

Ask Connie— A Lion Dream

Connie Myslik-
McFadden

Dear Connie—

Last night I dreamed I was in a dense jungle, and a huge lion with a big shaggy mane was stalking me. I ran away through the jungle, terrified, but each time I thought I was free of him he showed up again. I tried to climb a tree, but I couldn't climb high enough, and he reached up and clawed my foot. I couldn't get away. I woke up screaming, in a cold sweat. Why would I have a dream like that?

Sincerely, —Linda

Dear Linda—

That's a dream worth exploring! The answers to a few simple questions may help you understand why you had such a vivid, powerful, and frightening dream:

- How did you feel in the dream, and when you awakened? You've already said you were terrified in the dream and you woke up screaming—so you've answered that question.

- Can you give the dream a title? A title focuses your attention on what might be the deeper meaning in the dream.

- Do you recognize characters or the setting of the dream? Do you recognize anything from this dream that relates to the rest of your life? Do a reality check—if you watched the movie, “The Light and the Darkness” recently, which is about man-eating lions, that is probably relevant.

- What are your associations to lions, the jungle, having your

foot clawed? Is there anything powerful in your external or internal life that you might be trying to run away from? Have you lost your footing, or are you in danger of doing so?

- What would you like to know about this dream? You've asked why you would have this dream. Are there other questions?

I'm going to assume, for the purposes of this column, that you have answered those questions for yourself. If I were working with you in person, other questions might arise. Then, we would play a game called, “If it were my dream...” So I'm going to play that game with you.

If it were my dream, I would want to know why this lion is chasing me. I remember a series of lion dreams I had over a period of years in which I tried in vain to escape from fierce lions—sometimes one lion, sometimes an entire pride of lions. These were nightmares, and they terrified me.

It took quite a while for me to realize I was running from my own power, which was actually scary to me. The lions were in fact allies, demonstrating the strength, assertiveness, and inde-

pendence I hadn't been able to claim in my own life. Once I understood that, and was able to claim those qualities in myself, I stopped having lion dreams.

I wonder whether the lion in your dream could in truth be an ally.

In a Dreamwork Group, each person would have the opportunity to ask questions of you, which you could answer or not, depending on your comfort level. Then, with your permission, group members would take a few minutes to re-enter your dream, and they would share their “dreams of your dream”. These imaginal “dreams” could greatly enlarge your perspective on the meaning of your dream.

There are other group techniques, such as Dream Theatre, which can contribute a great deal towards expanding one's understanding of dreams. Remember, though, it is your dream. Though others can contribute to your understanding, no one else should try to tell you what the



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dream means.

The last part of this process is to find a way to honor the dream. This could be something like making a bumper sticker saying, for example, "Make Friends with Lion," writing a poem or drawing the dream, re-entering the dream to dialogue with the lion, or using an object to hold the energy of the dream.

Remember, dreams are messages from the unconscious, gifts which, if opened, can contribute enormously to one's self understanding. Keeping a dream journal, sharing dreams with a friend or spouse, and working with dreams in individual therapy or in a Dreamwork Group are all worthwhile ways to enrich one's life through consciously working with dreams.

These ideas are based on the theories of Carl Jung and Robert Moss, plus my more than twenty-five years of experience as a dreamworker. Both Jung and Moss have written many fascinating books on the subject of dreams. ■

Blessings— Connie

Do you have a relationship question?

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Connie Myslik-McFadden, MSS, LCSW, is a psychotherapist in Bozeman with 25 years of experience working with individuals, couples and groups. She leads workshops, retreats and teaches Dreamwork and Pathwork. Connie devoted 9 years to Jungian analysis, training, and supervision, after graduating from the Bryn Mawr School

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