

Your Soul  
is Talking.

Are You  
Listening?

5 Steps to Uncovering  
Your Hidden Purpose



DEBORAH LUKOVICH PHD

*Praise For*  
**Your Soul is Talking. Are You Listening?**

“This book on listening to the Soul is a great supplement to therapy for those in midlife transition who are looking for purpose in their lives. Individuals who are learning to listen to their inner voice and appreciate the mysterious ways in which the Soul communicates will find Deborah Lukovich’s book both instructive and relatable.”

—**Stacey Shelby, PhD.**, Registered Clinical Counselor, and author of *Tracking the Wild Woman Archetype: A Guide to Becoming a Whole In-Divisible Woman*

“After my divorce, I was lost, and nothing made sense anymore. I didn’t know anything about Depth Psychology and drawing my dream during one of Deborah’s workshops made me feel silly, but something shifted in me. I hardly recognize myself after three years of allowing my dreams to guide our sessions and my journey. Working through this book is like having Deborah right there with you—as storyteller, teacher, guide, and cheerleader.”

—**Angela Sterling**, Coaching Client

“Dr. Lukovich’s book is an insightful examination of the human psyche through personal revelation during her quest to relate to the feminine, sexuality, and ultimately God. The book is not only a well-written introduction to Jungian theory but a useful workbook that provides readers with practical exercises to use in working with images offered by the unconscious.”

—**Vlado Šolc**, Jungian Analyst, and author of *Dark Religion: Fundamentalism from the Perspective of Jungian Psychology*

“I always knew my dreams and odd coincidences were trying to tell me something, but I didn’t know how to decode them, until Deborah taught me how to speak the language of the unconscious. I’ve gained so much CLARITY about my life because of our sessions and because journaling and drawing are now a part of my life. This book will help you find meaning in what you might be tempted to dismiss as meaningless.”

—**Kinnethia Tolson**, Coaching Client

“In this remarkable book, Dr. Lukovich describes with creativity and imagination her experience of the Deep Self. But her purpose in so doing is not so much to tell her story as it is to liberate her readers to experience the peace and joy that comes only by way of inner union with the deepest dimension of the human psyche. Only those who have been transformed in this way can serve to promote the inner transformation of others. Dr. Lukovich, having undergone depth-level change, is thus capable of transmitting such change to others. I strongly recommend her book.”

—**Thomas Galten, LCSW CSAC**, author of *What Do You Really Want? The Self's Search for Itself and Enlightenment is Not an Ego Project*

“Dr. Deborah Lukovich’s new book, *Your Soul is Talking. Are You Listening?* is a call to adventure in the land of our Deep Selves. For so many people—people who are taught to please, to comply, to dismiss and deny their needs and feelings—this book provides steps and ways to *loosen the grip of convention*. I wish it had been there for me thirty years ago, but I’m pleased to have it available for my clients to read along during our therapy work.”

—**Jane Bolton, Psy.D., LMFT**

“I couldn’t see what was happening beneath my Type-A life—full of career success and fulfillment as a wife and mother of two boys. Angst about approaching my fortieth birthday and a dream about a grizzly bear that mauled my family brought me to Dr. Deborah. Our sessions, journaling, drawing, and a new commitment to a day per month devoted to myself were my gifts to me. My recent dream about the sick but beautiful and vividly colored peacock I was unable to console served as the warning of a breaking point, but also provided a glimpse into my future now that I am tending to my Self. Deborah’s book will help you hear the pleas of your inner being.”

—**Dana Felton**, Coaching Client

“My friend has brought a treasure into the world through the making of this book. Deborah has a remarkable ability to condense complicated and abstract concepts into digestible ideas. Not only has she done that in this excellent introduction to depth psychology, but she has also made the material relatable, humorous, and inviting. If you want to become the kind of person that celebrates your own uniqueness and diversity, then it would do you well to give this book a read.”

—**Alex Luber, LPC, M.S.**

“A deeply personal account of Deborah Lukovich’s spiritual growth intensified by completing her Ph.D. in Depth Psychology. As a teacher, educator, and community developer, I find Deborah’s ability to self-reflect and understand personal wounds to be a refreshing take on exploring the subconscious of relationships between women and men. Deborah provides tools and lovingly guides the reader to reflect and discern next steps for improving those relationships.”

—**Robert A. Pavlik, Ed.D.**  
Project for Community Transformation, Marquette University



# **Your Soul is Talking. Are You Listening?**

**5 STEPS TO UNCOVERING  
YOUR HIDDEN PURPOSE**

**DEBORAH LUKOVICH, PHD**

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## About the Author

Deborah Lukovich, PhD is a coach, writer, and speaker. Her midlife unraveling coincided with a calling to study depth psychology, and the boundary between theory and personal experience was blurred many times. Her midlife reconstruction paralleled her research on women's experience of reconciling sexuality and spirituality, and the reward of exploring her unconscious came in the form a new sense of purpose and creativity that was unleashed when she picked up and moved to a beach town.

As a coach, she is passionate about helping people come into deeper relationship with themselves and others, and uses a framework based on C.G. Jung's theory of individuation. She teachers her coaching clients how to recognize and decode the messages the Soul sends through the unconscious in the form of dreams, synchronistic events, symbols, film images, complexes, fantasies, obsessions, and even anxiety and depression.

As a writer, Deborah offers equal parts entertainment and healing by weaving in her most awkward experiences to create space for others to explore their own. Through her blog posts and short stories, her mixture of conversational instruction, sprinkled with humor, guides readers through information, stories, and practical approaches to self-reflection.

Deborah is working on a memoir inspired by her midlife experience and research on women's experience of reconciling sexuality and spirituality. To learn more and subscribe to receive notifications of blog posts and updates about her writing visit [www.deborahlukovich.com](http://www.deborahlukovich.com).

## **A Short Note**

This book represents my first endeavor to share my experience of exploring life through the lens of depth psychology. My Soul was sneaky. Midlife unraveling coincided with a calling to study depth psychology. The five-year journey, culminating in a PhD, was not simply an intellectual exercise. I projected a lot onto C.G. Jung, and my educational experience turned into a spiritual practice as each class plunged me deeper into the depths of my unconscious. I didn't know what I was going to do with my new education, so I called it expensive therapy for a while.

## Acknowledgements

Often only in hindsight can you identify that one moment that set something in motion that otherwise would never have occurred. I appreciated all the professors at Pacifica Graduate Institute, but it was the response of Dr. Susan Rowland to what felt like a coming out of the closet experience that put me on a path I would never have anticipated. All she said was “I suggest you follow the energy,” and somehow, I found the courage to accept the invitation to a journey that changed my life. Her passion for supporting women and her no nonsense critiques prepared me for doing the kind of research and scholarly writing required to secure a PhD. Thank you also to Drs. Stacey Shelby, Kesstan Blandin, and Thomas Galten, my dissertation committee members who provided the encouragement, feedback, and guidance to get me to the finish line.

By the end of the first quarter of my education journey I had my own Jungian analyst—Vladislav (Vlado) Šolc. I felt energized after every one of the twice-monthly visits over five years. I am grateful for the space Vlado offered me for exploring my most awkward and vulnerable experiences, and now I appreciate him as a friend and colleague. I never did lay on the leather couch in his office—I was too self-conscious.

Thank you to Dr. Robert Pavlik, my friend and spiritual guide of many years. During our quarterly lunches at the Royal Garden Chinese restaurant, our conversations always included questions meant to help me discover how I might use my newfound passion in service of others.

Thank you to my sisters—Christine and Michele. Texting and phone conversations with them were more like a virtual journal, where I processed overwhelming experiences. They never complained about my three-minute voicemail messages and long texts about interpretations of sexual imagery that showed up in dreams, or my take on superhero films.

My friend Billie Jean Smith scooped me up during a pivotal time—the ending of my marriage and the beginning of my journey to deconstruct and reconstruct myself. Weekly conversations over wine resembled episodes of a Netflix series about women in midlife. Deb Stamp, my friend of more than 30 years, was always a calming and accepting presence during the most tumultuous part of my midlife unraveling.

My research topic found me, not the other way around. If I hadn't allowed myself to be swept up in my first post-divorce relationship with a younger man, I might not have healed wounds I didn't even know I had. This inspired my research on women's experience of reconciling sexuality and spirituality. This man will always have a special place in my heart.

My former husband and I are now on different journeys, and yet we will always have a deep connection that goes beyond our shared children. A marriage that ends ought not to be considered a failure. Over time I came to appreciate how without the twenty-four-year marriage—and its unraveling—I might not have developed the capacity to become vulnerable enough to come into deeper relationship with myself.

My children Rachel and William had to bear the brunt of my midlife transformation, which included many hours devoted to studying and writing. I had to make brave decisions that caused them great suffering, and they have had to watch their mother become someone new. Witnessing them grow into kind and self-reflective human beings affirms my decision to be true to myself.

This book symbolizes the beginning of my new purpose, and everyone above and more contributed to my getting here.

# **Dedication**

*For my children,*

*Rachel and William*

*I am honored to be a witness  
as you continue to unfold into  
two amazing, kind, and  
self-reflecting human beings.*

*The world needs you both!*

*Love, Mom*





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## CHAPTER ONE

# The Discovery of You

Do you really know yourself? I want to get you excited about exploring the most important final frontier—your inner world. Like an iceberg, most of you is unknown, and just as the artifacts found by archaeologists help make meaning of the present, exploring your own life can do the same for you. Making sense of your current life will influence your future in ways you never imagined.

Can you get through life without this depth of self-reflection? Sure, and many do. Others reach a time in life when what used to make sense doesn't anymore. Your patterns of thinking and behaving are what helped you survive and thrive up until now, but eventually some of those ways of responding to life's events stop working and start holding you back. If you don't recognize them, you will feel frustrated by why certain things happen in your life, and you won't understand that it is not necessarily others holding you back, rather a glass ceiling of your own making.

The way you approach life now is a stepping-stone to growing into the next version of you. Have you reflected about why you believe what you believe? Did you adopt your parents' religious beliefs, or did you run the other way? What does your annoyance with certain people say about you? Are you the black sheep in the family? Why did you become a lawyer or a

community activist? Do you know the real reason you got married? If you're struggling with alcohol, have you wondered what you're really craving? Do you wonder why that thing your mother always says makes you so angry, or why you can't help saying hurtful things to your sister? Do you know why you're obsessed with certain Netflix shows or why you cannot watch enough superhero movies? Have you figured out what that recurring dream wants from you, the one where a plane crashes? Have you had the dream where your teeth are crumbling, or the one where armed militia are chasing you through your childhood home? Why do you feel fear when someone expresses misogynistic ideas even if you are not in physical danger? What is your earliest childhood memory?

Answers to questions like these are clues to discovering what a deeper part of you wants from you now. Maybe you don't want to know, because then you will have to shine a light on parts of you that are not pleasant to look at, or parts that you've been ignoring. And what purpose does it serve to peel away those stinky onion layers anyway?

The deeper part of you can be referred to as Soul, and the Soul speaks to you through your unconscious. Lots of people have opinions about what Soul is or means, but Soul is how I describe the part of you that knows more about you than you do. Soul is part of you and at the same time transcends your physical form. Soul connects you to everything and everyone. Soul allows the Source of creative energy to mix with your unique human experiences for the purpose of creating only what you can create. Soul is a perspective, a way of living life, a drive to find meaning, and Soul is how we make meaning. Soul cannot be pinned down. Soul is a noun, a verb, an adjective, and an adverb.

Scientific evidence affirms that unconscious forces direct ninety-five percent of our habits and patterns, automatic body functions, creativity, emotions, personality, beliefs and values, cognitive biases, and long-term memory. Not coming into relationship with your unconscious means forgoing

acquiring knowledge about most of who you are. Exploring all this is not about reliving or getting stuck in the past, nor is it about punishing yourself, or making excuses for bad behavior. It's more like being a witness or companion to yourself as you reach into unknown parts of you and grab the things that will help you make sense of your current life. You'll begin to see things you never saw before, as if you had been given a magnifying glass to reveal choices that never occurred to you before or that seemed possible.

## My Story

The revelation that I didn't know myself like I thought I did was painful and humbling. I'm super aware, I had bragged to people, so sure I knew why I had made the choices I did. Why I disliked certain types of people, why I became a feminist activist, and why at age thirty-three I suddenly decided I was ready to be a mother. Then, at forty-seven, it was like a trick had been played on me. I was surprised to have been nominated to receive an award that recognized my activism, and as I prepared my five-minute speech, a flood of memories rushed to the surface. I scratched out a list of twenty women who had encouraged me over the years. *Of course, you can do that!* was always the push I needed to do the scary things required to become the version of me I wanted to be.

Standing at the podium, I inhaled and exhaled, and then looked up. My voice started out strong and then began to crack. Oh no, I thought. Tears were making their way up from a deep place. Sobs came as I read the words, *I make a difference walking around being me.* Embarrassment washed over me as I continued to have the kind of big cry you don't want to have in front of a hundred people. I couldn't move. I saw my twelve-year-old son whisper something to my husband, who then got up and made his way to the stage to rescue me.

In that Soul-making moment, I learned that the deeper drive behind my activism was a desperate need for validation

that I was good enough. Ironically, I could only see this once I realized that I was indeed good enough. It was an earth-shattering realization at the time, but three years passed without my awareness of how that insight had changed my life. I was fifty now and a student in the second quarter of my MA/PhD program in Depth Psychology. It was a mystery why I was pursuing this education, and I'll talk about that later. During one of my classes, we were asked to explore how our earliest childhood memories could make sense of the trajectory our lives had taken. A pair of memories came up for me, the first was being bullied in elementary school, and the second was of the small corner of the playground where I played marbles—where I felt safe.

My fierce desire to advocate for others now made sense, but what about all my other decisions? In the blink of an eye, my ideas about my own life were shattered. I panicked at the possibility I might not know the true reason for any of my actions—past, present, or future. Suddenly, I didn't trust myself at all. What a strange statement, I thought. Who is this part of me that trusts or distrusts? And who is the other part of me that needs to be trusted? Panic turned to excitement when I realized that this was why I was in the program, to figure this out and to discover who the deeper part of me was and what she wanted for my life now. But how did I get to that moment?

Let's go back a few years—ten years before I received that award. I was thirty-eight and life was good. I was peaking at my version of being mom, professional, and wife, a version that did not fit into the conventional notion of success. Vindication is what I had felt about my refusal to choose between being a mother or professional or desperately trying to do them both perfectly. Inside, I knew that the best thing I could do for my children was pursue my deepest desires. I thought that's what I was doing—writing my own story, charting my own course.

One day I was on a power walk with my two children, ages five and three. Everything about our walk felt idyllic, one

of those rare moments of feeling life was in balance. Something my son said made me pause and look up. What a beautiful sight, sunshine sparkling through the rustling leaves, but then I tipped my head to one side. A single ray was desperately trying to break through the spaces between the leaves. My heart ached as the comforting ray of sunshine turned into a burning realization that I had lost a piece of myself. My shoulders drooped, and I was overcome with sadness. I felt confused. It's not true! I told myself. It can't be true! I didn't want it to be true, so I tucked it away.

Six years passed, and in the meantime, I had talked my husband into moving out of the suburbs and back to our old more urban neighborhood. I didn't realize his agreement had been more like acquiescence and that our relationship had been deteriorating beneath the surface of our busy lives. My unconscious started getting more dramatic in its efforts to get my attention. One day, our family embarked on a short walk to main street, and a few blocks in it began to rain. I was excited to get caught in a warm summer rain, but my husband was not in sync with my romantic view of the situation. During the few moments spent arguing about whether to turn around, I suddenly felt exhausted at the familiarity of the moment. I became aware of the role I had been playing—constantly managing the relationship between my children and their father. I felt so tired.

We walked into a pharmacy and scattered in different directions. I gravitated to the magazine rack, and I purchased an issue of *Yoga Journal*. Then we walked home. Later that evening, as I paged through the magazine in the privacy of the bathroom, the fiery orange and red logo for the Pacifica Graduate Institute MA/PhD program in Depth Psychology popped off the page and grabbed me by the shoulders. The image screamed that this was the answer to a question I hadn't even known to ask.

The words on the website felt like a mysterious religious language full of symbolism that needed to be interpreted. My

inner being was clear she had to have this, and I had never felt as certain about anything. But I was scared. My husband would not understand, he couldn't, he didn't, but I couldn't ignore that the survival of my Soul depended upon pursuing this program.

### **Another Version of You Awaits**

Those strange events had been staged by another version of me, a version that had opinions and needs of her own. Answering the mysterious call to pursue the educational journey no matter the cost set something in motion, including the beginning of the end of my twenty-four-year marriage. In that moment, I trusted the voice that had escaped the deepest part of me. She must know something I don't, I thought. It was terrifying, but I gave up the need to know how it would go. It took two years to start my new educational journey, and the courses mysteriously were presented in the order I needed. I made sense of many things, including a hidden motivation for marrying my husband. I will talk about that later too.

If I hadn't surrendered to my inner being—my Soul—I would not have experienced the eventual reconciliation of the opposing forces inside me. The treasure that awaited was deeper relationship with my feminine nature, my body, my sexuality, and the deepest part of me—the bridge to what some describe as God. If I hadn't embraced the uncertainty that answering the call had involved, then I might not have found and unleashed a buried creative urge that now freely roams the Earth. If I had not explored the root of the patterns of thinking and behaving that led me to show up in my marriage the way I did, I would have missed out on all the sexual and spiritual growth I have been able to experience.

This is what I want for you. Your Soul is speaking to you all the time—through inner beings and forces that live, play, and argue in the playground of your unconscious. But are you listening, or do you dismiss those fleeting nudges that come in the form of intuition or images that scream for your attention?

When you do hear the whispers, do you understand the messages? I know you have days where you feel a powerful urge to do something different, and then another part of you uses logic and reason to push it down. Or maybe something from that deeper part of you has escaped through a small crack, like the single ray of sunshine that reached me through the small space between some rustling leaves. You can't ignore it anymore, but you feel fear at the prospect of making the decisions that need to be made to answer the call. There will be people around you who will be vocal about their disapproval of your journey to find your own truth because that will shine a light on the denial of their own.

In this book, I will teach you how to hear and communicate with your unconscious, the realm of the unknown, the vessel through which and from which your Soul communicates with you. Your biggest challenge will be conventional systems that have influenced your approach to life. These systems have helped you make sense of the world and your place in it, but these systems also drown out, distract you from, or invalidate your inner knowing, and they end up thinking for you.

What better time than now to choose to loosen the grip convention has had on your life and to embrace the forgotten part of you that is seeking expression through your unique experience as a human being. C.G. Jung (Carl Jung), one of the founders of depth psychology—the study of the unconscious—suggested more than a hundred years ago that the fate of humanity depended upon the self-reflecting individual. He suggested the collective psyche of a large group is more like that of an animal as reflected in its mob mentality (Jung, 1954/1968). Avoiding self-reflection leads to the dangerous path of accepting as truth what would not withstand scrutiny by any measure of critical thinking. Allow this book to be your guide as you come into deeper relationship with your Self and Others and see what begins to unfold.



## CHAPTER TWO

# How This Book Works

This is not an academic book, nor is it targeted towards researchers or professionals who work in the field of psychology, except as a resource for their patients and clients. This book is not for people who limit themselves to seeing through an intellectual lens that values logic and reason over other types of knowing. The overarching framework of this book is depth psychology—the study of the unconscious—and I refer to theories and approaches developed within this field, especially those originating with Jung. Much has been and will continue to be written that critiques and expands on these theories, but this is not the purpose of my book. The approaches and exercises are written through the lens of my personal experience and are those I found most useful during my midlife unraveling and reconstruction, which coincided with working towards a PhD in depth psychology.

This book is for people who are new to self-reflection and those who want to learn more about a depth psychological approach to life. It is a user guide for people who know there are forces beneath the surface of their lives, prompting them towards something which they cannot yet articulate in words. This something that is prompting them to reflect and find new meaning I refer to as Soul. This book is for people who sense that intellectual understanding by itself is incomplete. It is

inclusive of differing religious frameworks, reflects my symbolic approach to sexuality and spirituality, and is written in a way that values multiple ways of learning.

## Sharing My Stories

Stories are an effective way to deliver and receive knowledge, and I've been told that sharing my especially awkward stories creates a safe space for others to explore their own uncomfortable experiences. Being alone will not protect you from feeling vulnerable. Engaging with my fantasy of being sexually submissive for example, was not easy. I never chose to have that fantasy, I was embarrassed by it, and it would just pop up, follow me around, and torture me. As a budding depth psychologist, I knew embarrassment was key to its significance, and I decided to draw it—to get away from it. By putting it on paper and stepping back, I could safely explore it and try to figure out what it was trying to tell me. What did it want from me? My fantasy was encouraging me to submit to my inner being, and the arousal I felt was the reward for having the courage to follow the uncertain path that was in front of me. I offer lots of stories to encourage you to embrace your own awkward and vulnerable life experiences, which are key to coming into deeper relationship with yourself and others.

## Experiential Learning

This book is designed to engage your unconscious from the start and be a tool to process your experiences along the way. Numerous **Reflection Questions** are meant to get your juices flowing. In all the hundreds of depth psychology books I read, I often struggled with the need to have examples or a template. Under each heading titled **Try This** are opportunities to put concepts and approaches to work right away. The sections titled **Sharing My Insights** illustrate my process of finding meaning in my images and how that meaning turned

into new ways of thinking and behaving. You might be tempted to avoid that last step, but it is the doorway to a new place. Practicing the new attitude, way of thinking, or approach contributes to your capacity to respond to life in new ways and creates new neural connections. This book is designed to last a lifetime, guiding you to go deeper and deeper over time.

## What's Covered in this Book

In the next chapter, concepts and terms are defined. Some of them are depth psychology terms that I want to explain in everyday language, and others are common terms that I use in a more symbolic and inclusive way. **Chapter 4** introduces you to my five-step process to working with the unconscious that emerged naturally as I became more experienced working with my images. **Chapter 5** encourages you to consider the larger forces that have influenced you, especially the big one called patriarchy, which is stubbornly hanging on in no small part due to the validation it receives from patriarchal religious doctrine. I think you'll find the new theories regarding the topic interesting and empowering. **Chapters 6-15** cover ten ways the unconscious speaks, along with examples, reflection questions, and personal stories to help you identify the ways your unconscious has been talking to you.

**Chapters 16-24** outline nine methods of working with your unconscious, guiding you to explore the types of images you learned about in the previous chapters. More exercises and stories illustrate how these methods contributed to my process of finding meaning, identifying new areas of growth, and ultimately leading to my life unfolding in a new way. As you try them out, insights may come quick or slow. The more relaxed and curious you are, the more you will get out of the process. **Chapter 25** encourages you to consider your experience with this book as the beginning of a new practice. Good nutrition and exercise are not ends, rather they are practices that contribute to long-term health. Working with your unconscious is a

practice of self-reflection that contributes to living a meaningful life.

## **Capturing and Processing Your Experiences**

Exploring myself as a laboratory experiment or mystery novel helps me avoid drowning in my experiences. Looking at myself as if I am *over there*, creates distance and brings some objectivity to the process. The intense awkwardness I felt in the beginning of my post-divorce life changed my sense of humor, a defense mechanism of sorts for me to survive the process, and sharing my experiences with others helped me process them. After decades of being in control of the persona I showed the world, I had now found myself blurting out my awkward stories to certain people, who oddly found them entertaining. My personal Netflix series sometimes resembled a family drama and other times a romantic comedy.

This book will engage your unconscious as you learn about and apply concepts to your life experiences. Embrace your wandering mind when memories or fantasies come to the surface and pay attention to emotions and the feelings you use to make sense of them, as well as what gets activated in your body. Do not discard or judge these glimpses into your inner world. Plunging into the depths of the unconscious, the realm of which we know nothing, requires letting go of control and allowing new insights to emerge. The meaning will come later but know that the mysterious messages are meant to be helpful and contribute to your growth.

Finding meaning in the clues that emerge from your unconscious is not like solving a math problem where there is one correct answer. Often messages and new insights conflict with what we consciously believe, prompting us to evolve our attitude about ourselves and others. The more rigid our beliefs, the more threatening it feels to have a more nuanced and tolerant viewpoint. For example, holding yourself to impossible standards not only can lead to shame about past mistakes, but

often leads to unfair projections onto others of what you cannot face in yourself. A new balanced attitude can emerge when there is capacity to manage the tension between the two things that were perceived to be in opposition. Carl Jung called this process the transcendent function (Jung, 1954/1972, p. 223).

Just as students use workbooks to practice and apply mathematical concepts, you will need a tool—a gathering place—to explore the material your unconscious presents to you. You will need two types of journals—one where you write, and one in which you draw. You can purchase journals from my store at [www.deborahlukovich.com](http://www.deborahlukovich.com). The written journal (I use a Word document) is where you will document messages from your unconscious, dreams for example. This is where you will reflect about associations and insights and develop strategies to integrate new ways of thinking and behaving into your life.

If you are new to journaling, or you haven't journaled in a while, you may feel resistance. Journaling is difficult for many people for reasons that are more complex than they realize. Pulling things out of your unconscious and putting them on paper makes them real. Research shows that people who write down their goals are eighty-five percent more likely to achieve them, so putting your dreams and deepest thoughts down on paper creates momentum for exploring and makes it possible to find new meaning and change your life.

Having not journaled since fifth grade, I found myself compelled to start writing on my laptop when I was forty-eight. It felt like daily vomiting onto the page for six months. Then it stopped, and I read what I wrote. I was surprised at re-reading my first journal entry: I can't live like this anymore. The fifty plus pages documenting my husband's drinking revealed a sinister pattern I had not seen before, a pattern that involved a self-imposed minimizing of my suffering. Maybe I knew it, but I didn't know it in a way that forced me to face it.

Be gentle with yourself as you gather the courage to pull out your insides and display them even if only to yourself. Write or type the words, half-sentences, run-on sentences, bullets,

stream of consciousness writing, poetry, prose. There is no right way to journal. It's the first step in allowing your inner being to have a voice. You don't get to control what she/he/they have to say, but you can honor your inner being by putting the words on paper, and then you can walk away for a while.

