

Dreams, Healing & Religious Experience

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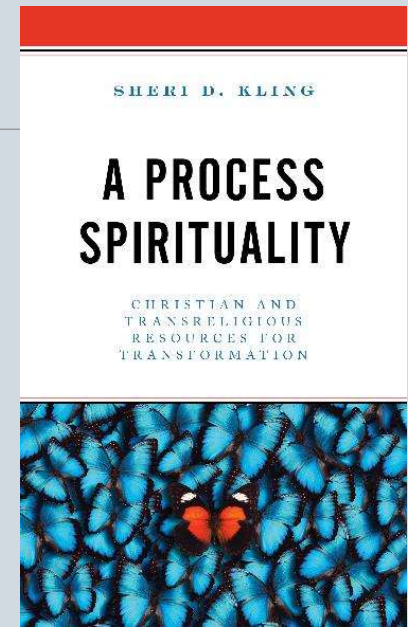
Background

 <p>Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago</p>		<p>SEWANEE THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH</p>	 <p>Process & Faith</p> <p>Director</p> <hr/>
	<p>CLAREMONT SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY</p>		

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My Research

To show how a synthesis of **process theology/philosophy** and **Jungian psychology** combined with a spiritual practice of **dream work** reveals the nature of **all levels of reality** — *cosmic and psychic* — to be **integrated, value-soaked, relational, and transformative.**



*We matter. We belong.
We can experience positive change.*

Agenda

The Problem

- A divided people, a divisive culture

Contributing Factors

- Dualistic worldview and secularization

The Good News

- Healing power of religious experience

The Power of Dreams

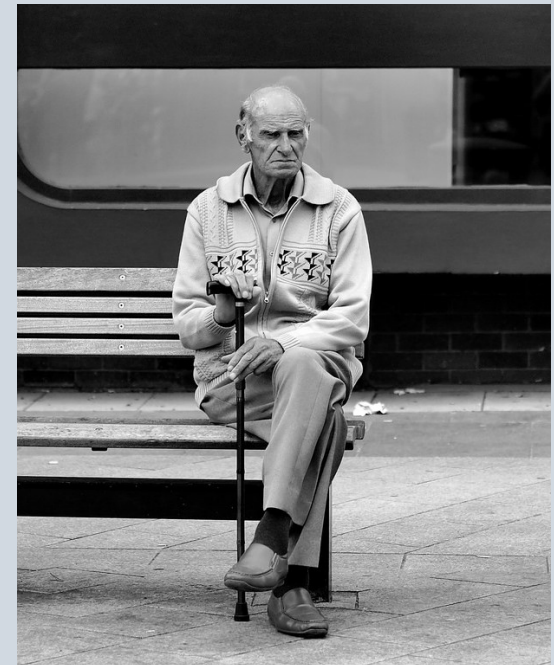
- Research and imaginal praxis

Primary Claim:

Dream work can facilitate embodied experiences of wholeness that are *healing, transformative,* and very much needed today.

A Divided People

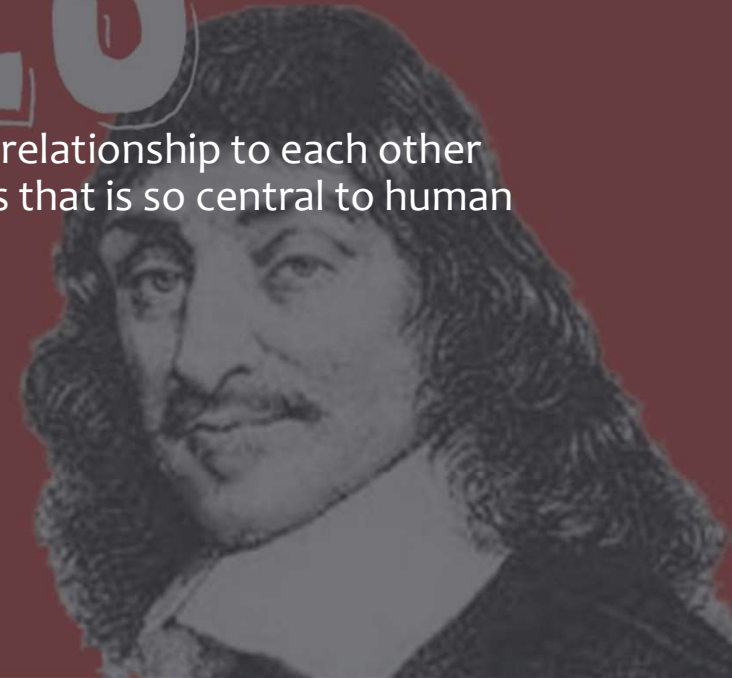
- Societally
- Interpersonally
- Intrapersonally



