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Warmly,

Dina Glouberman

**LIFE  
CHOICES  
LIFE  
CHANGES**

*Develop Your Personal Vision  
with Imagework*

Dr Dina Glouberman

Skyros Books

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## 10 Sensing life Choices, Making life Decisions

### Where am I going?

During an Imagework session on life choices a few years ago, I suggested that group members picture themselves walking down the road of their lives, where they would reach a crossroads and could try out the various paths into the future. Polly had a powerful experience, which she wrote to me about later:

*At the crossroads, I chose first a lovely grassy green lane - banked high with blackberries. This was my ideal image of the life I was hoping to lead in the country. At the end of the lane was me - a Mrs Applecheeks - wearing an apron, hands on hips, hair in a bun and ample bosom - standing in front of a larder piled high with shelf upon shelf of blackberry jam. I thought - ugh - and went back to the crossroads.*



*Now I went on the 'not so inviting' path - gravel and puddles. I walked up the path, splashing in the puddles, and at the end was a large building with people moving around, inside and out of doors. I wanted to be one of them.*

*When you suggested that it was five years on, I found myself sitting inside on a rocking chair, oldish, holding hands with a man - grey haired - also in a rocking chair. We were in the middle of the building, with people moving in and out around us - right in the middle of the action.*

*Today - I lose count of how many years on from that choice of a path, perhaps three years on - I actually live in a house up a gravel drive - full of puddles. At the other end of a long gravel road - also full of puddles - are my farm buildings. Together with an expanding group of interested people, I am working towards developing this into a retreat and a healing centre. An architect friend is drawing the plans for my house in a barn down there. As the barns and the land adjoining are mine, I do sit in the centre of it. We all have a long way to go before I'm in my rocking chair. Meanwhile, I'm having an amazing time living through my own 'vision'.*

Nowhere does imagery seem to be so magical a tool as when we are sensing goals and making choices. While by now you may be used to the fact that you can bring the past into the present and work with it, it is harder to believe that you can bring the future into the present and learn from it. Yet this is so.

This doesn't mean that the images you come up with will always be as photographically accurate as Polly's were, though this does happen surprisingly often. What is more usual is that you can sense the major direction or nature of what you want, rather than an accurate and detailed 'prophetic' picture.

Often the clue that the future you are sensing is the right one for you is that combination of surprise that indicates that your conscious mind had not yet worked this one out and a deep inner recognition which betrays the fact that on some level you have always known this to be true.

Helen's picture of the future was very different indeed from Polly's, but it came to her with the same shock of surprise and recognition. She wrote to me about it later: 'You invited me to stand five years into the future and to visualize myself in detail. Not easy, but I eventually formed the picture and, with it, came a deep inward smile of contentment. I was doing absolutely, totally, utterly, nothing.'

'I have now applied for early retirement and expect to leave my job at the end of April. I know that there are possibilities of freelance work, but I've made no specific arrangements. I just want to *be* for a while.'

Life goals and life choices are weighty words, but when the future calls us, and we want to know what it is saying and how we will get there, it may not tell us about creating an amazing project, nor about helping all the world's unfortunates. It may just gently remind us that for a while we need to do nothing.

## Modern Day Prophets?

Do we all have the gift of prophecy? Or do we create that future because we have seen the image? And is the future fixed and fated? Or do we have some choice in the matter? These questions come up again and again when we look at the future through Imagework.

Because Imagework, like dreams, opens a window into various levels of our unconscious intuition, it may well be that some of our pictures of the future really *are* the result of transcending time and space and seeing the future, or rather one or more of our possible futures. Even if this is so, the future is still our choice: Polly found two futures and the one that really happened to her would have been pretty unlikely had she not made a conscious choice to follow a less inviting path at that crucial moment in her life.

But in any case, the 'crystal ball gazing' aspect of Imagework, exciting as it may seem, is a very minor part of what we are doing when we tune into the future. Just as only a minute percentage of dreams tell of the future rather than of our own wishes and fears about the future, so it is with Imagework.