Sometimes you will not be able to find the words to express an experience. The image journal will allow you to capture experiences for which there are no words, and it will be the gathering place for the most vulnerable expressions from your unconscious. Mine is small, leather bound, and full of those cream-colored pages with imperfect edges, and I mostly use color pencils for my drawings. This may be the toughest part of the process if your inner artist has been sitting in the shadows since childhood.

### **Sharing My Insights**

The first time I allowed my unconscious to express itself in a drawing was a year after that first journal entry I mentioned above. I felt like I was in kindergarten, and I didn't know what to draw, and this caused intense anxiety. In a trance, sipping on a glass of wine at my favorite bar, I started drawing lines from the center of the page to the edge. I must have drawn over a hundred lines. After I filled the page, I stepped back, took another sip of wine and my eyes widened and my chest felt heavy. My cheeks turned red when I noticed that the blank space left in the center of the paper was in the shape of a heart. I colored it in, pressing down hard on the crayons and pastels, tears in my eyes.

In that vulnerable moment I had met my inner child. She was six, the year before I began to be bullied at school. I never told the teacher, and I don't think I told my parents about the emotional torture and the threats of violence to my little body. The raw experience of allowing this drawing to emerge unleashed that forgotten and scared child part of me. She was able to break through all my protective layers as she guided me

through the drawing of the image. I might not have found her if I hadn't allowed myself to draw like a child. Acknowledging her and beginning to provide her with what I hadn't received as a child led to new levels of joy, passion, and creative expression in my life.

## **Death Comes Before Rebirth**

Throughout this book are sprinkled opportunities to apply concepts, including exercises related to specific approaches. Sometimes you will be excited and other times you will be tempted to dismiss something as silly. Resist the temptation to stay in your head and the bullying by your defensive ego. Feeling resistance is a clue you're onto something and feeling awkward indicates you're going to experience something new. Hang in there and push yourself through it. Developing my capacity for awkwardness brought the most amazing rewards in the form of deep connection with a lover and courage to leave behind my old professional persona in favor of a new life as a writer.

Making room for something new requires the symbolic death of something old. Jungian analyst Murray Stein destroyed my once romantic view of the metaphoric journey from caterpillar to butterfly. In his book, *Transformation: Emergence of the Self* (1998), he describes what is really going on inside that cocoon. The most gruesome part of the transformative process is the complete disintegration of the caterpillar form, which precedes the emergence of the new butterfly that has no choice but to desperately dig its way out of the now suffocating womb. Transformation in how one exists in the world requires a psychological death, but the reward of authenticity is worth the price.

The individual who consciously embarks on the journey into their unconscious has courage. I love how Dr. Brené Brown talks about courage in her book, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love,*

*Parent and Lead* (2012). The book was inspired by ten years of research on vulnerability. Courage is not the absence of fear, rather it is doing something in the presence of fear. For people who choose to remain unaware or are not equipped to become aware, shadowy demons may find a way to wreak havoc in their lives.

Are you intrigued? I must be honest about what you're up against should you say *Yes!* to this Indiana Jones-like adventure. You will be going against the grain of modern culture, convention, and other groups and inherited beliefs which have influenced your life. As you change the way you exist in the world, some of your strongest relationships will change. Those who had previously projected onto you the responsibility for meeting certain psychological needs may throw a temper tantrum, because they have been used to you responding to them in a certain way. Likewise, taking back what you've projected onto others may cause anxiety in you. Watching others do fine without your meddling can feel like a blow to your sense of identity. Initial vulnerability will transform into empowerment as you learn to meet your own psychological needs and allow others to do the same.

This chapter was meant to help you get the most out of your experience of my book.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Definitions

This chapter covers how I am using some concepts and terms. Some of them are depth psychology terms that I want to explain in everyday language, and two books by Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1989), and *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (1955), provide a relatable understanding of the larger context in which Jung's theories emerged. One additional book, *On the Nature of the Psyche* (1954/1972), is a useful reference for most of the terms and theories I refer to in my book. A list of additional references is located at the back of my book.

Exploring this new frontier requires a different kind of knowing and mastering a new language, one that is full of paradoxes and is anything but linear and direct. The purpose of this book is to help you apply concepts that I found helpful in exploring my unconscious during a challenging time in my life. When the most challenging part was over, I didn't stop. It's more fun now as I relax into a version of my life that I never anticipated.

After decades of *making* things happen, I am still getting used to *allowing* things to happen. Somewhere during the past five years, my Soul reminded me that in high school I had wanted to be a psychologist, but I dismissed it out of hand because it was too big for me to figure out. My Soul also reminded me that when I was younger, I loved making art,

writing, and dancing, but my perfectionism was too much to bear. Now, I'm a depth psychologist and a writer because I chose to listen to an irrational mysterious voice instead of forcing myself to look through the lens of reason.

The root of **psychology** is, "the study of the Soul," from Modern Latin *psychologia*, probably coined mid-16c. in Germany by Melanchthon from Latinized form of Greek *psykhē* "breath, spirit, Soul" (see psyche) + *logia* "study of" (see -logy). ([www.etymonline.com](http://www.etymonline.com)).

Relating to your unconscious requires a devotion to experiencing truth for yourself. Depth psychology is the study of the **unconscious**, the parts of us that are unknown. The **personal unconscious** contains those things of which we are unaware and relate to our personal circumstances and experiences. The **collective unconscious** is the sum of the unconscious of more than one individual, including that of the whole existence of humanity. The memory of humanity's experience is like a **psychic DNA**, which Jung suggested includes a **religious instinct**, an instinct to make meaning. (Jung, 1954/1972)

You can look at the collective unconscious as the realm of everything unknown, including the source of creation or what others refer to as God, consequently depth psychology can feel like a spiritual practice that offers spiritual experiences. If you identify as Christian, you may enjoy reading *The Living God and Our Living Psyche; What Christians Can Learn from Carl Jung* (2008), written by Ann Ulanov, who is a Jungian analyst and Christian Theologian.

The term **ego** carries a lot of baggage. Some think the ego is all bad. Jung equated the ego with conscious awareness (Jung, 1989). The ego stands between what is known and what is not known. I like to think of the ego as a mediator between the conscious and unconscious, favoring the conscious over the unconscious. The ego helps us manage the tension between our instincts/desires and fitting into the collective. It makes sense that the first part of life involves strengthening our ego by

fitting into what is around us. We form a personality, we seek physical security, and we achieve things. In its role as protector, the ego helps us avoid short-term suffering by avoiding and denying things that are unpleasant or painful. As an organizer, it helps make sense of everything we take in through our senses. As a facilitator, the ego helps make sense of what emerges from the unconscious, for example exploring and finding meaning in dream images.

Our ego helps us fit in and conform to the expectations of culture and the society in which we live. But if we conform too much, we lose our uniqueness, and we may become victims of our own repressed desires and instincts. A strong ego knows when to loosen its grip and be willing to relate to those forces in the unconscious that are seeking expression. Without a strong ego, we might get swallowed up by a group identity, or an overwhelming experience. Our ego is what helps us strategize how to integrate new awareness into conscious life.

During my midlife unraveling, I felt psychologically tortured as I shed certain beliefs about myself but didn't know with what to replace them. The threshold, the doorway between one room and another, became a living symbol for the anxiety I felt in the space between the old me and the unknown new me. My ego had to let me experience new things, but it also had to protect me from going too far. And then my ego helped me make sense of new images, emotions, and events that no longer made sense within the context of the past. A strong ego knows when to surrender to the unknown and when to analyze and find meaning in the experience.

**Self** is the term Jung gave to what he referred to as the ordering principle in our psyche (our total self—conscious and unconscious) (Jung, 1954/1972). He suggested that the Self prompts the process of increasing conscious awareness, transforming what was once unconscious into evolving consciousness. One could say that the Self is the same as Soul, and I use these terms interchangeably because I haven't been able to pin them down in my own experience. Self, Soul, inner

being, God, unconscious messages, they all refer to something that is me and transcends me and has a mysterious pull on me. I encourage you to choose whatever terms work best for you to come into closer relationship with the deepest part of you that is your bridge to the Source of everything.

Jung used the term **individuation** to name the process of coming into relationship with your unconscious (Jung, 1954/1972). I use Soul instead of Self, but sometimes I sneak in Self. I am not digging into the theory of individuation in this book, but the approaches and process I am encouraging you to follow, reflect Jung's theory of individuation. Jungian analyst Murray Stein is my favorite writer on the topic.

**Complex** was a term used by Jung to describe patterns of thinking and behaving, and they are neutral until they get in the way (Shalit, 2002). The root of most of our patterns can be found in childhood experiences, specifically in our relationships with parents or major caregivers. The first complex I found is a good example of how a helpful strategy can turn into a major obstacle. I was amused when I found what I called my *eternal optimism complex*. I had always taken pride in this character trait, which took many forms. I'll figure it out, I said to many of my first consulting clients. They believed me, and I did too.

That eternal optimism helped me get a new business off the ground, but eternal optimism can also blind you to something you need to acknowledge. After realizing how my husband's drinking was impacting our family, I found myself believing my husband when he said he could manage his drinking. One day, a stranger who had overhead my conversation with someone told me, "Stay strong." I felt so much anger. Every Monday had felt like a promise for a fresh start, but eternal optimism had kept me blind to the reality of addiction.

The complex I will discuss most is my **mother complex**—how my childhood relationship with my mother forced me to develop ways of thinking and behaving that

worked well for a long time—until they didn't work anymore. According to Jung, behind every complex is an archetype (Shalit, 2002). Complexes are personal, but **archetypes** are universal. Jung defined the archetypes as deeper universal drives—like the need for security and membership in a group, the hero's journey, the experience of falling in love, stages of grief—that are part of the collective unconscious of humanity (Jung, 1954/1968). A kind of psychic DNA that passes down a mysterious blueprint of core experiences that evolve over time and within different cultures. James Hillman, author of *Revisioning Psychology* (1992), is considered the father of archetypal psychology, and I introduce you to one of his frameworks in Chapter 22.

What is important to know is that archetypes are larger forces guiding human experiences and that they seek to evolve, first through individual experience and then through collective consciousness. Jungian analyst Edward Edinger, in his book, *The Creation of Consciousness: Jung's Myth for Modern Man* (1975/1984) suggested that Jung believed the purpose of human life was to create consciousness (p. 18). His interpretation inspires me and confirms that my self-reflection contributes to the evolution of humanity. In her book (1973/1997), Jungian analyst Irene de Castillejo suggested that the personal Self (Soul) is a bridge to the Divine (p. 136). Increasing collective consciousness only occurs if there are enough self-reflecting individuals who are reconciling their own inner division.

The **image** is the language of the **psyche**, according to Jung (Chodorow, 1997). **Psyche** is the term he used to define our total self—the personal unconscious and conscious. When I googled the term image, I was intrigued with the indirectness of descriptors such as idea, representation, impression, depiction, perception, and reflection. It makes sense that the language of the unconscious, which cannot be fully understood by the intellect, can also not be fully defined by the intellect. I think of images as impressions and experiences that sidestep

the ego and prevent it from automatically applying meaning that only affirms current conscious beliefs.

My midlife journey included reconciling my sexuality and spirituality. During times of meditation, spontaneous spiritual images of a golden chalice, beautiful decorative bowls, and light emanating from and into my head, were accompanied by feelings of intense arousal. I explored the pictures in my mind *and* the feelings of arousal. Rather than feel shame about my experience, drawing it helped me explore how the images were leading me to a deeper connection with Source. In her book, *Picturing God* (2002), Ann Ulanov, encourages people to put all their images of God—the transcendent presence within us—on the table, work with them like a puzzle until they evolve into new images that bring us closer to that transcendent part of us that many call God (p. 181).

One more term—**projection**. We relate through projection. Relationship with others is how we come to know ourselves as separate individuals (von Franz, 1986). Projection is sneaky. For example, my mother looked to my behavior to judge whether she was doing a better job parenting than her mother did, and she projected onto me the responsibility of proving that was true. Any misbehavior on my part was internalized by her as failure of her goal to be a better parent than her abusive mother.

Projection is thick in new romances, which makes them great opportunities for significant growth. In my first post-divorce relationship, the younger man's sensual and meandering nature opposed my self-conscious and more goal-oriented approach to life. It was exactly what I needed at that time—to develop my own sensual and meandering self.

The aim of this chapter was to take the mystery out of concepts that may be unfamiliar and clarify the use of other more common terms. At the end of my book, you will find a list of additional references that might be of interest and influence your journey.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# My Five-Step Process

This chapter introduces you to my five-step process to working with the unconscious, a framework that emerged naturally as I became more experienced working with my images. Midlife unraveling and learning about depth psychology mysteriously happened in parallel fashion. My sneaky Soul. I'm pretty sure that was the plan, experiential learning at its best. The boundary between theory and personal experience was blurred many times. As I approached the end of the master's program, I lacked clarity about whether I should attempt to get into the PhD program. I didn't know what I was going to do with the master's degree, what the heck would I do with a PhD, what would I research? I decided to think about my education as expensive therapy.

Eventually, my Soul orchestrated more events to guide me on this mysterious path. There were tiny breadcrumbs that revealed just enough to make me take another small step. Go big or go home, I told myself as I prepared for the master's exam, which would also determine whether I would be accepted into the PhD program. I was accepted! More odd events happened, which led me to the research topic that I never imagined pursuing—women's experience of reconciling sexuality and spirituality. Like I said, my sneaky Soul. The five

steps will sometimes happen in order, but not always, and at other times all at once.

## Step 1—Gathering Intelligence

**Gathering intelligence** is how I refer to noticing how your unconscious is trying to communicate with you, like a detective looking for clues that lead to solving a mystery. Writing them down can be accompanied by drawing what cannot be expressed in words. At the end of my first post-divorce relationship, I was so angry, and I was also experiencing menopausal hot flashes during the night. Sometimes, I didn't know what I felt, so I sat down in front of my image journal, and it all poured out.

Gathering intelligence includes observing things you never noticed before and might have dismissed as insignificant. Like the detective's small spiral notebook, you will be gathering your clues in your written and image journals.

## Step 2—Finding Themes and Patterns

**Finding themes and patterns** is about making connections between things that on the surface don't appear to be related. Like when I noticed my naïve belief that every Monday could magically erase my husband's alcohol addiction. I didn't know it was an addiction at that point, and every Monday had seemed like a fresh start. Two beers on the golf course on Tuesday seemed innocent, but there would be more beers Wednesday at happy hour. By Thursday, my husband had switched to mixed drinks, and as he came through the back door, he was a wolf sniffing for prey, desperate to catch our son doing something wrong. By Friday, when he showed up for date night, he had already had his first martini. It took months of journaling and fifty pages for me to find the pattern.

Your pattern might include a certain image that keeps coming up in your dreams or noticing that you end up in the

same kind of argument with different people. Maybe you realize that you have gotten strep throat three times in the past year. Multiple physical injuries or aches and pains are a dead giveaway that your unconscious is trying to get your attention. First, it was your neck, now your back, and then you slammed your knee into the car door. *Fuck!* you yell as you look up to the sky. Maybe you wake up with anxiety every Monday or keep seeing certain numbers, long lines of cars that are the same color, or dead birds. Just noticing the repetition of experiences and how they correlate to other experiences. There's no analysis yet, merely noticing, making connections, and documenting in your journals.

### **Step 3—Where is This Happening in Your Life?**

In this step, you try to find the metaphor. For example, having lots of dreams that include babies is a pattern, but how is that image a metaphor for something happening in your life? Babies often symbolize something new trying to emerge from within. Are you struggling to develop a new sense of security about finances after divorce, or confidence as you pursue the passion that your parents judged as an inadequate way to garner respect in the world? Maybe you're gathering the courage to ask for a raise or give feedback to your boss about her poor leadership skills. Maybe you've been in your head for decades, and now you need to be more comfortable with your body and emotions.

During the beginning of the reconstruction phase of my midlife, dreams of babies were common. In one dream, a newborn made a sound as it was waking up in the morning. I didn't think it was my baby, I thought I was watching it for someone. I went into the bedroom and peeked at it. It had a wrinkly face, and then it opened its eyes and looked up at me. I knew it was too young to smile, but she had a huge smile on her face. The baby in the dream looked like it knew something. Something new was growing inside me, not in a literal sense,

rather a new desire, a new way of looking at the world. The end of the dream was indicative of where I stood in relation to this new thing emerging from me. In the dream, there were other people downstairs, and I was annoyed because they wanted to see the baby. I wasn't ready, I needed to shower and get ready for the day. Believing the baby was not mine was a reflection that I was not yet ready to claim a new part of myself.

This step is about thinking symbolically about your images. You might not know what the new thing is that seeks expression, but simply being aware that there is a new part of you developing can put you on alert for finding more meaning in these images down the road.

#### **Step 4—Finding New Insights and Meaning**

**Finding new insights and meaning** is the analysis part. You're not looking for answers as much as meaning and new insights, what many refer to as ah-ha moments. Discovering why you always act in a certain way or make too many bad decisions, or just making sense out of the way you approach life right now. Are you trying to find your voice, or do you want freedom from other people's expectations? I discovered that the hidden agenda for marrying my husband had been to rescue me from my out-of-control life.

Some of my dreams about babies commented on whether I was providing proper nourishment to the baby. In one such dream, I was in a hospital, and I noticed a malnourished baby, which had been abandoned. I was asked to tend to the baby, and breastfeed the weak little body, which I thought was ridiculous because it wasn't mine. The sores on the baby's bottom indicated that its diaper hadn't been changed in a while, so I tended to her as if she was mine, including breastfeeding her.

These babies symbolized my growing capacity to surrender, receive, and be vulnerable, traits required for a more intimate relationship with a lover or Source, and

ultimately those babies symbolized my growing creative urge which had been seeking expression.

In this step, the mystery will begin to make a little sense. The symbolic is evolving into knowledge about what needs to change in your life.

### **Step 5—Integrating a New Attitude or Behavior**

**Integrating a new attitude or behavior** into daily life is the part where you take responsibility for meeting your own psychological and spiritual needs. For example, when I feel anxiety, I need to find the new boundary I'm supposed to set. When a bunch of things go wrong, and I try to brush it off, look out as I may be holding down feelings that need to be expressed. My new behavior is to notice when I'm pushing down my anger and then journal or draw—or walk around my apartment yelling that I feel angry. It means I need to advocate for myself in some way, which often triggers my authority complex.

Journaling and drawing help me process the old child-like reaction to make room for the adult version of me that needs to rise to the occasion, and the expression of anger often results in a burst of creativity. The occasional feelings of financial insecurity are telling me I need to learn to feel secure in an uncertain situation now that I'm on my own. I need to start the day telling myself I'll figure it out, that it will all work out, which allows me to be alert for opportunities. In a former job, anxiety often meant I needed to stop allowing my coworker to get away with passive-aggressive comments. The new behavior was to learn to use a tool that helped me conduct a difficult conversation.

There are so many possible actions that you might decide to take. Start small and notice how your body responds when you try something new. Challenging passive-aggressive behavior for example takes courage. It feels uncomfortable in the moment, almost as if you're doing something morally

wrong. Whatever new behavior you try, follow it up with a walk or other physical activity to allow your body to process the experience and your brain to form a new neural connection. You will notice a sense of relief, linger in it. It will feel less uncomfortable next time, and one day, you will have developed a capacity to do that *new thing* with confidence.

You may find yourself quickly moving through all five steps on a topic before you get to the end of the book. Or you may simply be gathering intelligence and exploring for a while before you have your first ah-ha moment. There's no right way, so just stay curious.

This chapter introduced you to my personal framework for getting from image to insight to action. I suspect your overarching goal is to get to a new place even if you're not sure what it is. My midlife experience is turning out to be more about meandering and less about getting to a known destination, but the meandering is purposeful, as my Soul continues to guide me to experiences my ego could never have imagined or believed possible.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# The Forces that Shape You

This chapter provides a larger context for your journey. You may think you have been charting your own course, but you have had less control over your life than you think. Only now can I appreciate the complexity of coming of age in the 1980s. It was a time of great progress for women in many ways, but the excitement of new possibilities was matched by angry resistance expressed in political movements that found righteous validation in oppressive interpretations of religious doctrine. The impact on women of being demonized as family wreckers and sexual deviants simply because they desired control over their lives deserves more attention.

Somehow, in between work and college I found time to immerse myself in everything feminist—legal perspectives, theology, literature, and public policy. I couldn't relate to the stories of the post-WWII generation of white suburban middleclass women presented in Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), but I found sisterhood with women who felt stifled by a system that desperately worked to secure their permission to be oppressed. Reading Riane Eisler's book, *The Chalice and the Blade* (1988) blew my mind. I had mistakenly trusted that the history I had learned was

objectively presented, not simply words meant to reinforce a narrative that privileged some over others.

### **Sharing My Insights**

Not until midlife unraveling, did I realize my life had been driven by an instinct for freedom, and that it had shown itself in different ways as I zipped through life. The childhood part of my life had been consumed by freedom *from* the burden of proving my mother was a good mother. Skipping into adulthood with optimism and certainty that only I would determine the course of my life reflected my new drive towards self-determination—freedom to *do* things. I felt exhilarated as I freely pursued life goals like education and career, not worrying about what anyone thought of me. I worked in a male-dominated field, I found my voice as a feminist activist, and I felt free to have sex.

Even within the convention of marriage, I felt free to adapt it to fit my values, resisting the oppressive symbolism of the contract that was designed to achieve aims that most never contemplated. My husband and I walked ourselves down the aisle as partners.

It turns out I wasn't as free as I thought I had been. These days my instinct for freedom feels more like a journey to circle back to what *being* felt like before I was corrupted by convention and other people's ideas about what I ought to be and do. Circling back implies returning to a place you left, so leaving is part of the deal. Could it be that without the journey I have already taken, the inspiration to return home might not have arisen?

### **Try This**

This is your first opportunity to gather intelligence about your inner world. Journal your reflections about cultural norms that have shaped the beliefs you hold about yourself and

others. What assumptions about humanity are these beliefs rooted in? Do you believe people are poor because they deserve to be poor? Do you believe your values are better than those of younger generations? How do you define work ethic, and where did that come from? Have you ever questioned the assumptions your parents hold about other people, and what happened when you did? Do you find yourself judging the way other people parent or live their lives, and what does that reveal about you? What does individual freedom mean to you, and how do you square that with personal and collective responsibility?

## **The Danger of Groups**

What about belief systems that oppress their own believers? What happens when you realize you're wrong about the assumptions you've made about yourself or other people? What do you do about it? The process by which beliefs develop seems logical, and those beliefs help people make sense of the world in which they live, but what we cannot tolerate about ourselves is projected onto others. One experience has an effect, and then another experience is interpreted through that lens, and then another and another, until we are unable to see through a different lens.

Perhaps you simply never questioned the beliefs handed to you as a child. Belief systems make sense to the believer, even if it is irrational to others, or even destructive. As beliefs are passed down, it is easier to accept them instead of reflecting about whether they make sense anymore.

Jung suggested our psychic DNA includes an instinctual religious attitude, a need to connect with a higher authority, to make judgments that oppose extreme mass-minded ideas (Palmer, 1997). He suggested that it was not necessarily religion that people were turning away from but a rejection of empty words in favor of seeking of a more effective means to connect with one's inner authority. If you do not reflect about

whether what you believe makes sense, then when there are events that feel overwhelming, you may be tempted to project blame only onto others. This brings temporary relief, but it further erodes your capacity to challenge mass-minded and extreme ideas. Soon, you could find yourself latching onto a movement or ideology that contradicts your own values.

### **Sharing My Insights**

When I was in college, I stated to others that I didn't need the reward of Heaven or the threat of Hell to determine that the survival and evolution of humanity depended upon notions of equality, compassion, and collaboration. Where did I get that idea from? At that point in my life, I had a beginner feminist lens and my intuition. My family had not been religious, but I had attended three years at a Catholic elementary school where I felt unconditional love, but the oppressive interpretation of Biblical beliefs that was presented in my college theology courses made no sense to me. The professors who refused to explore my questions because they felt I was challenging their Christian beliefs (I wasn't) demonstrated a childlike level of spirituality in my view. Why did I care?

What prompted me to challenge the college professor? Something in me had to ask questions. When have you disrupted the status quo, and where did you get the courage and conviction to resist those who exercised power over your mind?

### **Patriarchy—Systems of Domination**

Understanding the larger forces that have shaped you and how you see your place in the larger community is helpful in making sense of opposing forces in your unconscious. Reflecting about this will help you hear the messages your Soul is sending.

The highest level of convention comes in the form of the model of social organization under which we live—patriarchy—a system of domination, hierarchy, and ranking. Other systems exist within this model—unfettered capitalism for example. Patriarchy survives by inflicting trauma through violence that comes in many forms including extreme economic inequality, sexual violence and attempts to control women's bodies, environmental catastrophes, and inequities in health and infant mortality.

In her book, *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body—New Paths to Power and Love* (2011), cultural historian and systems scientist Riane Eisler presents theories based on new evidence showing that patriarchy, which she refers to as a “dominator model” of social organization, did not always exist, nor did it likely develop as a natural part of evolution. It is now thought that the system of hierarchy and ranking originated in areas of the globe that were harsh and caused great physical and psychological trauma to those who eventually migrated to other areas of the globe. These hierarchical societies, which were forced to survive in scarce environments, aggressively expanded and sustained themselves through the institutionalization of trauma.

As increased consciousness grows, patriarchal systems react to the threat in increasingly extreme and irrational ways, reflecting the dominator model's desperation to survive. The mostly quiet rebellion seems to have taken hold however, and the tension between pure capitalism for example (profit is the only lens) and other models (that also consider values such as human dignity, sustainability, and racial equity) reflect an evolutionary push towards increased human consciousness.

## **Fear of Vulnerability**

In her book, *Why Does Patriarchy Persist?* (2018), American feminist, ethicist, and psychologist Carol Gilligan views patriarchy today more as a system of hierarchy than an

attempt by men to control women, and that there now is in place a psychological need to maintain patriarchy. The authors suggest that patriarchy persists as a defense mechanism against the risks associated with vulnerability and intimate connection. The system of patriarchy requires the denial of the need for relationship to maintain its focus on hierarchy, and it requires the cooperation of those who are ranked lower.