DESCARTES

A Divisive Culture

- Substance Metaphysics
- Dualism/Materialism
 - If mind and body are two different substances that have no relationship to each other then on what basis can we claim the unity with “our” bodies that is so central to human experience?
- Mechanism
- Patriarchy
- Dismissal of the Non-rational

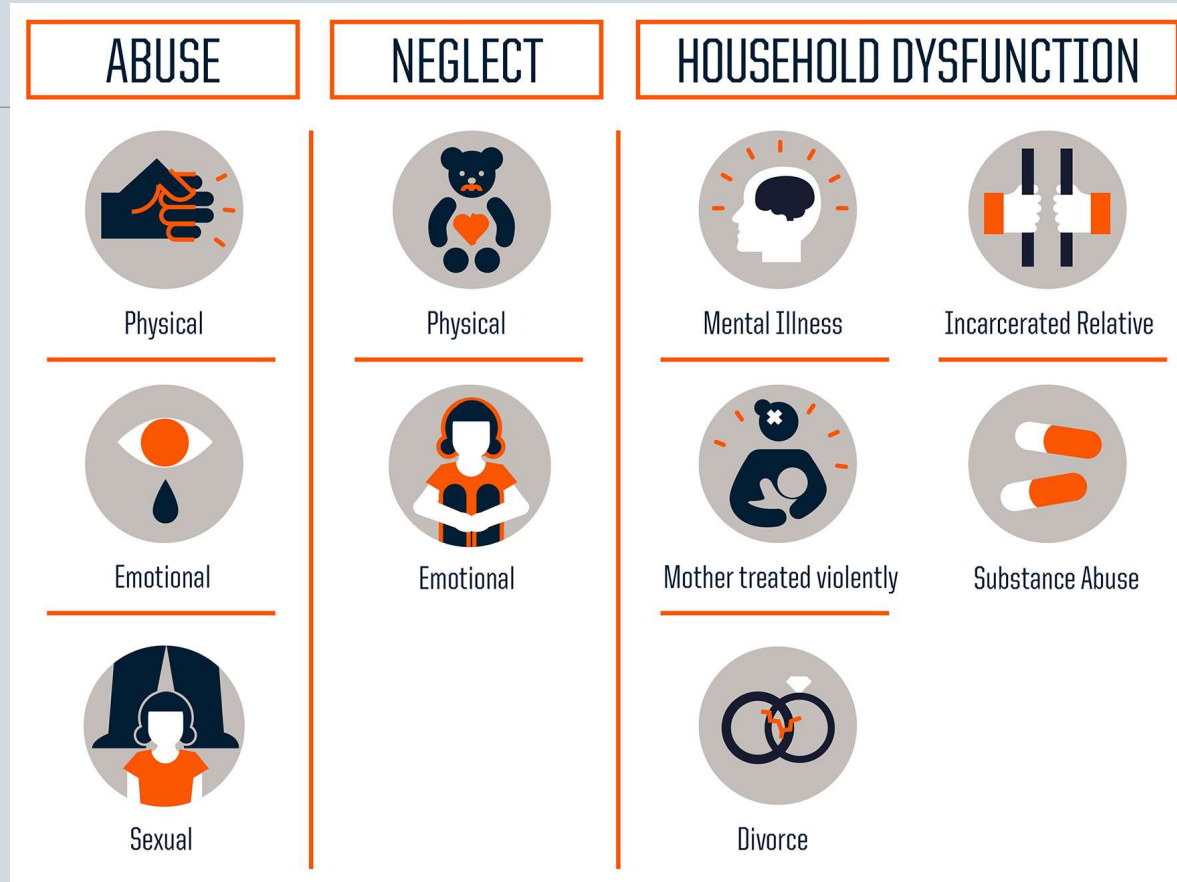


ACE Study

- Conducted by:
 - The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Atlanta – Robert Anda
 - Kaiser Permanente, San Diego – Vincent Felitti
- 17,000 people surveyed over 10 years
 - 72% attended university
 - 77% white
 - 62% were 50 years old or older



Categories of ACEs from Felitti and Anda



ACE Study Results

ACE Score	Total %
0	36.1
1	26.0
2	15.9
3	9.5
4 or more	12.5

- **1 in 4** exposed to **two** categories of ACEs
- **1 in 16** was exposed to **four** categories.
- **22%** were **sexually abused as children.**
- **66% of the women** experienced abuse, violence or family strife in childhood.

