

Holistic, integrative practices.

Earn your M.S., Ph.D., or certificate in Mind-Body Medicine.



Doing the work since 1971.

[Learn more](#)



Magazine Services ▾

[Subscribe](#)

[Log In](#) | [Search](#)

Categories ▾

Columns ▾

Spirituality & Health

Podcasts

Collections

● spiritual practices

Spiritual Dreamwork: A Case Study

by *Laura Huff Hileman and Allen Proctor*



Share: [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#)

Jorm Sangsorn/Getty

Drop into another's dream to explore natural spirituality in action.

Waking up with a dream is waking up to your truth. People who take part in dreamwork seek that truth under the guidance of mentors trained in connecting the spiritual and the psychological in dreams.

Join this dreamer, a woman in a time of midlife discernment, as she shares her dream, dubbed "Lightning Foot":

I'm clinging to a tiny raft, face down and alone in pitch-black darkness on the ocean, rocking on the waves. I hold onto the raft with all my strength as the wind blows harder, and the waves grow wilder.

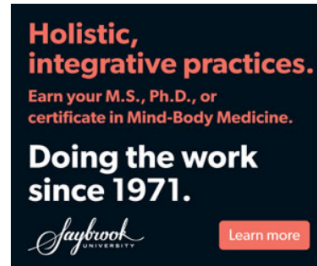
Then lightning begins. I am terrified as bolts strike all around me—and then I see that lightning is also striking from down in the water. This fascinates me.

Suddenly a lightning bolt cracks down out of the sky and strikes me on the bottom of my foot. I'm jolted, shocked—but the storm seems to abate, and now I can sit up. I examine the spot on the bottom of my foot where the lightning struck, and I'm astounded: Burnt into my flesh is a map of an unknown country.

Dreams: Where Do They Come From & Why Do We Have Them?

Carl Jung believed that dreams serve to connect our waking ego mind to the unlimited unconscious reality of our true self, also conceived as the divine within. He called this connection the ego-self axis, which is an unlovely term for what is essentially the trunk of the tree of life. Imagine the great tree continually coursing with lifegiving water and nutrients between the leaves and the roots, in a slow-growth surge. In psychospiritual terms, this axis is the vital link between mind and soul. Tending it is crucial to our greatest work as humans, which is, according to Jung, to become the person we are at essence—for our own wellbeing and for that of humankind.

Jung called this process individuation. It is natural spirituality in action.



A Relationship Between Realms

Dreams give us countless images of connection: lightning, stairs, wells, ladders, ropes, telephones, deep places or high places, for example. All of them offer a felt sense of **relationship between realms**. Because this natural flow between our ego and true self is so crucial to our wellbeing, some of us cultivate practices that activate it consciously: contemplative prayer or meditation; creative expression; acts of compassion; physical embodiment like dance, running, or wilderness wandering. Over time, you realize your vitality is there, in this sacred flow. Your practice is your lifeline to everything that matters.

With dreams, however, your main practice is falling asleep. Whether or not you **remember your dreams**, they arise five or six times every night in the service of healing and wholeness. Dreamwork as a conscious practice is simply waking up to what's already going on. Remember the tree of life? Dreams originate from the seed itself.

The self—the organizing center of the psyche and repository of your psychospiritual DNA—composes each night, with astounding detail. The experience we call a dream is full of visual imagery, sounds, tastes, smells, sensory details, vivid action, emotions, words, puns, memories, references, and energetic nudges. If we relax into our metaphorical knowing, we see that these dreams, even little fragments, are rich with meaning. (Jung famously commented that the chief ailment of his middle-aged patients was lack of meaning.)

A dream's meaning is about our journey toward wholeness: dreams are primarily concerned with the growth, transformation, and flourishing of the soul.

Image and Emotion: Dropping Into Another's Dream

Dreams regularly offer astounding wisdom, but rarely will they use pragmatic bullet points. If they did, it would be too easy to never engage with the deeper meaning. Instead, dreams use the **experiential language** of image and emotion, as poems or parables do, to wake us up to our own reality. (As Carl Jung said, the transformative power of dreams is not in the analysis but in experiencing the images.) Dreams link the mystery of the unconscious with the concerns of our waking lives. They tell us something we don't know—or they present a familiar insight with a new perspective. And they never mean just one thing.

[Read: "My Dreams Are Really Bizarre!"]

