

# Delaney's Dream Interview Method: Step-By-Step

***This method of interpretation is intended to be used alone, between two people, or in a group.*** When you work solo, the dreamer plays both roles of Dreamer and Interviewer. In teaching the method I find it much easier on all concerned to discuss the interview in terms of the roles of the Interviewer and the Dreamer. Most often, people work alone with their dreams and so learn how to play both roles in which you ask yourself the interview questions and soon learn how to adopt the curiosity and procedural focus of the interviewer.

***The dream interview method is transparent, logical, and teachable.***

However, as my colleague and partner in our dream center, Dr. Loma Flowers, taught me, the simplicity and transparency of the Dream Interview Method (DIM) can be misleading. It takes practice and discipline to resist making assumptions. Both the Interviewer and the Dreamer learn to hide and put aside their theoretical assumptions or “intuitive” inspirations which are usually projections, so that they will not distract the Dreamer from following her own unique path. One needs practice in learning how and when to ask the dreamer questions that will uncover connections showing how her particular imagery, including the feelings and judgments associated with it, can shed revealing light on current life issues and patterns.

***While it is far, far easier to insert prefabricated interpretations,***

nothing is as thrilling, as satisfying, or as accurate as having the dreamer discover her own meanings in her own words.

And to be perfectly blunt, most interpretations taken from any source external to the dreamer, usually lead to incorrect and often ridiculous-if-convenient interpretations that lead the dreamer away from her dream’s metaphoric integrity and contextual cohesiveness. Most dreams have a carefully organized plot that employs every image and action to get its point across. Even in cases where the interpreter’s intrusion with her own hypothesis is right on the money, she commits the crime of stealing the thrill of discovery from the dreamer, and decreases the specificity of connection with her life that only her descriptive words can offer.

After 50 years of work exclusively focused on dreamers, I strongly believe the major cause of far-fetched, inaccurate, and vague interpretations to be the result of the dreamer's or the expert's tendency to jump to conclusions based upon traditional, vague, or convenient pre-formulated interpretations. This happens often out of our awareness; we don't realize we are doing it! The Dream Interview Method (DIM) will keep you from slipping into this trap if you follow the steps provided to prevent it. My clients who are psychologists, psychiatrists, cardiologists, coaches, internists, and neurologists who have worked so hard to learn how to help their patients make sense of nightmares spilled out at the end of a session by patients, are shocked to realize how many assumptions they make, and how they had unquestioningly accepted Old Wives and Old Psychiatrist's tales!

This is why I developed The Dream Interview Method (DIM) which promotes the "Interpreter" to the higher and more effective role of "Interviewer." The "Interpreter" external to the dreamer, or the dreamer herself who, like many therapists and coaches, may tend to grasp the nearest hand-me-down theoretical interpretation, but the external postulators can only guess at the life impressions and experiences that led the dreamer to select this or that theme or image at this particular time in her life to create a given dream. Interpretive guesses are often based on generalized "meanings" derived from a therapist's favorite theorist, from grandmothers, from unknown gurus, or from any source, including hearsay from the psychological street.

How would a therapist, even one who knows you very well, even IF he can unencumber himself from his theoretical prejudices, know what you think and feel about motorcycles, high heels, your grandmother's house, your High School Geometry teacher, or Purcell, your fourth-grade classmate? How would he know what you took home from a given movie you both have seen, but may have "seen" it very differently? He could not know without asking, and few dream workers know how to methodically and efficiently ask you!

The Dream Interviewer in the DIM learns how to do this and learns how to resist the **Tremendous Temptation** to try to "help" you by intruding with his own prejudices, words, and projections! Furthermore, the dream interviewer learns how not to jump to interpretive conclusions, but to ask you the right questions and later, at the right moment, to recapitulate your words back to you. The Dream Interviewer almost never has to give in to the urge to steal from you the exquisite thrill of discovering the meaning of your dream that pops your eyes wide open to a new insight!

***One question you will never hear before the summary near the end of the interview is "What does your dream mean to you?"***

While that is EXACTLY what every Interviewer wants to know, neither the Dreamer nor the Interviewer have access to the RICH descriptive material waiting to come out in the Interview dialogue.

The (DIM) presents you with the most effective and efficient questions I have found since 1971 when it dawned on me that asking dreamers to pretend that I come from another planet and know little about life on Earth. This device opened the dreamers' minds, helped them find the words to describe their opinions, feelings, and experiences with little resistance (and with little wandering off-topic). Equally as important, is the fact that the Interviewer no longer plays the "Interpreter" who wrongly feels that his or her theoretical expertise allows him or her to intrude upon YOUR dream with intuitions that are often only unrecognized projections! No one outside of yourself can possibly grasp in accurate detail the unique specificity and custom-made depth of your dream! How could any "Interpreter" know why you dreamt of your cousin Bandy from second grade, and not of another classmate? Or of a leopard and not of a tiger without asking the questions to unlock your personal descriptive answers?