In the main, we are simply doing what we do all the time when we set goals and make plans - we are building up pictures of what we expect from the world, and then making the kind of choices that fit into and bring about those pictures. The difference is that we are able to do it far more effectively because we are making use of the powerful partnership we have created between our conscious self and our unconscious intuitive wisdom.

## Setting Goals and Sensing Goals

Usually, we work out our life choices and set our goals by figuratively drawing a line forward from our present conscious expectations into the future that these would create. Often our conscious self is, unbeknown to itself, influenced by unexamined fantasies or by other people's expectations which we have swallowed over the years. For Polly, an idyllic country life full of blackberries represented perfection - until she tried it. Luckily, having done that in her imagination, she didn't need to spend years of her life pursuing a false dream.

At other times our conscious self draws up one plan and our unconscious self has quite different intentions. These are the times when we find that we keep creating sensible lists of what we are going to do today, or great plans for what we will do tomorrow or next week or next year, or fantasies about the perfect life, and yet we never seem to do anything to make this future happen.

By trusting our intuitive ability to project ourselves into the future and test whether it feels good, we can *sense* the appropriate way forward, rather than *setting* the goal that looks right from where we are standing. In this way it becomes possible to find a way of life that fits us, rather than fitting ourselves into a model that we think, or others think, we should have. It is then not so surprising if this future that is really ours does come about, and, even more important, brings us the contentment we expect it will.

## Taking the Fear out of Hope

Creating a picture of the future serves another important function - reducing anxiety. In any creative movement between the present and the future, there is always the anxiety that we will fail to create what we intend. A small amount of anxiety is useful: the sympathetic nervous system prepares us for action and we have that wonderful surge that creative people rely on to get things done. But too much anxiety can incapacitate us, to the extent that we don't dare go for what we want or we go for it with such tension that we set ourselves up for trouble.

But, to quote an old cliché: seeing is believing. Once we have seen the future, it is easy to believe that it will be and that all we have to do is get there. It is almost as if we have a vivid memory of having achieved this goal before and this keeps us hopeful when the going gets rough.

I remember how it was when we were setting up Atsitsa, our second centre on Skyros island in Greece. The summer brochure had to go out before Christmas, when the centre didn't yet exist. We did have the place, and knew what we wanted to create, but the house and grounds were still a building site, and, more important, there was no staff. That January, I 'tuned into' the future using Imagework and found myself picturing a time six weeks from then, with most of the staff team already chosen. I breathed a sigh of relief and went on confidently to do what I needed to do to create a staff team.

Six weeks later, I did indeed have most of my staff. I cannot say whether this would have happened anyway - did I see an image from the future or did I create this future out of the image? What I do know is that without that image at the back of my mind, I would have been operating under the strain of an enormous amount of anxiety, fear and doubt. Instead, the process was more like getting ready to go out in the morning - the question is what you will wear, not whether you will be able to get dressed at all.

Another precious gift of future sensing is the ability to look back and see how we got there. When I visualized having my staff team chosen, I also looked back to see how I'd done it. In retrospect, the steps were obvious. Having seen them, I could now go ahead and do them. No problem.

If all this is beginning to sound too magical, it isn't really. The understandings we gain access to through Imagework are not picked out of a hat with no prior information or rational considerations. Because we are not looking into a crystal ball but rather just using our best potential, the future that we are able to discover depends as much on knowledge as on intuition. The Imagework we do after we have taken the trouble to 'do our homework' is likely to be more defined, and more useful, than that which we are able to do without any relevant information. Imagework is always a partnership between the conscious and the unconscious, and between reason and imagination, and this partnership is its major strength.

### **A Goal a Day Keeps the Future Okay**

This ability to project yourself into the future and look back to how you got there is not limited to long-term decisions and plans. It is just as useful when you want to plan, or make decisions about, the next half year, half day or half hour.

