

SECOND IN A SERIES OF 10

PARANORMAL RESEARCH SERIES

BY HENRY REED, PhD

The Dream Helper Circle

Edgar Cayce's Unique Path into Psychical Research

When Marcia called to invite Eleanor, John, and some other friends over to her house for a dream helper circle, they knew exactly what to do. They would make a point of going to bed with the conscious decision to dream on Marcia's behalf, and then to remember and record their dreams to share at the gathering at Marcia's house the next day.



The dream helper circle held at Marcia's request is but one of countless such healing activities shared by students of the Cayce material—and others—since the creation of this special approach to gaining guidance from the dreams of many. It was young people sharing their dreams at the A.R.E. Camp in the mid-1970s that first inspired the creation of this method.

Giving a Little Help with our Dreams

Ever since the dreamwork movement of the 1980s brought dreams into national awareness, almost everyone has come to learn about the creative, healing, and spiritual potential of dreams. Yet only about a third of the population remembers a dream on any given morning, and even fewer do anything with those dreams. The new method that the camp children inspired almost guarantees that not only are people more likely to remember a dream, as it is desired for a specific purpose, but they will also discover how that dream can be truly helpful to a specific task at hand. Those two qualities provide highly significant credentials!

The method's effectiveness arises from two well-known phenomena:

- 1) the power of altruism to inspire folks to go beyond their presumed abilities; and
- 2) the power of a group, and its members' comparative points of view, to get a clearer perspective on something that's otherwise ambiguous.

What happens in a dream helper circle? A shared purpose creates intuitive insights, reveals truths, and heightens empathy.

When Marcia's friends, in response to her call for help, promise to remember a dream for her and then come together to share these dreams, they have no idea if they will mean anything to Marcia. Their dreams may seem like the typical mysteries they might

normally discard. There's no dream interpretation expert to help them out. So what are they to do?

Shared Dream Themes Reveal Truths

When Marcia's friends share their dreams, they can also seek commonalities between them. While they do so, Marcia has her back turned toward the group, so they have no idea of how she is responding to their attempted analysis.

In John's dream, someone is sitting at a red light at an intersection, and then the light goes green. The person begins to enter the intersection when, off to their right they see another car crossing into the intersection at high speed. The person brakes, then enters the intersection when it is safe to do so.

In Eleanor's dream, someone gets up from watching TV to go into the kitchen to make a cup of coffee. The person gets some cream from the refrigerator, and as they are about to pour it into their coffee, they discover that the cream has soured! They find a fresh carton of cream for the coffee, then return to the TV as the show resumes.

The group notices something similar in these two dreams: Someone is involved in a habitual pattern. Something unexpected occurs. The person notices a problem in time to adjust/change in order to avoid an undesirable event. In the group, there are many variations on the theme which provide nuances that offer greater understanding. For example, when the surprise happens, someone is in motion moving from one place or activity to another with intention.

From such commonalities, the group begins to discuss the life situations to which these commonalities might apply. With some brainstorming, they speculate as to what is the possible topic of concern, what seems to be the obstacle that makes it a concern, and what advice do the dreams suggest. In our example, it seems that something that the focus person does regularly, with certain expectations, may have some unexpected consequences, because of an unusual event. Extra caution is advised.

When brainstorming winds down, the most interesting moment arrives

when the group has Marcia answer the question, "Has our conversation made any sense to you?" As typically happens at such a moment in the process, Marcia breaks out with a surprising exclamation, "You wouldn't believe it! Your dreams make perfect sense!"

In this case, Marcia's concern was about finances and planning. She was questioning some regular, periodic investments. The suggestion from the group's dreams was that something unexpected was going to disrupt or sour something about those investments, and that precaution was in order. The warning proved to be true; fortunately, Marcia did act on the advice of the dreams and avoided the disruption.

This example is but one of countless stories out there about what happens when a group of people intentionally tune into their dreams to help someone in need. Assisting people with their life issues is a wonderful thing. But there's more! This simple method also proved to offer some important and helpful lessons about working with dreams.



The dream helper circle fulfills Cayce's ideal of emphasizing the spiritual over the psychic.