Another amazing thing about dreams is that we can participate in anyone else's dream because it draws from the collective unconscious and general human experience. **Try this exercise for yourself with the "Lightning Foot" dream:**



"Ascend" by Anne Zuberer @annezuberer_artist

Let yourself drop into the dream ... become the dreamer. Feel yourself now, lying face down on a tiny raft ... you're at sea, and the wind is rising, and the darkness is thick, and you're alone. How do you feel? What are your hands doing, your heart? What are you telling yourself in this situation? The waves swell and you rise and drop, rise and drop. Then the wind picks up and the waves grow wilder ... you're still holding on. Suddenly the storm comes and lightning flashes all around you ... over and over ... and then you see the lightning is flashing in the water now, brilliant underwater lightning, lightning above and below you, all around ... then one loud crack and you feel the searing heat on the sole of your bare foot ...

Uncomfortable? Good. When we feel discomfort in a dream, it is usually the ego that is balking. The dream challenges this "me" to feel our growing edges and see where we need to welcome transformation. Like smoke alarms, **nightmares show us** something as urgent as a housefire that demands immediate attention.

Remember, dreams work primarily by offering emotions and images—settings, characters, animals, actions, situations, stories, and so on. We can **begin to understand a dream** by taking it image by image, letting each work on us like a bridge, connecting something we do know with something we aren't yet conscious of.

Sometimes just the setting and our feelings about it tell us what we need to know about what's really going on. In "Lightning Foot" we can ask, "Where in my waking life am I experiencing fear... the feeling of being alone, overwhelmed, 'at sea,' 'in the dark,' and totally vulnerable?" Maybe you already know that you're "at sea" in your life, but the dream helps you realize the particular possibilities of vulnerability.

Archetypal Situations, Characters, and Images

The ocean and the sky are both archetypes of the unknowable vastness that surrounds us—below and above, within and without. An archetype is a profoundly raw and central energetic reality common to all humans, and we recognize it when it dresses up in powerful costumes.

In "Lightning Foot," ocean and sky show us a numinous reality that threatens us, fascinates us, and is full of illumination and vitality. Water is often an image of the unconscious and/or emotions, and the state of the water might show us just how tumultuous we feel. The lightning bolt may be an archetypal image of the ego-self axis: perhaps in this dream, it pictures the connection as illuminating, high-intensity, and dangerous. Perhaps it feels like a lightning rod for the energy of the self. This degree of vulnerability is thrilling and terrifying, full of numinous charge. What feels like this in waking life? Archetypal god images? Ideas? Trying to live with this intensity every day? Maybe this is part of the growing edge—the uncomfortable realization that what is needed is to learn how to translate the glory and tumult of the numinous into something useful for every day. Happily, there's a map for that. It's burned into the sole/soul.



Untitled Encaustic by Anne Zuberer @annezuberer_artist

What if you ask the map on the sole of your foot what it wants to say to you about itself? (You can try asking the map right now.) Perhaps the map says to you that it's a sign of divine encounter. Like the torn sineu in Jacob's hip after he wrestles with the angel, it'll remind you of this always. And because it's a burn, you're marked, like others in sacred stories, as a wounded healer. Maybe it's here to remind you that every step you take is on holy ground. The map may tell you that it's the route to your destiny, that you'll always know where you are.

What about the raft in this dream?

You can make associations: the raft is the part of you that supports, keeps you afloat. It's good for a drift down a peaceful river but not equal to the sea and storm. It reminds you of your ego self, the part you usually identify with. You can talk to the raft, interview it imaginatively in a practice called active imagination. You can get your hands into raft making: maybe if you shape a little raft of twigs, you begin to think of it as a craft, and then you begin to imagine your own "craft" that has kept you afloat in wild times. Is it your work? Your ability to make meaning? Your skill with people or ideas? Your ability to navigate the waters of the unconscious? Maybe your craft makes you vulnerable to a power that could kill you but instead singles you out and blesses you. Maybe it tells you that it's your life raft. Have you recently "jumped ship?" Which ship? Why? You may keep relating to your raft over time, noticing how it might seek out deeper waters than it can safely handle.

As we stay in relationship with a powerful symbol, we realize it is a part of our essence. It teaches us; it knows us and leads us by **intuition**, trial and error, synchronicity.

