

# Want to find out more about dreams?

Here are a few blog posts I wrote on the topic, they will also give you some insight into where The Beckoning Rooms novel idea came from.



Dreams hold fascinating meaning, but how do we interpret them?

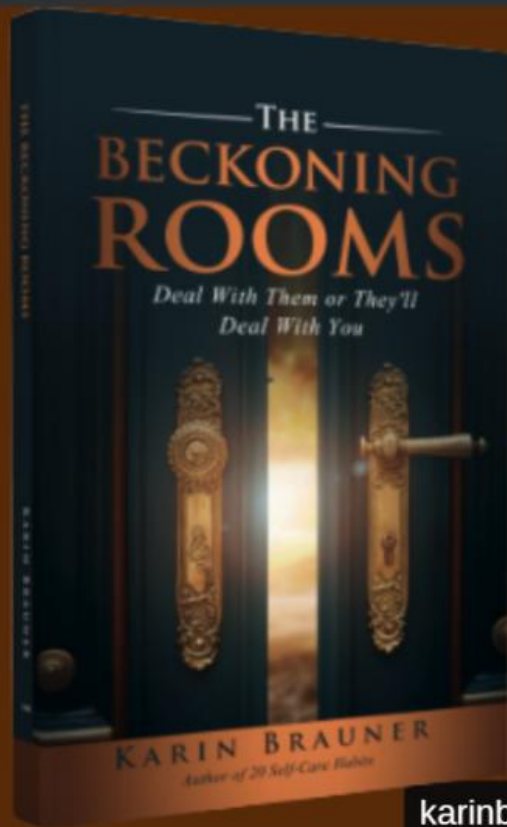


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## 4 Dream Mechanisms

Why are our dreams so strange?





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## What is in a dream?

That is the question that I pose to you today.

Not as a random question, but as one that would trigger your thoughts and lead you to delve into the exploration of the meaning of dreams and how this relates to therapy and therefore to the unconscious.

My counselling training has been covered by a blanket of psychoanalytic theories and wonderful tutors that made these theories come alive.

I am integrative [in practice](#), but at my core I will always have an analytical mind when it comes to exploring the unconscious and the issues my clients bring me.

Freud wrote *The Interpretation of Dreams* around 100 years ago, and more has been theorised since then.

In this series, I want to talk about Freud's theory, and possibly also Jung and other theorists, in regard to our dream life.

Why do I find dreams fascinating and worthy of a blog series?

I'm glad you asked.

Let me take you back to 2003-2004.

I started seeing my very first clients at the University clinic in Guatemala, and therefore also decided to start my own therapy process.

There were personal and professional reasons for this. I won't go into details as that's between me and my therapist. I had about a year of sessions with this therapist.

She was very traditionally psychoanalytic, so she didn't say much to me, which suited me just fine.

The things she did say stick to my mind even now, and have been a great source of comfort to me ever since.  
*That's the power of therapy.*

At the end of this batch of therapeutic work, I started talking about a particular topic (again, I won't disclose what it was, sorry), and tried to open up about it, but it was still not time.

So I "legged" it out of there to never return.

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In 2009, I embarked on another counselling course so I could work in the United Kingdom as a therapist – I do believe now, looking back, my counselling training in Guatemala would have been enough to start, but I needed to find my way around the UK way of life and working.

Taking on this course meant another batch of therapy, this time for the duration of the course, as a requirement to graduate.

That was fine by me as there were things I still needed to work on.

There always is something to work on as the unconscious material from our past beckons us.

Sometimes gently. Sometimes more forcefully.

Anyway.

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There came a point where the aforementioned "particular topic" came up again, and it was hard.

I believe my words to my therapist were "I really don't want to go there, but here we are, we might as well do it".

She checked with me (This one also didn't say much, but what she said is still having an impact to this day): "are you sure you want to talk about that?"

I said "yes", probably a crying blubbing mess at that point.

What happened during the next few weeks of opening the proverbial Pandora's box, was quite something!

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I also discovered a link between talking about that "topic" and my dream life...

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I used to have a recurring dream, where I'd always appear in a house.

The house was familiar to me. I wasn't in a strange place or anything. I knew the place I was in.

It was either my house or a friend's house.

Lurking somewhere in the building, there was always a room, a door that I was weary of.

