

DREAMS

To Paul M, for inspiring me to follow my dreams.

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DREAMS

WHAT YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS
WANTS TO TELL YOU

ROSE INSERRA

ROCKPOOL
PUBLISHING

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INTRODUCTION

WE ALL DREAM. That's a fact. It's one thing we have in common with the entire human race – and mammals, as research suggests. The ancient Greeks believed that when you fell asleep you'd fall into the arms of Morpheus, the god of dreams, where you would surrender to the divine messages given to you through your dreams in forms of symbols, images and prophecies. Indigenous peoples have held strong beliefs in dreams as a spiritual connection to spirits, guides and their ancestors. Dreams have featured in holy texts, such as the Bible, and across traditional religious beliefs from all nations. And modern science has made enormous progress in the understanding of our dreaming mind and its purpose and function in our lives. Both Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud conducted extensive research on the topic of dreams and provided valuable information that has increased our awareness and understanding of dream interpretation. Their findings on the purpose and messages of the subconscious have shaped our view on what dreams mean as a tool in helping us navigate our waking-life issues.

My belief is that dreams are a gateway to understanding yourself. Images you see in a dream highlight parts of your personality – what's going on at an 'ego' level and episodes in your life that may need to be examined or analysed.

In my experience, analysing our dreams is not simply a problem-solving device, even though dreams in fact help us with solutions. The magic that dreams provide is that they reveal feelings that need to be dealt with. They are a wake-up call from your soul or subconscious self. But how do you enable the emotions that surface in your dreams to transfer into your consciousness?

For those who want to understand their dreams but cannot remember them, *Dreams: What Your Subconscious Wants to Tell You* will motivate you to want to recall your dreams. For those of you who remember your dreams, this book will help you to take an active role in interpreting them

and discovering the layers of meaning from their symbols and images. As dreams are a reflection of your inner world it's essential that *you*, and only *you*, are the final authority on what your dreams mean.

As a creative writer I love using metaphors and vivid imagery in my prose, and it became my mission to search for the perfect metaphor to encapsulate my own personal connection to the study of understanding dreams.

After a number of concepts that led to a dead-end, I finally discovered the thread metaphor. Comparing our existence to threads is closely associated with the thread of life spun for us by the Three Sisters of Fate from Greek mythology, the Moirae, who determine the life and death of all mortals. Clotho weaves the threads at the beginning of our life; Lachesis determines the shape and length of it and decides which events should occur in everyone's life; and Atropos cuts the thread when the time has come for death.

These threads represent the parts of ourselves that make up the greater tapestry of our life's experiences – and that includes the six years we spend dreaming during our lifetime.

I have also used the symbolism of 'thread' in the three parts of the book to represent our connection to one another as fellow dreamers. Dreams are threads given to us by our conscious to hang on to – they are everyday threads. We usually hold on by a thread to our reality when life gets too challenging, as we hang on by that invisible thread when we are desperately lost in our nightmares.

Dreams help us enter our subconscious and ensure we return back safely.

The thread is also a metaphor for the process we use as we wind our way through the labyrinthine dreamworld – holding on to an invisible thread of hope that we will be able to interpret the extraordinary dreams we weave. This process is made up of three parts:

1. Knowledge
2. Intuition
3. Application

Once applied, the three parts will provide you with tools that I believe will enable you to understand your dream messages more fully and empower you to make changes in your waking life.

The case studies used throughout the book reinforce the success of this process and I'm very grateful to have had the permission of the dreamers, whose names have been changed for confidentiality, to use their dreams to encourage insightful dream interpretation.

By viewing dreams as a wealth of resources rather than possessing rigid meanings, you can make the most of their gifts of wisdom. Then watch for magic to happen.

The background features a light gray gradient with various decorative elements. On the left side, there are stylized floral motifs, including large, overlapping petals and starburst-like flower heads. Scattered throughout the background are numerous bokeh effects, consisting of soft, out-of-focus circles and hexagons in shades of white and light gray. Some of these shapes have a starburst or lens flare effect, giving the overall appearance a shimmering, ethereal quality.

PART 1

KNOWLEDGE

WE ARE ALL connected to each other through the magic thread of dreams that we share as humans. This part of the book looks at the knowledge we can gain from how symbols work in our dreams and their magic in bringing to light all that you need for self-understanding.

