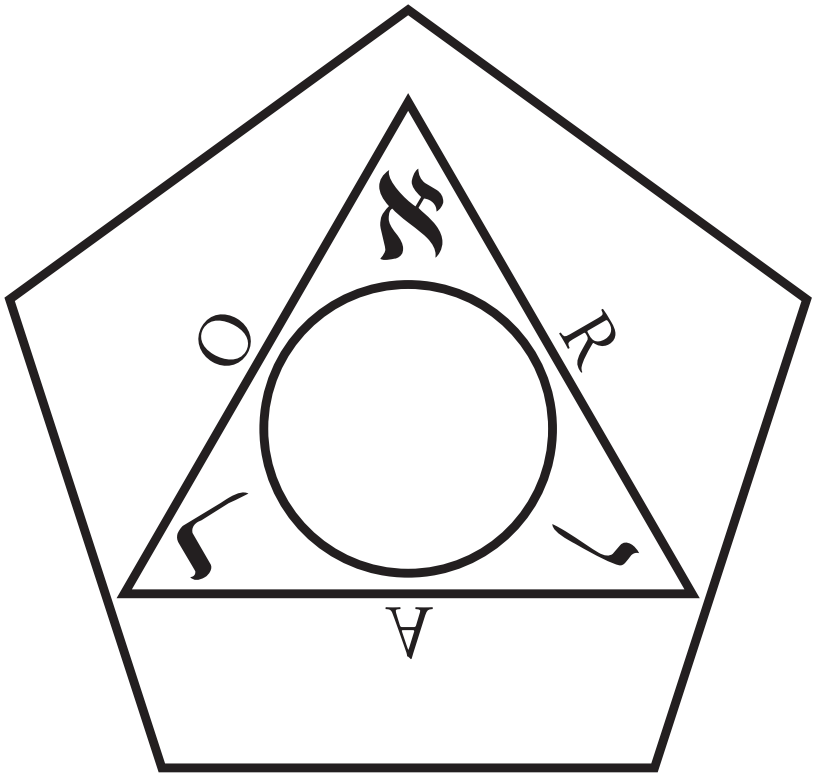
Academy of Reflection

— COURSE MATERIAL —



Fundamental Experiments in Dreamwork

AOR1120

Prerequisite Courses

- *Basic Methods in the Intentional Practice of Awareness (AOR1000)*

Prerequisite Reading

- *None*

Course Guidelines

- None

Introduction

In many of our degrees, you have been encouraged to develop your mind. We tend to think of the mind as our conscious awareness. However, there is far more to the mind than we are ever entirely aware of at any given moment. Holistic maturation demands integrity, and integrity is the result of integration. Therefore, it is important to integrate the conscious and unconscious mind as much as possible, without breaking the due bounds of either. Dreamwork is a safe and time-tested method of performing such work.

We know that dreams have a significant potential for aiding holistic maturation. Dreaming is one of the psyche's methods of sorting out information, forming associations, and solving problems. Dreaming also serves as one of the means by which the unconscious mind communicates with the conscious mind. Therefore, involving your conscious awareness in this process actually establishes a dialogue between these two aspects of your psyche, ideally enabling you to become more whole and healthy.

Before getting into more detail about dreamwork, there are some precautionary considerations. Dreamwork can be very exciting and fantastic, rich with imagery and symbolism that may suggest all sorts of things. For some people, it can become tempting to believe that their deeper spiritual nature, or even God, is starting to speak to them or lead them solely through the language of their dreams. However, please note that your conscious mind is in the seat of authority with regard to your behavior, your psyche is naturally designed for it to be so, and you should respect and maintain that arrangement. Always take the time to contemplate things from a rational and balanced perspective. An important tool for maintaining that balance is to share your dreams with at least one other person whom you can trust to be stable and well grounded, such as your reviewer. You should usually explore different interpretations before you allow yourself to come to any conclusions.