Capitalism without constraints is a one-sided patriarchal system where the denial of relationship allows for the prioritizing of profit over human life. Loss of life due to unsafe products and disasters caused by deregulation are accepted as collateral damage in a free market system, and hyper consumerism is a brilliant system of gaining permission by the oppressed for their own oppression.

Dr. Brené Brown, a research professor and author of five #1 New York Times bestselling books, is recognized for her landmark research on shame and vulnerability. All three scholars I reference here point to new evidence that suggests human beings are hardwired for relatedness, and that the emergence of romantic love and pleasure are evolutionary forces. Brown's two decades of research highlight that the danger of a one-sided masculine-focused society (masculine not defined as male) is a severely diminished capacity for vulnerability (and empathy), which is required for deep connection, a hardwired need in human beings.

### **Reflection Questions**

How are you participating in this push and pull? How have your assumptions and values changed over time, or haven't they?

### **Lost Men and the Wounded Masculine**

Both women and men, and those who do not identify with gender, have been harmed by patriarchy. Men are victims

of patriarchy because external validation depends on establishing their dominance over someone or something, including women, queer men and men of color, and men defined as weak. To be considered successful in this wounded masculine culture, women also must establish dominance over someone, usually other women, and at the bottom are placed women of color, people of all colors who live in poverty, and immigrants.

Partnership, equality, friendships, and diversity in general are threats to patriarchy, which works hard to ensure we all have an enemy to distract us from the actual enemy of patriarchy. Overcoming this oppressive system is difficult because it requires a collective and voluntary willingness to give up a false sense of identity that continues to be propped up for no logical reason (our own sense of entitlement).

Women who have developed their masculine at the expense of their feminine feed into this model when they rank themselves over other women or others defined as inferior. Many women today are as misogynistic as some men. For other women, self-determination and loving their man feels mutually exclusive. I have an appreciation for the suffering of men and respect for the growing number of people who embody a healthier balance of the feminine and masculine.

The movement towards detaching from gender completely reflects an unleashed desire from the collective unconscious to dismantle systems of hierarchy, and the desperation to cling to these systems of dominance fuels violent rhetoric and acts targeted towards people who symbolize and embody the beginning of the end of patriarchy.

Many men of the so-called Millennial generation are challenging the assumption that the masculine is naturally hierarchical and aggressive, and those who seek to transcend gender are living the battle in their inner world. They can be seen as a mirror being held up to the rest of the world to prompt new levels of tolerance seeking expression from the collective

unconscious. Visit [www.deborahlukovich.com](http://www.deborahlukovich.com) to read my blog post titled, *It Ain't Easy Being a Man Either.*

## Can Christianity Transcend Patriarchy?

The development of Christian doctrine coincided with the aggressive expansion of the dominator model of social organization, offering righteous validation for its oppressive systems and violence towards an expanding number of groups seen to be inferior. From the start, there was resistance to the patriarchal domination of evolving Christian doctrine.

In her book *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (2012), Professor of Feminist Theology Rosemary Radford Ruether traces the history of feminist attempts to resist the one-sided interpretation that subordinated the feminine, women, the body, and nature. If Christianity does not evolve into a more inclusive framework, its membership will continue to decline.

## Reflection Questions

Do you have challenges reconciling tolerance, empathy, compassion, and inclusion with your religious faith? Have you found a way to contribute to the evolution of your religious faith?

This is leading somewhere, I promise. Personal experiences are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to exploring the source of our demons and inner opposition. There is a larger framework in which our personal, family, and ancestral wounds exist. As you explore your personal unconscious, you will be able to see your personal psychology within the context of the other groups of which you are a member. These groups include your immediate and expanded family, your ancestry, your ancestors' country of origin, and that's only the beginning.

Because patriarchy relies on hierarchy and ranking, the system thrives on finding new creative ways to label, categorize, and separate people, categories like rural, urban, and suburban, white collar and blue collar, college-educated and non-college educated. Patriarchy thrives on luring people to project onto others what is difficult to understand and labeling it bad or inferior.

### **More Reflection Questions**

What other categories do you find yourself referring to?  
How do you use categories to prop yourself up?

### **Pleasure as Sacred**

One way patriarchy institutionalized division was by denigrating the once-revered feminine and then projecting it onto nature, women, women's bodies, and women's sexuality—all labeled as inferior. At the same time, patriarchy, in partnership with those who were shaping Christian doctrine, elevated the masculine and assigned it onto men as a gender. The union between feminine and masculine, along with the goddess, were violently displaced in favor of the masculine in the form of the monotheistic god.

Before the emergence of patriarchy, there were more partnership-oriented societies where the feminine and masculine were equally revered, and where women were not subordinate to men. There was a time when women's bodies and sexuality were seen as critical to uniting with the Divine. In my own journey to come into a deeper relationship with my Self, reuniting with my body and sexuality was an important part of achieving balance between my inner feminine and masculine, and then connecting with a transcendent force.

Because the masculine and feminine have been defined for so long within a hierarchical system, it is unclear what is naturally feminine or masculine. The evolution of relationship

between the masculine and feminine playing out within individuals, is reflected in movements that value feminine qualities and a balance of both. These movements include alternative forms of spirituality, a growing appreciation for right brained and introverted people, sustainability practices, and a focus on social, emotional, and ethical intelligence.

A more balanced notion of human values versus feminine or masculine values is emerging. Just as women can be seen to have been over domesticated by culture, men have been desensitized, trained, and rewarded for being dominators, or shamed for having a more balanced approach to life. In today's culture, where I suspect most men support women's right to self-determination, if women's progress is mutually exclusive of men's self-worth, then men are put in a difficult situation psychologically. And how do women (or marginalized people) press forward in their quest for self-determination in a way that is not mutually exclusive of respect for the *others* who are perceived to be the source of oppression? Visit [www.deborahlukovich.com](http://www.deborahlukovich.com) to read my blog post titled, Sex, God & Transcending Patriarchy.

### Try This

Sometimes you're called to contribute to the evolution of humanity, and it is never easy because it always requires challenging convention. Reflect and journal about the times you were in a situation and felt called to challenge the status quo or when you felt unable to transcend the status quo. Are you the peacemaker, the disrupter? Are you silent at times when you should speak up, and why do you think that is? When did you come across something that blew up your assumptions about life, or about others? The beliefs we are most attached to are probably the ones that need the most examination. Keep working to find patterns, meaning, and new ways of thinking you want to try out.

This chapter encouraged you to appreciate the larger forces that have influenced your psychological development. This can be an empowering lens through which to view future choices. If you are interested in reading my research, you can download a PDF at [www.deborahlukovich.com](http://www.deborahlukovich.com).



## CHAPTER SIX

## How the Unconscious Speaks—Symbols

In **Chapters 6-15**, I will share my take on the most common images that the unconscious uses to try to get your attention. My prompts, reflection questions, and exercises will get you started in your exploration to uncover your Soul's hidden purpose. If you're new to journaling, these reflections will provide you with material to work with. This first part is all about gathering intelligence, finding patterns, and connecting dots.

The methods outlined in **Chapters 16-24** will help you find meaning in your images, pointing to new strategies that could be integrated into your life. You are a bottomless pit of interesting insights about yourself and the world around you, and the world needs you to uncover and pursue your Soul's purpose.

Remember, an image can be visual but not always, rather it is an experience that makes an impression. When you find one that triggers your unconscious start journaling. Documenting your image experiences comes first, and these chapters will help you generate lots of material to explore as you make your way to the analysis methods outlined later.

Just as you need to learn Spanish to communicate with Spanish speakers, learning the language of the unconscious is required to decode your Soul's messages. At first, it won't make

sense, and you'll feel as clumsy and self-conscious as you would trying to learn beach volleyball at forty-eight. Consider how you usually make sense of things, information taken in through the senses and filtered through the brain in a way that relates it to things you already know. Making meaning is prejudiced towards fitting into or building on top of existing belief systems, which are based on assumptions about people and how the world works. This is not a bad thing necessarily, especially when it comes to certain kinds of knowledge. We cannot go from mastering addition right to algebra for instance.

The language of the unconscious is mysterious, sneaky, paradoxical, ambiguous, and understanding it requires patience. It feels irrational to the newbie that has not cultivated the capacity to have a dialogue with the inner personalities which sometimes play well together and other times clash. Even if your inner world feels balanced, you exist within the swirling forces of the collective—conscious and unconscious.

## Symbols

Symbols are one type of image. They are different from signs, which represent a known or agreed-upon meaning. A symbol is powerful because it represents something that cannot yet be articulated in words (Jung, Franz, 1968). At one time in history, the Christian cross communicated something so powerful it could not be described in words, and only after much time did it come to reflect an awareness about the psychological experience of redemption. It is possible that as it became more of a sign, the loss of mystery caused the cross to lose its effectiveness as a religious symbol.

That fiery red and orange logo for the graduate school acted as a symbol for something of which I was not yet aware. I felt its power as it called me to do something that I could not rationalize even to myself. I experienced a *knowing* that superseded my intellect. The nature of the call felt transcendent, and the *knowing* caused great distress because I

lacked a framework for understanding what was happening to me. The meaning of the calling revealed itself to me over time, as if my Soul knew that too much too soon would send me running the other way.

### **Reflection Questions**

Are there religious or other symbols that affect you powerfully? What emotions are stirred when you connect with these symbols? A sense of eternity, peace, arousal, anger? Do you find yourself pulled towards certain sights, sounds, or scenery? Water is a symbol for the unconscious, so if you find yourself gravitating towards the beach more than usual, there may be something new wanting to break into consciousness. Journal your reflections and look for clues about ways your Soul may be trying to get your attention through symbols.

### **Try This**

Can you identify a time when you felt powerfully influenced by an image? A logo, an image on a billboard, watching a sunset, the experience of yoga or meditation. The image, the experience, felt mysterious, and you didn't know what it meant, only that it was communicating something important. When this happened, did you dismiss the experience, or did you allow it to lead you somewhere? Did the image's pull lead to an action, decision, or other shift that set you on a different path? Journal as much as you can remember about the image, when it occurred, and the circumstances of your life at the time. Try drawing the image or the parts of your experience that you cannot articulate in words.

This chapter was about symbols, which represent something that cannot yet be articulated in words. The reflection questions and exercise were prompts for you to explore times in your life when you might have missed the opportunity to explore a symbol that was trying to get your

attention. Finding meaning in this prior experience will help you be more alert in the future.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# Synchronicity

Synchronistic events are meaningful coincidences where one's inner world collides with external reality, probability cannot explain the coincidence, and emotion is involved (Jung, 1968/2010). That moment is a doorway to a new insight. The graduate school logo acted as a symbol that communicated something unknown and significant to me, but it was a synchronistic event that made it possible for the symbol to reach me. What had happened earlier that day caused my ego to surrender enough to open the doorway for my inner world to grab an image that would get my attention.

What made this a synchronistic event is the collision of the semi-conscious awareness of a new insight about my life and an image that connected with something deep inside that produced an emotion so strong I couldn't ignore it. You notice what you notice for a reason, but most times you probably do not reflect about the potential message your unconscious may be sending, especially when your ego has stubbornly worked to prevent it from reaching you.

### Reflection Questions

Have you experienced a synchronicity? What did you do, and how did you feel? Maybe the event gave you the permission

you needed to quit your corporate job and go back to school, or the courage to end a relationship. Journal about your findings.

### Try This

Think about times when you wondered about a coincidence, especially one where you felt an emotional charge. Maybe someone called you the same moment you were thinking about them, or you noticed that every car around you happened to be white. The billboard you drove past reminded you to do something important, or a butterfly showed up in your dream and over the next week two more flew past you. Have you ever prayed for an answer to a question, and the solution came in the form of a license plate on the car in front of you? Maybe you told your friends you wanted a new kind of relationship, more than sex, to meet someone intellectual, and two days later you met a woman who had recently secured her PhD. Maybe you were sick in bed, exhaustion causing you to be open enough to seeing something you never saw before, and the insight changed the way you thought about an important relationship.

What emotions accompanied the synchronistic event, and did you stop and reflect about the potential meaning? If you found meaning, what did you do as a result? Journal about one or more of these events, adding as much detail as possible—when you think it occurred and what was happening in your life at the time. Try drawing the image, especially if it is difficult to articulate in words.

This chapter got you thinking about synchronicities as another way your unconscious tries to get your attention. These events happen during moments when your ego is relaxed enough to allow something new to come to the surface. Synchronistic events momentarily transport you to another realm of possibilities to which you are usually closed.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# Dreams

Dreams are a direct route to your unconscious because your ego is not standing guard while you sleep. Working with dreams is one of my favorite ways to receive guidance from my unconscious. In dream tending sessions with clients, the most challenging part is the tendency to look at them literally. This chapter offer guidelines to help you resist this, and you can download a one-sheet at [www.deborahlukovich.com](http://www.deborahlukovich.com). In my dream of last night, I was caught off guard when I found out I was going to a twenty-five-year elementary school reunion. The boy I adored in middle school was there, and I told him his hair was soft. That was it. I'll walk you through how to resist the temptation of interpreting this dream literally.

**There is no right interpretation.** To find meaning in dreams, set aside the goal of finding the *right* interpretation, and instead look for *meaning* that might lead to reconciling inner or outer conflict. Sometimes dreams offer assurance that you will survive what is in front of you. Other times dreams encourage you to have a sense of humor about life or to give yourself permission to express the anger you don't want to feel.

As I journaled about the dream above, I followed where my memory took me—back to middle school. As a fifth grader, I was new to the community and this school, and I was terribly shy and insecure. By seventh grade, I was in love with a boy, but

I never let him know. Those three years at middle school felt like a womb of love, which became the foundation for how I approached high school, where I attempted to overcome my shyness and insecurity. This recent dream might be affirming that I have a new foundation that has prepared me for what is happening in my life right now, overcoming my insecurities about publishing my first book about depth psychology.

**What are you avoiding?** Your dreams may be trying to get you to pay attention to something you've been ignoring or to get you to take actions to compensate for being too one-sided in some area of your life (Jung, 1948/1972). Being violent in a dream could be encouraging you to express repressed negative emotions, and dreams about crumbling teeth could be telling you it's time to let go of fixing and controlling. The goal is *not* to find a correct interpretation, but to gain insights that might be useful in your life right now.

Back to my dream, where I was attending a twenty-five-year grade school reunion. This was interesting, because in real life, I had attended the actual reunion in 2004 (seventeen years earlier). But in my dream, it wasn't the same reunion. I let my mind wander back to that time of my life. I was thirty-nine at the time of the actual reunion, my children were six and four, and I was building a new business after having lost a job that had caused me emotional suffering. This was also about the time when my unconscious began trying to get my attention—the ray of sunshine that reached me through those rustling leaves I talked about earlier.

Then I journaled about the loneliness I had felt in my marriage. I asked myself what this seventh-grade crush wanted from me now as I pursue my new life as a writer. I went on to journal that I never told the boy that I liked him, even at the actual twenty-five year-reunion. I was still too shy and embarrassed about it. I didn't know the answer to my question, but I felt encouraged to power through my current insecurities related to publishing this book.

**People in dreams represent parts of you.** The people in your dreams are typically representations of different parts of you. Some you are familiar with, and others are shadowy versions of you that have not been acknowledged or validated. The sister you describe as selfish may show up in your dream to shine a light on your own selfishness or highlight the need for you to be more selfish. I will never forget the day in class when I worked a dream with Jungian analyst, Dr. Lionel Corbett. I excitedly described it, “My sister was standing on the stove in my grandmother’s house. She was stirring a big pot of something.” The professor asked me what came to mind when I thought about my sister. “She needs a lot of validation . . . It’s annoying.” As I completed my thought, I blushed when I realized I was talking about that part of me, the part that needed validation. Oh, how I hated that part of me.

That dream where you’re stabbing a coworker may be about a part of your own personality that you need to symbolically kill off or stand up to. Think of your images as symbols and metaphors and not literally, including people, and especially the ones that are embarrassing. Dreams that take place in a bed or a bedroom or include sexual activity may represent some part of you that wants to be recognized and valued. Becoming intimate with a part of you that has in the past received harsh judgment may feel dirty or inappropriate.

Back to the dream about my seventh-grade crush. I went on to journal about what part of me he might represent. I remembered him to be kind and cute, and at the actual twenty-five-year reunion, I found out he had not gotten married and that he owned a printing company. Maybe this seventh-grade boy in my dream was encouraging me to continue embracing my new life as a writer and an unattached woman living on her own for the first time in her life.

**Initial interpretations are sometimes wrong.** Robert Johnson, author of *Inner Work: Using Dreams and Active Imagination for Personal Growth* (1989), suggests that if you figure out the meaning of a dream too quickly, you’re probably

wrong. Dreams are meant to tell you something new, so if it feels too obvious, you might want to set it aside for now. In **Chapters 16-24**, I will outline different methods for working with dreams and other images. In the meantime, these guidelines will help you switch your lens away from the literal to the symbolic.

This dream is fresh enough that I'm not grasping its full meaning, but it prompts me to embrace my life right now with the same youthful love I felt for the seventh-grade boy. In the end, it's all about whether something clicks. If not, set it aside. Your unconscious will bring it up again. If it's clicking, the only goal is to find something meaningful that contributes to your growth.

### Reflection Questions

Do you have a recurring dream? Have you dreamed about cheating on your partner or that your partner cheated on you? Have you had dreams about flying, and is it easy to fly or does it feel like swimming underwater? Have you had dreams about snakes, bears, wolves, a peacock, or a black panther? Which co-workers show up in your dreams? How about water or fire, or being in a bathroom, or sitting on a toilet in the front yard? I recommend journaling about whatever dream images come to mind right away, and then setting it aside for now.

### Try This

Journal as much detail as possible about a recurring dream, noting how many times you think you've had this dream and when it started. One evening, as you are settling into sleep, ask your unconscious to bring the dream back. If it doesn't come that night, just try again until it does. The next day, write the dream down as best you can and note how it might have changed. Those changes contain clues about the meaning of the dream. You may also draw the dream, your impression of the

dream, or the feelings associated with the dream, just follow your imagination.

This chapter introduced you to working with dream images. The guidelines will help you remember that the language of dreams is symbolic, and what you have journaled so far will prepare you for finding meaning when we get to the methods chapter.



## CHAPTER NINE

# Anxiety and Obsessions

This chapter helps you explore how symptoms like anxiety and obsessive behaviors can be another way your unconscious is trying to get your attention. I came to understand that when anxiety visits me, there is a new boundary to set with someone or some experience. During my midlife unraveling, the new job that initially felt like the answer to a prayer became unbearable. I couldn't make myself like it anymore, and every ounce of discipline was matched by a stronger sense that my Soul depended upon my leaving this job. The more I resisted, the more dramatic my unconscious became.

The last night of a work conference, I woke up sweating and feeling anxious after a dream of barely escaping a swirling flock of blackbirds. In the dream, getting into my car and rolling up the windows saved me. When I awoke, the anxiety was so intense I skipped out on the last session and left for the airport without telling anyone. Once on the plane, the feeling of panic overwhelmed me, and I embarrassingly explained to the flight attendant that I needed a new seat. I had never had a panic attack, but now that possibility was very real. I had to escape the job situation, but I didn't know how.

It wasn't until I had had an honest conversation with the organization about a transition plan that my anxiety was relieved. I had no idea what job would replace the one I now

had, and I didn't know if they would allow me to reduce my work schedule, but I had to try. Just like that the anxiety stopped. I had taken an action that felt terrifying but right, and it worked out.

Now, instead of resisting my anxiety, I ask what it wants from me. Sometimes I have an imaginary dialogue with it and write it down. When I ask questions, my anxiety usually responds. You can approach other symptoms in this way, like depression and obsessive behaviors.

### **Reflection Questions**

Do you think you might be drinking more than you should? Does someone in your family suffer from alcohol addiction, and what is their booze of choice? It is a symbol with meaning, for example what does Captain Morgan rum want from you or your loved one, or Jose Cuervo? What meaning do these characters have for you or the loved one?

Do you suffer from chronic anxiety? When is it worse or better, and how does it correlate with times of day, week, month, year? Does the presence of certain people or events make it worse or better? Do you have a ritual or any obsessive behaviors you're curious about, like a preference for even numbers, avoiding cracks on the sidewalk, or washing your hands? Journal about this and see if you can find a pattern and connect any dots.

### **Sharing My Insights**

During the most difficult part of my unraveling marriage, I wondered if I was depressed. I didn't think so because I did not feel despair or hopelessness, rather I felt impatience. My body was so tired I would crawl back into bed after sending my children off to school. I felt fear at not being able to come back to my energetic self, but I decided to take a

chance and listen to my body over my critical and judgmental mind.

One day, when I melted into my bed and looked up at the slowly turning ceiling fan, I wondered if I had experienced psychological surrender. It didn't feel like giving up, rather it felt more like getting out of the way so I could allow a different form of intelligence to get to work. I slept, and I rested. I gave myself permission to take three-hour naps almost every day for a month without shame. I accepted that my mind could no longer fix the situation. I had to learn how to let go of control, to surrender to another part of me that would take the lead.

Months later, as I began to let go of certain ways of thinking, I felt anxiety about what would replace those things I had released. I laughed at the seriousness of my commitment to a strange new daily ritual that spontaneously emerged. I found myself in a trance every morning as I carefully and diligently wiped down the bathroom sink after finishing my hair and makeup.

Although I did not realize its purpose at the time, this obsession with the bathroom sink had grounded me, it was one thing over which I had control. A bathroom can also be symbolic of purification, and at an unconscious level, wiping down the sink every morning helped me feel like I was cleaning up the mess in which I found myself. Over time, as I replaced the old ways of thinking and behaving with new ones, the ritual dissipated.

### **More Reflection Questions**

Obsessive behaviors can be another way your unconscious is helping you manage the discomfort of change, bringing a sense of relief by helping you feel more grounded. What odd behaviors or worrisome symptoms do you have? Do you feel anxiety on a regular basis? Have you felt depressed or wondered whether you were depressed? What is or was happening in your life at the time? Which activities during what

times bring relief from your anxiety or depression? Do you make your bed every morning, or do you find yourself letting clothes pile up on the floor until there's no visible path? Can you let your dishes dry overnight, or must you leave your kitchen spotless before you retire for the night? How does your perfectionism show up, or your procrastination? Are you always late? I read somewhere that people who are always late are unconsciously seeking to compensate for not feeling a sense of control over their lives. What behaviors would you describe as obsessions? Journal your reflections about what the obsession or symptom might be trying to communicate to you.

### Try This

Journal about behaviors and patterns of thinking that you wonder about. No judgment, just be a curious observer of your own behavior. Do you have a secret obsession, maybe with a Netflix series or a certain genre of book, film, or music? Do you have important rituals in your life that others might find odd? Do you always need an escape route, for example, always sitting on the aisle in the movie theatre or on the plane? Do you begin to panic if you linger in certain social situations too long? Are your initial waking moments filled with anxiety or dread? Are you irrationally optimistic or pessimistic?

Write as much as possible about the potential meaning of your obsession, and have a sense of humor about it, maybe even come up with a clever character name for it.

This chapter introduced you to the idea that symptoms like anxiety and obsessive behaviors can be ways your unconscious tries to get your attention. Sometimes you're not aware of the unusual and temporary behavior, and other times you might judge yourself for it. I encourage you to consider these behaviors as helpful and explore what need they are meeting at the time. Knowing that your odd behaviors have purpose can bring a sense of relief and empower you with more control over when and how to intentionally use them.

## CHAPTER TEN

# Bodily Sensations and Injuries

Sometimes our unconscious speaks to us through the body, aches, pains, and injuries. The field of somatic depth psychology (soma means body) and physiological science affirm that memories and adverse childhood experiences are held in the body and are factors that contribute to future physical and psychological disorders. I did not fully appreciate how the trauma of my mother's childhood lived in her body, and how not having the capacity to explore these wounds only intensified her physical and psychological suffering.

One way to find meaning in your pain is to look for the metaphor that might be at work. During a stressful phase of my first post-divorce relationship, I fell down the steps twice in the span of two weeks. In the same way and at the same time of night. The first time, I was stomping down the steps to take my nervous dog to his kennel during a thunderstorm. I was so angry I didn't bother putting clothes on before I grabbed the dog and angrily left my room.

It was both amusing and significant when I found myself laying naked at the bottom of the steps, my nakedness being a perfect symbol for needing to strip myself of all the trappings of my persona. And then I looked up to consult a higher power and wondered what message my unconscious was trying to

send me. Did I miss a step, was I overstepping, what was I exposing?

Clearly, I hadn't gotten the message. My second fall the next week was severe enough to require an x-ray and crutches, and my daughter wisely suggested that I slow down. My entrenched pattern of manic movement was difficult to change. Danger was the theme over the next couple months as I continued to have new aches and pains.

During this time, I was preparing to reunite with the man who was my first post-divorce relationship after some time apart. He was moving in with me, and my son was so angry about it he put a lock on his bedroom door and threatened to get a gun. I didn't know it consciously at the time, but my injuries, aches and pains were warning me about what was going to be unfolding psychologically. Simply being aware that these events had significance contributed to my ability to handle what would come next—the fulfillment of the purpose of the relationship and the capacity to end it when it needed to end.

Today, as I continue to meander into my new life as a writer, my body gives me clues about what lurks beneath my conscious awareness. The occasional tightness in my jaw reflects my insecurity about transitioning from student and researcher to expert in my field. From time to time, surrendering my body during yoga class inspires a burst of creativity in the form of a blog post.

Those aches and pains are also ways your inner being is trying to get your attention. If you're in physical pain, your inner being is in pain too. Your body is talking to you all the time. Once I accepted the fact that my family and marriage were falling apart, I lost the extra fifteen pounds I had gained during my last three months of manic avoidance of what I couldn't face.

## Reflection Questions

Have you considered the potential psychological meaning of your physical pain? Are you carrying extra weight around? What or who in your life is causing the pain in your neck? Do you have allergies or asthma, knee or back pain, menopausal hot flashes, or interrupted sleep? Do you get up to pee four times per night? Do you bruise easily, or do you trip over air and bump into random objects? How often do you get sick, what time of year, and is getting sick the only thing that disrupts your manic approach to life?

