

Dreams as a Potential Guide to Internal Changes

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ABSTRACT

Inspired by Patanjali's advice to "meditate on the knowledge that comes in sleep" (Yoga Sutra I.38), my research aims to explore whether people who feel a general sense of being stuck and lacking motivation in their everyday lives can benefit from using their dreams to overcome these blocks. My approach is based on a Jungian perspective whose interpretation of dream images provides a guide for an inner process of transformation.

In addition, my research delves into which images are most helpful to meditate on so as to deeply embed the positive aspects they carry into a dreamer's consciousness.

Participants initially reported experiencing:

- A lack of motivation
- Feelings of being stuck
- A sense of inner blockage
- A disconnection from their inner selves
- A lack of direction in their daily lives
- Difficulty managing changes in both personal and professional realms
- Discomfort with the aging process
- Feeling overwhelmed by family issues

Thanks to the dream exploration process which involved group discussions and a series of meditations focused on significant dream imagery, participants reported feeling more connected to their needs and achieving a greater sense of integration among various facets of themselves. Meditating on the key elements in their dreams proved particularly helpful for reinforcing positive feelings of strength and selfhood which in turn helped dreamers make important decisions more confidently. The majority of participants also related feeling more spiritually fulfilled.

I. INTRODUCTION

Interest in dreams has spanned centuries and cultures. An ancient reference in yoga tradition is recorded in the *Mandukya Upanishad*. According to the *Mandukya Upanishad*, there are 4 states of consciousness:

- waking life (*jāgrat-avastha*)
- dream-consciousness (*taijasa*)
- deep sleep (*prājña*)
- beyond the previous three (*turya*)

Yoga practice aims to reach the fourth state, where individuals go beyond their conditioned mental impressions (*samskara*).

Although dream-consciousness is not the ultimate goal of yoga practice, dreams are considered a means to deepen the study of oneself (*svadhyaya*). They can be a valuable support in our *sadhana*, as well as an important guide in our lives, because dreams are a manifestation of the Cosmic Subtle Consciousness (*hiranyagarba*).

Dream-consciousness (*taijasa*) can be described as a subtler internal function compared to the waking state of consciousness. This function exists at an exact present moment; indeed, we are nourishing it with experiences from our daily life. In dreams, we can recognize objects, people, and situations of waking life. But these kinds of fragments are not particularly interesting or helpful. What is more interesting and useful is that our life is ruled, to a greater or lesser extent, by conditioning. And in point of fact, dream images may actually mirror our conditionings. However, dreams are not related exclusively to our personal experiences; dreams are also nourished by something deeper, higher, wider, more subtle, and infinite, the divine essence in each of us.

So, moving from the four states of the *Mandukya Upanishad*, we can see how dreams are imbued with elements that come from different dimensions, i.e. the personal and the transcendental. My metaphor for describing a dream is that of the image of a bridge and the water under the bridge. The bridge connects the waking state to the deep sleep state; the water under the bridge is the new and essential flowing energy carrying elements of both sides.

Before moving to the core of my research, a few words about the language of dreams are necessary. The language of dreams is made up of images. To describe dreams, Swami Sivananda talks about "dream pictures." An image is a form perceived by sight. This makes a dream similar to a painting or a film. The language of dreams is a code much more similar to art and poetry than to the rational code of logical, discursive thought. Therefore, we are encouraged to approach dreams in an open, emotional, and intuitive way.

There are some essential references useful for better understanding the research I'm presenting. If you wish to delve deeper into the topic and learn more about the cultural dimension of dreams, you can find an article of mine entitled *Focusing on Dreams: a comparison of yoga and western traditions* published in the Yoga Sankalp 2025 magazine as a memento of this weekend of yoga conferences.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The philosophical foundations of Yoga's interest in dreams can be found in ancient texts such as *Yoga Sutras I.38* and the *Mandukya Upanishad*. Commentaries by Krishnananda and Shivananda also explore these topics. Jung's perspective on dreams is also fundamental for anyone interested in dream research.

