

# Dream Tending



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# DREAM TENDING

A Master of Dreamwork Shows How to Awaken  
the Power of the Living Dream to Transform  
Your Relationships, Career, Health, and Spirit

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## *Chapter One*

# THE LIVING IMAGE

*Dream Tending is a life practice* that healers, storytellers, and poets have known by many different names for thousands of years. Passed on through the generations, the art of tending living dream images emerges in a culture when the call to see the natural world as alive is urgent. Then, after a while, the teachings are forgotten and go underground once more. My great-grandfather understood this at a time when people were in desperate need of the life-affirming power of the dream. I believe I picked up the nearly forgotten threads of knowledge three generations later, as a small boy in his cobbler's shop. As years passed and the culture again suffered the pangs of separation from the wellspring of internal nature, I felt the awakening of this craft within me.

Dream Tending, as I would name this calling, did not appear to me as a fully formed vision. The craft came to me out of both necessity and destiny. My early struggles with dyslexia meant that I had to find alternative learning skills simply to survive. Belonging to my great-grandfather's lineage was a matter of fate, but what was most formative in the revelation of Dream Tending was the journey of discovery itself. It was not a direct route, not a straight path to the wisdom that dreams are alive and the images

in them are as real as you or I. It was, in fact, just the opposite. It was a circuitous expedition, clumsy at times, often not conscious, yet always underneath I felt pushed by a force, as if the journey was guided by the living images of dreams themselves.

Connecting to the living images of dreams opened me to a life abundant with possibility. These living images, dismissed as irrelevant in our society, became teachers and guides shaping my life. I discovered that they exist at the core of our being. We are born into their presence. They live with us always, making visit upon visit each night. Living below conscious awareness, they significantly influence our behavior and temperament, animate our life, offer warning when needed, and inspire our work.

### **THE JOURNEY TO THE LIVING IMAGE**

When I was a kid, I dreamed of becoming a doctor. Of course the adults in my family and community assumed *all* of us kids would become either doctors or lawyers, and so we were continually pushed in those directions. Thinking about it now, I'm not sure whether the dream of becoming a doctor was actually theirs or mine. But in any case, I worked very hard in high school, kept up my grades, and got accepted into the premed program at UCLA, at the time my definition of heaven.

The college experience, however, turned out to be far from what I anticipated. I was no longer among a group of teenagers who just happened to go to the same high school. I was in a group of high-achievers from around the nation and the world. These teenagers were the cream of the crop. I found myself in hardcore chemistry, biology, and calculus classes and surrounded by serious and dedicated students who seemed to have a much better idea of what was going on than I did. By the time we got our first round of test scores back, I realized that I was

falling behind. I was serious and dedicated too, but these subjects didn't come naturally to me. Furthermore I found I didn't really enjoy them at all.

I hadn't expected college to be easy, though, so I dug in and tried harder. I spent night after night in the library, studying until they shut the doors behind me and turned out the lights. And still, when test day rolled around, the exams might as well have been written in a foreign language. I got Ds across the board. It was a very hard time for me.

One day in biology lab we were going to be tested on our knowledge of the anatomical structure of the brain. Like the other students I had on my white lab coat and was standing in front of my slab, ready to lift an animal brain out of its jar of formaldehyde solution, plop it on the table, and begin cutting it up. Standing there looking at that brain, I found myself overcome with nausea, panicky at the thought of what I was supposed to do next. I knew that I wasn't going to be able to find and identify all the little structures in that mass of flesh.

As I was stood there trying to pull myself together, the teacher's assistant asked me to follow him out into the hallway. I had no idea what he wanted, or why he would interrupt me right at that moment, but I didn't mind escaping that room full of brains. When we got in the hall, he took a deep breath, let it out in a sigh, then looked me right in the face. "Steve, let me ask you something. Do you see anybody here like you? What I mean is, when you talk to your classmates do any of them seem interested in the stuff you're interested in? Do you really belong here?"

I didn't know what to say. On one hand, I had spent my whole life preparing for medical school. All my plans, all the dreams the family had for me, revolved around becoming a doctor. So at that moment, I felt an urge to dismiss his questions and get back

to business. On the other hand, deep down I knew that he was absolutely right. None of the people in the premed program were anything like me.

Then, in the nicest way possible, he asked, “Have you ever explored the other side of the campus?” I had no idea what he was talking about. I didn’t even know there was another side of the campus. I said, “no.” He explained that the north side of campus was where the humanities programs were located, and that I might want to go up there and take a little walk around.

And so not returning to the brain waiting for dissection in the classroom and feeling very confused, I hiked from the medical school to the humanities hall. Right away I could tell that the people here were different. They were hanging out in the sculpture garden, seemingly relaxed and open. I heard people talking about art, literature, and the issues of the day. Instead of the tense, focused, getting-things-done atmosphere of the premed students, people who were talking about philosophy, politics, love, and life surrounded me. Even the landscape was different. Instead of cold concrete laboratories, there were trees and gardens, brick and ivy.

It had never occurred to me that college could be about anything but science. I couldn’t believe that you could get college credit for using your imagination, entertaining ideas, and valuing human experience. My secret life of fantasy, politics, art, literature, and especially dreams (that I now understand to have been inspired in me by Zadie and that I had kept hidden from everyone else while growing up) stirred a re-awakening within me. I was able to see these things as something that people actually *valued*. I dropped out of premed and enrolled in a sampling of liberal arts classes, just to find out what I was really interested in, which turned out to be political science and psychology. That was where my exploration of the living images in dreams began in earnest.

