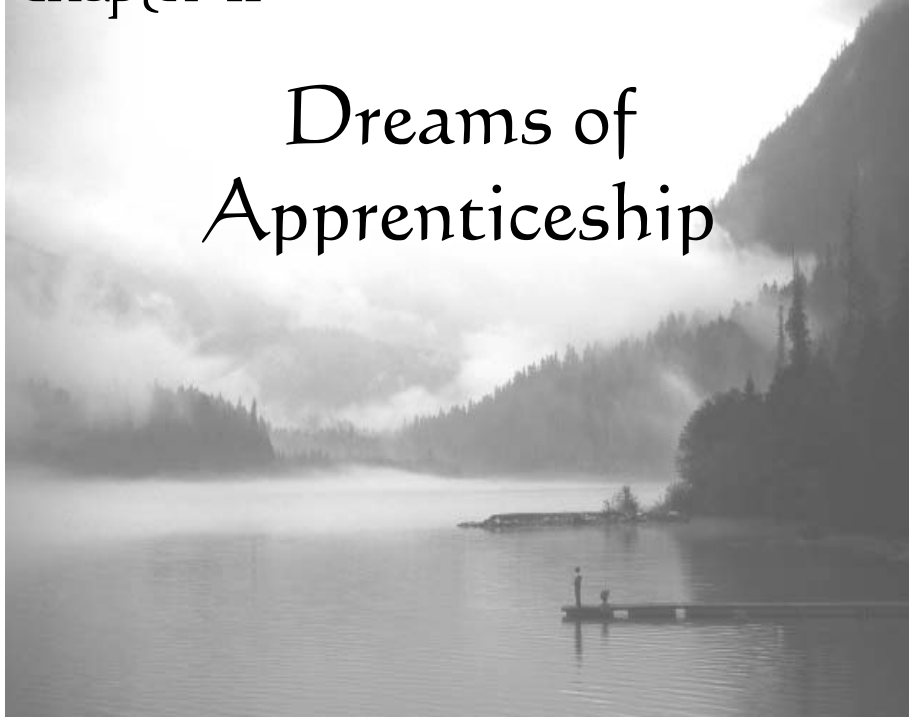


Chapter II

Dreams of Apprenticeship



All the arts we practice are apprenticeship. The big art is our life.

—M. C. Richards

After the long and arduous struggle through the Quest, our dreams reflect a growing trust and willingness to follow the guidance of our Dream Mentors. As you read in Chapter 9, after a period of continued resistance, in our dreams we begin to pray for help and even fearfully stand up somewhat to the Collective mind (within us) on behalf of our Self.

Little fear is present in Illumination dreams and what is present quickly wanes as the dream progresses. We move into the role of apprentice to our Mentors who no longer appear threatening. Instead, we experience them as helpful friends and sages offering us timeless guidance and wisdom on our Journey.

Now in the time of our Illumination our dreams feel fulfilling and there is an experience of resolution rather than frustration.

Let's look at some dreams shared with me by friends and clients that reflect their own experience of apprenticeship as they learn to embrace the values that foster expanded consciousness. Take note that these are Dreams of Apprenticeship because in each we are just beginning to learn. We do not act on our own as in the Dreams of Embrace and Mastery that you'll read about next. We merely receive instruction in a heartfelt manner from caring Mentors. The deepening of the lesson—our true initiation—comes in later Illumination dreams.

Mindfulness of Solitude and Stillness

Evie had been a member of my Mindful Dreaming group for some months and had been taking very seriously the guidance she received from her Dream Mentors about releasing ego strategies, especially self-judgment. Then she shared this dream in which her Mentors, members of the dream group, were teaching her about the benefits of solitude and how to become quiet within:

Each of you was trying to teach me a game that involved pebbles and stones that were being buffeted by the strong current of a stream. I was supposed to keep the stones still by using my mind. I was not very good at it but each of you spent time giving me tips. It seemed that the game was part of an ancient ritual.



