
Book Review / Compte rendu

Vedfelt, O. (2017). *A Guide to the World of Dreams: An Integrative Approach to Dreamwork*. London: Routledge. ISBN: 978-1-13894-807-5, 252 pages.

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ABSTRACT

In his book, Ole Vedfelt describes dreams as an inexhaustible creative resource which, throughout life, proactively contributes to the inner balance of the personality. He begins with an overview of psychological and natural scientific knowledge of dreams and dreamwork today, and introduces a theory of complexity for the integration of this knowledge. Substantiated by the relevant research, he delineates ten core qualities of dreams and illustrates these with practical dreamwork examples. Finally, the book has a manual for work with the core qualities of dreams in different settings and for different levels of expertise, such as in psychotherapy, counselling, and self-help.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans son livre, Ole Vedfelt présente les rêves comme une source de créativité inépuisable qui, tout au long de la vie, contribue proactivement à l'équilibre intérieur de la personnalité. Il donne d'abord un aperçu des connaissances actuelles en psychologie et en sciences naturelles en ce qui touche les rêves et le travail sur les rêves, puis introduit une théorie de la complexité permettant d'intégrer ces connaissances. En s'appuyant sur les études en la matière, l'auteur définit 10 grandes caractéristiques des rêves, qu'il illustre par des exemples concrets. Enfin, le livre comporte un manuel destiné à intégrer la connaissance de ces caractéristiques au travail sur les rêves, et ce, dans différents contextes et pour divers degrés d'expertise (psychothérapie, counseling, travail sur soi personnel, etc.).

Ole Vedfelt has intensively studied and worked with dreams for more than 40 years, and has internationally published both academic and popular books and articles on the subject. In his earlier book, *The Dimensions of Dreams* (2002), he provided a comprehensive examination of the most prominent psychotherapeutic schools of dream interpretation. This earlier book could be considered a preliminary guide for the integrative theory and method presented in *A Guide to the World of Dreams*. Furthermore, Vedfelt is widely recognized for his books on the levels and states of consciousness, and on the human unconscious as consisting of intelligent, self-organizing systems. *A Guide to the World of Dreams* has a tripartite structure.

Part 1: Knowledge of Dreams (Chapters 1-3)

In the first chapter, Vedfelt offers a concise description of Jungian, psychoanalytic, existential, experiential, and cognitive approaches to understanding dreams. In Chapter Two, Vedfelt comprehensively reviews research from sleep laboratories, theories of dream cognition, and the dreaming brain. He concludes, "Although much valuable knowledge about dreams has been established... There still exist significant variations in the understanding of the nature and function of dreams, as well as how to make them useful to human beings" (p. 33).

According to Vedfelt, we dream because we are complex beings who need to process information in multiple ways. Dreams provide us with differing perspectives on our lives. As a new integrative paradigm, he describes the human psyche as a complex and multileveled information network – a “cybernetic network theory.” He presents this as a meta-theory for the integration of the most valid knowledge of dreams in chapter three.

Part 2: The Ten Core Qualities (Chapters 4-13)

In Part Two, Vedfelt presents a well-structured and manageable model for dreams and dream work. He delineates 10 core qualities of dreams that reflect our interior as well as our exterior life, depending on the context. He explains the core qualities using cybernetic network theory, substantiated by clinical and natural science research. For example, there is heightened neurobiological activity in brain networks for basic emotions, social feelings, creativity, and intuitive skills when dreaming. Vedfelt describes the core qualities with a richness of convincing and emotionally moving examples from his own practice. Next, I highlight one or two salient features from each core quality.

1. *Core Quality 1: Dreams Deal with Matters Important to Us.* In dreams, the mind is liberated from the many practical duties of everyday life. This creates a surplus of capacity to process information on a higher self-organizing level than during waking.
2. *Core Quality 2: Dreams Symbolize.* Dreams can be approached as metaphors of everyday life and can have deeper symbolic meanings as well.
3. *Core Quality 3: Dreams Personify.* Dream characters have the same intellectual, imaginative, and emotional properties as persons in the real world. The dream ego has an enhanced social awareness as compared to waking life. This goes for relations in the dreamer’s exterior life, as well as for a dialogue between personified inner aspects of the personality.
4. *Core Quality 4: Dreams are Trial Runs in a Safe Place.* The narrative structures of dreams could be used to help understand the dreamer’s good, as well as inadequate, ways of dealing with life.
5. *Core Quality 5: Dreams are Online to Unconscious Intelligence.* This chapter presented experiential dreamwork that uses states of consciousness closer to the dream experience than normal waking consciousness (e.g., free association, mindfulness, evocative therapy, art therapy, body sensing).
6. *Core Quality 6: Dreams are Pattern Recognition.* According to complexity theory, there could be many sources that create a psychological phenomenon, and many different ways to develop harmonious states. Thus, there are no definitive dream interpretations. According to Vedfelt, good dreamwork seeks a “goodness of fit” with a psychic pattern in the dreamer’s waking life that gives meaning and emotional response.
7. *Core Quality 7: Dreams are High-Level Communication.* Dreams are proactive regarding optimizing psychosocial development and maturation. They also respond to all serious attempts of the dreamer to assess what is important in life.

8. *Core Quality 8: Dreams are Condensed Information.* This is understood as the creative synthesis of areas and levels of the personality, which are separated from each other during the routine thinking of everyday life
9. *Core Quality 9: Dreams are Experiences of Wholeness.* The chapter describes “supramodal” dreamwork using combinations of thought, imagery, bodily expressions, and emotions.
10. *Core Quality 10: Dreams are Psychological Energy Landscapes.* Dreams provide information about several important interests in the dreamer’s life simultaneously, and about their mutual strength at any given moment. In this section, there is a focus on peak experience dreams which are: individuation dreams, earliest remembered dreams, creative breakthrough dreams, and work with dream series.

Part 3: (Chapters 14-17)

After a well-informed Chapter 14 on dreams and trauma, Part 3 describes principles and methods for the practical work with each of the core qualities. According to Vedfelt dreamwork can be included in many contexts such as psychotherapy, counselling, groups for personal development, and even social functions. Part 3 is structured as a systematic manual with guidelines for works with individuals and groups, with instructions for counselling, analysis, and experiential dreamwork for various levels of expertise allowing for more and more complexity in the work.

Discussion

Ole Vedfelt’s writing skill is delightful, engaging, and easy to read. His knowledge of dreams seems encyclopedic, and it is rooted both in practice and great theoretical knowledge. All chapters are carefully referenced. The book contains a wealth of examples from people of all ages with diverse life situations. Part 1 is a condensed tutorial treatment of the knowledge of dreams today. In Chapter 1, Vedfelt summarizes the various dream schools in a concise manner but does not provide practical examples. References are provided for further reading. Vedfelt’s description of the dreaming brain in Chapter 2 is theoretically advanced. While the references are current, readers without a scientific background may struggle to understand the content. My main interest lies in Parts 2 and 3 of the book, which contain practical examples of dreams and dreamwork. I found it useful to begin by reading Parts 2 and 3 to orient to the work, followed by reading the first three chapters. As a psychotherapist and counsellor, I am very pleased to add this thorough and important book to my toolbox.

Reference

Vedfelt, O. (2002). *The dimensions of dreams: The nature function and interpretation of dreams.* London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

About the Author

Hanne Fogh Pedersen is a diploma psychotherapist, member of the Danish Association of Psychotherapists. She works with integrative psychotherapy in private practice. Her main interest revolves around dreamwork.

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