## REDISCOVERING THE LIVING IMAGE

When I started reading about psychology, particularly about dreams, something came alive inside me. The reading list in Psych 101 included Freud's *On the Interpretation of Dreams*, in which he suggests that dream images are more than what they appear to be. He said they are representations of latent wishes or repressed aggressive sexual drives, which are too disturbing for the conscious mind to encounter directly. Freud developed a reductive method of getting to the meaning of this repressed material, called "association" or "free association." To associate means to find the hidden connections between a dream image and past experience.

Allow me to illustrate this with an example. If there were a lion in a dream, we might think of a trip to the zoo, where we saw a lion. We might also remember something from *National Geographic* about lions in Africa. This might then remind us of a boss who was particularly mean-spirited. Which might further remind us of our aggressive father. We might even remember a specific incident in which our father punished us too harshly which would then remind us of our own pent-up rage. So using association, we would reduce the dream image back to an early scene in our life which evoked unexpressed feelings of rage. This rage was the repressed material that the dream was masking.

I learned that the task of a good Freudian was to "play detective" and use association to uncover this hidden material in a dream. This was a concept that I could readily relate to. At the time I was trying to find meaning in practically everything around me, seeing the "deeper truth" in all that existed, even in existence itself. This was the late 1960s, when psychoanalysis was all the rage. From Woody Allen to John Lennon (and his encounter with primal therapy), the whole idea was that our

early experiences with our neurotic parents totally shape who we are. That year at college we all became wannabe Freudians. We ransacked our dreams for the keys from our past that would free us from our neuroses. I used to sit on the steps of Royce Hall at UCLA, stroking my beard, analyzing my friends' dreams. The psychiatrist was definitely "in."

Then in my second year, the human potential movement hit like a tidal wave. In my psych and sociology classes we were now reading Jung's *Collected Works*, Maslow's *Toward a Psychology of Being*, and Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Back at the dorm we were into authors like Theodore Roszak, Betty Friedan, Allen Ginsberg, Norman Mailer, and every existential French or German philosopher we could get our hands on. Just as the 1960s opened up the culture in general, this period also exploded the field of psychology. The 1950s lab-rat-in-a-maze, behaviorism, and shock treatment model of mental health gave way to the expression of feelings and creativity, the humanistic psychologies of Transactional Analysis (*I'm OK, You're OK*), Psychosynthesis, Gestalt Therapy, and Carl Rogers' work on empathy. Now we understood the images in dreams in a completely new way. They were no longer just literal references to our personal history—stories about how messed up our relationships were with Mom and Dad. Instead they pointed to something much bigger than our personal egos.

The genius behind this viewpoint was Carl Jung. Jung felt that dream images are much more than just repressed infantile wishes and drives. They originate, he said, in the collective human psyche and can represent universal *archetypes*. That is, dream images are similar to the characters and themes found in fairy tales, mythology, religion, and world literature. They are archetypal in that they can tell us something of the grand story in which we live.

From Jung's point of view, the method of association is not the only way to work with dreams. Instead, Jung developed a process called *amplification*, in which we discover a dream image's connections to universal cultural themes. For example, to amplify the dream image of a lion, we would note that lions represent royalty or nobility, like Richard the Lionheart, or *The Lion King*, or the zodiac sign of Leo. Lions are also fierce protectors, presiding over home and palace alike as guardians at the gates. And in many mythologies, lions symbolize the heart.

Perhaps when we *associated* to the lion image in our dream in the example above, we found that it was a stand-in for our own infantile rage. However, when we take the same image and *amplify* it, the lion now points to something regal, noble, fierce, or big-hearted in our nature. Using amplification we expand the image to its full stature as an archetype, and then see how that archetypal motif is currently active in our lives.

This obviously takes us in a much different direction than association. Amplification opens us up to the great teachings that are alive and active in dream images. These stories tell us about the perils of our situation, the potential positive outcomes, strategic teachings, and the collective wisdom of generations past. As the great mythologist Joseph Campbell said, dreams are like myths. A myth is a story that expresses something meaningful about a culture, from origins to values to sanctioned social interactions. Every night the dreaming psyche is generating something of our own personal mythology, informing us about our origins, values, and so on. A single dream image, amplified through literature and mythology, can offer us tremendous insight into our lives.

When Jung's ideas hit our campus with full force, they were as revolutionary as the times. No longer was I playing psychiatrist on

the Royce Hall steps, analyzing dreams as neurotic patterns of early childhood. Even in our psychology classes we passionately discussed everything from the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, from *Siddhartha* to *Alice in Wonderland*, and their relationship to human behavior and dreams. Everything for me became a quest to understand how dream images worked in both the popular imagination and our own lives.

I was learning to live within dreams, as if I were participating in a great play. At this time we began to stretch beyond Jung's grand concept of amplification. I was living in an artists' commune in Santa Monica surrounded by professional actors, musicians, artists, dancers, and a few surfers, exploring the frontiers of "liquid theater," using improvisation to act out dream images on stage. Watching my friends perform at the Mark Taper Forum in downtown Los Angeles, it was suddenly obvious that dream figures are actually alive and interactive. Watching a person improvise being a prowling lion onstage, I experienced the actor actually taking on and inhabiting the living archetypal presence of the lion. When I witnessed the embodiment of Lion, it became clear that dreamwork was about more than just the mythology of Lion; it was also about the direct experience of the figures. Rather than going off to a library and only studying these images' history in some dusty encyclopedia of mythology, it was now possible to talk to them, dance with them, argue with them, live with them. Yet as dream images came alive to me through the arts, I was still struggling to understand conceptually what I was learning in my direct experience.