There is an ancient Chinese proverb that says:

'An invisible red thread connects those who are destined to meet, regardless of the time, the place or the circumstance. The thread may stretch or tangle, but it will never break.'

According to ancient Eastern beliefs, when a child is born, an invisible red thread extends from the child's spirit and connects him or her to all the significant people – present and future – who will play a part in his or her life. As the child grows, the thread shortens; this draws those people who are destined to be together closer.

The concept of destiny and the red thread extends to the folklore of the old lunar matchmaker god, who ties an invisible red string around the ankles of men and women who are destined to become soul mates and will one day marry each other. This magical thread, too, may stretch or tangle, but will never break. And so it is with the dream thread. You don't know why a theme or a piece from a scene is carried through the dreamer to the waking world, but you trust it because it will reveal itself to be significant.

The magic of understanding our dreamscape is all about the journey we take into our dreaming world and how we bring it back into our conscious lives. You may ask, what do I do with these dreams? How do I journey safely? How do I retrieve the symbols and meanings so that my life's better? What does it require?

Trust the red thread of connection. The thread will never break. Your dreams hold the answer. Use the knowledge from this first part of the book to understand your personal symbols and to interpret the code of what your subconscious is trying to tell you.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DREAMS

'A dream is a microscope through which we look at the hidden occurrences in our soul.'

– **Erich Fromm**

DREAMING REPRESENTS AN important part of our lives – whether you remember your dreams or not, we do it every single night. It is a universal experience and more than just a biological function. In ancient civilisations, dreams were considered a sacred connection with the divine (the gods), who provided healing and predicted the future through omens sent from dreams.

People created shrines and built temples where dreams were incubated for healing purposes. The most famous dream-incubating shrines were dedicated to the Greek physician Asklepius, who is thought to have lived in the 11th century BCE and was later worshipped as a god. Over time, more than 400 temples were built in his honour. Followers of the dream cult slept overnight in the shrines in the hope of a visit from the gods to bring them healing for their ailments. In the morning, priests would interpret the dream and recommend a cure. Dreams were held in high regard as a means of finding cures for illness, foretelling the future, receiving guidance from divine sources, precognitive dreams and speaking with the dead.

Throughout history, many cultures such as the ancient Egyptians were said to have written the oldest dream dictionary on papyrus, which

dates back to 1250 BCE, known as the Dream Book from the Chester Beatty papyrus on dreams, which contains records of 200 dreams and their interpretations according to the priests of Horus. In Babylonia, temples existed to the goddess Mamu. Ancient Chinese visited temples and performed dream incubation, and to understand the dream was therapeutic. Ancient India's book on wisdom, the Atharva Veda, contains many early beliefs about dream symbols. The Bible refers to dreams and interpretations. Native American Indians and the Indigenous peoples of Australia believed in the healing power of dreams and guidance obtained by a vision or vision quest. Dreams, however, were not taken seriously for a long time in the Western world until psychologist Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) began to study them as part of psychoanalysis. He analysed and interpreted dreams as the place where unconscious fears, desires, sexual urges and repressions resided. His theory was that our conscious minds are so repulsed by our hidden urges that we repress them in the unconscious. For Freud, dreams were about the hidden parts of ourselves that we try to repress or reject. His work focused a great deal on finding the causes of dreams, using an analytical approach of free association in which the dreamer described thoughts and feelings as they came to mind. This technique was used to discover the real issue behind the dream. Freud, however, as an early pioneer, put too much emphasis on the motives behind dreams as being sexual repressions and wish fulfilment. Today, dream therapists do not follow Freud's teachings but are more often aligned with other later dream experts, such as Carl Jung and his philosophy of looking to the purpose of dreaming rather than the causes.

Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) was Freud's student, as well as a psychotherapist, a scholar of mythology and a mystic. He regarded the unconscious as a spiritual aspect of the self and dreams as a way to understand the unconscious. Dreams were a guide for becoming a whole person and providing solutions to waking-life issues. This process was called *individuation*. Jung's theories on the collective unconscious – universal symbols or archetypes that everyone in the world recognises and which can come through dreams and stories – have contributed significantly to current dream work.

