

**Shrink Rap Radio #93, May 23, 2007, Dreaming as a Bridge Between Religion and Science**

**David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka “Dr. Dave” interviews Kelly Bulkeley, Ph.D.**  
(transcribed from [www.ShrinkRapRadio](http://www.ShrinkRapRadio) by Dori Lehner)

**Excerpt:** *There’s this sense that dreaming gives us kind of this special window into the realm of death and dying, and what my mom and I have done in this book is tried to provide people the very non-theoretical – and we’re really not [saying] Freud’s right or Jung’s right, or neuroscientists are right – we’re only just saying, look, when people are facing the final weeks and days and hours of their lives, they often find themselves confronting the most profound existential questions of human life: What is the meaning of life, my individual life? What’s going to happen to me now? And in response to those kinds of questions, people will often experience powerful dreams and visions.*

**Introduction:** Powerful dreams and visions, indeed. That was the voice of my guest, Dr. Kelly Bulkeley. Kelly Bulkeley, Ph.D. is a visiting scholar at the Graduate Theological Union, and he teaches in the Dream Studies Program at John F. Kennedy University. Both are in the San Francisco Bay Area. He earned his doctorate in Religion and Psychological Studies from the University of Chicago Divinity School, and is a former president of the International Association for the Study of Dreams. He has written and edited several books on dreaming, religion, psychology, culture and science, including *The Wilderness of Dreams, An Introduction to the Psychology of Dreaming, Visions of the Night, The Wondering Brain, Dreaming Beyond Death, and Soul, Psyche, Brain: New Directions in the Study of Religion and Brain-Mind Science*. For some reason there was an unusually large amount of static and background noise on the Skype call for this particular interview. I’ve done my best to filter it out, and hopefully it won’t be too troubling. Now, here’s the interview.

**Dr. Dave:** Dr. Kelly Bulkeley, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Thanks for having me.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, I see you have a background in divinity studies, first at Stanford, then Harvard, then the University of Chicago. Now, how did that come about?

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Well, I’ve been interested in dreams basically since I was a teenager, thanks to some strange and perplexing nightmares of my own that piqued my curiosity and got me interested in exploring dreams and learning about what they mean. And the first place I turned was the study of psychology. I thought, “Well, psychology is how our society studies dreams.” But I pretty quickly found that the kinds of issues and themes and dimensions of dreams that I was interested in were not well covered by mainstream psychology, and I found myself in college and then in graduate school looking more and more to religious studies, to philosophy, to anthropology, comparative mythology, things like that, to teach me about sort of the broader dimensions – along with psychology. I’m not a minister;

I'm not a sort of a bible something, religious person per se. I'm passionately interested about dreams and studying them through a prism of religion and philosophy, in a way that [I've found is most valuable] to study them.

**Dr. Dave:** That's really fascinating because I think most people would think that psychology would be the doorway into studying dreams – either psychology or psychiatry. And I don't think it would have occurred to many people that ministry could be a good way to go.

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Yeah, well the basic way I put it is that psychology as a discipline was founded in the mid-19th century, 150 or so years ago, and before that people were talking about the dreams and thinking about their dreams and reflecting on them, but not in a psychological language, but usually in the languages of religion and philosophy and myth. And so if you really want to – this is my general argument in my research and writing – is that if you really want to understand the full spectrum of human dreaming and the full sort of potentiality of dreaming, you really have to look beyond psychology. And I'm not saying that psychology doesn't have a vital role, but you can't only rely on psychology. You really need to look at the collected wisdom of human culture throughout history.

**Dr. Dave:** That's interesting. Of course, you and I both know Jeremy Taylor, who I've interviewed previously on this show, and he's a Unitarian Universalist minister, and sees dream work as his ministry, and ...

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Yeah, yeah, well Jeremy's one of my closest friends and a true mentor. I still vividly remember going to meet him for the first time and I was a very green and naive graduate student, and he's been a guide and a real inspiration throughout my time of studying dreams. And he, yes, he's – as a Unitarian minister, he finds dreaming to be an incredibly powerful means of opening people to their own spiritual potential. And, again, I'm not a minister; I'm not affiliated with any church or anything like that, but I work with ministers and with people in various faiths who look to dreams in that kind of way. And, again, I think this is one of the truly universal themes of world religion, is a veneration for dreaming.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes.