PSYCHOLOGY AND ALCHEMY BY Carl Gustav Jung

THE MANDUKYA UPANISHAD by Swami Krishnananda

PHILOSOPHY OF DREAMS by Sri Swami Sivananda

RAJA YOGA by Swami Vivekananda

III. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

My key research questions are:

- Can the dream state reveal specific steps of internal processes of change and healing?
- Are there recurring dreams or specific images to work on through visualizations and meditations that can support the dreamer in the healing process?

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Structure of the research:

- Weekly sessions from September 2024 to June 2025
- Session duration 1.15h
- Each session included group discussion and meditation

Participants:

- Group of 8 women between 40 and 70 years of age

In my work, I follow the evolution of dreams over time, identifying, along the way, images that help bring awareness to the dreamer's psychic dynamics. I don't analyze an entire dream, but rather select key elements that help to follow the unfolding psychic process.

In this presentation I base myself on the dreams of Raffaella C., a 54-year-old woman, whose journey is particularly suited to outlining a possible sequence of a healing process that led her to make important decisions at both a professional and personal level.

Let's have a look to her dreams:

DREAM 1

I'm in a hospital waiting room. I grab a game from the coffee machine and then abandon it. A male nurse finds it and is happy. I ask him if he wants me to bring him more games.

Hospital

A hospital is a place where we go when we're sick. The unconscious suggests that there's something that needs fixing, a mental or physical ailment, a part of us that requires deeper listening, attention, and care.

Nurse

Someone who assists us in our daily routines; in dreams, they can represent a practical helper.

DREAM 2

I'm with friends, we're coming down from the stands, so I decide to take the stairs. It's easier. I gather my things, which are so numerous, they never seem to end, and I feel like I'm wasting time. By the time I get down to the street, I've lost my friends. Anxiety.

Stairs

Stairs represent the possibility of elevating our thinking and looking at life from different perspectives. In her dream, Raffaella descends the stairs: it's a metaphor for the descent into the depths of her unconscious.

Other interesting elements in the dream are:

- Wasting time tidying up her belongings
- Her friends disappearing
- Feelings of anxiety

These elements, together with images from her dreams of the following weeks, paint a general picture of loneliness, confusion, self-judgment, and inadequacy.

In the following weeks, Raffaella reported:

DREAMS 3 - 4 - 5 (extracts)

- *A stranger's family is surrounding my head, talking loudly, each saying different things. Their voices are so loud that they bother me.*
- *I have a test at school, but I didn't study*
- *Anxiety because I'm ignorant.*

She also has a recurring dream:

DREAM 6

I have to leave. I'm packing, but there are too many things to pack, so I feel like I'm wasting my time. I'm worried because I'm late.

All of these images occur very frequently when we let something of ourselves go without yet having a precise goal or direction.

DREAM 7

I'm at school and I notice the soles of my old and ugly shoes

Shoes are suggestive objects, rich in meaning. They often symbolize a condition that requires regeneration. When we can no longer navigate the world according to old patterns, shoes appear old, ugly, and unsuitable for the life that we desire.

Up to this point in the course, we had been discussing dreams and identifying some interesting images together. At the end of November, I proposed a visualization specifically designed to help participants better understand their inner states. I invited them to visualize a house, which embodies one's psyche and personality, offering profound insights into one's inner state.

RAFFAELLA'S VISUALIZATION

Lying down, fresh grass, a clear day, plenty of space. I walk barefoot toward the house, feeling the earth beneath me. The house is uninhabited, recently abandoned, and everything lies peacefully. The door is made of

wood, it's old but it still works. Everything inside has a lived-in air, but it's all still pleasant, though now abandoned. Outside, light colored walls need painting. Inside, an internal staircase leads down to the basement. There's a bicycle there. I take it.

This dream suggests that her internal transformations are not yet visibly structured: the individual has to let go of old patterns, but a new way of being in the world has yet to fully establish itself. The presence of the stairs clearly demonstrates that the dreamer is thoroughly exploring the depths of her psyche.

