



Dreams, Healing, and Religious Experience

Sheri D. Kling, Ph.D.

Flow of this Presentation

- Cultural fragmentation
- Healing power of religious or mystical experience
- Dream work and wholeness

Can dream work facilitate embodied experiences of wholeness that are *healing and transformative*?

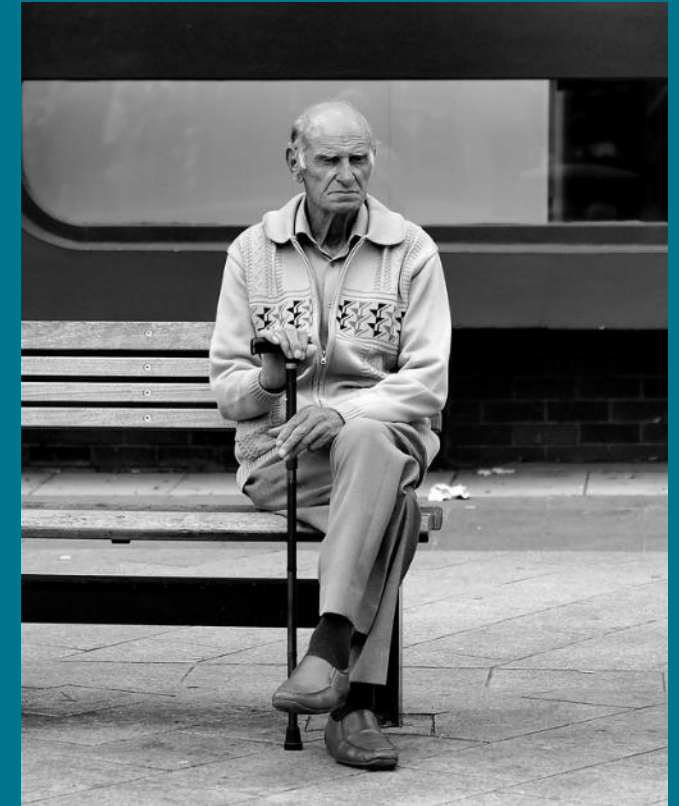


The background is a solid teal color. A large, semi-transparent teal circle is positioned on the right side of the frame. A vertical teal line runs through the center of the circle, extending from the top to the bottom of the image.

FRAGMENTATION & WHOLENESS

A Divided People

- Societally
- Interpersonally
- Intrapersonally



A Divisive Worldview

DESCARTES

- Mechanistic materialism
- Mind—body dualism
- Radical individualism
- Dismissal of the Non-rational