Friedrich Perls (1893–1970) was the founder of Gestalt therapy, and believed that dreams contained the unwanted or rejected parts of ourselves.

In general, new theories suggest that dreams act as a safe place where we confront primal threats to our livelihood and survival. By confronting these fears in dreams, we rehearse how we deal with our waking-life challenges.

For me, dreaming is a space where magic happens. It's a transformative experience, as it has personal meaning and gives me direct guidance about what is going on in my world. It is the territory of my intuition, where anything is possible without restrictions. It is the world where my subconscious can express itself freely and where I can speak directly with my intuition.

Our dreams can reveal many truths about our lives, giving us amazing insights that can provide information on health, relationships, work and our overall emotional state. Our subconscious is like a personal therapist. Understanding our dreams can bring self-awareness and a strong connection to our soul.

SLEEP STATES

We all experience five stages or cycles of sleep each night, from the lightest sleep (stages 1-2) to the very deep sleep (stages 3-4) where it's difficult to wake someone up. Stage 5 sleep is known as REM sleep – the sleep period where we dream most vividly. During REM (rapid-eye-movement) sleep, when we dream, the brain is thought to be processing stored memory.

For most adults, the REM sleep cycle occurs every ninety minutes. The first cycle usually lasts for only three minutes, but the duration increases with each cycle, so by early morning the last cycle can last up to fifty-five minutes. That's why we can remember our dreams more easily, as we've stayed longer in this cycle and it's just before we wake up. Most people experience three to five intervals of REM sleep each night. In total we may dream up to two hours and have up to ten dreams on average in each cycle.

During REM sleep, our muscles are temporarily paralysed. That is so that we are protected from physically acting out our dreams with our bodies. During dreaming your eyes move rapidly, your heart beats faster, your breath accelerates, blood pressure rises and your brain waves are activated. In fact, brain waves are increased to the same levels as when you are awake.

Infants spend almost fifty per cent of their time in REM sleep, while adults spend about twenty per cent in REM sleep. REM sleep is thought to be vital for memory and learning.

DREAMS FACTS

We sleep for about one third of our lives, and we have REM-sleep dreams for roughly one quarter of that time. It is estimated that we sleep for about twenty-five years and we dream for six of those years. In one year we have, on average, up to 1800 dreams of which we will only remember a few, if any.

If disturbed or aroused from REM sleep phase on a regular basis, a person may experience difficulty in concentration, irritability, mood swings, anxiety and even hallucinations.

PARTS OF THE BRAIN USED IN DREAMING

Sleep studies show that dreams occur mostly in rapid eye movement (REM) cycles, but they can happen in other non rapid eye movement (NREM) sleep phases as well, although they are not as vivid. This explains people being able to sleepwalk, which cannot happen in REM sleep because, as mentioned previously, a person's muscles become temporarily paralysed – a phenomenon which takes place in the *pons* areas located in the brain stem and which travels upward through to certain sections of the brain.

After the pons paralyses that section of our brain, dream activity begins in the *lateral geniculate nucleus* and the *occipital cortex* – the two parts vital for our vision, which makes sense as dreams are predominantly visual. Once the occipital cortex is activated, other areas including the *cerebral cortex* and the *thalamus* begin to show signs of activity. These areas are connected with our other senses such as hearing, touch and movement; however, the parts of the brain that arouse smell and taste do not become activated during REM sleep.

Another part of the brain that is highly active during REM is the *limbic system*, which helps to regulate emotions, in particular two

areas of the limbic – the *hippocampus* and *amygdala*, which are involved in memory and instincts. So if you feel any level of emotion during your dream, your brain processes it in the same way as if you were awake. It does not distinguish between your dreaming state and your waking state.

Our logical, problem-solving and planning part of the brain, the *prefrontal cortex*, is quiet during our dreaming sleep. It is not surprising, therefore, that as we dream our way through impossible, illogical and bizarre dream scenarios, we are able to participate in the dream freely without judgement. That is why we dream of doing things we would not normally do in real life, which seem perfectly natural to do in our dream world.

HOW WE SEE OUR DREAMS

People who become blind after birth can see images in their dreams, however if one is born blind, they may not be able to dream in images but their dreams are equally vivid. Other senses such as sound, touch, smell and emotions compensate for the lack of visionary stimulation.