**Kelly Bulkeley:** For dreams as a way that humans can connect with and be guided by the divine, however they define that.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes. Now, not to beat this topic to death, but I couldn't help but notice on your Web site that your wife has Rev. in front of her name, Reverend. So where does she tie into the ... ?

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Actually, I think you're referring to my mother.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, really?

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Patricia Bulkeley. Yeah, we co-authored *Dreaming Beyond Death* together a [year or two ago].

**Dr. Dave:** Ah, I was assuming that was your wife. I'm sorry.

**Kelly Bulkeley:** That's fine. My wife's a lawyer, so – does quite well for herself. But, no, my mom is a Presbyterian minister and, again, that's her calling and she works for 10 plus years as a hospice chaplain, working with people who are on the verge of dying, and dying, and the various dreams and visions and pre-death spiritual experiences that she's encountered in that work. She and I wrote the *Dreaming Beyond Death* book about that as kind of a guide for what kinds of unusual dream and visionary experiences can happen around the time of death. The mainstream medicine really doesn't pay a lot of attention to this.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, let's go ahead and talk about that book, *Dreaming Beyond Death: a Guide to Pre-Death Dreams and Visions*. So tell us some more about that, what that book explores.

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Yeah, well, dreaming has always had an intimate connection in people's minds with death. And in virtually every religious tradition there's a sense that one of the functions – one of the spiritual functions – of dreams is to give us a glimpse of what lies beyond this life. And there's a folk belief that when we go to sleep and dream, our spirit or our soul is released, and when we wake up our spirit or soul comes back, and when we die, our spirit is released for good. And so there's this sense that dreaming gives us kind of this special window into the realm of death and dying.

And what my mom and I have done in this book is tried to provide people the very sort of non-theoretical – and we're really not [saying] Freud's right or Jung's right, or neuroscientists are right – we're only just saying, look, when people are facing the final weeks and days and hours of their lives, they often find themselves confronting the most profound existential questions of human life: What is the meaning of my individual life? What's going to happen to me now? And in response to those kinds of questions, people will often experience powerful dreams and visions, and different types of experiences that people have questions about: Well, where did that come from? Or, is that divine intervention or is that just something inside the person's own head?

And what we argue is that wherever these dreams and visions come from, their effect – their pragmatic, practical effect – is very often to diminish people's fear and distress at the approaching end of their life, and, in fact, to give them sort of a sense of courage and hopefulness and peace.

And the main theme in the kind of dreams that we look at tends to be the theme of a journey, that – and, no big surprise, if you know anything about world mythology

and world religions, you know that death is often portrayed as a journey to some other land or some other realm or some other dimension of existence. And that often plays out in the people's dreams, where they'll dream of being in a car, or they'll dream of being in a boat, or they'll dream of being on a train, or they're walking, or some sense of movement is very frequent in pre-death dreams and visions. And in our experience, it's a way of signaling that, yes, this is the ultimate and the final transition and transformation of human life. And it's something ultimate; I mean, even if some of the experiences are frightening and [disgusting], many of them are not. And this is something we feel very strongly, that people should not be scared of these kinds of experiences, but celebrate them as part of sort of the natural spiritual [evolution] of the human soul.

**Dr. Dave:** So I gather that in the process of writing this book, did you go out and actually collect a lot of dreams?

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Oh, yeah, yeah, this is based on not only my research, but my mother's 10 plus years actually being with people. You know, she's a chaplain. She would be called in when people were – you know, they had a terminal diagnosis; they were going to die in a very short period of time. And she would help them talk through any concerns they had, help them plan their funeral.

And it's the sort of thing that people have never really studied before, really investigated. In part – which is in Western medical contexts – there's often an assumption that: Oh, if people start having dreams or visions, that must mean they're suffering dementia; they're losing their minds, and need to be medicated, or something like that. We really push back hard against that way of approaching death, and feel that when you get that terminal diagnosis, it's not the end of life right there, it's the beginning of the final chapter of life. And that final chapter can be filled with discovery and with the spiritual insights, and with all sorts of transformations that these dreams and visions are part of.

**Dr. Dave:** That's interesting, and you talk about the Western perspective. I'm sure you've also looked into Tibetan Buddhism, and ...

