

Imagery and Healing

Imagery: experiencing something in your imagination. Hearing, seeing, tasting, touching, smelling something that is not physically present to your 5 senses, and feeling it emotionally as well. The goal being to have a sense of calm confidence and doing imagery to support that emotion. Imagery is highly experiential and emotionally charged and its impact is ongoing. We are doing imagery all the time though too often unconsciously and with negative impact.

Imagery content from the new Continuum Exhibit (including imagery for healing):

“When a person says I wish I could become an Olympic athlete it’s actually a negative image emphasizing what I am not. It’s a step forward to affirm that “I want...”, and it’s still more powerful to imagine that I will be an Olympian”. But the most effective process is to affirm and imagine, as though it is happening, “I am an Olympian.” Imagery can be used to envision, step by step, how we’re going to accomplish that goal.” **Marilyn King - Olympic Pentathlete**

“I have short goals – to get better every day, to help my teammates every day – but my ultimate goal is to win an NBA championship. I dream about it. I dream about it all the time, how it would look, how it would feel...so amazing.” **LeBron James**

“Imagery, it seems, is the language of our unconscious idea processor.” **Willis Harman - former Stanford Professor of Engineering, past president, World Business Academy**

“The effectiveness of mental imagery in the treatment of a wide variety of problems has been documented in a considerable body of literature produced by experimental and clinical psychologists.” **Anees Sheikh, PhD former Chair, Dept of Psychology at Marquette University wrote many books on imagery including Healing Images: the Role of Imagination in Healing**

“For changes in health or behavior to occur, a change in your information base isn’t enough – you have to change your imagery base...mental images have a far greater effect on the body than does verbal instruction.” **Karen Olness, MD - former Research Director, Minneapolis Children’s Hospital**

“The source of my thoughts are not words but images” **Einstein**

“The use of imagery helps students relieve tension and focus their attention. It has also significantly improved their creative writing and seems to enhance their test-taking skills.” **Stan Peichel, former principal, Eisenhower Elementary Coon Rapids, MN**

“...in this dream-like state, when the conscious mind is in temporary abeyance, I see clearly what is obscure in my ordinary moods...Those vibrations assume the form of distinct mental images.” **Johannes Brahms, classical composer**

A B-52 navigator with far-advanced throat cancer was coached by his oncologist, Carl Simonton, MD to enter an alpha state visualizing his white blood cells in the form of riders on horseback riding into the cancer cells and vanquishing them. 3 X per day for 15 minutes. Over 7 weeks the cancer shrunk, then disappeared.

A 6’4” 240lb truck driver who hauls big pipes was in the hospital faced with foot amputated because his leg had been crushed between two cars and no blood was getting past the damaged vessels – even with stent surgery. Coached by his nurse to make pictures in his mind, hear the sounds and feel water (blood) flowing through his leg (a pipe), the blood started flowing and avoided amputation.

A 14 year old boy, a computer whiz who loved his computers, was diagnosed with acute leukemia. In his imagination he transformed himself into his favorite computer and assumed its emotional qualities which for him were real. This included tranquility and reliability. He imagined his body as an immensely intelligent “program” fully capable of effectively and successfully distributing the drugs to the cancer cells. To him the imagery meant being powerful. He experienced complete remission and remained disease free.

“I imagined hanging out with friends that I would meet in college.” **Edo Walker** used imagery, focusing, and diaphragmatic breathing to transform from a high school student failing math and barely playing JV to catching up on all his work and becoming a Varsity starter and co-captain – going to Morehouse on scholarship.

Excerpts from *Healing Images: The Role of Imagination in Health* – Anees Sheikh, PhD

P3 The ancient literature of numerous cultures abounds with accounts of spectacular cures resulting from the imaging process. These accounts are now corroborated by a growing body of clinical and experiential evidence. The effectiveness of mental imagery in the treatment of a wide variety of problems [obesity and insomnia, to anxieties, phobias and cancer] has been documented (Epstein, '89; Naparesk, '94; Sheikh '76, '83, '84, '96, '02; Bornstein & Sipprelle, '73; Habeck, '84; Meichenbaum, '77; Singer & Switzer, '80; Jaffe & Bresler, '80; Korn and Johnson, '83; McCaffery & Beebe, '89; Pickett, '87-88; Hall, '84 to list a few).

