

A review of a *Guide to the World of Dreams: An Integrative Approach to Dreamwork* by Ole Vedfelt, London & New York, Routledge, 2017

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Abstract:

In *A Guide to the World of Dreams* Ole Vedfelt defines “ten core qualities of dreams”. These core qualities are unique thematic aspects of dreams with particular therapeutic perspectives. The step-by-step structure of the book, which includes theory, illustrative case examples, and practical guidelines, makes this book applicable in the training of all professional therapists. Ole Vedfelt is a training analyst for the International Association for Analytical Psychology, a dream researcher, and author of *The Dimensions of Dreams*.

Keywords: dream interpretation, dream psychotherapy, dream-complexity, integrative dreamwork, dreamwork manual.

A Guide to the World of Dreams: An Integrative Approach to Dreamwork is structured in three parts: Part 1 provides a general introduction to the theoretical and historical perspectives of dreamwork. Part 2 goes through the 10 Core Qualities of dreams from a theoretically integrated perspective. Part 3 contains exercises and guidelines for therapeutically integrative work with the 10 Core Qualities.

At the outset of part one, Vedfelt makes a thorough review of the *psychodynamic tradition* from Freud and Jung to the present day. Next is a longer chapter about scientific dream research and the *Dreaming Brain*, a point of departure for themes of *complexity theories* and *neural network theory*. These themes are further developed throughout the book.

The neurology described in this book confirm that the dreaming brain is active in the three layers: the vital areas in the neocortex, the brainstem, and the limbic system. Portions of the cerebral cortex and “paralimbic” cortex implicated in the refinement of emotions, verifiable intuitive knowledge, social relationships, and creativity are more active when we dream than when we are awake. This underpins the view that dreams process information in significant and meaningful ways.

According to Vedfelt, the apparently inaccessible language of dreams reflects that dreams are advanced unconscious communication that he describes as *unconscious intelligence*. The main theme of the book is that *dreams are information from our unconscious intelligence to our everyday consciousness*. Vedfelt states that issues that cannot be resolved during the day with consciousness can be resolved through *unconscious intelligence* while dreaming. In Vedfelt’s vision, the *unconscious intelligence* while dreaming has a far greater capacity to synthesize knowledge than conscious thought when awake. *Unconscious intelligence* allows people to rehearse problem solving, while remaining in the safety of sleep.

The book is abundant in case material that illustrate both theory and practice. One especially touching case is of a young woman about to give birth for the first time with her baby in breach position. The woman dreamed about a complication with the fetus in relationship to her own mother. In therapeutic dreamwork, this woman found strength in taking responsibility upon herself. The following night, she dreamed that her baby told her it was ready to descend. It turned out that the baby had turned during the night and was now headed the right way for the upcoming delivery. How beautiful. Earlier in Danish, a poetic term was used to describe giving birth: “at nedkomme” (to come down – both literally and metaphorically). This is a touchingly beautiful therapeutic story, yet it is also deeply fascinating that her dream spoke in such precise poetic language.

The central portion of the book describes 10 core qualities of dreams while providing a structured step-by-step immersion into Vedfelt’s theory. Each core quality builds on the previous one thereby giving the reader an understanding of

the integrative approach to dream work. The 10 core qualities of dreams are designated as 1) *Dreams Deal with Matters Important to Us*, 2) *Dreams Symbolize*, 3) *Dreams Personify*, 4) *Dreams are Trial Runs in a Safe Place*, 5) *Dreams are Online to Unconscious Intelligence*, 6) *Dreams are Pattern Recognition*, 7) *Dreams are High Level Communication*, 8) *Dreams are Condensed Information*, 9) *Dreams are Experiences of Wholeness*, 10) *Dreams are Psychological Energy Landscapes*.

These core qualities are Vedfelt's attempt to create comprehensive insight into the function of dreams in human life. Humans are seen as self-acknowledging, interpreting, and communicating beings. Core Qualities 1 – 3 correspond to classical Freudian/Jungian perspectives. Core Quality 4 – about safe model simulations – can be tied to both psychotherapist Peter Levine's "safe place" and also to neural network models of the mind. In Core Qualities 5-8, the previously-mentioned primary concern is found: the highly condensed information found in dreams can be viewed as a system of communication matrices between unconscious intelligence and everyday consciousness. Core Quality 10 focuses on existential, spiritual and religious experience. As a special application, Vedfelt demonstrates how dreamwork based on these Ten Core Qualities can support trauma work in a separate chapter.

The third portion of the book is a richly detailed manual for practical dreamwork with the 10 Core Qualities. Everything from the ethical aspects of dreamwork to how to record one's own dreams. Guidelines are provided for each core quality with structured exercises, so they can be thematically taught one core quality after the next. Employing a built-in summary element, each chapter links back to the previous core quality's practical and theoretical aspects.

This book is relevant for anyone working with dreams. Vedfelt's model with its ten core qualities is inspiringly innovative while also including significant classical perspectives. This book is not just about understanding the client or oneself in relationship to dreams, rather its emphasis is on how the unconscious intelligence of dreams reflect humanity's extremely high potential as communicating beings – dreams are a mirror into our deep commonality. Dreams mirror human intelligence and poetic reality.

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Henrik Hass is a Danish psychotherapist MPF, a member of both the Danish Association for Psychotherapy and the Educational Board of the Danish Association for Psychotherapy. Henrik has a BA in philosophy and religious studies from University of Copenhagen. Hass has contributed to an anthology: "*The Potential of the Unconscious - Cybernetic Psychology in Practice* with the essay *The Necessary Complexity.*"