

Asclepius, son of Apollo, practised his art of giving and preserving life for seven centuries in Ancient Greece. **Kerry Kousionis** discovers how the Greek god used the power of dreams to heal in the ancient world, **Katherine Byles** takes us on a modern day pilgrimage, and psychotherapist **Brenda Mallon** shares her dream interpretations

Asclepius started life as a human physician/healer. He became a healer of such excellence that his fame spread.

The myth tells that Asclepius was born of Apollo and a mortal mother, Coronis.

Apollo, on discovering that his pregnant lover had been given as a bride to a mortal husband, flew into a rage and killed her. Coronis was placed on the funeral pyre but as she was burning, Apollo took pity on his unborn son and

removed the baby from her womb, saving its life. He gave the baby to Chiron, the centaur, to raise. Chiron taught him the art of healing. He also acquired knowledge of surgery, herbalism, potions and incantations.

Asclepius became so skilled that, for a fee, he was able to bring the dead back to life. Zeus, the king of the Greek pantheon, could not allow this infringement of the laws of nature to continue and struck Asclepius down with a thunderbolt. In the course of time, Asclepius was deified. He became the 'patron saint' of the healer/doctor. So for nearly seven centuries, followers of Asclepius wandered around Greece practising their art.

Eventually the cult of Asclepius found a home. There were two main sanctuaries for Asclepius: one in Tricca (the modern day Trikala), the other in Epidavros. At first Asclepius was considered the god of curing illness, but developed to become 'the giver and preserver of health'. He also took on the mantle of the god of the family – called upon for even small daily affairs.

The Greeks' belief system was a wonderful marriage of the scientific and the non-rational. When someone could not be cured by modern medicine, the

physician would acknowledge this and would then recommend their patients to seek healing through Asclepius the god.

Healing came about through a visitation of the healing god (or one of his totems – the dog or snake) in a dream. The dream would then result in a spontaneous healing or an indication of what had to be done or undone to bring about healing.

Asclepius' healing sanctuaries were found throughout the known Hellenic world and were still active until the fifth century AD. The healing sanctuaries were called Asclepeions. People would go on a pilgrimage to these centres. They would be offered bodywork, hydrotherapy, psychotherapy, good food and changes in diet. When the temple Therapeutes (therapists) considered a person was ready, they would be introduced to the Abaton which was an incubation room where the patient would pray to the god and sleep – expecting a visitation from Asclepius in their dreams. The patients' cure would be spontaneous or the answer to their healing would be found within the dream.

The illnesses cured were recorded on the thousands of votive offerings that were presented to the temples.

In many ways the life of Asclepius

Dream interpretations BY BRENDA MALLON

Main picture: The temple at Corinth was a major centre for the worship of Asclepius (shown in sculptural form).

mirrors many of the features of Jesus' life. He was a mortal physician/healer born of a mortal woman and divine father. He was killed and became divine.

What the god Asclepius encompasses is something gentle, caring and giving.

The Christian church thought that, of all the gods of the Greeks and Roman Empire, the cult of Asclepius posed the most threat. It is no surprise that the Christian church incorporated many of the Asclepian rituals. In the Greek Orthodox Church even now, votive offerings are presented to healing saints, the Virgin Mary or Jesus Christ.

Modern dream healing does not mean that you have to believe in a Pagan god. We can pray to the healing, benevolent god or divine being of our own beliefs.

“Modern dream healing does not mean that you have to believe in a Pagan god”

Dreams are still held in high regard in Greek folk culture.

Once we commit ourselves to a dream healing pilgrimage then we start our journey of healing. We surround ourselves with things and people that nurture our soul and we slow down the pace and style of our lives.

The beauty of nature, music, theatre and art can touch us at a very deep level that can be both cathartic and healing.

Even now when you seek out the healing sanctuaries there is a strong, peaceful energy to these sites. They seem to have the ability to connect the parts within us to create a whole and lead us to our own healing.

The Spirit of Life centre in Greece is in the Peloponnese in the locality of an ancient Asclepeion recorded by Pausanias, chronicler of the second century AD.