I myself seldom walk into a new situation, particularly one in which I have an important role to play, without stopping for a moment and projecting myself forward into the future by saying to myself: 'It's the end of this event and I feel good about it. What is the good feeling and how did I get there?' This gives me a clear sense of what I really want and how to get it. In order to find out what path not to take, I often do the opposite as well. 'It's the end of this event and I feel awful about it. What is the awful feeling and how did I achieve it?' By understanding what I really wish to accomplish and what I need to avoid, I can walk into the situation with a clear focus and go for what I want.

The results of this intuitive sensing of goals can be so different from my conscious beliefs about my goals that I am still constantly surprised. For example, a few months ago, I walked into an Imagework training session with the conscious goal of teaching the students as much as possible. But when I tuned into the positive 'end of the session' image, what I found was: The good feeling is of warmth and closeness in the group, and the shared sense that we have been through a journey together and have positive wishes to send each other on our journeys. I accomplished this by relaxing and caring about everyone, and encouraging them to care for each other. The negative picture of the end of session was 'I feel rushed and hurried because I tried to do too much. Everyone looks strained and stressed, and I'm exhausted. I wonder why I bother to run these courses. I seem to have got to this point by thinking I needed to teach the students everything I know.'

Had I tried to follow my original conscious intention of teaching the students as much as possible, I would almost certainly have ended up feeling bad rather than good about the session and yet been unable to understand why. Instead, I chose to go directly for the goal of creating warmth and closeness. The students learned just as much as usual about Imagework, but a lot more about human relationships, and we all ended up feeling refreshed, relaxed and hopeful.

I often use the same process to make difficult decisions, whether small or large. I put myself forward to the time after the decision has been made to find out what I did decide. I also utilize it in groups, courses or team meetings to create shared visions. Once everyone has projected themselves to the end of the session and clarified what experience they really want, it is easy to create a shared plan for the group that will bring people together creatively and enjoyably.

### **Why do we Need to be Going Anywhere?**

Why is the future important anyway? Why not just live in the present? We do need to live in the present, but the present always emerges from the past and reaches towards the future, and it is this historical process that gives events their meaning. Actions of any kind have a purpose or intention and clarifying our intentions is what sensing the future is all about. Even reaching to grab a luscious fruit is an activity in the present which derives its meaning from the felt desire of just a moment ago and the intention to eat the fruit in the next moment.

Thus the point is not to live in or strive for the future, but rather to live in a present that makes sense to us. It does seem that the feeling that what we are doing has some kind of meaning or purpose is central to healthy and happy living.

Carl and Stephanie Simonton,<sup>1</sup> pioneers in the use of visualization with cancer patients, discovered that those who showed an exceptionally good response to treatment all had one thing in common: they had strong reasons for wanting to live, could elaborate on these in a detailed way and felt that this strong commitment to the future was responsible for their good progress.

Conversely, depression, confusion and illness are common effects of the feeling that we do not know what we want, cannot direct our lives effectively and are unable to see a positive pathway into the future. At the heart of this feeling is often the inability to express creativity in our lives.

Creativity doesn't necessarily mean producing massive results, or being at the forefront of art, science or mathematics. It means having the sense that you can always create or discover something which gives you, and others, pleasure and meaning. What you create or discover could be an insight, or a lovely garden, or a sculpture, or a health centre, or a flower arrangement, or a happy family atmosphere, or a new approach to life, or a new way to love. As long as it emerges freely out of your inner well of life energy rather than being a response to expectations, and has a quality of freshness and vitality about it, it is creative and life-enhancing.

The exercises in this chapter are relevant to sensing any kind of long- or short-term goal, expressing any form of creativity, or making any choice or decision, whether it is to do with personal health, self esteem, relationships, work

life or anything else. You will find that the whole process can help you to uncover your real purposes in life, feel more hopeful about the future, give you a focus and direction for your energy, and get a sense of yourself as an active creative being in charge of your life.