Two other interesting elements appear in her visualization:

- being barefoot
- finding and taking a bicycle

Being **barefoot** is the opposite of wearing old shoes; it signifies letting go of something obsolete. The dreamer is now ready to explore the world while embracing her new feelings. Walking on a green meadow symbolizes her connection with nature, providing support, nourishment, and renewal.

The **bicycle** is the reward for probing the depths of the psyche. It symbolizes balance, freedom, and personal effort to reach one's goal. The presence of this symbol marks a turning point in Raffaella's journey: in the dreams that follow, we find symbols of renewal, direction, and certainty of success.

Two weeks later, a dream that indicates her realization of her own inner strength.

DREAM 8

"I'm with friends. We have to cross a square, but in the middle, there's a wall with a gate to climb over. I'm scared because below the wall, there's a sheer drop to the sea, but I face it anyway. At a certain point, I can only

hold on by the strength of my arms. I manage. This dream occurred twice, and it was the same each time.

In the depths of her mind, Raffaella realizes a new possibility: overcoming obstacles through her own strength.

Some dreams reveal Raffaella's recognition of building new habits, achieving new skills, and accepting new challenges.

- She has a **new jacket** that symbolizes new habits and new ways of presenting herself to the world
- **She's part of the flight crew**, meaning that she has new skills
- She has to form **English sentences**

The process is moving forward smoothly, and she is experiencing some dreams of resolution.

DREAMS 9

My ex has asked me to go to work with him. I hesitate at first, but then I decide to go.

She is experiencing her usual uncertainty but chooses to empower herself by making decisions. From now on, in her dreams, Raffaella reaches her destination!!!

DREAMS 10

I need to hurry and get dressed; my bra is taking too much time, but I'm almost ready. I put everything into my bag, which turns into a briefcase, and

I'm off! I run, and even though there's a closed door, I manage to open it. I walk through the different rooms and finally arrive.

A new life journey has begun. She no longer fears the unknown; instead, she makes clear decisions and has the right tools to overcome obstacles.

From this point forward, she can also rely on her instincts.

DREAM 11

It's evening, and it's dark outside. A friend of mine lets me hold her cat on a leash before she disappears. I ask the cat, "Where do you live?" Then I say, "Go to your house." The cat takes off, pulling me along, and I'm afraid of losing the leash, so I wrap it a couple of times around my hand. We arrive in front of her house, and I ask the neighbor for confirmation to check if it's the right door. I also ask about the name on my friend's doorbell. I ring the bell, and we go upstairs. [...]

Cats symbolize independence and intuition. Egyptians revered cats as symbols of magic, divine power, and transcendence. This dream suggests that Raffaella is connecting with her intuition (represented by the leash); she trusts her instincts and lets herself be directed by them.

This is undoubtedly a genuine sense of direction! She added a note to her dream: "In recent dreams, I arrive at my destination, unlike in the past."

The culmination of this deep and transformative inner journey is the dawning of a new inner identity. And here's how the next dream unfolds:

DREAM 12

I see a very beautiful newborn baby lying on the ground. I love him and gently kiss him. He has white spots on his head and back.

Newborn babies symbolize a new identity.

I embrace him, kissing him symbolizes welcoming her new identity and connecting with it.

In the following dream, there is a test of courage.

DREAM 13

I see a boy with a gun, and I'm scared. He shoots, but he doesn't hit me.

The **gun** symbolizes a life-threatening situation. The fact that the bullet **doesn't hit her**, signifies that scary things no longer trigger her anxiety. Raffaella's new identity has empowered her; she feels safe within this strength.

Raffaella is now strong, and nothing can happen to her that she can't handle. This final dream resembles the concluding scene of a movie or the happy ending of a fairy tale: the hero has overcome a difficult challenge and is now facing the future with newfound inner strength and skills. It's truly uplifting!

