

## Dreams: Hieroglyphs of the Unconscious

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*“Hieroglyphs are pictures used as signs in writing. Many depict living creatures or objects (and) some signs represent the object they depict... However, very few words are written in this way. Instead, hieroglyphic picture-signs are used to convey the sound (and meaning) of the ancient Egyptian language.”* From *How to Read Egyptian* by Mark Collier, Bill Manley

Dreams are hieroglyphs of the unconscious, the mysterious, vivid, colorful, precise and beautiful language of our inner Self. The Rossetta stone—an ancient Egyptian stele inscribed with a decree written in three scripts one above the other, Egyptian hieroglyphics, Demotic and ancient Greek—provided the key to our understanding of hieroglyphs. Before its discovery, the fascinated curiosity archaeologists felt when studying ancient Egypt is comparable to how many people feel about their dreams—that they will never really be able to fully understand them because they don't quite know how to read this pictorial language of the unconscious. But it can be done. The first step is to stop taking all dreams literally, because then they make no more sense than a hieroglyphic texts does if we try to read it assuming each image stands only for what it literally represents.

One can wonder exactly why the ancient Egyptians chose particular creatures, objects and shapes to represent the sounds and meaning of their language. For example, a picture of a “plow” = *mr* which when combined with the hieroglyph for mouth, and the determinative of a seated man with his hand raised to his mouth, spells the word “love.” Now consider why the ancient Egyptians chose these pictures to mean “love” just as we might ponder the meaning of dream images... A plow makes a path through the earth in which seeds are planted, seeds that grow into food we take in through our mouth to nourish us. We want, we need, food. *We cannot live without food.* The ancient Egyptians may have been inspired to assign certain sounds and meanings to their hieroglyphs by the way dreams combine images to convey meaning. By choosing a plow to represent the sound used to write the word “love,” the ancient Egyptian scribes who first developed the hieroglyphic language may have been emulating the eloquence of our dreaming minds to express the belief that love, like food, keeps us alive, that love *is* life. When two feathers are written after the sign for plow it spells *mrj*, “beloved.”

In dreams as in hieroglyphs, images can represent the object depicted while also being part of a language penned by our unconscious. The ancient Egyptians employed “determinatives” or “meaning signs” which were sometimes placed at the end of words to provide a general idea of the word's meaning. For example, a rolled papyrus scroll was used to indicate an abstract word or concept. Anyone who pays attention to their dreams, and especially those of us who engage in prolonged dream work, know there are different kinds of dreams, and that each dream provides us with mysterious “determinatives” as to how it should be read or interpreted. The more fluent we become in the language of our dreams, the more easily we can identify “determinatives” or meaning-signs that help us understand them.

The following is an example of how in a single key dream object, just as in a single hieroglyphic sound-sign, much can be contained and expressed. The main dream object/symbol “airplanes”, when combined with the other picture-signs surrounding it, can be read like a hieroglyphic text:

I had two nearly identical lucid dreams in one night. In both dreams I witnessed two large airplanes approaching me from different directions, both of them flying so low they grazed the roof of my house on which I was standing. Yet even when the roof collapsed beneath me, I was unaffected and not really afraid; I was much more in awe of this totally unexpected brush with two dangerous but thrilling forces

that looked as though they might collide directly above me. The wings of the two planes grazed each other but both moved on without crashing disastrously over my house and property.

When I woke, I was tempted to interpret the dreams symbolically as the union of opposing forces coming together inside me and bringing me closer to the exhilarating powers of my inner Self, etc. etc. And yet how I felt about the objects and events of the dream, that they were “other”, “outside of me”, served as a “determinative” that suggested a more literal interpretation might be in order. It was soon all over the news that two massive storms were moving toward each other, Hurricane Sandy approaching from the south, a Nor Easter from the west, and there was a very real danger they would converge where I lived. I suddenly understood my dreams. “Air” moves over “plains”, the two weather fronts. Phonetically “airplane” even sounds a little like “hurricane.” Airplanes are also filled with passengers, an indication that lots of people would be affected by what they represented. New York city was in Hurricane Sandy's path—another disaster was heading the city's way, the biggest since 911, in which, of course, multiple airplanes were involved. Also significant is that I had two nearly identical lucid dreams in a single night, paralleling the two identical airplanes and the two threatening storms. Fortunately, we experienced only the fringe of both fronts, which included strong, but not devastating winds from Hurricane Sandy, and light snow from the Nor Easter, nothing compared to the crippling three feet of snow that fell in the mountains just west of us which caused the roofs of many homes to collapse.

In these two lucid dreams, I believe I received an incredibly precise precognitive message written in the hieroglyphs of my unconscious. How I felt about the airplanes, that they were “other” or “outside” me acted a determinative cluing me into the fact that the dreams were not about my inner life. This dream helped teach me how to better read my dreams.

Right now I am using the words of a language common to millions of other people to write this article, but how I express myself with it is subtly different from how everyone else writes. We all share a common dream language by virtue of living on the same planet, but how our unconscious or inner Self expresses itself is invariably unique. The word “water” in any language, including the ancient Egyptian sound-sign for water, refers to H<sub>2</sub>O, a modern “hieroglyph” for this life-sustaining compound that exists in liquid, solid and gaseous states. In a dream when water appears in its liquid state, for example, it can literally be water, but it can also represent abstract concepts or qualities such as “flowing” “formlessness” “the opposite of fixed or rigid” and so on. The interpretation depends on the images and events surrounding it and the all-important determinative of how it feels. As the authors of our own personal hieroglyphic-like dream texts, we are also the best readers, the most fluent in their mysteriously beautiful language.