### **Life Paths. and My Future Self: The Structure of the Exercises**

The exercise that Polly did, called Life Paths, was based on working with the image of life as a path or road, with our choice points pictured as a crossroads. The process begins, as usual, with clearing a space and relaxing, and then inviting an image of walking along the road of our lives and coming to a crossroads. Trying out the most attractive path first, you walk along and find out how it is to be on this path now, and five, ten and fifteen years later. You are then able to try out all the other paths too - unlike in real life where opportunity is sometimes said to knock only once. It is also possible to rise above the scene and get an aerial view of all the paths. Sometimes the most surprising insights emerge then - for example all the paths may end up in the same place after all. You can then return to the crossroads and decide which you like best. You conclude as usual by appreciating, reflecting and looking forward to the practical implications of your insights.

Thus the format is:

Preparation: Clearing a space, relaxing

- 1 Inviting the image: a life path with a crossroads
- 2 Trying out the paths
- 3 Taking an aerial view
- 4 Returning to the crossroads and making a choice
- 5 Appreciating, emerging, reflecting and looking forward

#### **Life Paths: Basic Exercise**

*Preparation: Clearing a space, relaxing*

1 *Inviting the image:* Imagine yourself on a road, the road of your life. What sort of road is it? What is the scenery like? What are you wearing? How does it feel to walk on this road?

Now you come to a crossroads in the road. Can you see what the signs say? What do the different paths or roads look like from here? Which seems most inviting?

2 *Exploring paths:* Go down the road or path which seems most inviting. What does it look like? How does it feel? What happens to you on this road? And how are you walking - are you skipping, trudging, or walking purposefully?

Stop. Breathe. How is it to be you on this path?

Now: It's five years on. Start walking. What is happening now? What do you see, feel, sense and know? What is life like for you now, on this path?

Stop. Breathe. Consider your experience.

Now: It's another five years on (ten from the crossroads).

Start walking. Now what is your life like? What do you notice? How do you feel about it? Stop. Breathe. Consider how it is to be you, ten years from now, on this path. Now: It's another ten years on (twenty years from the crossroads). Start walking. Now how is it for you?

Stop. Breathe. Consider your experience.

Now: Look back at the person you were at the crossroads twenty years ago. What would you whisper to that person to help them see their way forward?

Having looked at this path in detail, return to the crossroads and tryout the other ones in exactly the same way.

3 *An aerial view:* Allow your consciousness to rise above your body and float high enough above the roads so you can see the whole pattern. What do you notice?

4 *Returning to the crossroads and making a choice:* Now go back to the crossroads. Name the paths, *or*, if they had a name, rename them. Which one is the 'path with the heart' - the one that feels good to you, is most in line with who you are and what you want in life? Take, and name, your first steps on this path.

5 *Appreciation, reflecting, looking forward and emerging:* Appreciate your unconscious for the help it has given you and your conscious for daring to look at these difficult issues clearly. Both before and after emerging, ask yourself: What do the different roads mean to you? What implications does this experience have? What choices do you need to make in the near future so that you follow a path you can feel good about? Be as specific as possible.

The second exercise in this chapter, My Future Self, is the one that Helen was doing when she had the experience of putting herself forward into a future in which she was doing nothing. This exercise involves directly projecting yourself

into a future time when you feel good about what you have chosen. The time period selected depends on the kind of goals you want to look at or the choices and decisions involved.

Thus you may project yourself into being eighty years old to explore your life goals, or five years from now to explore your medium-term choices, or three to six months from now to explore your shorter-term plans and decisions. You may also project yourself to the end of the day, or the hour, or the session, or the interview. Once having done this, you can look back and see what choices you made and what attitude you took in order to get to this point.