What made me weary of it was a mystery to me, in the years that I had the dream, I couldn't figure it out!

I could never go into that room, or even go near it.

It gave me the creeps.

I felt really anxious and had a sense of dread about what I might find if I did open that door.

I'm unsure of what else happened in those recurring dreams. It felt like I was in the house for a long time.

Maybe a normal day, with normal things going on.

It's been a while since I've had that dream. I know what stopped it was talking about "that topic" in therapy.

*Hence, as I mentioned before, the power of therapy!*

I've not dreamt that dream ever since those hard sessions, where everything in life felt surreal for a few weeks, but something released.

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That unconscious part of myself had lost its power. It had lost its ability to haunt me, in my waking and sleeping hours.

I know that there are lots of more things to explore about "the topic" as there always will be – the unconscious is vast, and will strike whenever and however it wants.

This is why I find therapy so precious – as a process I've gone through myself – and as a process I support my counselling clients with.

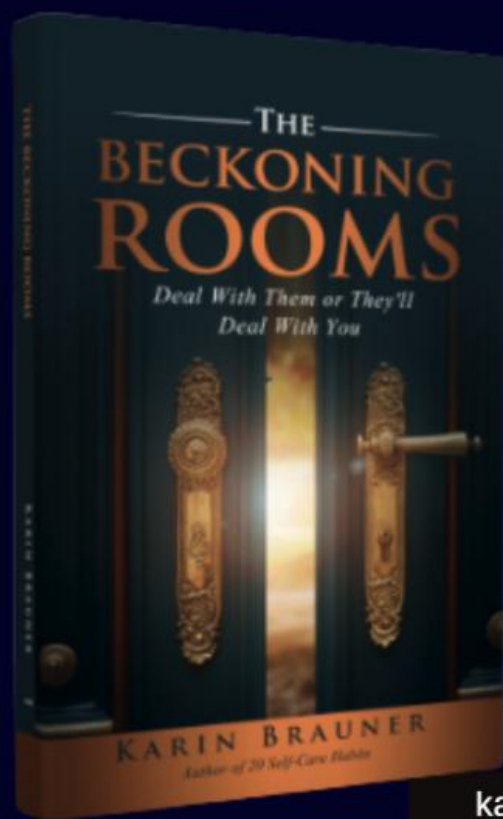
In the story I've just told you, talking through something in therapy made a recurring dream stop.

The symbolism in dreams is truly incredible. I've seen it in my own dreams and life, and also in my clients' dreams and lives.

What we dream says something about who we are, what we've sent to the repressed bin of our minds, and what we must deal with before it deals with us.

The end of my recurring dream after that batch of therapy led me to write [\*The Beckoning Rooms\*](#) novel, a fictional psychological thriller.

The idea first came to me a few months after that therapy process.



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## Dreams hold fascinating meaning, but how do we interpret them?

As I stated in my previous post, [What's in a dream? \(The power of therapy\)](#), my experience of a recurring dream I'd had for years suddenly stopping after a few weeks of therapeutic discussion with my analyst about a very specific topic, led me to be even more fascinated by dream work.

I was already enthralled by the work of Sigmund Freud – his masterpiece, The Interpretation of Dreams – which I will use as a base for the following series of posts on dream life, but having my own experience of the power of therapy and interpretation of dreams has led me down a great journey.

This great journey includes the writing of my first fictional novel, [The Beckoning Rooms](#).

This novel takes us into the unconscious mind of Jenna, Jeremiah and Jacob, in a very particular way, akin to what I went through in my therapy process.

In this post I'd like to explain a bit of why I wrote the [prequel](#) as a “companion” to explain a bit more about how the unconscious mind works when we are asleep.

In the history of humanity, since ancient times, people have been trying to make sense of dreams, and this goes on up to this day.

There are many books that go into the specific interpretation of dreams, which I'd like to stay away from here, as I believe that dreams are very individual and very specific to the dreamer and their particular circumstances.

Dreams are telling of what we've gone through in the past, what happened to us in the days or even hours before the dream happened, and sometimes they might be pointing us towards our unfulfilled wishes and desires for our future (near and far) lives.

An example of an interpretation that might be too generic is the one with the dreams of your teeth falling out. It is popularly thought that this means that this relates to loss, anxiety, transitions in life, and so on. Other dreams are interpreted as some wealth coming your way.