While many of our dreams are not recalled and thus remain unconscious, some of our dreams are remembered and may, in fact, call upon the simultaneous participation of waking consciousness. In other words, sometimes we suspect or actually become aware that we are dreaming. We call that phenomenon lucid dreaming, knowing that we are dreaming while we are dreaming. Though there are methods for and rewards from developing one's capacity for lucid dreaming, the benefits from dreamwork are not limited to lucid dreaming. In fact, this course is not directly concerned with lucid dreaming, and it is suggested that you not begin any investigation or experimentation along those lines until after completing the work in this course.

In dreams, we are often confronted with imagery that may be enthralling, titillating, confusing, threatening, or even horrifying. These experiences are sometimes so realistic and intense that we may not be able to distinguish them from our waking world. It's easy to see why the world of dreams might be thought of as a world of its own. After all, in dreams unexpected events happen and people act and speak without our conscious direction. In fact, according to the spiritual traditions of many cultures, the dream world is a real world, paralleling and interacting with the physical world, though operating according to different laws.

For our purposes, the dream world is a world of symbolism, mythology, and psychology. By examining the imagery, themes and your emotional responses to your dreams, you can become aware of previously unknown conflicts or potentials in your own psyche. For example, a dream involving an argument between a man and a woman about finances might actually be symbolic of the dialogue between conflicting needs of stability and spontaneity in one's life, with the finances representing one's energy. Your reaction to the argument and characters would probably serve as a good starting place for reaching a more satisfactory balance between stability and spontaneity. The basic point is that remembered and lucid dreams can be a source of information about you which can, in turn, lead to greater wholeness and maturation.

Interpreting Your Own Dreams

There are many different schools of thought regarding dream interpretation. Some say dreams refer to the past, some say they are most relevant to the present, and others consider them a rehearsal or preparation for the future. Certain viewpoints rely on a complex archetypal symbology, or a belief that all dream elements refer to specific instincts, drives, and ego defenses. Others begin with the assumption that dream symbolism is highly personal and flexible.

It seems reasonable to conclude that there is some truth to each of these positions. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that your dreams will conform to whatever method of interpretation you wish to practice. For these reasons, we assume that, ultimately, nobody can be more qualified than you to discover the meaning in your dreams, though input from others can be quite valuable. Once you begin to pay more attention to this dialogue between the conscious and unconscious, you will find your own characteristic patterns of imagery and symbolism. At times, these may clearly refer to unfinished business from the past. On other occasions, they may help you work out immediate issues, or lead you into new directions for the future. They can certainly speak to you on all these levels.

General Guidelines

When interpreting your dreams, try to remember a few important ideas. First, it is largely the interaction between the various aspects of your own psyche that is creating the dream. Second, dreams are usually highly symbolic. Third, interpretations can yield insights on personal, social, and spiritual levels.

It is very important to remember that your psyche and experiences supply the canvas and paints of your dreams. Even more importantly, it is within your unconscious mind that the brushes and strokes are applied which put your dreams together. This is important because your dreams often involve people, places, and things that seem very familiar. Therefore, if you interact with your spouse, parent, or a close friend in your dream, remember that you most probably have not made significant psychic contact with the actual person. Rather, you have seen an image of the person provided by your own mind and experience. Likewise, dreams about spiritual beings are far less likely to be direct interactions with such beings than they are with elements of your own psyche.

It is also important to remember that it is primarily your psyche that constructs whatever pleasures, pains, difficulties or curiosities you may experience in a dream. For instance, if you have a dream about your spouse being unfaithful, it would be unfair to wake up and act with jealousy or suspicion toward your spouse. Instead, realize that this dream may very well say more about you and your own feelings than it does about your spouse. "Projection" is an important word to remember in this context, for we project our own emotions and desires onto the characters in our dreams just as a movie projector puts images on a screen.