### Try This

Reflect about past or current physical limitations, timelines, and circumstances of your life at the time. Can you find any metaphors at work? What aches and pains plague you? Lower back or knee pain, jaw pain from grinding your teeth while you sleep, stomach bloating, headaches? Do you get migraines, have digestive issues? Do you suffer from menopausal symptoms like hot flashes or extra belly fat? Do you feel fatigued?

Journal your thoughts about these questions and see if you can find a potential metaphor, connect any dots, find meaning, or identify an action you could take to disrupt the psychological prison you're in.

In this chapter, you reflected about how the unconscious may be communicating through your body. Are you beginning to see how creative your unconscious can be in its attempts to deliver messages from your Soul? Do your digestive problems reflect something in your life that you are having difficulty digesting, or how your asthma may be symbolic of living or working in an environment where you cannot breathe or get a breath? I encourage you to consider the psychological aspects of bodily experiences.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# Emotions and Feelings

In this chapter, you will learn to look at your emotions and feelings in a new way. You can reflect about emotions after the fact, but nothing can stop them. I'm still confused about the difference between emotions and feelings. Emotions are instincts, they just happen, and feelings are supposedly your thoughts about what emotions mean. It was the Pixar movie *Inside Out* (Docter, 2015) that helped me understand that underneath my metal armor was a very child-like relationship with my raw emotions. I had a warped sense of empathy and often there was no boundary between my emotions and those of someone else.

I don't think I'm alone. Some of us are good at hiding from our emotions—a trait valued in patriarchal systems. We use our feelings (how we interpret our emotions) to judge ourselves and others, which helps us maintain control over our life. Anger gets banished to the shadow when it cannot be expressed and processed. Emotions apparently are instinctual and natural, but what if as a child you weren't allowed to have them? That was me. How could I use my reason now to determine how I felt about an emotion that had never been allowed to be naturally expressed?

Whatever is repressed will find a crack through which to escape. Patterns of emotional reactions can be a great source

of data about deeper motivations. I am good at hiding from my anger. I was not permitted to show anger as a child, especially towards my mother. I won't know it's lurking beneath the surface until right before it erupts. On one such occasion during my midlife reconstruction, seeing the movie *Black Panther* (Coogler, 2018) and then coming home and having my window blinds fall apart was exactly what was needed to force unexpressed anger towards my constantly relapsing ex-husband out of my body.

As I watched slat after slat of my fancy window blinds fall onto the floor, the anger welled up inside me. In the past I would have held it back, because I didn't realize the anger was about something old, not the stupid window blinds. With my son standing behind me, I screamed and then turned around and assured him that it wasn't about him. He smirked and nodded in agreement, and then we laughed. Being emotionally strong during a difficult time sounds honorable but pretending not to notice your anger will only make the eventual eruption worse.

### Reflection Questions

What makes you angry, who makes you angry, what do you do when you're angry? Do you say things you later regret, and how do you deal with that? Do you have imposter syndrome? Do you sweat when your boss asks you to come into the office without telling you why? How do you handle conflict? Does your blood boil when your technology breaks down? Do you allow your children to fail? Can you be a witness to your children's suffering without coming to the rescue? Can you deliver bad news to someone, or have a difficult conversation with a co-worker? How do you feel when you advocate for yourself?

Journal about your emotions and feelings. See what patterns you can find, and which emotions need some attention.

## Try This

Being human includes expressing our full range of emotions. Journal about your emotions and how you use feelings to find meaning. Do you feel a big cry coming? Don't hide from it, instead, surrender to it. There are benefits to crying, including the physiological release of toxins. I love big cries because they move your Soul, shift things, release blockages. Do you hide from your anger? Pull out some art supplies and draw your anger. Do you feel sadness? What situations or types of people tend to frustrate you? When do you feel helpless and when do you feel empowered? What might you be holding back?

This chapter introduced you to the idea that emotional reactions are clues to what's going on in your unconscious. Men are not the only ones who have been trained to suppress emotion. Women who forced their way into realms of society that were once reserved for men also had to learn to suppress emotion. Those emotions don't go away, they hide in the body and the unconscious until the tiniest crack unleashes them into the world.

This happens on a collective level too. Current events make it important to reflect about what has been repressed on both levels—individual and collective. In a blog post titled *A One Night Stand with Shame*, I connect the dots between an unexpected feeling of shame, a dream, and what was going on with my body ([www.deborahlukovich.com](http://www.deborahlukovich.com)).



## CHAPTER TWELVE

# Psychological/Personality Type

This chapter is about how your personality type offers clues to what's in your unconscious. You may be familiar with the Meyers-Briggs (MBTI) Assessment but not know that it is based on Jung's Theory of Psychological Type. It's a gold mine for self-reflecting individuals. Jung's book, *General Description of the Types* (1921/1971) is for those who want to dig deep. It begins as a seemingly straightforward description of his theory but quickly becomes complex when he illustrates the theory through human behavior. What's your type? If you don't know, take a free online test. I like [www.16personalities.com](http://www.16personalities.com).

### Sharing My Insights

It was not until I read, *The Experience of Introversion: An Integration of Phenomenological, Empirical, and Jungian Approaches* (1975), by Kenneth Joel Shapiro, that I began to really understand how I experience life. I know that sounds strange, but as one of the rare INFJ types (introversion, intuition, feeling, judgment), I felt validated when I learned that the things that made me feel like a misfit—like my intense self-consciousness—were the same things that made my unique perspective important. Learning about my type liberated me to freely roam my inner world.

For an introvert, it is the experience of experiencing that matters. I am driven by finding meaning in my life experiences. I can't even enjoy a simple sunset without reflecting about the experience. As the introvert notices their response to an experience they are pulled into their inner world, and this is their playground. Does this sound like you?

With a new appreciation for my unique way of experiencing life, I began responding differently to people who would tell me I was over thinking something. I now understand that analyzing did not describe my experience at all. There was no goal other than to linger in the meaning that was being created. "That's like asking me not to breathe," I began telling people who suggested I stop over-thinking things.

## An Introduction

The theory begins by suggesting individuals have an innate preference when it comes to **introversion** versus **extraversion**. These ways of engaging with the world have little to do with being shy or outgoing rather they express a preference for how one refuels psychologically. Are you energized by going inward? That's introversion. Or are you energized by engaging with the world outside you? That's extraversion. Some people tip only slightly into one or the other, and others are at the end of the range of one or the other.

For example, I love public speaking and engaging with people if there is meaning and purpose in doing so, but if I am attending a party where there is little opportunity to engage one on one or have meaningful conversation, I feel drained from incessant small talk. Eventually, I will need to escape or recover in solitude.

Extraverted people are energized by everything around them, moving from conversation to conversation, gathering more energy in the process. Introverts often enjoy the company of extraverts because the experience of engagement and being an object of attention inspires opportunities for meaning

making. Exploring the types that are most compatible with your own offers clues to uncovering what your Soul wants from you.

The preference for **perceiving** over **judging** means you have an insatiable appetite for stimulus, whether it comes from your inner world or the outside environment. On the other hand, judging reflects a need for purpose or meaning in what is being perceived. Preferring receiving stimulus via your **senses** over **intuition** means you are more interested in facts and figures and concrete objects, but if you rely on data only, you lack the capacity to linger in ambiguity or appreciate paradox. People who are one-sidedly intuitive have difficulty getting others to see what they see. **Thinking** and **feeling** are both rational ways of processing and making meaning out of experiences.

### Reflection Questions

Did you try out the link above and get a report on your type? How would you describe your type to someone? If you're introverted, where does that show up in your life, what if you're extraverted? Were you surprised about the result? Do you feel that your natural type was stunted by your parents or other belief system? Do you feel people know or understand you? Is your type compatible with your current work environment? If not, how does that make you feel and how do you find ways to express your natural type? Are you in the middle, or are you on one end of the range?

Did you know that both feeling and thinking are rational ways of making decisions? Did you know that intuition and sensing are both important and valid ways of receiving information? If you are more intuitive, how have you developed the capacity to analyze data? If you naturally prefer thinking as a way of making decisions, how have you developed the capacity to consider decisions through a feeling lens?

### Try This

Finding your preferred way of existing in the world is not meant to limit or label you. Knowing your preferences helps make sense of how you show up in the world and how you navigate life experiences and relationships. Knowing your type helps you identify where you might be too one-sided.

Write about events and experiences that illustrate your preferences and help you understand why you do what you do. Wanting to stay home on a Friday night doesn't mean you're anti-social, rather it means you need some space to refuel so you can bring your full self to your next encounter. Which situations don't feel natural, and which cause the most discomfort? This will reveal those parts of you that need to be developed or that need to be avoided because they deplete your energy too much.

Reflect and journal about events that highlight those sensibilities that are weakest. For example, if you find yourself unable to negotiate with someone who is offering information based on intuition you might lack the capacity to access knowledge that doesn't show up in facts and figures.

This chapter introduced you to the idea that your personality type—your natural way of experiencing and making sense of life—offers clues to what's in your unconscious. What did you find out?

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# Complexes

Our foundational patterns of thinking and behaving are established during childhood through our first relationships—with parents or primary caregivers. In addition, other adults in authority positions or just any random adult can inflict trauma on a child using only a few words. That child may develop an approach to life that protects them and holds back their full expression as a human being.

*My mother complex* continues to be a gold mine of insights. Some of the entrenched patterns of thinking and behaving that got me through childhood and into adulthood became strengths and others eventually turned into weaknesses. As an independent adult, you have the power to retire dysfunctional patterns in favor of developing new ones. Along the way, you can find humor as you bring new form to an old story.

Reflect and journal about your childhood, paying close attention to what you learned about life from your parents. A flood of memories might come to the surface. Write them down without judging yourself for how you feel about your parents, siblings, authoritative figures, and specific memories. Whatever emotions accompany the memories are significant. Your role right now is to be an observer of yourself, not a defensive lawyer or critical judge.

## Sharing My Insights

As I began discovering my complexes, I decided to embrace them and even name them. My *womb complex* reflects the burden of validating my mother's self-worth as a parent and helps me make sense of my need to have an escape route, whether in a movie theatre, on a plane, or in a classroom. Since my divorce, my body reminds me when I'm in the danger zone of over-adapting to someone, flooding my body with the emotion of fear of being trapped. Once I uncovered my *womb complex*, I was also able to make sense of how I was seeking to re-experience the womb in a positive way. Cozy is what I call my tendency to prefer small groups, small homes, and forming relationships with bartenders in my regular hangouts.

Before I knew anything about depth psychology, a question posed by Iyanla Vanzant, in her book, *In the Meantime* (1998), helped me explore my parental complexes. The question was simple—What did you learn about love from your parents? Finding the answer took time. I discovered that I had learned that love was conditional upon my mother feeling she was a good mother. Her sense of worth as a parent depended upon my behavior, and my misbehavior was internalized by her as failure in her role as mother.

Exploring my parental complexes helped me make sense of how I was responding to life events. The more I understood my *mother complex*—my patterns of thinking and behaving that developed through my relationship with her—the more compassion I had for both of us. Understanding my *mother complex* helped me place it within an ancestral context. Recognizing that my mother, her mother, and her grandmother lacked good male role models helped me make sense of how my mother treated my father and stepfather, which helped me make sense of how I showed up in my own marriage in an almost opposite manner.

You don't have to have experienced trauma in childhood to have complexes that eventually get in the way. You also don't

need to be mad at your parents once you identify those patterns that aren't working for you anymore, only that you be curious about what you learned about life, yourself, and others during your childhood experience.

I knew a woman in her late twenties who I think had genius level intelligence, and I loved listening to whatever came out of her mouth. I could hardly keep up. She was quite expressive of her love for family. Her brother had recently been seriously injured in a car crash, and his recovery was long. Her feeling of gratitude for her family and for life seemed to have manifested as a severe projection onto herself of very high standards and expectations. It felt as if she needed to prove that she deserved her life.

### **Reflection Questions**

What did you learn about love from your parents? What did you learn about success, achievement, generosity, community, responsibility? How did these lessons follow you into adulthood? How did they allow you to survive your childhood, high school, and young adulthood? Did any of these thought patterns begin to interfere with achieving new goals or with relationships over time? Can you think of an example where you consciously developed a new attitude that was needed to get where you couldn't get before? Journal about your findings.

Did you discover the root of a pattern of thinking or responding to certain situations? You may initially feel shame or guilt about your finding but think about it as a data point or an observation. Yesterday, I discovered how past criticisms of my sister reflected a projection onto her and her husband—a judgment—related to my disappointment of the relationship with my now ex-husband. Feelings of guilt washed over me. I had to do something with those feelings, so I apologized to her for those decades-old comments. You don't have to do that. You

may feel relief once you get them out of your body and put them down on paper.

### Try This

Complexes are patterns of thinking and behaving that are neutral. They do not become negative or positive until you rely on them in a dysfunctional manner. Parental complexes reflect our most basic patterns of navigating the world around us, including relationships, because our parents/caregivers were our first role models. Sometimes there is good reason to blame our parents for lingering trauma. On the other hand, there is no need to assign blame to our parents for complexes that have become negative as we seek to find meaning and a road to transcending them.

Journal about what may be happening in your body as you reflect on a complex. This might be a good time to pull out your image journal. Emotions can be difficult to process in words and drawing your experience might be a good first step. As you journal or draw, is your body becoming hot, is it shaking, do you feel a big cry coming, do you feel anxiety or fear? It's all good. A few words said at a pivotal moment in a child's life can cause trauma that gets trapped in a specific part of the body. If your memories are those of a positive nature, they are no less significant. Whatever you remember or feel, get it onto the page.

This chapter helped you start identifying the patterns of thinking and behaving that might be getting in your way now. We'll learn more about how to use complexes to explore our unconscious in Chapter 20.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

# Relationships

This chapter is about how relationships reveal a lot about what our unconscious wants us to learn about ourselves. We relate through projection, and it is going on in every interaction with another person. We are attracted to people who represent pieces of us that wish to come out and play or be acknowledged. If you refuse to indulge these sub-personalities, our dark and our light sides, and instead force someone else to carry that burden, eventually you might come to resent the differences that you previously considered positive.

People we don't like sometimes reflect pieces of us that are seeking expression or forgiveness. I know a woman in her thirties who recognized that her mother's happiness depended upon her happiness. That means if something went awry in her life, she has the added burden of worrying about how her suffering caused suffering for her mother. She worked on setting a boundary with her mother to free herself to experience life fully—the good and the bad—which meant acknowledging that she was not responsible for whether her mother was happy.

## Sharing My Insights

Finding yourself feeling part admiration and part disdain for someone may suggest an unacknowledged part of you is desperate to come out of the closet. As my marriage was unraveling, I became obsessed with the reality TV shows *Millionaire Matchmaker* and *Tabitha Salon Takeover*. I cringed when the women were *mean* to their clients, but I also wanted to be like them. I knew my *inner bitch* needed to come out if I was to deal with how my husband's addiction allowed him to exploit and manipulate my children and me.

Relationships can be seen to offer a curriculum for growth, and I am not sure projecting an expectation of permanency onto them makes sense. Spiritually, I believe God wants us to grow through finding truth for ourselves, and this collides with a rather arrogant human need to control what happens in relationship or to assume that relationships are supposed to last a lifetime.

My twenty-four-year marriage presented me with a bottomless pit of growth experiences, but to keep growing, the relationship had to end. The six months following my divorce were filled with new life lessons that had little to do with finding a life partner. My encounters with the ten men I dated over six months strengthened my ability to set boundaries, as well as help me to develop a healthier relationship with my body and sexuality.

That growth prepared me for a more serious relationship—the one that brought me closer to my inner being and the Divine. Relationships, intimate and otherwise, are the most powerful prompts for self-reflection and growth.

## Reflection Questions

Have you thought about what initially attracted you to your current partner? What do they possess that you do not, and how are you making them responsible for your sense of

security, identity, or worth? What are you avoiding through your relationship with them? For whom do you feel both admiration and disdain, and what might that say about the part of you that is seeking expression? What kinds of people are attracted to you and vice versa? Have you ever been swept up in an irrational love affair?

What role do you play in the family? Does everyone look to you to make the major decisions, and do you secretly love playing that role? Or do you hate it? Does your sister unconsciously make you express the anger she will not allow herself to express for her ex-husband? Do you have to walk on eggshells around someone in your family? What are you projecting onto your boss or your co-worker?

### Try This

Time for journaling. Reflect about what you learned about relationships from your parents and early life experiences. What did you learn about love and friendship? What did you learn about romance, marriage, sexuality, religion? What beliefs do you now hold because of these experiences, and how attached to them are you? How do you feel when you have experiences that challenge these beliefs, and how do you respond to others who hold opinions that are different?

Take time to journal about all your significant romantic relationships. Write about how you felt when you realized you liked or loved the other person, the circumstances of your meeting, what happened during the relationship, how it ended or why it lasted, and who you credit with the failure or success.

Can you identify any patterns that follow you from relationship to relationship? Was/is there a certain kind of person you are attracted to? What do you find most frustrating in your relationships? Journal more about other relationships, such as friendships, coworkers, or people in positions of authority. Can you identify some of your personal patterns of

behaving and thinking, especially during times of stress, which is when dysfunctional complexes get triggered?

Think about your most troubling relationship and document events that were full of conflict, the last fight you had with your mother for example. Journal about the earliest childhood memory where you felt that way. Now bring yourself back to the present. Can you see where a childhood dynamic is occurring in your adult life? You are merely gathering intelligence here, getting the most challenging situations onto paper so you can explore them later.

In this chapter, you had an opportunity to discover some things you didn't know about yourself by seeing other people as mirrors. Was a secret desire revealed, or did you find a version of you that wants to compensate for being too much of a rule follower? The more opinionated we are about the faults of others, the more there is to learn about ourselves.

I encourage you to explore your most difficult relationships. The goal is not to make yourself be friends with someone you don't like or to adapt to a dysfunctional relationship, rather seek to find those repressed parts of yourself that are looking for opportunities to come to life. In my blog post titled *I Didn't Become a Romantic Until I got Divorced*, I write about sexual attraction as an invitation from God. You can find this blog post at [www.deborahlukovich.com](http://www.deborahlukovich.com).

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

# Fantasies and Memories

In this chapter, we explore how memories and fantasies are another way the unconscious speaks. When you're reading a book, does your mind sometimes wander? In the space between realizing you got off track and forcing your attention back to the book, something was trying to get your attention. There's a reason that childhood memory came up for example. Have you felt plagued by spontaneous thoughts and fantasy images that are embarrassing or concerning?

During the years leading up to the beginning of the end of my marriage, as I drove over the highest bridge in my hometown, a terrible thought would occur. I would imagine driving right off that bridge. The thought scared me, and I didn't tell anyone about it for years. I wondered if I had a secret desire to kill myself. When I finally got the courage to share it with my therapist, he suggested I reflect about the feeling between the bridge and the ground. I realized that in the fantasy I had never crashed. What I had desired was the freedom to let go, to fall apart for a little bit.

### Reflection Questions

Pay attention to the thoughts and memories that spontaneously erupt out of your unconscious. They are trying

to communicate something. Do you have a sexual fantasy that won't leave you alone, maybe about someone other than your partner? Do you have a fantasy of doing something violent to your boss or an ex? Have you thought about which part of you the fantasy is asking you to reflect about? Do you have a fantasy that scares you? It is probably not about what you think but rather meant to get your attention and get you reflecting.

### Try This

The next time your mind wanders, or you find yourself daydreaming, resist the temptation to course correct. Journal about memories or fantasies that sneak out of your unconscious. Some may be embarrassing, but do not judge them, for those are among the most meaningful. Exploring images that bring feelings of shame or embarrassment may be encouraging you to embrace parts of yourself for which you have been judged or criticized. They do not necessarily have to do with physical sex, but because there is so much shame in our culture about sex, your psyche may call on those images to get your attention.

In my case, being plagued by a fantasy of being sexually submissive had more to do with surrendering to my inner being, and the sexual arousal I felt because of the images were a reward for those times I let go of control.

Your mind may now be flooded with memories of when your unconscious was speaking to you, and you have documented them in your written or image journal. What do you do with them now? How do you begin to make sense of them? How do you cultivate the capacity to be alert to the subtle ways your unconscious attempts to get your attention? As I became more comfortable working with my images—many of them were downright embarrassing—my confidence and capacity to find meaning grew.

This chapter was about how memories and fantasies are ways your unconscious also speaks to you. My stories and the

reflection questions were meant to prompt specific experiences that you might want to explore further.

### **Sharing My Insights**

Another fantasy about a man I had met after my first post-divorce relationship ended followed me all the way to my beach town. We had spent just a couple nights together and I was ready to dive in, but he wasn't. I did not trust myself to send unwanted texts, so I deleted his number. The fantasy of our reunion wouldn't leave me alone until it became my first short story—*The Fantasy*. ([www.deborahlukovich.com](http://www.deborahlukovich.com))

In the next several chapters, I share multiple methods for exploring images. My initial need for a linear process evolved into more of a collage. As my ego let go of controlling the process, I could pick and choose pieces of other people's frameworks, calling on one over another depending on whether I was working a film image or a personal conflict. The purpose of weaving in my experiences is to demonstrate how you might apply the approach. See what *clicks* for you. I promise you will learn something new about yourself.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

# Methods—Finding Associations

This chapter describes the four-step approach to working with images offered in the book, *Inner Work: Using Dreams and Active Imagination for Personal Growth*, by Robert Johnson (1989). When I started working with my images, I needed a more linear approach to save me from drowning in the mysterious images that came after surrendering to the wisdom of my unconscious. These four steps remain the foundation of my personal framework, and you can download a one-sheet of these steps on the Newsletters+ page of my website [www.deborahlukovich.com](http://www.deborahlukovich.com).

### Step 1—Identify All the Images

The goal of this step is to identify all the images in a message from your unconscious—dream, memory, when a complex got triggered, synchronistic event—and choose one or more to explore. Begin with a full accounting of the message (dream or conflict, for example) as you remember it. Describe the scene(s), characters, events, and emotions. Are there any smells, sounds, or lighting that seem significant? Do you remember smelling anything? Some people notice they dream in black and white while others sense colors. Did you notice the temperature, was it windy, if there was water, was it cold or

warm, crystal clear or dirty? Note how you felt when you woke from the dream. Were you scared or comforted? How was your body reacting? Was your heart beating fast, were you sweating, did you feel like you had just run a marathon?

Next, make a list of all the possible images you could explore. Remember, images are not only visual, and a single dream, experience, or event may contain many images. Think of images as impressions, like how you were paralyzed meeting with your boss, feeling like a scolded child. A single dream can involve multiple people or creatures, taking you from scene to scene. The way you feel upon waking is an image. The experience of being drawn to a symbol on a billboard involves not only the symbol, but the emotions elicited and the surrounding scenery. Maybe you want to start with an obsessive behavior you noticed, a complex that got triggered, or something else. I recommend you choose what you find most interesting or feels most dramatic.

Now that you have fully documented your experience of the image in your written and/or image journal, you will begin exploring them.

## **Step 2—Finding Associations**

For this step, you will begin exploring one of the images by finding associations. You are associating the image with something else. The image causes you to make a connection. The key to finding associations is to finish this thought: This image causes me to think or feel \_\_\_\_\_. When I allow myself to linger in the emotion that got triggered, it reminds me of \_\_\_\_\_. When I put myself back in that part of the dream, my mind goes \_\_\_\_\_. This image reminds me about that time in my life when \_\_\_\_\_ happened. This image takes me back to \_\_\_\_\_. This image causes me to feel like I did when I was \_\_\_\_\_ years old. Questions like this help you find associations for the image.

The goal of this step is to relate the image to something in your life—past present, or future. Your unconscious is using this image to lead you somewhere—a time in your life, a place, a person, a feeling. The associations are clues. Journal about what comes to mind when you think about the image. What comes to mind when you allow your imagination to experience the image again?

For example, if the image is your sister, what thoughts and feelings arise? She's so annoying? Write it all down. What else do you think and feel when you think about that sibling? It's not fair that \_\_\_\_\_. Write it down. Keep going back to the image and see what comes up until you cannot think of any more associations. Don't have expectations. You may have one association or many more.

This step was about relating the image to something else, something known. We did this through a process of associations. When there are no more associations to be made, it's time to find a little more meaning.

### **Step 3—Where is this showing up in your life?**

In this step, you are looking for a possible metaphor that might be at play. Your unconscious is using that image to tell you something about your life. For example, say the image you're working with is a memory that recently came up during a conversation with your sister. Let's say the two of you were ruminating about how your mother dressed you as children—in clothes you absolutely hated. Today, you both insist it doesn't bother you anymore, or maybe one of you is still angry about it. But why did the memory come up? It is not a meaningless coincidence if there is some emotion involved.

Rehashing or venting is not what we're doing here. You are trying to make sense of your life—how you got where you are right now. Do you know where you want to go next in your life? Will the way you have been living your life until now work to get you there? This is where Soul comes in. My ego's answers

to these questions during my midlife unraveling didn't feel right. I had to learn the language of the unconscious.

In the childhood memory example, clothes have much to do with personal identity, which is complex. There's the face you present to the outside world, which doesn't always match what's inside. Your unconscious may be pushing up this memory of wearing ugly clothes to help you realize you're in a situation that is forcing you to project yourself into the world in a way that is not authentic. It is ugly and you feel you are being forced to be or do something that you don't want to be or do. Perhaps you've put up with this situation for too long. As a child, did you resist your mother or father? What happened when you did? Do you have a fear today of resisting authority?

In this section, you took the image you wanted to explore, along with your associations and identified where they are showing up in your life symbolically. Keep wondering where this is happening in your life—the dynamic, the emotion, the interaction. Reflect and journal about this.

### **Step 4—Integrate the new insight**

This is the step that can change your life. In what ways is the image guiding you to do something different in your life? Maybe something that terrifies you, or something that feels immoral or irresponsible, even when you know it's not. Going forward, be alert to emotions, how your body responds, and ways you feel prompted to take actions you might not otherwise have taken. Set it aside and be alert to how these images may continue to present themselves in dreams, film, synchronicities, emotional responses in the body. You may realize your mother's response to your resistance has shaped how you respond to conflict. Recognizing this can empower you to try something new.

