

# Ancester dreaming: A portal for inner and outer world peace when dreaming for and with the ancestors

Barbara J. Genovese

Brookings, Oregon, USA

*Summary.* It is commonly believed that dreams are only for the dreamer. However, in my experience, some of our dreams are for and from the ancestors, and as such, ask for healing so we can live our own lives, while tending to the grief of the ancestors.

*Keywords:* Dreams, ancestor dreaming, grief

## 1. Introduction

I had dreamed as a child, but childhood and my early years as an adult were focused on survival. One of my anchors was learning that my father, as a boy, had a wolf as a pet. My beautiful, silent father. So whenever my father said anything, my ears were at attention. He spoke one sentence, and in what context he was inspired, motivated, and moved to speak it, I no longer remember. As a boy, he had a wolf, but after a time, the wolf was given to a farmer because the cat population in the neighborhood was being decimated. I heard the sadness in my father's voice, and, I caught his wry humor. The introduction of a wild animal so close to me was a great gift.

Once I started to record my dreams in 1976, the animals came, sometimes in great numbers; at other times, it was as if they had disappeared into a deep and dark forest. Perhaps this accounts for my pilgrimages to zoos, so I can be closer to them in the physical when they are absent in my dream world.

At the end of each year, I re-read all my dreams, and make notations of patterns or themes, prescient dreams, symbols, animals, and anything else that comes through. As I read, I am able to immerse myself in the dreams once more, feeling their particular essence.

When the animals started to appear, I wanted to know what they meant. There are animal dictionaries and online sources, but two books that found me were Jamie Sams and David Carson's "Medicine Cards", and Ted Andrews' "Animal Speak". If an animal appeared that I couldn't find a meaning for, I intuited it, or not, or we just hung out for the time being, as meaning and symbolism fell to the wayside.

## 2. Animals in Shamanism and strengthening those dreaming muscles

I'm an inveterate student with a wide curiosity. That became an entre into shamanic studies. One day, a magazine that I hadn't subscribed to, arrived in the mail. It had my name on it, but I had not ordered it. It was called "Shaman's Drum" and I fell into its pages. Thus began my formal study of shamanism, which heralded a deeper dive into the animal world; then the animals began to visit in droves.

My interest in dreams took me to The Ojai Foundation and Dream Circle classes, and the Pacifica Graduate Institute, both in California.

I will tell you that I have acted and reacted to messages in dreams. Once, I was given a telephone number, which I called. I calmly explained to the person why I was calling. When I hung up, I understood that this was part of strengthening my dreaming muscles.

## 3. The ancestor's dreams

Mid-2015, I began not only waking in the middle of the night, but waking and remembering some dreams. This had never happened before. The waking usually occurred around 2-3AM. Having recorded my dreams for 40 years (and the analogy of a tribe wandering in the desert for that long is not lost on me), I knew their shape, form, and color, like a mother knows her children. But something about these dreams was different. They were elusive; they were like wisps of smoke that when I reached for them, vanished.

At about this same time, I have a clear memory of a thought that stopped me in my tracks in my living room, which was my bedroom, which was next to the fireplace. My word for fireplace is hearth. It has a connection for me with a warm home, and since that experience had been missing, something said that the right place for the bed in this home was next to the hearth.

On this day, the thought that was asking to speak literally shouted to the ancestors that I had work to do, and that if they didn't want to come along for the journey, then they had to leave. While I was stunned by the sound of my voice to the invisible, it had been necessary. It was as if I had said

Corresponding address:

Barbara J. Genovese, 815 Old County Road #15, Brookings  
OR 97415, USA.

Email: [bjgenovese@msn.com](mailto:bjgenovese@msn.com)

Submitted for publication: October 2016

Accepted for publication: December 2016

or understood that while the ancestors were connected, there were some that were dead weight, so to speak. I was willing to help, I said, but I needed some give and take.

#### Here's what I don't know

The thought that stopped me? Did I think it or was it thought through me? I don't have an answer except to say that whatever "spoke" needed to be said, and it needed to be heard.

#### Here's what I do know

These dreams were not mine but needed to be dreamed through me. These dreams were not mine but were connected with me. These dreams were not mine, and they were happy to be dreamed now.

It was as if something were being expelled, exonerated, exorcised, released, diffused (much like a bomb), blessed, and then made sacred.

I have learned, since this experience, and when these dreams come in the middle of the night, to not strain to remember them. If I remember them, I write them down. If I don't remember them, I let them go. This is another strengthening of my dreaming muscles.

#### 4. A.R.E. Dream helper Circles

Almost a year later, I read in A.R.E.'s monthly magazine *Venue Inward*, an article titled: "Let's Normalize the Paranormal: A Revolution in Dreamwork" by Henry Reed, PhD. I answered the clarion call and participated in two Dream Helper Circles, and was the administrator for a third.