<http://www.cestudy.org/the-ace-score.html>

Why is this Important?

- Trauma affects the developing brain
- The emotional and psychic content of trauma is overwhelming and fragmenting for a child
- Experience of trauma becomes accurate predictor for later problems:
 - Physical illnesses
 - Mental illnesses
 - Risky behaviors



The higher the ACE Score, the greater the likelihood of:

- Severe and persistent emotional problems
- Health risk behaviors
- Serious social problems
- Adult disease and disability
- High health and mental health care costs
- Poor life expectancy



Emotional Problems

- **Adults** with an ACE score of 4 or more were **460% more likely** to be suffering from **depression**
- The likelihood of **adult suicide attempts increased 30-fold, or 3,000%**, with an ACE score of 7 or more; **Childhood and adolescent suicide attempts increased 51-fold, or 5,100%** with an ACE score of 7 or more.
- 12% of the participants were partially or sometimes totally amnesiac for a period of their lives, typically the few years before weight gain began. In the ACE Study, they found that there was a distinct relationship of ACE Score to impaired memory of childhood, and understand this phenomenon to be reflective of dissociative responses to emotional trauma.



Health Risk Behaviors

- A child with 6 or more categories of adverse childhood experiences is **250% more likely to become an adult smoker**
- A person with 4 categories of adverse childhood experiences is **260% more likely to have Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)**
- A **500% increase in adult alcoholism** is directly related to adverse childhood experiences.
- A **male child** with an ACE score of 6 has a **4,600% increase** in the likelihood that he will become an **IV drug user** later in life; **78% of drug injection by women** can be attributed to **ACEs**



Serious Social Problems

- Women with an ACE score of 4+ are 500% more likely to become victims of **domestic violence**; they are almost 900% more likely to become victims of **rape**.
- As ACE scores rise, women and men become more likely to be **perpetrators** of domestic violence.
- Higher # of ACEs more likelihood of the adult having had 50 or more sexual partners and being at risk for **unwanted pregnancy, socially transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS**.
- Boys who were sexually abused are more likely to impregnate a teenage **girl**.
- The higher the ACE score the harder time an individual may have in making a living. Here there is a graded relationship between ACE scores and **Absenteeism, Serious Financial Problems and Job Problems**



A Public Health Threat

Robert W. Block

*Adverse childhood experiences
are the single greatest
unaddressed public health threat
facing our nation today.*



How Might this Threat be Addressed?

- ACEs Study shows that somehow mind is influencing body
- Dissociation and fragmentation involved
- If the mind can influence negatively, can it influence positively?





A Better Worldview
Isn't Enough

*Embodied Experiences
of Wholeness*





Canyon de Chelly, AZ

W



Reflective Exercise

Think of a time when you felt whole, unusually connected, or immersed in the flow of experience and describe your awareness of that experience:

- When did this experience happen?
- Where were you?
- What thoughts arose during the experience?
- What did you feel in your body?
- What were you aware of through your senses?
- What emotions did you feel?

Core Characteristics of Religious Experience

- Unitary consciousness
- Timelessness and spacelessness
- Feelings of blessedness
- Inner knowing
- Paradoxical
- Ineffable



The Healing Power of Religious Experience

- The “numinous” and the “nonrational”
- Experience of wholeness and belonging
- Profound changes to personality
- Fragmentation of Western culture reveals its lack of such experience





Religion and the Unconscious

- Primordial life at the depths of human experience
- Unconscious material, the Self, and compensation
- Primordial experience and God
 - Religion as a “true container”
 - Religion as protection of individuality