Here Evie is an apprentice to her Mentors who are “giving her tips” about an “ancient,” perennial lesson: the importance of stilling her thoughts. The dream likens her thoughts to pebbles and stones buffeted by the heavy current of a stream. Her task is the same as ours—that is, to quiet her thoughts and keep them still despite the strong current of energy generated by her ego's plans and fears. As Eckhart Tolle reminds us, “The stream of thinking has enormous momentum that can easily drag you along with it. Every thought pretends that it matters so much. It wants to draw your attention in completely. Here is a new spiritual practice for you: Don't take your thoughts too seriously.”¹

Indeed it is no coincidence that in Evie's dream the work of stilling her thoughts is not serious but rather a “game,” and the mood of the dream is one

of playfulness. Why play? Because what other activity better suits the Present Moment? In play, as in the stillness of the Present Moment, we don't nurture thoughts about the past or future, no worries or concerns. We simply smell the roses.

In the dream Evie must "use her mind" to still her thoughts. This "mind" is the mind of Witnessing Consciousness in which we experience that we are not our thoughts. Again, Tolle says it so well: "The realm of consciousness is much vaster than thought can grasp. When you no longer believe everything you think, you step out of thought and see clearly that the thinker is not who you are."² An "ancient ritual" indeed!

My client Gale set the intention to fulfill her own needs for the first time in her life and to be less exclusively centered on caretaking her husband and family. She frequently told me that she wanted a "sign from God" that this new path in life was a correct one and not simply a "selfish wish." Praying for an answer to this question, she dreamed:

A friend of mine is leading me into a churchyard, whereupon the hand of God—it's gigantic—appears right in front of me. On God's finger stands the most beautiful angel dressed in white and with white light radiating out of her and all around her. She's almost too brilliant to see. I'm in awe but we keep walking and now I'm alone in the church, which is one of those Spanish-looking adobe buildings, like the old traditional Catholic churches where I had some of my most moving experiences. Someone says that the service can't start until I put on a veil.



After describing the dream in detail, Gale lamented, "If only I could have a sign from God that I'm doing the right thing." I laughed out loud, but she was quite serious. Then I realized what she intuitively understood. We'll discuss her intuition in Chapter 13, but first let's return to Gale's very important experience of apprenticeship in the current dream.

It's interesting that Gale doesn't even pause as she walks by the brilliant angel on God's finger—she just "keeps walking." What could be more important than a radiant image of God and an angel right before her eyes? The answer lies in the second scene of the dream.

The church service—the ritual for accessing the Divine—cannot start until Gale wears a veil. This is the veil with which we create the solitude and stillness needed to experience the Witnessing God-Consciousness within. In her dream it's as if the external image of God and angel, despite its extraordinary beauty, is just that: an image, not the opportunity for true communion. Gale's Dream Mentor is the anonymous voice that treats her as an apprentice, instructing her to put on a veil and find stillness before she can experience the answer to her prayers. When we discuss her Mentor's advice Gale resolves that she will make more time to be alone, reflect, and look within. It was only about a week or two later that she returned with the dream she was seeking. You can read that dream in Chapter 13 about dreams of embodiment.

Mindfulness of Humility and Receiving Guidance

Remember the dream I shared with you in Chapter 3 when algae-like plants grew up through the floor in the shape of letters and words that formed messages from the Divine? Soon the growth became so profuse that I couldn't read a single word or letter. I had to release control and assume an attitude of reverence and humility toward the Source as a respectful apprentice needing to learn. *Then* I was given the tool—huge hedge clippers—with which to do the work of pruning so I could continue to understand and follow the guidance offered.