***The process of the interview consists of Steps 1 through 5*** and shows you how to employ the right questions at the right time to help the dreamer DESCRIBE the dream elements, then the Interviewer RECAPITULATES or reflects your description back to you in YOUR WORDS ONLY. The delight of discovery her waking life.

The following “overview” of the 5 steps of the Dream Interview process below, and the CUE CARD of Basic Interview Questions (on the following page) will introduce you to DIM. We invite you to print out these pages that will guide you as you learn how to be your own Dream Interviewer and as you interview clients, friends, or dream group members. We have never heard of a client or dream partner who was bothered by the Interviewer’s referring to her clipboard to decide what to do next, or to see how to phrase what question to ask.

## The Vital SET UP Of The Interview

THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT DEVICE in the interview is to ask questions from the perspective of a very curious traveler from another planet. Ask the dreamer to PRETEND that you have only recently landed and will make almost no assumptions or judgments about life on Earth. Your “Martian” is interested only in your impressions, reading of facts, beliefs, and opinions. This POV of the alien allows the interviewer to ask **non-leading** questions that reach into the dreamer’s unique impressions, associations, and KEYWORDS that will trigger the dreamer’s recognition of the often-surprising metaphoric parallels between her dream and her waking life.

The moment you ask with a friendly alien's curiosity, the Cue Card questions (in the following section) such as, "What is a motorcycle"? and "What are motorcycles **like?**", or, "Pretend I come from another planet and have never heard of motorcycles before." The dreamer will feel free to give you what might start as a concrete, dictionary-description, When you add the word, "**like?**" the dreamer will usually open-up with a colorful description, full of feelings, judgments, anecdotes, and other descriptive details. A dreamer new to DIM, might benefit from follow-up questions such as, "What kinds of people ride them?" "How do you like motorcycles?" or "Do you ride one?" "How does it feel to a human like you to ride a motorcycle?" "Remember, I come from another planet!" These basic questions, tailored to "dream objects" will elicit responses from yourself or your dreamer that flesh out the descriptive response with feelings and judgments that enrich the description unique to the dreamer that she may not have realized she held, and they will trigger her ability to recognize waking life parallels, especially when we get to STEP 3 (BRIDGE) of the interview. The Interviewer's job is to keep her projections, intuitions, and interpretations to herself and to askillfully elicit RICH Descriptions, not hand-me-down interpretations. When you gather experience in how and when to post the basic and follow-up Cue Card these elements, the Recap (STEP 2) and the Bridge (STEP 3) questions will come much more easily. See any of my books to find numerous examples on how to do this!

The Dreamer, or you, if you play both roles, will have little trouble giving a quick, terse, and relatively unadulterated descriptions in the very words that will later trigger the recognition of the dream's meaning. If you feel silly asking the dreamer to pretend you come from another planet, remember that Stephen Hawkins used the same device of an inquisitive alien to ask himself about how the universe works, so you needn't feel silly or self-conscious! You will quickly see how powerful a POV this is, and how the use of the word "LIKE" in your questions will open surprising and highly useful Key Words for the rest of the interview.

It is often helpful to ask the dreamer to give 3-4 adjectives that describe the image or action. Resist the sometimes-strong temptation to fill in the descriptive words for the dreamer. Generally, this will not help, but discourage him from feeling around inside to find the best and most accurate words native to his experience that act as a trigger to recognize the dream metaphor connecting the dream imagery and feelings to something specific in his life.

Print out IN LARGE FONTS the Overview, Cue Card, and the DIM Flow chart pages as a guide that will keep you focused as you conduct an Interview. If you put these sheets on a legal-length clipboard you will be more comfortable jotting down the dreamer's exact words so you will remember them, and so you will not be tempted to substitute words of your own choosing no matter how you might prefer them for any reason.

## **5 Steps Of The Dream Interview**

# 3 BASIC STEPS

- **STEP 1: DESCRIPTION:** One of the most common ways dreams express themselves is through creating powerful, visual, and feeling-laden metaphors. “Metaphors work by highlighting a particular characteristic of a person, setting, object, or a situation and thus offer to enhance your perception and understanding of something in particular. Comparing your husband to a polar bear only works if we discover what you think of polar bears. Do you think they are remote and dangerous? Quick to anger? Overly protective of their young? Or do you think of them as endangered, strong, and good providers? To get the good out of the personalized metaphors you create while dreaming, it is crucial to know what the dreamer thinks and feels about any image, action, or feeling. This DESCRIPTION step is the most important step in the interview, upon which the other Steps depend. Dreamers are often surprised to discover what they say in response to the alien’s interviewer’s questions. (The CUE CARD of Dream Interview questions for each step will follow this page).
- **STEP 2: RECAPITULATION:** Here the Interviewer restates the dreamer’s description while editing slightly, but always using the dreamer’s own words and following the dreamer’s emphasis and tone. You ask explicitly or by your tone, if you have it right. Invite the dreamer to change his mind about a word, correct you, modify, or amplify his DESCRIPTION.

