

Dear reader,

Welcome to Imagework.

This is a sample chapter of my book **Life Choices, Life Changes**. I hope you enjoy it. Please note that it is for personal use only.

If you want to buy the whole book at a discounted price, or to buy CDs and tapes, or download audio Imagework exercises (only available via my website), you can go to the online shop on my website, <http://www.dinaglouberman.com/shop/>

Warmly,

Dina Glouberman

**LIFE  
CHOICES  
LIFE  
CHANGES**

*Develop Your Personal Vision  
with Imagework*

Dr Dina Glouberman

Skyros Books

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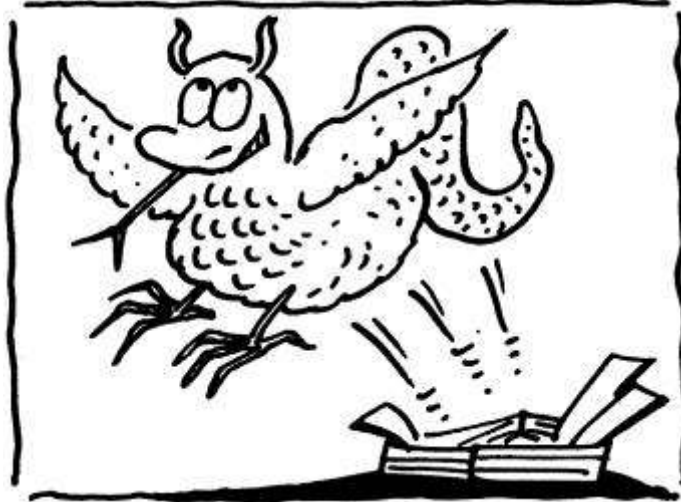
## 6 The Image as Life Metaphor

### Who am I?

After taking the step of committing herself to being a fulltime writer, Evelyn found herself unable to write. She felt horribly stuck and wondered if she'd made a big mistake. When I gave her an earlier version of this chapter to read, she decided to try out the 'Image as Metaphor' exercise on her own and see if she could get some insight into her situation.

An image emerged of a large amphibious creature rather like a sea serpent, with a black shiny skin, confined in a very small wooden box. When she looked down on the box from above she discovered that its top was made of very flimsy plywood slats. She suddenly realized that the creature could easily shatter these. She suggested to the serpent that it could break out of the box, but it continued to huddle fearfully inside.

As she stepped into the image and 'became' the creature, she found that she felt totally vulnerable because of her soft skin and was terrified of leaving the box. Switching roles and becoming the 'guide', Evelyn asked the serpent: 'If you *could* get out, how would it be?' She then became the creature again and in seconds she burst out of the top of the box, rearing up many feet into the air, and became a multicoloured, powerful hissing serpent. She felt absolutely wonderful.



Evelyn suddenly recognized that her block was due to her fear of exposing her sensitive self to the public eye with her writing. She also realized that she had the potential to be far more powerful and colourful and, indeed, to make a real impact. She now felt confident, rather than fearful and compressed, and was able quite literally to launch herself out.

Within a few days, Evelyn sent her first article to a newspaper. They liked it so much that they asked if they could put her name on their list of freelance writers. The next time I saw her, I noticed that even her clothes were more colourful.

In this chapter we will explore how we can use imagery in this receptive way to get messages from our unconscious so that we can know who we really are and what is going on for us, and act out of a sense of inner clarity. The technique introduced here can be used to understand clearly and deal more effectively with any situation or problem, whether it be our general life situation, problematic work relationships or a marketing campaign. In order to act rather than react, we need to be able to pause, understand ourselves as well as the inner structure of the situation we are in, and determine the simplest and most appropriate way to move forward. This is what using an image as metaphor enables us to do.

### Imaging a Problem

This first and most basic use of imagery involves inviting an image to emerge in response to a question and then working with the image. As in the case of Evelyn's serpent, the images that come in this way have the powerful ability to sum up with a telling metaphor the basic structure of whatever it is you are asking about. The metaphor tends to be so accurate that the more you explore it, the more it can be seen to correspond on every level and in every detail not only with the specific problem but even with your life as a whole. The implicit becomes suddenly explicit, the complexities of the problem become streamlined into a simple structure, the history of the situation becomes obvious, and suddenly a resolution emerges where it seemed impossible before.

