

Ask Connie—

Connie Myslik-McFadden, MSS, LCSW

Dreamwork in Groups

“Lightning Dream Game” at the
Robert Moss center [mossdreams.com]



Dear Connie,

I have done some dreamwork in therapy over the years, always one-on-one. It has been helpful, but I'm not in therapy now and am considering joining a dreamwork group. Can you explain the pros and cons of being part of such a group?

Sincerely,
—Sally

Dear Sally,

There are two basic types of dreamwork groups. One is a group of peers, essentially a leaderless group, in which members share their dreams and the others in the group offer insights based on their knowledge of dream symbols and their knowledge of the dreamer. This can be quite helpful, and it's free! The downside of this kind of group is that often it's a group of friends, with relationships outside the group.



Connie Myslik-McFadden, MSS, LCSW, is the author of the new novel, “Willow’s Gift.” She is a psychotherapist with 30 years of experience working with individuals, couples and groups. She leads workshops and retreats, and teaches Dreamwork and Pathwork. Connie devoted 9 years to Jungian analysis, training, and supervision, after graduating from the Bryn Mawr School of Social Work. She went on to graduate from the Barbara Brennan School of Healing, and Society of Souls, a kabbalistic school of healing. She is the author of

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What tends to happen is that not only is there likely to be a fair amount of projection, but the group process can become too familial. In other words, members can either hold back their insights because they don't want to hurt a friend's feelings, or they can become too outspoken, analyzing one another's dreams in inappropriate and potentially hurtful ways.

The other kind of group has a leader, someone with training and experience working with dreams. The leader can guide the group in ways that will help each dreamer explore and understand the messages in his or her dreams. The leader can intervene if someone, for example, deviates from recounting a dream into telling a long story, or if someone jumps to a conclusion about what someone else's dream means. It is also easier for a leader to retain a certain amount of objectivity while listening to dreams, something that is more difficult for those in a peer dream group.

I have written before (see “The Gift of the Lion” at GatheringTheSoul.com) about Robert Moss' dreamwork techniques, the most basic of which is the Lightning Dreamwork Process. This can be used with individuals or in groups, and it is not dream analysis. Instead, it leads a dreamer through a set of questions which help the dreamer to get to an “AHA!”—a flash of understanding about what the dream means.

Let's assume it's a group. The dreamer tells the dream and gives it a title to help bring focus to what follows. Then the dreamer answers the following questions: 1) How did you feel in the dream, and when you

woke up? 2) What in your real life—past, present, or future—might relate to the images in the dream? 3) What do you want to know about the dream?

Then the leader and the group members have a chance to ask questions of the dreamer. The dreamer can decline to answer any question if he or she chooses. Next, each person in the group takes a minute or two to contemplate the dream and offers these words: “If it were my dream...” for example, “I would wonder what happened with my sister when we were children to cause me to not want to be around her.” That way the group members are not telling the dreamer what the dream means, but they are contributing to the dreamer’s understanding. It’s amazing how the dreamer’s understanding expands with this process.

An expanded version of this group process involves all the group members taking ten minutes or so and letting their imaginations create a dream from some aspect of the dreamer’s dream. In that case, each person shares in this way: “In my dream of your dream...,” etc. Again, amazing insights are gleaned by the dreamer.

One of my favorite group techniques is Dream Theatre, which I learned in Robert Moss’ Dream Teacher Training. Here’s an example from a recent retreat I led:

A woman with a complicated

and challenging family situation dreamed she was trying to cross a street carrying a heavy doormat over her head, arms extended. She was oh so tired; she could hardly move her feet. She dragged herself across the street with great difficulty and then hid behind a wall when she saw a group of children she recognized.

People asked the Lightning Dreamwork questions, and then I suggested the dreamer choreograph a play, choosing group members to play the roles of characters and objects in the dream. One person was her, another the doormat, another the road, one the wall, some the children. She directed them to enact their roles, and then she stepped in and played herself. Amid tears and laughter, the group became fully engaged in the drama, and the result was that the dreamer really got that she had become a doormat for others. She realized that she was exhausted and urgently needed to create more balance and more self-care in her life. It was a huge breakthrough for her.

These are just some of the possible ways to work with dreams. Different leaders will use different techniques, such as art, poetry, dream re-entry and tracking, shamanic journeying, etc. So if you’re interested in exploring your dreams, by all means join a dream group! ■

Blessings, —Connie

Do you have a psychology question? Connie Myslik-McFadden is now offering sessions in person and by phone from Bozeman and leads regular groups and workshops. Call Connie at (406) 582-7450 or e-mail: mtlionlady@gmail.com. E-mail sent to Connie is read only by Connie and will be held in strictest confidence. No identities will be published. **Disclaimer: The responses to questions in this column are for information only. Never disregard professional advice or delay seeking it because of anything you read here. Working with a skilled professional is highly recommended.**



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