



Dreaming: An Introduction to the Science of Sleep

By J. Allan Hobson

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What is dreaming? Why are dreams so strange and why are they so hard to remember? In this fascinating book, Harvard researcher Allan Hobson offers an intriguing look at our nightly odyssey through the illusory world of dreams. Hobson describes how the theory of dreaming has advanced dramatically over the past fifty years, sparked by the use of EEGs in the 1950s and by recent innovations in brain imaging. We have learned for instance that, in dreaming, some areas of the brain are very active--the visual and auditory centers, for instance--while others are completely shut down, including the centers for self-awareness, logic, and memory. Thus we can have visually vivid dreams, but be utterly unaware that the sequence of events or locales may be bizarre and, quite often, impossible. And because the memory center is inactive, we don't remember the dream at all, unless we wake up while it is in progress. Hobson also shows that modern research has disproved most of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (as one scientist put it, "Freud was 50% right and 100% wrong"), but we have gained new insight into the nature of mental illness. The book also discusses dream disorders (nightmares, night terrors, sleep walking), the possible link between dreaming and the regulation of body temperature, the effects of sleep deprivation, and much more.

With special boxed features that highlight intriguing questions--Do we dream in color? (yes), Do animals dream? (probably), Do men and women dream differently? (no)--*Dreaming* offers a cutting-edge account of the most mysterious area of our mental life.

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Editorial Review

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People have always been intrigued by the contents of dreams, seeking to interpret their meaning as either divine messages or the coded communiques of repressed desires, à la Freud, but what about the formal features of dreams, asks Harvard psychiatry professor and sleep expert Hobson. Dreams have specific perceptual, cognitive, and emotional qualities that set them apart from waking consciousness--loss of awareness of self, loss of orientation, loss of directed thought, reduction in logical reasoning, and poor memory--that correspond, as it turns out, to specific modes of brain activity. As Hobson meticulously matches dream features to brain chemistry, he cajoles readers into replacing mystical interpretations with an understanding of the evidence indicating that our precious dreams are the results of the brain's routine processing of an overwhelming amount of memory. Initially this perspective may seem reductively mechanical, but Hobson, who quotes extensively from his own 116-volume dream journal, doesn't deny that dreams offer clues to the psyche, and the complex workings of the brain are every bit as entrancing as the most dazzling of dreams. *Donna Seaman*

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Review

"A cool outline of modern knowledge about dreams...and an explanation of what is really happening in our brains when we dream.... Throughout he uses his own dreams, recorded over many years, as examples while showing how the science of sleep has evolved over the past 50 years. Along the way, Freud takes a battering."--*New Scientist*

About the Author

J. Allan Hobson is Director of the Neurophysiology and Sleep Laboratory and Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. Widely considered the world's leading expert on sleep research, he is the author of *The Dreaming Brain*, *The Chemistry of Conscious States*, *Sleep*, *Dreaming as Delirium: How the Brain Goes Out of Its Mind*, and *Consciousness*.

Users Review

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