During one Imagework session, Ken, the father of a girl in her early twenties who was having problems finding a career, wondered how he could help her. How much should he run around to get information for her? Should he push her? Should he just let her get on with it? What is the role of a good father? He had arranged to have dinner with her that evening and was tense and confused about what to do when he met her.

An image emerged of a cross. Ken was distressed: he associated the cross with his pattern of having a sacrificial sense of responsibility toward the people in his life and he hadn't realized that this was what he was unwittingly doing once again. He didn't want to play this role with his daughter. What could he do to change this? He 'became' the cross, and suddenly found himself burning. He realized that he was no longer a cross, but a beacon burning high on a hill. This idea worried him at first, yet it felt warm and wonderful. He realized that he had become a fixed point to which people came for light and warmth.

Ken saw immediately that transforming his sense of burdened responsibility to one of open and receptive warmth and understanding was the key not only to dealing with his daughter, but with his relationships more generally. He went out to meet his daughter looking forward with pleasure to a warm and light filled evening.

Since an image also represents an internal thought form or program, as you work through the image you often find that you have directly shifted your previous state of body, mind and spirit. One Imagework student, Anne, has a tense jaw and invited an image associated with it; a tied knot emerged. As she worked with the knot and managed to unravel it, she discovered to her surprise that her jaw had loosened along with the knot. This is why one of the more powerful methods of quick relaxation (see chapter 5, A Quick Relax, no. 4) is to allow an image to emerge of your tension and then transform the image. The tension goes right along with it.

Furthermore, you can extend your understanding and clarity about present, past and future by consciously mapping the image back onto your life and seeing the parallels. Thus Anne, by understanding how the knot got tied, what it took to unravel it and what would happen to the piece of rope when it was no longer a knot, could draw some far-reaching conclusions about her general life pattern and possibilities.

### **The Poetic Imagination**

What sort of images come up for people? Any and every image is possible, for we are all natural poets, and the strangest images are often the most straightforward to understand. I remember a professor of economics who participated in an Imagework session I held with computer programmers. He came away so amazed at the poetic quality of the images which emerged naturally from these super-rational mathematical students that he felt as if he'd just attended a séance.

Some typical images that come to mind are: a rock nestling under a cliff, worn away by waves, dreaming of eternity; a sunflower, face lifted up to the sun, its stalk aching because it needs support; a bird, with its wing damaged, unable to find a place to shelter and heal; an aspidistra in a plant pot that is much too small, thinking that if she lets her leaves go brown she might get some attention and get her pot changed; a tiger in a cage, remembering the way it used to be in Africa, yet convincing himself that it's okay and safe in here and where would he go anyway?

The images usually have an intuitive meaning both to the person whose image it is and to others who hear it. If you are working in a group, other people can join in and ask questions or send wishes: 'Rock - I wish you the pleasure of children playing on you and admiring you.' 'Sunflower - my stalk aches too. Perhaps we could join forces and support each other.' 'Bird - I wish you other birds to hover around you and heal you.' 'Aspidistra - try another way to get a new pot than by getting ill.' 'Tiger - why not try the cage door? You can always go back in the cage if you want to.'

### **The logic of the Imagination**

The images have their own inner logic, which may not be the logic of everyday reality. It is crucial to sense what the image-being - which is what I call the personified animal, plant or object that emerges as the image - wants to do, no matter how much this may conflict with biological facts or rationality. I remember the joy we all had in an imagery session when a 'pig' decided it wanted to stop wallowing and start to fly - and did.

The image-being does know best what its next step should be. There was the time I was on my last day of holiday and felt unsettled and didn't know why. I got an image of a boat near the shore, neither in the water nor out, feeling stuck. I understood now that my unsettled feeling must have to do with the fact that it was my last day and I didn't know how to deal with this. I thought I'd better push the boat back on the shore. But although I tried and tried to do this the boat kept slipping back into the water. So I decided to go the other way and push the boat out to sea - and that felt absolutely right.

I came to the conclusion that although it was my last day on holiday, I needed to go all out and get the most out of it rather than simply close down as I tend to do near the end of an experience. The highlight of my holiday was the visit to a little village church which I made that day only because I saw that boat in the middle of the sea feeling wonderful.

### **The Structure of the Exercise**

How do we get these images? Eventually you will simply ask for an image and, almost like flicking on a television set, there it will be. But at first, it may seem a bit daunting. It's probably easiest to begin by working with a friend or by using a tape - either one of the Image Power-Inner Power tapes or one you have made for yourself. But if you work by

yourself and simply shift seats so that you are the guide asking the questions in one seat and the image-being in the other, you will feel almost as if you are two separate people in one.

