people who has a beautifully embroidered or embossed hardcover journal for my dreams. You know, with proper binding with that smell of old books that is said to be so wonderful, the magical kind you see in movies... Honestly, I do not like the smell of old books, they make me feel kind of yuck. So finding *your* way of journaling your dreams is important.

Some prefer handwriting, and they say all sorts of things about handwriting and the connection to the unconscious and whatnot. The benefits of a handwritten journal is that you can also sketch out dream images and scenes that you cannot put into words so quickly or so easily.

Personally my dreams are usually focused on feelings and the narratives and so writing my dreams out is enough for me as a daily practice.

I actually use my phone notes to record my dreams. I then upload them to a Google doc when I can be bothered. I like to use my phone notes for a number of reasons. As soon as I wake up from a dream I can record the dream's happenings without turning on the light. This way, I can get back to sleep easier and I also do not risk disturbing my sleeping partner. I can also look up old dreams in a flash by typing in keywords. The phone also has the voice-to-text option and the voice recorder. I tried the voice-to-text option once, but I must sound strange in half-sleep, the phone could not record my words accurately...

The voice recording would have been too tedious because then I would have to transcribe it later, so I wrote that idea off pretty quickly. The whole laptop route is too bothersome for me.

Do what works for you. If you are just starting out, the voice recording could be a quick and easy way to get the ball rolling.

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Record what emerges

Get into a habit of recording your dream in a way that you can easily refer back to. A simple way is to put the date of the dream and a title. The title helps you identify the dream and also gives you an idea of what the main theme or image of the dream is for you. Record your dream in first person, present tense. E.g. "I am standing in a green field..." not "I was standing/I stood in a green field..." Recalling your dream in the present tense tends to transport us back to that very moment, and will help you connect back to the felt sense of the dream when you are revisiting it later.

Things to notice:

- ***The location:*** where does the dream take place? Is it a known or unknown location? The dream setting often provides information on our psychological environment. Often I will dream of being at Wye River, where we had a beach house while I was growing up. I have found in my own Dreamwork that this indicates themes pertaining to those periods of my life and also emotional states that I experienced during that time and also at that house.
- ***Who is present/who is absent:*** Although dream figures do not always represent the person they appear as, they most likely represent an aspect of that person that is playing out in the psyche. For example, my younger brother tends to show up in my dreams to represent an aspect of my inner masculine energy, or our shared innocence of childhood, and not my actual brother. It is also worth noting who is not there, who you would expect to be there in such a situation in waking life. This can point out to you an energy that is absent, or lacking, for instance, I could be in a state of emergency yet my partner or my mother is nowhere to be seen.

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- ***The narrative:*** Often the dream narrative makes no “sense”. One minute you are at a circus and the next you are on a grassy plain in Africa. The dream speaks in symbol and metaphor. While things may seem nonsensical to the conscious mind, you will find that everything makes perfect sense, if you take the time to look for the linking threads. It is the themes, issues and feeling states that weave the story together. Record the dream story as it appears. No censoring. This is another reason why it is important you record it in that half asleep/half awake state, before the conscious mind steps in to spoil the show.
- ***Record the wisps:*** Sometimes you just “know” things in your dream, even if the dream does not demonstrate these facts. Such as, you know the person while you are dreaming but in waking life they are an unknown person. All of this “knowing” is important. When I am recording these parts of the dream it sounds like, “I get the sense that she is my neighbour” or “it is understood that we met recently”.
- ***Thoughts:*** The “I” figure in the dream, the dream ego, has thoughts. Take note of these, as they can give you an indication of the waking or conscious attitude you are taking regarding the situation. Sometimes these thoughts do not align with our ways of thinking in waking life and can feel embarrassing to admit. Be as honest with yourself as possible when recording these, particularly when they seem irrational.
- ***Feelings and Emotions:*** These aspects of the dream are also important. Record how you felt during the dream, taking note of when feelings change throughout the story. Sometimes there might be just an overall tone, such as, “I am feeling misunderstood and anxious”, or “I am feeling as though I cannot escape”.
- ***Waking life:*** What is going on for you right now? Our dreams tend to respond to happenings of the last 48 hours as well as make references to unprocessed material from last week, last month, last year... And our younger years. When looking back on

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your dream journal entries, it will be helpful in identifying your own personal symbols for how people, themes and issues show up.

Extra tips to stimulate dream recall

As I have said before, we all dream every night. We often just have a hard time remembering them. Things that can affect dream recall are, not adequate sleep, alcohol consumption before bed and some drugs, like marijuana. I am no doctor, but from personal experience, sometimes alcohol and certain drugs tend to knock me out rather than put me to sleep. So sorry to be boring, but your sleep regimen is going to be a practical first place to start.

You might like to also try having a conversation with your dream consciousness, your unconscious. This might be as a form of meditation as you settle into sleep, or an Active Imagination (I shall be sharing more on Active Imagination in the future). Ask your unconscious, “Why am I not dreaming?” “Where have my dreams gone?” “What can I do to strengthen my relationship with my dreams?” These are just examples, you will have to word things that make sense to you and fit your situation. Wait for an answer to bubble up and give it a response. It might feel a bit strange like you are having a conversation in your head, with yourself... And that is because you are...

Work with the last dream you *can* remember. Perhaps it is from months, years or even decades ago. Record what you can, in as much detail as you can and begin working with what comes up from that. Perhaps there is something that needs your attention before you are offered new material to work with. I find this to be the case for myself, the night before I am to meet my therapist. I have had a week full of dreams that have been recorded, but not worked with. I like to bring the freshest of dreams to therapy, but if I find that on the day of my therapy session I cannot remember my dreams, often I have other, older dreams that need to be given attention. After all, why would my unconscious give me more dreams if I have not looked at the ones I have been given?

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In my own experience, I have also found that when I cannot seem to trace a dream from the previous night, there is usually an issue already made conscious, that needs to be worked through.

I do not see dreams as having explicit messages or motives. Rather, like every aspect of our body, the unconscious has a self-regulating function. If it serves any role at all, I believe one of them is to show us a fuller picture of what we are experiencing in our lives, balancing us out in a sense. I have also found that while the universe may not always have my back, my unconscious is my biggest supporter - it is always showing me the signs that point towards my healing, growth and development.

I hope this guide will get you started on your Dreamwork journey. There are so many ways we can work with dreams. Working with the unconscious can be tricky, which is why it is beneficial to bring your dreams to a space that is facilitated by a professional, trained in Dreamwork.

Dreamwork with me can take the form of individual sessions, or it can be integrated into our therapeutic work together, with or without the use of Expressive Arts Therapy and/or Tarot.

If you would like to book a session, or you have any comments, questions or queries, please complete the contact form on my website, send me an email, or connect with me on Instagram.

 **Mei Wang**

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