This, for me, is too generic an interpretation, and leaves out the unconscious life of the dreamer.

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As Freud says in one of his texts, when we are awake, there are at least two censors that prevent unconscious material from arising to consciousness. When we sleep one of those is removed and this is why the unconscious finds its way into our dream life in a much more easier and direct way.

Dreams are a safer way to explore our unconscious, without planning on doing so, it just happens. It's less threatening than thinking it up in our conscious life, as we can leave the dream off as just that – a dream.

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Unconscious material is there for a reason – we don't want to know about it.

It could be a past trauma in childhood or in previous years that we'd rather dissociate from, hence sending the emotions to the repressed part of our minds, leaving only the traumatic memory.

It could also be that we have so much shame about a particular situation that happened to us that we send it to the back of our minds, where it festers until talked about and processed (this is what happened with my dream – I spoke about “the topic” and the dream disappeared. It lost its power and purpose, leaving less unconscious material to be found).

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Hence, a dream about losing our teeth becomes a very personal matter.

If I dream about losing my teeth, it might be relating to a real loss that I might have experienced – a friend, a relative, and the dream might have elements of that lost loved one.

The dream might also just relate to the fact that I forgot to brush my teeth and my super-ego has seeped into my dream-life, telling me that it was a bad thing to do, and will be detrimental to my oral hygiene.

There are so many ways to interpret this dream, and I'm hoping that through those two examples, you can see the individualistic way of interpreting dreams is much more realistic and truthful to the dream itself, than giving it a generic, universal meaning.

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I've had many experiences of interpreting dreams in my own life, but also in the lives of my clients. All of them have been fascinating, as they add more to the story that is being shared consciously with me in the therapy session.

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Dreams are often symbolic of something else.

This symbolism can help us gain access to those unconscious parts that have been left unprocessed, by one reason or another. One reason might be that when the experience happened, we were too young to understand or to stand up for ourselves, and the unprocessed or un-said content is still wreaking havoc in our waking life.

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As I can't really reveal my clients' dreams. In the next few paragraphs I'll be explaining Jenna's dreams and what they might mean in the context of her personal life (you'll be able to read more about Jenna in [the novel](#)).

[Jenna's first dream](#) had to do with unicorns and fantastical creatures.

Jenna loved to read, and immerse herself in her books. They helped her cope with her life at that point in time. Now, as an adult, she's faced with the beckoning rooms, and a big part of her wishes she didn't have to. So what happens?

She takes herself back to a place where she felt safe. Where she could exist with mythical creatures that weren't there to harm her or criticise her, or anything negative.

She took herself to her safe place, in her dreams.

This is what Freud might describe as dreaming up an unfulfilled wish.

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[Jenna's second dream](#), entitled "losing it all", is something that forms part of her recurring arsenal of dreams.

She has this dream often, and every time she wakes up with a feeling of anxiety all over her body.

In this dream, there is a sense of trust in the world, but this sense of trust is quickly shattered by the fact that her bag with all her belongings has gone missing from the spot she'd left it.

What does it mean to lose her personal belongings?  
Is it about the things themselves, or is there a deeper meaning here?

As you'll read in the novel, there are things that are taken away from her, without consultation or care.

This dream is a direct re-living of the trauma she went through, the difference here is that she's kind of done it to herself.

Does she feel she allowed these terrible things to happen to her in her past?

Could she have prevented these things?

These questions might be swirling in her pre-conscious and unconscious mind constantly, and possibly activated by more recent events in her life – like the fact that her freedom has been temporarily taken away as she explores The Beckoning Rooms.

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Finally, [the third dream](#), is all about the end of Jenna's world.

She dreams that she's all alone in the world.

No one else in sight.

The familiar noises are gone.