You read another Dream of Apprenticeship about following guidance in Section I. Remember Lenny? He followed his Mentor, complaining all the way about the roughness of their path and worrying constantly that they were lost. But when push came to shove, so to speak, Lenny committed to remaining his Mentor's apprentice and took the proverbial "leap" right off the cliff. The lesson of his apprenticeship was the importance of finding the humility to surrender control, to give the benefit of the doubt to the Source and accept guidance.

I'll share with you a lesson I received from a Dream of Apprenticeship in an earlier period of my life when I was intent on being kind at all costs, overly concerned about not hurting anyone and wanting to protect loved ones from feeling loss, rejection, or pain.

I dreamed that I was driving down a country lane, across which cute little ducklings were being herded. I turned my car around to drive the other way, but it simply ran backwards, even though I stomped on the brakes many times. When the car did stop many ducklings had been run over. Aghast and horrified, I apologized to the duck herder, who then admonished me with great kindness, saying, “Many of these ducklings would have died if left on their own in nature. There’s pain and death in life, David, and you must face that in the end you have no control over that.”



As my Dream Mentor’s apprentice I learned about my own limitations. I realized that pain is a great teacher and there was no way I could or should protect others from the lessons to be learned from their own suffering.

Mindfulness of Compassion

Perennial wisdom teaches that the rational mind, our ego, focuses on issues of fear and survival, whereas the thoughts of our heart are concerned with all that sustains and nourishes life. The great Indian sage and yogi Patanjali has said, “Peace can be reached through meditation on the knowledge which dreams give. Peace can also be reached through concentration upon that which is dearest to the heart.”³

Our egos thrive on future plans and goals, creating a purpose with which to rationalize our worth or existence, whereas when we release the need to prove our worth—empty our ego’s purpose—we clear a space in the Present Moment to experience the sheer joy of life for its own sake, and our heart is filled. Dreams, too, work to clear a quiet space for the voice of our heart to be heard behind the incessant drumbeat of our ego’s thoughts. In Mindful Dreaming we serve as apprentices to our Dream Mentors and set the intention to witness with compassion the limitations and suffering caused by our ego’s demands.

A Dream of Apprenticeship shared by my friend Martin illustrates beautifully the importance of compassion:

I am feeling despair that I will never grasp all the complex rules of the board game in front of me. Then, a beautiful woman begins to seduce me. At the same time, she pulls her heart out of her chest, placing it on the game board. When she does so, the board seems to glow and I immediately grasp the rules and the nature of the game. I awaken realizing she came to show me that only the values of my heart, not my head, will provide the experience I seek in life—my heart's path.



Speaking of awakened consciousness as the Philosopher's Stone, alchemist Petrus Bonus simply said, "To find the Philosopher's Stone, we need to look with our eyes but see with our heart."⁴

Here's another poignant dream tale told by my cousin Tricia. Her Dream Mentor would stop at nothing to get her attention about this central issue in our lives:

My dear old friend I've known since I was a child takes me into my bathroom. Bending down, she says, "You've got to see this!" She reaches deep into the toilet and pulls out my own beating heart.

I wake up in sorrow for the years I've wasted trying to please everyone but myself, doing what I thought they wanted—and hating myself for "failing." But I knew things would be different from that moment on.



Mindfulness of the Formless (Transcending our Attachment to Form)

These dreams help us understand more fully why we've been learning to grieve and release our attachments. We are being prepared to experience formless consciousness. Dreams of the Formless teach us that the material forms of the world are a creation of pure consciousness. Put another way, Dream Mentors show us that physical or material forms are impermanent and more or less interchangeable. Instead, consciousness itself is primary, existing independently of our bodies. This is the meaning of the old Chinese proverb: "I am only interested in what remains after the pot has been broken."⁵

The phenomenon of shape shifting in dreams is an excellent example of the secondary importance of form in the world of consciousness. In waking life we may think something such as this: “My father Irv is my father Irv and his favorite chair is just his favorite chair.” In the world of our dreams, however, all bets are off. Consider the following dream I had about my father:

I am sitting in my father’s favorite chair and expressing my gratitude to him for all that he has done. In waking life he recently passed on, and in fact, is not anywhere to be seen in the dream.