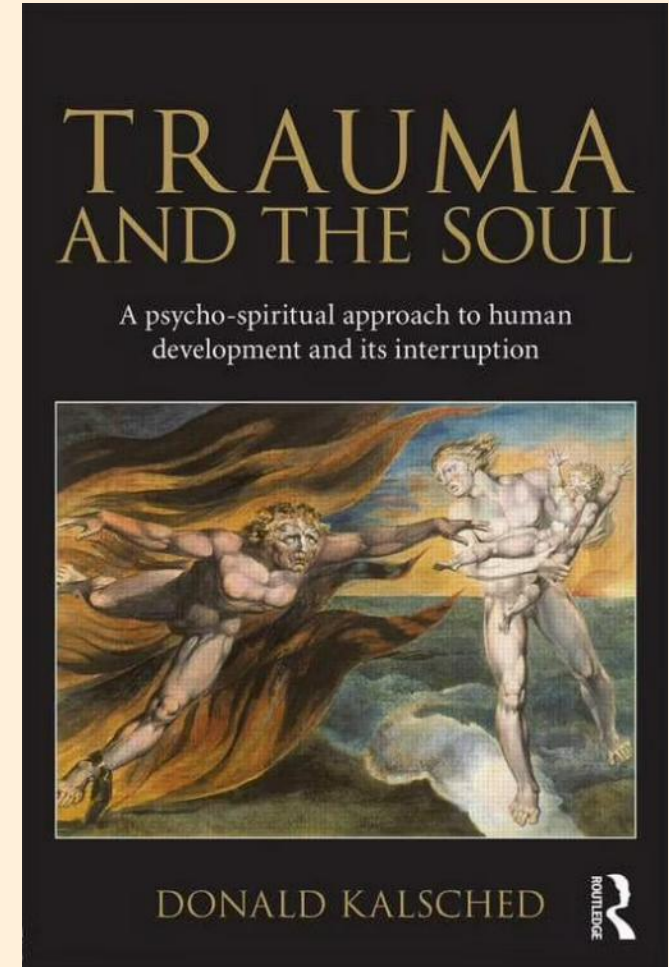
ACE Study

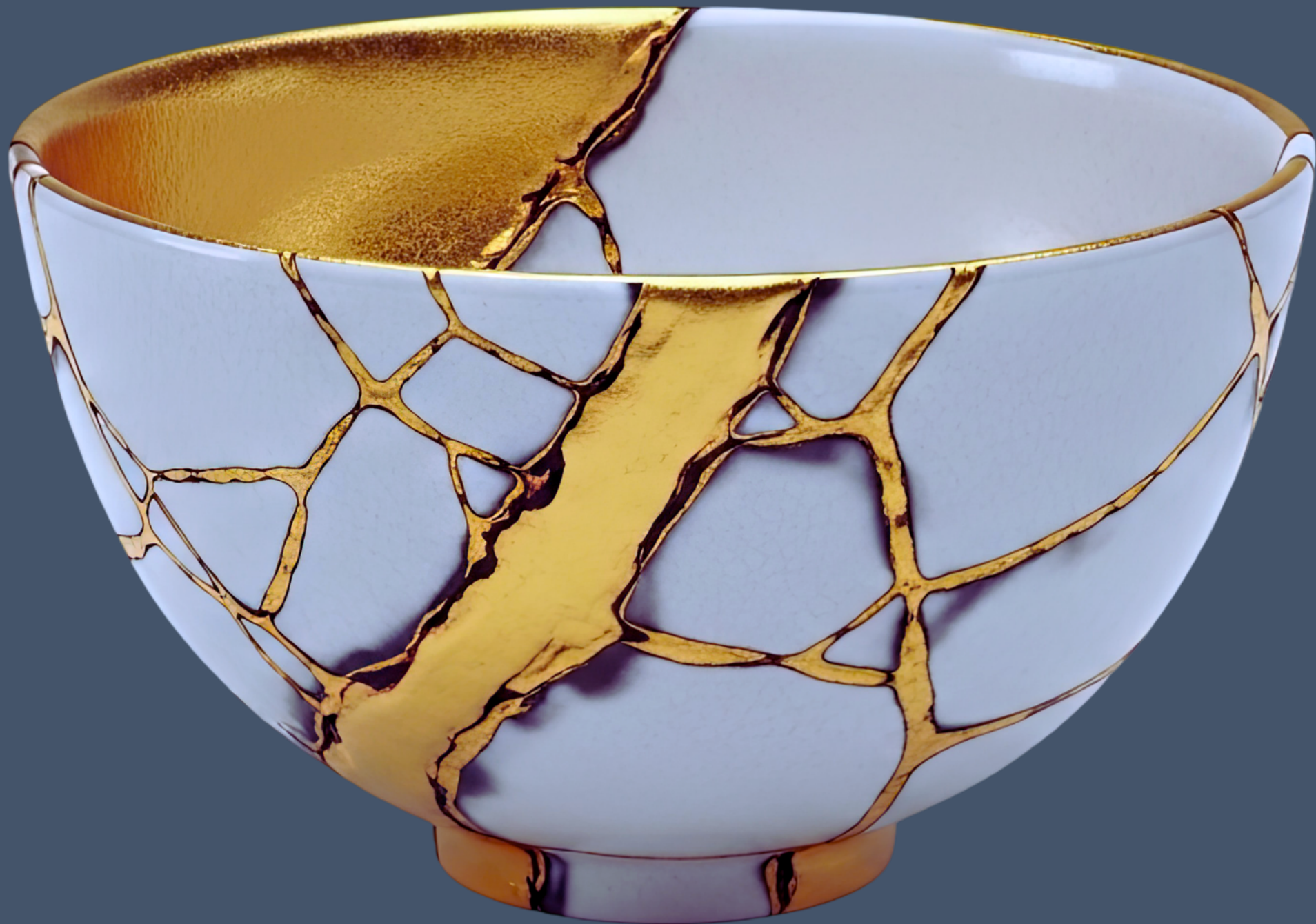
- Conducted by:
 - The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Atlanta – Robert Anda
 - Kaiser Permanente, San Diego – Vincent Felitti
- 17,000 people surveyed over 10 years
- High ACE scores associated with
 - Heart disease
 - Depression and anxiety
 - Addiction
 - Suicide attempts
 - Chronic illness