As always, you need to remember the principles of Imagework of chapter 4, and then begin by clearing a space and relaxing (see chapter 5). If you are working alone, put a cushion or chair opposite you to serve as the chair of the image-being: this is where the image will 'appear' and where you will sit to become the image. You return to your original seat always when you are asking guiding questions. Many people prefer to keep their eyes closed when they are the image-being, because this enhances the experience for them. Find out what is most comfortable for you.

The basic structure of the exercise is as follows: you encourage an image to emerge and study it from a number of perspectives. You then enter into the image, becoming the image-being, and deepen the exploration. Then you look back and get a sense of what led up to the present situation, and look forward to find out what is the next step for you, and try out this next step. You then appreciate both your conscious and your unconscious selves for their joint effort. Now you take time to think about the image and map it back onto your life and consider what the implications are for the future and then emerge from your relaxed state. Thus, the steps are:

Preparation: Clearing a space and relaxing

- 1 Inviting an image
- 2 Studying the image
- 3 Becoming the image: deepening and exploring
- 4 Getting a sense of the history
- 5 Getting a sense of the possibilities
- 6 Appreciating and emerging
- 7 Reflecting
- 8 Looking forward
- 9 Emerging

In other words, you allow an image to emerge and tell its Story, beginning with the present, then going to the past, like a flashback, and then to the future, and eventually you draw conclusions more directly about your life. The preliminary question on which the image is based given in the exercise below is a general one: 'Who are you and what do you need to know at this moment in your life?' Later you can vary this to ask specific questions about specific problems.

You may wish to have some paper and felt-tip pens, crayons or paint ready, either for creating an image to begin with, just in case thinking of one proves difficult, or for drawing the image afterwards.

The exercise form given below is rather long and may seem complicated. This is mainly because it is full of alternatives and explanations to cover every eventuality that might come up for a novice Imageworker. A Short form of this process is given at the end, which is particularly useful when you have only a few moments and need to quickly understand something or someone, or to make an instant decision.

To keep you company in this process, I will work along with you, inviting an image to arise and following all the steps with you. You'll find a summary of my experience in Appendix Two. I promise that I am not going to cheat and find an image that I know sounds good, but literally will follow along right now as I am writing this, doing the exercise with you. So remember: don't look for an image that *you* think is a good one; the first image that comes to mind is the best one for you at this moment.

I remember Michael who asked for an image to help him decide whether to reveal an important secret in his life. He got an image of a factory. What did this have to do with his question, he wondered? He went into the factory where he saw tins coming off a production line. Even more disappointed with the image, he was about to reject it when he noticed that they were tins of baked beans. Suddenly, one of the tins exploded, the beans shooting out every which way. Then the message appeared in the air: 'Spill the beans.'

### **Image as a Metaphor: Basic Exercise**

(Please note: The instructions are in the form appropriate for guiding yourself through the exercise. If you are guiding a partner, change the pronouns as in: 'I'd like you to allow an image to emerge' rather than 'I'd like to allow an image to emerge.')

Preparation: Clearing a Space and Relaxing

*1 Inviting the image:* Suggest this: 'I'd like to allow an image to emerge of an animal, a plant or an object that somehow represents who I am or what I need to know at this moment in my life, the first image that comes to mind, whether as a word, a picture, a sound or a fleeting sense. This image is now sitting in the chair opposite.'

**THANKING THE UNCONSCIOUS:** When the image emerges, say: Thank you unconscious. I appreciate the gift:

**IN CASE NOTHING HAPPENS:** If nothing comes to mind at all, try the following alternatives in turn until one does:

- a Unconscious, I thank you for your efforts to protect me, but I would like to explore these images. Please help me to do so in a safe and natural way. I ask you to allow an image to emerge...(continue as in basic instruction)
- b 'I now imagine that my unconscious is like a wonderful rich sea full of treasures and as I sink down into the sea an image floats up that represents who I am or what I need to know at this moment in my life. This image-being is now sitting opposite'
- c 'Looking back over the past day or two, remembering all the things I have seen, I notice one memory image that seems to draw my attention. This image is now in the chair opposite me.
- d Take felt-tip pens and paper and suggest: 'I would like to allow an image to emerge on this paper of an animal, a plant, or an object etc. (as above).' Then just choose colours and put the pens to paper and draw without thinking. Get to know the image on paper and then imagine it sitting in the chair opposite.
- e Take the 'nothingness' or 'blankness' of not having an image to be your image and explore that.