## Sharing My Insights

In one dream during my midlife unraveling, I was walking outside, and it was dark. I came upon a building that felt like my elementary school. I walked down some steps to the lower level. In the corner was an opening in the floor that led to a level below that. I had to crawl through a turnstile to get to the room below that was lit by a table lamp. A few people were down there encouraging me to join them, and they sounded like they were having fun. I was nervous about being able to get through the turnstile. I feared being trapped.

This dream had many images—building, turnstile, lower level, lamp, unknown people, curiosity, and fear of being trapped. The image I explored first was the **building**, which I associated with my **elementary school** where I was bullied through fourth grade. What was going on in my life during the time of the dream? I had recently been hired to run a nonprofit that transformed school climate through play. My elementary school was one of its customers. Talk about **circling back**. The dream images **prompted me to explore** the deeper meaning of this job.

The second image I explored was the **turnstile**. I associated it with a **boundary** between the first floor and a lower level. It would be tricky to get through the turnstile—I **feared** getting stuck in the process. I associated this image with the discomfort of needing to revisit these memories. It felt meaningful that I ended up in a job that brought me back to a painful time in my life.

The third image I explored was the **lower level**, which was lit by a **lamp**. The first floor was familiar—my elementary school—but the **lower-level** symbolized something **unknown** related to my elementary school experience. I couldn't see what was down there, but I associated the lamp with **assurance** that a light would be shed on something, that it would ultimately be a helpful experience. What was going on in my life? I was getting divorced. It was odd that I had gotten this job in a matter

of three weeks, a job that brought me back to this time in my life and also brought financial independence.

The final image I explored from this dream was the group of **unknown people**, who were down in the lower level. The room below was lit and full of laughter, which told me that I would be rewarded for going back and revisiting something painful. They were **encouraging** me. I associated them with **parts of my psyche** that would get me through the process. I didn't recognize the people, so I associated them with new parts of me that I didn't know about. What was happening in my life? I needed to grow. I would soon need to be independent from a financial standpoint. After having had zero intimacy for two and a half years, my sexuality had recently been awakened through a chance meeting with a younger man. I was in major transition.

What meaning did I find? What were my insights? I had turned fifty, was back in school, and I got a job working with schools. In one depth psychology class we were asked to explore our earliest memories. The coincidences didn't stop. Two memories immediately came to mind. The negative memory of being bullied was accompanied by a memory of the one place I felt safe at school—the huge tree at the corner of the asphalt playground where a small group of us played marbles. In this corner I also felt competent.

Back to my dream—about elementary school. The images were an attempt by my unconscious to shorten the tether between my forgotten scared child and the grownup version of me. My new job offered me a **second chance at childhood**—it felt like playing. The work part was easy, because years of consulting with small nonprofits had prepared me for it. Playing on the other hand was what took practice and permission to let my guard down, to have fun, to laugh out loud. My first day included a game of Pictionary with my staff. It was so awkward.

Playing with kids was now part of my job. Foursquare, kickball and running around playing tag with five- and six-year-

olds felt exhilarating. Pent-up laughter exploded out of me during the school visits. "Want to play with us?" The children craved attention from adults, and I was like a celebrity. The little people's eyes were so big when I told them, "I'm the boss." I learned that when adults play with children on the playground, stress and conflict decreases throughout the entire day. It made perfect sense to me. Playing mini basketball on rolling chairs with my staff in the office loosened something up in my body. I needed this job more than it needed me. Being a serious competitor in smash ball became one of my personal goals. I couldn't remember when I had laughed as much as I was laughing now.

Finally, what did I do different in my life because of this insight? I realized that my overly responsible adult-self had been crushing my inner child. Outside of work, my sexual spirit soared, and my body came alive every week playing beach volleyball. I'd randomly start skipping down the sidewalk while listening through my headphones to the Top 40 music that made me feel like I was in my twenties again. **I indulged my inner child**, making space for her to play.

My personal stories are meant to be a template for you as you learn to decode your own unconscious messages. The meaning, insights, and new attitude did not happen overnight. The most important insights had to do with encouraging me to look at things in a new way, and that I would be rewarded for doing so. Over time, this dream and its images gained more meaning and helped me make sense of what was happening during certain parts of my midlife journey.

### Try This

Your turn. Try the four steps on one of your images, or several images. There is a treasure of insight waiting to be found, and then allow your intellect and ego to help integrate new insights into your life. Not until you think or behave differently will something new and different happen.

In this chapter, I laid out a foundational approach that is more linear and straight-forward than others. Try it out and have realistic expectations. You may be amused that your unconscious has a sense of humor too. Sometimes finding meaning feels like the satisfaction of finishing a puzzle or getting the punchline to a joke. If one image isn't going anywhere, set your perfectionism aside and try another one. If journaling isn't working, draw in your image journal.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

# Active Imagination

This chapter is about technique—and attitude. The technique is called active imagination, a term Jung used to describe a way of interacting with your images (Chodorow, 1997). Attitude refers to the regard you have towards your images. To get the most out of active imagination, you must engage with your images as if they are real and show them respect as you would a guest in your home. Why? *Relating* to your images will inspire them to reveal their meaning. You want their cooperation. Saying *hello* is how you might start. *Why are you here?* is a question I often ask my images. *What do you want from me?* is another question.

### Sharing My Insights

Fantasies that are sexual in nature are full of symbolic meaning but may be dismissed because of initial feelings of embarrassment or shame. I used to think we created fantasies until I became plagued by a fantasy of being sexually submissive. It came out of nowhere, and it would return at the strangest times. The fantasy of being naked and kneeling in front of a naked man standing with an erect penis made me cringe at first, and then it aroused me. The man was someone I was dating in my first post-divorce relationship. At first, I

thought it was about sex, because I felt desire for this man that I had not felt before. But it would show up at the oddest times. I decided to draw it (Appendix 2).

It turned out not to be about sex. Over time, I came to understand the submission fantasy and other religious symbols as invitations to submit to a part of me for which I felt insecurity and shame. Reconciling my sexuality and spirituality, which until then had been at war inside me, brought great physical relief and emotional healing. Surrendering to these experiences also led to eruptions of creativity. If I had dismissed the awkward fantasy, the eventual recognition of my desire to create may not have blossomed.

In her book, *Picturing God* (2003), Jungian analyst and Christian Theologian Ann Ulanov states that our personal images of God, whether beautiful, ugly, embarrassing, sexual, or violent are important and act as a potential doorway to a relationship with God or the transcendent. How refreshing! Honoring your own subjective experience of how God is working through you instead of dismissing, or worse, repressing images that if explored could bring you into deeper relationship with yourself, others, and God.

### Try This

#### **The Playground of Your Mind**

Ready to try? Choose an image and engage with it as if it was a real person. Unlike the first approach, where you related the image to something in the past to identify where to focus in the present, allow your imagination to lead you somewhere into the future. If you have a free-flowing imagination, this might be easy for you. Find somewhere comfortable to sit or lay and close your eyes. If you choose a dream image, put yourself back in the dream, anywhere you want, and take a moment to notice the surroundings, the people in the dream, and what's happening. You might choose to be an observer and watch how

the dream unfolds, or you might say hello to the person with whom you want to engage. Allow your imagination to lead the way and see what happens.

If you choose a fantasy image, allow it to play out, noticing emotions that arise and how your body is responding. You could also choose to re-experience a conflict, this time allowing your imagination to have it play out differently. If you choose an image like a memory of being swept up by a sunset or being attracted to someone, step back into it and allow your imagination to take you somewhere. Imagination is how your Soul is pulling you towards your hidden purpose.

Then journal about your experience and try to answer the questions from the previous chapter about associations and where this is happening in your life. I had difficulty with this technique for a long time. It didn't work the way it was supposed to for me, but I was able to find some variations, which I share below.

### **Sharing My Insights**

One night, I dreamed I was in the dining room of a small home, it was dark, and the windows were covered with heavy curtains. At the head of the antique dark wood dining table sat my mother-in-law. Journaling about the dream didn't get me far, but when I imagined going back into the dream, it was the feeling that prompted meaning. In my imagination, I walked towards my mother-in-law, sat down at the table, and asked "Why are you here?" I was annoyed that she was there. I felt angry. I don't remember what she said, I don't think she said anything. The feeling of being trapped was unbearable.

Journaling helped me associate her with the forms of convention I had sought to avoid. I was angry at a part of myself—the part that allowed me to get trapped in convention. The active imagination exercise impressed upon me that I would need to escape the part of myself that had brought me what I had never wanted.

## Try This

### Engaging Through Drawing

Sometimes, my mind won't be still long enough for images to emerge, or my ego wants to start analyzing and interpreting things right away. In those instances, I use my hands to channel my imagination onto the page—by writing, typing, or drawing. Drawing is a great way to sidestep your rational mind. It feels like a direct route to what wants to be known and an effective way to resist the temptation to assign meaning based on what you already know. If you can type fast, there's no time for the ego to interfere in what wants to come out onto the page.

For this variation, you might choose an image that has more to do with an emotional experience, something that is challenging to describe in words. Like intense feelings that linger after a dream. Once you get over the initial nervousness about your artistic ability, you will experience powerful moments of revelation as you surrender to how your Soul is seeking to express itself.

Do not judge or interpret your drawing. You might start out drawing something literal and that is fine. The magic happens when you free your mind from needing to know and instead allow your hands to be directed by a force that includes a mixture of you and something that's bigger than you.

Don't journal about your drawing right away, instead linger in the experience of drawing and allow your body to process it for a couple days. If that lingering feeling from the dream was positive, try to re-experience it as many times as possible to allow your body to adopt it and make it a permanent part of you. When you go back to your journal, answer the questions related to associations, like where this is happening in your life and what the image may be calling you to do in your conscious life.

## Sharing My Insights

One dream I had early on in my first post-divorce relationship brought feelings I had never experienced before. In the dream, I was in a restroom at a state park, it was cold, dark, and empty. I had finished going to the bathroom and walked out of the steel stall. It was completely dark, and I could not see my way out of the bathroom. I walked slowly, my hands out in front of me, dragging my feet across the cement floor, until I felt the door.

Suddenly, I was standing in the doorway with my back facing outside, and I fell backwards and tumbled down the hill. No matter how wide I opened my eyes I could see only blackness. I noticed that I felt trusting, and my fall was slow and soft. After a few backwards somersaults, I slowed down and then continued falling. This time I noticed the soft warm breeze and swirling freshly fallen leaves that enveloped me on the way down the hill. I felt safe and more secure than I had ever felt in my life, and the feeling stayed with me after I woke up. I tried to make it last.

When I drew the image (Appendix 1), I started with an open door at the top. The rest of the page was filled with colorful leaves and squiggly lines to symbolize the breeze that cradled the image I drew of me falling down the hill, dressed in a fuchsia color dress. Then I felt compelled to add a pair of hands at the bottom of the page.

The meaning of this image revealed itself over time, the feeling of safety and the image of protective hands offered assurance that I could handle the transformative nature of my first post-divorce relationship. It is not necessary to find the complete meaning of an image for it to be working behind the scenes of your life. Simply recognizing that your images have purpose indicates your openness to being guided.

This section was about how drawing sometimes is a better way to engage images, especially those which are difficult to capture in words.

## Try This

### Create a Screenplay

This variation focuses on dialogue. You can think of it as acting out parts in a play, only you are acting or writing the play as you go. Relating to an image requires conversation and mutual effort to get to know each other. You're already doing this—talking to yourself. Maybe without realizing it, you have been using another part of yourself as a sounding board.

Find some stillness, breathe in and out, close your eyes, and engage in conversation with one of your images. Be sure to make it feel welcome. Then simply ask it questions and listen for responses. Do not judge your inner personalities. Do you feel opposing forces inside you? Anxiety can be an opposing force, and so can that inner voice that judges your imperfection. Do you sense two different voices or personalities within? We all have voices, personalities, feelings, and desires that are competing for attention.

For this variation, you might want to choose one or both images involved in an inner battle. Does your inner high school dropout-self want to bring relief to your perfectionist-self? Does your inner prostitute want to give you the experience of ecstasy that you've denied yourself? What inner version of you lurks beneath the surface wanting to compensate for the parts of your life that are too rigid?

Engage in a dialogue with the part of you that is seeking expression. Ask him or her questions and listen to the answers. You could do this in the playground of your mind or write it down as dialogue in a screenplay. Allow the experience to move you. You will have thoughts and feelings that you haven't allowed yourself to have before, and they might feel ethically or morally wrong. This experience is not to be taken literally, rather it is symbolic, a metaphor, and points towards a psychological shift meant to be helpful.

At some point, journal about your experience. Explore questions related to associations—Where is this happening in your life? Is there something I should do differently in my life?

### **Sharing My Insights**

As my marriage was ending, I began a new life as a student, secured a full-time job, and did my best to provide stability for my children as we were coming to terms with my ex-husband's alcohol addiction. Two forces within were at odds. Two of my fellow graduate school students guided me in a conversation with these conflicting energies, one force I named my inner lawyer and the other my inner child. I had recently found her—remember the heart drawing? She wanted to make up for lost time and play all the time.

My inner lawyer was used to my more serious side, and he was freaking out over my sudden unleashed child self. I found that if I patiently listened to him make his case, he was fine with whatever decision I made, he was not a judge after all. He returns from time to time, always there to remind me not to go overboard with my insatiable appetite for new experiences in my newfound freedom.

In this Chapter, you loosened up and became more comfortable relying on your imagination. How did it go? Did your image answer questions? Were you surprised by any of the answers? Were you able to find associations to circumstances in your conscious life? Practice having conversations with your images like you would with a therapist or a friend. Think of it as talking to yourself, and keep journaling.



## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

# Tending Dreams

This chapter expands on the use of active imagination. You will learn how to apply the methods of dream tending and dream councils to find meaning in your dreams and answers to the big life questions for which you seek answers. These methods were developed by Dr. Stephen Aizenstat, founder of Pacifica Graduate Institute, and author of the book, *Dream Tending: Awakening to the Healing Power of Dreams* (2011). I'm spending more time on dreams because they are such a rich source of insights. Working with dreams also takes time and practice, so I want to offer more examples to help you accelerate your learning curve. You may want to go back and revisit the guidelines in Chapter 8.

### Try This

#### Recurring Dreams

When you are ready to work with your recurring dream, one night ask your unconscious to bring it to you. It might not come the first night, ask again. In Chapter 16, you learned how to associate dream images to something in the past to help you become aware that something now is not quite right. In this chapter, you will be learning to relate to your image as if it is

right in front of you, calling on your unconscious to be more direct in finding meaning in the present. You might feel silly doing this, but you'll come to appreciate that the images have a life and agenda all their own.

Journal as much detail as possible about a dream. Now, center yourself with a big inhale and exhale, close your eyes, and pick up in your dream where you left off when you awoke. It doesn't have to be a recurring dream, but these dreams keep coming because your unconscious wants you to become conscious of something that remains stubbornly hidden in your unconscious. Imagine yourself in that place and see where your imagination takes you.

Approach your image in a friendly manner. It took me quite some time to be able to receive images. The first few times, nothing came. Be gentle with yourself, your ego is learning to partner with your unconscious, and it will eventually become curious because it loves to analyze things. Don't give up if your imagination refuses to play. Your unconscious wants to be taken seriously, and she or he may sense you're not ready.

Journal about everything that happens, and then use the *Associations* approach from Chapter 16 to work with the new images to find new insights and meaning.

## Sharing My Insights

My recurring dream returned the first night of a dream tending workshop. When I awoke, I realized that the dream of being chased by mercenaries through my childhood home did in fact return, but it had been different. This time, as I ran into my sister's red-carpeted bedroom, I noticed that my son was in her bed. This was new. In my dream, I hesitated in my quest to jump out the screened bedroom window, yelling to my son, "Come on! We have to get out of here!" I pleaded with him to crawl out the window with me, but he calmly looked at me and said, "Go ahead Mom, it will be okay." That was it.

The next morning, we paired up with a partner, but you don't need a partner. As you read on, simply imagine you are playing the role of partner. She guided me to imagine that I was back in the dream. I picked up where the dream had ended.

"Where are you?" she asked. I was intrigued with my decision to enter my childhood home through the attached garage. I quietly opened the door from inside the garage to the inside of the house.

"What do you see?" She asked. As I quietly peered through the crack in the door, I saw a man. "What does he look like?" she asked. I responded that he was sitting, and that he was wearing a top hat. "What does that mean to you?" she asked. Well, it reminds me of Frank Sinatra for some reason, and that reminds me of my husband.

"What do you do next?" my partner continued. My imagination guided me further. I'm walking towards the figure. My fear waned as I drew closer. I could see the man was more of a shadowy figure, not all there. I sat down in the chair—on top of the shadowy figure. "What is happening now?" My partner asked. I was surprised that I didn't feel any emotion.

The meaning I initially gave to my experience was that I would be safe facing something difficult, which was reassuring. I forgot about the dream, but two years later after it was clear my marriage would be ending, I realized the dream had been prompting me to become conscious that I no longer loved my husband in a romantic way. Even though I didn't realize it, something had reached me at a semi-conscious level. If it had not, I might not have realized it at all, and I might not have felt empowered to share how I felt with my husband, which put something painful in motion. Today, I wonder if the dream had also been an indication that the feeling was mutual. My husband did not put up much resistance to ending our marriage.

That's why this work is so important. Having a strong ego can mean lots of automatic defense mechanisms and attempts to control how you present yourself to the world. I

was able to stay ignorant for a long time, which only postponed the ultimate reckoning that had to happen for me to continue growing as a human being.

### Try This

#### Dream Council

Another active imagination exercise Dr. Aizenstat recommends is what he calls a *Dream Council*. You might be tempted to skip this one, but I encourage you to embrace the awkwardness and try it. Have you ever heard that there really is no new knowledge, that what feels like new knowledge emerges when needed, as seeds planted in the imagination of the human being that will be the vessel in which it forms and then enters physical existence? Many inventors and artists credit their dreams and imagination as the source of insights that led to their creations. In essence, you will be calling on the wisdom of people you respect, whether they are still alive or not.

When is the right time to do a dream council? When you have a question or need advice. My first experience followed a long phase of exploring my mother complex within the context of my ancestors. I'll share more as I walk you through the steps.

**What's your question?** Is there something important you need to decide? Whether to leave a high-paying job, or whether to end a relationship. How to provide support to someone who has an addiction? Maybe something a little less serious, like whether you should get on a dating app or accept a job offer?

**Who's on the invitation list?** As you wonder about your question or topic, who or what comes to mind? It could be someone you know and is alive, or someone you know who passed away before you were born. It could be someone very successful or significant who you respect, like Oprah Winfrey or Barack Obama, or a religious figure like Jesus or Mother

Theresa. You could invite a spirit animal, your family pet, an actor, an Olympian athlete, or a symbol that has great meaning, like a Christian cross or black panther. Finally, you could invite an inanimate object, something that has personal or ancestral meaning. You might gather small objects to symbolize each invitee.

**Decide on a location.** Is there a place that has special meaning for you? Your location could be a religious setting like a church or temple, or your dream council could take place in a fancy board room real or imaginary. Maybe you prefer a more intimate family setting, like your grandparents' home or a place in nature. Whatever the location, you may go to the actual physical space or simply visit it in your imagination.

**Today's the day.** In your imagination or at the physical space, settle into a comfortable position, close your eyes, and breathe. "I'm ready," you might imagine saying. Be gracious, thank everyone for coming, suggest they take a seat and be comfortable, and tell them why you've called them to the council. Then listen, be patient, and thank them again for coming when the council ends. Do not have any expectations about how this will go and be prepared for your ego to get in the way as you feel tempted to dismiss the experience or come up with an interpretation too quickly. Know that you are tapping into a real source of wisdom, and trust that whatever happens has meaning.

**Journal about the experience.** Write down what was said, how you felt, the scenery, the temperature, colors, sounds. You can use the *Associations* method to explore the experience. This is a more advanced way of working with your unconscious, so be gentle and patient with yourself. What meaning did you find in your dream council experience?

## Sharing My Insights

When I did my dream council, I had gone through a period of unleashed sexual desire after not having had sex for

two and half years. I invited the **first younger man** with whom I had sex after my divorce, and **another man** who was the victim of my projection of irrational sexual energy. I invited **my son**, who had shown up in several dreams as a guide, and I invited a **hummingbird**, and someone from **my ancestry**.

I didn't have a specific question. I was feeling lost about my purpose, and I was wondering about how far back a **family wound** could go. I had recently reflected that there had been no good models of healthy relationship between men and women going back three generations in my mother's family and at least one generation in my father's and stepfather's family.

I imagined the location was the **urban beach** in my hometown. I had always been drawn to water, whether on a coast or a lakefront, but more so over the past two years. My two men showed up in khaki pants and white shirts, which made me laugh. A younger version of my son showed up, along with my hummingbird. I awaited some representatives from my ancestry, and finally, a **dark-skinned couple** in their thirties arrived. They were dressed as if they were from ancient Greece, she was beautiful and wearing a flowing dress, a shade of blue that I noticed when I had traveled to Greece, and he was handsome. I didn't know their names, and during my first dream council, the couple from my ancestry didn't say why they came. During the second council, when I asked them why they came, they said, "Something has been taken from our family—**the love between a man and a woman.**" My mind did not know what to do with the information, but my body felt honored to have received the information.

### Try This

#### Past Life Regression

Ready to challenge your ego more? A fifteen-minute past-life regression exercise unleashed insights that my intellect could never have found, including how feeling

suffocated by my mother's need for validation through my behavior showed up in my adult life. Imagining an experience before my birth connected me with those who came before me and hinted at my purpose. You don't have to believe in past lives, and I don't have an opinion on the matter, it's just an active imagination exercise. Walk yourself through these steps and see where your imagination takes you.

**Think and feel about your life now.** Close your eyes and take deep breaths—allow images to come up that are associated with your life right now. They might have to do with family and career, or the death of a loved one or another crisis.

**What about five years ago.** What were you doing then? What experiences float up to consciousness? Now ask your imagination to take you back five years before that, then another five or ten years before that, until you get back to childhood, allowing images and memories to naturally come up.

**Your time in the womb.** Imagine your personal experience of being in your mother's womb. Some say your actual experience in the womb is imprinted in your psyche and your body. I don't know about that, but for this exercise the goal is to allow your imagination to take you back to the womb symbolically. Notice what feelings, memories, and thoughts come up. Do you feel all cozy and safe, or are you suffocating? What are you aware of?

**Before the womb.** Imagine time before the womb, before you were conceived. Your ego is really going to try to stop you from doing this. Nothing about this exercise is to be taken literally. This is about harnessing a wisdom that cannot be accessed by your mind. Hang in there. Just try it.

This experience helped me find more meaning in my dream council experience. Beyond helping me make sense out of **how I had showed up in my marriage**, I began to feel called to explore the **wounds that men and women** carry because of generations of living under oppressive patriarchal systems.

Journal about your experience and/or draw it. Start with identifying all the different images, including your emotions, thoughts, and feelings, then use the *Associations* approach or another method to explore and find meaning in your experience.

This chapter expanded on the use of active imagination, specifically, the methods of dream-tending, dream councils, and past-life regression. The methods that most challenge your ego, the ones you most want to label as silly or stupid, are the ones that are key to finding answers to those big life questions.

These exercises require trust in ways of knowing that go beyond the rational intellect. My stories were meant to provide examples of how working with my unconscious generated insights that led to concrete changes in my life, changes that brought a new sense of purpose and unleashed a buried creative urge.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

# **Wisdom of the Body**

In this chapter, I talk about the most ignored approach to connecting with the unconscious—the body. I provide two specific exercises to help you relate to your body in a new way. You might feel sillier doing these exercises than you did drawing and doing a dream council, but the more vulnerable you are willing to feel, the more you will be rewarded in the way of important insights.

Lip service has been given to the idea of valuing the body as a source of wisdom and psychological healing, the mind still dominating as far as I can tell. Science confirms that personal memories and trauma are stored in the body. Collective trauma remains in our bodies from the lasting effects of living within a social system that devalues the feminine, women's bodies, and sexuality. This collective trauma shows up as discomfort with the body and even self-loathing, which occurs among men, and people who are seeking to be freed from gender identity.

When natural instincts are denied and repressed, they often find a home in extreme ideas and movements. Sexual violence, human trafficking and oppressive ideas about women's bodies and sexuality are enforced through shaming and validated by patriarchal religious doctrine. The individual women, men, and those beyond binary identity, are seeking to

heal the split between the body and spirit, and they are holding up a mirror to our own inner division.

Meghan Tschanz (<https://www.meghantschanz.com>), after years of working as a missionary with sexually exploited and oppressed women, started a movement—*Reclaiming Feminism for Christianity*. I may have lost hope for Christianity being able to transcend patriarchy, but Meghan’s podcast, *Faith and Feminism*, is a great resource for women and men who need support unlearning and rethinking harmful ideas through a Biblical lens.

Your unconscious is trying to communicate through your body. Erectile dysfunction for example has a psychological component that many people skip over on their way to the pharmacy. In some cases, your body is screaming at you. No one teaches us how to speak the language of the unconscious, much less how to listen to what it is saying through our bodies and sexuality. Allowing the unconscious to express itself through your body can release emotions that desperately want to be expressed. My most significant insights occurred after coming into deeper relationship with my body.

Movement therapist Daria Halprin, author of *The Expressive Body in Life, Art, and Therapy: Working with Movement, Metaphor, and Meaning* (2003), suggests that for real transformation to take place, the body must be considered. A leader in the study of movement and dance, Sondra Fraleigh, in her book, *Moving Consciously: Somatic Transformations Through Dance, Yoga, and Touch* (2015), emphasizes the importance of the body in complementing the mind. When our bodies and minds work together as partners, we have a deeper relationship with the knowledge we have gained.

A huge cry has meaning, moves the Soul, and releases toxins that have accumulated in the body from being so disconnected from our nature. As I related better to my emotions, I grew in my capacity to be a witness (instead of a fixer) as my young adult children learned to process their own emotions and reactions to challenging events in their lives.

They were growing spiritually when they processed an initial grievance as a deeper issue, and the ultimate unleashing of tears could make room for new understanding about themselves. Every time it happens, the whole thing feels like a big sigh, opening them up to new ideas about what to do next. Getting out of the head and into the body feels awkward and vulnerable but only in those states can certain insights occur.