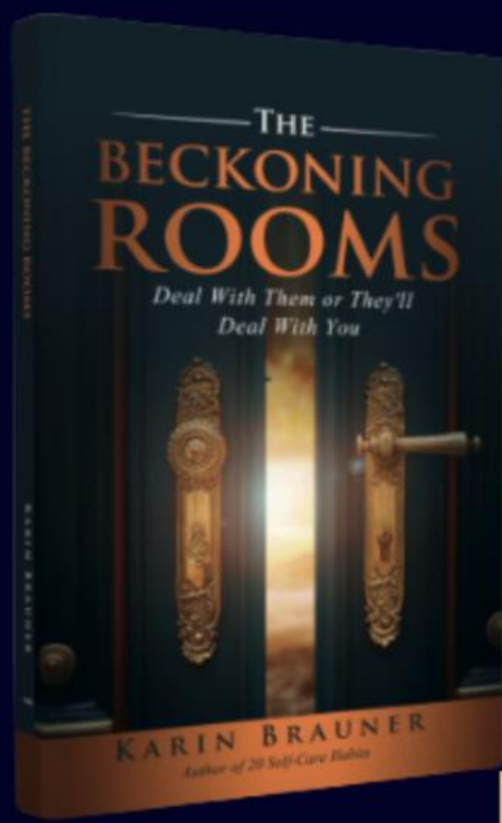
This dream encapsulates a bit of what 2020-2021 has been about for many of us.

The familiar is gone to a certain extent.

We're having to regroup and rethink life as we knew it, as we endeavour to keep ourselves safe (and sane, let's face it).  
Is there a future? This is what Jenna is left with.

This dream might relate to her current predicament of being locked in the house with the Beckoning Rooms, or it might have a deeper meaning for her life.

What to do next might be a burgeoning question as she explores parts of herself she'd thought she'd left behind forever.



## 4 Dream Mechanisms -Why are our dreams so strange?

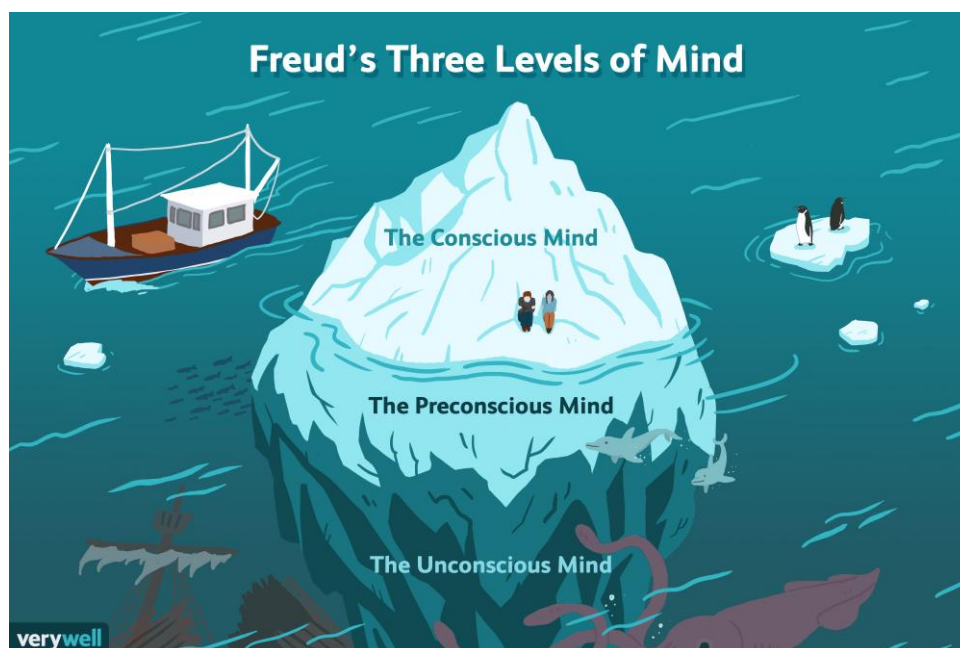
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I never cease to marvel at my dreams and the dreams that I've heard from clients through the years.

As I recounted in [another post](#), a recurring dream, and a therapy process, led me to make the link between the topic I discussed in therapy and the sudden disappearance of these recurring dreams.

Through my studies I had already become curious about the dream world, and how it represents our deepest, darkest memories, thoughts, feelings. Those that we wouldn't want anyone to know.

Sometimes we don't even want to know.  
Enter the unconscious....



This diagram (courtesy of [verywellmind.com](https://www.verywellmind.com)) explains, in very simple terms, what the unconscious, preconscious and conscious mind entail.

As you can see, the conscious mind is just the proverbial “tip of the iceberg”.

There are many reasons for this. And this links well to explaining why our dreams are so strange sometimes.

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In this post, I'll get into the mechanisms that make dreams so strange.