Even foetuses in the womb dream, despite the lack of visual stimuli. Research suggests that they enter REM and NREM sleep cycles, depending on the stage of their development, and their dreams are made up of sound and touch sensations.

The majority of people, approximately seventy-five per cent, dream in colour.

WHY WE DREAM

‘The general function of dreams is to try and restore our psychological balance by producing dream material that re-establishes, in a subtle way, the total psychic equilibrium.’

– **Carl Jung**

There is plenty of evidence to support the mental and physiological benefits of dreams. We need to be aware of these benefits in order to understand how they relate to our present state of being.

BIOLOGICAL NECESSITY

Our bodies need a specific amount of REM sleep to assist with recovery and repair. Sleep also restores functions such as memory and learning. Dreaming, therefore, reduces stress and gives our busy, conscious mind a break while our brain and body regenerate.

TO RELEASE, CLEANSE AND PROCESS

Dreams help us get in touch with our emotions and bring imbalances to our attention. Our subconscious mind processes input from our everyday problems – stresses, anxieties, fears, self-doubt and repressed feelings – which can be filtered, sorted and then brought to the surface where healing can take place. Dreams provide a safe outlet where we can discharge or relieve our emotional build-up.

TO INVESTIGATE AND PROBLEM SOLVE

Dreams can help us pinpoint health problems, address major life issues, and help us to solve problems by shutting out the busy-ness of our waking brain and allowing our subconscious mind to explore solutions and possible scenarios without restrictions.

IN PREPARATION FOR FUTURE EVENTS

Dreams allow us to rehearse or practise for future events, as we dream up scenarios of potential real-life scenes. Nightmares help us prepare for possible traumatic events in our lives. Haven't we heard ourselves say, 'This is a nightmare'? Chances are that it probably was, as our psyche protects us from the shock, because we've already experienced the emotions in our dream.

FOR CREATIVITY AND INSPIRATION

Dreams have had a huge impact on our inventions, creativity and inspiration. Recording artist Paul McCartney heard the tune of *Yesterday* in a dream. Author Stephen King dreamt the idea for his best-selling book *Misery*, as well as other characters and plots in his novels. Chemist Friedrich Kekule credited a dream to his discovery of the structure of the benzene molecule. In the dream he saw snake-like formations writhing and twirling in a dance-like manner. One of the snakes seized its own tail.

His discovery became known as the benzene ring. The alchemical symbol of the snake swallowing or eating its own tail is known as the *ouroboros*.

SPIRITUALITY

Dreams can be insightful and spiritually uplifting, as dreamers receive messages from their departed loved ones, spiritual guides or their own inner wisdom, and use these lessons in waking life.

LAYERS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Dreams are a biological necessity that keep us healthy by identifying patterns of behaviour, and releasing old and unhelpful belief systems and thoughts. It's important, therefore, to understand the function of the conscious, the subconscious and the unconscious mind when working out the layers of the dream meanings and each type of dream.

THE CONSCIOUS

The conscious mind consists of all the mental processes of which we are aware. It gathers information from your five senses and makes all the decisions. It is the only part of your mind that thinks and, as such, solves problems – the outcome depends on whatever information it receives. In short, our aware mind, or awake mind, is the conscious.

THE UNCONSCIOUS

According to Freud, the unconscious mind is described as being a reservoir of feelings, thoughts, urges and memories that are outside of our conscious awareness. Most of what's in the unconscious are unacceptable or unpleasant, such as feelings of pain, anxiety or conflict. Many of these feelings, desires or emotions are repressed and out of our awareness because they are too threatening or unacceptable to us. It's through dreams that sometimes these secret desires and unacceptable feelings make themselves known. In waking life they are also known as 'Freudian slips' or slips of the tongue.

Freud described the unconscious mind as an iceberg. Everything above the water represents conscious awareness, while everything below the water represents the unconscious. Somewhere in between the two is the subconscious.