### Try This

#### Elevator Exercise

As I learned more about the field of somatic depth psychology (soma means body) I came across this active imagination exercise. Take an elevator down to a part of my body? As a recovering control freak, I had been working hard to set my mind aside and allow myself to feel like a child again, and I knew that resistance to feeling vulnerable was a clue that it would be a powerful and helpful experience. This exercise will help you tap into the wisdom of your unconscious as it lives in your body.

Find a place where you feel safe feeling vulnerable, maybe do it with a friend if that helps you feel less silly. You can feel silly together and then go have wine or coffee. Begin by relaxing and centering yourself with big inhales and exhales, and then a sigh. Sighing is different than a regular exhale, because it engages more of your body, which results in making room for something new to happen. You will be taking an elevator down to an area of your body. It will take ten minutes, and then you can linger in the experience and journal about it. If you would like me to guide you through the exercise, go to my YouTube Channel at [www.deborahlukovich.com](http://www.deborahlukovich.com). Ready? Close your eyes.

**Entering the elevator.** You may have an idea of where in your body you want the elevator to go, or you may be open to where your imagination directs. I knew right away that my

elevator was going down to the dark basement of my stomach, the part of my body with which I have a love/hate relationship. As you await the elevator notice where you are. Are you in a hotel, an office or other building? Do you need to push the button or is the door already open? After you walk into the elevator, notice its design, the lighting, how many floors there are, how long the doors take to close.

When you get into the elevator, which button do you push? How does the ride feel? Is it one of those old-fashioned elevators that feels bumpy as you slowly move from floor to floor, or does it move so fast your tummy feels like it's on a roller coaster? Does it have mirrors or are the walls made of walnut colored stain? Is the elevator going up or down, what is the temperature, how do you feel in the elevator? Nervous, claustrophobic, excited, calm?

**Explore your body.** When you arrive, how long does it take for the doors to open? As you walk out of the elevator, notice your surroundings. Where are you? Do your surroundings look like how you would imagine the actual inside of your body? Which organs, bones, or blood vessels can you see? Maybe you're in a hotel lobby or hallway, an office building, or high-rise apartment. Now where are you in your body? Your heart, ribs, uterus, brain? What is the lighting like, brightly lit or like a dark cave? Is it warm and humid or cold? What do you see, is there anyone else there? Feel free to ask them questions. Do you feel fear, curiosity, anxiety? Walk around a bit if you feel comfortable. Follow your imagination.

**Return to the elevator.** When you're ready, walk back towards the elevator. Do you need to press the button or is the door already open? When you walk in, does the elevator look the same? How long does it take you to come back? Does the elevator go up or down? Do you feel confused, sad, excited, inspired, angry? When the elevator stops, walk out, relax, and breathe again. Let out a big sigh. Open your eyes when you're ready.

**Document your experience.** Write down, type, and/or draw your experience. Try to capture every detail, especially emotions and feelings. No matter what happened, it's all good. Use the *Associations* method to find initial meaning in your experience.

### Sharing My Insights

When I got into the elevator, it went down like I knew it would, but when the doors opened, I was surprised to find myself in the inside of a volcano. It felt warm and moist, and the lighting was dim. As I walked through dark caverns, I noticed streams of slowly moving red and orange lava at my feet. It felt intense and comforting at the same time, and I wanted to linger, but feeling silly cut my trip short. When I returned, I realized I had been in my womb. I didn't know what to make of it, but I laughed when I wrote, "There's a lot going on down there."

A few days later I decided to draw the experience. I started by drawing me, sitting in a lotus pose, with my eyes closed. I drew the orange, red, and black colors in the form of a river that swirled around me. My imagination then prompted me to draw a snake that started at the root of my spine and ended at the crown of my head. I didn't know the meaning of my drawing, but I felt it had been a significant experience.

Around this time, the man who was my first post-divorce relationship shared that he felt conflicted about having sex outside of marriage. The initial disappointment evolved into embracing new experiences of intimate and sustained arousal without penetration. During a moment of stillness with him, a spontaneous fantasy emerged of his face between my legs, which then turned into a huge snake that I allowed to enter me. The experience of surrender and openness brought intense arousal and connected me to something transcendent. My elevator experience was beginning to be processed, and my drawing hinted at the coming experience of reconciling my

sexuality and spirituality, an awakening of my life force, which in Hinduism is referred to as a Kundalini experience.

Two years later, when I journaled about an eruption of anger and an onslaught of menopausal hot flashes, new meaning exploded in a drawing that I named *Womb on Fire* (Appendix 3). Releasing the energy from my body and allowing it to find expression in another drawing, was what my intellect had needed to write the outline for a workshop I was going to be presenting: *Healing the Collective Wounds that Prevent Deep Connection Between Men and Women*. My mind did not develop the content, rather my mind brought form to the content that had been developed in the cauldron of my symbolic womb.

Sharing my personal experience with this exercise is meant to encourage you to follow my lead trying something that goes against your usual way of gaining new knowledge. You can see that I found more and more meaning over time, and I did not need to interpret the experience, just be open to it. It was as if that experience was a prophecy, and the part of my body with which I had the most difficult relationship ended up being the source of my creative power.

## **Movement**

Have you thought about the permission you do or do not give yourself to take up space in the world? When I was in my twenties, I read an article suggesting that the new size ranges for women's clothes, which now included *size zero*, sent the message that women's value was correlated with taking up less space in the world. I thought about what a woman was really saying when she bragged about being a *size zero*.

Are you aware of how much space you take up in the world? How you position your body around authority figures, in friend groups, or when accompanying your partner to a dinner party? Do you walk with people as equals down the sidewalk, or do you defer to others to take the lead? Do you like to follow, and if yes, why? Do you wrestle with others to be the

first to do something, and if yes, why? During yoga class, is your focus on comparing your poses with others or are you in competition with yourself? Do you linger in each pose, embracing the discomfort, or are you anxious to move on to the next? Do you ever feel like skipping down the sidewalk or doing a cartwheel, and do you go through with it? Do you love exerting yourself in physical activities, building muscle and strength? Have you taken hip hop dance lessons for fun?

## Sharing My Insights

How you move your body reflects your perception of your right to exist in the world. During one of my somatic depth psychology classes, we were asked to move the way our bodies wanted to move as we listened to different types of music. My resistance to the way my body wanted to move during one song intrigued me, and when I gave myself permission to make huge circles with my arms, taking up a lot of space, embarrassment came, and then tears. I was overwhelmed with the realization I had been holding myself back from full expression as a human being. Recently, one of my coaching clients shared her experience of following her body while she was cooking and listening to music and how the experience led her to reflect about needing to establish stronger boundaries with members of her family.

## Try This

**Choose some music.** Are you a fan of the Top 40, Blues, Nu Metal, folk songs? What's your favorite song or genre? Choose one or a mix of songs for this exercise.

**Find a safe space.** You could do this with a friend, but only if that causes you to be more open to the experience. Alone is probably better.

**Allow your body to respond.** Turn on the music and follow your body. Notice when you want to resist and then give

yourself permission to feel silly and vulnerable. Does your body want to lay down or skip around the room? What do your arms want to do, reach down and scoop something up and offer it to God or the Goddess, or reach straight up while you twirl in a circle imagining yourself in a beautiful gown? Do your legs want to march? Your unconscious has an agenda that also wishes to be expressed through your body.

Journal about the experience, and/or draw it. Include as much detail as possible. Use the *Associations* method to find some initial meaning.

## Sharing My Insights

### The Dreaded Pigeon Pose

If you practice yoga, you might be familiar with pigeon pose. It's hard to explain, but it's all about opening those hips, the place where stubborn stress accumulates. For years, I've been perplexed at how easy the pose is for others. After a ten-year break from yoga, I picked it up again when I moved to a beach town, diligently attending class twice per week.

One day as we were settling into pigeon pose, I heard the instructor's words in a way I hadn't previously. "Find your edge," she said. It was a perfect symbol for where I was in my midlife transition. "Let go of resistance," she said. I wondered what I was resisting by avoiding full expression of the pose. What was I afraid of, tearing a muscle? I realized I was hanging on tightly to something, and then I let go, settling into my fullest expression yet of that pose. I felt the same psychological release as from one of my big cries. It was a Soul-making experience.

This chapter encouraged you to value the wisdom that exists in your body. The specific exercises were ones I found helpful in understanding how I was holding myself back. Pay attention to your body and how you try to control it and prevent it from fully expressing who you are or who your Soul is nudging you to become.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

# Personal Shadow—Complexes

Chapter 13 introduced you to the concept of complexes—the deeply ingrained patterns of thinking and behaving that influence how you have been approaching life, and the reflection questions helped you begin to identify your own complexes. This chapter teaches you how to use your complexes to face what is in your personal unconscious, what many call the shadow—the keeper of the key to discovering your Soul's hidden purpose.

Baggage is one metaphor for the things in your shadow you don't want to face or remember. Loved ones you've lost, a broken heart, being bullied, the child version of you that was forced to grow up too fast, anger you feel towards your ex, shame you feel for cheating on your ex, and other more traumatic experiences.

The baggage gets heavier and heavier as more things are stuffed into it, and then one day the zipper breaks, and all your secrets spill onto the floor. The emotion you've been trying to control now erupts like a volcano. "I'm sorry, I don't know what got into me," becomes your new mantra. Maybe you knew it was a mistake on your wedding night, but you couldn't bring yourself to disappoint all those people. Years later, the right look from the right woman was all it took to unleash a buried part of yourself.

There are hidden treasures in your shadow too. The love for theatre you traded in for financial security, or the desire for independence you traded in for the approval that came from living a conventional life, and the job symbolizing peaking in your profession that suddenly causes unbearable anxiety and panic. Your suitcase is filled with a mix of experiences, thoughts, memories, secret desires, and hidden talents. Some of the things in your shadow cause pain because they were negative experiences, and other things are painful because they symbolize the missed opportunities to fully express yourself.

Now there it is, all those things that you were hiding from yourself, heaped in messy piles. You're faced with a choice. How are you going to clean up this mess? It occurs to you that you could walk away and feel relief from not having to carry that stuff around anymore, so you leave it on the floor and start fresh. In another scenario, you try to shove it all back into that broken suitcase, and you keep carrying it around. You can't get away from it, so you turn to something that might help you avoid the pain of facing what is too hard to face, maybe alcohol or sex.

There's a third scenario—sorting through the mess and figuring out what role you played in getting to this moment. The intuition you ignored most of your life is now enticing you with a promise that it will be worth it. Figuring out how you got here will bring rewards in the form of insights and clues that lead you back to your deepest desires.

### **Sharing My Insights**

I didn't think I had a mother wound. Intellectually, I had let my mother off the hook, because she had good reasons for her imperfect parenting. But I had never reclaimed my wounded child self. Then my life started falling apart, and I saw it—how the wound was showing up in my life. My mind tried to fix it with a technique, but it popped up again. I couldn't get away from it.

## **What would you do? What did you do?**

Do you hurriedly shove everything back in that worn out suitcase, maybe use some duct tape to hold it together? Do you start sorting through all the items on the floor, knowing that some of them have a light side too? Those embarrassing moments are what turn into good novels and films, and persevering through all your mistakes has made you pretty good at something after all. As you sort through things, you realize you can look through a different lens. The monster started out as a baby monster. You also start remembering that some of those items are good, like the passion you had for painting as a child before the so-called art teacher corrected your version of a butterfly and turned you into a perfectionist. Or the good memories of your father that were dulled over time because of his alcohol addiction.

In that shadow are also many potential versions of you that never came to fruition. During my midlife unraveling, I remembered that in high school I wanted to study psychology. I was the first in my family to go to college and I couldn't wrap my mind around how seven years of college was possible. The desire went underground because I couldn't see how it could happen. Maybe you're a mom whose children are getting ready to go off to college, and now you're feeling anxious. Your husband doesn't understand why you can't be happy because his income made it possible for you to stay home with the children. Was there a hidden agenda beneath your decision to be a full-time mother? Is it possible you ended up projecting your own potential financial independence onto your husband?

Just as you cannot run from your literal shadow on a sunny day, you can't run away from all the other parts of you hiding out in your unconscious. Your shadow is full of good stuff that you may never get the chance to uncover if you don't turn around and invite it to play with you. You don't have to relive anything you don't want to relive. The goal is to become conscious of the patterns that are underneath your life,

patterns of thinking and behaving that may be undermining your growth now. And if you are searching for a new sense of meaning and fulfillment, the key is in your unconscious.

### Try This

Complexes reveal themselves most during times of stress and in situations that involve conflict, even if the conflict is within. Which complexes did you identify so far, and did you give them any names? Did you find your mother or father complex? What other patterns have influenced the way you approach life? Write about the most emotional events and experiences from your past and how they show up today. Where and in what circumstances are you feeling or acting like a child?

Complexes offer a gold mine of material for you to explore and are at the core of how you relate to the world. Because they were developed in childhood, they are a part of who you are, and you never really get rid of them. The goal is to relate to them, to find compassion for these other parts of you, and to allow them to take you to your inner world. Over time, your complexes will have less influence over you, freeing up energy to develop new ways of looking at and living life.

### Sharing My Insights

There was a time when I would lose my temper if my computer wasn't working. I'm not kidding, I would get so angry, my husband would stand there in wonder, as if he was observing a wild animal attacking its prey. It was bad, and thankfully computers don't have feelings. My husband was the only person who ever saw me that way. Eventually, he would ask me to walk away so he could try to fix the issue. "All I want is..." It felt so unfair. "Why can't I just..." I felt helpless in those moments, not in control of my life. What was the complex, where was this anger coming from, and why did it get

unleashed when it did? I didn't know it at the time, but there was so much old anger that had never been allowed to be expressed. Instead, it had been able to hide in my shadow for many years, until the subtle changes in my marriage became the crack through which it leaked.

Repressing anger was what I had learned in childhood, along with adapting to situations that required me to compromise my needs and desires. Adapting, controlling, and repressing were not going to work anymore, but they were entrenched patterns. It would be some time before I dealt with what was brewing in my marriage, and eventually I began to acknowledge and express the old anger, which led to more clarity about decisions I needed to make.

### Try This

Go deeper into one of your complexes, by finding more ways in which a behavior you developed in childhood is now causing you problems or holding you back in some way. I knew a woman who seemed to always end up in jobs where her boss, who was a woman, made her life miserable. It's true that eighty-five percent of people leave their jobs because of their boss, but there was something deeper going on. The woman preferred a boss who worked to bring out her best, who would take the time to acknowledge what she did well and offer constructive critiques on areas that needed development. Who wouldn't want that? Her first boss fit the bill, and he happened to be a man.

Unfortunately, her job was eliminated during a recession, and as she spent a few years here and there in other jobs, she felt worse and worse about her bosses, who all happened to be women. Why did the woman keep ending up in this situation? What was she supposed to be learning? This woman had a clear pattern in how she responded to these situations. She focused on adapting to please her boss, and when that didn't work, she would voice her needs, and when

that didn't work, she would suffer through until she couldn't anymore, or until that job was eliminated.

I share this to help you go deeper into your own patterns of how you respond to situations in life. Sometimes the pattern is hidden behind your misinterpretation of the event. Did you find something interesting? Finding your pattern—the one that holds you back—feels liberating eventually. You realize there is a new choice to be made, one you never considered before, one that can bring a new result.

### Sharing My Insights

Before I acquired the framework of depth psychology, I experienced a moment when something from my unconscious suddenly became conscious. *He is my mother!* I said to myself after ending a phone call with a client I had nicknamed Napoleon because he thought he knew everything. This client didn't think much of women in general and rarely accepted my advice without a fight. I had had many moments like this with this man, but something finally broke open inside me, and that insight led to another insight. I realized that I had been avoiding answering the phone if I did not know who was calling, and if I knew the call was from a client, a feeling of anxiety swept over me because I feared I had done something wrong. My childhood fear of disappointing my mother had been unleashed into my adult life. Had it always been there, or was there purpose in it emerging now?

Facing parts of us we do not like or cannot embrace is difficult. It's easier to see them in others, especially the parts we want to ignore. For example, if you rage against selfish people (a complex), shining a light onto your own selfishness may cause extreme self-judgment, causing you to repress a healthy selfishness even more. In the end, you only strengthen your projection onto other people of your own hidden selfishness (projection). There are times to be selfish, and the task is to come into a healthy relationship with your selfishness.

## Sharing My Insights

Uncovering my own passive-aggressive tendencies was painful. I didn't want to see it—that part of me. Looking back, it all started with a dramatic and personal experience with someone who was objectively passive-aggressive. The dynamic was so stressful I got a cold sore on my lip. Then I began to recognize my husband's passive-aggressive tendency in certain types of conversations. My pleas for understanding and request for help had always been met with comments like, "Well, I'm helping," a way of putting it back on me. I became aware that this dynamic had conspired to keep me in the dysfunctional relationship.

My growing annoyance with passive-aggressive behavior indicated there was something important being mirrored back to me. The more I became aware of passive-aggressive behavior, and the more stress it caused, the more I resisted the idea that I could be guilty of this behavior (a projection). Self-judgment and then shame came, but eventually I realized that my inner passive-aggressive self was exactly what I needed to survive that time in my life. It was awful at first, but after I accepted this part of me and realized it was needed sometimes, I magically never came across a passive-aggressive person again.

Exploring complexes brings a sense of relief, because you begin to understand why certain things have happened and how you got to the place you stand now. When you wrap your arms around your inner child and begin to provide for her/him/them what your parents could not or would not, you release your imperfect parents from the standards they could never have met. New compassion for them and for yourself leads to releasing the other people in your life—a spouse, best friend, or boss for example—who you have been holding responsible for meeting those needs. You're now a healthier and more pleasant person.

This chapter taught you how to use your complexes to face what is in your personal unconscious. The shame that sometimes immediately follows an insight eventually leads to liberation, and the truth about yourself does set you free. Accepting and coming to terms with your shadow side creates an opening to develop a new attitude about life—finding meaning where there was none and making sense of what once was senseless.

## CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

# Personal Shadow—Projection

Chapter 14 introduced you to the concept of projection—making others responsible for expressing parts of you that you’re not able to acknowledge or accept. This chapter delves into the projection that is beneath the surface of romantic relationships and relationships with people for whom you feel both admiration and disdain.

Relationships with others is how people come to know themselves as separate individuals. Projection is sneaky. It takes a high degree of awareness to realize that the reason you think your now sober brother-in-law is boring is because part of you knows you have a drinking problem, and you fear you will be boring if you stop drinking.

Projection happens for example when we admire a trait in someone else, sometimes putting that person on a pedestal. The admiration is a mirror to a trait within yourself that you may not see, or have the confidence to use, or been told you weren’t supposed to express. A husband may project his feminine onto his wife, idealizing her nurturing capacity, in an unconscious effort to avoid his own feminine nature. The problem with this is that when his wife does not act in a way that conforms with his ideal version of the feminine, he might become angry with her for not meeting his unconscious expectations.

The masculine, which is part of everyone's psyche, refers to that more linear and goal-oriented approach to relating to the world. The masculine likes clarity and simple answers. When the masculine is developed to the exclusion of the feminine, the individual becomes rigid and threatened by people and ideas that do not conform to their personal beliefs.

The feminine, which is also part of everyone's psyche, refers to the capacity to exist in the middle, between this or that, appreciates paradox, and is more relationship oriented. Women who do not develop their masculine nature sometimes force their husbands to carry it for them. These women often do not have their own ideas or opinions. There are other women who have developed their masculine in a way that has made it difficult for them to embrace their feminine.

### **Falling in Love**

Sexual attraction is full of projection and new romances offer opportunities for deep transformation. In my first post-divorce relationship, it was my male partner's sense of feminine that unleashed my own. Being comfortable with your feminine requires the capacity to be awkward and vulnerable, two traits that got a workout during my relationship. This is how opposites work. We are attracted to people who represent pieces of us that wish to come out and play.

We project an awful lot onto that *magical one*. The college-aged women who project their financial independence onto men, might wonder why their husbands might be intrigued by professional women. Men who project onto women everything having to do with family, might wonder why their wives no longer want to have sex with them.

Each romance is an opportunity for growth. I do not believe there is necessarily such a thing as *the one*, and maybe it's growth that should be prioritized over longevity, or could it be that focusing on spiritual and psychological growth increases the chances of longevity? The exception seems to

prove the rule that one person and one relationship cannot possibly meet the psychological and spiritual needs of a person. Why do we demand it be so? There are those rare couples whose relationship allows for mutual growth, and in all cases, relationships act as life courses for spiritual and psychological growth no matter how long they last.

### Try This

Have you ever been so swept up in a new romance you found yourself doing things that you previously judged as wrong? You double checked with your mind to confirm that these new desires were not wrong, but you had been so closed off from certain parts of yourself for so long, expressing them challenged your old assumptions about what was right and wrong. This is where you need to call on your own higher sense of morality and truth. What once felt wrong suddenly could be right.

The process of getting there requires a partnership between your body, mind, and soul, a back and forth, push and pull. A new desire is communicated by your Soul through your body. Whoosh! It sometimes feels like. Your ego automatically judges it as wrong because that's what you've been indoctrinated to believe. Your mind does a little critical thinking, and you come to a decision to try out this new desire, but you include some caveats. You begin to relate to the new desire, and you won't get it perfect right away, but over time, you will settle into a more balanced relationship with it. Be kind to yourself in the process. It is a brave person who sets out on the journey to discover truth for themselves.

Journal about your romantic experiences. Start with the very first time you felt that twinge of attraction. Describe the moments of attraction in as much detail as possible. What was your age, where were you, what did you feel, which traits attracted you most? Were you attracted to what they had achieved in life or their family background? What did you

admire about them? Keep writing, especially about the ones that didn't turn out. Are there traits that became irritations? What pattern or theme can you find that connects the experiences?

### **Sharing My Insights**

One day I journaled about every attraction I had ever experienced. Twelve pages—single spaced. My first attraction was in fifth grade—to a boy named Darren. A mere three feet separated Darren's body from mine as our desks faced each other. I was an insecure and self-conscious girl and looking up at him caused me to feel completely naked. I have a memory of the two of us sneaking into the supply room. Nothing happened, but the harsh scolding was the beginning of being trained to feel shame for all sorts of things. That school year was my first and last year at a new Catholic elementary school. My next attraction was to the boy in seventh grade I spoke about earlier.

And on I went. Going back and reading what I had written made me realize that in these moments of deep attraction, I was connecting with something transcendent. The moment of connection with another human being acted as a vessel for the Divine to reach me. I now understand that soulmates are not so much about being perfect partners but about making soul, finding truth which sometimes requires you to challenge convention.

### **Try This**

#### **Did You Marry Your Mother or Father?**

Journal about how a version of your parents' relationship might exist below the surface of your own marriage or relationship. Does that make you cringe? When did you realize you were like your mother or father, or their opposite? Many people don't become aware of this dynamic

until after divorce. Your parents were your first model for romantic relationship. Journal about what you think might have been the hidden purpose of your marriage and what you have been projecting onto your partner.

Journal about the roles you and your partner tend to play in the relationship, for example who disciplines the children? Once it was clear my marriage was ending, my unconscious, unleashed all the things I had sought to be protected from during my marriage—the wounds related to my sexuality and spirituality. My safety net was gone!

### Try This

#### People You Admire Who Also Make You Cringe

Do you hate your boss and respect her too? The trait that you perceive to be negative might be the one you need to develop. Can your mother or father still make you feel like a scolded child, but you also respect their authority? Maybe you need to strengthen your own authoritative voice. Is your mind a constant tennis match between two different parts of your personality? Do you feel both disgust and admiration for someone you know, a celebrity or fictional film character? If you want to know more about yourself, explore your relationships, good, bad, past, and present, including those with people whom you've never met in person.

Don't forget about the relationship with your inner being or Self. For example, I have always been an opinionated person, but I cringe at the memories of me having debates back in my twenties, with people who demonized poor women with children as *welfare queens*. Over the years, I've toned myself down, and I've learned every possible communication technique there is for influencing others to see injustice in places where it is obvious to me. Because people do not always see what I see, anger at what I perceive to be their ignorance can quickly turn to self-judgment for being too opinionated.

Funny for a self-proclaimed rebel. In these instances, I remind myself that my opinions are founded in the basic human right to dignity. What trait are you proud of and at the same time feel discomfort using?

This chapter delved into the projection that is beneath the surface of romantic relationships and those people for whom you feel both admiration and disdain. Which traits are hiding in your unconscious—traits that are begging to come out and play?

## CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

# The Archetype Behind Your Complex

This chapter digs into the psychological instincts at the core of your personal complexes. In Chapter 3, you were introduced to the notion of archetypes as psychological instincts deeply ingrained in the human experience, which are universal and evolve over time. These include how we think about mother and father, the transcendent force some call God, how we experience grief or falling in love, the need for redemption, the experience of overcoming (hero's journey), and the desire for one's life to have meaning and purpose. Ideas about the masculine and feminine are breaking down, and as more and more individuals have experiences that do not match conventional norms, new ideas, beliefs, and expressions of the core archetypes are emerging.

What does this have to do with your complexes? The patterns of thinking and behaving that were key to surviving childhood but aren't working anymore can be looked at as a wound. Many times, the wound originated in the generations before you, and your life is an opportunity to help heal the wound.

I gained insight today about the wounds below the surface of one man's mission to make transgender people the butt of his jokes. When asked what he was like as a child, he smiled and said, "I was so happy that I skipped down the

sidewalk,” and then he became somber as he explained how he was put in his place by the neighborhood bullies who shamed him. His story includes more trauma, but to deal with it he credits his bullies explaining, “They made me grow up.” He had never made the connection between his experience of being bullied for skipping and his ridicule of “men who want to walk down the sidewalk in a dress.”

Why would you want to go the extra mile? You could stop and enjoy life as a healthier more pleasant person after having explored your personal complexes but going beyond the personal opens you up to a whole other world that brings an even deeper sense of meaning and purpose. If you can develop the humility needed to become open to how certain archetypal energies are seeking expression through your life, you can look at your personal complexes and wounds as a doorway to the archetypal forces that wish to mix with your human experience to manifest in a new way—to contribute to the evolution of human consciousness.