Big Healing Dreams and Transpersonal Realities

Sometimes all we recall are tiny, mundane dream fragments. They're like haiku instead of epics: concentrated little dreams that can move the rudder a hair's breadth. But occasionally we'll have a dream that bears enormous significance. These "big dreams," or healing dreams, stay with us, carrying new layers of meaning over time. They throw a spotlight onto our future, revealing a powerful shadow to integrate and showing us how we've been playing too small all along.

One reason dreams bewilder us is that they have a bigger perspective than our waking minds do. Returning to "Lightning Foot," the landscape of significance is not just the raft but the wholeness of the sky and sea. Dreams include everything within our psyche: shadows, archetypes, anima and animus energies, our varied personas, and the living images of the true self.

While dreams speak to our individual concerns, often giving us direct personal guidance, they also carry the energies beyond us, connecting us with the collective unconscious and beyond, into the transpersonal realm. In "Lightning Foot" we may see the hand of God behind that lightning bolt that strikes our "soul." Being branded with the map says as much about whose we are as who we are.

Carl Jung said, "As far as we can determine, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light of meaning in the darkness of mere being." The need for storying our lives and tapping into something beyond us is an inevitable human yearning. Dreams offer us a path through our maze of distractions and neuroses to meaning and purpose. They connect us to truth, to source, to mystery, to wisdom, and—especially through dream groups and dream sharing—to each other.

[Read: "[Bring Families Together through Dreams.](#)"]

In this world of growing existential crises, we are in desperate need of human beings who have the courage and determination to seek wholeness for themselves and for the planet. We invite you to join in this adventure of inner work and wholeness: record your dreams, explore the images, make associations, creatively embody the narratives, paint or sculpt or draw or collage, and share your dreams with a partner or a group. As Jungian analyst Pittman McGehee says, you alone can become yourself, but you cannot become yourself alone.

Further Reading:

- Inner Work by Robert Johnson
- The Wisdom of Your Dreams by Jeremy Taylor
- Dream Language by Robert Hoss
- The Art of Dreaming: Tools for Creative Dream Work by Jill Mellick
- Dream Theatres of the Soul by Jean Benedict Raffa

Keep the dreamwork alive with "[How to Get Guidance From Your Dreams.](#)"

Dreams

Ego

Healing

About the Author

Laura Huff Hileman is a dreamwork facilitator and spiritual director at Fire by Night Dreamwork in Jonesborough, TN. Allen Proctor is the director of The Haden Institute, which offers training in dream work and spiritual direction.

[Click for more from this author.](#)

Spiritual Practices

[See All >](#)



● spiritual practices

Podcast: After Death Communication ... Don't Be Afraid, You're Not Alone

"I understood then that this was the point of the dream. That I was being shown this world as a ...



● spiritual practices

3 Essential Practices for Gratitude

Experience more fullness of heart with these exercises embracing gratitude as a spiritual practice.



● spiritual practices

Mysticism of the Breath

Mysticism of the breath is an ancient, and appropriately timeless, tool for healing and ...

— sponsored



● spiritual practices

Christian Fasting: A Spiritual Practice for Now?

Christians (and non-Christians) can



● spiritual practices

A Prayer to Welcome the New Year

Turn the page on a terrible, divisive



● spiritual practices

Queer Spirituality

"Just because your religion betrayed you does not mean that Spirit has



embrace fasting as a way to overcome
our deep-rooted idea ...



2020 with prayer—even if you don't
normally pray and you ...



... see how much God has
abandoned you."

Similar Content



★ ● spiritual practices

The Healing Spirits of Brazil



● spiritual practices

Our Tibetan Crystal Bowl Adventure

A woman embraces her mother's desire
to "see more, hear more, feel more."



● spiritual practices

Eat Your Flowers



Atlantic University
DEAC Accredited

TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION | ONLINE

Graduate Degrees & Professional Training programs in
Transpersonal Psychology, Mindfulness, Integrated Imagery and more....

[http:// AtlanticUniv.edu](http://AtlanticUniv.edu) info@atlanticuniv.edu | 757-457-7172

Enlightening, Empowering, Innovative, Inspiring ... Don't Miss a Word!

Sign up to receive some of our favorite articles, gain access to free e-books, and be the
first to know about giveaways and special offers.

Enter Your Email Address

Sign Up

[Contact](#) [About Us](#) [Advertise](#) [Submissions](#)

Magazine Services

[Subscribe](#) [Give a Gift](#) [Renew](#) [Manage Your Subscription](#) [Customer Service](#)



©2022 Spirituality & Health (en-US)

[Terms and Conditions](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Do Not Sell My Information](#)