

DREAMING TOGETHER



Explore Your Dreams
by Acting Them Out

JON LIPSKY



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Part Four

WAKING
DREAMS



Dream Enactment in Daily Life



Flying into Moscow, 1991

August 19: Gorbachev ousted; tanks roll into Moscow.

August 20: Yeltsin defies coup; crowds defend barricades.

August 21: Coup fails; celebrations in the street.

Dreams have given me lots of insights over the years: insights about my inner landscape, about my life's journey, about what makes me tick. But of all the insights, the most powerful has been the notion that we are all dreaming while awake.

By this I mean that our dream maker, our image-maker, our imagination, is always turned on, not just at night. We imagine our lives even as we experience them. We resonate with the images of everyday life on an emotional, intuitive, symbolic level. We ask of every moment, "What's it like?" We don't notice this because there is so much else going on, so much "reality noise" drowning out the imagery; but the imagery is there nonetheless, and we feel it.

This was brought home to me most vividly when I found myself, by chance, flying into Moscow on August 19, 1991, the day Mikhail Gorbachev was ousted from power by a neo-Stalinist coup. As we drove from the airport, the tanks were grinding down the ring road outside of Moscow towards the center of the city. On the outskirts, we passed the memorial to where the Red Army stopped the Nazis on their push towards Moscow in World War II. In our conference center, we tuned in to Radio Moscow for news until the government clamped down on it; then we tried to tune in to CNN until the government clamped down on that; and then we were under the iron hand of censorship. I found myself living in a dream of World War III.

In so-called "reality," I had flown into Moscow to do a workshop in Dream Enactment at the invitation of Robert Bosnak, who was organizing the first dream conference of its kind ever held in Russia. The point of the conference (among other things) was to consider the interface and interaction between

one's "personal unconscious" and the "collective unconscious." We could not have asked for a better laboratory. While our personal reactions to the crisis bubbled up, the collective unconscious of the Muscovites was spilling out onto the barricades.

What dreams we had, both sleeping and waking! Some of us were caught up in a dream of liberation, like the French Revolution. Others were caught up in a dream of gulags and concentration camps. Still others, lubricating themselves with shots of vodka, treated it like a spectator sport in a banana republic. As for myself, with two small children back home in the U.S., I was caught in the dream of the End of the World, melodramatically wondering how I was going to survive the chaos that could devolve into the Third World War.

Of course, you could describe these different reactions from a psychological, or political, or cultural point of view, showing how different people react differently to the same event. But in this case I think it would be much more accurate to say that the different reactions were fueled by the different images we had of this event—that is, from the waking dreams we constructed in our imaginations.

Since that time, I have been keenly aware of how even ordinary events—making a presentation at a faculty meeting, playing catch with my kids, being stuck in a traffic jam—are loaded with imagery and symbolism. If you simply ask yourself, "If this were a dream, what dream would I be in?" the emotional resonance of daily life can hit home.

It has often been said that there is no such thing as an archetype, just specific examples of it. The spirit of Aphrodite is constellated in the intimate laughter of your lover; the spirit of Ares appears in the blood bonds of two soldiers in the trenches; your Shadow lurks in the face of that derelict who leers at you from an alley. Daily life abounds with archetypal imagery, which, if we tune in to it, amounts to a waking dream.¹²

With practice, dream work can change the way you look at your life. You can experience it through imagery, your own personal imagery and the collective imagery that is all around us.

12. The term "waking dreams" is borrowed from the title of an excellent book by Mary M. Watkins on active imagination (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1984).

For instance, at this moment I am both writing this section and dreaming that I am writing it. The one who is merely writing it is focused on the task at hand. The one who is dreaming it has a much richer experience. On one hand, I am reminded of the image of my father who was also a writer. On the other, I'm feeling oppressed as if I'm locked in my college dorm room, chained to my desk to finish a term paper. Some inflated part of me sees myself in the presence of the pantheon of dream writers like Freud and Jung. And some inferior part of me sees myself as a hack newspaper reporter banging out a thousand words to fill a deadline. The image of writing this section resonates on many levels if I just tune out the static of everyday life and listen to the music of my dream maker.

You yourself undoubtedly are dreaming right now as you read this book. If this is a dream, what dream are you in?