When looking at life goals, there are three major areas that are important to consider: relationships with others, work or creativity, and your personal relationship to yourself. I also like to add the relationship to life itself - how we feel about the way our fate has come forward to meet us.

It is important to have a look not only at the future that you would feel good about, so as to see what path you want to follow, but also at the future that you would feel awful about, so as to clarify where danger lies. Sometimes people find it quite difficult to imagine a positive future; in this case it is best to begin with the negative future and then move on to the positive one.

In fact, I originally introduced the notion of looking at the negative future when I was working with a man who felt too hopeless to be able to find any positive pictures at all. Once he had looked at and understood the negative future he was set on having, he found it possible, and a great relief, to picture a future he might actually enjoy and which seemed to be within his reach.

The format then is:

Preparation: Clearing a space and relaxing

- 1 Inviting my positive future self
- 2 Exploring the image
- 3 My interpersonal, creative, and personal choices - and life itself
- 4 My negative future self
- 5 Appreciating, reflecting, looking forward and emerging

### **My Future Self: Basic Exercise**

This exercise can be used with respect to any time period in the future at all. I suggest that you start by imagining your 80-year-old self, so as to get a sense of your long-term goals. Then choose whatever shorter time period or periods feel most relevant to you. Simply keep repeating the same exercise, but with a different initial instruction. Note that it is easier - and very essential - to be more specific about your choices the shorter the time period it is.

*Preparation: Clearing a space and relaxing*

1 *Inviting my future self:* Decide on the time period that you want to explore and then suggest to yourself one of the following:

a I'm on a space ship going off the face of the Earth. What is my spaceship like? I press my Go button and I go off the face of the earth, to a dimension where past, present and future are one, outside the tyranny of time. I rest there for a while. How is it? Now I point my spaceship towards Earth. I press my Go button and return to Earth at a time in the future (give the number of years or months forward, or the date) when I am eighty-years-old/ten years older/five years older/six months older (choose the appropriate period) and happy about my life. I land.

b It is now x years/months/days/hours (as appropriate) from now, and it is the end of this period in my life/course/session/interview/day (or whatever) and I feel really delighted with how it's been and what I've chosen.

COMMENT: If you are projecting yourself many years forward, it is easiest to imagine yourself on a space ship actually going off Earth and then coming back again. For shorter time periods, or once you are used to the exercise, this is not so necessary and you can just project yourself to the time you want by giving yourself a suggestion.

2 *Exploring the image:* Begin by making the image of your future self really vivid and concrete, particularly if it is a long time period forward. Ask yourself some of these questions, adapting the language if it is not appropriate for the time period you are envisaging:

'What am I wearing? What do I have on my feet? What can I see around me? How do I feel in my body, mind and spirit?'

'What is the good feeling I have? What was the most important thing I did or experienced to reach this good feeling? What really has made life or this time period or event worthwhile? Looking back at the younger me at the beginning of this period, what do I notice? What do I want to whisper that would make life easier for him or her?'

(If you are the eighty-year-old: 'How do I feel about being eighty years old? When I look forward to death, how do I feel about it? What would I tell the younger me about being old?')

3 *My interpersonal, creative and personal choices - and life itself:* Having established a clear image, start to explore the following specific areas. In each case, begin with the initial specific questions listed under that heading and then go on to follow the same general process:

a *Interpersonal:* 'How have my social relationships been - family, partners, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, etc?' (Go on to the general questions.)

b *Creativity or work:* 'What did I accomplish or create and how did I go about that process? What was work like? How did it fit into other aspects of my life?' (Go on to the general questions.)

c *Personal:* This has to do with the part of my life that concerns only myself. How was I in my relationship to myself, to my body, mind and spirit? How was my self-esteem? How did I take care of myself?' (Go on to the general questions.)

d *Life itself:* 'How do I feel about the way life has treated me? What did I learn over all those years about life itself, about the turns of the wheel of fate?' (Go on to the general questions.)