A Different Approach to Dream Interpretation

We might define dream interpretation as the intuitive process of seeing the pattern in a dream that is relevant to waking life. As Cayce put it, seek to “correlate those truths.” His method, as extracted and made explicit by Scott Sparrow and Mark Thurston (both Cayce authors who have written on the topic of dreams), is to ignore the symbols that are so frequently focused on and instead formulate generic descriptions to reveal the dynamics in a dream. The specifics of a dream can be very captivating, but a phrase that might seem vague, such as “somebody does something in some kind of way,” or “somebody is in some kind of situation,” can be a powerful lens for the dreamer. In the dream helper circle, when people begin to explore the commonalities of multiple dreams, their responses automatically come in the form of such thematic statements, as in our example: “Someone is involved in a habitual pattern.” The fact that folks

make these types of statements quite spontaneously strongly supports Cayce’s suggestion that it is actually a natural form of perceiving and understanding events, including dreams.

The dream helper circle also adds to our understanding of dream work and it gets us beyond the typical dualistic thinking implicit in the question, “Are dreams objective or subjective?” In a dream helper circle, we discover that they can be both. Here’s how:

The method prescribes an additional important step that happens *after* the focus person has responded to the group’s analysis. The members of the circle reconsider their dreams with a simple exercise. This process goes as follows:

- 1) Create a title for the dream that describes in a few words what happens.
- 2) Next, imagine looking into a mirror while your dream title is displayed as a caption. What does the dream title say about you?
- 3) Address the focus person with this comment: “Here’s what I’m learning about myself from my dream that might be helpful to you and your concern.”

In this way, participants see that a dream can provide a meaningful, although subjective, personal slant on an external, objective, reality. Each dreamer is finding that the focus person’s concern reflects something within themselves. In John’s case, for example, he noted that being in a hurry, not considering the circumstances of others, has caused him a lot of grief. Simply checking in with his significant relationships brings him important news that he needs to reconsider his options.

And, as each individual dream reflects the dreamer’s own relationship with the focus person’s issue, an additional benefit accrues. It provides the individuals in the group a palpable sense of shared empathy. Focus people make confirming comments like, “I felt like they really tuned into what it’s like for me. I felt seen, accepted, and loved.” The collaboration has brought into the group a

shared sense of oneness, individually perceived. I’ve heard such comments as, “It seemed we agreed to meet in the mind of God at a point decided by our focus person, and then we shared what it was like from our individual perspectives.”

Psychic (ESP) Dreams and the Dream Helper Circle

What is going on in a dream helper circle? Laboratory dream research plays a role in our story. The late Robert Van de Castle, a well-known dream researcher at the University of Virginia, was a contributor to the circle’s original creation. He coined the name “dream helper,” as a play on the product *Hamburger Helper*, because he found that folks get so much help with dreams using this method. He compared it favorably to the formal laboratory studies of his own dream ESP (psychic dream) abilities.

As described in the influential book authored by Montague Ullman and Stanley Krippner, *Dream Telepathy*, “Roberto” was a frequent experimental subject in their Brooklyn laboratory. During the night, they tested Roberto’s dream ESP by monitoring his EEG (an electroencephalogram, used to monitor electrical activity of the brain), and awakened him after every dream period. Roberto was attempting to dream about a secret picture—something a woman in another room was staring at while awake all night. In the morning, when independent judges viewed a group of five pictures, they could correctly identify the one the woman had stared at simply on the basis of what the judges found in reports on Roberto’s dreams from that night, thus confirming dream ESP.

Besides suggesting a telepathic influence from the targeted picture, Roberto’s dreams provided something else that was off the record. His lab dreams, he later confided to me, would also contain references to some kind of troubling situation going on in the woman’s life, as he would later confirm when they met afterwards. It was Roberto’s “curiosity” about the personal life of the “sender” that had gained some of his dream attention.

Mark Thurston collaborated with Stanley Krippner to see if his

Maimonides Medical Center dream laboratory assessment procedures could provide the dream helper circle with statistical evidence for dream telepathy. For his doctoral dissertation, Mark created a mail-order, cross-country experiment, with a large group of people dreaming for someone mentioned in a sealed envelope that they slept on. He demonstrated that a focus person, given a large collection of dreams (some collected randomly, some were the result of folks dreaming for that focus person, others were dreams aimed at different people) could correctly identify which dreams were actually intended for their help. Again, a statistical process is used as an argument for dream telepathy.

