

Dreaming Beyond: 7 Tips for Connecting With Your Departed Loved Ones Through Your Dreams

by Linda Yael Schiller

After the question “What does my dream mean?” the most common question that I get as a dreamworker is, “Can I connect with my departed relatives through my dreams?” Even the most intrepid “dreams-mean-nothing” dreamers ask about this. Last week I was talking with Mia, my hairdresser, about a Dream Salon we are going to do at her hair studio to help get word out about the power of dreamwork and my new book, *Modern Dreamwork: New Tools for Decoding Your Soul’s Wisdom*. Her husband, also a stylist there, overheard us and joined the conversation saying, ‘I don’t dream, and I don’t think they mean anything anyhow, but if I did I would want to see my mom again. She died 5 years ago.” After extending my condolences, I shared with him that actually, everyone dreams every night, but we don’t always remember them. We all have 5-7 REM cycles, (rapid eye movements) which have been shown through PET scans to indicate when we are dreaming), but we tend to remember only the ones we have when we first wake up. However, if we don’t write them down or record them in some way, we forget those as well. Dreams are as gossamer as wisps of mist or smoke.

I continued by letting him know that if he wanted to have a visit from his mom, it was highly likely that he could have one, and he could start by a.) Wanting to have her visit, b.) Believing that it was possible, and c.) Inviting her over. “Sometimes our beloveds are right there, and just waiting for an invitation before they come for a visit,” I told him.

These first steps help us to set the stage for a nocturnal visit. The veil between worlds may be thinner while we are asleep, and the spirits of our departed loved ones may have an easier time contacting us then, especially if given an invitation to pave the way. When the conscious censoring parts of our minds that say things like, “That couldn’t happen” or “That cant’ be real” are tucked in for the night, our wider collective mind and our personal unconscious and soul-mind is free to journey to other places and realms during unguarded moments such as

our dream states. When asked whether he felt that our dream life was as real as our waking life, Thomas Moore, author of *Care of the Soul* answered: "Very real, maybe even more so". When Dorothy returned to Kansas at the end of her journey to Oz, her Auntie Em told her, "It was just a dream, dear". To which Dorothy responds, "No, Auntie Em, it was a very real place", and would not be convinced otherwise. After all, she had just been there.

Our mythic stories often contain the seeds of our deeper truths. Mythos, legend, fairy tales and modern film and fantasy all contain allusions or references to connecting across time and space and the veil between life and afterlife. In Greek myth, Orpheus journeys to the underworld to attempt to retrieve his beloved Persephone. Harry Potter periodically receives messages of love and support from his deceased mother that help to sustain him through his many trials.

Tibetan tradition teaches that there is a bardo state between worlds where the spirits of our loved ones can rest on their transition to their final destination, and where we may be able to join them to connect. Indigenous peoples such as the Anishnabe hold ceremonies to invite the spirits of their departed loved ones in to teach, guide, and heal. Mexican tradition has an annual "Day of the Dead" where not only are gravesites tended with feasts and flowers, but dead relatives are greeted, acknowledged and conversed with.

In the internationally popular movie *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye needs to convince his wife Golde that they should allow their daughter Tzeitel to marry her beloved Motel the tailor, rather than Lazar Wolf to whom she was betrothed. To get his wife to agree to this plan, he pretends that Goldie's beloved deceased grandma had appeared to him in a dream to give her blessing to this new idea of a love match. Tevye knew the power of dreams for his wife, and that a dream-visit with a message from the other side would have an unarguable impact on her. So, taking no chances, in his fabricated dream scene, Tevye wakes up Goldie and reports what he had been "told" in a dream by her grandma: That she is giving her blessing to the match. Tevye's ploy of reporting visits from beyond the grave finally convinced Goldie of the validity of this newfangled plan of marrying for love. This was the most powerful message for Golde, and although her husband told a white

lie in the service of allowing his daughter to marry the man of her own dreams, there was no doubt for either him or Golde that a visit from beyond the grave was a possible and viable experience.¹

Dreaming of a loved one after their death almost universally brings a sense of peace and comfort to the dreamer, as well as an opportunity to put closure on any unfinished business that might be lingering in the relationship before the death. Sometimes our loved ones come as themselves, or sometimes we can recognize them in another form as they come to comfort us in our sleeping or our waking dream states. When my dad died, my mother reported that after a few days had passed, then every day for a full week a bright red male cardinal came and tapped at her bedroom window. She knew in her soul that it was her beloved Bud coming to connect. Never before had this happened, and she was immensely comforted by this waking dream visit. Now whenever anyone in my family sees a cardinal, we all say, "Hi dad, so nice to see you!"