### **Sharing My Insights**

Exploring my mother complex released me from my projection onto her of the archetype of the mother—the source of feeling loved unconditionally. Once I began tending to that inner child part of me, I found something deeper, and digging into my ancestry helped me see that my wound was generational, related to the relations between men and women. That led to finding my Sex and God wounds, and I started to get excited that my personal wounds were part of something bigger.

My unique experience was playing a role in how the universal (archetypal) instincts of sexuality and spirituality wanted to evolve, and those instincts (archetypal energies) were seeking new expression through my personal life. I didn’t know it at the time but writing about my experience is part of unleashing new ideas into the collective. Exploring my wounds

within the larger context of human experience now feels like an adventure, and it also feels like a responsibility.

### **Ready to Get Swept Up?**

Getting swept up in archetypal energy takes your breath away, and the psychological growth that can occur during such an experience may reflect something new emerging from the collective unconscious. The 1980s was a time of explosions of new visions of what it meant to be a woman. From the film *Thelma and Louise* (Scott & Gitlin, 1991) to the real-life stories of violence against women on the newly launched cable network *Lifetime*, to record numbers of women holding political office, and the resulting Violence Against Women Act, something exploded from what was beneath the surface of conventional society.

The unleashed new perspective resulted from momentum caused by increasing numbers of women and men who became vessels through which the archetypal energies of the feminine and masculine mixed. Eventually, there were enough new individual manifestations to coalesce into larger expansive cultural movements and attitudes about the masculine and feminine, as well as about men and women.

It is not always a positive experience, especially for those who do not have the capacity for self-reflection. Some can unwittingly become vessels for destructive expressions of archetypal energy.

### **An Archetypal Approach**

James Hillman, the father of archetypal psychology, prioritizes Soul-making over treatment for those things we refer to as mental health issues. Hillman offers the Greek myths as a framework for relating to archetypal energies, because Western thought grew out of ancient Greek society. The Greek gods and goddesses can serve as vehicles for personifying the

personalities within our psyche, which show themselves through intense emotions and symptoms like anxiety and depression. Beware though, I find the myths sometimes to be trapped in a limiting patriarchal lens, and other world myths could work better depending on your ancestry. For me, superhero films feel like updated Greek and Roman Myths.

Hillman's framework is outlined in his book *Re-visioning Psychology* (1992), and includes four components: (1) personifying, (2) pathologizing or falling apart, (3) psychologizing or seeing through, and (4) Soul-making. I describe them in my own words and through the lens of my personal experience with this approach.

## **Personifying**

We can relate powerful instincts to various gods and goddesses to better relate to them and respect their power. Think about times you might have been taken over by Ares, the ancient Greek God of War. Maybe you just had a brutal fight with a loved one and the next day you feel shame. The shame is never released, and it evolves into guilt, and then all that guilt gets unleashed during an explosive conflict. To avoid future conflict, you begin prioritizing someone else's needs over your own—until you can't anymore. *Personifying* your eruption of anger as a visit from Ares allows you to detach from it enough to explore a parental complex that may be responsible for a pattern of dealing with situations where you are not in control.

## **Pathologizing or Falling Apart**

Hillman uses the term *pathologizing* to describe the Soul's ability to create suffering and to imagine what the Soul is trying to communicate through illness or anxiety for example. There are so many terms used to describe behaviors and attributes that simply reflect the diversity and variety of human experience. What if our disorders, illnesses, anxiety,

obsessions, aches, and pains are offering us opportunities to come into deeper relationship with our Soul and with others? None of this is to say that a medical model might not also be appropriate or necessary, rather the point is to realize that there is something deeper going on beneath our anxiety and relating to it may result in some Soul making.

### **Psychologizing or Seeing Through**

In Chapter 3, you learned that the root of psychology is Soul, and Hillman uses the term *psychologizing* to describe Soul-making or finding the deeper meaning of an experience. Those who do not spend time self-reflecting are susceptible to the ideas of others, no matter how crazy. Imagining your addiction as a love affair with Captain Morgan for example might unleash a new insight about the story you've been telling yourself and leading to the discovery of which core human instinct is starving for attention.

What if the epidemic of alcohol addiction was explored through a collective lens? What is it about the way we live that is driving so many of us to drink too much? What if making the individual carry all the blame and shame is an unconscious way of distracting us from challenging the larger forces that influence our lives? What if choosing to live this way is choosing oppression?

### **Soul-making**

Our experiences are unique manifestations of old stories. Falling in love for example is an archetypal experience that seeks new expression over and over through more and more people. Over time, new manifestations coalesce and unleash new attitudes and perspectives about the universal experience of falling in love. You may find your current romantic experience within a mythic story, and this may help you deal with a difficulty. What lesson has already been learned

by others? Your unique expression of old stories leads to your personal philosophy about the meaning of your life. This is *Soul-making*. Our experiences act as vessels in which to wrestle with these swirling forces. Dreaming about killing a coworker does not mean literally needing to kill a coworker or that you want to kill a coworker. Your task is to find the metaphor—what the coworker symbolizes in your waking life that might need to be killed to make room for something new. The mythic stories can provide guidance.

Hillman's approach to psychology may click with you immediately or it might go right over your head. I have found that some people have a natural mythic sensibility and others do not—like me. Weaving in my experiences is meant help you apply the framework to your personal situation.

## **Which Archetypes Are Seeking Expression Through You?**

As you get closer to the core of your personal complex, you may find yourself swept up in archetypal energies. This is a perfect opportunity to explore which Greek god or goddess might be seeking expression through your life experience. Has Dionysus descended upon you when you were trying to hold yourself together during a time of uncertainty? This Greek god represents fruitfulness, vegetation, wine, and ecstasy. On more than one occasion, during my midlife reconstruction, one extra glass of wine or a shot of Fireball would lead to the desire to kiss a stranger or put on a pair of sunglasses in a bar and dance for hours. Embarrassment would come the next day and then forgiveness for my harmless expression of pent-up desire.

In this section, I touch on some of the Greek gods and goddesses that were helpful in exploring the forces in which I found myself swept up. I mentioned before that many of these myths have been trapped in the masculine, but they are useful ways to explore the forces that can overtake us from time to

time. The Greek Goddess Aphrodite isn't about women, rather she embodies the focus on relationship that exists in all human beings. The Greek Goddess Artemis is a great example of what a healthy balance of the masculine and feminine might look like. The Myth of the Sacred Prostitute reflects the experience of the union of sexuality and spirituality—symbolically (the role of the prostitute can be played by the feminine within a man). I weave in my experiences of relating to these mythic characters and stories to help you find your own.

Personifying intense emotional experiences as characters provides distance between you and your experience. Imagining that this part of you as someone else helps you to relate to the unfamiliar part of you that has escaped your unconscious. Your experience is a combination of something universal that is shaped by your unique experience of being human. Ultimately, your experience will add meaning to your life and contribute to humanity's psychic DNA.

### Try This

#### **The Greek God Hermes**

Recognizing the presence of Hermes, the Greek god considered to be a guide of Souls, started to become a game with me. Ironies, obsessions, synchronicities, misplaced objects, slips of the tongue became clues to a mystery that needed to be solved. Sometimes I won and I would laugh out loud. Other days I cried or exploded with frustration over my inability to find the meaning in an event, like the time I fell down the steps in my house in the middle of the night—two weeks in a row.

Hermes is a disrupter, and he is always present during times of transition, as Murray Stein (1983) says. He orchestrates events that feel like practical jokes to trick the ego into loosening its grip. He tricks you into accepting the

invitation to a transformative experience that requires intense vulnerability.

Journal about times you felt a trick had been played on you. It could be something as benign as searching for your sunglasses only to find them on your head, driving around in circles because your GPS isn't working, getting fired from your job after six months of complaining, or being surprised by an unexpected attraction. Hermes is also a messenger and protector. Journal about times you felt like you decoded what once felt confusing, when you happened to notice birds—known as messengers of the gods—over the course of a week, or when you couldn't explain why some force magically saved you from going through that red light.

Reflect about what was going on in your life when these things happened. How did you respond to the little nudges that made you feel like you were the butt of a joke or that someone up above had it out for you? Journal about what you think your unconscious was trying to get you to do or look at differently. What happened next in your life?

Hindsight is a great way to practice, and analyzing past experiences helps strengthen your capacity to find meaning in future events. Being alert to the presence of Soul lessens your resistance to what it wants from you. Next time you lose your keys, you can laugh and wonder what you're supposed to be doing instead of stressing out.

### Try This

#### **The Greek Goddess Aphrodite**

Journal about times you felt swept up in love and relationship. It doesn't need to be romantic. The Disney film *Frozen* (Buck & Lee, 2013) is so successful because it transcends the conventional notion of love. In the film, it is the love between two sisters that saves the day. Some mothers feel sexually aroused when they breastfeed. This doesn't have to do

with sex, but rather intense love and connection. I have felt physically aroused by intellectual ideas many times.

Being swept up by archetypal energy feels like losing control of your body. I had decided to take a break after six months of online dating following my divorce. Other than a random desire for a cute guy to walk up to me on the beach, my head was in my book as I sat comfortably on a beach chair one day, working on a paper for class. It was the intuitive sense of being watched that caused me to look up and wonder if the cute man was looking at me. I quickly looked down, feeling both excited and exposed. It became a game of peek-a-boo, and I felt silly each time I looked up to see if he was still looking at me. The intensity of the energy that penetrated my body was striking. Let it go, I told myself and went back my book and paper. I inwardly laughed at my over-active imagination.

After a few minutes, I paused, and my eyes looked up from my book enough to gaze at the sand just inches beyond the edge of my lounge chair. There he was! The voice in my body shouted, "Lay me down and kiss me!" As we conversed, the attractive younger man took a seat next to me. My heart beat hard and fast, and I gasped inward when his hand accidentally touched my calf and his pointing finger, ever so slightly touched my chest as he was making a point. I felt intellectually and sexually aroused, and I felt a deep connection with who this man was underneath his charismatic persona. Kiss me please! my body demanded again.

For two hours, I was swept up in a dramatic play, as if a bolt of lightning had been absorbed by my body. There was no choice involved, the Greek Goddess of Love and Beauty herself, Aphrodite had jumped into my body, and she knew what she wanted. I had no choice but to accept the invitation to what became a transformative relationship that led to reconciling my sexuality and spirituality.

Continue journaling about experiences of being swept up by the goddess of love and beauty. She is not only present in connection between people, but also in those eternal moments

of communion with a beautiful sunrise or sunset and walking in solitude through the woods. She is there when you feel aroused by the idea of social justice for all and during times of connection with the Divine. What are you falling in love with today?

### **The Greek Goddess Artemis**

Artemis my favorite of all the Greek gods and goddesses because she embodies a balance of masculine and feminine traits. Jean Shinoda, author of *Goddesses in Everywoman: Powerful Archetypes in Women's Lives* (1984/2014), describes Artemis as the Greek Goddess of the Hunt and of the Moon, Competitor and Sister, and suggests that women (and men) who have a strong sense of Artemis energy are focused and usually identify with, or may be an advocate for, feminist (social justice) issues.

These women (and men) also have sisterly and brotherly relationships with women and men. Artemis is relationship oriented in an unselfish way, lessening the suffering of women in labor, rescuing her mother and other women from rape (and victims of sexual trafficking), protecting pre-adolescent girls, and even protecting the honor of the feminine.

The story of Actaeon, the hunter who offended Artemis by looking at her naked body without permission, is interesting to me because she does not kill him directly, instead she turns him into what his own hunting dogs would attack as prey. In contrast to interpretation of religious doctrine that leads to blaming women for men's sexual transgressions (and even being raped), in this story Actaeon is responsible for and suffers the consequence of his lack of respect for Artemis's sexual nature.

Artemis is independent but she falls in love with Orion, and I find it interesting that Bolen blames Artemis's overly competitive nature for Orion's accidental death, when in fact it

was her brother's deceit that tricked her into killing the man, which she related to as friend and lover. For me, this event reflects the threat that women's friendship and bonding with men represents to patriarchal systems. In my opinion, Artemis's healthy competitive spirit facilitated a deeper connection with Orion.

The most distinguishing feature of Artemis is that she is a virgin in the sense that she does not require marriage or a man to be fulfilled or whole. She is independent and a protector of women, especially young women who still have that feisty energy, and her female nymphs run free and unhampered by the conventions of society. All these attributes have both a light and dark side, and I can see how Aphrodite complements Artemis to ensure a woman's (or man's) sense of independence does not prevent intimate connection.

### Try This

Journal about your inner Artemis no matter your gender or nongender. How would you describe your balance of masculine and feminine energies? Did your parents steer you in one direction or another? Did your father work hard to prepare you for financial independence, and/or did your mother project onto you her desire to be the princess saved by the prince?

Are you one of those rare ten percent of women (or men or nongendered people) who have the capacity to adapt to situations by calling on your masculine or feminine when one or the other would be more useful? How would you describe your friendships with those of the opposite gender, or those who are beyond gender? How did those friendships change when you or your friend got married?

## Sharing My Insights

### The Archetype of the Sacred Prostitute

There not only was a time when the feminine was honored in the form of the goddess, there was a time when the sexual nature of the feminine was honored too. In their book *The Sacred Prostitute: Eternal Aspects of the Feminine* (Qualls-Corbett, 1988), the authors ask and try to answer an important question having to do with the impact on culture of the shift from reverence for women's sexuality to the denigration and exploitation of women's sexuality in modern society.

The Myth of the Sacred Prostitute captured my attention because it helped explain my need to reconcile sexuality and spirituality. I felt validated and empowered by the knowledge that women's bodies had at one time been seen as a bridge to the Divine, and that women were revered as the initiators of the sexual ritual, which was to ensure the presence of love as a creative and unifying force in human experience.

There is much discussion about the need to unite mind, body, and Soul, but the split between spirituality and sexuality is a stubborn one in a society where masculine values still dominate, and where many wish to control women's sexuality and bodies. If I had honored my own natural sexuality as a young adult, I might not have felt so detached from the Divine and the deepest parts of me when I reached midlife.

Calling on sexuality and spirituality as partners inspires a sense of responsibility to something that transcends our physical lives. More and more women are intuiting the rightness of sexual experiences, but without an understanding of the archetypal forces driving the increased desire and sexual activity, sex plays out as quantity, technique, and temporary physical release. Exploring sexuality and spirituality as partners and inviting in a transcendent presence to help with meaning making, leads to higher levels of ecstasy and deeper

connection with yourself and the transcendent. There is a higher purpose to sexual pleasure.

### Try This

#### The Wild Woman Archetype

In *Tracking the Wild Woman Archetype* (2018), depth psychotherapist Stacey Shelby, asks “How can a woman live within the culture and not be captured by it?” The wild and instinctual animal is a part of a woman’s psyche, beyond the stereotype of mamma bear protecting her young. Sometimes, only in midlife does a woman become conscious of this part of herself. She finally feels safe declaring to the world, “I don’t care what people think anymore. Fuck them!” Maybe some men feel this way too, exhausted from years of being ranked. Up until then, women often detach from their natural state to conform to society’s expectations. Some of us feel anger at the discovery that our natural wolf-like nature has been domesticated like that of a dog, and some women even plunge into depression.

Have you found your undomesticated side? I don’t think this should be limited to women. Frankly, we do not know what the natural wild state of men is either, because we’ve been indoctrinated to believe certain things. What does wild and natural even mean? Journal about what you believe your inner wild nature means and feels like—especially if you’re a man. Just as women have been over-domesticated, men’s psyches have been beat into submission in another way. My guess is that the naturally wild man does not seek to have dominion over women.

### Try This

Try applying the four components of Hillman’s approach to your life and journal about what myth or mythic character might be seeking expression through your life

experience. Have you been swept up in a love affair, or does your love life resemble a mythic story? Taylor Swift's music expresses an archetype related to a certain experience of love. She is forever single—forever falling in love. An archetypal energy surely has found expression through her, and she does it well.

Finding the myth is a challenge for me, but I can usually find a superhero or other character from a film or Netflix series that helps me find meaning in my experience. How is your life an expression of a larger mythic story, and have you found a film that feels like a mirror of this phase of your life? Does it bring to life the mythic hero's journey, and what inner dragons did you have to slay to find the treasure of insight that you now need to share with others? What myth are you living?

This chapter delved into the core psychological instincts (archetypes) that are at the root of personal complexes. The patterns of thinking and behaving that were key to surviving childhood but aren't working anymore can be looked at as wounds. Exploring them can bring you into contact with the deeper universal forces that are seeking expression through your unique experience of being human.

Touching this realm inspires a new sense of meaning and purpose for your life. You can read my blog posts about the first two workshops I presented about my research at [www.deborahlukovich.com](http://www.deborahlukovich.com). The first is titled *Men Are Not the Enemy: Healing the Collective Wounds that Prevent Deep Connection Between Men and Women*. The second one is titled *Sex, God & Transcending Patriarchy*.

## CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

# What Movie Are You Living?

In this chapter, we explore how your Soul uses the images in movies, and TV shows to get your attention, and that you can use the same methods to explore them as you do other images.

Have you ever gone back to the theater to see the same movie multiple times? Is there a TV series that you've watched over and over? In my mid-forties, I watched all 178 episodes of the original *Charmed* series produced by Aaron Spelling—six times. I cried at the end every time, but I didn't know why. Today, as I linger in the memory of the last scene, my tears make sense. The seventy-five-year-old version of Piper and her gray-haired husband Leo ascend the steps in the family home.

Piper had played the role of matriarch in the trio of sisters, and Leo was an angel who gave up his transcendent powers to be in a relationship with a human. Through their eyes, you take in the wall of photos that track the years and two new generations since the three sisters became the *Charmed Ones*. I suspect my tears reflected a semi-conscious awareness that something other than this TV show would be coming to an end—my marriage and the way I had been existing in the world.

## Jungian Film Theory

Jung didn't say much about film, but Research Professor of Media Analysis and Jungian analyst Luke Hockley saw his theories as useful in exploring the meaning of film from both an individual and collective perspective. I found it interesting that the moving picture was invented alongside the emergence of the field of psychology. Could it be that the desire to see life mirrored on the movie screen reflected an unconscious need for making sense of modern life?

There were two concepts that helped me explore my film viewing experiences. The first was Jung's notion that there was so much more communication going on between you and another person—or experience—than you consciously knew. It's like four different conversations happening at the same time, the **first** conversation at the conscious level, where two people believe they know what they intend to communicate and how they intend to respond. Your unconscious is also receiving messages from the other person's conscious and unconscious and vice versa. The **ego interprets** what it believes to be **unconscious messages** from the other person, but like an iceberg, most of the conversation is happening at an **unconscious level**—between the **unconscious of both parties**. Neither person is aware of what is going on at that level.

The second concept was Luke Hockley's idea of the **third image**, which you can read more about in *Jung & film II: The Return: Further Post-Jungian Takes on the Moving Image* (2011). Think of the third image as meaning that is created in the space between you and the film screen, your TV, laptop, the radio, or the stage on which a performance is taking place. This meaning may have little to do with what you consciously think the story is about or what the director intends. This space is a playground where various contents from your unconscious react with the images, and an effect is produced—an insight, a new question, an emotion, or new meaning. In this

psychological space, you may feel partially awake and partially in a dream world where your ego has loosened enough to receive something unexpected.

### **Sharing My Insights**

The first film that swept me up after I began studying depth psychology was a little-known film that had not been released in theatres, only on Netflix. As I repeatedly watched *In Your Eyes* (Hill, 2014), categorized as a paranormal romance, I wondered whether the man and woman in the film—their characters were strong stereotypes of feminine and masculine—represented the inner war between my own masculine and feminine.

It was unclear to me whether they were indeed separate people in the film, or whether one character represented the missing piece of the other. I wondered whether this was what the director had intended, and my unconscious was stirred up for weeks as I excitedly journaled to make sense of the experience.

### **Try This**

#### **Looking Back to Make Sense of Now**

Journal about a film or TV show that had a dramatic effect on you? What was the genre or the story arc, which characters moved you most, and was there a character that mirrored a part of you that was desperate for attention? What emotions were triggered, did you talk about the movie with others, and was your experience of the film different from theirs, and in what ways? What was going on in your life at the time, and what do you think the experience was asking of you? Did the experience lead to an insight about your life? If not then, how about now?

During the first part of my life, I was somewhat conscious of why I was drawn to certain films and types of films. However, without a framework for finding deeper meaning about the purpose of my connection to these films, I was unable to find the deeper insights that could have been helpful as I attempted to grow and develop psychologically, spiritually, and professionally. Many of the films that significantly influenced me happened to be among those selected by United States Library of Congress for preservation in the National Film Registry for being culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant.

### **Sharing My Insights**

#### **Women Can Kick Alien Ass Too!**

The film *Alien* (Scott, 1979) was the first I remember seeing that unleashed a dramatic emotional response from me. It was the first science fiction film that featured a female as the hero who battled the evil aliens as violently as any male could. I mistakenly gave credit to the masculine, rather than realizing the feminine has her own violent nature.

In the sequel *Aliens* (Cameron, 1986), the character Newt was added, a little girl that was the sole survivor at the scene of alien destruction. She is found hiding in a small space, having survived by learning to avoid the alien as she scurried around foraging for food. Newt was a symbol for the barely surviving and forgotten feminine. But she did survive, and she was saved from death by Ripley—the kicker of alien ass—who refused to leave her behind.

These films reflected attempts to process the changing notions of feminine and masculine, and the sequels offered an interesting twist. We find out that the alien is a queen mother, and her sole purpose is laying eggs. Her womb is in the darkest area of the abandoned site, and she uses humans as temporary hosts, each forcibly impregnated with the potential alien baby,

which will violently burst out of the human's chest, killing the host. Ripley rescues Newt before she becomes a host, and with Newt perched on one hip and flame thrower on the other, Ripley sets fire to hundreds of eggs—a giant womb on fire. She has now made an enemy of the queen alien, and eventually Ripley falls victim and becomes a host. She escapes and ultimately sacrifices herself to prevent the alien from being born. My eyes were wide as I watched Ripley fall backwards, in slow motion, into a burning inferno as she desperately held the last baby alien violently bursting from her chest—a chance at redemption for humanity.

### **Try This**

Journal about what film or TV show you remember being the first that had a dramatic impact on you? *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Harry Potter*, *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*, *The Truman Show*, *Fight Club*, *Gladiator*, *Alien*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Happy Days*, *All in the Family*, *Cagney & Lacey*, *Black Panther*? At this younger point in your life, how do you think these movies contributed to your attitude about yourself, others, and the world? Try the *Associations* method to explore what emerges from your unconscious, just like you would a dream, symbol, or memory.

### **Sharing My Insights**

### **Choosing Death Over Oppression**

The film *Thelma and Louise* (Scott & Gitlin, 1991) reflected the brewing rage that was being unleashed from the collective unconscious of women. The audacity of women to fight back and choose death over succumbing to a system stacked against them visibly threatened the status quo. Male critics revealed their hidden fear of the vengeful feminine through their harsh critiques.

In the film, two women friends decide to take a spontaneous trip, and the cynical and independent Louise, played by Susan Sarandon, is just what Thelma, played by Geena Davis, needed to break free from the grips of her emotionally abusive husband. A harmless expression of rebelliousness turns serious when Louise finds herself in a no-win situation and kills a man who attempts to rape Thelma after having a little fun at a bar.

They now find themselves on the run, and they come to terms with the reality that they are not likely to be believed that their actions were in self-defense. Along the way, the two women become empowered as they take a stand for self-determination. The scene of a terror-stricken semi-truck driver fleeing the scene after the two women blew up his truck was sending a message to patriarchy, the movie reflecting an unconscious need to release this rage into consciousness.

The detective, played by Harvey Keitel, symbolized the small number of men that sympathized with women's plight at the time. I felt one with the millions of women who joined me in cheering as Thelma and Louise drove off the cliff—choosing death over oppression.

This eruption of anger on the screen coincided with the launching of the independent cable network *Lifetime*, which targeted women, and for a decade raised the consciousness of women and men about violence against women. At this time, violence within a marriage was considered a domestic and private affair, and it was not a coincidence that these images of violence and rage fueled the eventual criminalization of marital rape in all fifty states by 1993.

### Try This

Can you think of another film or TV show that impacted you strongly? Reflect and journal about the genre, story arc, and the character with which you most identified. Was there something about this character that made you wish your life

was different? Did you begin to regret some decisions? Did you fall out of love with your spouse, or did you give up on the illusion that you could do it all? Did you or do you regret setting your needs aside to support other people? Can you see what the films that most impacted you were trying to communicate to you?

### **Sharing My Insights**

#### **Midlife—The Second Coming of Age**

My experience of the film *Room in Rome* (Medem & Longoria, 2010) was the beginning of my understanding that reconnecting with the feminine was a Divine revelation and had to do with the body and sexuality. In this film two women come together, one lesbian and one heterosexual, and they answer a call to the feminine heroine's journey (not limited to women) towards relatedness.

In the end they realize the experience does not have to do with a fantasy of their ending up together, but that their intimate experience has helped them come into deeper relationship with themselves as individuals, which in turn, will impact their capacity to be in relationship with another. Religious symbolism in the form of paintings on the walls and ceilings created a sacred womb for their sexual connection and transformative experience.

### **Try This**

Have you had a midlife unraveling, or any unraveling, the ending of a long-term relationship, the death of someone important, or been fired from a job? Any event that causes you to throw up your hands and say *I don't know what's true anymore*, is the beginning of the death of the way you once found meaning in life. Journal about this. It's painful at the time

but working through it leads to an exciting new way of finding meaning in your lived experience.

Journal about the movies or TV shows are helping you through the transition. The film *Begin Again* (Carney, 2013), which stars Mark Ruffalo and Keira Knightly, was the type of story I was looking for—death and rebirth of the Self. In all my fifty plus years, I had never lived alone, not until I had packed up and moved to a beach town with nothing except what could fit in my car. No job, and just some money from selling my house. It was terrifying and it took twelve months to embrace my solitude. Now I cannot imagine living with someone—I'm not done with my selfish phase.

## Sharing My Insights

### Coming of Age Spiritually

During the first part of our lives, we live mostly according to the expectations of others, including spiritually, and then one day that doesn't work anymore. You can keep trying to force yourself to meet those expectations that don't make sense anymore, but you will suffer as a result. I thought I had charted my own course and rebelled against convention, but by the time my marriage unraveled, I cringed at my realization of how conventional I had become. My manic and busy nature had kept me in denial.