THE SUBCONSCIOUS

The subconscious, sometimes called the pre-conscious, can be defined as just outside of awareness but within our reach, while our unconscious is the deeper materials that haven't yet emerged into subconscious awareness – the rejected, forgotten, devalued or ignored parts of ourselves. I personally prefer to use the term 'subconscious' when discussing dreams as I feel that it is more intuitive to the reader and has a less negative connotation. When we talk of someone being unconscious or in an unconscious state, it brings to mind a lack of control, or passivity. The subconscious is much more animated – it contains thoughts and feelings that a person is not currently aware of, but which can easily be brought to consciousness. The subconscious is where dreams emerge, and thoughts, emotions, feelings and forgotten memories can be accessed and brought to waking-life consciousness.

THE SUPERCONSCIOUS

The superconscious mind is not connected with our physical shell or body. It exists at a level beyond time and space. It is known as the Infinite Intelligence or the Universal Mind – one that we are all connected to. It is like the internet, which allows us to connect to every other computer in the world as well as people using these computers. Some call it our Higher Self – one that extends beyond our birth and death and one which holds the blueprint for what we've set out to achieve in our lifetime. We can access this superconscious mind through spiritual dreams and precognitive or prophetic dreams.

TYPES OF DREAMS

ANXIETY. Most dreams are anxiety based – that is, they highlight our waking-life anxieties that we mostly ignore or are not aware of. That knot in your stomach when you walk past the boss's office can very well turn into a real knot in a dream, where you are tied up and cannot undo the ties. This type of dream is therefore a reflection of our everyday life situation, where our attitudes and emotions are highlighted and exaggerated in our dreams. Our anxiety dreams often turn into recurring dreams or nightmares unless we deal with the ongoing issue.

CREATIVE. Those working in creative fields such as art, music or literature are more directly impacted by creative dreams, which are a deep source of inspiration. Many an invention, work of art or musical piece has been a result of dreaming it first.

COMPENSATORY. Whatever hasn't been given a healthy outlet or expression in your waking life has the potential to manifest as a negative, compensatory dream. Feeling angry? You may dream of angry characters trying to attack or chase you.

WISH-FULFILMENT. The purpose of a wish-fulfilment dream is not to show the dreamer what is missing in their life, but rather to show the potential that is in each of us to achieve our goals and dreams.

PRECOGNITIVE. Dreaming of something before it happens (a future event) can be a confusing dream type as the dreamer has not much indication if it's a symbolic dream or a precognitive/prophetic dream until after the future event happens.

WARNING. Warning dreams show us potential dangers that may pose a physical or psychological threat, especially if we have not heeded our intuition in our waking life. These dreams prompt you to implement changes in your life before you get hurt.

ARCHETYPAL. An archetypal dream deals with a much bigger issue than simply a personal one. It deals with patterns of behaviour or belief systems that are universally shared. (See Chapters 7 and 8)

NUMINOUS. These 'big dreams' bring you in contact with the divine. They are transformative dreams that usually involve spiritual phenomena such as spirit guides. (See Chapter 11)

SHAMANIC. Dreams that involve elements of initiation, ritual, healing and guidance for the benefit of the dreamer and others (tribal) are manifested in distinct shamanic ways passed down from indigenous cultures and traditions. (See chapters 10 and 11)

HEALING. A healing dream is one that heals your physical body, your emotional state and your relationships with others. It can offer you clues as to what illness you may have, even before medical diagnosis.

PARA-PSYCHOLOGICAL. Many dreams that cannot be explained logically fit into this dream type, such as telepathic dreams, dream sharing, afterlife, past lives, future or parallel lives.

LUCID/ASTRAL TRAVEL/OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCE (OBE). Lucid dreaming is ‘knowing’ or being aware that you are dreaming while you are dreaming. In some cases, you can control the events and outcome of the dream. Astral travel and OBE is being able to dream yourself out of your body and travel in the astral realm, often meeting other dreamers in these places. (See Chapter 10)

WHAT DREAMS TELL YOU ABOUT YOUR HEALTH

There are a number of symbols in your dreams that indicate illness or potential health problems. Having a mind-body connection means that all parts of our body and all of the emotional responses we have, share a common language and communicate with each other. When dreaming of any of these symbols, accidents or parts of the body, interpret them as being a message from your subconscious mind and take the images seriously. Illness can be detected by your body first, which then informs your psyche.