My dream (a type of Return dream that you’ll read about in Section V) reminds me that through my lifetime part of the core experience of my dad is embodied in his chair. To this day when I sit in his chair, I feel his vigilant energy, lighten in the aura of his humorous pontifications, feel the warmth of his affection for the entire family, and see the virtual glow his love cast upon the entire house from that one place. The image of his chair is not simply a metaphor, but literally carries for me the energy—the consciousness or *experience* of “my dad” that a mere image of him does not evoke. What we love about people and what I loved about my father is the quality of their energy—the experience of life and quality of consciousness they evoke in us. In my dream, the chair is an embodiment and gateway for that experience no less important than my father himself. To dream of sitting in that chair is to embrace that experience of life as my own—one that has not passed away with the material form of my father’s consciousness.

In waking life we use mementos of a cherished relationship in the same fashion to access not only the memory of that experience, but also the experience itself. In indigenous cultures the shaman may take an additional step. For example, she may lead a mourner through a ritual experience of healing and then use a feather or stone from that ritual as an amulet for the mourner to carry with him—now infused with the memory and experience of that healing process. The core idea here is that conscious experience makes the world go ‘round—not the form it takes.

Another example: A client of mine, Patricia (whose dreams of conforming to and hiding from the Collective you read in Section III), worried that she was sometimes too harsh with friends and loved ones. She dreamed she was a beautiful

rosebush. A boy reached out and was pricked by one of her thorns. In her dream she understood through the *experience*, or the consciousness of being a rosebush, that her nature was both beautiful and sharp-edged, neither good nor bad, and that she was not herself to blame for the careless attitude with which people approached her. As the saying goes: “There is no gathering the rose without being pricked by the thorns.”

So is it more accurate for Patricia to identify with her image in a photo or the image of the rosebush in her dream? Which better clarifies the nature of her true self? Which provides the direct *experience* or consciousness of redemption from self-doubt and blame?

Every dream image embodies a quality of consciousness—no matter how much we want to label and categorize its symbolic meaning. To consider the rosebush or my father’s chair as mere metaphor and to intellectually understand its “meaning” is to shortchange the conscious experience their image carries and produces in us.

Even more problematic is the waking life attitude in which we see ourselves distinct and separate from the chairs, rosebushes, and material world around us—even from other people. As it is said in the Hindu Upanishads, “Who sees all beings in his own Self, and his own Self in all beings, loses all fear.”⁶ This is why it is so important to meditate on every Mentor and object in your dreams, because the consciousness or experience they embody when embraced is an aspect of our true self. Listen to the great poet Rumi in “The Sufi Path of Love”:

*If you are born of Adam, sit like him and
Behold his progeny within yourself.
What does the vat contain that is not in the river?
What does the room encompass that is not in the city?
This world is the vat, and the heart the running stream,
This world the room, and the heart the city of wonders.⁷*

When we speak about forms we are referring not only to material objects and our physical bodies, but to the forms we create with our thoughts such as our self-image (how we view ourselves) and our social image or persona (how we want to appear to others). All are forms with which our ego is identified and to which it’s attached.

My friend Stan shared with me that he had been feeling “stuck” for a long time in his life—stuck in a job that he didn’t really like and in a marriage that he knew had lost its vision long ago. But Stan was afraid: “I’m 55 years old and I think that’s just too old to do any real changing. Don’t you?” I answered Stan as I’m prone to do when anyone asks me a question that I think is too important to rest on my own limited perspective: “Why don’t you try incubating a dream about it and see what you’re told?” I explained how that process works (You can read about it again in Chapter 2).

The next day Stan shared this Dream of the Formless with me:

It was really weird. There was what I’d call a quietly powerful woman. That’s the only way I can describe her because her shape and appearance changed every time I encountered her—yet each time within the dream I knew she was the same person.

