



## C H A P T E R 1



# Life Is the Dream

I am not the first to dip her ladle into the Milky Way. As my dream journals mounted in number, I did not know what they were about. I was confused about many things that I was seeing: Grandmother, Corn Woman, a feminine god, spirit in nature. I stumbled and fell many times attempting to live up to the gifts I received. I had the feeling I was living in a house of mirrors, trying to find which was the reflection and which was the reality as I sought to decipher the meaning of the paradigm I had uncovered. I yearned to satisfy a need rumbling deep within my being, and looking to the stars felt like a logical source to turn to; because looking to the stars is a long-held tradition of my Mexican ancestors.

Though people of the Americas have not forgotten the Cosmic Mother, the Creatrix of our existence, we *have* forgotten that her power and wisdom reside within, and that she calls us yet to reclaim our wholeness and place in the universe. We have lost the meaning of the legends and stories and how they aid us in our modern-day lives. When I encountered Corn Woman in my dreams, I pondered the identity of the

beautiful spirit who had touched my heart. I turned on my back the following morning to think on her, her name came to me in a sweet melody.

I had the dream in 1995, and it took eleven years to unravel the mystery of who she was and how she related to my cultural past. I studied history at the University of California at Berkeley because in my early adult years, I'd begun to suspect that something dreadful had occurred in my people's past. The answers I'd found only opened a mysterious box of more questions as I began my descent into time. Intimacy with my own people's culture evaded me.

### *The Call of Destiny*

The gap widened as I came upon the paradigm that contradicted the religion of my youth. Imagine my amazement at finding the feminine face of God, where the Mother is as powerful as the Father of Western Christianity. In my fundamentalist Christian childhood, the message was that the native religions were, at best, heretical and demonic.

In an odd way, I've always felt that destiny beckoned me, and certainly, there have been many forces that catapulted my life in directions that brought me face-to-face with that destiny. It called most certainly when my three-year-old sister's death occurred on October 28, 1940, three years before I was born. Other challenges set my course as well, and without them, I venture to say that I wouldn't have hastened to my appointment with it.

But my sister's death set me in motion along the course that was to be mine—even before I was born. My parents had named her after a fair-skinned, green-eyed aunt on my father's side of the family, whose name was Leonor. *Leonorsita*, as they called my sister, was also fair-skinned and had light brown hair and eyes. She was a little princess born after two boys, and when she was three years old, she was suddenly taken ill with pneumonia. My parents' grief still remained unresolved when I was born on October 27, 1943—the third anniversary of my sister's death short by only one day—and they named me *Leonor* also. On my birth certificate, my name appears in English as Eleanor. I didn't like my name, because somehow it made me feel invisible, and it sounded too harsh in Spanish. Someone once called me *León*, lion, and that made me recoil from it even more. I'm brown-skinned, my eyes are black, and I once had a jet-black mane.

Even as a child, I knew something was off kilter, but could not name it. To compound the issue, my eldest brother John married an Eleanor whose birthday was October 26. I prayed to get my sister back, and I loved the idea. But it was disconcerting to be identified with three others who had the same name. Besides, the name never really became mine; in my family I was always called *Noni*, a nickname that is

with me today. I felt displaced, and eventually I walked away from the family thinking I would leave the feelings of homelessness behind.

I open this dream map with these thoughts and feelings to let you know who I am. I have been an outsider since I was in my mother's womb. If you have picked up this book, you too have your reasons for it. Somewhere in the deepest part of your soul, you also long to find your way home. I am glad you are joining me on this path of self-discovery and truth.

### *The Dream Journey*

The Mayan dreamers/healers, the Daykeepers of Guatemala, believe that the dream will struggle against the dreamer to be forgotten.<sup>13</sup> The process of pulling back the veil that separates the dream from the waking world is one of remembering either of the worlds in which you find yourself. Becoming awake *within the dream* and learning to dream *within the waking world* takes commitment, practice, and fierce determination. Dreams have a life and will of their own and being blessed with their abundance requires only the agility and tenderness it takes to trap a moonbeam.

