

## 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 there 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: associa-

tion, 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 complete 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?