In my dream she has been trying to teach me something I don’t understand by repeatedly killing herself in various ways—an approach I think is very odd. Then I watch again as she places herself in a crematorium. I see her burning up in the raging blue fire, her clothes are melting to her skin, and her body turning to ashes. I walk by feeling disturbed by the sight, but now absolutely certain that she won’t return. I enter an adjoining room shocked to see her standing there, fully alive and well, brushing off the ashes from her arms and legs.

When I woke up I understood right away what she was trying to say: Life is about being creative. Age has nothing to do with it. I can reinvent my self as many times as I want. I shouldn’t take who I think I am so seriously!



Stan’s Dream Mentor shows him that the very nature of life is ever changing, ever dying, and ever being born again. The material world, our bodies, and the images of ourselves with which we are so identified, all change and dissolve, but our true nature—consciousness—remains eternal. This is why even though Stan’s Mentor returns every time in a different body, he can still recognize her. We are the formless essence of consciousness itself and we know its face when we see it. I am that!

Through Mindful Dreaming we stand with our Mentors as apprentices in the common ground of witnessing consciousness, embracing with humility and compassion the infinite array of shapes and faces—the suffering and the wise within and around us. Only then can we release our iron grip of attachment to “one shape of reality” and awaken to the guiding presence of the Creative Source in our lives—here and now.

Stan continued on as an apprentice to his Dream Mentor in many subsequent dreams. When you understand the dream’s message you know that there really is just one Mentor and that is the Source whose many manifestations appear nightly clothed in different bodies. No different are we than waves of the ocean that arise and return to our Source.

Here’s a dream of my own that demonstrated with humor how I needed to release my attachment about how a dreamworker should appear to others—the appropriate “form” or “look” of a dreamworker. You’ll recall my Calling nightmare of Section II in which I was surrounded by the broken bricks of a devastated city. In that dream, the last remaining brick I was about to break became a contract for a program that a radio producer asked me to sign. One reason I didn’t want to sign that contract was my belief that a serious dreamworker wouldn’t stoop to the crassness of sound bites on a radio call-in program when teaching others about the profound nature of dreams. Here’s my simple and to-the-point dream:

I’m watching Thich Nhat Hanh on stage spreading his message to thousands of cheering people—as a world-renowned rapper.

I listened for a while and he was actually quite good! More important, of course, was the relief as well as chagrin I felt at being reminded that it’s not the image, stupid! It’s the message! Not the form, but the truth that’s spoken—the quality of consciousness that’s conveyed.



Let’s conclude with a dream reported by my friend and master dreamworker Rev. Jeremy Taylor that demonstrates the profound reward of learning to let go and release our attachments. A friend of Jeremy’s shared this dream, which she had the night after the September 11, 2001, attack. She was visiting New York

City at the time, not knowing if her childhood friend, who worked on the 32nd floor of Tower 2, had escaped or not. Here's the dream:

In my dream, I find myself in the midst of a forest that has been clear cut—nothing but great, big stumps in all directions as far as I can see. I am devastated. I am weeping. I walk through the destroyed landscape asking myself, “Who could do such a thing?” Then I am drawn to stop and look at the spiral pattern in one of the stumps. I realize how very old this forest was, and it makes me even more filled with anger at the loss of this beautiful old forest. Then I begin to be drawn into the spiral. As I sink down into the spiral and into myself, I realize that this is a part of the tree that I almost never got to see. I am drawn more and more deeply into the spiral—down into a place of myself that is so wise, calm, and deep that it is simply greater than my intense grief and the horror.



She awakened from the dream with a sense of calmness and clarity that allowed her to get through the next day, even with all of her friends “freaking out.”