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Yeah, well, we kind of semi-jokingly thought of our book as kind of an American Book of the Dead. Tibet has its Book of the Dead, and the ancient Egyptians had a Book of the Dead, something that would provide people with some kind of guidance as they approached the end of this mortal life. We thought of this book and we looked around and my mom said as she does her work, she's kept looking around for something she could provide to her patients, her clients, to help them understand what they're experiencing, and there just wasn't anything like it, so, yes, we tried to write something that would be appropriate for this cultural context, that would make sense [to them].

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, now what is the Tibetan view? What would the Tibetan commentary on this be?

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Well, the Tibetans – I mean, the view of death is that it's a transition from this incarnation to another one. And that if you can, as you're dying, maintain your awareness that you're dying and that this is part of a cycle of mortal existence. The goal – as I understand it of the Tibetan process – is to maintain a kind of clear awareness of what's happening, so that you can be released from it. And most of the time people don't remember and they're caught back up into the cycle of birth and death and rebirth. But for – I mean, [they're not] very different ultimate theological views between, say, Christianity and Buddhism. But I think [that it's a] similar approach to death ultimately in that it's seen not as something to fear or something to avoid or to fight or to be terrified of, but rather sort of as tremendous opportunity for spiritual growth. And that, I think, is where Tibetans and Christians and people of many other faiths, I think, ultimately agree in the world [they think about that].

**Dr. Dave:** Do you have any idea how Tibetans would regard these dreams, though?

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Well, I would think that Tibetan – I mean Buddhist tradition generally looks to dreams as expressions of our experiences in the waking world – the entanglements, the emotional conflicts, the habitual repeating of patterns that we can sometimes get stuck in. And also, perhaps, as arenas in which sort of non-human [transpersonal] – sometimes positive, sometimes negative – forces can influence our lives. But I think that – again, I think that the similarities are quite strong in that Tibetans look at these dreams as indicators, as signs, of where they're still stuck and perhaps as glimpses of where they might move forward.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay. I'm remembering that Jung had a couple of very powerful dreams right near the end of his life. I'm thinking about that three part film series that Laurens van der Post narrates. Do you remember that dream? Can you – I don't quite have it firmly ...

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Oh, no. I'm not going to have – right, I can't get the actual dream – I'm looking it up in the book here. I know he's talked a bit about that, yes. I mean, Jung is an inspiration, of course, to everybody who works with dreams, and his approach to perspective function of dreaming is really what we drew upon the most in this book. The idea that dreams have kind of an anticipatory function or look ahead to what's coming in our lives and at the end of life, that's sort of the ultimate perspective challenge – is what's going to come after physical death. So that's really where we relied most heavily on Jung.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, I seem to recall that it was a dream – maybe there was a tree and the roots were wrapped around gold. I could be making this up, though [laughs], I just remember there was a very ...

**Kelly Bulkeley:** He's – I mean, he had a profound near death experience, of course, where, as I recall, he had sort of the classic experience of being elevated out of his

body and rising above the earth and then being pulled back with the realization that, no, he still had things to do in this world.

**Dr. Dave:** No, I wasn't aware of that one.

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Yeah. I remember that from somewhere in the confronting the unconscious chapter of *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, okay, it's been a long time since I read that one. I'm sure it's – it would probably be a good one to re-read. I know that you've – this is taking off in a little bit of a different direction – I know that you've studied dreams in relation to political orientation. What can you tell us about that?

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Sure. Well, that's been a kind of a sideline area of research for several years, the one that I'm curious about for couple of reasons: One, I've noticed just in pursuing my main area of research – which is the dream teachings and traditions of the world's religious groups – that virtually every religious tradition looks to dreams as sources of insight, not only for personal well-being and guidance, but also for collective well-being and guidance; and so then looking at Western psychological teachings that really restrict those, to the fear of meaningfulness of dreams, to the individual, and to psychic. Jung is better on this than, say, Freud or some others, but for the most part, the trend, I think, in Western psychology is to kind of think of dreams as only about your inner world business. And if you dream, for example, of the President, well, that's not really a dream about the President; that's about the president part of you.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Kelly Bulkeley:** And I had some questions about that. This goes back 16 years now to when I first started studying this, and so since then I've been looking at people's dreams of politicians; I've been looking at dreams around election time, when in the United States there's a lot of political sort of energy and enthusiasm; and I've also been looking at comparisons of the dreams – of sleep and dream patterns – of people who are politically liberal on the one hand, and politically conservative on the other hand. So, in various ways trying to look at what are the more collective dimensions of dreaming, and not – you know, several times I have found people's dreams of the President or President Clinton or President Bush or whatever, where it seems like those themes are reflecting something about their personal life. But there are plenty of times and findings that I'm coming up with that suggest, you know, dreaming really does reflect some broader realities as well, and we shouldn't sell dreams short by thinking they only have value for individual lives, but also for our understanding of collective realities as well.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, for example, have you found any findings or preliminary findings in terms of differences between the dreams of liberals versus the dreams of conservatives?

