

SPONTANEOUS CREATIVE IMAGERY



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

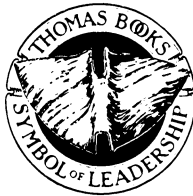
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SPONTANEOUS CREATIVE IMAGERY: Problem-Solving and Life-Enhancing Skills

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FOREWORD

Imagery is probably the most underutilized health resource in the modern world. Unconsciously, it lies at the core of our beliefs about who we are, why we are here, what the world is like, what we deserve, and how we take care of ourselves. It is found at the center of our beliefs about how we fall ill, and what will help us get better, and it influences the actions of all our medical and psychological interventions in a profound way. The ubiquitous placebo effect, to which we compare all other modalities (and find relatively few more powerful), is perhaps the strongest evidence of the power of the imagination in healing, yet until recently imagery had been formally ignored in western culture as a source of information, problem solving, and healing.

In other cultures and times, imagery played a conscious role in healing. The Greeks at the time of Hippocrates had a psychophysiologic model that characterized the imagination as an organ at the literal heart of healing. In this model, the senses apprehended reality, subtracted its matter, and took it into the psyche where it formed images. Some of these images stimulated emotional reactions, which in turn moved the four humors which were believed to influence the balance and health of the body. Depending on the strength and nature of the particular reaction, the patient's health could be influenced for better or worse. Interestingly, if you substitute the term "peptide molecules" for "humors," this model makes quite a bit of sense in light of what we now know about the interplay of the immune, endocrine, and nervous systems.

Dr. David Bresler, Co-Founder and Co-Director of the Academy for Guided Imagery and Associate Professor of Psychology at UCLA, likes to describe imagery as one of the two higher order languages of the human nervous system. Dr. Nucho terms these two modes as discursive on the one hand and the presentational on the other. Another way to describe them is as the sequential information processing system which underlies linear, analytic, and verbal thinking, and simultaneous information processing, which underlies holistic, synthetic, imagistic thinking.

Years ago, Dr. Robert Ornstein of Stanford University captured the essence of these two thinking modes with the metaphor of two observers watching a train come around a curve in the track. The first observer, analogous to sequential thinking, is standing on the outside of the curve at track level and experiences the train rolling by as a series of separate cars, following one after the other. The second observer, our simultaneous thinker, is in a balloon three hundred feet above the track, and sees the entire train, as well as several miles of the track in either direction. It may see the town the train came from, and the town it's going to next, as well as the rolling hills the train is passing through, the cows in the pastures nearby, and the distant mountains with the sun rising behind them. This observer apprehends this gestalt at once and while none of these elements causes the other, they are still meaningfully related, just as the threads of a tapestry all join to form its pattern.

This latter type of thinking, subserved by imagery, is one in which we have had very little education. Linear thinking, where most of our educational programs focus is, of course, essential if you are to balance your checkbook, plan a research project, or write a book. Pattern thinking is likewise essential if you are creating, envisioning, or looking to grasp the larger context of a situation. This ability of imagery to present us with the "big picture" allows us to see connections within and between events, emotions, and physiologic responses in a way we often can't when we try to "figure them out" in the usual way. It can allow us to imagine alternative possible responses to the challenges of life. It allows us to tap into our intuitive, emotional, and even somatic awareness, giving us a better chance to creatively and effectively respond to problems and opportunities alike.

Imagery is the dominant natural language of the unconscious mind, and can often seem to the clinical therapist like a glass-bottomed boat that allows them to directly see into their client's inner world. Even more importantly, it allows the willing client the same view. Perhaps the most important and exciting aspect of learning to better use the imagination is that it is not only a powerful therapeutic tool, but one that translates naturally into more effective self-care.

Whatever outer events an individual experiences, their personal reality is very much created and accessed through imaginative processing and that is where the treasure of self-knowledge can be most easily found. The talents of dispassionate observation, interactive exploring, and inner inquiry are skills that can be developed with time and

practice, and the imagery that we then encounter can provide powerful guidance for healing and living more effectively. By utilizing content-free prompting and guiding, helping professionals who understand imagery and its principles can help their clients quickly develop an appreciation of their inner resources and help set them on the path to greater autonomy and self-efficacy.

In addition to its many uses in psychotherapy, the uses of imagery in medicine and nursing include, but go beyond, helping people deal with the psychological stresses of illness or understanding psychophysiologic phenomena. Imagery can have profound physiologic effects on many of the major control systems of the body. It is very exciting to read Dr. Nucho's review of the emerging research that is finally being done on the effects of imagery on physical as well as emotional and psychological healing. As we understand these effects better, mental health professionals are likely to find new roles for themselves in the medical field, as providers of not only adjunctive services, but of therapeutic interventions that have direct effects on physical healing.