### **ANIMATING THE LIVING IMAGE**

Around this time I heard of the work of James Hillman. One night my friend Richard Tarnas and I were at Esalen in Big Sur,

walking under a brilliant sky full of stars and talking about new directions in psychotherapy. Rick handed me a book by Hillman and said, “You have to read this.” After only the first few pages, I realized that Hillman was talking about dream images in just the way I was experiencing them. As a twenty-two-year-old self-proclaimed Jungian, I saw it as remarkable synchronicity that Dr. Hillman would be giving a talk in nearby San Francisco a few days hence. So I hitchhiked to the Bay Area and crashed the conference to attend his lecture.

Hillman cut an impressive figure. Tall, thin, and fit, he had intense eyes that reminded me of a hawk. In a roomful of California new-agers, he brought the discriminating intellect of a European scholar and cut right through our fuzzy, feel-good thinking with the sharp sword of erudition and experience. His ideas set the room on fire. I listened enraptured as Hillman described in depth, detail, and scholarship the view of dream images that I had been blindly groping towards.

James Hillman had been one of Jung’s senior students, and his work took up where Jung’s had left off. He said that dream images were more than signs pointing to some answer, as Freud said, or symbols representing a meaning, like Jung. They were also phenomenal, like living animals, and had presence, place, and body. He said that dream images are actually “persons of the soul” and “necessary angels.” They are demons, djinn, and gods who show us our fate and await a response from us.

In his way of looking at dreams, we needed to go beyond association and amplification to a new process called *animation*. In animation, we look for ways of experiencing dream images in their living, embodied reality. For example, the lion, rather than just referring to our childhood rage or the universal archetype of nobility, now takes on a physical existence, actually present in

the room, on the prowl, roaring with its fanged mouth, lashing its tail and licking its huge, furry paws. Furthermore, this is not like watching a lion in a movie, because in Hillman's animation we are able to actually interact with the lion, talk to it, ask it questions, pet its fur, hear what it has to say, and follow it through its habitat. It's a full-immersion, interactive experience.

Inspired by what I was learning, in the 1970s I co-founded a school of depth psychology dedicated to the exploration of the living images that was the forerunner to Pacifica Graduate Institute. One of our first presenters was a Jungian, Marion Woodman. Students crammed into a bare room lit by an anemic light bulb to drink in her lively energy and encyclopedic understanding of dream images. Her view fit very well with Hillman's—essentially, that dream images exist both in spirit and in matter and as such are expressions of both body and soul, psyche and soma, and allow us to connect with ourselves in both realms. Marion Woodman helped me understand dream images as even more concrete, even more embodied. It was somewhere around this time that I finally grasped the most basic concept of all my future dreamwork, that *dreams are alive*.

In conclusion, the process of Dream Tending stands on the shoulders of giants. From Freud's association, to Jung's amplification, to the animation of Hillman and Woodman, as well as from my personal experiences with indigenous teachers of dreams worldwide, and with direct inspiration from my great-grandfather's teachings, I have developed Dream Tending.

### **ASSOCIATION, AMPLIFICATION, ANIMATION**

In order to begin Dream Tending, we need to be familiar with the three methods of dreamwork that we have looked at: associ-

ation, amplification, and animation. In this book, we will spend the majority of our time learning techniques of animation. Yet I have found that the other two methods come in handy often enough that it is important to be proficient with them as well.

These three techniques have a natural sequence, which also happens to be both their historical order in modern psychology and their order of psychic “depth.” Association comes first, and is closest to the ego; then comes amplification, which has its home deeper in the psyche; and then animation, which arises from the deepest level of the psyche. Actually these processes are not hierarchical, however, it is useful here at the beginning to see them in this sequence.

Learning Dream Tending is not just reading about ideas. It is also experiential, because a real feel for the material can only develop through actually working with living dream images. The teaching points in this book can be thought of as support for direct interaction with living images, which is offered in the exercises. Living images are where the action is, and what our work is about. Along with each teaching point, I invite you to experiment with the material in an exercise.

### EXERCISE: *Association, Amplification, Animation*

Choose an image from your dreams that has really gotten your attention recently. It may be a character, like a person or a creature, or it could even be something like an ocean, a forest, a rock, a building, or another object. Whatever image you choose, notice what aspects of it get your attention and seem to stay with you in the time since you had the dream. Write a description of the dream figure, being as concrete and specific as possible.

Now, work with the image using *association*. Let your mind spontaneously connect the dream image to any events, feelings, ideas, or scenes from personal history that come up. Let one association lead to the next. Do not worry about getting the “right” answer. Just let one impression connect to the next, over and over. You can write down these associations in a dream journal as they spontaneously occur to you.

Observe where this process of association takes you. Take special note of any childhood experiences that come up. From the point of view of the personal unconscious, such a memory may be the root of your dream image, and offers an important insight into why this particular image is occurring now in your dreams.