- **STEP 3: BRIDGE:** The BRIDGE step is the first level of interpretation. Bridge questions come (almost) always on the heels of a recapitulation, even if that means the Interviewer must patiently repeat for the 2-4th time the most recent version of the dreamer's description. The interviewer asks the dreamer: "Is there anything in your life, any part of yourself, or anyone in your life like this (the image, feeling, action or theme) that is like \_\_\_\_\_(repeat the RECAPITULATION)?" The interviewer, (be that a dream partner or the dreamer playing also the role of Interviewer), repeats the recapitulation briefly and always in the dreamer's own words. Surprisingly, this is usually the first time the dreamer REALLY hears his description and begins to see if it describes a part of his life.

If the dreamer cannot BRIDGE the image or scene to something in his life, return to the first step and get a richer description, or move on to the following images to pick up more clues and context before coming back to enrich the description. After which the Interviewer will update the RECAPITULATION before moving right to the BRIDGE questions. Some BRIDGES take a few times to connect especially if the dreamer is in a defensive mode. Be patient. As you continue with the interview, you will get more contextual material and the dreamer's desire to figure out his puzzling dream will help in reducing denial and defensiveness.

## 2 ADVANCED STEPS

- **STEP 4: TEST THE BRIDGE:** Sometimes the metaphorical fit is

very good, sometimes not so good, sometimes terrible. Remaining patient Ever-CURIOS, and non-judgmental, the “Martian” Interviewer ask the dreamer to say just how the dream image and its description reminds her of the person, part of herself, or thing she identified in the BRIDGE answer. You can say, “So how good a fit is that bridge?” Or being more efficient, ask, “Hoe so?”

If you hear, “Well, Margaret Thatcher in my dream reminds me of my wife in that she too is very smart, selfish, and difficult. But my wife is not able to get anything done. Unlike Thatcher, she is not a good organizer; nor is she competent.” If you notice that a significant part of the image is not a strong bridge, that it does not fit well, the interviewer can return for a richer DESCRIPTION or the Interviewer can repeat the same recapitulation and ask the BRIDGE question again. Often, upon hearing his descriptive words and hearing the invitation to move to the metaphoric level, “Is there anything, anyone, or anything in your life LIKE ...” the dreamer might take in a fuller sense of the metaphor and say, “You know! That really sounds like my business partner. She has a different color of hair, but Thatcher’s traits are an exact fit for her!”

• **STEP 5: LINKING & SUMMARY:** Here, or at any point in the interview, the Interviewer (or the dreamer working alone) links the bridges made so far. Since most dreams are carefully crafted within a plot, it is vital to understand the dramatic thrust of the plot/actions and see if all the images and bridges make sense in the CONTEXT of the dream story.

Either the Interviewer or the Dreamer can summarize the

either the interviewer or the dreamer can summarize the dream, retelling the story, including the bridges made, and noting what remains unclear. (Never force a bridge. Let time and reflection work over the next week.)

As you conduct your interview, keep in mind that

## THE 5 BASIC STEPS OF THE DREAM INTERVIEW

1. DESCRIPTION
2. RECAPITULATION
3. BRIDGE
4. TEST THE BRIDGE
5. LINKING & SUMMARY

CAN BE APPLIED TO THE ALL the KEY ELEMENTS OF THE DREAM

- SETTINGS
- PEOPLE
- ANIMALS
- OBJECTS
- FEELINGS
- ACTIONS/THEMES/PLOTS

How? By using the basic questions tailored to each of the elements in the CUE CARD. These questions EXECUTE each step for each element. You will learn to create and ask follow-up questions that you customize to each dream. If you find an element not specifically on our short list of 6 ELEMENTS, keep to your alien role, and custom-tailor one yourself. For example, a direct quote in a dream, my son said, “How does it feel to gag a prisoner?” You could use an action question, or a feeling question from the CUE CARD or make up one the spot. You WILL get the hang of being a non-intrusive and curious person from another planet! By the way, the skills of Dream Interviewing, are skills that can be of precious value in many waking relationships—that of remembering that every person you know has a unique, mostly silent, network of perceptions, thoughts, judgments, and meaning.

Now you are ready to make good use of the companion post to this one: “THE CUE CARD” where you find all the questions you will need to get you started on your own dream, or your Dream Partner’s First Dream Interview!

[CUE CARD Question Guide](#)