

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 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 journals 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 answers 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 inhaling 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 well as 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, 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 using 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 when 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.

Don't make up in your mind ahead of time about what you are going to say next. First, really listen to what you hear, and see what you see, then let your response originate from the curiosity that comes from what the dream figure says and does.

Be patient. Become interested in what is happening, not what this interaction means. As a host, keep your focus on the wellbeing of the dream figure. This interaction is at least as much about the image as it is about you, perhaps more. What occurs to you as the next part of your greeting? Do or say this now.

Get curious about what the image is doing. Ask the question, "What is happening here?" and watch the figure's activities in relation to you. If other images from the dream have entered the room, which may happen because of the friendly atmosphere you have created, observe those interactions as well. Take the time to witness. There is no hurry. Hosting is about creating the space to feel secure and open. Settle into the ambience.

If the dream figure leaves the room for a time, wait for it to return. If it is gone for a long time, you might turn to another image for a while. When your original guest returns, bring your attention back to it. Patience is required to sustain a friendly connection. Continue your conversation and interaction. Do not ask the figure too many questions about how to solve your personal problems or pump it for information about yourself. That would be rude. Instead just observe with interest what the figure is up to now. Stay curious. Ask it questions about itself.

What do you see or hear from the image? Is it asking for something more? As a good host, how do you respond?

How does the image respond in turn? Go back and forth in dialogue from a place of caring. You are mindfully hosting the image. Take your time and enjoy your deepening friendship. Do not lead the image or talk for it. Remain open to the spontaneity of the conversation. Watch for any surprises.

Sustaining Relationship with an Image by Using the Senses

Once we make friends with a guest, we need to sustain that relationship, whether in life or in Dream Tending. In other words, for better or worse, we are stuck with them and are now part of the same dreamtime. Whether a Wise Elder offers important teachings or a Vampire frightens with a thirst for blood, the image is here now. We have hosted it, and now is the time to deepen our engagement.

One way to increase our contact with the figure is through the use of our senses. When we listen more attentively, see more precisely, even touch, taste, and smell more fully, we bolster our connection with the living image. Of course, we cannot literally touch or taste an image, but we can get a clear sense of doing so by imagining just what the texture or scent of a figure might be. As we open our senses to an image, we experience it as a three-dimensional, fully detailed, living figure. If we are working with the image of Horse, we feel its smooth, thick horsehair, see its huge, soft eyes, and smell its undeniable horsey-ness. The image comes to life, walking on four legs and swishing its tail. As we contact the dream animal in this sensory way, we feel that Horse is actually in the room with us. As Horse embodies, it begins to assert its autonomy, its will.

To go even further with this, we look at Horse with an eye for the details. How is this dream horse different from any other horse that we have seen before? We notice everything we can: the color of its coat, its particular markings, the shape of its

head, and so on. Often these details become the source of its name: Painted Pony, White Stallion, Red Tail. All these details give individuality to Horse, who is now standing, walking, galloping in the room along with us.

Before we move into the exercise, let's imagine how this kind of engagement might unfold with a dream figure that is not a person or an animal. For example, in a dream image of Ocean, we use our sense of smell to pick up the strong scent of the sea. We touch the salty water to feel its texture and temperature. We imagine tasting the water to see what that might be like.

Looking more closely at Ocean, we see if it is aqua blue, emerald green, or steely gray. We notice how this particular ocean is different from others. By not giving in to interpretations like Ocean as a "body of tears" or as the source of all life, We invite Ocean to come to life, present and embodied. Particularity keeps us in direct, experiential contact with this dream image of Ocean visiting now. Using our senses of touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing, we bring our instinctual body into relationship with the living image as an embodied entity.

EXERCISE: *Sustaining Relationship with an Image by Using the Senses*

Use the Dream Tending skills that you have learned thus far to bring yourself into a present-centered, embodied relationship with an image. Notice the quality of contact that you experience with this image. Notice how you are interacting with it. How are you in relationship? Most likely, you are watching the image, observing what it is up to. Again notice the quality of your body experience here at this stage of relationship. Bring your attention to the depth of emotion and the range of motion of the dream image. Write about this in your journal.

To begin, turn away from the image and spend a few moments awakening your senses. A simple way to do this is to look around the room in a mindful way. Focus your attention on the object that captures your attention with its beauty, its form, its texture, its brightness, or some other sensory quality.

Now close your eyes, quiet down, and listen to the sounds in the room. What do you hear? Perhaps you hear the hum of a fan, the chirp of birdsong from outside, or traffic noise from the street.

Then bring your awareness to your sense of smell. What does the room smell like? Can you differentiate various scents? Notice how the flowers or plants have a different scent than that of the carpet or the furniture. Is there a particular odor from the furnace or heater? If a window is open, can you make out the fragrance drifting into the room from outside?

Now open your eyes and notice how you see differently, with sensitivity for color, shades of light, and detail. Notice how much more acutely you hear and smell the world around you.

Turn back to the image that is in the room with you and use your activated senses to engage it. What do you become aware of? Next, imagine that you reach out and touch the image. Notice the texture, the hot or cold qualities, and the contours of the image. As the image becomes more real and present to your imagination, use your sense of smell. Close your eyes and really breathe in its particular smell. Take your time. Let the scent come to you. What do you smell?