After a marriage falls apart, and when personal life experience doesn't jive with unquestioned religious beliefs, there is a choice to be made. Keep conforming even though it feels wrong or go find truth for yourself—even if it's hard and you lose friends. What kind of friends do not support your quest for truth anyway?

Have you had your second coming of age experience—spiritual, sexual, psychological, or all three? There is so much depth once midlife arrives, it's like everything that has happened up to this point has prepared you for a more

meaningful life. Finding new passions, experiencing more ecstasy sexually and spiritually, taking risks that you couldn't when the children were young, saying no to people, getting over yourself and saying *Fuck* a lot, and busting out of the prison of consumerism. It's a whole new world.

### Try This

Has a film prompted you to think differently? Explore this through journaling or drawing. The Soul speaks to us through images that can sidestep the ego, which thinks it knows everything. The reason certain films are blockbusters is not always obvious. *Black Panther* was hugely successful for reasons more complex than most realize. You can pull out different threads that are obvious, but there is so much more to the story. I found it interesting that only after the release of the movie did the film's actors realize they were all Christian. I wondered whether this film was being used by collective Soul to push Christianity to escape from the prison of patriarchy.

### Sharing My Insights

#### Dismembering Old Beliefs

The sixth time I viewed *Alita: Battle Angel* (Cameron & Landau, 2019), I feverishly took notes that filled three paper napkins. As I watched the last scene, my eyes widened, and I could feel something explosive welling up in me. Not until the end, do we see Nova, played by Edward Norton, who is referred to as the omnipotent and all-seeing power that resides in Sky City. As I watched him slowly remove his goggles, revealing cold and penetrating eyes that overlooked Iron City, I blurted out in a whisper, *Father God is going down!*

Reconciling my sexuality and spirituality had required facing the fear I felt in the presence of oppressive beliefs especially about women—a fear of being symbolically burned

at the stake. This moment unleashed my *Warrior Self*, reflecting a new confidence to claim that my spiritual path was my own and not subject to anyone else's correction or condemnation.

Alita begins a journey to the Self and ultimately discovers she is a warrior empowered with ancient technology (ancient feminine power) believed to have been destroyed in the war that created the boundary between Sky City and Iron City. Alita declares, "I will not stand by in the presence of evil."

My own journey confirms that moving from the safety of the wounded masculine—where we avoid the vulnerability required for intimate connection with others—requires the courage and humility to develop the capacity to feel vulnerable. Alita's love interest Hugo is dismembered and falls to his death in front of her, but rather than be overcome with rage and the need for revenge, Alita puts her masculine to work and patiently works the system, looking forward to the day when she will meet Nova face to face. I'm eagerly waiting for the sequel!

### Try This

If you have been through an unraveling, reflect and journal about the pieces of yourself that were being dismembered. One of the images I drew during my midlife unraveling were separated puzzle pieces. Dismemberment sounds dramatic, but I felt as if I was being disassembled and reassembled. The process of psychological dismemberment can feel like torture because the beliefs and assumptions we must challenge are those we have built our lives and identity around. Are there films—now or in the past—that symbolize your own psychological dismemberment? Journal more.

## Sharing My Insights

### God as Self

My first viewing of the superhero film *Captain Marvel* (Boden & Fleck, 2019) left me feeling emotionally neutral, except for appreciating that this was the second female superhero, after Alita, that had not been sexualized. Both female superheroes interestingly had also proudly and humbly proclaimed, "I'm just a girl." During my midlife unraveling, as I sought to compensate for my one-sided masculine, I found myself explaining to people that I could do the strong and independent stuff, but that sometimes *I just wanted to be a girl*. Why had these things been mutually exclusive?

Not knowing she had been kidnapped from Earth by another planet's race because she absorbed the energy from a cutting-edge technology, Carol (Captain Marvel) relies on the guidance of her ill-intentioned male mentor, played by Jude Law. He has indoctrinated her to believe that her idea of the supreme intelligence—God—has been personified as the human being she most trusts and respects. He undermines her intuition and warns about her tendency to lose control because of her emotions. This tension between head and heart becomes the journey.

Like Alita, Carol does not know who she really is. During the film she journeys to the Self, finding that her wound contains her gift. This film awakened in me a strong feeling of being manipulated by patriarchal religion, and the most powerful scene for me was Captain Marvel falling to her death after having her power taken away by the *supreme intelligence*.

I experienced this as liberation from the powerful forces of religion to define what one's relationship with God can be. As she fell, it was regular Carol—not her superhero form of Captain Marvel—that came to life, stronger than ever, but only after she had stopped resisting and instead surrendered to her

true power. Her power was sourced in her inner being, not as given to her by someone else's perception of God.

### Try This

When you consider your own unraveling, reflect and journal about what wounds are seeking healing, and how are those wounds connected with larger cultural wounds. Can you think of films or TV shows that are mirroring those deeper forces in you that seek reconciliation?

This chapter encouraged you to consider how your unconscious sometimes uses the images in films and TV shows to get your attention. I hope you were both entertained and intrigued by the analysis of my film experiences. Dreams and films have been the source of significant insights and reinforced that I can trust where my Soul is taking me. You can read my blog posts about *Aquaman* and *Black Panther* at [www.deborahlukovich.com](http://www.deborahlukovich.com).

## CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

# More on Psychological/Personality Type

In this chapter, I encourage you to go beyond the basics when it comes to your psychological type. You may discover a part of you that you didn't know existed, because your natural way of relating to the world was stunted by how you were parented, larger cultural beliefs, experiences of trauma, or personal choices that limited your natural expression. For example, only recently has intuition become valued as a legitimate way of knowing, and introverts often are unfairly criticized for not playing well with others or for being anti-social.

On the other hand, reading your report may feel like reading your autobiography. This report merely scratches the surface, and you can't really grasp it all at once. I found the book, *Personality Types: Jung's Model of Typology*, by Caryl Sharp (1987), to be a user-friendly and comprehensive guidebook. I learn more and more each time I dig a little deeper.

## **Your Type is the Right Type—For You**

Why would you want to dig deeper into your type? First, in a world where certain attributes are valued over others, it is validating to know that one type is not better than another. Instead, being balanced is the goal. Knowing you are an introverted intuitive can help you make sense of why you love networking but tend to focus on fewer interactions. Knowing you prefer judging over perceiving helps make sense of your impatience in getting things done or your jealousy of people who can happily meander through life. Digging into your type helps you make sense of your oddest behaviors.

### **Try This**

#### **Reflecting About Yourself**

Journal more about your life experiences through the lens of your type. What kind of people frustrate you, and can you identify times when you were stubbornly one-sided? What activities are you engaging in when you feel most alive, how about those that deplete you? I was always surprised at how energized I felt studying after working eight hours. During the day, I was leading my team and raising money. I enjoyed it, and I was exhausted at the end of the day, but an hour later I came to life reading books and typing responses to discussion posts.

#### **Appreciating Others**

The second reason to dig into your type is that understanding yourself helps you value the natural preferences of others and even appreciate their quirky behaviors. Being too much of an introvert does make it difficult to develop friendships and knowing that your romantic partner is an extravert helps you understand that his need to go out dancing on a Friday night does not mean he doesn't want to be with you.

Knowing that your preference is sensing can alert you to when you might dismiss that more mysterious way of knowing and being aware that your preference is thinking can alert you to when you are unfairly prioritizing your way of making decisions over that of others.

### Try This

#### Reflecting About Others

Can you identify the psychological type of your parents or siblings, what about your boss, coworkers, or best friend? Opposites can attract and some types are naturally more compatible with some more than others. On the other hand, if you're an introvert attracted to an extravert be aware that if you never embrace your inner extravert, you might come to resent it in your partner. Reflect and journal about this.

#### Down and Dirty Summary

Psychological type theory can feel like a bottomless pit. The more you know, the more you realize you don't know—about you. In this chapter, I want to take you deeper without overwhelming you. There are four types of preferences that make up your type. There is no best or right type, just naturally preferred ways people experience life as a human being.

**Extraversion vs. Introversion** (first letter) describes two different ways people are energized psychologically. Extraverts are energized by the world outside of them, and introverts are energized by going inward.

**Sensing vs. Intuition** (second letter) describes the two different ways of perceiving or taking in information. Sensing is done through the five physical senses, and intuition is connecting with what is in the unconscious, what many refer to as the sixth sense. Both sensing and intuition are considered

irrational functions because they are simply ways of receiving information.

**Thinking vs. Feeling** (third letter) describes how we make judgments about the information we absorb. Thinking refers to mental processes and feeling refers to subjective value judgments. Feeling in this sense is *not* about emotions or feelings in the way we usually refer to them. Here feeling refers to a subjective evaluation of something, a sense of something being right or wrong. Both thinking and feeling are considered rational methods of judging.

**Judgment vs. Perceiving** (fourth letter) describes a preference for taking in information vs. making judgments about information. I think about this as the difference between someone who has an insatiable appetite for stimulation without the need to make decisions about it versus a person who feels compelled to do something purposeful with the information.

## Reflecting About Your Weaknesses

The third reason to dig into your type is to explore how being one-sided can lead to irrational reactions to events that do not go your way. I find Jungian analyst John Beebe's *8 Function Model* to be an interesting way to explore the limits of your psychological type. The model considers your type through two lenses—the conscious and the unconscious. You can learn more about this model at this page from the website for the Association for Psychological Type (<https://www.apt-nc.org/type-theories/eight-function-model/>).

The conscious self consists of functions over which you have control, and you are most comfortable using. Using these functions does not deplete you, and you feel competent using them. If you're an introvert, it feels easy and natural for you to be in solitude and to reflect about the meaning of an experience.

The functions that are most useful to explore are those that border on unconscious or are completely unconscious. Jung referred to the least developed function as inferior, which he described as having a mind of its own (Sharp, 1987). My inferior function is sensing, and I am most comfortable using my intuition. When we use the functions that exist beneath consciousness, they can come out as immature or childish.

### Try This

Are any of your functions near the middle of the range, or at one end of the range? You may naturally be balanced in your capacity to call on one function or another, or one of your functions may be in your blind spot. I have worked hard to develop my thinking and sensing functions, and this has helped me adapt when needed, but adapting too much is exhausting and frustrates me if the effort is not mutual.

The goal is to be aware of your weakness as much as possible so you can minimize irrational reactions to people and events. One way to find your inferior function is to observe times when you are most frustrated or overly emotional and explore whether the other person might be mirroring back your inferior function. Journal about your blind spots.

### Sharing My Insights

#### Spirituality and Psychological Type

As an intuitive, relying solely on facts and figures drives me crazy, and I cannot stand black and white thinking. It is clear to me that all the major world religions contain a core group of stories meant to help us make sense of human existence, and it is equally obvious to me that there is no right religion, only a preferred framework for living a meaningful life. In his article *The Intuitive Function and Religious Orientation* (1992), psychologist Christopher Ross found that one's approach to

spirituality is often related to psychological type. This validated my personal spiritual experience, as well as shined a light on why others may find my approach frustrating.

During a class on psychological type, the professor put us in groups according to whether we were intuitive or sensing. She asked us to be open to what would come up from our unconscious when she said ISIS (the terrorist group). We were to linger in our experience and resist sharing until the next day.

Those whose psychological type included a preference for sensing over intuition shared concrete images of destruction—explosions, death, blackness. Those of us who preferred intuition over sensing shared more conceptual images. I'm an introverted intuitive, and my image came to me when I was sitting on the toilet. I said ISIS aloud, and above appeared the words SUFFERING and LOVE. My image went straight to the archetypes—universal human instincts/needs—that are at the core of terrorism.

### Try This

Journal about times you acted or felt childish. What were you doing? Can you tie your behavior to the function that is hiding in your unconscious? What about your approach to religion or spirituality? Do you find yourself more comfortable choosing one way or another or do you love ambiguity? If you are too black and white, you will have difficulty respecting differences. Too much of a meandering spiritual person sometimes makes you feel ungrounded. Journal about how your psychological type shows up in your approach to spirituality.

This chapter encouraged you to go beyond the basics of psychological type, to explore your blind spots. There is no right type, although society has valued some types over others based solely on economics. My stories were meant to prompt your own exploration, and I hope you gained some interesting insights about your life and how you relate to others.

## CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

# Sustaining Your New Practice

In this chapter, we celebrate you! This book was an introduction to learning the language of the unconscious to discover your Soul's hidden purpose. Did you skim it or really dig in, and what interesting patterns and insights did you discover? What new perspective or skills are you using that reflects the new direction your Soul wants you to take, and do you feel energized by a renewed sense of purpose?

If you're in the middle of a crisis, do you feel like your Soul has your back and you are more alert to the guidance it wants to provide? Are you more comfortable feeling awkward and vulnerable? From drawing like a child, to having imaginary dialogues with dream figures, to taking back projections from your partner, allowing your childlike nature to lead the way was key to hearing what you couldn't hear before.

As you work towards fluency in this foreign language, receiving and decoding the messages your Soul sends through your unconscious will become easier. The wounds at the root of patterns that no longer work can transform into gifts that act as a doorway to something new that wants to be created through your unique human experience.

As you surrender to the pull of your Soul, you might feel like a vessel through which something transcendent wants to speak. These moments feel like a gift of grace, a glimpse into the

eternal, or being in the zone or groove. It's not something you can make happen, rather it shows up when you relax into receiving what wants to flow through you.

### **Sharing My Insights**

When I began exploring my unconscious, I was dismayed at the realization I was not the rebel I thought I had been, despite my attempts at resisting convention. I recalled that twenty-four years earlier, I had stood my ground in the argument with my soon to be husband about not changing my last name. "Why would I change my last name?" I responded to what I thought was a dumb question. I was confused. "And why do you care?"

Why was my stand for self-determination a threat to his? The projection onto me of being partially responsible for his sense of masculine identity turned into a false sense of obligation on my part. Six years later, my husband's immediate dismissal of my desire to hyphenate our children's last names prompted a quick calculation of whether the emotional exhaustion inherent in standing up for my values was worth it. I didn't pursue it.

Not until my marriage unraveled, did I realize that over time small compromises like these made me smaller than who I was supposed to be. My choices had reflected a complex combination of factors. No, I wasn't like my mother, but being her opposite didn't work out either. Part of me viewed the way I showed up in my marriage as failure, but I had also disrupted a pattern and something new was happening through my experience.

### **Finding Your Groove**

Where do you go from here, are you hungry to find answers to new questions, and are you beginning to tell your story in a new way? You may feel a new sense of purpose

bubbling up to the surface but beware of the potential for your ego to use your new practice as just another way to achieve, satisfy an addiction, or reinforce an existing complex such as perfectionism. The goal is to stay curious, gather intelligence, explore patterns, find meaning, and integrate new insights into your life. How do you keep this process going and how do you integrate this work into your daily life, so it becomes more like a yoga practice and not a new goal to accomplish?

The foundation of this work is to capture encounters with your unconscious and reflect about them in your written and image journals. My morning routine includes journaling about dreams and daily events. Today, journaling about a dream helped me become conscious of feelings of fear about publishing this book. My reflections helped me process the fear so I could strategize how to get to the finish line.

You do not have to be on alert for every instance of your unconscious speaking to you, instead explore the ones that intrigue you and use the methods you enjoy. Journal about your dreams the next morning if you have time, and/or journal at the end of the day about a conflict at work.

If you're having one of those days where too many things are not going your way, your unconscious may be alerting you to a buildup of emotion that needs to be released. Drawing the emotion is one way to move it around and walking around the house yelling you're angry or purposely triggering a big cry are ways to process something that feels stuck. Don't beat yourself up if you go a week without journaling, just work on doing it more and more and then reward yourself.

Finding insights can feel like a powerful revelation or more nuanced and subtle as it gently grabs your attention. You can get addicted to finding meaning and depth in life just like you can become addicted to any other substance that fills a hole in your life. When I don't remember a dream for two weeks, I get antsy, but I remind myself that my Soul brings me what it knows I can handle.

You will also find yourself in situations that force you to face something again, something you thought you had already processed. You were starting to feel good about your new attitude and then . . . during a moment of stress, it all comes back. For me, it's my mother complex, but over time it has felt less dramatic, and now I have a sense of humor about the whole thing. In these instances, you are being invited to go deeper and find a new level of meaning that you weren't ready for previously, so follow your intuition and then call on your sense of discipline to find meaning in the experience.

### **How Images Evolve Over Time**

My first six months of journaling felt like water gushing out of a garden hose, and the major insight I gained after going back and reading my entries led to decisions that may never have been made otherwise. Journaling creates the scab that stops the bleeding and reflecting and making meaning out of what has been written or drawn can be thought of as the itchiness that is part of the healing process.

Have you noticed recurring themes in your dream images, fantasies, or obsessions? Snakes, bears or other animals, having sex with an ex, being chased by mercenaries, crashing airplanes, showing up for an exam after having never attended class, screaming for help but no sound coming out, flying, falling, babies, or being naked? If babies keep showing up in your dreams, are they healthy or malnourished? There may be some new part of you trying to grow. Are you tending to this new part of you?

Are there images that have changed over time? Water was a strong theme during my first two years of journaling—the lakefront, a lawn sprinkler, a slowly flooding white tile floor, a glass window standing between me and a tidal wave, a man steering my boat during a storm, jumping from the deck of a huge ship into the cold dark ocean, jumping into a swimming pool where I could see the bottom.

My dreams were warning that I was about to be plunged back down into my unconscious to learn something new about myself and they contained clues about the intensity of the experience. What was happening in my life at the time? Water is a symbol of purification, and in one dream, as I stood naked in a bathroom made of white marble, and slowly rising clear water rose to my ankles, I felt as if I was in a museum, a place of appreciation for valuable artifacts. My dream was ensuring me that the new unknown version of me that was being revealed was to be appreciated.

### Try This

After a month of journaling, go back and read what you've written. Do it again after six months, and again after a year, searching for terms that your intuition says might be themes. Are there things you don't remember writing, and are there new dots you can connect? Journal about new insights and what areas of your life you can approach differently because of the insight.

Maybe there's an answer to a question you've been struggling with, whether to stay or leave a relationship or work situation for example. When I need a prompt to help me find meaning in recurring images, I use [www.dreammoods.com](http://www.dreammoods.com), an online dictionary of dream meanings. Dismiss everything except the phrases that *click*, and don't look to the dictionary for interpretation, only to prompt associations.

### Sharing My Insights

#### The Complexity of the Phallus

One of my recurring images was the phallic symbol. What does it mean when a penis shows up in your dreams, or when you're having sex with a celebrity or your ex? Except for those who have been victims of sexual assault, the

embarrassment or shame you feel may have less to do with sex and more to do with coming into relationship with a part of yourself that has been neglected. Working to embrace this part of you might release a new creative urge, and maybe help you overcome some sexual hang ups too.

Having no framework to explore the symbolic nature of sexuality has contributed to two extreme versions of making meaning out of sexual energy, playing out as literal and concrete beliefs and behaviors that end up degrading the relationship between sexuality and spirituality. One version attempts to control sexual energy and shames people, especially women, who do not follow the *rules* established by authoritative figures who use religion to gain women's permission for their own sexual oppression. The other version promises liberation through an anything goes approach, and sexual energy as a creative life force is reduced to quantity, techniques, and self-gratification.

I ran from the oppression of religious ideas about my sexuality right into the trap of sexuality as a purely physical experience. It was not until my midlife unraveling that I found a deep wound reflecting a warped relationship between my sexuality and spirituality, and the process of healing it included being swept up in my first post-divorce relationship.

There was great irony that the man who swept me up turned out to be a fundamentalist Christian who visibly struggled with shame as he sought to keep his human instincts in check. Drinking Captain Morgan Rum and Coke unleashed eruptions of passion and sexual desire that otherwise were forced to stay in his shadow.

My anger about his conflict related to having sex outside of marriage turned to openness as I sought to understand where my sexual attraction was leading me. New experiences of intimacy and stillness brought arousal, and the deepening emotional connection with my partner turned vulnerability into trusting receptivity of what wanted to flow through me. The relationship acted as the perfect vessel for my ultimate

transformation and the inner reconciliation between my sexuality and spirituality.

It was not until a dream that came after I broke up with him that I came full circle in my relationship with the penis—literally and symbolically.

The dream:

*I'm in bed and I discover I have a penis.*

*It's mine and it's attached to my body.*

*I love it.*

*It's big and soft and hard and warm.*

*For some reason it's close enough to my face that I can kiss it,*

*So, I do,*

*and it explodes with cum all over my pillowcase.*

Throughout this transformative relationship, I had tended to many dreams that featured the penis, and my growing appreciation for symbolism opened me up to the deeper meaning of the phallic symbol during this part of my life. Over time, my dream images evolved from distorted penises that brought feelings of shame and disgust to a fantasy about sexual submission that was asking me to receive something new, including deeper sexual and spiritual pleasure.

The experience of surrendering—or emptying—and then receiving led to an eruption of creativity. I realized that my psyche had seized upon an image that triggered shame to help me recognize pieces of me that needed rescuing. After the relationship ended, my dream images eventually evolved in a way that the penis had nothing to do with a man.

The dream:

*I'm in bed with a man and he's trying to enter me.  
Wait, there's no man, just a penis.  
I'm so aroused, but I resist for some reason.  
I'm concerned because there's no condom.  
I surrender slowly, and . . .  
I feel like I'm going to explode.  
I'm resisting,  
the tension between resistance and desire intensifying.  
My arousal deepens.*

When I awoke, I realized I had experienced a vaginal orgasm for the first time. In my journal entry about the dream, I wondered about my concern that there was no condom and I laughed at my anticipation of the day I would not need to fear unplanned pregnancy.

The phallus symbol evolved to having its own agency separate from the body of a man, and it now became mine and wanted to enter me. The final act of leaving behind my old life involved selling my house, leaving my adult children, and getting in my car to drive to a beach town. After twelve months of feeling anxiety in my new version of life, I had a dream which reflected my growing embrace of this unfolding version of me.

The dream:

*I'm in a bathroom and I look down at myself.  
My external sex organs—labia, clitoris, vulva—  
are all huge and hanging out of me.  
It scares me.  
I say to someone, "Go get Mom."*

My new capacity to surrender and feel vulnerable primed me for an orgasmic explosion of creativity in the written form.

## **Do You Know More About Yourself Now?**

Making space to explore topics that feel uncomfortable is my sweet spot. Going to those places promises the juiciest insights, those that will potentially mean the most for your life.

This chapter encouraged you to turn curiosity about your Soul's hidden purpose into a practice, a life-long journey. One dream, a single image, can lead you to more places than you can imagine. It doesn't feel like a course to me anymore, rather connecting with my Soul through my unconscious feels more like a friendship. That's what I want for you.



## CONCLUSION

### Between This and That

Your Soul is speaking to you all the time—through inner beings and forces that live, play, and argue in the playground of your unconscious. But are you listening? This book was meant to teach you how to hear and decode the messages your Soul is sending through your unconscious. I warned that your biggest challenge would be conventional systems that have influenced your approach to life, and I agree with Jung that the fate of humanity depends upon the self-reflecting individual—you.

Jung is all about managing the tension between the opposites so that a new attitude can emerge. Whenever you feel pulled to one side of something to the exclusion of another, you've left that sweet spot where the magic happens. But that's okay, if you've been too one-sided, you'll find the middle again. Be forgiving during your journey to find truth, which is usually in the space between this and that.

Working with the unconscious is not a one-time event, nor is it a straight-forward experience. Your GPS app won't know how to respond to the request for directions to your unconscious or the phone number for your Soul. Give up the goal of getting from A to Z, and instead allow the ocean current to move you forward and backward, up and down. Making Soul is not like getting a great grade on a paper or making a sale,

rather you begin to deepen into life and feel joy for the silliest of reasons.

Embrace yourself as a living paradox, one drop in that ocean of humanity, caught up in waves that are more than you but made up partly of you. Your journey involves managing the tension between your uniqueness and as part of the collective.

Don't let any collective swallow you up by giving away your mind, heart, or Soul, and do not become arrogant and believe your way is the right way, because as soon as you believe you are right, you've lost perspective.

Don't take yourself too seriously either. Find the humor in your journey.

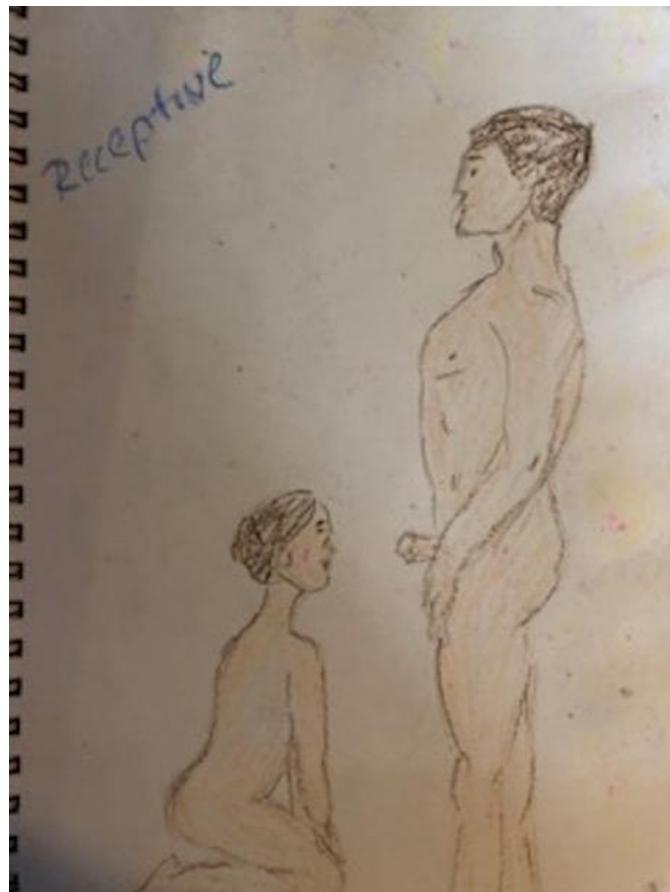
APPENDIX 1

## Drawing of Embodied Dream and Active Imagination



## APPENDIX 2

### Drawing of Submission Fantasy



## APPENDIX 3

### Drawing of Emotion





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