

**DREAM
IMAGES AND
SYMBOLS
A DICTIONARY**

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A Creative Breakthroughs Book



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How to Work with Symbols

Even though most people are completely unaware of it, the subconscious mind possesses a remarkable talent for self-exploration, for reviewing life's events, even for practical problem solving. In fact, individuals are much more in touch with themselves, with their relationships with others, and with their surroundings than they are consciously aware. By moving beyond simple logic and exploring an unbounded world of symbology through myth and dreams, the very realm that contains subtle indications of those things that you already know at a subconscious level, you can gain clearer insights into your life, your talents, your frustrations, your shortcomings, your relationships, and even the mission in life for which you may be best suited. Symbols provide mirror images of feelings, situations, fears, experiences, needs, potentials, and desires. The world of myth, imagination, and symbolism is universal, and the possibilities for using this untapped potential for creative expression and problem solving is nearly limitless.

At the very least, creative imaginings and dreams give individuals an objective and safe tool for bringing innermost thoughts and feelings to the conscious level where they can deal with them. Creative imaginings can provide insightful assistance in daily life.

Because there are so many types of symbols, and because a specific symbol can have so many different interpretations, each individual will be the best interpreter of their own images. Thankfully, with a little background, experience, and practice, this process is not at all difficult.

Images that are universal are called *archetypes*. These images have a similar meaning to people across time and culture. Fairy tales, legends, and myths often contain universal symbols and themes. As just one example, more than two hundred legends exist all around the world that tell the story of a Great Flood. Whether or not this story has a basis in fact, because it is so widespread, the tale has a meaning at a subconscious level beyond the story itself. In fact, when one looks closely at these flood stories to see what they have in common, there seems to be a theme of transformation and change. Therefore, to individuals the world over, the story of the Great Flood can be a universal symbol (or archetype) of being overwhelmed by

personal transformation and change. In a similar manner, the symbol of an old person is often associated with wisdom and experience, because the more one has lived, hopefully the more one has learned. Even if you are not conscious of it, there are literally hundreds of these universal archetypes of which you are already aware. Water, as the source of all life, can symbolize such things as sustenance, emotions, and even spirituality. A symbol such as a lion, or a great cat, can be associated with power or vitality.

There are also cultural and national symbols that reside in the world of imagery. For example, the symbol of a country's flag often represents patriotism (or nationalism) to citizens of that country. A crucifix is a symbol of faith to many Christians, whereas for many Jews a menorah or a mezuzah might represent the same thing. In the United States, a black cat or walking under a ladder can be considered bad luck. In Egypt, a beetle (or scarab) is symbolic of abundance and good luck. Students of the scriptures may associate a rainbow with a promise or a covenant. Throughout the world, groups of individuals have often given meaning to specific images and symbols based upon their history and experience, and that meaning has been passed along to people sharing a similar cultural background.

Because symbols are so profoundly and deeply personal, however, individuals may also associate their own feelings and thoughts with particular pictures and symbols. When these associations differ from the thoughts and feelings of others, they generally take precedence. For example, people the world over regard the symbol of the Statue of Liberty as representing *the United States, freedom, or independence*. However, to an individual employed as a tour guide for the monument, the statue could simply represent his *work*. Therefore, regardless of whether or not a symbol is universal, cultural, or individual, ultimately each person will be the best interpreter of her creative images because only that person is fully familiar with her current situation, background, experience, and thought processes.

As another example, many individuals have very emotional feelings about their pets. To a pet lover, the symbol of his or her dog could be literally associated with the dog, or it might represent love or faithfulness. Someone without a dog (and no particular feelings one way or another) might be culturally predisposed to associate dogs with man's best friend. Someone who was allergic to dogs, however, might think of dogs as representative of allergies, an irritation, or even the possibility of health problems. The underlying meaning of a specific symbol is usually very closely associated with what one personally equates to that particular image. To the subconscious mind, images contain condensed stories of events, thoughts, feelings, and experiences that mean much more than simply the image itself. By exploring these stories, you can gain valuable insights into your life, your feelings, your thought processes, your current situation, and your future.

Working with personal symbology is like listening to the advice of a trusted friend who acts as a mirror, allowing you to gain a little objectivity. It isn't that the friend's advice is somehow better than your own. It isn't magical. It isn't to be followed blindly. Rather, the process allows for a dialogue between the conscious and subconscious parts of your mind. It allows you to see things a little more

clearly. It allows you to stand back and view things from a different perspective. It makes you realize that many answers you have sought have been within yourself all along, but you just never knew how to look for them.

The potential uses for exploring creative imaginings, dreamwork, and personal symbology are nearly limitless. The following sections of this introduction present ways that images might be used for personal problem solving, for gaining insights into life's issues, even for working with children. These examples are merely guides to exploring your own images and symbols.