“It is such a startling dream,” said Jeremy, “because the spiral of the growth rings that serves as the pathway to the deepest truth and beauty would not be visible if the tree had not been cut down. At one level, [the dream] is a metaphor of doing the psycho-spiritual work necessary to be a person in whom such a metaphor of healing can rise to consciousness.” On the other hand, he says, the dream demonstrates that “it is often through our worst wounds and injuries, both individual and collective, that we are opened to healing and more direct communication with the Divine.”⁸

I would add that in this case the dream does not provide a literal Mentor for the dreamer. Indeed, there is no one in the dream but the dreamer. Such dreams are quite common and are still apprenticeship dreams, as the dream is the teacher. Her Dream Mentor is the ancient, formless Source itself that draws her into the forest and teaches her that there is a quality of consciousness that transcends the world of form—one that to be *experienced* requires us to embrace the inevitability of change, grieve, and let go.

Before moving on to the next chapter, take a few moments to explore some of the practices at the end of this chapter. In the meantime remember that at

any time on our Journey we are capable of receiving such uplifting dreams of guidance as well as other profound dream experiences in the chapters that follow. Our ego is always happy to tell us that we haven't earned something we want and it will have to wait for some time in the future when we've worked hard enough, suffered sufficiently or have more time for it. Yet, all that really matters to our Dream Mentors is our attitude of openness and humility when asking for guidance. When you are consistently at one with that attitude you enter the time of Illumination—and receive its gifts.

Though these dreams of Apprenticeship touch us deeply and shift our conscious perspective, later Dreams of Embrace and Mastery, Embodiment, and Being actually transmute our awareness as full-fledged initiates in a radically new consciousness. Until then, Dreams of the Formless simply point us toward our destination and we may take solace from the words of poet Robert Browning: “Ah, but a man's grasp should exceed his reach, Or what's a heaven for?”



Chapter Practices

Remember the Experience of Apprenticeship in Your Waking Life

Many of us have had the experience of being mentored by a parent, teacher, or friend in some important area of our life. This is always a landmark event in our lives.

If you've had such an experience, take a few moments to write about it in your journal. Breathe back into the experience for the joy of it or for the feeling of gratitude that it evokes in you.

It's true as well that most of us have a remaining hunger or unspoken yearning for a guru, teacher, or Mentor in some aspect of our lives. In your Journal explore what you long for or yearn to be taught and why this is important.

Incubate a dream to receive that specific help from a Dream Mentor.

A Simple Way to Work with Your Dreams and Dream Mentors

Here's an elegant and simple approach you can use with any dream as well as an easy way to receive the guidance offered by your Dream Mentor. I've adapted the core method from a gestalt technique created by my friend and fellow dreamworker Bob Hoss.

Remember that every dream character is a Mentor who has a gift of wisdom waiting for you if you take the time to get to know more about that Mentor and if your attitude is an accepting or positive one. First, get to know your Mentor.

☞ Step 1: Imagine yourself as the Dream Mentor that you are interested in learning more about and let that Mentor speak in the first person:

- ☛ a) Describe who/what you are and your key characteristics:
"I am ____." (You can write this in your journal if you prefer not to speak aloud.)

Note: If the Mentor is a known person from waking life, then become that person and state (or write) : "My main similarities with the dreamer are ____; my main differences with the dreamer are: ____."

- ☛ b) "As (this Mentor) my purpose or function is to ____."
- ☛ c) "As (this Mentor) I like ____."
- ☛ d) "As (this Mentor) I dislike ____."
- ☛ e) "As (this Mentor) what I desire most is ____."

☞ Step 2: Now that you have come to understand more, consider your attitude toward that Mentor: Are you angry? Avoiding? Running away? Loving? Embracing? Deceiving?

☞ Step 3: If your attitude is hostile or negative, consider the advantages of giving him or her the benefit of the doubt. Ask yourself how incorporating his or her perspective—if only in moderation—would be helpful in improving the quality of your daily life in some way. If your attitude is positive, ask yourself how you can embody his or her energy or perspective in the coming week.