If you decide to embark on this journey, the usual luggage will be unnecessary; your cell phone, even a compass will be superfluous. Instead, you will need sharpened senses, a pair of eyes that know, ears to witness silence, feet with wings, faith, courage, and an incredible amount of tenacity. Reality as you know it today will be blasted out from under you. Expect to be terrified, because you are about to step into infinity, where only your presence of mind counts. Many venture on this journey, and many get lost in space and time. There is a toll to pay, but the rewards you reap will ripple throughout this and many lifetimes to come.

On this fearless path of the dreamer, you will recover the brilliance that is normally beyond your reach and out of view: you've actually decided to become awake within *the great dream*. You will recognize that waking life *is* the dream; and dreaming is the time where real decisions are made, where the eyes witness the eternal light of life. In the beginning, assume that you, the dreamer, will encounter those places that one often ignores, that shake your senses and challenge your sanity. Welcome these moments as one would the warmth of a fire in the hearth after trudging through blasting and biting storms. Also assume that as you extend light into darkened caves that at first appear to be permanently stale and suffocating spaces, compassion awaits. I have found no place in my travels into other worlds where compassion is hidden from me or reserved only for those more deserving. Always trust your process and expect to be amazed, because you, a seeker, have entered into an initiation, and you are bound to confront the unknown with unplanned or unexpected reactions. Anything can be asked of you. Anything can happen—it is between you the dreamer and the Great Mystery.

So, you might wonder, why would I want to apply for this hazardous mission? I will tell you in just one word—power—an increase in your ability to understand the mysteries of the universe, attunement with the Divine, The Mother, and the powers of her medicine bundle: expanded consciousness, intuitive gifts necessary to accomplish those tasks destiny requires of you, wisdom, knowledge, and, best of all, transformation.

Do you still want to know? Then, let's begin, step by tiny step.

This chapter explains the primary task that will be yours in the early stages of dreaming. This task will, with time, branch out and grow into new stages. The integration of mind, body, and spirit is critical to developing dream awareness. These pages offer the details for preparation during the first stages of the journey, including pitfalls and surprises you may encounter.

### *Spiritual Preparation*

The stripping away of fears, prejudices, flaws, and all else that interferes with your remembering your primal state is a complex and painful process, but a dreamer gradually understands and *becomes* the meaning. When you have found peace and harmony, the journey will truly make sense.

First, let your life unravel. Snip here and there to let out those tight spaces of the mind that keep the body rigid and seemingly under control. If you already have a dream journal, you know from whence I speak. If you are a beginner, the idea of letting go of control may seem terrifying. Regardless of whether you are a new or experienced dreamer, give yourself a year or longer to fall in love with your inner self, and gradually allow the next level of your journey to be revealed to you. Love surfaces when it is least expected; the point is to trust yourself enough to fall back on your wits as though into the arms of your beloved. Allow your mind to drift and float like a feather falling from the sky—a gentle settling, softly, quietly going down, down, down. The unraveling of our life is part of the journey wherein we begin to recognize that what we have firmly believed was real, is not real at all; certain truths that we have held to be solid and unchanging are actually fragmented and in motion; and what we have relied upon to hold us up in times of trouble, has disappeared. Our values don't hold up, the image of ourself is not real, and there is only one direction to go—forward, until we have reached the other side of duality and been transformed.

Mind-body-spirit connection has subtle movement. Start with simple changes, such as a new hairstyle; or, do something you have always wanted to do, but were reluctant to risk, such as wearing a color not currently in your wardrobe. Something as ordinary as taking a new route to work can open your heart and help you breathe deeply and yield to this invitation.

Friends can join you in this new venture. Ask them over and take your time in fixing a sumptuous, delicious meal, including a rare champagne or sparkling mineral water; use candles, soft lighting, and set an elegant table. Throw caution to the wind and dare yourself to have a feeling heretofore unknown in your range of emotions.

When you are ready—this week, next year, or whenever—ask them what they like about you, and bathe in the warmth of their appreciation. Let them know what you most value about them, too. No risk is too small or insignificant.

You pick and choose the challenge. Your risk can be totally different from these suggestions. Just remember that as you brave venturing into unknown territory in the waking state, you are tilling the soil to bring up the cool, moist earth of your dreams. When your heart and mind have become flexible and pliant, the opening comes.