SYMBOL: HOUSE	POSSIBLE MEANING
Broken or blocked pipes	circulatory problems
Frozen or cold temperature	locked energy flow
Garbage	need to clean out/release, digestive problems
Renovation	healing needed, overhaul, change in diet
Burglary	open to infection, vulnerable
Flooding	excess, water retention, overwhelmed
Infestation	infection
Fire	fever, viral or bacterial infection, heartburn

Dreaming of illness or accident: Have a health check and take precaution in dreams of accidents. The dreams are usually symbolic of your emotional

state, but there are cases of precognitive dreams or that your subconscious has picked up early warnings of symptoms or potential dangers.

SYMBOL: ILLNESS

Allergies

Cancer

Diarrhoea

Epilepsy

Fever

Infection

Pneumonia

Rash

Breathing problems/asthma

Tumour

Vomiting

POSSIBLE MEANING

be more tolerant of those around you
something is eating away at you, part
of your life is not being lived

allow yourself to be nurtured

out of balance with life

anger, burning up with resentment

need to get rid of negative emotions,
purify

overwhelmed with emotions, inner
turmoil

self-critical, unable to express
yourself

trying to please others, focus on what
inspires you

feeling unlovable, self-neglect

you can't stomach something, need to
speak out and let go of old stuff

SYMBOL: ACCIDENTS

Burns

Cuts

Run over or crushed

Fall

Loss of limb

POSSIBLE MEANINGS

anger, soothe it with the balm of
forgiveness

emotional wounds

overwhelmed by stress or someone in
your life, something is crushing your
vision/spirit

lack of control, trust in yourself and
the universe

feeling disconnected or disempowered,
time to take stock of a situation

REMEMBERING YOUR DREAMS

1. Take a sincere interest in your dreams. If you are interested in your dreams, there is a very high probability that you will remember them.
2. Set a clear intention throughout the day to remember a significant dream. You might want to re-read some of your previous dreams to start connecting to the subconscious imagery or alternatively meditate on a question you'd like answered. You may wish to write the question on paper and place it under your pillow.
3. The way you wake up is very important so that you don't forget your dreams. Within five minutes of waking, fifty per cent of your dream is forgotten. Within ten minutes, ninety per cent is gone. Set a soft alarm to wake you up fifteen to twenty minutes earlier than usual, when you are still in the REM dream state. Better still, avoid using an alarm clock and train your body to wake you instead.
4. When you wake, keep your eyes closed and remain completely still, focusing on the memory of the dream. Recall all the images, emotions and scenes from your dream and jot them quickly in your dream journal.
5. Alcohol, caffeine, recreational drugs and medication diminish the ability to remember dreams, as does vitamin and mineral deficiency, particularly in the vitamin B group. Certain foods affect our dreams and therefore it's best to avoid heavy or spicy foods before bedtime when our bodies have not had time to digest. Interestingly, people who are giving up smoking have longer and more intense dreams – mostly about smoking – as a result of tobacco withdrawal.

CHAPTER 2

WHEN DREAMS ARE A PROBLEM

REST ASSURED THAT your dreams will never give you more than you can handle. All that is bubbling away within your subconscious will only come up to the conscious when it is ready. There will be times when our emotional world needs release and recurring dreams and nightmares are a result of deep feelings and thoughts that we are conscious of. They bring to our attention those things we have repressed, that we perceive to be threatening, overwhelming or devastating at some point in our past. Carl Jung believed that it is our Shadow (rejected parts and qualities we do not like about ourselves) that usually appear as frightening nightmares in our dreams if we don't acknowledge them in our conscious state.

'The unconscious always tries to produce an impossible situation in order to force the individual to bring out his very best. Otherwise one stops short of one's best, one is not complete, one does not realise oneself. What is needed is an impossible situation where one has to renounce one's own will and one's own wit and do nothing but wait and trust to the impersonal power of growth and development.'

– **Carl Jung (on nightmares)**

The point of the nightmare is a sign that you are now ready to deal with these emotions and unacceptable parts of your personality for the sake of your mental, physical, spiritual health. Believe it or not, your nightmare is there to help you. Nightmares are just dreams with the volume turned

up loud, desperately trying to grab your attention about aspects of your life and self that are ready to be dealt with and healed.

NIGHT TERRORS

Night terrors happen in the cycle before REM sleep and usually have no visuals, although dreamers wake up screaming. The more typical nightmares are detailed and in colour. It is believed that up to twenty per cent of people have nightmares once a week.