Trauma, Dissociation, and Somatic Unity

- Difficulty metabolizing early trauma
- Dissociation to avoid shattering of the psyche
- Energies distributed throughout the body





IMAGINATION
&
MEDICINE

The Future of Healing
in an Age of Neuroscience

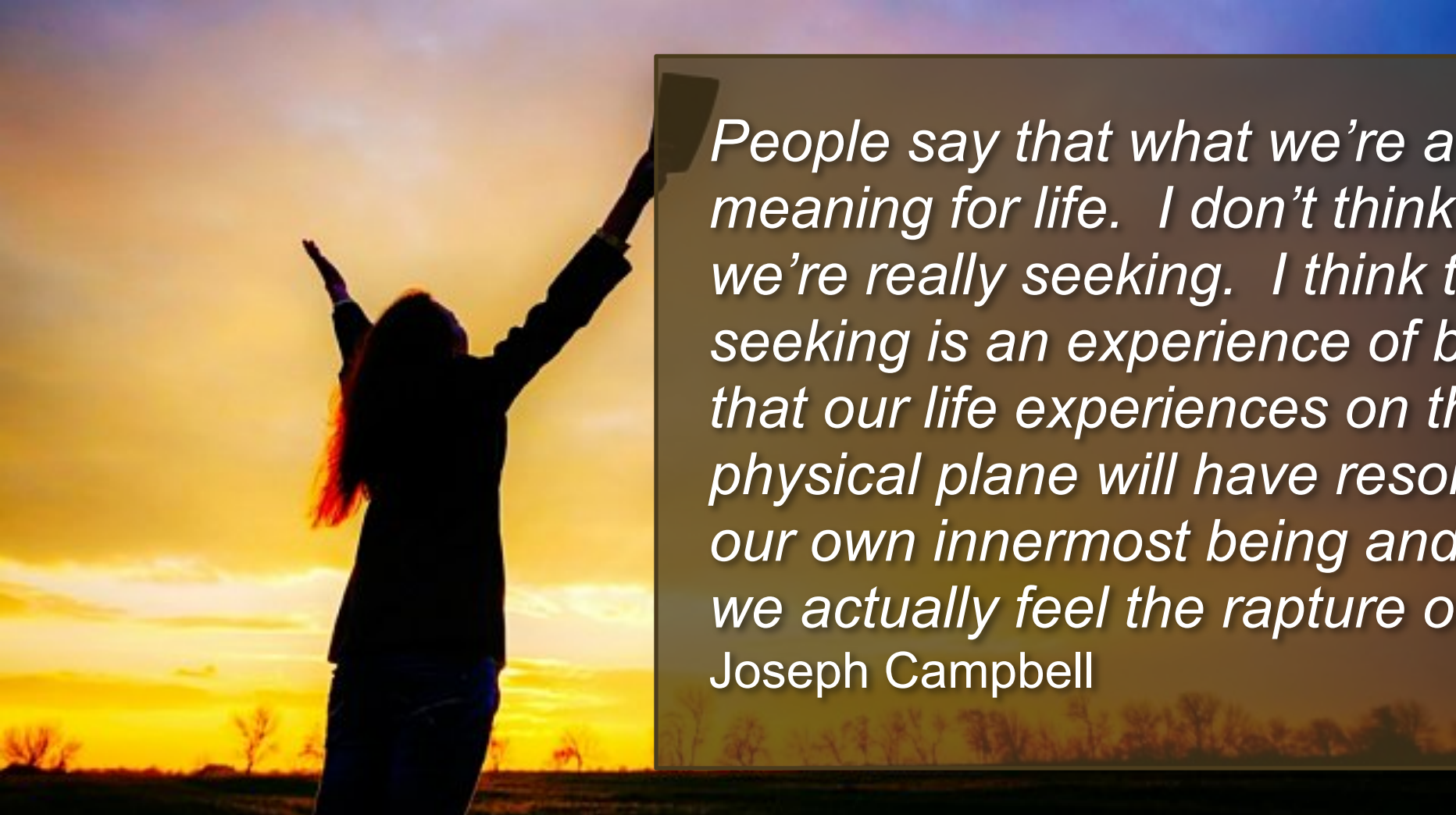
EDITED BY
STEPHEN AIZENSTAT
& ROBERT BOSNAK





**A Better Worldview
Isn't Enough**

Meaning and Embodied Wholeness



People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.
Joseph Campbell



What is Wholeness?

