

## **Rambling Through Internal Landscapes:**

reflections on a lifetime exploring inner worlds

I waken to darkness. It has a strange quality. It is not the familiar behind the eyes darkness nor the nocturnal darkness of my bedroom. Where am I? What place is this? The idea of movement as the initial means of exploring this space immediately becomes the expectation of movement in arms and legs. And then - the shock - no arms and legs are to be found. No movements can be initiated; all contact with my remembered body is lost. I cannot discover any part of me that is substantial. All the while panic grows and strengthens as the disorientation, strangeness, and inability to act take hold.

Where can I find help? My mother! I struggle to call out to her; to shout, to make her aware of my distress but I cannot find, let alone make contact with, my mouth, tongue, throat or lungs; they do not respond to my appeals for action. No sound issues forth. Eventually, after many attempts, the reconnection is made, my call springs out and a comforting mother appears. I am twelve years old and within a short period of time suffered several more of these nocturnal experiences.

I now know that such episodes are termed *sleep paralysis*. Are they are form of “religious experience”? I certainly did not consider them to be so at the time but in retrospect they were one of the seeds that grew to become a lifetime’s fascination, perhaps obsession, with the nature of mind, the psyche and the numinous. In adult life many other varied experiences were to follow and I would now be a happy to include sleep paralysis on the spectrum of these. As a child I did not attach a name or label to my experience of sleep paralysis, I more or less accepted it as just one of those things. This, in a somewhat more sophisticated form, has coloured my attitude to all my inner explorations, which I view with a determinedly naturalistic eye. A eye which views and focuses on the phenomena of inner experience as they are in themselves, or at least as they are to me; phenomena of the natural world with no need for recourse to the supernatural, magic or even to religion or God as modes of explanation.

As a young adult my concern with these topics was brought into sharp focus on reading Frieda Fordham’s “*An Introduction to Jung’s’ Psychology*”. I came upon this

little book at a time when my formal education was exposing me to the big ideas of the natural sciences, particularly in geology and biology and in *"An Introduction"* I found someone taking about inner experiences in a way that I could feel an affinity with. In a way that stuck a chord, that made intuitive sense. At the same time it offered a way of systematising and ordering thoughts about the inner world. It provided a framework for understanding, claimed to be, and provided evidence to support, a universal theory of mind. Jung was providing at least the prospect of a unifying big idea for the human psyche, one that might complement those big ideas I was so familiar with in earth history and life science. And at the heart of it all, dreams. Working with dreams as a means of achieving insight, of working with the natural inner reality and with the inner dynamics of the psyche to follow a process, to forge a path, to the desired goal.

It was all truly revelatory and life changing.

About a year after reading *"An Introduction"* and having now read several of Jung's own works, I obviously had enough confidence that I was on the right track to begin my Dream Diaries; begun in April 1972 little did I realise that I would still be recording dreams in 2011. Throughout this time dreams have formed a key strand of my "spiritual quest" and I have been frequently amazed by their ability to bring new insights and to forge fundamental changes in my mental orientation and outlook. I have come to see dreams much as I see other forms of human communication. Our words and vocalisations can be used in a wide variety of different ways to match varying circumstances and needs. Our conversations can be banal and everyday, formal and highly structured, convoluted and contorted, simple and straightforward or deep and profound. It now seems to me that dreams can be all of these too. It's just that the "conversation" is an internal one and not directed by the everyday self.

Although the unconscious may communicate using words in dreams, it is the symbols and images that form their important content, and the relationships set up between these symbols that provide their main communicative power. In charting the inner journey I see dreams as being of particular value because they are reports independent of the waking mind. They are involuntary, spontaneous and entirely natural expressions of deeper states of mind. They offer reports on developing relationships between aspects of mind, providing critiques, encouragement and

milestones along the way. In this sense they introduce a measure of "objectivity" into an overwhelmingly subjective developmental process.

But what of the dream journey itself? Dreams were not infrequently long and complex but I hope that the three short examples, selected from a series of over four hundred, will give some idea of their flavour, feel and content.

**Dream 1: Early April 1972 – “*The Voyage Begins*”:** I am alone at the rudder of a Roman style barge with a single central mast and one large sail. I stand at the stern on an elevated platform. There is no crew. Also on the platform is a large simmering cauldron, which is giving off steam. I am sailing through a network of canals or narrow natural channels with thick vegetation on either side. I observe my progress from my position on the platform but also from outside myself, from a position high above the barge. After a while I come across a small sandy beach and ground the barge upon it. I make my way up the barge and jump from the prow onto the beach. On the beach I pick up a handful of material, sand perhaps. Back on the platform I add the granular material to the contents of the cauldron. As the grains fall I see that they are red, brown and white in colour and that the mixture in the cauldron is fawn in colour. I proceed to stir the contents of the cauldron with a very large wooden spoon.