As unpleasant as they may be at the time, nightmares are an essential part of dreaming, as they are the manifestation of stress, anxiety, and fears from our daily lives that we may not be conscious of. Vivid images are required for us to pay attention and remember our dream scenes and therefore should not be taken literally. It is more productive to focus on the emotion and metaphors in the nightmares.

TYPES OF RECURRING DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES

There are many types of recurring dreams and nightmares that cause us fear, frustration, terror and sometimes physical pain. Some common negative dream scenarios include *falling, being chased or attacked, being killed or killing someone, seeing someone you love die or in danger, late or unprepared for a presentation or an exam, stuck in slow motion, unable to move or scream, suffocation, sinister presence*, to name a few.

If we don't deal with issues highlighted in our nightmares, by blocking, ignoring or denying them, they may haunt us in other ways, manifesting as illnesses, accidents, conflicts in relationships and other personal difficulties. Nightmares are there to remind us of some urgent business to be resolved.

RESOLVING NIGHTMARES

There are a number of methods you can use that will assist you in working with your nightmares so that you no longer dread them, but learn to harness the energy they offer. Insights from recurring dreams and

nightmares can give you great confidence in expressing your feelings instead of avoiding or running away from situations that are unpleasant in real life.

Some of the most useful techniques include dream re-scripting (changing the outcome of the dream once you learn to go back (dream re-entry) into the dream); and lucid dreaming (being awake in your dream and changing the events, such as asking the pursuer what they want or turning a potential weapon into a harmless object).

HOW TO RE-SCRIPT A DREAM

1. Select a recent nightmare or upsetting dream and re-write the ending.
2. Choose an ending that will make you feel empowered and confident in a new scenario, instead of how you actually felt in the dream.
3. Before going to sleep, sit in a comfortable position and relax your body and mind for a few minutes. Once you feel calm, visualise or recall the dream you've selected to re-script. Go through it as if it were a movie and when things turn scary or unpleasant, replace the old ending with the new, empowering one you've created. Imagine this as vividly as you can. Hold the image in your mind.
4. Tune in to your body and check how this feels. Do you feel confident? Free? Empowered? Imagine these feelings even if you don't actually feel this way yet.
5. Embrace the power of suggestion. Tell yourself that not only are these new thought patterns reaching into your waking life, but also that you will have a new dream that includes a more positive and empowering ending.

It's not always possible to dethrone the tyrants in our dreams that cause us terrifying nightmares. There may be other causes at play such as serious illness, post-operative recovery, medication, drugs, trauma and post-traumatic stress.

Two of my clients had very similar dreams that I traced back to a common probable cause. Both women had recurring nightmares that their child was encased or trapped in a glass container and they were unable to get them out. What caused the terror for both mothers was the

fact that the child was visibly distressed. They could see them through the glass, but they were powerless to rescue them as breaking the glass would mean possibly causing the child serious injury.

It seemed that these recurring dreams were brought about when there was a change in the child's routine – day care, kindergarten, school. In effect, when the child was out of range from parental supervision. However, as the child grew up, the recurring dreams continued to haunt the dreamers.

When we traced back the traumatic experiences they had as children, both dreamers said that they had witnessed their younger sibling's death. They subconsciously still felt a sense of powerlessness that they could do nothing to help the situation. This post-traumatic stress revisits the dreamers whenever there are new events in their lives over which they have little control. Both dreamers agreed that this nightmare experience was the most frightening of any other dream, including those that included their own death.

Nightmares with a symbolic or metaphoric meaning are quite different to post-traumatic stress dreams, as they are less intense. This dreamer felt the impact of her nightmare quite dramatically and she made radical changes to her life immediately after.

'I had a recurring dream of a white coffin in my kitchen. My mother (who is alive) was lying in it, but my favourite flowers, yellow roses, were strewn all around the coffin.'

Karen

When we discussed the dream imagery and the association she made with the white coffin and her mother, the dreamer understood the message.

'The white coffin reminded me of my mother's white kitchen tiles – the ones she was pushed onto by my violent father. The coffin represents my future. It's a clear message that if I don't get out of my present situation with domestic violence, I too will end up in a coffin. The yellow roses made sure that the dream knew it was referring to my future.'