Before going into them, I'd like to write a few more sentences about the unconscious and what we might send there.

When we experience something traumatic – no matter the size – we send it to the unconscious.

But we don't send the memory there.

We always remember what happened.

What we send to the unconscious is the fear, the anger, the extreme sadness, and any other feelings and thoughts that we might have had when going through a particular event.

We send it there because consciously knowing about it might be too overwhelming for us.

There is something that makes it easier for our unconscious mind to bring these repressed things up in our dreams.

You see, when we are awake, we have two censors. These prevent the unconscious material from arising to our consciousness.

When the pull of the unconscious to bring something to our awareness, our ego has a conversation with our unconscious, and they come to a sort-of deal.

It is what Freud called a “transaction”.

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For example, you have repressed the fact that when you were 3 you were separated from your parents in the amusement park, and you were terrified.

It's easy to tell this story as your emotional reactions are separated from the memory.

Our unconscious might want us to remember it all, but the ego knows this would be too much to handle.

A transaction, a deal is struck at this point and instead of the emotional memory of the event coming up, you get a “symptom”.

This symptom could be a headache, stomach pain, tiredness, or a strong reaction to something totally unrelated (on the conscious level), that is safer to process and be aware of.

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When we dream, something happens.

The second censor weakens, and “falls asleep” with you.

This means that we only have one censor left, and this lets slip out some of the unconscious content.

Similarly to the “symptom” transaction I explained above, your unconscious content doesn't come out as it originally was. The four mechanisms I'm about to outline take part in making our dreams so strange, so vivid, so realistic, and sometimes terrifying.

Through analysis we can get to the root of the dream. As Freud said in his Interpretation of Dreams, *Dreams are the royal road to the unconscious*.

I always get excited when a client brings a dream, as it will help us get further in the search for the origin of their current predicament, and to the relief of these “symptoms” (which you now understand a bit more why they might be there).

Of course there’s a lot more to therapy than this type of analysis, but it is very powerful indeed!

Now, what are these 4 mechanisms? Let’s get right to it.

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## Condensation

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Condensation is an unconscious mechanism that makes up most of the dream, and it is what makes it effective.

This mechanism takes place when two or more – unconscious – unfulfilled wishes or ideas are melded into one – the manifest content of the dream, which is the thing that joins all the elements together.

The content of the dream might seem innocuous and unimportant, but upon further investigation, we get to the linked content that the dream was hinting at.

For example, In [Jenna’s second dream](#) – she loses her bag. The bag is representing something.

Of course, Jenna doesn’t want to lose her possessions – she’d have to go get a replacement for her cards, licence, change the locks on her doors, and so on. That is bad enough.

But what the losing of the bag is representing, after further analysis, is the fact that there is underlying anxiety about losing control.

We’d have to sit with Jenna and ask her when in her life she felt out of control. You’ll find out more in [The Beckoning Rooms](#) (shameless plug).

This leads us to the second mechanism.

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## Displacement

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Displacement means, in short, placing importance on a less important aspect of the dream, because placing importance on the thing it’s pointing at would be too much for our conscious mind to handle.

In the safety of therapy, this can be worked through and we can then get to answers to questions like

“what is the bag representing?”

or “

what is it about losing your bag that made you so anxious in your dream?”

## Dramatization

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This third mechanism relates to making the abstract into something more concrete.

In Jenna's dream, the abstract emotion of anxiety and the feeling of losing control are turned into something we can see and feel.

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## Secondary Elaboration

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This mechanism is an attempt of the ego to make the dream "make sense".

It makes it into something more "normal."

Jenna used to go to this shop with her friend, so in the dream, the traumatic loss of the bag (the anxiety provoking visual object), is set in a usual place, familiar to Jenna.

Secondary elaboration makes the dream very cryptic to analysis as it makes sense: if it is about you losing your bag, then that's what it is about.

But as we've dug deeper, we've found that it's not as simple as that.

Secondary elaboration has hidden the real meaning of the dream, making it easier for us to digest consciously.

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*Do check out [Dreaming up the repressed – a Beckoning Rooms Prequel series](#), to get a different way to understand dreams and their meanings.*

*The [novel](#) and the prequel both have elements of these four mechanisms, as you will find out as you read the prequel.*

Find out more about the book via my [YouTube channel](#) or via [this link](#).