This leads us to the second point: Try to uncover the hidden messages within your dreams. Although a dream may well be taken at face value, there may yet be more to it. Your unconscious mind often creates seemingly concrete imagery to help you experience and work out more abstract problems. In the preceding example, the dream of your spouse's affair might well be a symbol for the consequences that come from inattention to a deeper sense of meaning and purpose in one's life. In effect, the spouse could represent your spirit, which you have denied and which is demanding more attention. The message could be that you need to work on a more intimate and nurturing relationship with your spirit, and to stop playing a role that has been accepted from others. If this facade is allowed to continue, you might run the risk of losing touch with the gifts that make you a truly unique and valuable individual. On the other hand, the dream might simply be a reminder of your own insecurities in relationships. The key thing to remember is that dreams, just like any good story, usually have underlying themes and messages.

When you start trying to find a hidden meaning, try to be open to possibilities at all levels. In our ongoing example, there are both personal and social aspects to the dream. We have discussed much of what you might gain as personal insight. However, the dream may well speak about trouble that does in fact exist in the marriage. In another instance, perhaps in a dream of losing a race with your friends, your unconscious may be saying that you and your friends are creating a more competitive atmosphere than you would prefer. In short, remember that a human being is a creature living in both a private context and a social context, and these two dimensions continually interact, even in our dreams.

Finally, you are advised to keep in mind that balance is an important part of dream interpretation. It is very easy to interpret dreams as entirely bright and encouraging on the one hand, or as completely dark and foreboding on the other. A single dream may have many layers of meaning, and like any good teacher, they often combine encouragement with critique.

An Interpretive Method

Of course, it's quite easy to say that dreams are symbolic and that all you need do is search out their hidden meanings. It is quite another to fully delve into all that symbolism and consistently come up with valid and useful insights. The method recommended here is comprised of examining the significant aspects of a dream from a subjective viewpoint. Subjectively examining dream elements means trying to understand each element's purpose from its own unique perspective. The way this interpretation is accomplished is through identifying oneself with the thing or character and then trying to verbalize its thoughts, feelings, functions or purposes in the context of the dream.

As an example, let's examine a dream from Ron, a new Master Mason and Junior Steward of his lodge. Ron had a bizarre nightmare in which an ugly green monster was biting off peoples' fingers while clicking a television remote. Ron assumed its identity and asked:

> *Why am I ugly? Why green? Why am I biting off peoples' fingers? Why am I clicking the remote?*

These were Ron's answers:

> *As the monster I am ugly because I don't know how to be attractive, to be liked. I am green because I am rotten and also because I am envious of the beauty and joy in other's lives. As the monster I bite off people's fingers because that way their hands become useless. I click the remote because I wish I could just change everyone's channel.*

Ron followed this with the subjective views of a useless hand and the television remote.

> *As a useless hand I can no longer point at anyone in blame. As the remote I have no mind of my own. I only serve my master.*

While working on his dream, Ron realized that he had recently been complaining to the Worshipful Master of his lodge about other brethren not seeming serious enough about their duties in the lodge. It then became apparent to him that he was envious of their ability to be relaxed and informal with each other, while he felt uptight and competitive. In effect, as the Junior Steward Ron had begun to feel like the lodge's remote control. He was also fearful that his brethren would point their fingers at him in the way that he had pointed his finger at them. The dream also revealed to Ron that he had a deep mistaken belief that being meek and submissive is what it takes to be considered a good person. Interpreting the dream in this manner enabled Ron to relax and enjoy his duties as Junior Steward while also being more assertive. His attitude and demeanor improved, leading him to establish better relationships with his brethren and feel more comfortable in the lodge.

Using this method of interpretation helps you establish your own dream vocabulary. Nobody can determine for you that a particular image must mean a particular thing. Your personal thoughts, feelings, and life experiences determine which images your unconscious mind uses in its effort to work with your consciousness. Therefore, as you become more attentive to your dreams and more experienced at looking for their deeper meanings, your conscious and unconscious will learn how to relate with each other in a way that is especially natural and effective for you.

There are two levels at which you can do such dreamwork effectively. You can choose to be very dedicated and make it a structured part of your life. On the other hand, you may prefer to rely on dreamwork as an occasional contributor to your holistic maturation. In either case, you can reap significant rewards. The degree to which you work with your dreams is simply a matter of your own preferences and judgment. However, you are encouraged to at least record and contemplate those dreams that are especially vivid and memorable.