COMMENT: I hope you haven't already forgotten to take the first image that comes to mind, not the first one that you like. And don't worry if you can't see it vividly - just let it fill out in time.

2 *Studying the image:* Allow the image to become clearer. What does it look like? What colour is it? Does it make a sound? Does it have a smell? Does it move? How? What is its relationship to the environment? Imagine that your consciousness goes up and out of an imaginary hole in the top of your head, and hovers above and around the image, looking at it from above, from behind, from the sides and even from underneath. In other words, get to know it from as many perspectives as possible. What more do you notice from each perspective?

COMMENT: Remember that the image as you perceive it does not have to conform to any known scientific principles. In the world of imagination, anything is possible.

3 *Becoming the image: Deepening and exploring:* Step into the image. This means in this case getting up and sitting on the seat where you saw the image. (If this is not convenient, just step into the image in your mind.) You are now this image-being. Feel this absolutely, concretely: feel the ground under your feet (if you are an animal) or around your roots (if you are a plant) or the wind against your wings (if you are a bird). What do you notice?

Now, returning to the seat of the guide, get to know the image-being as deeply as you can, in a kind of intimate exploratory interview. The following are some good questions to ask. You can also ask or say anything that feels right to you as you sensitively tune into the image-being. If you are working on your own, remember to switch places when you alternate between being the guide who asks and the image-being who answers the questions.

#### SOME EXPLORATORY QUESTIONS:

'Tell me about yourself.'

'What is the essence of being you?' (The sunflowerness of the sunflower, or the tigerness of the tiger, or the boatness of the boat, or whatever the image-being is.)

'Where are you? What can you see around you -what can you hear? Smell? Taste? Feel? Sense intuitively?'

'How does it feel to be you right now, physically, emotionally or spiritually? What is the best thing about your life and what is the worst of it? What do you hope for and what do you fear? What is important? What is not important?'

'How do you feel about your situation? Do you feel at home in the world around you or a stranger? Are you at one with your environment or in conflict with it? Is there a problem that needs solving? Do you feel stuck at all?'

'Are you alone or are there others? Are the others like you or different from you? How do you relate to them? If there is no one, how do you feel about that?'

'How do you move? What sounds do you make?'' (At this point, if you are able to, do get up and move as this image-being and make the sounds of this being.)

'What else do you notice about being you, this image-being, at this moment in your life?'

COMMENT: As the image-being, take a moment before answering to sink into being the image and to sense the answer the image-being would give, rather than the one that you, the human adult, would give.

Remember also that all these questions always refer to the image-being, not the adult human. So when the question is about 'this moment in your life' for example, this is not your life as a person, but the life of a big red bus or rainbow or cloud or aspidistra or whatever it is you are being at that moment.

As the guide, don't forget that the questions above are sample questions. As you feel sensitively in tune with the image-being, other questions will occur to you and it is fine to ask them. Just get used to thinking that you are having an intimate conversation, not with a person but with an image-being.

Once you are used to working with imagery; you won't really need to keep shifting seats, but will be able simply to step into the image in your imagination, and then alternately guide yourself and answer the questions without confusion. This makes it possible to do your Imagework in a public place without embarrassing yourself. However, actually moving physically does seem to have a powerful enhancing effect.

4 *Getting a sense of the history:* Ask the image-being about the background of the present situation. 'What led up to your present situation? Was there a time when things were different? If so, when? How were they different? How and when did the change take place? Do you like it better now or then?'

COMMENT: Every situation has a history, and by understanding the history you can make better sense of the present and future.

It is useful to be very precise about how long ago the change happened as this often yields important clues. A month ago? Six years ago? When I was small? Don't forget that the questions are still not addressed to you as the adult human, but you as the image-being.

5 *Getting a sense of the possibilities:* Begin to wonder what the next step of the image-being might be. Try these to help you:

RESOURCES FROM THE ENVIRONMENT: Look around at your environment, that whole image field that you could see from above. Now expand and become the whole environment. How does that feel? This too is you. You are more than just the image-being. What is your essence as the whole environment? When you look at the original image-being, what do you know about it that it doesn't know about itself. What could you say to it that might help it on its way. Whisper this to the image-being. You might also try becoming two or three other aspects of the environment (e.g. if you are a tree, then become the sky, a squirrel, and a stream) and do the same. You could also float up above as if you were a wise and loving being, and do the same.

