all about™ Dreams

WORKING WITH YOUR DREAMS

A Guide to Creating a Dream Journal

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A Guide To Creating a Dream Journal is a companion reference for the podcast learning series Working with Your Dreams.

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Dream work should be undertaken with a certain seriousness, as working with unconscious material can trigger unanticipated memories and emotional responses.

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All About Dreams is a community education initiative that teaches practical methods for working with sleep time dreams. Contemplative instructor, Kai Dailey, M.S., created the initiative to help people develop a healthy and meaningful relationship with themselves through dream work. All content is developed using an interdisciplinary, research-based approach that explores a wide range of perspectives on dreams while honoring the unique experience of the individual.

A brief introduction to dream work

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Every puzzling or intriguing dream presents an opportunity to begin a conversation with your inner self. We sometimes awake from the images, impressions, events, and emotions of our dreams feeling that they contain something meaningful for us.

Dream analysis or any activity that encourages people to take seriously their own internal experience is validating, and validation, is a form of healing.

Beliefs determine dream meaningfulness

Your beliefs about dreams influence how you work with them. They shape your understanding of not only the purpose of dreams but the meaningfulness of the experience. Getting to know your assumptions and attitudes will help you select the tools most useful to you for interpreting your dream reality (King, et al., 2011, p. 6).

There are many philosophies and approaches to guide dream work. From the spiritual and religious to the psychological and therapeutic approaches influenced by Freud and Jung to scientific dream research that incorporates neuroscience and big data. Dream researchers, King, Bulkeley, and Bernard (2011) commented, "We have found all approaches to dreams valuable in clarifying some aspects of the phenomenon, but none sufficient by itself" (p. 6).

These approaches vary widely in their general view of what dreams are and how to go about analyzing them. But regardless of what approaches you use, you'll need to write your dreams down so you can refer to them and learn from them. This guide is intended to assist you in developing a dream journaling practice to support your dream work efforts.

Select a paper journal that will support your entire dream work process

Get started by selecting a paper journal to record your dreams. Writing by hand promotes strong memory retention (Mueller & Oppenheimer, 2014) and deep emotional engagement compared to recording into a digital device (Goodwin, 2018). High emotional engagement with your dream experiences increases the quality of the narratives you write, which in turn enhances the depth of your analysis. In a pinch, you can record into a digital device but handwriting can be faster than launching an app on your phone.

When you are ready to analyze your dreams, you will need to transfer your handwritten journal into a word processing program. Choose a journal style that makes it easy to transcribe your writing. Lovely hard-bound journals with their rigid spines and beautiful covers are a pleasure to collect and use. However, spined journals can be difficult to keep open while copy-typing or voice recording. A better option is a spiral-bound notebook that can be easily propped up against a stack of books, typing stand, or document holder. In particular, an inexpensive steno pad works well for quickly capturing a dream at bedside and easily transcribing it later.

You can choose to keep all of your dreams and comments in paper form, or to reduce the time spent transcribing, create a hybrid system: dream narratives and first impressions recorded on paper and deeper reflections added to a word processing file.

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Write down the dream story and your experience of it

Keep your dream journal and a pen or pencil next to where you sleep. When you wake from a dream, immediately note your first thoughts and feelings. Write these down along with as much of the dream story as you remember. If only a general feeling lingers, take the time to record it.

Your emotional responses and the thoughts and feelings you have about your responses may signal a dream's significance. Writing draws attention to what is meaningful. Giving your attention to what is meaningful can improve your dream memory and understanding (Willingham, 2003).

Record the date and time

Write down your dream quickly without editing or stopping to correct spelling or punctuation.

Use brackets to separate your comments and reflections from the dream narrative.