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Yeah, well, the main finding on that score – and [I've] continuous works researched on that. I've got a book coming out next year on this subject; I'll have a lot more to say about this soon. But the findings, at this point, seem to be that the political conservatives – in this country, anyway – tend to have dreams that are more grounded in waking reality, that tend to be more, sort of, dealing with every day experiences, sort of the here-and-now of life. And liberals, by contrast, tend to have dreams with more bizarre things happening, more flying, more dead people coming back to life, more sort of fantasy material.

**Dr. Dave:** [laughs]

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Yeah, yeah, I hear you chuckling, and this is where I'm reluctant to even, sometimes, to talk about this stuff because it leads so easily into some partisan stereotypes.

**Dr. Dave:** It fits so well into stereotypes, you know, the conservatives would describe themselves as down-to-earth and realistic, and those liberals are flighty and just full of dreams about – that are totally unreal, and unrealistic. [laughs]

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Yeah, well, and you can also think that – and I've had people respond this way – that, “Oh, you know, conservatives are more uptight and constricted and limited; and liberals are more creative and more expansive and more imaginative.” So it sort of depends on your point of view. And, again, this is early stages of this research, even still, as much as I've done. And I'm hoping to kind of expand it so I can push it beyond this sort of easy stereotyping.

What I think is my own sense is that in the American body politic we have many different voices, and each voice has its sort of distinctive strengths and, perhaps, its distinctive drawbacks. And my strong belief about dreams is that dreams are honest portrayals of who we are – you know, warts and all, our best strengths and virtues and our worst failings. And trying to apply that to contemporary politics, seems to me like, wow, we could use all the help we could get in trying to sort through some of the issues we're facing, the conflicts that are pulling us down. And so I have a real faith in planting some dream seeds out in the world and getting people to think about that – you know, what are the ultimate values that define conservatives and define liberals, and what do they share? What do they – I mean, I found that during the administration of Bill Clinton that I was hearing more nightmares from conservatives, and in recent years, since the presidency of President George Bush, I've heard a lot more nightmares from liberals. So, you know, there might be some sense that we – we're sensitive to the dangers that we perceive from the other party, such that that can affect us in our dreams.

**Dr. Dave:** That's interesting. That's interesting. I think you're – I really like the kind of sophisticated considerations that you're bringing to bear on this. At the same time, I wonder if you might not be a little apprehensive about whether or not

this book will be caricatured in reviews, and might become a target for political whatever.

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Oh, sure. Well, that's already happened.

**Dr. Dave:** [laughs]

**Kelly Bulkeley:** I've done different studies over the years that have generated various kinds of responses, and I'm not worried; I just do what I feel I need to do. This forthcoming book, I think, is going to take it in a direction that hopefully will generate a little more respect, if nothing else. And how I'm approaching it, is I have – the core of this book is going to be called “American Dreamers.” And the core is going to be the 10 people who over the past year kept a detailed sleep and dream journal. And these are people from different political backgrounds, liberals and conservatives of different parts of the country, different ages. I'm thinking of them as kind of a dreamers focus group.

And this is going to give, along with sort of the big or survey data that I have, this is going to give kind of a real, in-depth, detailed, personal level view of actual Americans and their actual dreams, and sleep and dream patterns. And these are not all people that have any particular interest in dreams, they're just normal people, for the most part.

And I'm hoping that by sort of grounding my discussion at that level, just telling these people's stories and looking at how their dreams and their nightmares are woven into their waking lives, and into their waking lives' political beliefs, it will get a richer understanding of that kind of – sort of the political unconscious, I guess, is what I'm ultimately trying to illuminate. And I'm hoping that by – like, say, grounding that analysis in the really, I think, compelling personal life narrative, that will get people to pay a little more attention – not that they're being silly about liberals are [dumb or conservatives are dull].