What's that like?



Life Dreams

We are such stuff as dreams are made on

When we see a jet trail high in the clouds, a dream of foreign adventure may be constellated. When we see a woman in a red dress on a balcony, a dream of romance may be born. When we catch the eye of that crazy old lady on the subway, a death dream may be stalking us.

Imagery is everywhere. Our hearts and minds respond to images in real life just as they do in dreams. The material is similar. It is *all* imagination. It is through our imaginations that we experience the story of our lives.

Our imagination—our inner image-maker—is turned on all the time. We don't turn it off when we wake up. On the contrary, it's our constant companion. All the sights, smells, sounds of everyday life have both a literal connotation and a symbolic resonance. It's often hard to recognize this because our minds are so busy, so preoccupied with waking consciousness, that our imaginations are drowned in mundane static. Besides, there's so much we have

to do just to get through the day that it's hard to focus on our dream weaver. We tune out the emotional overtones generated by daily images though we feel them, nonetheless.

The smell of bacon in the morning brings us back to Sunday mornings when we were very young; the evil look of the bus driver fills us with paranoia and dread; the sight of a handsome young man dandling an infant may lead to longings for marriage and family. If we treat these as dream images, our emotional reactions to daily events become more acceptable, more enjoyable, more creative.

It takes practice, though, to recognize the imagery of everyday life; this is where the telling of dreams can be helpful. It trains your eye to identify images. The acting of dreams is even more helpful because it trains not only your eye, but your body as well.

Dream Enactment is a discipline, then, for recognizing imagery. It creates a sensitivity to moments in your life that have a dreamlike quality. You see a sickly, emaciated man in the supermarket and feel how under-nourished you are in your own work. You see a bright yellow dress in the store window and are brought to tears remembering your mother in her youth. You take a friend from out of town for a tour around your city and are filled with the excitement of a foreign adventure. These associations are waking dreams.

Often, waking dreams go unrecognized because the real-life context overwhelms the images. We scratch the surface of the moment and simply say to ourselves (if we say anything at all): "What a sick old man!" "What a pretty yellow dress!" or "What fun to show my friend around." We forget to check in with the personal feelings we are having or the associations, fantasies, memories, and metaphors that are evoked.

Here is an example of an unexpected, waking dream that surprised me at a meeting in an office:

Waking Dream of Baby in the Budget Meeting

I am sitting in the budget meeting of the board of directors of my kids' Charter School, when the president of the board, a woman who has recently given birth,

excuses herself from the weighty deliberations to nurse her baby. All of us on the board know one another very well, so it's not surprising that she stays seated in her presidential chair while lifting her loose blouse to give suck to her infant. We go on with the meeting as if nothing is happening and, of course, avoid putting the spotlight on her during this intimate time. And yet, the cooing baby is so satisfied and the beaming mother is so content that everyone at the meeting, I believe, is enchanted by the waking dream of Madonna and Child. We may be dreaming different versions of this dream depending on our associations with mothers and babies, but the image of the nursing child is so much stronger at that moment than the image, say, of the budget from the Long Range Planning Committee that you would have to say we are more present inside the waking dream than inside the budget meeting.

Inscape and instress

Life, like dreams, has no obligation to be meaningful, purposeful, or coherent. But, like dreams, it often seems as if it is. We often feel that things happen for a reason and that life makes sense. When this is not so—when we feel that random events are driving our lives on a chaotic journey leading nowhere—we often feel that something is wrong, that things ought to happen for a reason, and that life should make sense. Despite evidence to the contrary, most of us carry within ourselves a sense that life has, or ought to have, a shape. Human beings seem to have built into our psyches a shape maker, a kind of “life artist” that creates connections between disparate moments in our lives and finds meaning in the patterns.

But how can we tune in to our shape maker, our life artist?

In his famous poem, *Pied Beauty*, the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins pulls together a collection of objects and experiences which are “pied”—that is, multi-textured—and sees in them a reflection of the glory of God in all His multi-textured facets. To describe his creative process making poems, Hopkins uses two words, “inscape” and “instress.” In shaping his poetry, “inscape” is considered like an inner landscape, a tapestry of disparate things that intuitively seem to belong together in a unified whole. “Instress” is like the inner “stress”