

DREAMS AND THEIR Meanings

WE look at the psychology, if indeed there is any, behind dreams.

BY ALEX J. COYNE

“I was just a dream,” are common words of comfort when you wake up from that nightmare in which you’re standing in front of the entire high-school class, ready to launch into your graduation speech, only to realise you’re naked! But was it? And should we be taking our dreams seriously?

WHAT DREAMS MEAN

“ANALYSING your dreams is a very personal thing, and there’s a definite mystical element to them,” says Millae Pritchard (the daughter of seasoned South African artist Tienie Pritchard) who holds her honours degree in psychology. “Dreams and analysing them are all about symbols, archetypes, people and places and what they all mean to you.” Culture, she says, also tends to play a very strong role in the things people dream about. Pritchard says that dreams can often serve as a warning or guide originating from your subconscious mind, though she notes that not all dreams *have* to mean something. “Unless, of course, you feel that it does,” she points out. “Sometimes it can be likened to a defragmenting computer hard drive: it’s just random things reorganising themselves in

your head. Above all, analysing dreams teaches you to understand yourself and how you experience things. She recommends that people keep a simple dream journal by their bed and write down what they remember from their dreams the moment they wake up. “From there, you can solve the riddle your subconscious mind is giving you.” She suggests another interesting theory. “Maybe the scenarios we live out in our dreams are all occurring in a parallel universe somewhere...” Now there’s a thought.

SLEEP DEPRIVATION IN THE RAT

EXPERTS aren’t completely sure *why* humans dream, but they’re all in agreement over the fact that we can’t do without sleep – or dreams. Dr Allan Rechtschaffen was one of the first researchers to explore the effect of sleep deprivation on laboratory rats. In 1989, the doctor and his team kept rats up all night for science. The experiment concluded after 32 days of this with all the rats dying from sleep deprivation. Better catch that beauty sleep...

COMMON DREAM SIGNS

HAVE you experienced any of these dreams before? Here are some of the most common dream symbols and what they are believed to mean.

FACTS ABOUT DREAMS

- * **EVER** notice how certain foods make you feel sleepy? That’ll be the tryptophan, an amino-acid found in foods like cheese and turkey that switches over to serotonin – the happy stuff – in the brain.
- * **IF** you were wondering, the record for sleep deprivation without drugs is 264.4 hours by Randy Gardner, who set the record in 1964 at the age of 17.
- * **SOMEONE** who is born blind has no visual frame of reference, and will likely only experience auditory dreams.
- * **SLEEP** paralysis is what keeps your body from acting out your dreams; this, combined with hypnagogic hallucinations as the body falls asleep, is behind most of the legend of the sexual Incubus and Succubus demons that visit the sleeping.
- * **CAN** you die for real when you die in a dream? The International Association for the Study of Dreams says not!

- * **FEELING** trapped or running away is a common recurring nightmare when you are faced with an unsure situation or clear obstacle.
- * **DREAMING** of children or babies can mean new opportunities on the way, or a need to look for something new.
- * **PUBLIC** speaking is a common fear manifesting in dreams and tends to represent fear of either the unknown or of being put on the spot.
- * **DOORS** can mean different things. Is it open (to your future) or shut (towards something uncertain)?

TECH-AIDED SLEEP

YOUR smartphone can help you dream. If you don’t believe us, download some of these dream-related apps for your iPhone or Android device and have a nice, long nap...
* **DREAM-ON** claims that they’ve unlocked the secret to influencing dreams, and at the same time found a way to gather the largest amount of data yet about how people dream. Take part in this experiment by downloading the Dream:ON app and selecting your ‘soundscape’. The app will play this scene to you in your sleep at the right cycle and kick your dreams into gear.
* **AWOKEN** is tailored for lucid (or conscious) dreaming. The app functions as a detailed dream journal and lucid dreaming guide. You can set the app to play you special ‘dream clues’ while you’re asleep to alert you to the fact that you’re dreaming.
* **SHADOW** is another dream journal app from the Apple iStore, and it looks to create a large dream journal for analysis: Add yours!
* **DREAMDICTIONARY.ORG** and DreamBible.com both give you the meaning behind thousands upon thousands of common dream signs and symbolism.

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