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, well, that sounds like it's going to be a fascinating book. And ...

**Kelly Bulkeley:** I'm working away on it, I'll let you know.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Now, speaking of the political unconscious, did you do any writing about the dreams of Osama bin Laden and/or his followers?

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Yeah, yeah. There's the video that came out, I believe, in December of 2001, soon after the terrorist attacks of September 11, in which Osama bin Laden spent quite a bit of time talking with his followers about the dreams the people were having about the upcoming attack. And what I found most – and I have written some about this – that the way that he thought that people he – he told people to stop talking about their dreams, because he thought that the dreams were going to sort of give up – give away – the secret of what they were planning. And



Islam – I mean, this is another project I’m working on – I’m co-editing a book with a couple of colleagues on dreams in Christianity and Islam, specifically to try to generate some dialogue and conversation between these two traditions.

**Dr. Dave:** Good.

**Kelly Bulkeley:** And what I’ve learned from my Muslim colleagues is that dreaming is enormously important in Muslim culture, always has been and continues to be right into the present day; in many ways, more central and sort of openly acknowledged than in Christian cultures and communities. So the fact that Mohammed, Osama bin Laden, and Saddam Hussein, and Mullah Mohammad Omar –

**Dr. Dave:** Khadafi?

**Kelly Bulkeley:** – the Taliban leader in Afghanistan. There’s reports of all these people talking about their dreams. And again, I think if – putting it strictly in terms of we need to understand better the dynamics and the motivations and the behaviors of people in the Muslim world – if that’s really our goal, and I think everybody agrees with that, we really need to understand their dreams as well, and how they think about dreams, because that’s a huge part of the Islamic culture, and it always has been.

**Dr. Dave:** Um hmm. I believe that your current, your currently latest book – and it seems like you’re moving fast as a writer, so that’s always going to be a moving target – but you’ve got a fairly recent book out called *The Wondering Brain: Thinking About Religion With and Beyond Cognitive Neuroscience*. So what does that mean, thinking about religion with and beyond cognitive neuroscience?

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Yeah, well this project grew out of my dream research, and this last 10 or 15 years has been a very exciting time in the neuroscientific study of sleep and dreaming, in the sense that now we’ve got these wonderful new brain imaging toys that can sort of poke around inside the brain and give us images of different levels of chemical and electrical activity during sleep, and presumably during dreaming

And, what I found was that oftentimes these results – these scientific results – were used to sort of beat up on dreams, and say, “Ah, now we know that it’s all just the brain, and it doesn’t really mean anything.” Then I started noticing that many of these same authors, or authors sort of in the same arena, were making the same basic argument about religion, that, “Ah, now that we can look inside the brain, we can see that, oh, it’s people’s belief in god,” or it was their religious experience or their vision. That’s not really anything outside of them; that’s just the brain.

And so there’s been some real tension between those who study things like dreams and religion and mythology, and those who are in the neuroscientific realm. And as

I began to really look into that, the neuroscientific literature, I found, first, they're just wrong in some of their arguments about religion and dreams. The understanding of what dreaming is, the understanding of what religion is, among many neuroscientists is very inadequate, shall we say.

But at the same time – and this is where this is my hopefulness coming through – I find a lot of fascinating insights in the neuroscientific literature that I think, if we read them not with the kind of materialist biases of the scientists themselves, but if we just look at their findings, if we look at the research and if we look broadly at different discoveries that are being made, we realize, wow, there's actually a lot that we can learn about the power [burst] of dreaming, the power of spirituality and religion in human life, the power of human creativity and imagination, that goes far beyond what, like I said, materialist scientists are themselves seeing in the data that they're producing in their research studies.

So I'm kind of trying to draw together the studies of religion and dreams and visions and creativity, and put it together with some of the new neuroscientific research in a way that, like the title suggests, goes beyond what I perceive to be the limits of someone like Richard Dawkins and *The God Delusion*. I think that's just a failure of imagination to see what the new scientific findings are actually teaching us.

**Dr. Dave:** Can you give an example of one of the scientific findings that might lead some to a materialistic conclusion but leads you to say, “Wow, look at the power of dreaming.”

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Sure. Well, I think the main one I find so interesting is the way that, in dreaming, the part of the brain that's responsible for what's called “secondary visual processing” becomes very active, and that's the part of the brain that, if I asked you to close your eyes and imagine yourself on a beautiful beach, and the waves are crashing, the sun is shining above you – you're not seeing that with your primary visual sense, with your eyes, you're imagining it. You are recreating it within your mind, and there's a quite a significant part of the brain-mind system devoted to that.

