



Group Dreamwork 2005

The Image-and-Association Method Updated

"It would seem that these two methods of dreamwork are incommensurable and that in working a dream a group would have to choose one or the other. In our group, however, we combine the two, finding the combination to be an improvement over either method used alone."

ON THESE PAGES two and a half years ago, I described the image-and-association method as the latest stage in the ever evolving dreamwork method of our Natural Spirituality group at Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Athens, Georgia. We are still using the basic process described in that article, but we have now made enough additions and amendments to warrant a follow-up report. The first article, "The Image-and-Association Method of Dream Analysis," (*The Rose*, Issue 3, Winter-Spring 2003, pp. 29-31) can be downloaded for viewing and printing from the Episcopal Diocese of Arkansas's special web site, www.seedwork.org. The material in that article will amplify the more summary description of the image-and-association method I am giving here.

Basically, the image-and-association method for group dreamwork goes like this. As the dreamer tells the dream, another member of the group stands at a board or flipchart and lists the images that appear in the dream. The recorder does not write down what *happens* in the dream but only the *individual images*, the building blocks of the dream's narrative. For example, "A tall man came in the front door" would be recorded:

*man
tall
come in
front door*

All the images from the dream are listed in this way. If the dream is short, the list might fit on one page of a flipchart; a long dream could go on for several pages.

Once all the images are extracted, the recorder returns to the top of the list and begins to elicit the dreamer's associations with each image—e.g., "What do you associate with 'man'?" The associations are written beside the image. When the dreamer has exhausted his own

personal associations with a particular image, as well as any archetypal associations that occur to him, the recorder asks the group for any *archetypal* associations that might be added. For each offered association, the recorder asks the dreamer if he feels it might fit, and if the dreamer agrees, it is added to the chart, though in a different color to distinguish it from the dreamer's own thoughts and words.

This procedure is followed for all the images, with the dreamer doing most of the talking and the group making its more limited contribution. If the list is very long, the recorder and the dreamer might decide to coalesce some of the images into blocks—macro-images, you might say—in order to fit the process into the time available. As the associations to the images accumulate, the meaning of the dream becomes more and more discernable, but only at the end of the process is an interpretation attempted. This follows the procedure for dreamwork that was advocated by Carl Jung:

When we take up an obscure dream, our first task it not to understand and interpret, but to establish the context with minute care . . . [that is, to make] a careful and conscious illumination of the interconnected associations objectively grouped round particular images. . . . When we have done this for all the images in the dream, we are ready for the venture of interpretation. ("The Practical Use of Dream Analysis," CW 16, par. 319ff.)

IT IS IN THE FINAL PHASE—exploring the interpretation of the dream—that our present method differs most notably from the method described in *ROSE 3*. At the time of *ROSE 3*, our procedure was to venture interpretation as we went along in the earlier process of recording associations with the images. Group members could come in at any time with their observations, provided they discussed only the part of the dream to which associations had already been made. Since *ROSE 3*, however, our group has cross-pollinated with the Haden Institute, which in its Dream Leader Training Program teaches a number of dreamwork methods but especially emphasizes the group projection method. Most people know the group projection method as the "If it were my dream" approach popularized by Jeremy Taylor in his two books *Dream Work* and *Where People Fly and Water Runs Uphill*.

The group projection method is based on the understanding that none of us can truly know the meaning of another person's dream. In any attempt to do so, we merely project our own themes, issues, and insights onto the hooks provided by the other's dream, and these projections may or may not be helpful to the dreamer. It is

important to be aware of the fact that we are projecting. Therefore any comment on another's dream is prefaced by a conscious acknowledgment of projection, such as, "If it were my dream . . ."

In practice, the group projection method, when used alone, goes something like this. The dreamer tells the dream. The group members question the dreamer about parts of the dream for which they would like further clarification. Then the dreamer gets quiet while the group members discuss the dream in terms of what it brings to light for each of them, the discussants always being careful to preface their remarks with something like, "If it were my dream . . ." Bob Haden, the director of the Haden Institute, has added a useful refinement here by suggesting that the group member who is commenting on the dream should not look at the dreamer, thereby freeing the dreamer from the need to make even a nonverbal acknowledgment of what has been said. At the end of the group discussion the dreamer is given a chance to comment on any realizations or insights he might have gained.

The greatest strength of the group projection method is in its service to the group, to which it brings a large dose of fellowship and sharing. Everyone gets a chance to talk about what is important to him or her in the context of the archetypal themes stirred up by the dream. The strength of the image-and-association method, on the other hand, is in its service to the dreamer. It assumes that the dream is bringing very pointed and specific meaning to the dreamer and that the dreamer's own associations with the particular images of the dream provide the most direct access to that meaning.

It would seem that these two methods of dreamwork, while both valid, are incommensurable, and that in working a dream a group would have to choose one or the other. In our Natural Spirituality group at Emmanuel, however, we *combine* the two, finding the combination to be an improvement over either method used alone.

LET US RETURN, then, to the image-and-association method described above and see what it looks like when the group projection method is added. We have reached the point where associations to all the images have been made, primarily by the dreamer, with the group having added archetypal associations only. Note that the group members have not yet been allowed to add any *personal* associations of their own, nor has any interpretation been attempted by either the dreamer or the group, though the dreamer may have given voice to some "ahas" along the way; the group members, however, have not yet been allowed to voice their own "ahas."

