
This book can rightly be regarded as a step-by-step guide to interpreting and making useful meaning of dreams for personal transformation. Written by an expert therapist who makes dream work a central part of his practice, this book will be a valuable addition to therapists of any theoretical background and any level of experience in dream work who want to enhance their ability to work with their clients’ dreams. The book’s Jungian references will help orient professionals, but the overall accessibility of the book and its plethora of examples make it ideal for laypeople who are interested in learning how to understand and work with their dreams on their own. In fact, it would be hard to identify another book so ideally suited to teaching individuals how to begin working with their dreams alone without any reference to a “dream professional.” Bogart has managed to strike a perfect balance between the
theoretical grounding and references professionals warrant and the number and type of examples the average person can understand and apply without any special education. His development of what certain dream dynamics represent and how they can be used for personal growth is expressed in terms foundational enough for everyday understanding but further contain, for the professional, the subtleties and ramifications that will add value to professional dream workers and psychotherapists.

The book is divided into halves, concluding with a shorter third portion. The first part presents the techniques and processes used in Bogart’s way of doing dream work, including their origins in different psychological models and traditions. The emphasis is on how dreams, however baffling or superficially obscure, can serve as windows of insight to the self and relationships, revealing hidden wisdom and healing potential. The second part delves more deeply into Bogart’s largely Jungian approach, providing not only a more in-depth scholarly basis for his work but also grouping his many examples to illustrate core Jungian principles and how they play out in dream-oriented therapy, including chapters on archetypal themes, unfolding complexes in dreams, the persona and shadow dream work, the anima and animus in dreams, and dream work and individuation. Additional chapters discuss the use of creating and working with dream mandalas, synchronicity and dreams, and the spirit and the body in dreams. The last section is an in-depth case history illustrating all of the principles presented in the book taken from Bogart’s work with a gay male client showing how his dream imagery changed over time, helping his healing process advance and at times foreshadowing the growth, integration, and individuation that would take place.

One of the greatest strengths of this book is its clear presentation of a step-by-step process anyone can use to work with dreams. Bogart shares his method rather than stepping behind the obfuscation of what actually happens and jargon frequently used to maintain professional elitism. The second chapter (pp. 22–24) lays out the process Bogart uses on his own as a dreamer and when working with clients in language anyone can understand and with techniques anyone can practice. These processes are illustrated time and time again in different circumstances in the hundreds of examples provided.

The numerous examples from real cases—most of them Bogart’s clients but sometimes from Bogart’s own experiences and dreams—not only make the writing extremely clear in terms of what to do and how to do it but also in terms of what kinds of immense gifts dreams represent. It would be hard to imagine anyone’s reading this book without being inspired to work with his or her own dreams immediately, the author makes such a compelling case. Story after story shows how, even for people who feel beaten down and hopeless in waking life, their dreams contain what they need to heal and hold up a mirror of their own resplendency in wholeness.

Different aspects of Bogart’s technique are illustrated time and time again, gently educating the reader in how to work with dreams, especially how to make the connections between what might appear to be mundane, baffling, or
even disturbing imagery that will unlock the symbolism in terms meaningful to the dreamer. Bogart provides a list of questions (p. 23) to guide dreamers through a process to unpack the meaning of all dream elements that anyone can use, and throughout the book in his examples and in short essay sections, he shows how a sophisticated understanding of Jungian symbolism can further extend this interpretive process.

The contribution made by a grounding in Jungian symbolism does not overtake the book, leaving the layperson hopelessly adrift, but it is clear that this kind of expertise brings a level of sophistication that can expand dream work exponentially. Bogart is careful not to make an explicit case that dream work will be more successful with a skilled Jungian therapist, but clearly a large proportion—though not necessarily a majority—of his examples are heavily reliant on understanding universal associations with many symbols, not just personal ones.

The second half of the book, which is far more explicitly Jungian in terms of its organizing dream casework to demonstrate how Jungian principles play out through dreams places a greater demand on the reader to understand and agree with this particular theoretical perspective. Although these chapters are likely to be more informative for professionals, lay readers will still find much of value and interest in the way the examples illustrate what are likely to be familiar problems or dilemmas dreamers face in waking life.

A fascinating offering in the book is creating dream mandalas, a technique the author evolved in his therapy practice based on one Jung wrote about. These mandalas are circular diagrams on which the dreamer (or therapist) plots key dream elements, usually in oppositions or squares depicting contrasting dynamics, characters, feelings and so forth as points on the circle, such as male/female, weak/strong, good/evil, and the like. By drawing lines connecting these elements, it is possible to recognize relationships not necessarily evident in the dream and to view the mandala as a snapshot of the psyche at the time the dream takes place. These mandalas can also be used to trace the repetition and evolution of dream elements as a series of mandalas over time, illustrating greater individuation and healing as the dreamer evolves. Bogart devotes an entire chapter to this technique toward the end of the book (chapter 10). Unfortunately, the placement of this chapter seems rather late since examples of mandalas have been presented frequently throughout earlier chapters with only minimal explanatory text, rendering them hard to understand and their value equally hard to appreciate until the explanation finally appears.

Clearly the emphasis of this book is, as its title suggests, self-healing, and this hopeful message is presented realistically and with credible understatement through virtually all of the examples, including the disarmingly frank self-revelations of the author’s own struggles. Even without the capstone chapters on synchronicity and dreams, and spirit as it appears in dreams, a compelling case is made by example in preference to theory that dreams hold the key to self-understanding, self-healing, and even self-transcendence.
It is not a stretch to say that this is a book of hope, a book that will inspire and empower readers of any level of experience or expertise to unleash the potential of the apparently mundane revelations given to them every night. Bogart shows how dreams are blessings broadcast, and that anyone can access their foresight, hindsight, and insight for personal growth.

The Author

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