FUTURE POSSIBILITY QUESTIONS: 'What's next? What do you need to do to feel better, or to make your life more complete or simply to move forward? What seems right? What should happen? How would it feel to be completely okay? If you could wave a magic wand over your life, how would you like it to be?'

CARRY THROUGH: As you imagine this next step -do it, and enjoy it.

If the image-being is happy as it is, don't push change onto it, though you may comment about your perception of the situation if it doesn't feel right to you.

IF YOU GET STUCK: If there is a sense of stuckness, or the image-being cannot find out what to do or dare to do it, try one or all of these:

'What's stopping you from moving forward? What do you fear will happen?'

'What feels good or useful about even the seemingly negative aspects of the way you are now? Is there any other way to accomplish the same result that is more pleasant?'

'I recognize you don't want to or can't see how to move forward. But if you *could* move forward, what would it be like? If you *were* to change, what sort of change would *it* be?'

'Let your *mind* or consciousness float up and take a perspective from above *looking* down, surveying the scene. What can you see that would be useful for this image-being? If you could whisper something from above to the image-being what would that be?'

'It is now x time later [x time is five minutes, an hour, a day, a year or whatever period is appropriate] and you feel good about your life. What is happening now? What did you do?'

CARRY THROUGH: With all these questions, as soon as the next step does become clear, follow through by suggesting 'Do it, enjoy it.' And you can continue to ask 'What's next?' until there's a natural resting-point.

COMMENT: This is a crucial stage in the exploration, for we can sense what choices we have available and try them out in total safety.

When we are stuck and can't seem to get anywhere, the first step is to find out what is stopping us rather than trying to move forward against internal opposition (which is a bit like trying to *move your car with the hand brake on*). It is important to see, also, the positive functions of the present attitude, which probably have something to do with protection. Once you understand the function, you can help the image-being find a healthier way to accomplish the same thing.

Sometimes if we are really so frightened of change we can't even imagine it, we need to be 'tricked' into a moment of experiencing the new. For this purpose 'I know you don't want to do x, but if you did, how would it be?' is quite miraculous. It enables us to imagine freely without all the fears that attend change since we are stating clearly that we don't intend to do it. Of course, once we have imagined the change, we may find that it is so nice that we do want to change. Sometimes, by imagining it we have already changed.

Recently, one of my students had an image-being, a little rabbit, who was absolutely refusing under any circumstances to accept love into her life - saying she knew it was good for her but she simply would not take the risk. I acknowledged to her that she need not do so, but how would it be if she did? I can still see before my eyes that look on her face of pure joy when she allowed herself to imagine how it would be and the relaxation in her whole being a few moments later when she admitted that for the first time she felt there was now some hope.

When it simply seems difficult to find out what to do next, then shifting perspectives often helps: hence the suggestion that you float upwards and look down. ('Oh yes, the motor of the boat is broken, but from above I can see that the boat is so close to shore that you could row there.') Or that you shift forward in time and look back ('It's half an hour later and I can see that what I did was to stop struggling in the quicksand and call for help and that someone did come to help me.')

6 *Appreciating and emerging:* Tune back into the original image. What is happening now? Is there a change? How do you feel about the future?

Thank your conscious and unconscious selves for their teamwork.

Review the pictures and feelings you have just been through and notice the best picture/feeling in all that. Allow yourself to feel/be that again and to notice exactly what it is like, both physically and emotionally, so that you can recognize that state of mind and body in future. You can if you wish create a 'cue' to bring this feeling back more easily. Do this by seeing the picture, stepping into it, letting yourself feel it again, and, at the moment it all comes back to you in full strength, touching two fingers together or touching part of your body that you associate with that feeling. This is now a cue that will help you to bring the feeling back. Test it immediately after you emerge to see how it works.

COMMENT: Whenever you have done any Imagework, it is always crucial to return full circle to the original image and see that changes have taken place. If there are no changes at all, it may well be that the work has not yet gone deep enough or resolved itself. Going back to the beginning helps you both to evaluate and to appreciate the steps you have taken.

The major work with this image has now been done. The process you have been through is a transformative one in and of itself, in that you have begun to transform the deep symbols that program your life. You have also, just by going through this process, become more at home with your unconscious.

7 *Reflecting:* Using your conscious resources. Spend a few moments now reflecting on what you have just been through, and also keep the image in the back of your mind over the next few days and continue this process. Here are some possible questions:

'What did that image mean to me? How does it reflect my life as it is and has been? What do I feel good about as I look at this clarification of my underlying programme? What do I feel uneasy about? How does this image fit in with previous images I have had of myself?'