No big surprise, when we dream, that part of the brain becomes extremely active, and what that suggests to me – and in connection with a high degree of activation of what's called the amygdala in the limbic system, which is responsible for instinctual behavior or strong emotions and so forth – and what that suggests to me is that dreaming is, first off, it's healthy, normal. It's not like you're some deluded – you know, your brain is malfunctioning or something. No, it's a different way in which the brain is functioning, and what it says to me, is that humans are natural visionaries, that we have within us this powerful visionary capacity that's autonomous from ego control.

When I asked you to imagine something in the waking stage, that's kind of a top down, we kind of [direct] the imaginative process, which with the dreaming is autonomous. Dreaming is spontaneous. Dreaming comes from non-volitional, non-ego sources, and, to me, that really supports the various reports and experiences people have had throughout history of spontaneous visions and spontaneous dreams that seem to come from nowhere, and yet have these profound revelations and insights that come with them. And, to me, the new neuroscientific research is showing, yes, we have that capacity.

Now, we're always going to debate: Well, is that all it is or are there gods or divine beings beyond that? And for the moment I can bracket those questions down. What I focus on is, let's look at what amazing potentials there are within the human brain-mind system and how perfectly they account for and help us understand the variety and the spectacular power of human dreams and visions through history. And that's a – you know, I don't see that as a kind of a weapon or a club to beat on spiritual people, and say, "Ah, now, these [people, it's] in your brain." I see it as, like, "Wow, we are just beginning to grasp the profound depth of human potential." And these research studies – these neuroscientific studies – I think, in many ways are confirming things which we've learned through religion and spirituality over the ages.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, yes. Do you think there are things that people can do to cultivate that visionary power?

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Sure, well, that's the great question; that's a natural follow question. And in the study of dreams, that's often the work in the – under the heading of "dream incubation," [like] it's a very ritualized [system] to enhance the potential to have a powerful, revelatory dream or something. And I think that some of the common themes in these [practices] – and we can look at everything from Tibetan Buddhism and different yogic practices of Naropa and Milarepa, people like that, to the temples of Asclepius in ancient Greece, and [psychometric training] to Native American vision quests. Islam has a practice called Istakhara, which is their [attempt or] version of dream incubation.

Virtually every culture tries this, because there's a sense, wow, if we can encourage] and feel like this, these kinds of experiences, it would really be a benefit. And I'd say – this is very general, of course – but some of the basic themes of these ritual practices are trying to separate the individual from sort of ordinary, profane, human, earthly life, and coming closer to whatever it is the individual considers to be the divine or the sacred or those kinds of energies; so, trying to separate from this world by means of bathing, fasting, taking off your clothes, wearing special clothes, and usually sleeping in a special place, not in your regular bed, but in a graveyard, in a cave, on a mountaintop, by a sacred fire or sacred hearth, in a temple. These are, in all these different traditions, various ways of trying to separate oneself from the ordinary world, and bringing oneself as close as you can to the realm where you believe these powers dwell.

And in almost every tradition there's a recognition that it might not work. All you can do is sort of put yourself out there and open yourself up, and then maybe a dream will come, and maybe a dream won't come. It's not – I don't know of any tradition that considers this sort of an automatic, mechanical process, that you do X, Y, and Z and "Bing!" there you've got your dream revelation. It's more, you open yourself, you prepare yourself, you invite the dream creating power to come, and then you see what happens.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, yeah. Given the amount of conscious mind attention that you focused on this whole area of dreaming, I'm wondering if it's had any impact on your personal dream life.

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Well, sure. One thing we know from basic dream research is that we dream about that which we care about, and are concerned about in our waking lives. So, for example, I dream more about my wife, I think, than any other dream character, since she's the most important person in my waking world, and she appears most in my dreaming world as well.

I think we're – I mean, my dreams – I mentioned at the outset the nightmares that sort of plagued me early in adolescence, and that their coming sort of propelled me along this path; and those have definitely changed. The kinds of conflicts and tensions that I was experiencing then grew – my trying to understand those dreams – they have changed. And I've grown in that process.