*General questions for areas a-d:* 'What do I feel best about? What did I learn the hard way? What was most difficult to deal with? What still seems unresolved? What could I tell the younger me that would help him or her? Whatever it is, say it, being as specific as possible. Does the younger you understand? If not, find a way to make sure they do. You could also write a letter from the future you, dated in the future, to the present you. You might even like to put this in an envelope and mail it to yourself.

4 *Negative future self:*

a If you came in a spaceship, press your Go button and go back off the face of the earth. Reflect on that experience. Now point your spaceship toward earth, but this time suggest to yourself: 'I press my Go button and return to earth to that same time in the future that I set myself, X years on or at the age of X, but feeling terrible about my life.' When you land on earth, get out of your spaceship and look around. Notice how you feel and what you are wearing.

Or just say: 'It's X time from now/I am X months or years older/It's the end of the event or period and I feel absolutely terrible. (Remember to use the same time period as before). Look around, notice how you feel and what you are wearing.

Now ask yourself:

'What is my terrible feeling? What's at that heart of it? What do I feel bad about? What is the most important thing I did to make that happen? How is this different than what I did to reach my positive future?'

b *Coming back:* If you came in a spaceship, then get back in your spaceship, and return to space, reflecting on what has happened. If not, just let go of the future image, and reflect. It is a good idea to take a 'decontamination shower' - wash yourself clean of whatever unpleasant emotions and thoughts you acquired in that negative future.

Now come back to the present, either pressing the Go button on the spaceship to go back to earth in present time, or telling yourself to come back to the present. It is a nice idea to suggest; 'I am now returning to the present, feeling good about my life.' Then you can reflect on what you feel good about right here and now.

5 *Appreciate, reflect, look forward and emerge:* Thank the future you for his or her help and ask him or her to serve as an adviser for you when you need him or her. Both before and after emerging, reflect on what this has all meant and what the implications are. How will you specifically and practically carry through these understandings?

### Quick Visioning

A brief format, particularly useful for short-term goals and - decisions, or if you are doing this exercise regularly, is simply:

1 It's x time from now (or: It's the end of this event) and I feel good about it. What is the good feeling? What did I do to bring that about?

2 It's x time from now (or: It's the end of this event) and I feel awful about it. What is the awful feeling? What did I do to bring it about?

## **Applications**

**GROUP WORK:** At the beginning of a group session of any sort (whether it is a course, a committee meeting or a staff meeting), it is always useful to go around and ask people what their expectations are. Instead of, or in addition to, the usual expectation statements, try getting people to put themselves forward to the end of the meeting feeling good about it - or awful - and see what they feel good or bad about and how they got there. This lets the group members know what they, and everyone else, are wanting on a deep level, and helps the group to create a satisfying shared vision. At the end of the session, spend a moment discovering how similar or different the feelings are from what everyone imagined. What can you learn from that?

**EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES:** Discovering your intentions by sensing the future should not be limited to major life choices. Every day we engage in myriad activities that we could do better if we were clear about our intentions. So whether you are preparing to clean the house, write a lecture, do your gardening, go on holiday or go out on a date, do take a moment to stop, put yourself forward to the end of that task or event, sense your positive future, and look back and see how you got there. If you have time, check also into that negative future to make sure that this is not the one you are about to trip yourself into unwittingly.

**INNER CONSULTANT:** Your future self who feels good about his or her choices is a wonderful consultant. Now you have not only all your younger selves to share resources with, but all your older selves too. Do make use of this wonderful resource of having a wiser, older you to help you on your way.

## **In Conclusion**

Knowing where you want to go in life, whether in the short term or the long term, is more than half the battle. The next chapter is about making sure you get there, if it doesn't just all seem to fall into place. Don't see these exercises as one-off events. If you make it a practice to keep tuning into your future self at every choice point and at the beginning of every day, and to consult with your future self or selves as to the next step, you will really begin to understand what it means to be able to rely on your own personal vision.

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