Dreamwork
Guidelines for the client:

Before dreaming: we must know the difference between day and night. It seems an obvious and fundamental difference. Day and night. Night and day. Two halves of the whole, equal and opposite sides to the same coin.

But in our day and age, if we are honest with ourselves, there is no equality. Day always wins out over night. That is, day-life is always more important than night-life. In consciousness itself seems to have lost its ability to deal with the night. We're scared of it, though we don't admit it. Or, we take it to be a basically useless period in our lives, a necessary evil.

It is no wonder that we have such trouble getting to sleep, staying asleep, and certainly, remembering and working with the gifts of our sleep, our dreams. We pay a dear price for our devaluing the night. It is probably not too great an exaggeration to say that most of us no longer know how to fall asleep. Falling asleep ... it's an art of sorts. And, so is waking up, for that matter. And how we do both has much to do with working with our dreams. So, let's start with the art of going to sleep.

If you want to work with the unconscious at night, you want to prepare yourself properly. You want to be able to fall asleep with a fair amount of grace. And, as we well know, anything done with true grace takes practice. You actually must practice as falling asleep to fall asleep with grace. Some will be getting nervous about now. Something simple has gotten so complex. Yes and no. But, even if it has gotten so complex, the nice thing about this challenge is that you get to practice going to sleep every night. If you really want to, you are bound to get good at it. How can you not?

To fall asleep properly then, begin by establishing a nighttime ritual that will get you into bed at a reasonable time and in a receptive frame of mind to engage the unconscious. A ritual is meant to take you from point A to point B, in this case from day-life to nightlife. You need a good ritual to move into your night-life properly. The unconscious will be flattered that you take time out to reverence the transition from day-life to night-life by establishing a fitting ritual that you follow each night. You are starting off on the right foot when you so reverence the experience of sleep. The unconscious treats us as we treat it. If we are domineering, suspicious and resentful, it treats us in like manner. If we are respectful, open and friendly, it is also.

As part of your night-time ritual, include time to wind down before getting into bed. Begin to shift out of your normal day-life and start getting ready to take a trip into your night-life.

Once you enter your bed, become aware of how relaxed (or unrelaxed) you are in bed. If you are not relaxed, then do whatever relaxation exercise you are comfortable with to put some closure on the business part of your day. Begin to let go.

In going to sleep, maintain a willingness to be lead by the unconscious, to explore the unknown in your own psyche. Do not try to force anything. Your frame of mind should be relaxed and receptive.
In some ways, preparing yourself for a walk into the unconscious is like preparing to walk into a movie. I do not mean walking into a theater house and buying a ticket to see a movie. That is traditionally our consumerist approach to the unconscious ... through going to the movies. The movies are good as far as they go, but they are nothing compared to what your own unconscious is able to provide you. And, you cannot beat the cost.

When I say that preparing yourself for a walk into a movie, I mean that literally ... to walk into and become part of a movie ... a visual drama or fiction that for all practical purposes is indistinguishable from everyday life. This means that when you dream, you are not just having a good dream or a bad dream (like you would see a good movie or a bad movie). You ARE the dream. Or analogously, you ARE the movie ... all parts of it.

**Incubating a Dream:** There are times when you have been working with a problem during the day that will not let you go ... to sleep. This is a great opportunity for you. If your ritual is a strong and good one, you can make the transition into sleep. But, you may want to visualize whatever problem your are dealing with as a clear conflict between position A and position B. Problems have a natural predisposition of presenting themselves as conflicts or tensions between two opposite points of view, usually two opposite but LEGITIMATE points of view. Occasionally, a symbol or image may recommend itself as a worthy representation of the conflict. If that is the case, you are well on your way to engaging the unconscious in a creative way.

Take the conflict or symbol and give it to the Lord. Give it up reverently and ask for help... admitting that you have done the best you can with the problem and can go no more with it. All good forms of prayer take this point of view. It expresses the problem authentically and at the same time it is humbling.