**Commentary:** This is a solo voyage. I must take responsibility for it. I reach a far shore of the mind and add things that I find there to the melting pot of my awareness as it searches for a way forward, develops and evolves. Here are new ingredients for a new recipe of being.

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**Dream 27: 1<sup>st</sup> November 1972 – “*The Dawning of the Light*”:** A state of semi-consciousness? I seem to make out shadows of objects in my room. Or a very real dream? Power! Energy! A brilliant light of large dimensions exists before the window. I see only its iridescent yellow-gold-white edge. Even this is tremendously bright. I cannot bring myself to look upon the centre. Huge amounts of energy burn through my body and power through every nerve. Immense pleasure alternates with the fear that if I look at the centre I really will let myself go. Succumb to the energy. This is a loss that I cannot let myself make. Slowly the energy dies away. The whole experience seems to last for 15 to 20 minutes.

**Commentary:** To this day this remains one of the most powerful experiences of Openfoot's life. At the time it took him completely by surprise. Even now he is amazed that it came upon him so soon on his journey. It shook him to his core. He was not sure what to make of it. He decided to accept it as it was and to "bracket" its nature and meaning while the experience sank in. Above all it provided undoubted and irrevocable confirmation of the reality of the journey he had embarked upon. After this there could be no going back. He had to bottom this out, get to the root. And now? It seems a bit like carelessly putting your toe into a very hot bath. The **SHOCK!** of the new. But with repeated and continued contact the contrast is not so great and eventually becomes familiar and enjoyable. The very nature of the experience is itself transformed.

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**D147: 12<sup>th</sup> January 1973 – “Union”:** I am sitting on a harbour wall. It appears to be of an old Cornish or Welsh type. The harbour has a narrow mouth with cliffs rising on either side. I am sitting near the mouth. I look across the harbour to the point on the opposite harbour wall. There I see a small grey wispy figure of a woman. She has a somewhat ghostlike appearance. My feelings towards this woman are predominantly of curiosity, no fear, and no love. Suddenly she has transported herself across the harbour and is standing no more than a foot from me. I am still seated. I begin to merge with her. As this occurs I become aware that she is the image of THAT ENERGY. I am frightened for a moment but then resolve, as I have previously promised myself, to merge with it fully this time. We merge. I and it are one. Just pure golden light, soft, warm and loving. The transition to this state of total union is accompanied by a rushing, whooshing sound like a sharp inhalation of breath, quickly building in strength and terminating in a deep Uhhh! This state exists momentarily. I become aware of my boldness in coming this far and rapidly withdraw. Or perhaps the cognition of my state can only occur by my withdrawing from it. Afterwards there are feelings of surprise, amazement and satisfaction at the achievement. Growing in confidence I resolve to try and extend such periods. High-energy contentment prevails. There is excitement at the prospect of further exploration and future possibilities.

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These, and the 350 dreams that were to come, have left me in little doubt as to the reality of “spiritual experiences”. This will hardly be of much to surprise to the readers of this web site but perhaps it is not so evident that working methodically with your

dreams is a realistic and readily available method of following a path to awakening; of exploring the universal human birthright. In choosing to follow a spiritual path we are often asked to embrace perspectives and practices that have been developed and made a home in other cultures, or sometimes even stranger ones from within our own, but after forty years of dancing with dreams it seems to me that working with our own dreams is something that many people could potentially find a very natural thing to do.

Jung encouraged the individuals he counselled and advised to bring the contents of their unconscious, their dreams, into the light of day. I took this to heart early on. My “Dream Diaries” were one result but, as Jung suggested, I also sketched and painted dream material to give it a presence in the everyday world, and found that by doing this my ability to recall and engage with my dreams significantly increased.

My experiences have left me with the firm conviction that there is sense, method and structure to the world of dreams, if we would only look methodically and diligently at the phenomena they present; as Jung encouraged us to do. Dreams offer an entirely natural approach to exploring of our inner world, one that is accessible to us all wherever we live and in whatever culture we have been raised. They deserve more of our attention and more serious consideration than our dominant western culture currently prescribes.

For those who might be interested I offer a much larger sample from my dream diaries at [www.openfoot.net](http://www.openfoot.net) where they are accompanied by other reporting formats including, sketches, jottings, and some dream interpretation, that further chart my ramblings through internal landscapes.

Sleep on it. Sweet dreams everyone.

Continues next page



**Newborn:** And amongst all of this something new emerges. Something not seen before. Something to amaze, delight and confound; beyond previous experience. Observe, cultivate and nurture it as you would a babe.

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