

April 2010 *Sleep On It!*

Have you ever had to make a decision and told someone you'd "sleep on it"? Where did that expression come from and why is it still with us? Common sense tells us that taking time to think through a problem will lead to a good decision but this expression may take us back beyond common sense to the ancient world. In ancient Greece, people would travel to the temples of Asklepios, the god of healing. There, pilgrims would listen to sacred music and poetry, catch a Greek drama or two, bathe in holy waters and wait to be called. When it was their turn, they then would sleep in the temple, hoping for a physical or emotional healing that would take the form of the god visiting him or her in a dream. They would hope to wake up cured or with a prescription for cure. Finding help and solutions was associated with sleep and dreams. This practice continued for a thousand years, and after Christianity continued on in the form of sleeping on the grave of a saint or holy person hoping prayers would be answered or at least help gained for ones petitions.

This practice, called "dream incubation", is alive and well today and is an easy way to aid your life and connect with your soul. Through dream incubation you can use your dreams for creative ideas, problem solving and decision making. We are so much more than we know; wiser, calmer, fearless and intuitive. To learn to tap into your own wisest self, continue reading!

Dream Incubation (in a nutshell)

Did you know that all throughout recorded history artists, inventors, authors and others have credited their dreams as their creative source? Here are a few things you can do to begin to mine your dreams for their best "jewels".

- Write down your question (or situation for which you want guidance) and all the pros and cons that you can think of. Take a few minutes to journal on all the issues that come up as you think of the situation. This is important whether it is a practical question such as "should I go back to school?" or something more amorphous like, "what is the nature of my fear of public speaking?" or something creative like, "what should I write about?"
- Distill your discussion down to one key question. A long, complex question will be more difficult to sleep on. "Should I paint my room green or blue?" not, "Should I paint my room forest green because of my love of forests especially the damp smell that makes me think of....?" Keep it simple.
- Have a pad or journal and pen handy so you don't have to move too much in the morning to record it. Repeat your question over and over to yourself as you fall asleep.
- When you wake up, whether in the middle of the night or the next morning, write down whatever you were dreaming. Write it down without censoring yourself because at first glance, the dream will not usually appear to answer your question.
- Without focusing on your question, unpack your dream. Work on the dream until you have found the message. (More on how to understand your dreams next time!)
- Now go back and see if you can connect the dream's message to your question. It's not always obvious but with practice, all the answers you seek will be clear to you. I recently had a decision to make about taking on a new obligation and said I'd sleep on it and decide in the morning. That night I dreamt about a situation that was quite anxious, followed by a scene where a task I had to perform wasn't as unpleasant as I imagined. The dream first pointed out my fears and then told me clearly that it won't be so bad! That's all we have to do... sleep on it!