

Dreams, Healing, and Religious Experience

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Core Claim

Dream work can facilitate embodied experiences of wholeness that are healing and transformative — and deeply needed in our fragmented world.

The Journey We'll Take

1. Our cultural fragmentation
2. The healing power of religious or mystical experience
3. Why dreams may help restore embodied wholeness

Fragmentation in Our Time

Modern life often reflects fragmentation on three levels:

SOCIETAL

- Political polarization
- Racism and ideological division
- Difficulty communicating across differences

INTERPERSONAL

- Epidemic loneliness
- Over 25% of Americans report having **no one** to discuss personal struggles with

INTRAPERSONAL

- Rising anxiety, depression, and disconnection
- Nearly **400% increase in antidepressant use** since the late 1980s

Trauma and the Fragmented Self

The **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study** revealed strong connections between childhood trauma and adult health outcomes.

High ACE scores correlate with:

- depression
- heart disease
- chronic illness
- addiction
- suicide attempts

Jungian analyst **Donald Kalsched** explains that trauma threatens what he calls **psycho-somatic unity**. To protect itself, the psyche may **dissociate**, separating sensations, emotions, and memories.

An Image of Healing



Healing does not erase fracture.
Healing **integrates it**.

Like **kintsugi**, the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold. The cracks remain—but become part of the beauty.

Reflection

Where in your life have broken places eventually become sources of wisdom or transformation?

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Embodied Experiences of Wholeness

Ideas alone cannot heal us. We need **experiences of wholeness** that remind us we belong to something larger than ourselves. **Wholeness** involves:

- meaning
- connection
- integration
- transformation

It is a felt sense of being **at home in our bodies and in reality itself.**

Reflection Exercise

Recall a moment when you felt deeply **alive, connected, or whole.**

Where were you? What did you feel in your body? What emotions were present?

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Religious and Mystical Experience

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

Researchers such as **Walter Stace** and **Ralph Hood** found common characteristics in mystical experiences:

- unity or oneness
- deep peace or joy
- paradox
- timelessness
- a sense of profound knowing
- ineffability

These experiences often transform how people understand themselves and the world.

TWO FORMS OF TRANSCENDENCE

Vertical	Horizontal
Experience interpreted as encounter with God or the divine.	Experiences of unity through nature, art, music, love, or beauty.

Jung and the Psyche

Carl Jung believed the psyche naturally moves toward **integration and wholeness**. One way this happens is through **dreams**. Dreams may bring forward images, emotions, and symbols that reconnect what has been divided.

Reflection

Do you tend to think of dreams as: Psychological, Spiritual, Both? Why?

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Insights from a Study of Dream Workers

A qualitative study of Christian dream workers revealed five themes.

Dream work was experienced as:

1. **Mystical experience**
2. **A meaningful inner practice**
3. **Divine communication**
4. **Transformation of the self**
5. **Transformation of relationships**

EXAMPLE REFLECTIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS:

“When I hit midlife the dream work became the life preserver that I clung to when all hell broke loose.”

— John

“I don’t really feel shame anymore about who I am.”

— June

“I feel whole... People tell me constantly that I seem radiant.”

— Susan

What This Suggests

Dream work may function as:

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

A Whole-Making Reality

Despite trauma and fragmentation, reality itself may be **whole-making**. Some call this reality:

God... Psyche... Life... Cosmos

Again and again people encounter this whole-making reality through:

dreams • symbols • imagination • inner work

Final Reflection

What idea from today's presentation most **stretched or surprised** you? Where do you feel that idea in your body?

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