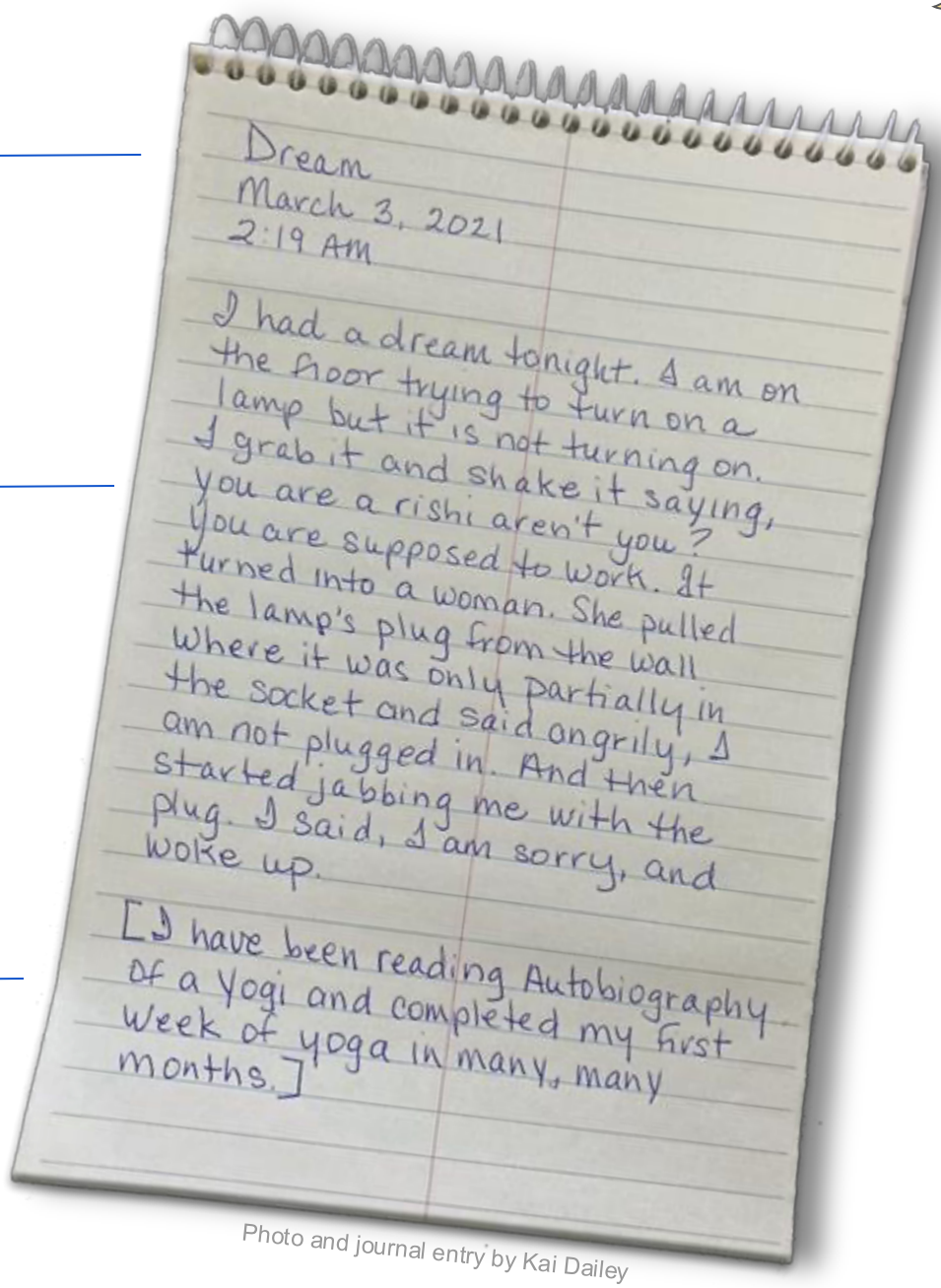

Photo and journal entry by Kai Dailey

Record your dream like an historian

Label your entries with the date. If you wait until the next day to record a dream, or if you remember one from a long time ago, include the date and time that you record it. As you write, separate your observations, impressions, and interpretations from the dream story. This will help you remember months or years later what part of your entry is the actual dream and what part is your impression of the dream. If you tend to intersperse commentary when recording your dream, place your comments in brackets.