The limits of this type of healing through imagery are unknown, both in general and certainly for any individual. It is, however, an inexpensive, always available, and nontoxic approach which can have profound effects. I often tell my patients that they'll never know what they can do with their minds until they try, and they don't need a million dollars and a research protocol approval from NIH to do their own personal experiments with imagery. Through imagery, they are often able to relax and gain respite from stress, and are frequently successful in relieving suffering from a wide variety of symptoms. Perhaps even more importantly, it allows them to better understand how their thoughts, emotions, and physical symptoms are linked, and gives them access to creative solutions to difficult problems that impede their ability to support their own healing. As long as they do not ignore necessary medical care, imagery provides an approach to self-awareness and self-healing that offers significant benefits at minimal risks.

One of my favorite ways to think about imagery is as a navigational tool of the self. It allows us to see where we've been, and remember formative patterns of not only distress but creative coping and strengths. Imagery also allows us to look into the future, not as fortune tellers, but as creative beings exploring possible alternatives. It allows us to take our inner bearings and to set our sights on where we want to go. With this landmark book, Dr. Aina Nucho brings this powerful navigational tool

clearly to light as the multifaceted health resource it can be. By providing a thorough history of its uses and functions, a thoughtful analysis of its mechanisms and an updated review of current research and applications, she makes a major contribution toward helping us reclaim a major and much needed resource for health.

MARTIN L. ROSSMAN, M.D.

PREFACE

The purpose of this book is to make imagery techniques readily accessible to professionals in the health and mental health fields. It is addressed to practitioners and students in the various helping and healing professions. Social workers, psychologists, counselors, nurse practitioners, and others will find this work useful. It may also be of interest to the general reader who intends to preserve good health or cope more effectively with some persistent health concern.

Imagery techniques are a relatively new development in the health and mental health fields. Imagery techniques have been used with excellent results for acute as well as chronic illnesses. These techniques have also proven effective in easing predicaments of interpersonal relationships. Empirical research studies have accumulated to show that imagery techniques are cost effective, short-term treatment procedures. In the current climate of health care reform and managed care, it is imperative that helping methods be employed that conserve the time and efforts of both the help provider and receiver. So far, our health care has been actually disease care. Help is usually offered after the illness has reached full bloom. Now the various Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs) are discovering that there are financial incentives in helping people maintain good health rather than waiting to provide treatment after the person has developed an illness. Imagery techniques are tools, in conjunction with conventional medical care, for both the prevention and the treatment of illnesses of various kinds.

The book is organized in two parts. Part I deals with the theoretical foundations of imagery techniques. Part II discusses the use of imagery techniques in the therapeutic process.

The phenomenon of imagery is clarified and its relationship with cognition is considered in Part I. Chapter 1 discusses the changing assumptions in health care and introduces the notion of infomedical paradigm, one aspect of which is imagery. Chapter 2 covers the different forms of imagery and provides definition of terms. The next three

chapters deal with the main theoretical frameworks of imagery techniques. The sources of theoretical approaches to imagery stretch from the ancient Eastern sages through the Psychodynamic theories to Learning Theory.

Chapter 6 explores the tasks of the therapist when using imagery techniques in treatment. The three subsequent chapters discuss specific imagery exercises. One chapter is devoted to Restorative forms of imagery, useful to people who suffer from various types of physical ailments. Another chapter presents Problem-Solving types of imagery. A third offers Maturational types of imagery procedures. The final chapter in Part II reviews the empirical research evidence concerning the effectiveness of imagery techniques. The book concludes with a summary of currently available training opportunities and resources in work with imagery.

Although seemingly novel, imagery techniques have roots that stretch all the way back to antiquity. It behooves the present day practitioner to be aware of these roots so that efforts are not squandered in trying to reinvent the wheel, as it were.

Imagery techniques are starting to seep into the various health and mental health professions, but they have not yet become part of the regular curriculum in professional education. Practitioners acquire these skills in occasional workshops that are still few and far between. So far imagery techniques have remained confined to the outskirts of professional education. Now is the time to make imagery techniques accessible to every professional clinician in the health and mental health fields.

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My special thanks to Dr. Arnold A. Lazarus for granting me permission to reproduce the Imagery Vividness Scale and the Inquiring Method of Relaxation from his book, *In the Mind's Eye* (The Guilford Press, New York, 1984).

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PART I
THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