My first dream visitation from a departed beloved actually came from my cat Ashorka. She came to visit in a dream I had a few months after her death. In it, she assured me that she was happy and would be a guide to me when my time came to cross over as well. She was one of the lucky ones- she died peacefully in her sleep at the ripe old cat age of 16 years. She is my role model for a good death. In her life I referred to her as a gray Buddha in a fur suit, and her name actually came to me in a dream about a cat gazing deeply into my eyes when we first brought her home from the shelter. She was frequently my co-therapist and would slip down to my office and do therapy with me. She seemed to have an innate understanding of who needed their leg rubbed or a warm, furry visitor in their lap at just the right moment.²

I wonder if it is easier for animals to cross over these thresholds, since they do not seem limited by our view of what is "real" or not. And perhaps the animals and their people continue to share a soul connection after they depart, as well as in life, particularly in the case of our animal familiars, a

¹ Schiller, "Modern Dreamwork: New Tools for Decoding Your Soul's Wisdom", pg. 164, Llewellyn Publishers, 2019

² Schiller, "Modern Dreamwork: New Tools for Decoding Your Soul's Wisdom", pg. 165, Llewellyn Publishers, 2019

Wiccan term, or daemons, and term made popular by the Golden Compass books.

Let us now look more closely at how we can connect with our departed, and then how we can recognize and differentiate a “visitation” from a dream where grandma or dad feature as a dream character. The following are a series of steps or states of being I have found useful in connecting with departed loved ones:

1. Bring clearly into your consciousness that you have a desire to connect, a desire for that visit. We tend to attract into our lives that which we look for and pay attention to, and it works for this goal as well. Say it out loud, or write it in your dream journal before going to sleep. It can be very simple: “I’d like to connect with my husband.”

2. If you are a skeptic, bring in that “willing suspension of disbelief”. Allow yourself to not only want to connect with your mom or sister, but allow that it is possible. If necessary, you can tell yourself that since none of us know for sure what happens after we die, it is just as likely as not that the soul retains the energetic imprint of our loved one even after the body is gone.

3. Extend an invitation. In life, if we want a friend or family member to come over for dinner or a party, we generally have to extend an invitation first. The same may be true for our friends and family in the spirit realm: They may be hanging around simply waiting to be invited first. My instincts tell me to give the departed at least a few weeks to get settled after the death of their body before requesting a visit however.

4. Learn to recognize what is a dream. A dream can be the images we see or the stories we have while asleep. It can also be a sensation, or a feeling, or even a scent. Tom smelled his wife’s perfume one night in his dream and knew she had visited. Those in-between zones between waking and sleeping, and then between sleep and wakefulness Carl Jung called the hypnopompic and the hypnogogic zones. These are also valid dream states. And finally, some dreams come to us while we are wide-

awake, such as my mom's cardinal visitation. One hallmark of a visitation dream is that it feels very real.

5. Stay with it. Don't give up if you don't get a response right away. You may need to incubate a dream inviting or requesting a visit for several nights or weeks before getting a response. Incubating a dream means setting an intention of what you would like to dream about before you go to sleep at night, and often writing it out in your dream journal or saying it out loud to give it strength. This method can be used for many issues, dilemmas, or requests. My book *“Modern Dreamwork: New Tools for Decoding Your Soul's Wisdom”* devotes a whole chapter to this. Know too that spiritual beings have “a life of their own”, and may not be available to simply come when you call.

6. People can show up in our dreams as a metaphor or a symbol for something, or as a visitor from the other side. Some dreams are processing or release dreams; they help us to grieve and process our feelings of loss and sadness. To differentiate, in a visit there is often a visceral or physical element that is not there when it is symbolic. You may feel a physical sensation or a smell a scent, as Tom did. I hear the tone and timbre of my dad's voice when he visits as if he were in the room speaking with me. My dream circle member Margo could feel her mom hugging her. The energetic quality of the person may be there, whether they have come as themselves or in animal spirit form. These dreams are often very vivid.

7. Finally, there seems to be a consensus that a feeling of deep connection and awe or joy exists in a visitation dream. Often there is little story line to this type of dream, the connection and bonding is the main event. They frequently leave a lasting impression and the dreamer wakes with strong emotions

Usually, the deceased will seem happy, healthy, and perhaps younger than they were when they passed. They may come bearing a message for you, to clear up any unfinished business on earth, or simply to assure you they are still with you. It is an opportunity to get greater closure, and the dreamer may feel profoundly changed by the experience. They may visit just once, on anniversary occasions, or whenever you call. There is no right or wrong way to dream or to establish this connection.

May you have the connection you are seeking, and may your dreams bring you the comfort of coming home.

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