



### **Imagery of the MindBodySpirit by Toni Gilbert, RN, MA**

The mystic receives knowledge of spirit from spirit. Mystics are divinely inspired with knowledge of things divine. Knowing spirit through spirit, the knower communes with—and perhaps unites with—the supreme object of knowledge, known by some as God.

I contend that we, as divine beings, can move beyond ego self-knowing (self-actualization) to a higher form of self-knowing, ego transcendence, and take our place with the mystics of all times.

There are many paths and practices that can lead to this higher self-knowledge. Imagery is one of them.

### **Imagery of the Mind and Spirit**

“Do not go out. Return into yourself. Truth dwells in the inner man.” Eckhart, a thirteenth century mystic

With imagery, one must turn from the outer world of the senses and go inward—to the soul and transcendent Spirit. Guided by the inner wisdom inherent in our soul we can come to a greater understanding, not only of our ego and transcendent self, but of each other and the world in which we live. It is truly a journey worth undertaking. It can begin with a single action. Close your eyes.

The medieval mystic Hildegard of Bingen perceived her visions only by “the organ of her imagination.” She wrote, “God revealed himself by voice and by means of images.” Centuries later, Sigmund Freud discovered a capacity of the human mind to store repressed information. He called this capacity the “unconscious mind.” His protege Carl Jung told us that the unconscious mind speaks to us in images.

The “unconscious mind” or “soul” (for me, these terms are equivalent) is a storehouse of information inside each of us. It has many dimensions or levels. But one cannot decide one day to become an instant mystic. One must begin a process (sometimes long, sometimes arduous) of “inner work” —clearing up old unfinished business. To do this, one must be accepting and completely honest with oneself. Imagery can help in this process.

Some years ago, just after I had decided to undertake this inner journey, I had a transformative experience involving imagery. This experience took no more than ten minutes, but it changed my life forever. I had long struggled with troublesome feelings of low self esteem and a deep sense of inadequacy, sometimes to the point of feeling nauseated. I honestly wondered why I was feeling this way. I went to the bathroom mirror, looked myself right in the eye and, with intense expectation of an answer, asked, “WHY?” “I like me. I like the way I look. I like the way I dress. I like the way I think.” In my imagination, I heard my question resound throughout my inner being. Then, in my mind, I suddenly saw a fierce dragon that had been chasing me. Courageously standing my ground, I turned on it and demanded, “WHY?” The ferocious entity at once turned into a harmless and lovable cartoon-like dragon.

Something in me had changed. I had at last confronted my sense of inadequacy and realized that it just wasn't true. I was really quite worthy after all. The imagery was symbolic of this process manifested at the conscious level. I haven't felt such feelings, to that degree, since.

Twenty years later, I have a small ceramic cartoon-like dragon laying peacefully on my desk. We are friends.

### **Imagery of the Body and Mind**

If the soul or the unconscious mind is disturbed about something, and tries to tell the conscious ego about the disturbance, it may issue a symptom to the physical body. It may try to communicate by causing a myriad of signals such as nausea (e.g. my dragon story), headache pain, injury or, if it goes unheard long enough, a disease.

Most of us, even if we are aware that the mind, spirit and body are inseparable, ignore the subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle messages of the body in its intuitive wisdom. Our minds are conditioned to spend most of the time responding to our outer world and its logic.

What you imagine, or image, can and does affect your very heartbeat, your hormonal secretions and the functioning of all your systems. Imagining the perfect functioning of the immune system can, to a surprising extent, counteract a life-threatening disease or condition. Much research over the last two decades has produced irrefutable scientific evidence that using the mind through techniques like guided imagery or visualizations can increase the health and effectiveness of the natural processes of the body.

### **The Mind Affects the Body**

I had just finished my first class in guided imagery. At home, I was met at the door by my husband in pain. He was standing there like a human "C" because one side of his back muscles was in spasm. I told him what I had just learned about guided imagery in school. With nothing to lose, we thought it might help his pain.

He carefully and painfully lay down and I talked him through a progressive relaxation. Then I told him to take his consciousness down to the site of his painful muscle, and to describe what he visualized. In his mind's eye, he saw a large rock. He thought that this rock needed to be pulverized to powder with a sledge hammer that happened to be nearby. This done, and the powder cleared away, I asked him what this area needed next to be healed. "It needs heat in the color of fire," he said. I guided him to breathe in, see and feel the fire-colored heat in the injured area of his back. On the out-breath he was to breathe out any tension or pain. At the end of this 20 minute session, he sat up pain free without a trace of the spasm. We stared at each other in amazement. I knew I had a powerful tool on my hands.

### **Finding a Teacher or Therapist**

Seeking out a guide to help you further your knowledge of your inner landscape and mindbodyspirit healing is a good step in beginning your inner work. It is very important, when dealing with your inner images, to listen to what your feelings are telling you. You can start the practice of tuning into your intuitive self upon your first meeting with a possible teacher or therapist. Notice how your body feels in the presence of this person. Do you feel good, relaxed

and safe? During this subtle sensing, does the person seem honest and trustworthy? What do your finer senses tell you?

On the logical side of this coin, education is not always a good indicator that the teacher or therapist will have the talent and wisdom to be able to assist you. But a total lack of training, especially in the use of images, is not likely to be the best choice either. I have a small quote on my refrigerator:

“A great teacher never strives to explain her vision; she simply invites you to stand beside her and see for yourself”—The Rev. R. Inman

The human mind has a way of exaggerating the simplicity of the divine to make it more complex; to make it sound less attainable than it is. The more complex the divine is made, the more religious and dogmatic it becomes. I am wary of anyone seeking authority over anyone else’s inner journey. If a person claims to know all the answers for you, get away quick.

### **And So . . .**

The imagery process that I have described is a tool to help the soul become more conscious. As we explore the unconscious forces within, we often become concerned about making mistakes. As you begin this important journey, know there will be what we call “mistakes” made, but mistakes are a part of the journey. One needs heart-felt sincerity, a surrender to the process, patience, and looking to God/spirit/the divine, and the world-at-large for information. Most important, tune into your own images and feelings. Each of us carries within us an inner world that is a very fine God-given guidance system.

In our ancestral history, the human soul was understood to be a part of, not apart from, all the workings of the universe. We have that same capacity today. We need only reach in and claim it. We need to heed and value our imagination, feeling states, the inner realms of dreams, meditation and intuition, as well as our physical symptoms of distress when they manifest as disease, allergies and injury.

**Toni Gilbert**, RN, MA, is creator of the Centre of Main Street (“Living Arts for Health and Well-Being,”) in Jefferson, Oregon. You can reach her at 541-327-7749.



[Top](#) | [eMail Alternatives](#) | [Home](#)

Site updated Spring 2010