'What are the feelings associated with the starting image? Are they familiar? When do I feel them? How old was I when I first felt that way? How would it be different to feel the way the changed image-being feels?'

'If I map this image back onto my life, like laying a diagram on a piece of tracing paper over the reality of my life, what correspondences can I find, in the past, present and possible future referred to?' (Be specific here; there is likely to be a one-to-one correspondence between all the features of your image and the nature of your life. For example, if as the image-being your life situation changed five months ago or six years ago, this may well be an accurate description of a real change in your own life at that time.)

*If you really cannot understand what the image means, try talking to your unconscious and saying: 'Unconscious, can you give me another image that will help me to understand the image I have just had? I'd like to allow an image to emerge that will illuminate my previous image.'*

COMMENT: While until now you have been encouraging your unconscious assumptions and images to come forth and reveal themselves, reflecting involves utilizing your conscious resources more fully to round off the work and to take the insights you have already begun to gain a step or two further. It also gets you into the habit of taking seriously, in your conscious everyday life, the messages that come in such a strange form from an inner dimension that we usually ignore. In this way, you can multiply the benefits of the imagery work. This then, is the time to use your conscious mind to make sense of, and make use of, the intuitive work you have just done.

8 *Looking forward:* Now is the time to think about what this all means in practice. Ask yourself some of the following questions:

'What are the practical implications? What does it really mean to make this change - what do I need to do practically in order to take my next step?'

'If I were the transformed image-being [the one who has already taken the next step or made the change], how would I deal differently with this problem and with life in general? How would I get up in the morning, eat breakfast, go to work and so on - i.e. what would a day in my life be like if I had this new image in the background? How does that compare with my present life?'

'What could stop me or how might I stop myself from making the change? What could I do about that? What frightens me about it? How do I usually sabotage myself? How can I make this work?'

COMMENT: This is the time to begin to make some conscious choices about how to integrate these new understandings into your life.

9 *Emerging*: When you are ready to emerge from this deeply relaxed state, suggest the following: 'I'm going to count up from one to five and when I say five, I will open my eyes, feeling relaxed and alert, feeling better than before, bringing back with me the best feelings, pictures and insights from my explorations. One, two - coming up to the surface, eyelids becoming lighter; three - alert but still relaxed; four, five - eyes open.'

COMMENT: Because this deeply relaxed state is also a highly focused one, it is best to begin your reflecting and looking forward before emerging from it. If the image has been an important one, you will certainly want to continue your reflecting and planning after you emerge and over the next few days and weeks.

LATER: At various moments during the next few days or weeks, simply notice if you get the same feeling as the one you had as the image-being at the very beginning of the process. Then, if it is not what you want, just wonder how you might experience things differently if you were the image-being at its best, after it had taken the step it needed to take. Or ask the changed image-being for advice: 'What do you think I should do now?' Or, if you created a cue for yourself, use it to bring back the good feeling, and then decide what to do.

Every now and then, also, just tune into the image-being and see what state it is in: is the rabbit feeling friendly? Running around in a fright? Hiding in a corner? This is a good indication of your present state of mind.

PAINTING THE IMAGE: Another very good thing to do is to sit down with paint, crayons or felt-tip pens and draw your image. When you've done so, it is a good idea to imagine that you are the painting (as you imagined that you were the image-being) and say: 'I am this painting. This is how it is to be me: and explore further. If at all possible, leave your painting out for a few days, so that you can, as the feeling takes you, add to it or change it.

COMMENT: As soon as you have a clear image of a positive way of being, you have a resource you can use. A clear positive image is implicitly a plan or pattern of being and acting. You can say: 'If I were this image-being, e.g. this motorized snail, or this free-flying bird, or this friendly rabbit, how would I deal with this situation?' Or else you can see these image-beings as advisers and ask them what to do.



Because every image is really a resource and adviser, you will find before long that you have so many potential members of your internal board of expert consultants that you will wonder how you can keep them all on your payroll!

Do also get into the habit of tuning back into images you have created already just for a moment to check your state of being. For example, I often used an image of a boat and would check it out every now and then to see how I was doing. When it was out at sea I knew I was in the middle of life working with my full energy. When the boat was a mess I knew that my disorder or chaos had reached too high a level and I needed to stop and do some internal clearing and ordering. If I was sailing against the current, I guessed I might be doing something that would be counter-productive. When it was upside down on the shore I gave up whatever I was doing and had a rest. Imagine a boat: what is your boat doing right now?