There is one more aspect I want to highlight, which brings us into the transcendent dimension that we, as yogis, yoginis, and sadhakas, are interested in. Raffaella's vibrant and successful journey, filled with dreams, images, symbols, fears, and intuitions, has significantly improved her inner balance. She has made important decisions, re-entered the professional world after many years, and taken significant steps regarding her role in family management. This transformation was foreshadowed by the very first image Raffaella received from her unconscious during the initial group meditation of the course.

RAFFAELLA'S MEDITATION

In the room, I can smell the earth. Among my ancestors, my grandmother, the only one I've ever been close to, comes to visit. Suddenly, a vortex opens, allowing everything to flow into me. I feel a bit afraid that something negative could enter me, but I only sense positive energy coming in. I welcome a mix of letters from the alphabet, information, sensations, and skills.

Energy in the universe moves in whirlpools, which is why a vortex is a significant symbol of transformation. In Hindu tradition, the myth of the “Churning of the Ocean of Milk,” undertaken by the *deva* and *asura* to extract the *amrita*, illustrates the importance of this symbol in the collective consciousness.

In Raffaella's case, the visualization was an initiating inner experience. The vortex was not merely a product of her vivid imagination; rather it was a genuine gift from the divine. Through this visualization experience, she received the energy needed to make significant changes in her life.

V. RESULTS

Through reflecting on and connecting with her ongoing internal processes via her dreams, Raffaella is transformed from a woman overwhelmed by feelings of inadequacy and a lack of self-confidence into a more balanced individual. She becomes more self-assured and comfortable with life's changes.

Through Raffaella's dreams, it is possible to map a healing journey that begins with insecurity and confusion and culminates in the awareness of one's own strength.

Images that capture this process:

1. Initial situation

- Hospital
- Nurse

Indicating that something is wrong and needs to be healed.

- Wasting time tidying up her own belongings
- Her friends vanishing
- A family of strangers talking loudly and saying different things in irritating and loud voices
- Facing a test at school without having studied
- Judging oneself as ignorant
- A need to leave
- Wasting time in packing
- Being late

These images and feelings indicate Raffaella's confusion, loneliness, and inability to face situations and overcome difficulties.

2. The beginning of the transformative process

- Old and ugly shoes
- Uninhabited house, recently abandoned

This indicates her desire to change her current situation and symbolizes the disappearance of the dreamer's former identity, highlighting a profound transformation in her sense of self.

3. Connecting to the need for change

- Staircase
- Bicycle
- Being barefoot

This conveys that exploring the depths of the psyche provides a sense of self-confidence and freedom.

4. Steps for modeling a New Identity: Structuring and Reinforcing

- Wall
- Gate to climb over

- Sheer drop to the sea
- Facing obstacles
- Holding on only by the strength of one's arms
- Succeeding

Indicating new internal modalities for overcoming obstacles only through one's strength.

- New jacket
- Being part of the flight crew
- Bag transforming in a suitcase
- Managing to open a closed door
- Walking through different rooms
- Arriving

Marking the beginning of a new life journey; embracing the unknown with determination and new skills to overcome obstacles.

5. Affirmation of a New inner Identity by embracing instincts and transcendence

- Cats
- Leash wrapped a couple of time around one's hand
- Going up stairs

Embracing one's instincts empowers with a true sense of direction, granting the ability to view life from a broader and more illuminating perspective.

- Newborn baby
- Embracing and gently kissing a new born baby

Symbolizing the recognition and welcoming of a new identity.

6. New Identity at work

- Gun
- Not being shot

Marking the ability to face fear without being overwhelmed by it.

VI. CONCLUSION

Although not all participants have such a complete experience, it's interesting to see how powerful and effective dream work can be for self transformation. Dreams can be valuable tools for bringing unconscious processes to consciousness. Being aware of our internal processes enhances our understanding of our thoughts, emotions, situations, conditioned habits, and relationships, allowing us to become more joyful and inspired human beings. It is my hope to continue this kind of research and to inspire others interested in spiritual realization.