Once you have completed the process of association, you are ready to give *amplification* a try. In this method, you correlate the dream image to symbols, archetypes, and figures from mythology, fairy tales, literature, theater, and other forms of cultural expression. You are looking for universal themes that connect to the dream image. For example, the image of a horse may be related to the mythological flying horse, Pegasus, or Burak, the eagle-winged horse that carried Mohammed on his journey to heaven. The dream image of an ocean may be amplified into the Source of Life or the place of the Night Sea Journey. Include contemporary as well as historical themes or characters. A character from a novel, a movie star, or a contemporary political figure may be a current representation of a cultural archetype.

There is no limit to how many archetypes the image can be amplified into. You may find that your dream images relate to an ancient Japanese myth as well as a modern Hollywood movie, to a poem from Medieval Spain as well as

the poetry of a pop song. These amplifications are not contradictory; rather, they weave together to form a rich and complex understanding of the dream image. You might continue to discover the image's network of archetypal connections for many years, always deepening your intimacy with it.

For now, write in your dream journal what you have learned about the image through the process of amplification. How does this expanded view of the image offer insight into your present life circumstances?

Once you have completed the processes of association and amplification, you are ready to move on to the practice of *animation*. This is the core practice of Dream Tending, and something that you will be doing in virtually every exercise in this book. To animate an image, you bring it to life in the here and now, rather than associating to the past or amplifying it into a myth or story.

Start by imagining the figure present in the room with you. See it clearly in your mind's eye. Even if it is wispy or indistinct, pay attention to any little bit of the image you can mentally see. Imagine for a moment that it has a life of its own, separate from all your associations and amplifications. Seeing it as a living entity, existing in its own right, what do you notice about what it is doing and how it is moving? How is it interacting with you? How does it affect you? Write your discoveries in your journal.

You have now associated, amplified, and animated a dream image. Read and compare the entries you made for each method. What happened to the image in each of these processes? What surprised you? How has each of these experiences affected you? What have you learned from each process? How has each of the methods increased your intimacy with the dream image?

## **LEARNING TO WORK WITH LIVING IMAGES**

Dream images are alive and embodied. This is the fundamental insight at the heart of Dream Tending and is at the heart of our work. The rest of this chapter will be dedicated to learning the skills of animating living dream images. In Part I, I will show how to prepare for Dream Tending. In Part II, I will cover the basic skill set, which includes accessing the archetypal ego, asking the core questions, and using language to vivify images. This will give us solid ground upon which to enter Part III, “Hosting the Guest,” which introduces us to a series of more advanced skills. Then in Part IV, “From Relationship to Revelation,” we will learn ways to interact with dream images on even deeper and more rewarding levels.

### **PART I: PREPARATION— ENTERING THE REALM OF THE LIVING DREAM**

When I listened to my great-grandfather tell his stories, I was transported from his little shoe shop in Pasadena to another world. With him, my imagination was completely active and open. He put me into a dreamlike state of mind, in which the images from his stories sprang to life in my mind’s eye. This state of mind turns out to be crucial to Dream Tending. I have found that there are four attitudinal qualities to prepare us to hear dreams in this dreamlike manner. We must:

- 1) Meet the Dream in the Way of the Dream
- 2) Open Our Body Awareness
- 3) Become Present in the Here and Now
- 4) Engage the Dream in an Attitude of Not Knowing

These attitudinal qualities set the stage for dream images to come to life and reveal themselves.

## *1. Meet the Dream in the Way of the Dream*

One of the most useful watchwords I have discovered is that “a dream loves a dream.” This means that when we approach an image with an open, accepting, dreamlike attitude, it comes to life.

In the actuality of the dreamtime, everyone experiences dreams as alive. When we are dreaming, the characters and action seem as real as anything else in our lives. It is only when we wake up, remember them with our conscious mind, and write them down in our dream journal that they can become static and dead.

To explain away an image is to lose contact with an important visitor. Most folks who listen to a dream try to figure it out mentally. They look for what it “means.” This is a trap. Dreams are not a product of the logical mind, and when a dream is met in the way of rational thought, images get folded, spindled, and mutilated to suit the rational mind.

When we approach dreams with an agenda to interpret or judge, the living image becomes stagnant, fixed, and eventually dies. For example, to interpret the dream image of a giraffe as a phallic symbol misses its actuality as an image in the inner landscape of our dream life.

It is crucial to sidestep the ego’s desire to understand, make meaning, and dominate. A dream needs to be met in the way of the dream. This is particularly the case when we have an immediate idea of what a dream “means.” When this happens it is very hard to find the patience to center ourselves, let go of our explanation, and then connect to the reality of the living dreamtime. So an attitude of wonderment, curiosity, and presence is a necessary first response to a living image.

## ***2. Open Body Awareness***

There is a line from Mary Oliver’s poem “Wild Geese” that informs all my dreamwork:

*“You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.”*

When I work from my “animal body,” greeting dream images in an embodied way, they in turn respond to me in the same way. It’s as if a dream image is actually a kind of person or animal with a body of its own, albeit imaginal. Images have life force and walk about on legs of their own. Even the non-creature dream entities, like clouds or airplanes or houses, are living, personified presences of the dreamtime. They too have a vitality that blossoms into visibility when met body-to-body.