Add any contextual information that comes to you, such as situations, events, or concerns in your waking life that you think might be relevant to understanding the dream.

Organize your dream work for deeper analysis

Compiling even a few weeks of dream journal entries yields surprising insights and patterns when viewed together. Entries once analyzed can be used to build a personal dream dictionary (e.g., words, phrases, and images that reoccur or that signal meaning for you). Visit www.allaboutdreams.com to learn how to build a personal dream dictionary.

What to consider before engaging with your dreams

Dream work should be undertaken with a certain seriousness, as working with unconscious material can trigger unanticipated memories and emotional responses.

If you are dealing with past trauma and intend to use dream work as a path to healing, it is recommended that you work with a mental health professional trained in dream work. It is important that you have someone in your life that you trust to provide emotional support and who can check in on you and your progress.

Undertaking dream work can be emotionally disruptive to your waking life. Insights, emotional responses, and memories may surface spontaneously. Privacy, safety, and an environment that supports reflection and rest are essential when engaging in intense dream work.

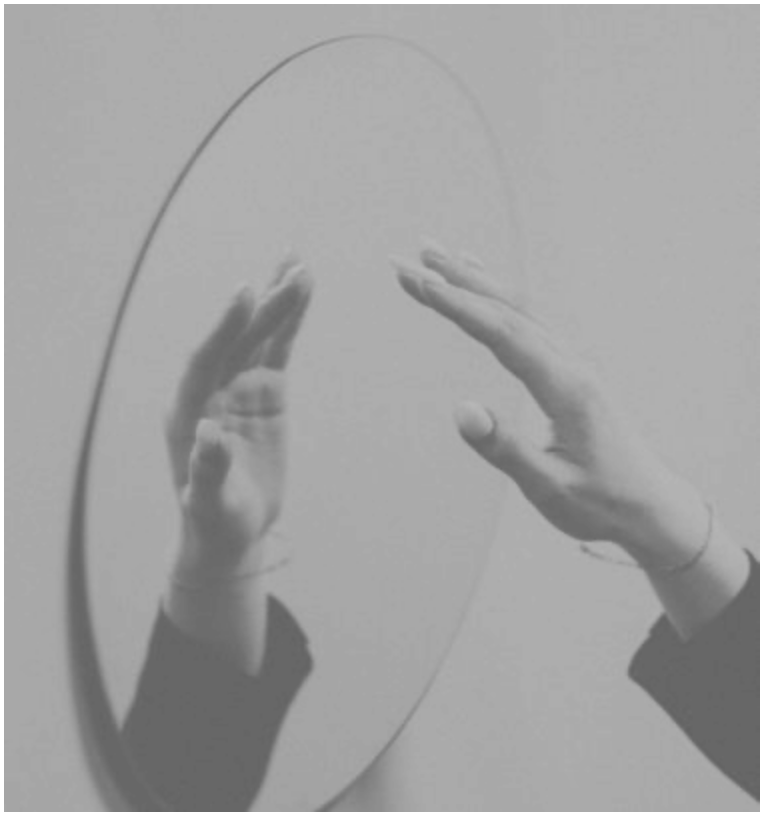

Photo by Михаил Секацкий on Unsplash

Consider reserving a time of extended holiday for exploring highly charged dream experiences.

Developing a relationship with yourself through dream work cultivates a means of inner emotional support and counsel that you can draw upon as you journey through life. It is an investment in yourself that yields deeper self-awareness and wisdom.

Visit www.allaboutdreams.com for free podcasts, videos, and handouts about how to use dream work for spiritual healing and personal growth.

References

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Mueller, P. A., & Oppenheimer, D. M. (2014). The pen is mightier than the keyboard: Advantages of longhand over laptop note taking. *Psychological science*, *25*(6), 1159-1168.

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Recommended Reading

The Sacred Crane. (n.d.). *All about dreams.* (n.d.). https://www.thesacredcrane.org/all-about-dreams

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