

Dreams and the Body

Stanley Keleman

Working somatically with people reveals the interconnection of dream and embodiment. Dreams are important because they are direct statements of our deep somatic reality and they demand attention from the awake brain to continue the body's emotional growth. For me, they are connected to the stages of our bodied life.

I became interested in somatic work and dreams when I began to notice a relationship between working physically and an increase in my dreaming life. I noticed a similar relationship with clients and their dreams. For example, working with assertion, increasing feeling in the legs, or having a sense of one's body disassociated from feelings easily brought dreams of no support, of falling, or of striding confidently. How the body dreams itself is a way the therapy can take direction. Confronting a change in age, having a different body, being someone else could evoke working with being softer or more assertive.

Dreaming presents us with how the somatic self is rehearsing and getting ready to appear. Dreams are the soma's interiority seeking embodiment, our inside reality using the language of society embedded in non-societal time and space. The underformed and undersomatized body has a hunger for more body and it announces this in the dream. To work somatically with a dream is to feel the characters in the dream as desires or emotions seeking to be embodied in the awake reality.

Jorge Borges, the Argentinean writer, tells a story about a man who wished to have a son. The man began his creation by dreaming him part by part over a period of many nights. When he was finished, he prayed to the god of fire to animate the son he had dreamed. The story ends when the dreamer discovers that he, like his creation, is also a creation of some dreamer.

Borges' tale offers insight into the role of dreams in the body's image-making process. Dreams make images and sequence them in a narrative form. The dream process connects the body we are with the one we are becoming. Dreams are part of the body's way of maintaining the ongoing relationship between the inherited body and its deep brain and the personal body of the cortex of the new brain. Dreams, then, are a part of the reality of the life of the body.

Dreams display what is becoming but not yet fully realized. As the body grows and forms its somatic identity, it speaks to itself in many languages. One is the dream. The body as process is always imaging and dreaming of its next shape and how to incarnate. Borges, the dreamer, represents all of us dreaming of the body we are and the body we will be.

His story also tells us about inner experience, how dream and awake states are two sides of the bodying process. Dreaming, and our ability to access dreaming, demonstrates the relationship we have to ourselves. Thus we learn about both the difference and similarity of the night self and the day self, how desire and image are linked.

There is a continuity between body process and dream image. The unconscious body appeals to the cortex for its images of itself. The awake brain appeals to its own body to animate its images. Borges' dreamer, who wants a companion, writes not only about a literal offspring but an inner brother/son. His theme parallels both the Christian story of resurrection-God sends his son-and the Golem story of the Hebrews, the making of a human-like creature. The theme of self-generation of oneself from oneself also is part of complexity theory, the most recent thinking about evolution.

These stories share a common theme the relationship between the brain's emotional and reflex centers and the more awake and volitional cortex. The brain makes an image of the body and then asks the body to animate it. Borges' story deepens the theme of human participation in the formation of the shapes of our existence from youth to full adulthood to maturity and then old age.

We can learn from dreams because we can reorganize meaning and association as well as influence somatic-emotional structure. Dreams have an emotional matrix that dream characters, or objects, are embedded in. Although we try to decode dream images and representations, we do not learn to experience them as an inner environment and to see them as expressions of a bodily state. Dreams are part of the mystery of somatic wisdom, the process of the soma's becoming self-aware, of having a subjectivity. As the body grows its subjectivity, the cortex forms images and motoric

expressions to match. As the body dreams, it uses the soma's cortical imaging, or futurizing, to influence its way to be present.

Two aspects of our body's process, the inherited and the socially experienced, organize and form an intermediate subjective realm. This complex relationship forms a life shape of its own, influencing the outside and the inside shape. Our bodied life is its own subject, and the experiencing of its experience makes it a personal experience. Our body is the subject of its own living, the source and reference for living. The body as a process has an essential relationship with itself. Dream is being intimate with oneself.

Dream images are snapshots of the unbroken, but non-linear, continuum of body shapes, expressions, feelings, and gestures. The inherited body's deep brain continually tattoos its image on the brain's receptive and dynamic cortex. The brain functions like its close relative, the skin, in that it, too, receives and absorbs the body's patterns.

The body's pulses, of which the dream is one, deepen the relationship of the body to itself by osmosis and volitional influences, thus shaping personal identity.

The dream is somatic activity, speaking about itself as it prepares for the awake world. The instinctual body and personal, social somatic shapes talk to each other. Some people dream of the wild man or woman even as they live as proper social citizen. Each self influences the midbrain the cortex in an inner dialogue. The body is an excitable, contractile continuum that is responsive and able to shift its shape. Dreams, too, are like the heart, continually shifting shape, a pulsation from stable to less stable, and back to stable again. These cellular pulses deepen the range of tissue metabolism and emotional expression. The dream, which is organized from the pulsation of the body, helps give the soma a personal structure and sense of presence.

The method of working with a dream is to connect it more fully to its own source, the body. In this approach, the focus is on somatic experience rather than meaning and interpretation. Dreams are about organizing how we use our bodies to be in the world and how we inhabit the body we live. We use dreams to grow a somatic reality and a complex subjectivity that embraces multiple realities.

In working with the dream somatically, I ask people to tell their dreams forward and backward in order to experience a non-linear reality. By going back and forth between different somatic shapes in a slow and controlled way, we engage the cortex and brainstem muscle patterns. We begin to be intimate with how we experience the given body and body images in the brain. This approach generates feelings and memories associated with the growth of our personal body.

Working with the dream, slowing down its sequences and freeze-framing the characters-the body's expressions and gestures-vivifies feeling and imagination. Telling the dream forward and backward intensifies the characters and establishes the relationship of the different bodies. The relationship aspect of our interior and exterior somatic shapes brings a subjective aspect to our bodily life.

The somatic work with the dream brings the process of bodying into the daily world of work, love, and relationships.

The practical application of this practice has five steps:

- Step 1:** Recollecting the dream, in language and in the experiences of body or brain.
- Step 2:** Intensifying the somatic characters of the dream, making their structure and expressions more manifest by a process of neuromuscular intensity and differentiation.
- Step 3:** Using the cortical and volitional function to influence the disassembling of the characters' somatic structure. Steps 2 and 3 provide an experience central to all somatic processes, to organize and disorganize sequences of behavior.
- Step 4:** The soma learns to contain what has been made available from dreaming, the steady flux of feelings and form that reassemble, that begin to incubate a subjectivity.
- Step 5:** We re-body, give form to feeling, embody our somatic and personal identity.

Dreams give a subjectivity to our soma's existence. Working somatically gives the soma both a narrative and a process by which it grows its own destiny: to be born, to be present, to die. The significance of this realization mirrors our conception of the immortal.