Here a modern day temple has been created dedicated to the traditions of dream healing. The Spirit of Life dream healing pilgrimage visits the ancient sites of Epidavros, Delphi, Athens, and Corinth. The Asclepeions are usually some way from the main settlement in a location that sets them apart from the normal and mundane.

There is deep yearning to understand what our dreams mean. For thousands of years, people have recorded dreams and developed different ways of making sense of them.

Today, many psychotherapists like myself use dreams to discover the root of anxiety and to find inner strengths to overcome difficulties.

People who interpret dreams have been around for thousands of years in every culture: temple diviners in ancient Greece, Babylonian Baru priests, medicine men in North and South America, shamans in Siberia.

Dream therapists can help uncover meanings, but it is for the dreamer to make sense of the dream. One technique is to build up your ability to see connections between the symbolic images and your waking life. This is what the philosopher Aristotle was referring to when he said that the art of dream interpretation requires the ability 'to see resemblances'. Some dreams feel especially significant, and stay with you as rich gems in your heart and soul. Jung called these numinous or sacred.

It was because of a dream that the emperor Ming Ti (100 BC) sent representatives to central Asia to bring back sacred Buddhist texts to China. His dream told him that through these texts he could deepen his spirituality.

Buddhists were generally encouraged to record their dreams and be alert to visitations by spirits bringing messages. They believed in precognitive dreams, and that dreams could resolve spiritual problems. Old Testament stories attest to the importance attributed to dreams by Ancient Egyptians and Hebrews.

In the Inuit tribes of Canada dreaming is seen as a way to cross the boundary between this world and other worlds, journeying far as their body sleeps. It is also regarded as important intuition about where to hunt.

Whatever we meet in our dreams, it comes to bring insight and wellbeing. We may meet monsters or magicians, we may fly, or run for our lives, but we move through darkness in our dream time to reach the light of day.

It takes courage to explore your dreams and be willing to see aspects of yourself that you have been unconscious of for years. The feeling of courage in a dream is especially empowering.

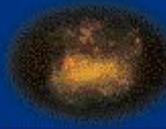
Shell-shocked victims wake up vomiting with fear after nightmares. Captain Rivers, a British doctor in the Royal Army Medical Corps, used dream therapy with shell-shocked soldiers in the First World War to help them recover from the overwhelming distress.

Stars or Calendars: Is your dream reminding you of a special date or anniversary you have overlooked?

Light often symbolises guidance. Illumination is our intuition, an inner guiding spirit.

Before a significant change in their life, people often dream of an intense bright light.

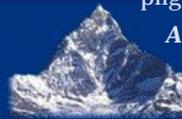
A mirror symbolises the mind and the art of reflection, of looking at the truth of who you are, and of seeing yourself in a new light.



People have always viewed the sky as the heavens, occupied by gods from the Greek gods to Hindu deities such as Indra and Vishnu. **Clouds** are connected to celestial messages.



Mountain peaks are where earth and heaven meet – the pinnacle of human effort and aspiration. This is why mountains are sacred sites of pilgrimage.



Air often features in anxiety dreams; the dreamer may suffer asthma or we may be gasping for life.



In Greek mythology, Daealus built a labyrinth on the island of Crete and imprisoned the minotaur. Eventually Theseus was sent into the labyrinth to kill the flesh-eating hybrid.

A maze may signify you are lost, confused, baffled or amazed.



Butterflies are beautiful symbols of souls in transformation. The Greek word psyche means soul or butterfly and the Celts also believed in butterfly souls.



In China, a butterfly is the sign of happy marriage and sexual ecstasy.

Bees are the symbols of souls allowed into heaven to Muslims, and honey was a symbol of God's grace in the Christian Bible. Since medieval times, bees have become a sign of success, productive endeavour, and prosperity.



Spirit of Life Dream Healing Diary

13 – 20 JUNE 2003 BY KATHERINE BYLES

13 June – Night One

Five of us arrive in Athens, greeted by Sky and Kerry from The Spirit of Life Centre. We head to the Parthenon. The full moon shows off the Acropolis – we share the stunning view as we enjoy our first meal together. Fall into bed at a hotel. Sleep is disrupted. I find myself dreaming about the group...