Now, with eyes still closed, listen. Really listen, as if you could hear the sound of silence. Be patient. At first you may only hear the external sounds around you. Let those sounds

deepen your sense of hearing. What do you hear from the image? Does it make a sound when it moves? Does it have its own call? Do you hear purring, chirping, or words? Is there a soft hum or a piercing noise that comes from it? Follow whatever sound you are hearing, stay with it for some time, and make note of what you are hearing and any changes that are occurring. Bring these recollections back with you as you open your eyes.

With activated senses, continue to engage the image. What do you notice about the embodied presence of the image? In this state of heightened sense awareness, take your time and follow the image as it continues in its activity. Note anything about this image that is unique or distinctive. What makes it particular, unlike any other image? What do you notice about your own body experience? Write down your findings in as much detail as possible, as well as your reflections about them.

LEARNING TO WORK WITH LIVING IMAGES— PART IV: FROM RELATIONSHIP TO REVELATION

The Portals of Soul

As our Dream Tending evolves and our relationship with the living image deepens, a new and important possibility arises: the capacity for revelation. Living images contain many surprising insights and secrets that reveal themselves under the right conditions. We do not manufacture revelation. It happens naturally when we are attuned to living images in an embodied and receptive way. For an image to reveal something essential, it must exist in a field of acceptance, positive regard, and openness.

A few years ago I took a journey to Australia, the land of the aboriginal dreamtime. As I explored the outback, I encountered

what were, for me, many out-of-the-ordinary creatures. One day while walking with my son through a rainforest, I found myself face to face with a koala bear curled around the branch of a eucalyptus tree only a few feet away. I looked at this remarkable creature for a long time, much longer than I had looked at a wild animal before. As I continued to watch him, the way I was seeing started to change.

First, I was surprised to be in the presence of such an unfamiliar, yet delightful being. He was certainly as appealing as any of those cuddly stuffed toy koalas that I grew up with. As time passed however, something more interesting began to unfold. As I felt more comfortable, I became more receptive and patient, and my way of looking at Koala deepened.

I saw the soft, gray-brown fur that covered Koala's tiny round body, and the small, cupped ears that flared out from both sides of his wide head. His sharp claws and strong legs were perfect for climbing the almost-vertical branches of the eucalyptus tree. I saw the extraordinary beauty that made this creature a particular, unique, individual Koala Bear.

Then I realized that Koala's beady black eyes were *looking intently right back at me*. As we looked into each other's eyes, I experienced a warm feeling of relationship and compassion. I felt that Koala and I belonged to the same community of beings.

It was then that I became aware of my breathing: a kind of breathing that seemed to come from the very source of breath itself. I felt part of something larger than myself. I felt at home. I stopped being a self-conscious observer of a strange animal and instead became an active participant in a very old dance between like-minded creatures. As Koala and I saw into and beyond each other, I found myself doing an amazing thing. I introduced Koala to my son, who was standing beside me. It was as if Koala

were an old friend of mine. It seemed perfectly natural, in fact *required*, to introduce him to my family.

In those moments Koala, my son, and I shared a primal recognition of life knowing life. I felt, for a time, the living and breathing reality of that which sources all life, that which I have come to know as "the dreaming."

As Dream Tenders we can set the stage for revelation by bringing the qualities of subtle perception and deep listening into our interactions with images. By subtle perception, I mean a kind of seeing in which we are aware of both our peripheral vision and our focused, core vision at the same time. It is a kind of total seeing that we do with both very relaxed and very alert eyes. To view a dream image in this way is like walking in the woods and seeing the uniqueness of particular trees and simultaneously witnessing the forest in its totality. When we do this, the living image often will reveal its innermost self, its soul.

In addition to subtle perception, it is also important to engage in deep listening. Deep listening, as we touched upon in the art of hosting, is a kind of hearing without the impulse to know or respond. Often this is somewhat difficult to do. Usually we have already prepared a response before a person has even finished her sentence. Obviously this way of listening does not allow for the fullest consideration and understanding of the other. Even if you do not speak, but there is a constant stream of mental responses to a dream figure, the revelatory process will likely come to an end.

We accomplish deep listening by emptying our minds of all responses. To listen carefully without reacting allows a dream figure to continue its activities uninterrupted and to reveal from the inside out what it has to say. When we listen to a living image in this way, its revelation is not conditioned by our expectations, judgments, or agendas.

Once we shift our mode of seeing and listening to subtle perception and deep listening, there is one additional move to make to witness revelation. The eyes have always been known as the portals of the soul, and this is true for dream figures as well. With the permission of a living image, and making sure that we are not forcing anything, we can gently gaze into its eyes. It is crucial to remain soft, relaxed, and open when we do this. If the living image is open to such contact, and we have shifted into the alternate modes of perception, then looking into the figure's eyes can open up a world of revelation.

I would like to emphasize the delicate nature of this eye-to-eye meeting. It is important not to barge into the eyes of a dream figure, demanding it reveal some sacred truth to you. This process is not about surging forward on the Hero's Journey, vortal sword in hand. We are not on a quest for the Grail, nor are we thieves, plundering a roomful of treasure.

The one thing we do gain is a profound and intimate connection with the dream image. Within the eyes of a dream figure, we find a well of timelessness and presence. We surrender to another kind of consciousness, a subtle mode of connection, requiring finesse, patience, sensitivity, and spaciousness.

With extended practice of looking into the eyes of a dream image, we will occasionally make contact with other images residing in the inner realms of this awareness, such as ancestor figures and guardian animals. This can be a tremendously rewarding experience. I have found that looking gently and mindfully into the eyes of a dream figure changes people. Entering the portals of the soul opens us ever more deeply into our own soul life and to the mysteries of the dreamtime.