As a dreamer, or *curandera*—a medicine woman—traveling through your dream-  
scape, you will find that there is no logical sequence or pattern to your learning. What some dreamers attain in weeks, others may take years to conquer. Movement forward alternates with successes and failures. What is consistent is that to grow spiritually, the dreamer must pay tribute in one form or another.

What you learn, and how you learn, must somehow be reconciled with your outer knowing. A tugging and pulling goes back and forth until one reaches a delicate balance. Your instincts will guide you. How you approach your waking experiences determines what happens in your dreams. And when you have an enlightening dream, remember that growth takes time; the outer and inner must meet on equal footing—no shortcuts, no exceptions.

### *My Own Beginning*

Let me tell you how it happened for me. In 1975, about a year before beginning my dream journals, I began to practice yoga. My body carried tension across my shoulders. Fear and discomfort surrounded me. Years would pass before I was able to relax and be comfortable in my body.

In 1982, six years after beginning the journals, I entered a graduate program in counseling at San Francisco State University. I chose to do my internship at the Center for Attitudinal Healing, founded by Jerry Jampolsky, MD, then in Tiburon, California, where I became acquainted with the principles of attitudinal healing. I saw the internship as an opportunity to learn about love.

I also took classes in biofeedback and underwent a radical process called *autogenic training*. Autogenic training is a method of learning to relax the body muscle group by muscle group.

The training in biofeedback also sent me in other directions. In 1983, I was introduced to the Nyingma Institute in Berkeley, California, founded by Rinpoche Tarthang Tulku, where I learned about the flow of energy and how relaxation can aid

in the restoration of balance between mind, body, and spirit. Through kum nye relaxation classes, I was able to identify patterns of holding in my body, and this led to my achieving relief from the stress I had been carrying since childhood.

Dreams collaborated by showing me other ways of letting my life unravel. Dream yoga gave me a new perspective on dreaming. Even Grandmother participated by imparting lessons on the necessity of having a resilient mind and body.

If you are a beginner, take your time to explore and find a new relationship with yourself. You will see how important this part of your practice is for remembering where you have been during the night, and you will learn what your next steps in life are to be. What you will witness in your dreams, only time will tell.

If you are an experienced dreamer and already have a spiritual discipline, besides keeping a dream journal, continue doing what you have been doing. A conscious relationship between mind and body is expedient in building the bridge between the waking and sleeping states. Keeping a dream journal is itself a spiritual discipline.

### *The Journal*

Select your journal, and keep it simple. You will need a method and tools you can rely on for the years to come, so keep these practical and accessible. A regular binder with writing paper or a spiral notebook will suffice. Some of my artist friends use large leather-bound sketchbooks for drawing dream scenes that have significance for them. Personally, I have found that entering dream accounts into the computer does not give me the same kinesthetic satisfaction that I get from my hand gliding across the page when writing down the images and fragments that come to mind in the morning. A pen that feels good in your hand is important. Pencil writing becomes hard to read as time passes—it fades and smudges.

### *Notes on Remembering*

Set aside a time to write in the morning; twenty to thirty minutes will probably be enough, maybe less. Relax. Once you have imposed your determination to remember your dreams, details will become more vivid over time.

Whatever the images or feelings that come up, don't dismiss them as trivial or meaningless. In the early stages of dreaming (about the first five years), I saw hundreds of images and had just as many feelings. I became an observer of my internal life. Whatever questions arise for you, just write down what you see, and think about them. Eventually, you will begin to make connections between these seemingly disjointed images. Commit to writing in the morning, and be willing to write merely fragmented memories that come to mind. Just write what you remember. As this awakening happens, my advice is to let it happen without pushing or grasping for it.

As an example of how cryptic notes can be, recording a dream I had in 1976, I wrote only “Lilly and Ernie give G., E., and me some earrings, blue stones.”

When I reviewed the journals years later, I realized that I still remembered much more detail. Here is how I remembered the dream many years later.

### **Remember**

*My cousins Ernie and Lilly give Georgie, Eleanor, and me some earrings. I hold a tiny gold box in my hand and open it. Two round blue stones. They vibrate and call my attention to something. Like a child's game, they invite me to guess at what they are saying. I feel the stirring of a memory, a vague sense of something wanting to reach out to me.*

*Again, the stones shake as though saying, “Remember. Remember.”  
I stare back thinking, “I can't. I can't.”*

Aside from the sketchy notes, the sensations that came with the shaking of the stones seemed to be jarring something new, an awakening—about culture, and on another level, about the beauty of the true self and of all creation. At the time of the dream, I had no idea what it was attempting to impress upon me. Now, I see it as a spiritual awakening unfolding. I was beginning to remember the deeper essence of *being*.