14 June – Night Two

We set off in a minibus to drive from Athens to Stoupas – a long drive, with a stop at an Asclepian Temple in Corinth. It's hidden away from the main ruins, down roads overgrown as if forgotten along with Asclepian healing. My child-like spirit of adventure takes over and I play a game: to look around and ask where I should go. Surprised by an overwhelming feeling to go towards the mountain, so off I set. Down some steps into the foundations of the temple is my next command. Off I go, climbing over brambles and long grasses. I find myself in front of a cave-like enclosure with steps down to the home of the healing spring waters that once served the temple. It's cool. I sit in awe of this cavern that has existed for thousands of years. After six hours along the winding mountain roads of the Peloponnese I'm exhausted. Sleep is difficult. Millipedes and centipedes climb the wall. A reptile on the roof makes a cracking noise until 4am. No time for dreams.

15 June – Day Three

Barbara Sidell, dream healing facilitator, leads us in a meditation by a waterfall. I'm stunned to see a beautiful man standing on rocks on the other side. His eyes are bright, and his mischievous grin says: 'I've been wondering when you would come, you finally made it!' He is radiating such warmth, compassion and love that tears come to my eyes. 'Come back into the room,' I hear Barbara saying in the distance..... I don't want to go back. Who is he? He's laughing as I'm torn between staying with him and making my way back. His strong presence reassures me I've not seen the last of him. I return to the group, moved.

We spend the afternoon at a small cove, jumping off rocks and lying in the Greek sunshine. Ahhhh, this is better! More dream work with Barbara. Lunch outside under the pagoda. The food is wonderful – all grown locally. Sky and Kerry are exceptionally good cooks.

15 June – Night Three

Finally a night dream. My dad is driving me to the post office, to post letters for my new business venture. We stop at the traffic lights and, padding along the street, is a lion. He is neither fearsome nor

frightening, merely going along his way in a Lion the Witch and The Wardrobe kind of way. 'He must have escaped from the zoo,' I say. We feel privileged to see such a creature free to roam the streets. We turn left at the traffic lights and further down the road happen upon two tigers. 'Look, they must have escaped too!'

16 June – Night Four

Barbara takes us through a wonderful colour journey, one I will be repeating at home. Unsettled sleep again. A loud voice (I think it's my own) wakes me up with a few simple words that leave me enlightened with a eureka feeling – I have discovered the answer to life, the universe and everything. 'Change is not the answer - simply add JOY!' The words resonate around the room and I laugh. There is so much emphasis on change – rather than striving to change it's a timely reminder to refocus and add joy. A 'joy shaker' comes to mind, similar to a flour shaker my grandmother had, only magically filled with joy. I can shake it on to sad or grumpy people and it protects my energy too.