Mark included an additional element in his experiment. He asked the focus person to consider the suggestions that came through the dreams to see if they helped with the problem. In one example, the problem concerned a skin rash and the dreams suggested a dietary change, which did, indeed, solve the problem. Therefore, the dreams were also helpful, not simply a demonstration of the statistical implication of being telepathic.

The Secret Sauce—Empathy and Rapport

Larry Walsh of Troy State University attended a session at A.R.E. Camp where several dream helper circles occurred, and he interviewed all the participants for a research study. He found the overwhelming majority of the participants judged the dreams to be pertinent and helpful to the focus question. All expressed enthusiasm in repeating their participation.

The focus people were fairly uniform in saying that the dreams were right on. They also were grateful for the tremendous bond of empathy they experienced with the group members. There is but a rare mention of “telepathy” or “ESP.” Instead, it was all about love and deep connection.

The focus people didn’t feel as if they were psychically “viewed,” but rather emotionally “joined and cared for” by their helpers. There’s a difference, and that difference may be a part of a potential Cayce “secret sauce” for improving


psychical research. The dream helper circle fulfills Cayce’s ideal of emphasizing the spiritual over the psychic. The participants respond naturally to the empathy and rapport that this exercise in paranormal guidance provides, thus normalizing the paranormal—it’s not “creepy,” but “heartwarming.”

Cayce’s Unique Approach: Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Psychic Guidance

In my dream of “the research dance,” reported in the previous (Jul-Sep ‘16) issue of *Venture Inward*, when folks were looking at the symbols that each person in the dance circle was holding up on a round sign for others to see, there erupted a fountain of sparks to provide light on their gathering. To me, this symbolizes that the dream helper circle sheds new light on the paranormal; that Cayce’s philosophy yields a unique way of approaching psychic phenomena in a DIY experimental fashion. In contrast to the traditional “scientific” approach, with its dogmatic attitude toward the myth of “objectivity by the numbers,” the Cayce protocol adds to the experiment the incredibly important component of service and helpfulness. It provides a meaningful and compelling reason for psychic phenomena to manifest. And since we all dream, it can also bypass the fears that the specter of “psychic” can evoke.

Countless hundreds of A.R.E. members have experienced the dream helper circle themselves at conferences and field programs and refer to it with a smile. The dream helper circle serves in so many ways as a wonderful ambassador to the spirit of the Cayce work. It arose spontaneously from the loving actions of children at a camp inspired by Edgar Cayce. It involves cooperation in a small group, with an ideal of being of service; it uses a comparative approach and evokes a natural ability to perceive the “truths” in a dream, as Cayce suggested.

It is a populist approach, not requiring a dream expert, but instead utilizing the often-recommended small group approach. It creates the experience of being an individual and yet one with the whole, a perspective Cayce highly valued. Finally, it helps to normalize the paranormal, while providing a natural handle on dream guidance. For example, I heard of one woman, who experienced the circle at A.R.E., and wanted to share it at home in very rural, conservative area. She and her friends enjoyed and repeated it several times. As a result, they began an *A Search for God* study group to explore Cayce’s approach to living with oneness.

Today I can readily imagine seeing dream helper circles forming all over the world. Before long, we just might be reading something like this in the news: *“Kids at an Appalachian summer camp created by the clairvoyant Christian mystic Edgar Cayce, have inspired, through their love for one another, Dream Helper Circles, a new approach to obtaining guidance and solving problems. Their special method has traveled around the world and is helping people in many countries discover a new and easy way to find answers to life’s challenges through the help of not only their own dreams, but the dreams of others.”* 

—To participate in a dream helper circle with other A.R.E. members around the world, or if you have ever participated and would like to share your experiences, please contact Henry.Reed@atlanticuniv.edu.

*Please check the website where most items in this essay have notes, links or additional resource materials available, as well as opportunities to participate in our no-fee, ongoing research project, “Normalizing the Paranormal,” at EdgarCayce-intuitionschool.org/VI-2/.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

HENRY REED, PhD, is a research psychologist by training, and the author of several books and scholarly articles describing his research developing ways of applying the concepts in the Edgar Cayce material.

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