Literature is organized into two principle categories or types: “non-fiction” and “fiction”. Similarly, experience has led me to believe there are two principle types of dreams. A scientific book reads and feels very different from a fantasy novel; we would know the difference between them immediately whether or not we had any prior knowledge of what sort of book we were picking up. Some dreams, like my two airplane dreams, are “non-fiction”. Many other dreams are “fiction”, the creatively scripted dramas of my soul which nightly “processes” my ego's thoughts and feelings, hopes, fears and desires:

***From my Lucid Dream Journal, October 18, 2013:***

I'm walking down a crowded city street in broad daylight when I see a man in black robes running straight toward me, his arms stretched urgently out before him. “Help me! Help me!” he begs. “You can heal me! You can heal me! You're my healer!” I already know I'm dreaming and, hurrying over to him, I slip a supportive arm around his shoulders. I become rooted in the dream scene as I help him walk quickly in the direction he had been running. Trying to understand what happened to him, I lead him to temporary refuge against a wall where he crouches down, weak and helpless. I leave him there and go in search of something, perhaps his possessions. I seem to be

walking on rocky, sandy cliffs. I remain conscious of being in a dream, and yet I also behave as though I've woken up as I begin telling some invisible presence about this lucid dream, broadcasting what I'm seeing as though communicating via a hidden microphone. I tell my contact how real everything looks, that it's like watching a huge screen TV, but not really because everything is in 3D and absolutely true to life. I watch troops climb and assemble on the upper level of a structure protecting a large compound. They are all lining up there in preparation for something, overlooking the open white concrete of what might be the tarmac of a large airbase or simply desert. I inform my invisible audience, "It's so realistic! I can't see their faces because the sun is behind them." The troops are in full uniform, and suddenly I know it's wrong to call them troops because they don't look like American military; their uniforms are slightly different, they feel foreign to me, and there is a distinct circular dark-green patch on their sleeves. Many of the men are holding rifles, and they are all wearing caps of some kind.

After waking from this dream I knew right away from the determinative of how it felt that it was "non-fiction". I Googled key words and immediately found a breaking news story about Afghan insurgents who, at around the time I was dreaming, attacked a residential compound in which many important foreign officials and their families live. The *International Security Assistance Force* was called in and their uniforms, logo patches and caps exactly matched those of the troops I saw in my dream. I feel the man in the black robe may have been one of the two fatalities cited in the news report. I had had similar experiences in lucid dreams before, which helped me recognize this dream as most likely telepathic and "non-fiction."

***From my Lucid Dream Journal, September 15, 2013:***

Next thing I know I'm back outside a large building at night, fully lucid again. I want to talk to my friends, so I insert three wires into the seemingly dead intercom. The wires are firm and a bright green, red, and yellow. I don't think it will work because the button I press is almost flat to the wall and not lit up, but then I hear one of my friends pick up inside the building. I say, "Hey, can one of you come down and free me?" because my ankles are tied together. I think it has something to do with how I'm sleeping in waking reality... In response to a brief back and forth, I explain to them, a little impatiently, why I'm asking for assistance: "So I can get on with my lucid dream." Finally I see one of my friends approaching through the building's glass front... She is young and beautiful and wearing a tight thigh-length black leather dress, her dark hair loosely pinned up with strands framing her face, very sexy. She stands on the other side of the glass looking out at me. I say, "I just want to be with you, I don't care where we go." The young woman steps back and I push open the door, which doesn't even appear to have been locked. We walk toward the staircase, and as we begin ascending I ask, "How can you stay in here so often when you're lucid? It's weird." I'm thinking how it would be so much more fun to go out and explore the city and meet people and do things. As we walk up the steps my friend says something to the effect of, "It's actually quite interesting" and I understand she performs lucid dreaming experiments here in a stable environment.

How I felt when I woke up told me this young woman—who looked and dressed very much as I did in my twenties and who in the dream felt like my best friend—was probably not a "real" person but rather a representation of how I was feeling at the time about the loss of my youth and the sensual excitement and desire that was so much a part of it. This determinative put the dream firmly into the "fiction" category. The green, yellow and red wires seemed then an obvious symbol of doing some mysterious energy/emotional work on myself. What struck me is that in the dream my physically younger self behaved as I do now in waking reality. I wrote in my dream notes: "The older and wiser me merges with my forever young and desire-filled dream body in a creatively empowering way, so that the old French saying is actually possible now in lucid dreams: *If the young only knew, of the old only could!*"

Until the Rosetta stone was discovered, hieroglyphs were an impenetrable mystery. Dream work is akin to the Rosetta stone, the three levels being the dream itself, how we feel about it when we wake up, and any relationship it has to our inner and external life. I know from experience that after only a few weeks of writing down, thinking about and seriously paying attention to our dreams, what at first may seem a confusing or even meaningless jumble of images soon begins making sense. After years of keeping three different dream journals—one for lucid dreams, one for semi-lucid dreams and one for intense but

otherwise “normal” dreams—I have become much more fluent in the language of my unconscious. Reading and deciphering my dreams is always an exciting, entertaining and enlightening process.