In order to make dreamwork a structured part of your life, you need to begin keeping a journal or an audio recorder near your bed. You can then use your dreams either freely, or focused as a means of gaining insight into particular issues. To work freely with your dreams, simply make notes on the basic information of every dream you recall from the previous night. Your notes might take the following form:

> *Where: a parking garage*
>
> *When: at night, about 10:00, but it seemed like 20 years ago, when I was a teen*
>
> *Who: me, my best friend from that time, and an unknown man*
>
> *What: washing a red car together*
>
> *Feelings: it felt good, we were working and having fun together like old times*

This information requires only a minute or two of your time, yet provides you with enough clues for performing a full interpretation at a later time. Before you begin your interpretation, you might want to write down a few more details. For instance, you might record the following:

> *The parking garage was very clean and empty. My best friend and I never even spoke with each other. The unknown man seemed like he might be the owner of the car. He just smiled a lot and patiently watched us. The car was very nice and plush. It was a four-door and had all the extras.*

It would also be useful to review dreams of the previous few days to see if there are any recurring images or themes. You would then be ready to do an interpretation, including the subjective views for each element in the dream. As you did so, you would make whatever notes were necessary to formulate and record your understanding of the dream.

While structured dreamwork is a great tool for holistic maturation, it can be so time consuming as to interfere with your other duties. In fact, it might become somewhat draining because the intense focus on dreaming can potentially interfere with natural sleep patterns. Therefore, you may choose to only do occasional dreamwork of this nature, which can be quite rewarding. The difference with this method is that you only record notes and perform interpretations for dreams that are particularly vivid or intriguing. Again, it is helpful for you to look back over previous notes for recurring images and themes. You might find that a dream you just had could help you gain insight into an entire series of dreams spread out over months or even years.

An Alternative Method

The following technique may be easier for some persons and require less time, while also providing valuable experience in different states of consciousness. It is especially useful for vivid dreams. It is not unusual for vivid dreams to lead one directly from sleep to a state of consciousness that is between normal wakefulness and true dreaming. In this state, called hypnogogic, mental images and thoughts can continue to spontaneously arise, yet the dreamer is also conscious and aware that he is lying in bed, awakening from a dream. This state can also be induced by the dreamer attempting to slip back into a dream from which he has just started to awaken. You can take advantage of this state of consciousness for dream interpretation.

As you begin to awaken from a vivid dream, allow yourself to go back into it. It is not necessary to fall back into sleep. Rather, you can simply relax and slide into the hypnogogic state, attempting a visual remembrance of the dream. As you do this, mentally ask about the nature of the dream or any of its parts. Then just relax and wait for the answer. Often the response will be immediate, and may be a feeling or an intuitive understanding. Sometimes a single word may suddenly come to mind that makes everything clear. Just remain open and trust that the answer will come to you. As with the other method, it is recommended that you keep notes in a journal.

Part 1 – Practicing Dreamwork

Choose a symbol or teaching from your Masonic experience that seems particularly mysterious to you. For one or two weeks, as you fall asleep each night, mentally repeat the following phrase: "My dreams will teach me about _____." Fill in the blank with the thing you have chosen. Consider also expressing your desire in the form of a prayer.

When you awaken, record whatever you recall of your dreams. At some point, perform discursive meditation to carefully contemplate how the imagery and events of your dream might reveal more light on the symbol or teaching that you are studying. When you feel that you have received sufficient information, you can coordinate your experiences into a meaningful statement of deeper understanding regarding the symbol or teaching. Write a thorough explanation of your understanding and share it with your reviewer or another brother.

Objectives:

- Document at least 360 minutes in discursive meditation on dreams, and 60 minutes in discussion of them with a brother.

Part 2 – Reflective Writing

Reflect upon your experiences with Part 1. In at least 1000 words, summarize your experience, noting how it was personally meaningful to you in one or more of the following areas:

- Understanding of self
- Relationships with others
- Experience and appreciation of Freemasonry
- Relationship with the Divine