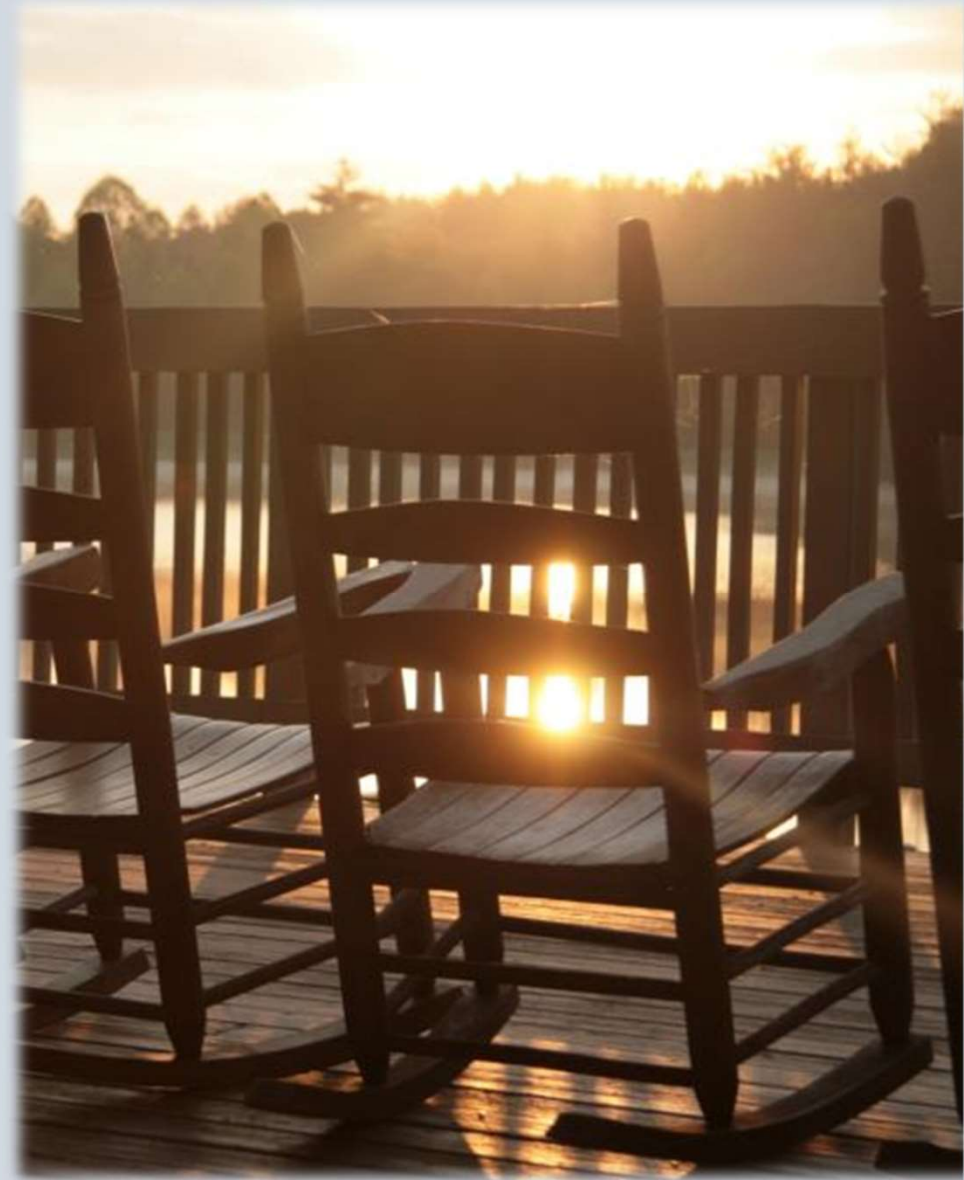
Pilot Qualitative Study



What is the essential nature and meaning of the practice of Jungian dream work in the spiritual lives of Christians who attend the Haden Conference?

Christian Dream Workers

Haden Summer Dream
& Spirituality Conference
Hendersonville, NC, 2014



Process



- 60-90 min interviews onsite in NC
- One by Skype
- Transcription
- Data analysis
- Summary report presented to AAR in Nov, 2014 in the Mysticism group
- Five primary themes emerged

1. Mystical Experiences

- Feeling God's presence
- Experiencing an inner knowing
- A heightened sense of the reality of the “spiritual realm”
- Energy or “numinosity” in dream images