To meet images in an embodied way, I pay particular attention to the feelings running through me as I encounter an image. I take the time to listen to what is happening in my corporeal experience. It pays to be patient, because often when I try to tune into my body and feelings, the “knower” is the first on the scene. He scrambles to figure things out, take control, offer an opinion. When he shows up, I instantly lose the immediacy of contact with my body. So over the years, I have learned to simply say hello to the “knower” and let him pass by. Then after quieting down, I bring awareness back to the immediacy of my animal body. Connected to my instinctual sensitivities, I am now ready to make body-to-body contact with the living embodied images of the dreamtime.

## ***3. Become Present in the Here and Now***

A third attitude for preparing ourselves to work with living images is to get anchored in the here and now, to come into the present moment. A dream image is always here, always now—always ready to connect in the eternal timeless Now of the dream.

I have never heard of anyone having a dream in the past tense. They are always in the present. Therefore it is helpful to become centered in the present moment as a way to enter the dreamtime.

Think of meeting a friend at the park. When I am preoccupied with the demands of the day, I bring nothing with me but a cluttered mind. The interaction is stale and dull. I have not made the effort to bring myself mentally to the meeting, and so neither of us comes to life. We both remain trapped inside a compulsive mind and a deadened body. Sound familiar? It hurts to realize how often we are nothing more than a head, floating in the future and past, disconnected from our body.

Now imagine the opposite. Maybe on the walk through the park to meet my friend, I opened my aesthetic eye to the sensual riot of flowers and took deep, full breaths of the fresh scent from the trees. The sensual richness of the world displaced past regrets and future worries, and centered me in the luxuriant, beautiful Now. When I meet my friend I am awake, receptive, grounded, fluid, interactive. Rooted in present time, I listen in a different way. My friend feels this and engages me with his presence, attention, and openness. Rather than just a check-in, we have a rich, fulfilling experience.

This is exactly the attitude to take with a living image. When we let go of our past and future concerns and simply meet the image in the eternal Now, we create an appropriate environment for good Dream Tending.

#### ***4. Engage the Dream in an Attitude of Not Knowing***

The first encounter with a living dream can create a sense of being overwhelmed or confused. This is especially true when we depend solely on the rational mind for explanation and meaning. Dreams can be complex, bizarre, confusing, and yet seem to have profound import. When feeling overwhelmed or confused,

I have found it quite helpful to reframe this experience as a positive state of “not knowing.” Not knowing means that we allow ourselves the comfort of not having all the answers about a dream. We give ourselves the luxury of taking the dream at face value, without struggling to unravel its knots. At its best, an attitude of not knowing is expansive, related, and attuned to the living actuality of dreams. Contrary to feelings of confusion, not knowing creates more room for the dream to present itself and for us to encounter it.

For example, let’s imagine a dream in which we find ourselves on a tropical island with a clear pond filled with colorful koi. Around us, swarms of fire ants are on the move. As the dream progresses, we are attacked by a snarling wolf. Presented with such a dream, it would only be natural to wonder what it all means. Any Jungian or Freudian would salivate at a dream like this! There is so much to make out of it. To find some answer would feel reassuring and insightful and remove any unpleasant sense of confusion. We could speculate forever about the possible implications. Yet for all our supposed insights, there is that which remains undeniably, unmistakably, and unchangeably true: a wolf with fangs is prowling, red ants are marching, and brightly colored fish are swimming. The dream itself is a *fact*. Everything else is conjecture.

However clever our explanations of dreams, they actually take us away from the clarity and reality of the dream itself. They are an attempt to deal with our own anxiety and confusion about such a compelling occurrence. If we become more comfortable with not knowing, we won’t be so motivated to explain away our dreams. In the long run it is much more satisfying and rich to sit with the mystery, wonder, and sometimes, even bizarreness of a dream. In not knowing, dreams stay fresh, alive, interactive, and surprising.

To experience the presence of living images in all of their wonder and possibility, we start out with these four fundamental attitudes: meet the dream in the way of the dream, open our body awareness, become present in the here and now, and engage the dream in an attitude of not-knowing. These four orienting attitudes bring us into relationship with the living reality that the dreaming psyche is presenting.

**EXERCISE:**

*Entering the Realm of the Living Dream*

Select a vivid dream to work with. Sometimes this is an obvious choice; perhaps the dream you had last night was so compelling that it hasn't let go of you all day. Or maybe there is a dream from the past that has continued to come into your thoughts again and again. Whatever dream you choose, or whichever dream chooses you, write or draw it in detail before going further.

When you are ready, find a quiet place and get settled. Reconnect with your body in whatever way you know. You may want to pay attention to your breathing. Notice how you begin to relax and deepen into your body sensations. Allow any thoughts that arise to gently pass through your mind, like clouds floating easily through the sky. Return to your breath. Allow your mind to clear and let go of any interpretations of the dream that you might be considering. Relax in your chair or couch. Take a few moments to feel your presence in the room.

Next read the text of the dream aloud to yourself or take a few moments to really witness the sketch that you have drawn. See the entire dream in your mind's eye, just as you saw it the first time you dreamt it. Imagine that you are in the theater of dream, participating in a live performance. Notice

carefully how entering this dream theater makes you feel. What emotions come up? What physical sensations arise in your body? Write down your observations in your journal.

By bringing yourself into the dream in an active and responsive way, in present time, you begin to open to the consciousness of the dream. You leave your daytime world ever so slightly behind, and begin to walk into the dream world. You are meeting the dream in the way of the dream. Begin to move forward, further and further into the dream. It is no longer an inanimate object that you are going to pick apart. You begin to see it as it really is—a living reality that is here and now.