- To understand all aspects of our lives as **one coherent whole**
- Experiencing life as **meaningful**
- Sensing **connection** with others and the cosmos
- **Integrating** different aspects of the self
- Feeling capable of **positive change**

Wholeness is also a feeling of “at homeness” or “at-onement” – it is feeling undivided.



Canyon de Chelly, AZ



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:

- Where were you?
- What did you notice in your body?
- What emotions were present?
- What made the experience meaningful?

HEALING AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Core Characteristics of Religious Experience

- Unity or oneness
- Timelessness and spacelessness
- Deep peace or joy
- A sense of authoritative knowing
- Paradox
- Ineffability



The Healing Power of Religious Experience

- Self-transcending
- Can ignite powerful changes to personality
- Two kinds of transcendence
 - Vertical
 - Horizontal





Religion and the Unconscious

- Primordial life at the depths of human experience
- Speaks through symbol and images
- Bringing unconscious material to consciousness, the Self, and compensation
- Encounters with the Sacred are unfathomable:
 - Supernatural nonsense or merely subjective
 - If such a reality exists, modern people are generally unaware of a way to access it.
- The psyche moves toward integration and wholeness
- Dreams are a primary way it does this.



Quick Reflection

Would you say that dreams are psychological, spiritual, or both?

Why?

The background is a solid teal color. A large, semi-transparent teal circle is positioned on the right side of the frame. A vertical teal line runs from the top to the bottom of the frame, passing through the center of the circle.