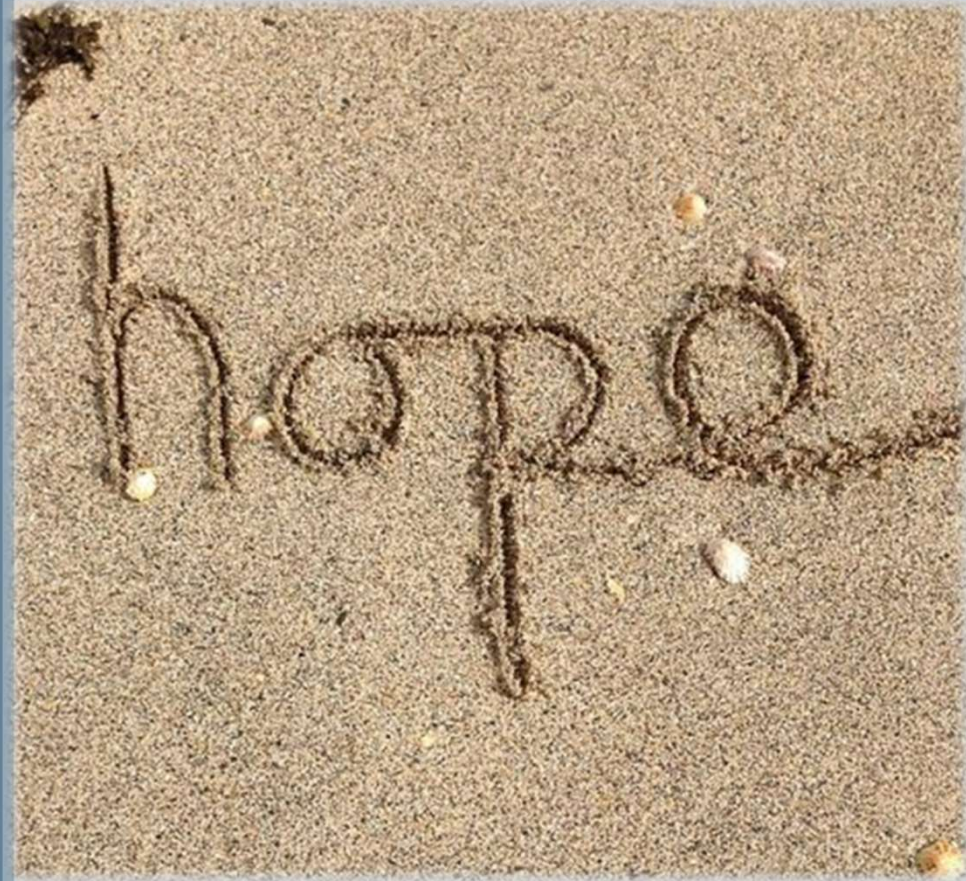
2. Significant

- Dreams hold important meaning and value
- Recorded their dreams and analyzed them



3. Divine Communication

- Insights
- Guidance
- Loving support
- Hope
- Healing



4. Enriching and Transformative Practice: Experience of Self

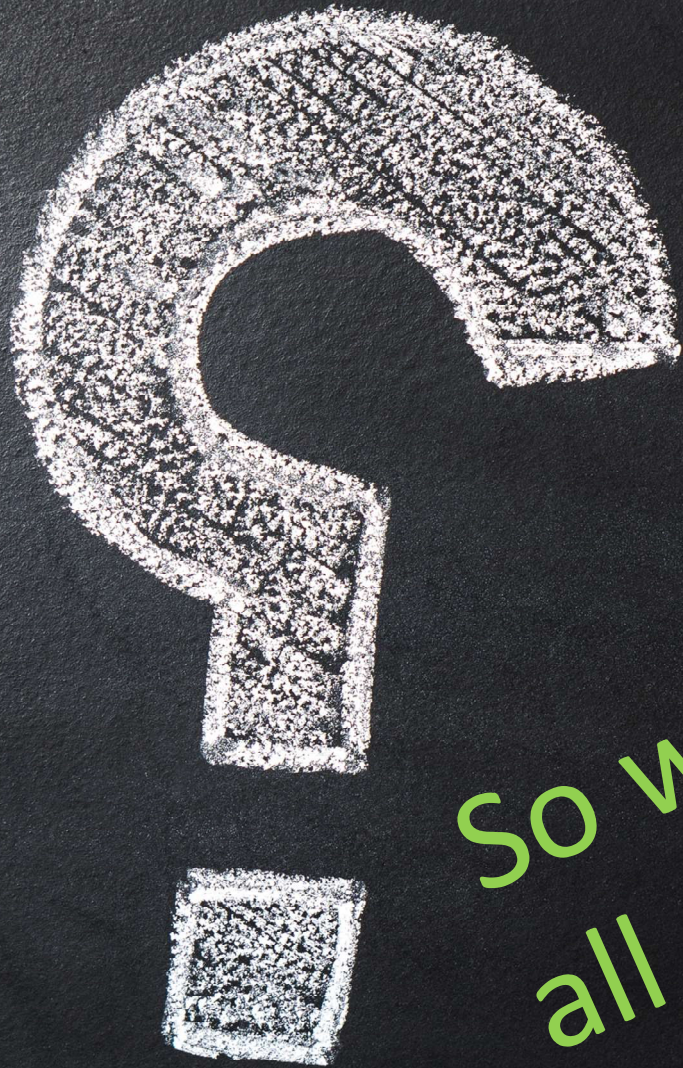
- Helped to increase their sense of self-acceptance, self-knowledge, self-forgiveness
- Happier, healthier, more integrated, more whole