18 June – Night Six

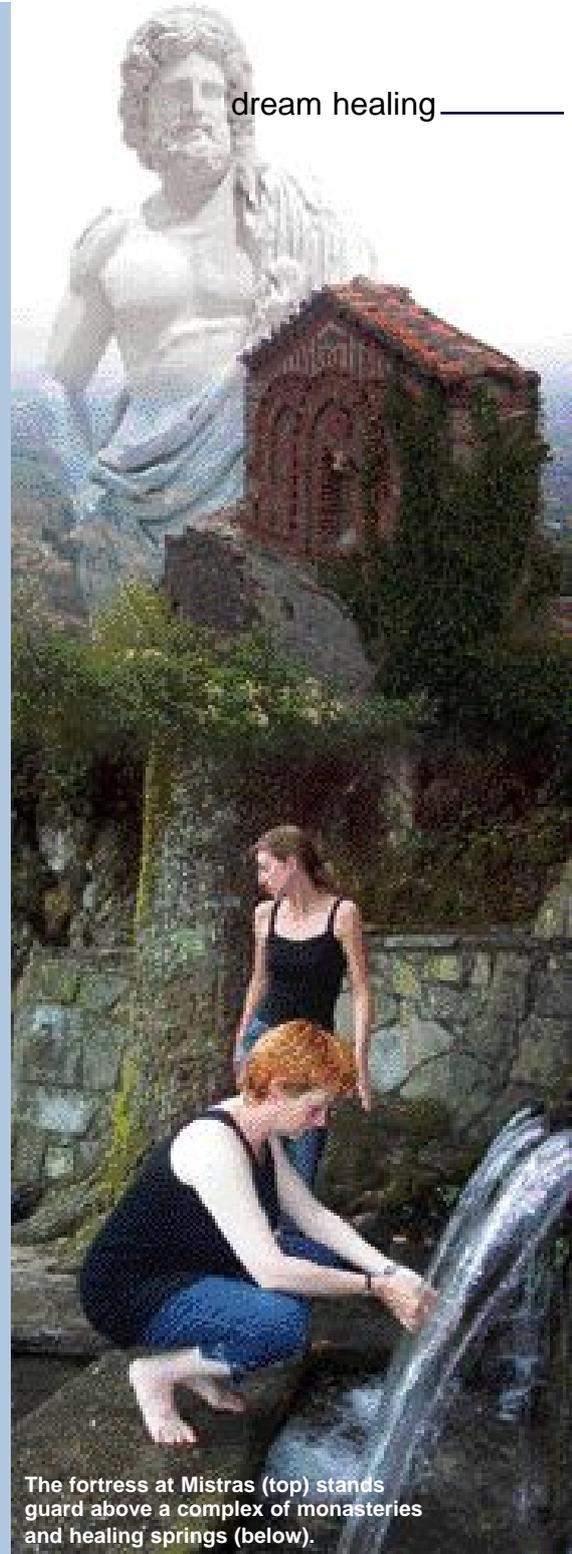
We say goodbye to the calm of the centre and set off in the minibus again, I'm reluctant – have only just begun to unwind and feel in need of sunbathing, sleep, and swimming in crystal waters. Mistras is hard to describe. After reviving our spirits at a healing spring, we head for the fortress – it's a long way to the top and the views are magnificent. An electric storm adds to the drama.

19 June – Day Seven

We visit Epidavros, the most important temple of Asclepius. There's an open track, a gymnasium where patients watched athletes perform and a stunning amphitheatre where patients saw plays and music. I feel like an adventurer and I'm drawn to a hill with a small group of trees. Below a tree I find a tortoise shell, intact. The word HOME jumps into my head and I think of the grounded, nurtured feeling I have at home. Barbara tells me it's a cosmic symbol, Yin, it signifies the beginning of creation, waters, the moon, earth mother, time, immortality, support and regeneration.

20 June – Day Eight

Travel back to Athens via Corinth. It is great to end where we started. Exploring the site further I am drawn to one of the massive fig trees. Scrambling through the branches I find myself standing on an intact tunnel system for the spring water. We learn a temple dance and leave a lovely energy. The feeling will stay with me as I recall my dreams back at home.



The fortress at Mistras (top) stands guard above a complex of monasteries and healing springs (below).

more information

- The Spirit of Life Dream Healing Pilgrimage costs £950 for flights, accommodation, transport to the temples, the dream course and healing sessions. Pilgrimages on 24-31 August and 18-25 October. Other courses are available in Reiki and healing.
- Contact the Spirit of Life Centre: www.thespiritoflife.co.uk or 0870 2427069.
- EasyJet www.easyjet.com (0870 6000 000) has daily services from Gatwick and Luton to Athens.
- Brenda Mallon is a psychotherapist and dream researcher on the Board of Directors of the International Association for the Study of Dreams. She is based in England, and specialises in counselling children with dream therapy.
- The Dream Bible – A Guide to Every Dream Symbol Under the Moon*, by Brenda Mallon (Godsfield Press, £12.99) is available from the **Kindred Spirit** Mail Order Collection.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY KATHERINE BYLES/SKY WICKENDEN