Now close your eyes and notice your breathing. As you bring your focus to your body, observe where you are feeling tight. Allow your inhale to naturally deepen, then bring your awareness back to the dream. Notice what you observe and write it down.

## **LEARNING TO WORK WITH LIVING IMAGES— PART II: THE BASIC SKILL SET**

### ***Contacting the Archetypal Ego***

Once we have entered the realm of the dream, it is helpful to contact a part of ourselves that I call the “archetypal ego.” This more essential self is located in the depth of our being, not in our heads, and is often referred to as our true nature, or the authentic self. This is somewhat different from what Jung called the archetype of the Self. Aligned with the archetypal ego, we have a much greater ability to tend to living images. From this center place, we have the capacity to witness without feeling compelled to act, and the images thus begin to interact with us more freely.

Dream Tending depends on our ability to sustain contact with the archetypal ego. It invites and engages with the animated spark alive within dream figures. Through this deep contact, dream figures come to life and reveal themselves as embodied entities and we gain access to the innate intelligence of these animated images.

My experience is that connecting to the archetypal ego is easier to understand conceptually than to actually do. But I have specifically developed Dream Tending exercises to help you get the hang of it. Like learning most new activities, it's a matter of doing the exercises and keeping an open mind.

### EXERCISE: *Contacting the Archetypal Ego*

To connect to the archetypal ego, identify a dream image that touches you emotionally. Sometimes it happens that the first image invites a second dream image into your awareness. If a second dream image shows up, stick to this new image and let the original one go. Spend time exploring this image. Use the skills of animation that you have learned to vivify the image and watch its activity. Meet the figure in the way of the dream. Notice what is particular about it.

Now enter more deeply into a relationship with this figure. Engage in a dialogue, either mentally or by writing it down. As you interact with the figure, notice how your connection to your breath, your heart, and your core deepens. Now imagine the figure alongside of you. Feel your feet on the ground, your breath deepening still further, and your heartfelt awareness broadening. From this awareness, you are now ready to meet the dream in the way of your animal body. You have engaged the archetypal ego, or what some call the authentic self. This is the desired state of awareness from which to continue tending the dream.

One way to help you connect with the archetypal ego is to discover a gesture associated with it. You may make some kind of gesture with your hands when remembering a dream. Notice this gesture, and before you start to work with a dream, repeat the gesture. Then exaggerate the movement, making it bigger in order to open up its range and feeling. You most likely will feel something new come forward from inside, perhaps an awareness of an inner depth. Bring forward your awareness of what you are experiencing from this more intimate place. How are you now engaging your body and your feelings?

Another trick involves any sound you might find yourself making when remembering a dream. Repeat the sound, using no words, just the pure sound, and allow it to move you into your body experience. Ask yourself what sensation you are connecting with and whether it is an experience that is familiar to you. Is this a place that you have known for a long time? Is it a place you visited before? If yes, then let your body experience take you back to the body memory of that quality of experience. What do you notice here? As you further tune into these feelings, what do you discover? Do you have a sense of belonging? Home ground? Allow yourself some time to deepen into this aspect of yourself, the archetypal ego.

It is here, at this more essential level of your personhood, that you will find the mode of being to meet the living dream in the way of the dream. Anchor here and reapproach the dream that you are tending. From this quality of being, what are you noticing about the dream images as they come forward? Keep watching with your open heart and animal body. As the dream images walk about, let what happens happen and simply take note. Stay with it. Don't do anything. Become present and stay patient.

When you feel ready, acknowledge what you have witnessed, say good-bye, and find transition from this experience. Write down what you have observed and what you have experienced.

### ***Asking the Core Questions***

Anchored in the archetypal ego, we are now in *anima* country, the wild place of the dreamtime. We are beyond the constructed, civilized, mental landscapes of modernity. Here we are open to the visitation of living images. We experience the world and ourselves in a different way. We do not know what is going to happen before it does.

Surprise is a big part of the joy of working with living dream images. When I am tending dreams, people often ask me how I know what is going to happen next, and my answer is, simply, “I don’t.” They look puzzled and ask, “Well if you don’t, then who does?” It is the dream images themselves that know what is coming next.

There are two questions that are the fundamental pillars of the Dream Tending system and distinguish Dream Tending from all other methods of dreamwork. Simple as they may first appear, these questions shatter decades of cultural conditioning, breaking through the prevailing zeitgeist of reductive literalism.

These questions are “Who is visiting now?” and “What is happening here?” These questions replace the more familiar “What does this dream mean?” or “Why did this happen?” It is really very simple. This tiny change in orientation shifts our consciousness completely. No longer are we playing detective, trying to solve a puzzle with our logical mind.

When we ask, “Who” we invite the living image into active dialogue. It is similar to meeting a new person; we wonder who they are, not what they “mean.” Getting interested in the person

(Who is visiting now?) invites him or her to come forward and encourages open expression. Interrogating a visitor (What do you mean?) creates defensiveness and stops friendly interaction.

The question “What is happening here?” evokes curiosity. We wonder about the activity of the dream figure and notice how it interacts with us. When we get curious about what is going on in the dream (What is happening?), the dream figure also gets interested and comes to life. Cross-examining persons of a dream (Why are you here?) makes them clam up, just as any of us would.