### *The Line between Sleeping and Waking*

The line between sleeping and waking becomes more complex as the dreamer begins to experience the multidimensional aspects of dreamtime. You are no longer just “asleep” or “awake.” Both states of reality take on more expanded meanings. For me, the sensations from the blue stones caused a blurring between the lines of sleeping and waking. I knew “something was happening,” and in hindsight, I can see that dreaming awareness was expanding my sense of reality, as though I was caught in an invisible net that simultaneously let me be in both realities at night and during the day.

### *Spirit Beings Appear*

Dream spirits prepare the way for the gift of power, and when they appear to you, they will serve as important guides along the way, but they may also be hiding behind significantly frightening images and feelings. Early stages of record keeping may be filled with a nightmarish quality. Also, nightmares may simply represent our desire to hang on and keep us safe in the familiar. I found that as my body learned to relax, I could go more deeply into the dream and maintain awareness of my breath as my

eyes observed events unfolding. This skill did not develop overnight; it took me years, but even so, I saw progress.

Spirit beings that lend a hand can also have a sense of humor. Grandmother's radiant smile, for instance, would nearly shake me awake with its vibrancy, and it always left me in the morning with definite reverberations that reminded me of a Mona Lisa-like smile. Her dancing eyes would literally tease me into playful engagement with her. And there were other beings that caught my attention with their outrageous humor.

The quest evokes many emotional, psychological, and spiritual challenges. When you encounter a dream spirit, take an active stance to find out its purpose in the dream. The spirit being may be there to impart its wisdom.

### *Disquieting Dreams*

In the early stages of dream awareness, you may be apt to forget about the various levels of reality and feel as though the floor is being pulled out from under you. The appearance of a spirit, or finding yourself high off the ground, for example, can be unnerving and cause extreme anxiety. Just remain calm, breathe easily, and maintain awareness of the double state you are in. Breathe deeply.

Experiences will vary. Each dreamer is unique. The decision to become awake within the dream demands fierce determination and the patience of a saint.

### *Sensory Awareness*

Sensory awareness is vital in following this dream map, whether you have your eyes open or have them closed during dreamtime. Your process of becoming aware in your dreams will speed up if in your waking state you practice noticing how your mind drifts to past and future events. Notice whether you can keep your attention on feeling states. Smiles, colors, and a sense of awe or fear are just a few examples of the sensations you will encounter.

In these sensations and impressions, your experience of expanded consciousness will leave you breathless. They cannot be described without alluding to the Divine. These sensations are like passports into heaven—there is no other way to describe them. This is what all world religions are about—meeting the Divine. The sensations I've been describing are unmistakable sensations of beauty and joy in all directions. Court them. Treat them gently. Above all, honor them.

If you experience fear, just observe it. Fear, of itself, is neither good nor bad; it is simply a sensation that occurs when something unusual is happening. But fear will become your ally. In my experience, fear became magnified in my dreams as I ventured into new realms. Along with exquisite joy, I commonly experienced naked fear

of such intensity that I wanted to abandon a dream or vision. Nevertheless, I found it vital to stay within the dream. The intensity of these frightful sensations was a clue that something big was on the other side—something that could only be described as awe.

People in general often believe that by waking up, they bring themselves to safety. But, by staying in the dream, you will always, always, always be rewarded with the bestowal of a sacred gift. To stay within the dream, breathe, focus, and commit to remaining conscious. Expect a reward for your trouble.

I courted these sensations by duplicating them in my waking state: I would wear the colors I saw, or put on an article of clothing similar to something someone wore in the dream. I also made notes to myself of phrases or images and put them in my working space to remind me of them throughout the day. In some manner or form, I externalized whatever I saw or felt so that I could keep it alive during my waking hours.

I began to appreciate color and combinations of colors more than before beginning the journals. In dreams, red and black became particularly significant, although I did not know what the color combination meant.

