

**The Principles and Techniques of Psychosynthesis: a series of seminars given by Viv Wynant (Fogel) in Vaxjo, Sweden, 1991.**

**Spontaneous Imagery and the use of Symbols.**

Allowing images to spontaneously emerge from the unconscious is an extremely powerful technique. Images and symbols are a form of language, a communication, from the unconscious. Working with images, allowing them to tell us what they are about, is a matter of respect and trust of the process.

If we allow these images, or visual messages and symbols to change or transform themselves of their own accord – then this is a different process to directly guiding them. Roberto Assagioli quotes William James on Imagery: *“Every image has in itself a motor element...”* In other words, an image contains within itself a motivating, or moving force, which, if we can respect it, will provide us with the key to healing and transformation. An image does not have to be guided to change, it can and will transform itself, from itself, when it needs to. Jung called this process ‘active imagination’.

I would like here to give you an example of this in a client’s work with imaging. This particular client, K, described a feeling of emptiness, of being cut off from the feminine source within herself, and from her spirituality.

When I asked her to allow an image to emerge to represent that emptiness, she got a picture of a bunch of flowers. They were dried, and tightly bound, and not rooted in anything. It made her feel sad to see flowers like this – flowers that she acknowledged were once alive.

I asked her what she needed to do with the bunch. At first she had the impulse to discard them - but she felt that if she did that they would be gone forever - and that made her sadder. She stood ‘in the dark’ contemplating them - and then became aware that the flower heads contained seeds: she realised then that she had no choice but to plant them - for she knew that she wanted something to survive and grow from this bunch. Although she had no idea what would in fact come from the seeds, she felt relieved that they would be growing in the earth.

The imagery spontaneously changed into a circle of thistles surrounding a centre of carnations. She immediately felt concern for the rather delicate carnations - that they would be overwhelmed by the hardy and fast growing thistles, and that somehow she would have to keep the thistles down. She was also concerned that she would not be able to look after the carnations - which she felt would need ‘specialised’ attention. K realised that if she wanted them to survive, which she did, then she would have to put some effort into caring for them - perhaps with the help of a gardening manual or ‘guide’. (*Psychosynthesis psychotherapists are often spiritual mentors or guides.*)

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The qualities of the thistles were that they were tough and sturdy and a bit overwhelming, (like the exterior that K herself often presents) and that they were in danger of stifling and completely hiding the more fragile, feminine carnations: her inner sensitive and vulnerable core. When I asked her how she would like her garden to look, she suddenly 'received' the image of an azalea bush. The bush had strong wooden branches and delicate pink flowers. This spontaneous imagery had fused the best of both the qualities of the thistles and of the carnations. A new organic whole - a natural synthesis!

K has since painted her thistles and her carnations, - and is still working up to feeling ready to paint the azalea bush. When - or even whether - she does so or not, is not as important as the initial image of the azalea bush, which she can return to in her mind's eye, and from which she can continue to receive strength and meaning.

James Hillman likens these images that come to us 'out of the blue' - to "*visitations from the angels*" - heralds with messages for us to heed.

Hillman also says that the latent dimension to an image is that it is in-exhaustive - it always has more information to give us - if we care to listen or see.

For example, when we looked up the meaning of azalea we saw that it symbolises 'feminine grace and/or spirituality' - the very two aspects of herself that K felt she was cut off from.

Moreover, each image or symbol presents a multiplicity of meanings to the individual - that springs from their own personal well of unconsciousness, mythology and experience. Rather as in the different levels or layers of meaning in a dream.

Thus, another aspect to all this is the parallel with her mother's garden - which has very tall thistles growing in it - and K could see the connection with her mother's overbearing manner and insensitive behaviour, as she, K, experienced it, and from which she had to protect her vulnerable, sensitive parts.

Another level of meaning for her was to do with her partner, and another was connected to a memory from childhood of a teacher.

All this from one initial image and its ensuing spontaneous and unguided movement - the image's motor element that Hillman, James and Assagioli acknowledge. We could go on!