Once the last image has been amplified with associa-

The Dream

I know there had been a dream.
There remains a faint tinge
like the exhaust of a passing car
or the sound of a train whistle fading into the
distance.

Just a brief image is left: someone wearing
a Hawaiian shirt, a puff of emotion—but what?
It comes back another night, in another guise, to
tease me.

Like the mouse on her nocturnal path, disappearing
into a crack until only her tail remains.

And then that is gone.

Athens, GA Diane Ehlers

tions, the dream is ready for interpretation. Now we bring in the group projection method. "Okay," the group leader usually says, "let's do 'If it were my dream.'"

One by one the group members take a turn offering any glimmerings, insights, observations, or feelings that have arisen for them in response to the dream and the amplification of its images. The discussant may not look at the dreamer and must keep all remarks in first person—"I," "me," not "you." In our group we do not require the discussant to treat the dream as if it were his or her very own, although this is sometimes done. Far more often, however, the discussant says, "If this were my dream and I were Betty (the dreamer) . . ." Our comments take into account the associations that have been recorded, and in general we do not consider a comment to be particularly useful for the dreamer or the group if it departs very far from these parameters, although it may serve the needs of the discussant. After each group member has had a go at the dream, the dreamer brings the process to a close by making any comments he wishes to make, whether this means talking more about the dream or simply thanking the group as a whole for its input.

The group projection component brings several benefits to our image-and-association method. First of all, it allows us to remove from the earlier association process insights and observations from the group members that go beyond the simple offering of archetypal associations. This not only protects the dreamer from unguarded projections, but it also expedites the association process. Group members can more easily keep quiet when they

know they will have a chance at the end to fully voice their insights. Secondly, the group projection phase allows the dreamer to withdraw from the spotlight and return to his or her more private and protected self. When I am the dreamer, this part feels very good to me, like balm poured over me after all the hard work of pulling up my associations. Similarly, the experience of others putting on my images and issues for themselves feels to me like a blessing from each of them, especially since I am not required to say yea or nay to anything they offer. The third major benefit of the group projection component is that it gives the group members a chance to say whatever they want to say about the dream without any restraint other than the claiming of projection, the use of first person, and the courtesy of not looking at the dreamer.

The only drawback to this expanded image-and-association method is that it takes a long time to work through a dream—30 to 40 minutes if the dream is short, an hour or more if it is not. Therefore we can only fully analyze one or two dreams per session. To compensate for this deficit, we begin our sessions by letting each person in the group tell a dream. Although these are received without comment, or at most with very minimal discussion, they give us an opportunity to check in with each person's inner journey before we choose one or two of the dreams to analyze in depth.

Our group seems to be satisfied with this present approach to dreamwork. While everyone likes the addition of group projection, no one is willing to use that method alone, without the image-and-association component. We are too much devoted to the unique tie between the dreamer and the dream, and we are too used to digging in the deep, rich soil of the images and their associations. Thus we have settled upon this combined method, which we have been using on a steady basis for almost two years. Perhaps it is time to give it a name. How about the "Emmanuel" method of group dreamwork? Emmanuel, God with us.

Danielsville, GA **Joyce Rockwood Hudson**

Joyce Hudson notes the approaching end of the third quarter of her life, a time that has been marked by peak extraversion and dominated by Scarlett and the Soldier. She is glad to feel the shift. Double extraversion is not her truest nature. She loves the returning balance of introversion, which she is midwifing by resolutely setting limits on outer world demands. She has taken up the study of early Christianity and is beginning to think again about writing. She still enjoys editing THE ROSE, ever amazed at how each issue comes together.

 CW refers to Jung's *Collected Works*, Princeton University Press.

Natural Spirituality Regional Gathering

February 10–12, 2006 (or come for Feb. 11 only)

Mikell Camp and Conference Center, Toccoa, Georgia

OVER 100 PEOPLE ATTENDED the 2005 Gathering. Come join us for the next one. This two-tiered event—a one-day conference within a larger weekend conference—is aimed at natural spirituality veterans and inquirers alike. There will be lectures, workshops, small-group dreamwork, discussions of natural spirituality

program issues, introductory sessions for inquirers, meditative movement and contemplative prayer opportunities, worship, and time for relaxation and fellowship. Staff includes **Joyce Rockwood Hudson, Bob Haden, and Jerry Wright.**

This interdenominational conference is sponsored by natural spirituality groups in the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta. Camp Mikell is located in the mountains of North Georgia.

Registration deadline: Jan. 27, 2006

Early registration is advised.

Saturday-only fee: \$25 (includes lunch)

Weekend fees:

- \$145 double occupancy
- \$195 single occupancy (limited availability)
- \$ 95 dorm (12-bed "barracks": you get a bed, sheets, and a very basic bath)

A \$50 reduction in the dorm fee—to \$45—is available upon request to anyone who cannot otherwise attend the conference.

To register, contact Agnes Parker

706/742-2530

akbparker@earthlink.net



HUNDRED MONKEY ENROLLMENT

To join the troop of a Hundred Monkeys who are willing to be called upon for financial support for **THE ROSE** up to an annual limit of \$100, send this form to: **The Rose at Emmanuel Church, 498 Prince Ave, Athens, GA 30601.** You will be notified by mail of the amount to send in for each upcoming issue (see p. 3).



Name _____

Address _____