### **Image as Metaphor: Quick Method**

If you have only a few moments, try this brief format (which is really a quick summary of the process above):

1 *Invite the image*: Tell yourself, 'I'd like to allow an image to emerge of an animal, a plant or an object that somehow represents who I am or what I need to know at this moment in my life, the first image that comes to mind.'

- 2 *Study the image:* Observe the image and its relationship to its situation, and then look from above, the sides and below. What do you notice?
- 3 *Become the image:* Step into the image. Ask yourself: 'What is the essence of being me at this moment? What is going on for me? What is the best aspect of it? The worst of it?'
- 4 *Get a sense of the history:* Ask yourself: 'Has it always been this way? If not, how and when was it different, and how and when did it change?'
- 5 *Get a sense of the possibilities:* Ask yourself: 'What's next? What's the way forward?'
- 6 *Appreciate and reflect* Appreciate the joint effort of your conscious and unconscious selves, and reflect on the meaning.
- 7 *Look forward:* Consider how you can make use of your image and of the understanding you have gained from it.

### Variations

There are some other ways to get images that you may find useful. You can either get a quick sense of their meaning or work on them in much the same way as above.

*Asking the unconscious:* Speak directly to your unconscious and say: 'Unconscious, please give me an image that will help me to understand this problem.' Or: 'Unconscious, how would it be best for me to go forward? Please give me an image.'

*Magic Screen:* Imagine that you are sitting in your own private cinema, with a magic screen in front of you. Ask for an image to appear on the screen that describes your present situation. After seeing that one, ask for one that describes what you could do to shift the situation.

*Tell a story:* Tell yourself a story that begins: 'Once upon a time there was ...' (either: a little boy, a little girl, or an animal, a plant or an object). Follow the story through, saying what the characters are thinking and feeling and doing, what led up to the present events and how the story ends. You may continue then and say: 'And then what happens? And what happens five years later?'

*Images tell the story:* Consider three or four aspects of a problem that you have or a project that you are planning and allow an image to emerge for each. Watch them combining and recombining, follow any story line that emerges, observe them from all perspectives, talk to each of them and then make sense of the story, mapping it back to the original problem. For an example see Appendix One: The dog, the carrot, the samovar and the fishing boat.

*Standard images:* Any image becomes yours as you explore it, so starting from a standard image can yield important insights too. Trees and rosebushes are classic standard images: become a tree or rosebush, and find out about yourself. I like using the image of being a city. What do you look like? What kind of buildings do you have? Train station? University? Shops? Monuments? Banks? Transport? Government? Back streets? Slums? And so on. This can yield wonderful insights.

### Applications

**THE UNCONSCIOUS BODY:** A very powerful way of using the Image as Metaphor exercise is for understanding and changing a feeling in your body, whether it be a headache or a vague discomfort in the pit of your stomach or an anxiety feeling. After relaxing, tune into any body feeling that you want to understand or change and ask for a name or an image. Then continue just as you did above, getting a sense of the feeling, deepening and exploring, finding the next step, appreciating, reflecting, looking forward and emerging. Now, release the image from your body, ask for a new image that you would like better and put that new image in place of the old one.

At the end, it is important to check back to the body feeling you began with, and see how you are feeling now. If the feeling hasn't changed at all, you probably haven't quite reached the heart of the problem.

**PROBLEM SOLVING:** More generally, this exercise is a versatile one and can be used to make sense of any situation or problem. The only thing you need to do is to vary the first question. The unconscious, like a computer, will select an appropriate image.

For example, one I use when I am working as a consultant for professional development is: 'I'd like you to allow an image to emerge of your work and your relation to your work at this moment in your life.'

**COUNSELLING:** When I am working with people in any kind of counselling or psychotherapy role, I often just stop them after the first description of what is going on and say, 'Take a moment now, and see what image emerges.' And off we go. Imagework students tell me that they have learned to do this in everyday conversations with friends and therefore feel much more able to be genuinely helpful. When a friend has a problem they just ask what image comes up, instead of feeling called upon to give advice that they suspect will never be followed.

Another technique I use in counselling is to say to myself: 'I'd like to allow an image to emerge of an animal, a plant or an object that somehow represents the person I am counselling and their problem at this moment in their lives.' I then get a sense of the meaning of the image, and offer it to the client: 'This image has come up for me -does it mean anything to you?' In my experience the image has an immediate and powerful significance to the other person in 99 out of 100 cases, and often represents the turning point of the counselling session.