In orienting around the “Who?” and the “What is happening?” we trade in our critical, cynical minds for body wisdom and instinctual curiosity. Imagine for a moment that a powerful ambassador visits you in a dream. He is a high-ranking official in an international peace delegation operating through the United Nations. In the dream he is touring a remote African village devastated by drought, orchestrating some kind of humanitarian aid program. Upon awakening we consider the “humanitarian aspect” of ourselves and perhaps connect to how this humanitarian impulse in us has not been active in recent months. In fact we remember that we wanted to make a donation to Habitat for Humanity, but have forgotten to do so. We feel secure that we have now understood the dream’s meaning, decoded its message, and solved its riddle. Yet this is the reasoning mind at work, jumping to conclusions, making sense, and taking action. We have completely lost our direct connection to the dream ambassador who originally visited us. The figure no longer exists as a living entity in the psyche, but has been reduced to a trite symbol, dispensing safe and obvious observations about our ego.

When we use the two orienting questions of “Who is visiting now?” and “What is happening here?” with this image, however, we generate a very different outcome. When we get personally interested in this dream ambassador, he becomes an imaginal

presence in the room along with us. We sit down and take the time to get to know him, to befriend him, and to engage him in conversation. He senses our interest and begins to open up more completely about what he is doing. We learn from his talent, commitment, and intelligence. The appropriate starting place is “Who are you?”.

Discovering who is visiting involves paying attention to how this image engages in his particular activity in the dream (What is happening?). By observing what he is doing, we slow down the process and allow ourselves time to get curious and specific about his actions. By noticing how events are unfolding in the dream and how this main figure is interacting with other images, we gain more information about the image. We are tending the ambassador as a living image. This is part of why I call this activity Dream Tending, not Dream Dissection. We tend our relationship with a dream figure as we tend our relationship with a friend. The figure is engaged in his own activity in the here and now. Our curiosity is about him as a person and what he is up to, not about what he signifies about our own ego.

### EXERCISE: *Asking the Core Questions*

Choose a dream that has an identifiable figure (whether person or creature) in it. Tell or write the dream as it actually occurred, noting as much detail as possible.

Take the time you need to center into your archetypal ego and use skills that you have learned so far to animate the image. As it comes to life in the room, get curious. Let go of the tendency to make meaning. Instead ask the questions “Who is visiting now?” and “What is happening here?” and allow the dream image to answer in whatever way it wishes. This might take a long time, which you will want to fill with lots of ideas about the figure. Let go of all these

thoughts. Simply be patient and allow the figure to answer these questions in its own time.

The task is not to make sense out of what you are witnessing. Do not play detective, interrogate, or cross-examine. Rather, gather information by allowing the figure itself to unfold in front of you. Your work is to observe like a naturalist would, noticing the activity and particularity of the figure itself. What is he doing now? What is she up to? How is he moving about in the room? How is she interacting with the other dream figures with you?

Pay particular attention to any odd or unique behavior. This figure may not have a physical shape, but instead may present itself through a voice, or even a feeling, form, or color. The important thing is to notice what or who comes forward to greet you. Even if this image is frightening, stick with it as best you can. Often difficult dream figures prove to be the most important to get to know.

You are not being asked to figure anything out. You are not using your rational mind at all. Rather you are open to your sense of discovery. You are curious about who is visiting now. Return again and again to the orienting questions “Who is visiting now?” and “What is happening here?”. As you conclude your interaction, write down what you have experienced.

### *Using Language to Vivify Dream Images*

To complete our basic skill set, we must make a few changes in the language we use to talk about dreams. There are four simple verbal changes that will help us to allow dream images to achieve their full expression and vitality. I particularly like these methods because they are easy to do, yet have a profound effect on our dreamwork.

Most of us have encountered forms of language that have a deadening effect on experience. Much of our language today is

devoid of beauty, grace, and style. Bureaucratic, business, and institutional language tends to be dry and confusing, and is usually enough to make me want to fall asleep. Abstract academic language can also suck the life out of even the most interesting topic. We only have to imagine our wildest love affair described in the language of a lawyer, the turgid prose of a government pamphlet, or—dare I say?—the flat, clinical utterances of a therapist, to instantly feel how such language can turn whatever it touches to dust.

When we describe our dreams however, we are naturally drawn to use vivid and stimulating language. With a few minor adjustments we can make this even more effective. As I mentioned, there are four linguistic changes that make a big difference when working with living images. They are straightforward and structural; no artistry is required for them to work.

First and foremost is to talk about a dream *in the present tense*. As I mentioned earlier, I have never met anyone who had a dream in the past tense. When we have a dream, it always takes place Now, in the eternal present. Yet when we talk about our dreams, we tend to talk about them in the past tense.

If we talk about them instead in the present tense, they come alive and the images animate quickly. When expressed in present tense, the figures seem to be in the room right along with us. For example, when we remember a dream of being chased through a forest by a bear, we change it from “A bear chased me through the forest” to “A bear chases me through the forest.” Notice how different this feels right away.

Second, it is helpful to talk about dreams using verbs ending in “-ing.” So, for example, we would change “A bear chases me” to “A bear *is chasing* me.” These “-ing” verbs bring the action of the dream even more into immediate experience.

