

## Why Dreams Now

Greg Mogenson

Dreams are an immensely rich source of self-knowledge and spiritual direction. Arising as they do from a mysterious source within our own nature, dreams provide a more faithful reflection of who we are or yet might be than we can ever hope to gain interpersonally, from one another. As valuable as the perceptions of others undoubtedly are, they are generally tinged with the fantasies *they* have about us. Our dreams, by contrast, have the distinction of being our own.

If one stops to consider the countless things that impact upon us in a day--the trials and tribulations, joys and sorrows, providence and calamity--it is easily understood why we need to turn inward each night. At the end of the day, in our sleep and dreams, we can begin to take stock of all that has happened or that we anticipate happening and translate this myriad of events into the experiences that mark our path and make for meaning.

The world in which we live is so filled with ideas, opinions, platitudes, fashions, clichés, vogues, oughts and shoulds that it is difficult to know what it is that we think and feel about anything. Indeed, without an inner connection to the spontaneity of our own individual responses and impulses, we are blown about in the changing weather of public opinion, parental injunctions, family dysfunction, and societal norms.

It is precisely in relation to this state of affairs that dreams reveal their importance. By showing us how we are affected by the life we live, they provide us the opportunity to bring ourselves into more soulful relation to our lives. This is the inner connection.

As a psychotherapist, I find that people frequently become divided against themselves as a result of reflecting upon their lives from perspectives that do not fit for them. While some report that they no longer know what they feel, others have very intense feelings, but are at a loss as to why it is that they feel the way they do. It is at times like this that it can be so helpful to see what the dreams have to say. How is it that they depict the dreamer's situation?

A young mother, in treatment for depression, dreamt that her mother-in-law, a woman whose help and support she greatly appreciated, was pouring poisoned milk into the dreamer's ear. At first the dream seemed to make no sense. The mother-in-law was a kind and well-intentioned woman. She was generous with her time. Her advice was sound. But it was just this, the dream seemed to suggest, that was the problem. Sound though the mother-in-law's advice may actually have been, it had become a poisoned earful due to the dreamer's excessive reliance on it. For it was by responding to her mother-in-law's instructions, rather than to her baby directly, that the young mother had dislocated herself from the life-giving relationship to her own maternal instincts. Until she dreamt this dream depression was merely a grossly imprecise and generalizing word for a feeling in herself which she could not empathize with or understand.

This simple example affords a glimpse of the role that dreams can play in restoring us to ourselves. The dramas in which we find ourselves in dreams depict something of our relationship to life from a perspective so much greater than our usual viewpoint that dream-interpreters, down through the ages, have found fit to declare the dream-maker to be none other than God. Whether we ascribe to this view or not, experiences support the assertion that the mystery of dreams reflects the mystery of life. Perhaps, in our day, dreams can continue to remind us that life is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be experienced, explored and discovered anew by each of us.