**UNDERSTANDING AND EVALUATING OTHERS:** Similarly, if I am interviewing someone, and want to get a quick sense of what my intuition is telling me, I say to myself, 'I'd like to allow an image to emerge of an animal, a plant or an object that represents this person sitting opposite me.' If I don't have time to go into the image and understand it while the interview is going on, I spend a few moments exploring the image afterwards. It gives me the benefit of being able to use my intuitive understanding along with my conscious appraisal to make good decisions.

**THROWING IT ALL HIGH UP IN THE AIR:** I sometimes like to use this exercise to acknowledge where I am and then to throw my map up in the air and see what emerges. This is particularly helpful when I feel I cannot find a satisfactory way forward. To do this, you work on an image, and then stand in the middle of the image field and acknowledge how this feels to you. Then step off the image field, off the map. How does it feel to be without a map? Notice any fear or excitement that emerges. Now pick up the whole image field, as if it were a picnic tablecloth, and throw it high up in the air. See how it lands. Step back into the new picture. See how that feels.

## **In Conclusion**

Doing this exercise may not have been easy this first time. So now, do congratulate yourself, not because you made a brilliant discovery (even if you did), but simply because you took the time, and risk, to begin a process that most people shy away from all their lives. While the results may not show at once, and your development is likely to be a gradual process, with lots of enthusiastic starts and depressing defeats, one day you will turn around and say to yourself, 'You really have changed, haven't you?'

One of the changes you may find is to do with your values. Inherent in beginning to work with imagery is the understanding that your internal world is of value: that you care not only about external events but about your internal integrity, sense of meaning or feeling of rightness, and you are willing to devote some attention to it. For many people, this is a crucial shift. Of course, you will without doubt also find that external events work better because you have paid attention to reviewing and revising your internal plans of action. Indeed, if they didn't, this work would become a form of escapist daydreaming -relaxing enough, but deprived of its practical power.

It is worth emphasizing that although stepping into the image in your mind or even changing seats is very powerful, it is possible, if you wish, just to observe the image and talk to it rather than become it. This is particularly useful if you are doing Imagework in a public place. But for myself, even after all my years of practice, when I want to work deeply, I still prefer not only to step into the image in my mind but also to shift places, particularly if I feel stuck. I have developed a method of changing places or shifting in my seat in public situations that doesn't look too bizarre. Or so I believe.

Using images to sense your next step definitely does not mean forcing yourself to change or telling yourself you should be different, or hitting yourself on the head with any of the insights you have gained. It means clarifying your patterns and waiting for yourself to unfold naturally, because as your images change, you will slowly but surely change too.

It is, of course, often absolutely necessary to use your will and determination to carry your plans through, but this should not feel like a constant painful inner struggle but rather like a difficult but necessary path that you are determined to follow and, in a sense, are happy to follow. Being able to use your will effectively is in fact a part of the natural unfolding process.

If you find you are not making any changes, it is worth exploring what is stopping you, imagining concretely how it would be to have made this change or sensing whether you need a slightly different image so that you can feel comfortable. But expend the effort on creating a clearer, more appropriate pattern. It is never useful to whip yourself to fit into shape, no matter how good a shape it seems to be.

Do also enjoy and appreciate the images you get, and don't get discouraged or angry when nothing seems to be working. This too is part of your relationship with your unconscious and reminds you that you, as your conscious verbal self, are not totally in control. You can ask for a gift from the unconscious - or, to be more precise, from the image-making domain between your conscious and your unconscious -but you shouldn't demand or expect it.

It reminds me of how I used to feel when my children were toddlers and I'd come home from work with a present for them. I so loved the look on their faces when they were delighted and surprised by the little gift I had taken the trouble to choose; and perhaps it was this look that motivated me to choose another some other day. But when I walked in and they demanded, 'What did you bring me?' the pleasure died, and I immediately thought they were spoiled brats and that I shouldn't bring them any more presents.

The unconscious may well be rather similar. When you are delighted and surprised by its gifts, it wants to give you more and more. But when you come to expect the gifts and are angry when you don't get them, you may go through a period that feels rather like 'no more presents for that spoiled brat'.

If you wish to buy this book at a discounted price, or buy CDs and tapes or download audio Imagework exercises, please go to <http://www.dinaglouberman.com/shop/>

SAMPLE