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF DREAMERS

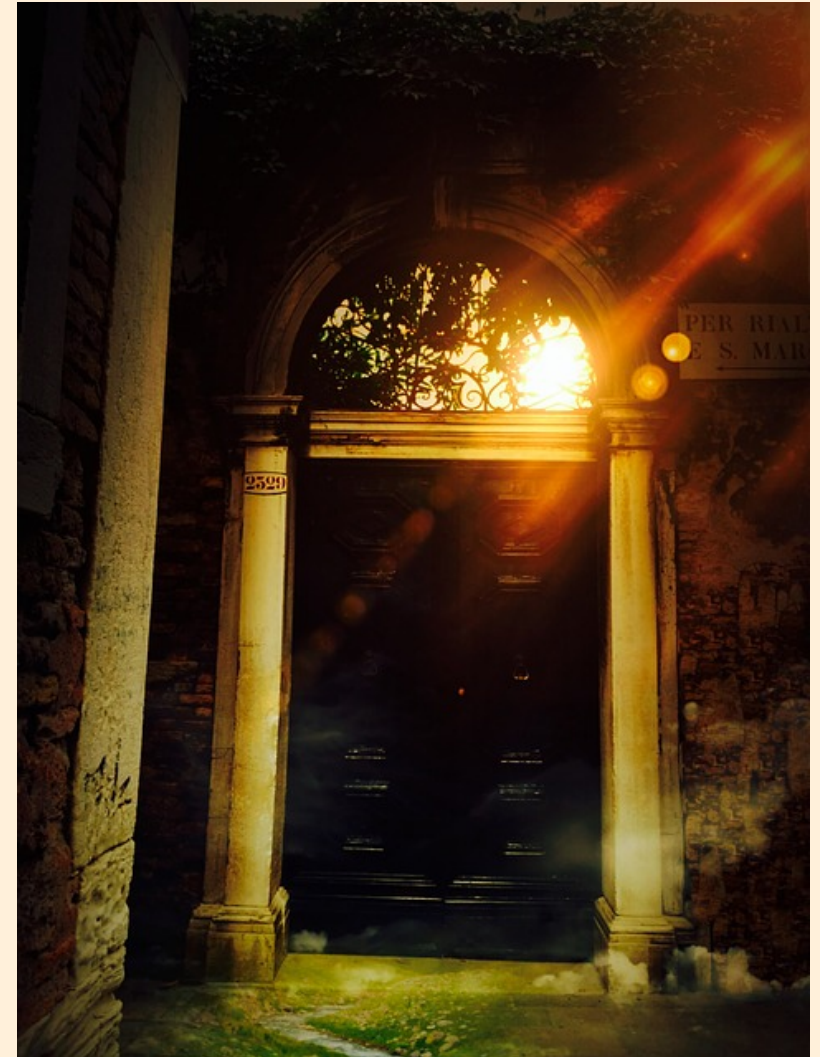
Process



- 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

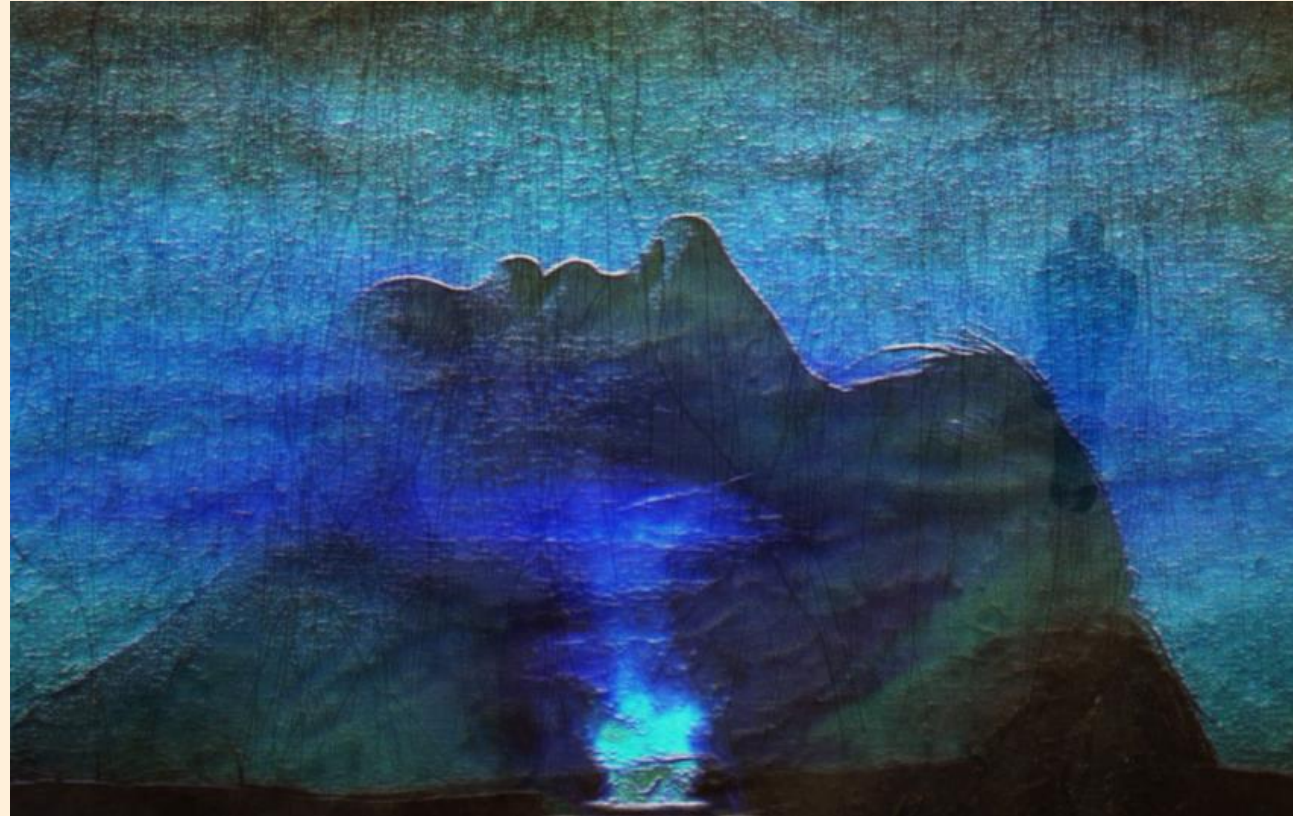
1. Mystical Experiences

- 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. Dreams are 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