If you have a strong affinity to the audio or visual mode of receiving impressions, it might help to notice these modes in your dream as well. Paying attention to sensations is important because doing so draws back the curtain between the waking and sleeping states. Equally important, sensory awareness presents a means for restoring communion between mind, body, and spirit.

Here is an example of the subtlety with which these sensations began for me. In 1980, I had the following dream.

***Paradise: El Mundo del Rojo y Negro***  
(The Land of Red and Black)

*Leaning on the counter of a concession stand in a huge open marketplace, I consider buying a pair of blue and pink earrings. I decide against them and instead select a pair of beaded blood red and black earrings.*

Although not mentioned in the dream, a wonderful sensation of joy resonated for me in a particular way. The dream was straightforward: I was selecting the color combination of dark red and black over the softer blue and pink. Through the sensory experiences, I began to recognize something beautiful and clear through exquisite feelings of knowing.

## *Community*

Doing the work in community is invaluable. We dreamers need to rub our rough edges against others' rough edges and get instant feedback. Participating in a spiritual community will add strength and momentum to your spiritual development.

Over the years, I risked getting close to people in different communities. And although I had thought myself gregarious previously, participating in these communities didn't come naturally. Looking back, I see that the lessons I needed to learn drew me toward and carved a path through a series of involvements in groups. And, like my breath, which feeds me through a rhythm of inhalation and exhalation, over time, the process of sensing inwardly, inquiring, and sharing, advanced the integration of mind, body, and spirit.

## *Psychotherapist or Spiritual Director*

Spiritual transformation requires objectivity. Having an impartial observer to witness your development can be quite helpful. Be willing to stay open to your process without judging it. Life is suffering, and time offers the opportunity to transcend the beliefs of this world. A psychotherapist or spiritual director can assist you in advancing your spiritual development.

## *Spiritual Self*

A dream I had while studying at the Nyingma Institute encouraged me not to confuse my feelings with my spiritual self. My teacher, who appears in the dream, was the dean of the institute at the time. He is a dreamer, and I had recently taken a dream workshop from him.

### *Es Necesario* (It's Necessary)

*A friend and I drive in my blue '72 Dodge Dart with A., who is sitting in the back seat. In the front passenger's seat, I turn around and face him.*

*As though he is telling the funniest joke, he blurts out with an infectious laughter, "Your feelings are essential to your spiritual growth. There's no way around them." With a twinkle in his eye, he adds, "And, watch out for those surprises."*

When I relayed the dream to the dean in class, he looked at me quizzically for a moment, and then he said, "Those are Rinpoche's exact words to me." Rinpoche Tarthang Tulku<sup>14</sup> was known for having a sense of humor on serious matters. This was especially appropriate to my need. My feelings were markedly apparent during the time I practiced there, yet I still tried to pretend I was above them. I often felt a

sense of shame or embarrassment when my feelings spilled out. As much as I loathe admitting this today, it took many a year to learn this lesson.

### *The Paradigm Shift*

For a dreamer of the Western world, this dream map presents a different paradigm, a multidimensional perception of the world, a view that is vastly different from Western psychology. In its broadest sense, Western psychology holds that dreams are a reflection of the dreamer's unconscious or deeper issues. Carl Jung, a student of Freud (and a serious dreamer), believed dreams offered a glimpse into a personal behavior, the unconscious pondering of a life issue, or an isolated dilemma present in one's life. However, he also developed the theory of the collective unconscious that holds that the individual is born with all the thoughts and feelings of not only one's ancestors, but of the entire human race. Jung's theories can be complementary to your process and taken into consideration in understanding your dreams, particularly if you choose to work with the Jungian theory of the Shadow.<sup>15</sup> Jung thought of the Shadow as a part of our personal makeup that is disowned and surfaces in ways we do not recognize as part of ourselves. An example would be an artist who ignores her talent or creative urges, becomes an art dealer, and then wonders how she became involved in selling other artists' work. These lost parts of you play a vital role throughout the stages of transformation.

From the spiritual perspective of this dream map, however, dreaming is quite different from the Western model, because of the difference in worldviews or paradigms. This dream map sees "awakening" as remembering who we truly are in spirit when we see ourselves reflected in the creation of the universe. We are not the body—frail, vulnerable, and suffering. We are not our feelings—which reflect our responses to what our caretakers projected upon us. Reality lies in the spirit world, which is multidimensional. We are spirit, and we have a great deal of freedom when we can view dreamtime as reality, and life on Earth as the dream.