In the second Dream Helper Circle (DHC), it was as if a Cosmic Tumbler had clicked into place. When dreaming for the Focus Person in the DHC, we were asked to record the first dream of the night after we went to sleep. I had that first dream and tried to capture it, but it was a wisp of smoke and I couldn't wrap my remembering mind around it. I realized at once that it was an ancestor dream and not one to be shared for the person in the DHC we were dreaming for. I learned from this that even though the circle was given the dictum to record the first dream of the night for the focus person, the ancestors clearly had not intended this first dream for that person.

#### 5. World peace, one issue at a time

During the DHC, I had the idea that we could have Circles that dream for a 'situation' in the world, like refugees, global warming, bullying. Maybe we wouldn't have a discernible or measureable effect, but it might be interesting to explore. Because at the heart of it, as I learned, the dreamer is healed too. This could generate some interesting articles & reflections.

So if this is possible, why not dream for the ancestors?

About a week after the DHC was over, a book I had ordered called "The Wild Edge of Sorrow" by Francis Weller arrived. I was into the Forward when I read of the five gates of grief, that one of the gates was "ancestral grief." It was the explanatory sentence that took my breath away: "This is the grief we carry in our bodies from sorrows experienced by our ancestors...tending this undigested grief of our ancestors not only frees us to live our own lives but also eases ancestral suffering in the other world."

This made consummate sense, and I could not advance further in my reading until I had digested, understood, and backtracked through my life.

#### 6. The puzzle pieces of an ancestral dreamer

When I was a young girl, my father purchased a set of the *World Book Encyclopedia*. I ripped through the volumes like a house on fire, as if I were looking for something. A clue that I, and only I, would recognize. I found it further down the alphabet in the picture of a South African miner. His face was covered in dust so he no longer had his black skin. In his outstretched hands were diamonds. The look on his face, the placement of his hands, as if in supplication, the new color of his skin – it spoke to me and I tore out the picture. I had to give it back when one of my siblings ratted on me, and I was severely punished.

But I knew there was something in that photograph that was me on a soul level. That touched me in a way few things in childhood had. And, that I should pay attention. Also, I knew that this, too, would be my job in this lifetime: to mine and mind the underground of my family's history to unearth the gems of my ancestral line. To heal, if I could; to help, if asked.

Once I had left the confines of my mother's house, slowly I began to remember dreams again. Thus began 40 years of dream journals. What I realized was that I had been mining my own dreams, so that at some point, more attention could be paid to the dreams of the ancestors.

#### 7. Postscript

Something unexpected came through in my DHC experience. This is the unexpurgated sentence: "Remember that you are a healer, and accept and bless what heals you."

I believe that we all have the potential to heal and be healed by our dreams, and by the dreams we dream for others. When you add the ancestor component, the possibilities for inner, and outer world peace become profound, life-saving, and a blessing.

Another unexpected epiphany came through a few months after the DHC's.

I consulted with an herbalist about, among other things, my fairly consistent waking between 2-3AM, and, what I was doing with that time because I did not like to toss and turn. I had stumbled upon a solution, and why, with my meditation practice that began in the early 1970's I hadn't thought of it sooner, was a mystery. When I was awakened at this hour, I would fall myself back into sleep by visualizing or imagining something good in my life – a kind of active meditation. My imagination had a field day with this. I relayed this to the herbalist.

His response, without missing a heartbeat, was that he had been told by a Lakota Medicine Woman that 2-3AM is the Time of the Ancestors, that the noise from the Collective Unconscious is quieter, and more subdued. Static is low, and thus it is a more subtle time to tune in for clarity, insight, and visioning. This made consummate sense, and I could see how it was thus easier for the dreams of the ancestors to slip through.

So not only had I stumbled into a sacred time, but that wider wisdom of mine, rooted in my meditation practice, taught me how to utilize that time, and how it linked with the ancestors.

It also taught me that certain visualizations/meditations “felt” better than others, calmed me down, infused me with a welcome peace, and soon shuttled me back to sleep. I can now better identify these “better feeling” visualizations/meditations. I must add that I don’t exactly know where they are coming from. I do not recognize any of them as events from my past. Are they my dreams, hopes, and wishes hidden deep in a memory well that had been cemented over with family and cultural verbotens? Was it extending back to forbidden desires and thoughts from my ancestors? Are they a thread on the loom of my life that is asking to be heard, and healed? Is it me dreaming my life forward? Are the ancestors dreaming through me? Am I participating in ancestral healing? Alas, I don’t have an answer. But I feel that I don’t need to know right now, and maybe never. Bottom line? Over 90% of the time, it helps me to go back to sleep!

I will say that there are certain visualizations/meditations that I return to time and time again. And that if I try to go back to one I’ve already have and I have visited there recently, sometimes the door is not opened and I have to conjure another visualization/meditation. I have learned that there are plenty of them to choose from!

### Closing thought

I think it is possible that this ancestral dreaming doorway is another way for the ancestors to communicate what they knew and could not (some of them) never tell us. After all, they had dreams too.

### References

- Reed, Henry, PhD. Let’s Normalize the Paranormal: A Revolution in Dreamwork. *Venture Inward* (the magazine of the A.R.E. Foundation), July-August-September 2016.
- Weller, Francis. *The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief*. North Atlantic Books, 2015.