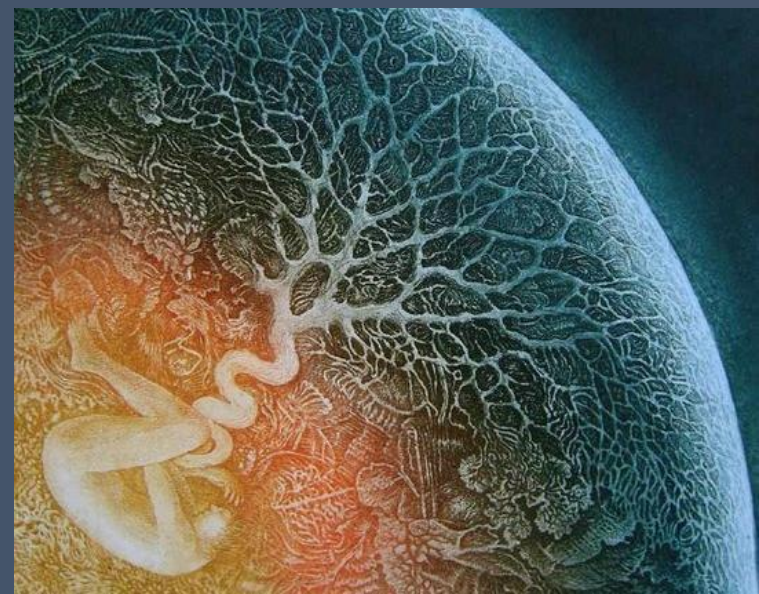
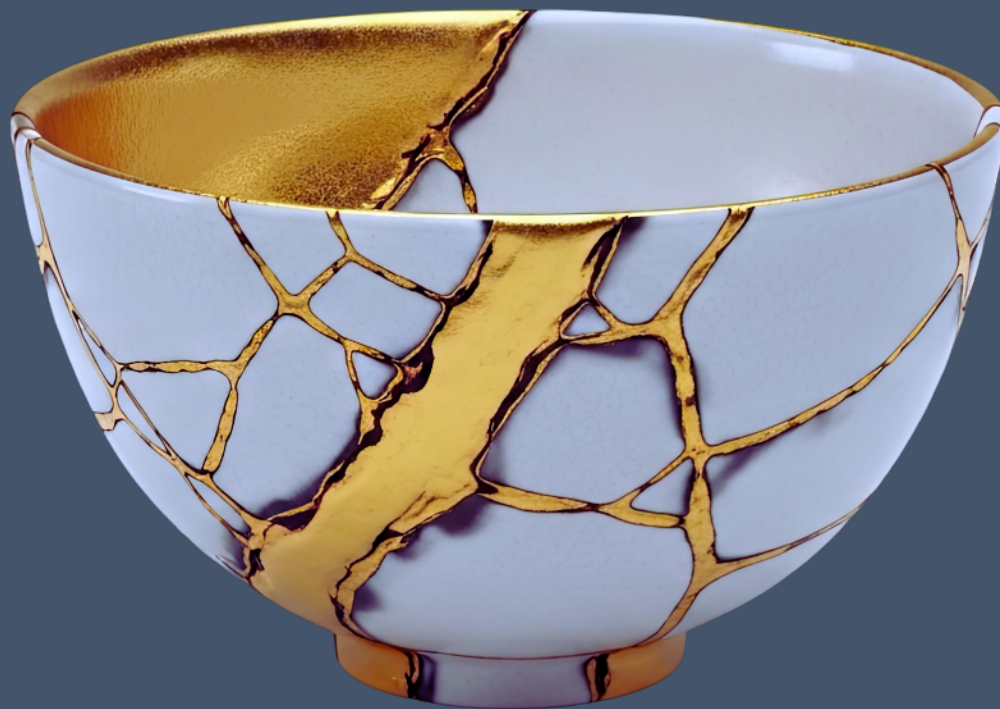


So What Does This Mean?



Dreams may function as:

- A form of spiritual practice
- A path toward self-integration
- A source of guidance and meaning
- And sometimes a transformative religious experience