### *Inner Teacher*

Experiences that are actual journeys into other dimensions present themselves in dreams, and the spirits you encounter are as real as the people you meet in the waking state. A spirit being may leave a message and be gone just as quickly as he or she appeared. Or, a relationship with an inner teacher such as the one I developed with Grandmother may take on a life of its own.<sup>16</sup> One or both can emerge.

## *Discipline*

Many paths lead to transformation, and dreaming is only one of them. In my inquiries into world religions, I have found that the flow of energy is a vital aspect in understanding the will of the Divine for our lives. Dreaming, as understood in the Mesoamerican traditions, is a path of awakening through extended alertness and wakefulness in our dreamtime. In much the same way, yoginis and yogis of India utilize the power of kundalini, Asian traditions focus on the activity of chi, and the Desert Fathers of the Christian tradition approached communion through surrender. What I'm saying here is that the mind needs to be flexible and supple, open to different possibilities. Through discipline and intention, dreamers achieve surrender through resilient minds and bodies.

Physical disciplines, including yoga, kum nye, and chi kung, and others can help you transcend your ego. These practices teach us to become aware that in our bodies, we are holding patterns that also exist in our personalities. These patterns are subtle, and it may take some time before you achieve mind/body integration. Relaxed minds and bodies are essential as we approach dreaming.

Another discipline is working with one's mind and learning to disengage from thoughts that modify our concepts of possibilities. In the 1980s, my brother John gave me a copy of *A Course in Miracles*,<sup>17</sup> a workbook with a particular Christian perspective teaching that only love is real. Since then, I have studied the 365 daily lessons several times, and these lessons have influenced the way I look at the world. Similar to the way the Old Dreamers saw life as the dream, the *Course* also sees the waking world as illusion.

Various spiritual study groups abound that you can join to facilitate a new frame of reference by which to see reality.

## *Summary*

This chapter has discussed the process of opening up to your inner self and commencing the process of uniting mind, body, and spirit. Beginning the journal and finding a comfortable way of ending your night with twenty to thirty minutes of writing is easy; it's the stripping away of the familiar that presents the challenge.

Be practical in your selection of writing materials. Take your time, and be consistent in your writing practice. Your awareness of reality will shift. Surround yourself with support, community, psychotherapy, and/or spiritual direction. What you are entering into is an ancient tradition—as ancient as the world—and it has a timing of its own.

Stay with your feelings within the dream. Fear and awe wait. Distinguish between your waking self and the Self that begins to emerge. Recognize that you are making a

transition from psychological/waking time focus to a spiritual focus where the inner is more real than the waking. Keep in mind that a spiritual discipline such as yoga or slow movement will facilitate mind, body, and spirit integration. Enter your dreams as consciously as possible, noticing the levels of relaxation, with mind, body, and spirit becoming one. In waking and sleeping, be aware of your senses, noticing smiles, color, feelings of awe and fear. When we slowly enter a cool pool of water, there comes a tipping point when we surrender, even if against our will, and then it's all or nothing.

And, finally, dreaming is like creating a beautiful tapestry of hundreds of satin, silk, linen threads and ribbons of many colors—reds, blues, yellows—textures of feelings, sweet fragrances, and elements woven together. Some strands appear in waking time, but in dreamtime, appear only for a millisecond and then are gone; and other textures, sensations and colors we see abundantly in dreams, but in waking life, they disappear, just as stars fade with the light of coming day. We sometimes miss completely the threads of gold, silver, and copper that we weave into this great tapestry, but they are always there, surfacing and then going back underground with the beating of the heart.

I offer these guidelines as a rough format in directing your course toward your awakening within the dream. Remember that the world you have entered into is more real than the waking world; indeed, at some point, it will become apparent that the inner world is more solid than the waking. Allow it to approach you with its grace and compassion—let go. Trust yourself.

You will be tested. You are going into the unknown and will find many a strange thing. Be attentive.

*Abrazos y buena suerte.* “Hugs, and good luck.” E-mail me now and then.<sup>18</sup>