Once you have offered the problem up, you must trust. This is not easy, as you may find yourself wanting to go back to the problem to fight with it. Well, if you have to you have to. But, the longer you do fight with the problem, the longer you will stay awake, which means you are depriving the unconscious from having a go at it. Some people do feel however that they must totally exhaust themselves, physically and mentally, before they are ready to submit.

**Waking up:** When you have a dream and you awake in your bed, there is an art to waking up with the dream in hand, so to speak. Dreams are slippery fish that don't take to abrupt movements and splashing around. If you pull them out of the water too quickly or too violently, they will squirt right out of your hand and make for down river.

To pursue our fish catching metaphor, imagine yourself down in the water as one of the fish. Only you are a fish with a difference. You do just as well out of water as in. There is one slight problem however. Whatever you see underwater gets all mucked up if you shoot out of the water too fast. The picture goes along with the memory, as soon as you hit air. So, the trick is to get out of the water nice and easy, watching all the while the world you are leaving behind. And, just before breaking the plane of the water, you review in your mind all the marvelous images and feeling from below, and you say to yourself, "I don't know what it all means, but I'm not forgetting it!"
Now, get out of bed slowly and deliberately and go do your dreamwork.

**Dreamwork:** Dreamwork is WORK. Once you have a dream, you are not to presume that you will remember it, even if it is the most vivid dream of your life. Especially, if it is the most vivid dream of your life! Here are some steps to follow when you've caught a dream.

**Write your dreams down.** Keep a journal for them, using dates and times. Develop the skill of taking down the dream as a reporter would write a story for a responsible newspaper, that is accurately, in detail, and objectively without editorializing. Some may find that a recorder works best for this.

**Do dreamwork.** That is, flesh out your dreams. First make your associations to the dominant images. These may refer to something that happened earlier in the day or week, or they may carry you back further to earlier childhood memories, or simply be other images that are conjured up by the main dream image. If you have trouble associating, take a dream image, for example, an airplane, and pretend you are describing it to a Martian who knows nothing about an airplane.

Next, make any **amplifications** at a cultural or historical level that seem pertinent. These are connections made in the larger contexts that one may view one's life. For this you may even be inclined to research certain images.

**Do something creative with your dream.** If you believe you've got the meaning of a dream, do not leave it in an intellectual guise. Conduct some physical ritual to affirm the message of the dream or find a way to give it symbolic importance. The best rituals are physical, solitary, and silent.

**Stick to the dream images.** Figure that you are doing good dreamwork if you begin and end with the dream images themselves.

**Value your dreams.** Periodically ask yourself if you're taking your dreams seriously. That is, do you value them enough to allow them attention, to keep them around with you for a while? Contemplate your dreams.

**Look for dream motifs or themes.** Try to identify a motif or theme in a dream. Don't push this too hard. Dreams are notoriously repetitious. Motifs and themes will hit you without you clutching or panicking to "find" something.

Typical motifs are flying, falling, climbing stairs or mountains, wandering through two or three storied houses, going out without any clothes, losing your teeth or moustache, crowds of people, hotels, mazes, railway stations or airports, automobiles, animals of one kind or another, colors, numbers, death ... there are countless so call motifs. Themes may be phrased in one concise line such as: "The fear that goes unfaced is the fear that will consume me." In a sense, the theme may be considered a psychological lesson or insight.

**Look at the different levels of your dream.** Look at your dream subjectively, that is at the level of the personal unconscious and in relation to aspects of your own personality, and objectively, that is at the archetypal level. Often a dream
can speak eloquently on both levels at once. After all, the separation between these two levels of the unconscious is not absolute. In some dreams, one is really looking at the same material from two different but related angles.

Look at your dream in regard to the past, present, and future. Look at your dream in the context of the past but also in the context of the future ... where it may be leading you or what it may be pointing you toward.

Notice how you wake up from a dream. What is your emotional state? What parts of the dream seemed to most affect you? Review your dreams. Periodically go back over your dream journal to look at material that seemed unapproachable.

Title your dreams. Give your dreams titles that are akin to titles for fairy tales, such as, "The woman with the Poisonous Soup."