

Dreams: The Guiding Words of the Soul

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La compassion, c'est notre priorité



West Island
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Compassion lives here

INTRODUCTION

Taking time to listen to dreams can be a useful and therapeutic tool in caring for a dying person. The dream belongs to the dreamer; therefore it is crucial to treat it with respect and discretion. Key to this process is asking the 'right' questions, keeping them simple and not getting caught up in the interpretation of dreams. Sometimes the metaphor in the dream can lead to a deeper understanding of the dreamer and can help to identify where the dreamer is in his "here and now". The dream can be an important source of information of the dreamer's feelings. It is the emotion that is felt by the dreamer (after reflecting on the dream) that can be viewed as a direct link with his current life situation. Therefore listening to the dreamer's dream, without passing judgement, is a simple tool a caregiver can use to provide support and to maintain or open the lines of honest communication.

WHY ASK A PATIENT ABOUT HIS/HER DREAMS?

- To promote the importance of taking time to listen to the dying persons dreams.
- To be able to use the dream as a therapeutic tool, to support and listen to the patient.
- To bring awareness to the dreamer in his own ability to identify where he is in his "here and now."
- To create awareness within the health care team of the usefulness of this tool.

GROUND RULES FOR LISTENING

- Be non-judgemental, never interpretive.
- Never minimize a dream: ask the patient if HE thinks the dream has meaning.
- Use discretion: share the dream only if the dreamer authorizes you to do so and with whom.
- Be spontaneous: anytime may be a good time to ask about a patient's dreams. Sometimes the most opportune moment for listening can happen while providing basic care.

METHOD

1. Ask the person if he dreams. **"Do you dream?"**
2. Ask the dreamer if he would like to tell you his dream. **"Would you like to tell me your dream?"**
3. Find out what feelings the person himself identified at the end of the dream. **"Can you tell me how you felt at the end of the dream?"**
4. Help the dreamer identify if a link exists between the feelings experienced from the dream with his current feelings. **"Do you think there's a link between the emotions you felt in the dream to what you are feeling right now in your life?"**
5. Share the dream with either his family and/or the health care team. **"May I share your dream with?"**

This exercise allows the caregiver to accurately identify where the dreamer is in his journey. It can serve as a tool to promote communication to the person's family and/or the health care team.

"Dreams are the guiding words of the soul" Carl Jung, *Liber Novus*



Blackness



"I don't see anything...everything around me is black. It means I'm afraid to die" - Jacques, Patient
This dream opened up communication between Jacques and his family.

Pushing my Dead Husband in a Wheelchair



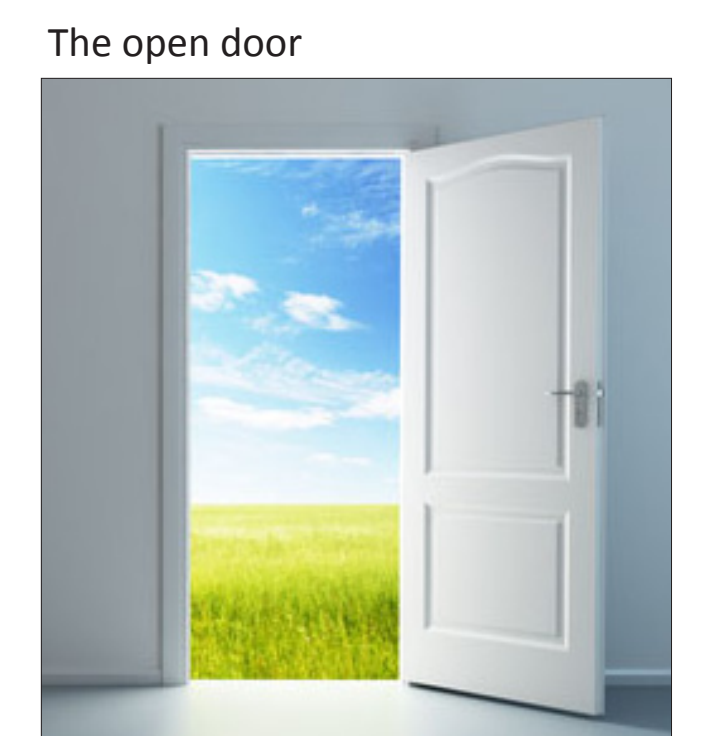
In the dream, my husband asked me: "Do you know where you're going?" I (Denise, Patient) said to him, "Of course I know where I am going."

