



Embodied Dream Image Work in Groups

Much unplumbed creativity is contained in the unconscious. By freeing our dreams from the inscrutable prison of our ego's perspective, we realize more creative power through the healing faculty of imagination. Dutch Jungian Analyst, Robert Bosnak, author of the Shambhala Press classic, *A Little Course in Dreams*, has developed "Embodied Dreaming," a technique for working with dreams imaginatively in groups.

We sit with eyes closed in a low lit room and are led back into a dream, sinking into a slightly altered state of consciousness where active imagination awakens naturally. Leading the dreamer with questions, locating images in the body, we explore the images from perspectives other than those the ego imposes. Repressed images eventually become conscious and reveal tensions held in the unconscious mind.

Throughout history societies have honored the wisdom of dreamwork. The Greeks studied dreams to diagnose illness, knowing that which is not made conscious can manifest as a physical symptom. Bosnak calls dreams "energy fields" with their own "eco-systems" which involve us in a reality that our psyche experiences as being awake. When we identify places in our bodies where we feel our dream's emotions, we consciously compare and contrast them, simultaneously experiencing the feelings they generate. Essentially, dream work heals.

Since we sleep for one third of our lives, there is a lot of valuable material which we lose when we dismiss images as "just a dream." In an extroverted culture such as ours, we have Ego on all fronts, with all its damaging projections and shadows. For example, what you recall from the dream where an assailant puts a gun to your head is only your ego's terror. By examining the aggressor's point of view, we can release deeper fears as well as repressed anger. By expressing dark feelings and discovering their source somewhere in our current lives, we process and own the tension rather than act it out in negative behavior spurred on by the projected idea of evil being "out there" rather than "in here" as well. When the dream-antagonist imaginatively feels beneath his anger, terrorism collapses; we see what he really wants is empathy. Offering compassion to our inner-terrorists helps us live with ourselves, as well as love ourselves a little more.

There are personal dreams and collective dreams. In Native American culture, the shaman will dream for the whole village. Universal archetypes such as *The Divine Child*, *The Wise Old Man or Woman*, *The Trickster*, *The Hero*, *Fair Maiden* and *Devouring Feminine* appear repeatedly through dreams, art, religion, poetry and mythology. As a group bonds, many synchronicities occur and one dream often applies to everyone.

The group encourages the dreamer to imaginatively describe the subtle nuances of the atmosphere, objects and figures. By gently directing the dreamer into the ego-alien aspects of the dream, the dreamer can be "tripped" into feeling unconscious images. By ourselves we find it hard to identify with alienated complexes. But the dream will reveal itself to the dreamer as the group's gentle prodding breaks through the dreamer's blocks and resistances, making these figures conscious. Questions posed by the group trigger responses expanding the dream psychically. This is called "dreaming the dream onward." Active imagination carries the dream to a new healing image when the tension is highest. This image may unite the opposites through what Jung called the "autonomous psyche."

For instance, if the earth is dried out and feels frightening to the dreamer while the sky is gorgeous and comforting, the dreamer may find it difficult to hold both these images at once. The group questions back and forth between the two, asking for more details. The dreamer, then begins to see more, and new images surface. A tree may suddenly appear rooted down beneath the dry soil into a place where water flows back up the roots through the trunk and branches into the sky. The group presses the dreamer to feel this tree in her body. The active imagination connects the threatening earth and idealized sky.

For very personal questions a simple *yes* or *no* suffices to recreate feeling. Yet the dreamer's privacy is ensured since only she will see the context behind the conflicting images, for example, a negative father or mother. These autonomous images might be identified as held in the lower back, behind the eyes, or deep in the chest where the heart lives.

We learn as we go regarding which kinds of questions work best. When processing dreamwork, the group becomes a container, an alchemical vessel heating the oppositions and transforming the substance, the matrix of feelings which produced the dream and the smallest fragment can be expanded into a multi-layered experience. Connecting the dots of the bodily-held images, the dreamer builds a new energy body and shifts the emotional impact of the imagery. The dream is "cooked" or "worked" until all its contradictions and complexities are intuitively made conscious through imagination. When the group work is over, a discussion (with eyes open) can amplify the symbolic or archetypal images with intellectual associations.

Memories, attitudes, judgments and wounds together create dreams. Too often we limit our dream "interpretation" to what we already know through Almighty Ego's perspective. Yet it is *the unconscious mind* that trips us up in life. Through imagination we give voice, texture and visual detail to the "otherness" of shadow figures and penetrate feelings we harbour yet consciously disown. We all gravitate toward idealized visions and repress unpleasant images. When we take responsibility for the dark side we no longer loath it; we transform it. More compassion surfaces for ourselves and others.

Embodied dreamwork keeps us honest, uniting fields of diverse emotions through empathy. This technique facilitates *experience* rather than interpretation. By this practice we learn that intellectually "understanding" a psychological complex does not necessarily heal it. Yet by *emotionally* freeing an image, *imagination* heals. Jung said we cannot change anyone else, only ourselves, but in this way each of us changes the world for the better.

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