Now, one of the things that I – one of the ways that I relate with my dreams is as a source of new ideas and insights, so if I have a dream – I mean, the dreams and politics subject is a good example. It's not like I set out to study that, but I had a couple dreams of being with my dad and with Ronald Reagan, with Republicans. And my dad is very conservative; he was a Reagan supporter back then, and I'm not. I'm very different from him, and those dreams and the way my family relationships were intertwined with the political themes got me thinking, like, "Wow! Wonder if anybody else had dreams like that?"

And, so that's the way my dreams are sort of a resource for me; that they kind of give me ideas about what's out there, and then I go and explore. And sometimes I find other people do have dreams like that, and sometimes I find they don't. I don't think my dreams are sort of the gold standard by any means; that I have the "right" kinds of dreams, the "best" kinds of dreams, but they – I know my dreams pretty well, and when I learn something from them, it makes me wonder if other people are experiencing that as well. Yeah, I try to keep kind of just an open conversation going, and see where it leads.

**Dr. Dave:** Excellent. I notice on your Web site that you have a dream survey that you're actually inviting anybody who comes to your Web site to fill out, and I guess that provides you with a lot of great raw material for future books, huh?

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Yeah, well, my Web site's in – I guess Web site's are always in process of being refurbished and redone. And I'm just about to finish a whole new orientation for it, but, yes, that survey I've had up for awhile. And there's always an issue – not just with Internet surveys, but surveys of college students or anywhere – that you never know if people aren't just kind of making it up. And that's kind of a challenge for research in this area, and so, with the surveys that I do over the Internet, I – for the most part, I take people at their word, and what I look for – and this has become more and more my sort of research MO – is that I try not to base any claim or any argument on a single case, because you just never know. You just never know if someone's – they've sort of fabricated it or they, maybe, polished it up a little bit.

What I'm interested in at this point, in large part, is trying to find some of these broad, very pervasive themes and patterns that, whether or not a few people are kind of pulling my leg, you start to see the same – the same kind of pattern; for example this pattern of conservatives having more sort of realistic type dreams, and liberals having somewhat more bizarre dreams. If I only heard that in a couple of dreams, a couple of people, I'd be, like, "Eh, maybe." But when I start to see it over lots and lots of people, hundreds of people, then I start to think, "Yeah, maybe that's – maybe there's something [goes] to that." So that's – that Internet survey's just part of a general trying to hear about people's dreams, and people from different backgrounds and different perspectives, and then see what we can learn.

**Dr. Dave:** Now, you're going to be a presenter at the upcoming 24th Annual International Association for the Study of Dreams Conference in Rohnert Park. What are you presenting on?

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Well, actually, this is a different kind of angle entirely, but I'm going to be helping doing something with my mother, the *Dreaming Beyond Death* book, and the teaching we've done out of that. I'm also going to be doing a presentation on a, actually, a homeless program in San Francisco, where a church, a Catholic church, has allowed for the last couple of years homeless people to sleep in the pews during the day, where people who aren't able to make decent shelters at night and are terribly sleep deprived, and are in various kinds of distress and danger, are allowed to sleep in this church.

And what strikes me about it, it's kind of an unintentional incubation site, for people who are obviously in very desperate circumstances, and so I visited the church and talked to some people there, and I'm hoping – I've still got a little work to do [laughs] to get it ready for the conference – but my hope is to illuminate for people who are interested in dreams another area in which, I think, we can contribute to sort of collective well-being and betterment.

Because these are – these people are obviously in very difficult circumstances, and it seems to me everything we know about sleep and dreams is that if people aren't

getting an opportunity to sleep, if people aren't getting just a simple opportunity to rest and to allow their creative imaginations to be free, as they are in our dreams, how do we possibly expect them to function well in the waking world? And so, this particular program at this church in San Francisco, I think, is a very thought provoking example for those that I've seen in the dream studies world about how we might promote certain kinds of social reform, cultural change, that can, just at a very basic level, enhance people's ability to sleep well and dream well.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, that certainly sounds fascinating. Well, Dr. Kelly Bulkeley – did I cut you off? Go ahead.

**Kelly Bulkeley:** No, no.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, I was just going to say thanks so much for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Well, it's been my pleasure.

**Dr. Dave:** I'll look forward to meeting you at the conference.

**Kelly Bulkeley:** Looking forward to it too. I hope some of your listeners show – come along, too. It's a lot of fun.