CHAPTER 3

DREAMS AND GENDER

HOW MEN AND WOMEN DREAM

According to dream research, men and women dream differently. Women have greater dream recall in general. This may be due to the relationship between high oestrogen levels and the ability to remember dreams. Women also have more nightmares than men. Perhaps this is due to the fact that women are more likely to share this information and have better dream recall.

Women dream of people they know, male and female, and mostly in a familiar setting indoors.

Men's dreams take place outdoors, with mostly male characters who are unfamiliar to them. These male characters are usually aggressive, unfriendly or hostile.

Researchers suggest that the reason for these differences is that they reflect traditional real-life experiences. For men, they see the workplace as a hostile place where they compete with other men they don't know. Women are generally more social and co-operative, and build relationships with both genders in the workplace and socially. Despite women moving into the more competitive areas of the workforce that were once traditionally dominated by men, both men and women are wired to believe that men derive a greater sense of self-esteem from success at work (being the provider) and women's confidence comes from maintaining successful relationships.

PREGNANCY AND MENOPAUSE

Pregnant women dream more, tend to have better dream recall and experience more vivid dreams than usual. This may be due to the increased levels of progesterone, which many women claim gives them odd or disturbing dreams. Apart from the hormone changes, pregnant women

are also going through a very emotional time and therefore their dreams reflect their anxieties.

Oestrogen also has an overall effect on dream recall – it's been reported that women dream more at certain times during their menstrual cycle.

Similarly with menopause, the physical, mental and emotional changes inevitably affect sleep patterns and dreaming. Hot flushes and discomfort are some of the symptoms of menopause and cause insomnia and strange dreams. Pregnancy and menopause are times of great transition – in one there is the birth and addition to the family, in the other it's the empty nest and finding a new role that makes some women feel valued for something other than their sexuality.

Both pregnant women and menopausal women wake more in the middle of their REM cycles and this is a possible reason why they remember their dreams. Generally, menopause causes women to have fewer dreams.

COMMON DREAMS FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

- having a deformed baby
- forgetting to take care of the child
- fish, swimming, drowning, standing in the ocean
- giving birth to animal babies which grow in size as the pregnancy progresses
- giving birth to an alien
- cheating partner
- re-appearing ex-lovers

It is normal for pregnant women to experience anxiety dreams as it reflects their conscious anxieties about the impending birth, change in their body appearance, feeling self-conscious about losing their feminine shape, and the pressure of being a good parent. Other emotions associated with this major life change include insecurity, vulnerability, ambivalence towards the new role as parent, and feeling the weight of responsibility for a helpless new baby.

Common anxiety dreams include dreaming the baby is born prematurely or that it is or becomes something other than a baby, such as a

furry animal. Women often dream that they can 'see' the baby either through a transparency in their stomach or because part of it emerges. Dreams about ex-lovers or about partner infidelity are also common – both arising from an anxiety about change in body appearance.

The dreams just prior to birth mirror real-life emotions about the expectancy of the event and the responsibility of new motherhood. They may include dreams about impending travel or anxious dreams where the baby is born but something is wrong and only care taken in the dream fixes the problem.

COMMON DREAMS FOR MENOPAUSAL WOMEN

- giving birth
- fire
- losing a baby
- losing the car/possessions
- losing teeth
- finding new rooms in the house

Women's emotions are running high during the 'change' of life and strange dreams are a part of this new phase. Anxiety dreams such as losing a baby, car or teeth are related to feeling vulnerable, older, less attractive and not knowing where things are any more (losing car/baby/possessions).

Fire is possibly related to the discomfort of hot flushes or perhaps it's more emotional – the end of the childbearing years and the beginning of a new and less intense stage. It could be said that it's a metaphor: the phoenix rising out of the ashes (burning of the old self) to reinvent one's life in order to give birth to the new self.

When a menopausal woman finds a new room in the house, it is a positive dream to suggest that she has found a new part of herself – one that was put on hold and has now been rediscovered, such as starting that new university course, doing a charity run, travelling overseas, taking up life drawing and more. It's the opportunity to find a new identity out of the old, rather like 'up-cycling' (a new version or use of the original). This dream is common in women who have sacrificed their passions, ideal career and interests for parental responsibilities.