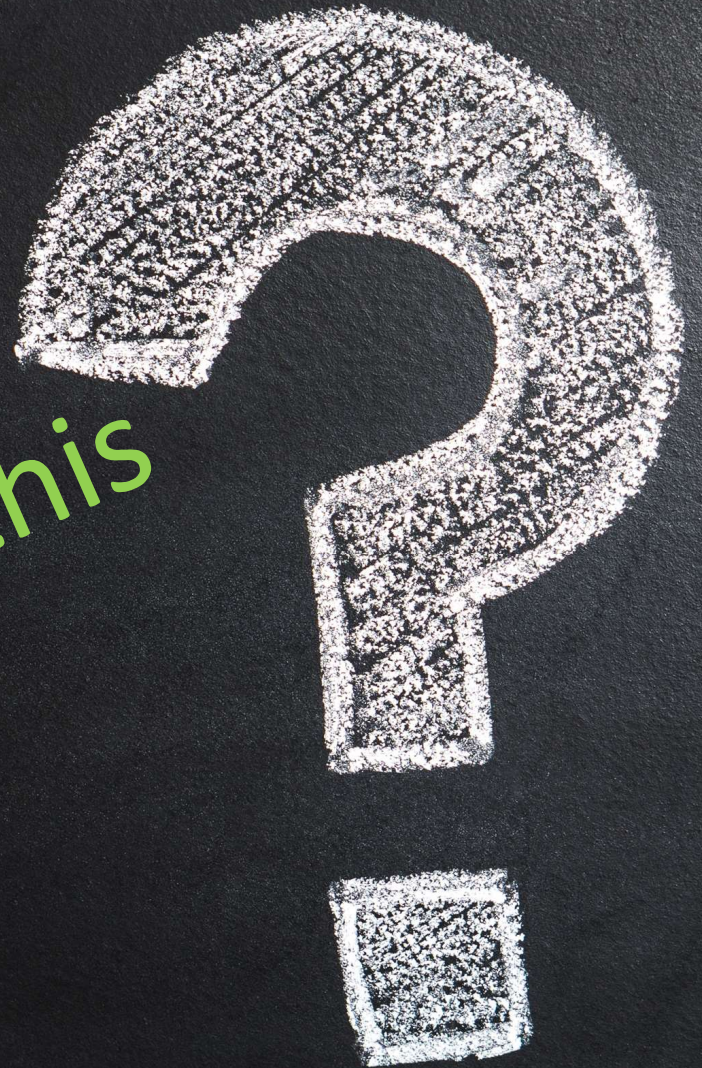
5. Enriching and Transformative Practice: Experience of God and Others

- Helped to broaden their spiritual perspectives
- Changed their images of God
- Deepened their friendships
- Healed past hurts
- Increased their appreciation of other religious traditions





So what does this
all mean?





We can experience ourselves as part of a cosmos in which:

- We matter
- We belong
- We can experience positive change
- And this is true *universally*

Discussion

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It is in dreams that one can catch sight of the most fundamental and stable symbolisms of humanity passing from the “cosmic” function to the “psychic function.”

—Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*

This is how he dreams. He takes materials from the entire world and, taking them apart on his own and then on his own putting them back together, he dreams with his own radiance, with his own light. In that place this person becomes his own light.

—Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

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