This dream helped her to realize she felt very serene.

Two Dreams in Two Weeks



"No, I'm not ready yet"



"It's just beautiful"

"I wasn't ready and now I'm ready to die", Ann, Patient

Our Hands Don't Touch Anymore



"Because of that dream, I became very aware that my sister is going to die." - Patient's sister Sylvie
This dream helped Sylvie to face the death of her sister.

The Yellow Bus



"Will I know when it's time to get off?" "Is there someone who will tell me when I must get out off of the bus?"
-Juliette, Patient
This allows Juliette's caregivers to know that she had some deep thoughts about her eventual death.

The Schooner



"I am sitting in the schooner. The water is very calm and my father (who is already dead) is sitting beside me." Lise (patient) concluded that, "It means that my dad is coming to pick me up."

This dream gave her a strong feeling of tranquility.

Jumping off the Balcony



"I dreamt that I jumped off the balcony with my husband." - Patient's wife Jocelyne

"That dream gave me the confidence to know that when my husband dies, everything is going to be O.K." - Patient's wife Jocelyne

Driving the Autobahn in a Porsche at 250 km/hr



This dream helped Geraldine's family accept that her death was coming faster than they thought.

Having a Picnic with my Father



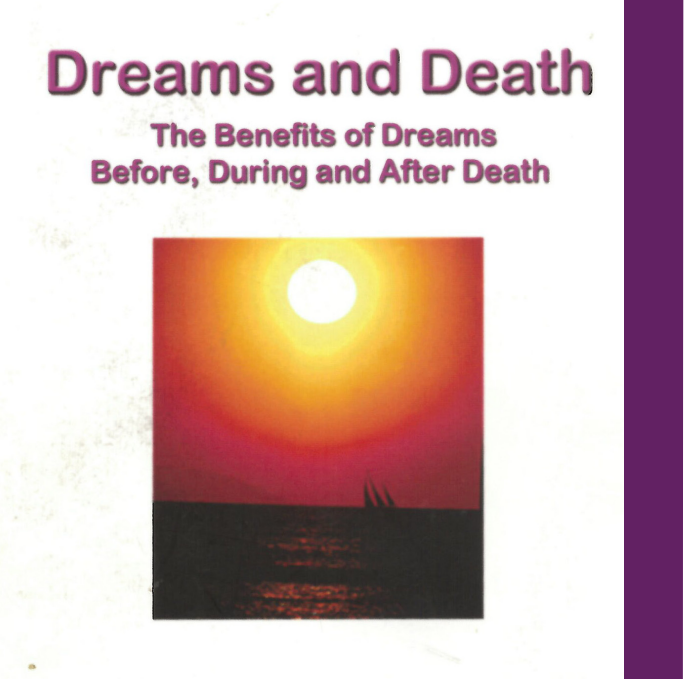
"I have a sense of healing" - Heather, sister of a patient

This dream was helpful in the family's grieving process.

SUMMARY

Actively listening to the dreamer can provide comfort, reassurance and build trust. Our hospice team has acknowledged that they have felt reassured and comforted by hearing the dreams of those dying. Our team members routinely ask about patients' dreams and when appropriate, note it in the patient's chart so that everyone can gain a deeper understanding of how the patient is feeling in his 'here and now'. We also have found it to be helpful in opening up the lines of communication within families. Hearing about their loved one's dream has helped family members acknowledge and deal with their own grief.

What started out as a personal project has become a professional passion. I began asking about the dreams of patients in 2003, shortly after I started working at the West Island Palliative Care Residence, in Montreal, Quebec. I have since co-authored a book with Nicole Gratton entitled, "Dreams and Death" (2009). I am a member of the International Association for the Study of Dreams and have lectured extensively on the subject.



If I am able to suggest a piece of advice to the caregiver reading this poster, it would be to possess an openness of listening to the dream of the dreamer. If your patient happens to mention having a dream, do not hesitate to take it one step further. Ask about it, and listen to the story as though you've received a letter from a friend and took the necessary time to read it.

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