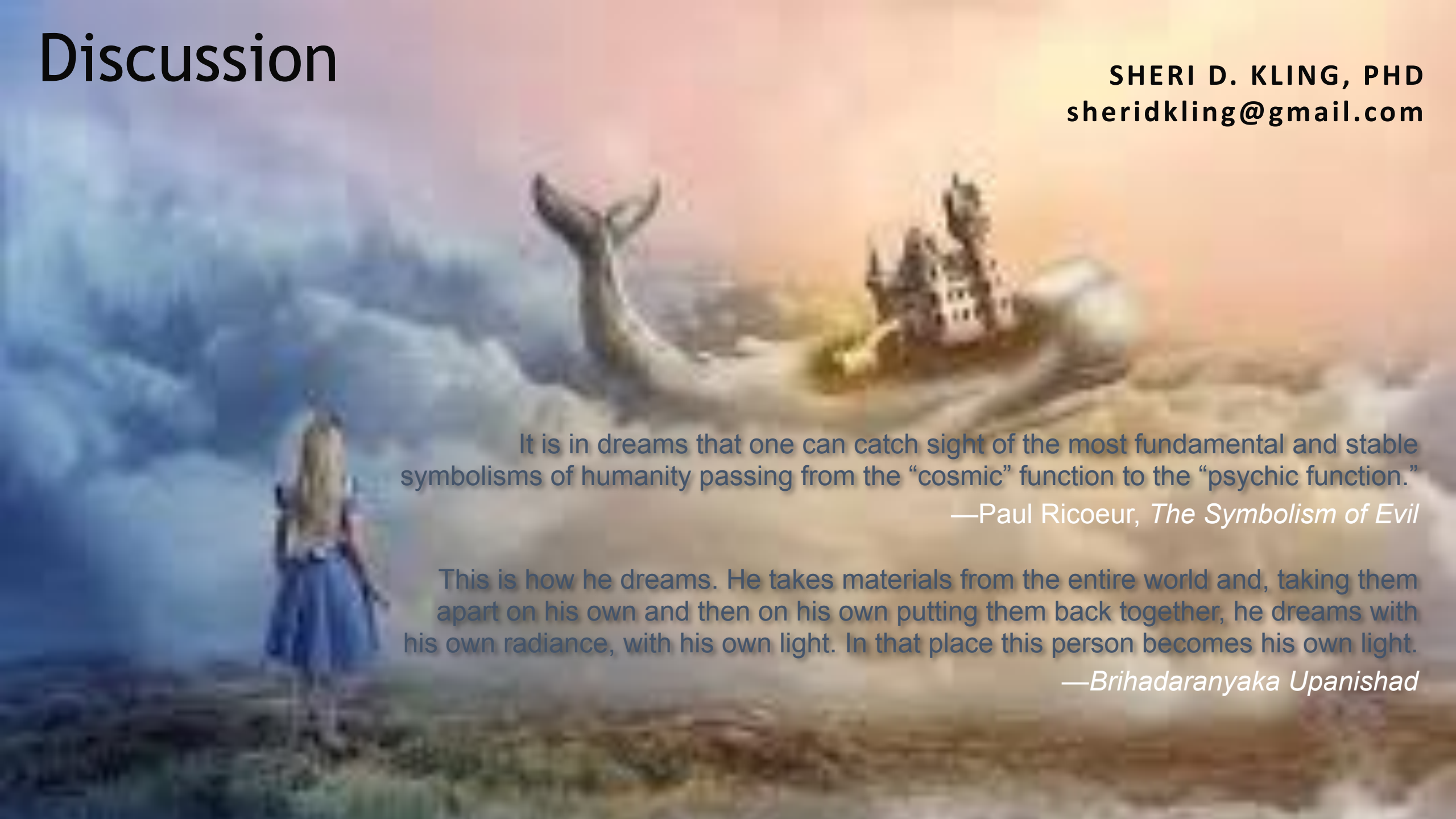


We can experience ourselves
as part of a cosmos in which:

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

Discussion

SHERI D. KLING, PHD
sheridkling@gmail.com



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*

References

- Ann and Barry Ulanov, *Religion and the Unconscious*, Westminster John Knox Press; New edition edition (September 1, 1985)
- Mark Potok, “The Year in Hate and Extremism,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, February 11, 2016, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2016/year-hate-and-extremism>.
- Janice Shaw Crouse, “The Loneliness of American Society,” *The American Spectator*, May 18, 2014, http://spectator.org/59230_loneliness-american-society/.
- “The Profound Power of Loneliness: National Science Foundation,” *National Science Foundation*, February 3, 2016, http://www.nsf.gov/discoveries/disc_summ.jsp?cntn_id=137534.
- George Monbiot, “Neoliberalism Is Creating Loneliness. That’s What’s Wrenching Society Apart,” *The Guardian*, October 12, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/oct/12/neoliberalism-creating-loneliness-wrenching-society-apart?CMP=share_btn_fb.
- Vincent J. Felitti and Robert F. Anda, “The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences to Adult Medical Disease, Psychiatric Disorders and Sexual Behavior: Implications for Healthcare,” in *The Impact of Early Life Trauma on Health and Disease: The Hidden Epidemic*, ed. Ruth A. Lanius, Eric Vermetten, and Clare Pain (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 78–79.
- Donald Kalsched, *Trauma and the Soul: A Psycho-Spiritual Approach to Human Development and Its Interruption* (London, New York: Routledge, 2013)