Third, we can *remove all articles* (meaning “a,” “an,” and “the”) from the telling of a dream. Articles tend to reduce the image from a specific character with an independent identity to a generic class of beings. For example, in the dream image just mentioned, we take out “a” and “the” so it reads simply, “Bear is chasing me through forest.” Notice how this no longer indicates just a class of animals called bears, and instead now indicates a discrete, individual bear. The forest, too, has been linguistically transformed into a unique entity.

The last change is to write the names of the dream characters *using capital letters* to give them the status of proper nouns. For example, we change the noun “bear” to the name “Bear.” This completes the transformation of the living image to an individual character with its own life, experience, and most importantly, *name*. In the example the description becomes “Bear is chasing me through Forest.”

These four linguistic moves bring energy and individuality to our expression of dreams. We started with a dead report of a past occurrence—“A bear chased me through a forest”—and ended up with something much more alive—“Bear is chasing me through Forest.” Notice how without the articles, and using capitals, “-ing” verbs, and the present tense, we can feel the uniqueness and immediacy of these two dream images much more sharply.

Who is visiting now? Bear is visiting now. Forest is visiting now. And Bear is chasing me through Forest! I feel their vitality and I sense the spark of life within them.

### EXERCISE: *Using Language to Vivify Dream Images*

This exercise is short and easy. Take the dream you’ve been working with so far and write or tell it again, making these four changes: 1) use the present tense, 2) change the verbs to

use the “-ing” ending, 3) take out all the articles (“a,” “an,” and “the”), and 4) write the names of the primary dream characters using capital letters.

These four techniques will bring the dream into the room in present time and the image will further animate. Notice that as the dream image comes alive into the room with you, your own body opens up in new ways and with a new awareness. Also notice that as the living image wakes up, it reveals more of itself. Observe, get interested, and take note.

### **LEARNING TO WORK WITH LIVING IMAGES— PART III: RELATIONSHIP SKILLS**

One day I overheard an interesting conversation coming from the back bedroom of my home. My six-year-old daughter, Alia, was talking to her friend about the plight of a baby chipmunk. It was her urgent tone of voice that first caught my ear. The chipmunk apparently lived in the yard outside her bedroom. The weather had turned cold in the last few days, and there were few acorns. To make things worse, the chipmunk’s parents were nowhere to be seen. The baby was clearly in danger.

Next I overheard Alia’s friend comforting her with advice about the chipmunk. She made it clear that everything was going to be OK and offered a number of useful suggestions about how to help the creature. As the hours passed, they discussed whether or not the chipmunk was scared, how to make it feel better now that it was missing its mommy, and what it might want to eat. Did it like candy bars? Did it want to be petted, or did it need a blanket? Where would it prefer to sleep? Do chipmunks sleep all night?

Finally, toward evening, I knocked on Alia’s door to announce

dinner. “Come in,” she said. When I did, I was astonished to find that Alia was all alone in there. There was no friend, and even the chipmunk was imaginary. Neither of these beings existed in objective reality. They were figures from the dreamtime whom Alia, in her childhood innocence, had hosted so well.

In our Dream Tending work so far, we have learned basic skills to animate the living images of dreams. When we do this we find ourselves in the midst of living beings who are present and active in the room with us in the Now. Like Alia, we want to be a good host to these images we have invited into our lives. Hosting is an ancient and beautiful art, requiring a sensitive and active engagement with the guest. If we host our images well, they will feel comfortable and friendly and perhaps disposed to reveal a good deal more about themselves. We can then engage our senses to encounter them more fully.

### *Hosting the Guest*

I have found three qualities of hosting that are particularly helpful when tending dreams. First, hosting entails seeing to the comfort and needs of the guest. We imagine what they may want and think about how to provide it for them. A host is gracious and responsive.

Second, hosting requires an ability to create beauty and atmosphere. To feel comfortable, the guest needs a sense of being received in a secure and appealing place, a setting where they feel a sense of belonging. We take the time to create a beautiful, welcoming, appropriate, well-arranged space for the meeting. We set the table, put out the good silverware, light the fire in the fireplace, and place vases of fresh flowers around the room. We adjust the lighting and the music to comfortable levels.

Third, to host well is to know something about the guest. We need to know what interests her, what is going on in her life,

what she may be excited to talk about. If we don't know these things in advance, we ask the guest about herself in order to learn. Most people love to talk about themselves, and it is no different if the dream guest is a whale, a spaceship, or an insect. Conversation is a good way to tune into his wants and needs, likes and dislikes.

When we take pains to host living images, they feel welcomed and will share a tremendous amount with us. Hosting the image allows us to establish a long-term relationship with an image and be able to go very deep with it. I have found that the more I host (rather than interrogate or dissect) a living dream figure, the more rewarded and satisfied I feel. No longer are we two strangers passing in the night. Instead, we get to know each other as long-term friends.

A fragment of a poem by Kabir (in Robert Bly's translation) highlights this aspect of hosting dream images:

*Kabir says, Listen, my friend:  
There is one thing in the world that satisfies,  
And that is a meeting with the Guest.*

### EXERCISE: *Hosting the Guest*

Choose a dream figure that you have been working with for a while, or select another that is particularly active at the moment. In silent imagination, invite the figure into relationship with you. Relax, become receptive, and imagine that you are asking the figure into your home, to join you in conversation.

Now greet the figure in whatever way makes sense to you. One way or another, say hello and welcome the image into your presence. Ask the dream figure, "How are you?" Take the time to listen to the response.