P4 In ancient wisdom, consciousness was not restricted to the self or the brain, “but echoed the heartbeat of the entire universe. Within this context, health constituted simply being in harmony with creation (Scholem, '61). Hence the shaman’s first course of treatment consisted of an attempt to build up the patient’s power; only then would they begin to deal with the bodily symptoms.

The shamans were both priests and doctors. They were concerned both with the spirit and the body because they considered the two to be aspects of one integrated organism. Obviously the, the current dominant belief among Western physicians that the mind and body are separate entities [and that the mental events we call “mind” emerges from the brain] stands in radical opposition to the shamanic stance. Modern scientists generally look upon the body independently of the spirit. Disease is an external agent, something against which one should

protect oneself; failing that, disease is something that should be removed or destroyed through technological and biochemical interventions.

P14 Imagination [played] an important role in the Western healing traditions well into the Renaissance. For instance, Paracelsus, a famous physician and the founder of modern chemistry, restated a theme common among the ancient Greeks – that is, the individual is comprised of three elements: the spiritual, the physical and the mental.

‘Man has a visible and an invisible workshop. The visible one is his body, the invisible one is his imagination (mind)...The power of the imagination is a great factor in medicine. It may produce diseases...and it may cure them.’ (Hartmann, '73 pp111-112)

P15 Physicians of the Renaissance still considered health to be a matter of equilibrium, and their therapy consisted of adjusting imbalance...This holistic approach prevailed until the 17th century when Renee Descartes (1596-1650) proposed a revolutionary view. He maintained that the mind or soul (he used the terms interchangeably, is “entirely distinct from the body...and would not itself cease to be all that it is, even should the body cease to exist.” (McMahon & Sheikh, 1984 p13). This dualistic view, which won over Western thinkers, quite radically changed the approach to disease.

In the pre-Cartesian period, no mind-body problem existed. Both mental and physical events had their roots in a common substrate...But Descartes proposed that mind and body are mutually exclusive entities and mechanistic physiopathology gradually became the dominant approach to disease. However in Europe the situation was not quite the same.

P17 In the early 1900's notable contributions to the clinical use of images in the early 1900's include the work of Pierre Janet, Alfred Binet, Carl Happpich, Eugene Casslant, Oscar Vogt, Johannes Schultz, Ludwig Frank and Carl Jung.

‘The psyche consists essentially of images. It is a series of images in the truest sense, not as an accidental juxtaposition of sequence but a structure that is throughout full of meaning and purpose; it is a picture of vital activities and just as

the material of the body that is ready for life has a need of the psyche in order to be capable of life, so the psyche presupposes the living body in order that its images may live. (Jung 1960 p325-6). Jung's therapeutic use of imagery is best represented by the method he termed "active imagination."

P18 One must credit the European clinicians not only for keeping alive the clinical use of images in the wake of behaviorism but also for providing a rich heritage of therapeutic procedures, for keeping us in touch with the unavoidably phenomenological nature of perception, and for building a bridge between Eastern and western approaches to the understanding of the nature of consciousness.

P16 After Descartes' dualism had taken root in the Western mind, imagination was stripped of its role in disease and wellness. During the 18th and 19th centuries, several protests were voiced but the dualistic trend prevailed...The behaviorists successfully eliminated all mentalist concepts from the arena of serious research. Watson (1913) regarded mental images as mere ghosts of sensations with no functional significance whatsoever. Klinger (1971) notes that from 1920 to 1960, there was a moratorium in North American psychology on the study of inner experience, and not even one book on the topic of mental imagery was published.

P19 During the last three decades, imagery has risen from a position of near disgrace to become one of the hottest topics in both clinical and experimental cognitive psychology. Experimental and clinical psychologists of varied persuasions have made imagery the subject of their inquiry, and they have produced a considerable body of literature documenting that images are indeed a powerful force.

