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On the Cover: Penguin Dream

Mary de Wit

1977. *Intaglio Print.*

(Journal entry) Sept 24, 1977: My favorite dream of late, and this needs to become a picture (maybe a self-portrait in printmaking?): I am in the woods at night. I hear rushing water, chatter, giggles. I kneel, part the rushes, and come to an open space made by a very large, impressive, and powerful waterfall. All along the top of the fall are penguins with inner tubes... lots of them! They hold the tubes and jump out — they land with their bellies in the inner tubes and fly out over the water. When they land in the water, they bounce on down the whitewater over rocks.

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Active Dreaming

Book Review

WHAT EXACTLY DOES ROBERT MOSS MEAN by the term *active dreaming*? The title of this book brought to mind Jung's practice of active imagination. Here are Moss's own words:

Active Dreaming is a way of being fully of this world while maintaining constant contact with another world, the world-behind-the-world, where the deeper logic and purpose of our lives are to be found. It is a way of remembering and embodying what the soul knows about essential things: who we are, where we come from, and what our sacred purpose is in this life and beyond this life" (p. 14).

Perhaps Moss's active dreaming is a bit like active imagination on steroids. Any questions?

Moss goes on to list three "core areas" of the practice of active dreaming.

The first core area has to do with engaging deeply and meaningfully with our dreams. It is "...a way of talking and walking our dreams, of bringing energy and guidance from the dreamworld into everyday life" (p. 15). A dream that is not brought into waking life, even just by telling it to others and getting their feedback, is wasted. One of the chapters of the book is devoted to encouraging young children to share with their parents their powerful dreams of what Michael Harner (1980) would call "non-ordinary reality." Moss also has advice for how adults can break a "dream drought," something that he asserts is very common and represents a real danger to the individual who is not recalling dreams and also to the entire world, since we need the wisdom from all of our dreams for the common good. He offers a process called "Lightning Dreamwork," a group process meant to "return dreams to the dreamers, affirming that we don't need to be doctors or shrinks to offer helpful comments on someone else's dreams" (p. 32). What Moss has to offer makes it worth putting up with his mild dismissal of psychotherapists.

The second core area of active dreaming is what Moss calls "a method of shamanic lucid dreaming" (p. 48). The

*Active Dreaming:
Journey Beyond
Self-Limitation to a Life
of Wild Freedom,*
by Robert Moss.
New World Library, 2011,
272 pages.

reference to shamanism indicates that the author believes that this process is extremely old and well established within human society, although he asserts that much of it has been lost in the course of industrialization and modern civilization. Fortunately the last few decades have seen an enormous resurgence of interest in shamanism, so that what has been lost is in the process of being recovered. Even more fortunate is that this recovery process does not require the unearthing and translating of ancient texts or paintings on the walls of caves. It only requires that people attend to their dreams in a more serious manner. Psychologists have already found ways to help people have lucid dreams—dreams in which the dreamer is aware of being in a dream and can sometimes even control some of what is explored in the dream—and active dreaming just takes this lead and directs it toward the kinds of experiences commonly associated with shamanic journeying. In active dreaming the notion of exerting any kind of control within a dream is discouraged. One should simply become aware that one is dreaming. Moss takes the position that lucid dreaming is something one should first master in the waking or semi-waking state, and then take that skill along when one goes into a sleeping dream. His point is the awareness that we are always living in a dream world in which all manner of magic is available to us all the time.

Moss's third core area is what he calls "conscious living." He says that this "requires us to reclaim our inner child and the child's gift of spontaneity, play, and imagination" and also to "claim the power of naming and to define our life project" (p. 14). In addition to these requirements, conscious living also invites us to discover and follow "the natural path of our energies" and to "...remember our bigger and braver story and tell and live it in such a way that it can be heard and received by others" (p. 15). If we meet these requirements and accept these invitations, Moss promises that conscious living will make us "able to welcome the things that block or oppose us as opportunities for course correction or as tests that will confirm us in our calling if we are willing to develop the courage and clarity to pursue it" (p. 15). I would suggest that good psychotherapy might have a similar effect, and that it can also help in the development of the courage and clarity Moss mentions.

Moss practices what he preaches when he advises us to surrender ourselves to the call of our souls and live a life of passion in which we also encourage others to do the same. His passion shows up in large and small ways. In a section on the importance and value of keeping a journal, he exhorts us: "If you are not already keeping one, please start *today*" (p. 41). Certainly therapists who regard psychotherapy as anything other than a manualizable technique are likely to be striving to live the life of passion and purpose that is the goal of psychotherapy.

Regarding the goals of psychotherapy, which would presumably be based on the symptoms or presenting complaints at the outset, I am sure Moss would endorse the idea that the underlying cause of all psychological (and probably most physical) symptoms and complaints is some kind of estrangement from one's soul or life's calling. This would imply that the treatment must address the need to reconnect with one's soul or purpose. Most existential psychotherapists would agree, and would probably also agree that psychological symptoms are usually guideposts on the road to the discovery/recovery of soul. However Moss takes things a little further. I think that he would say that even a physical injury from an untoward event like a car accident can serve as an invitation from the cosmos to an awakening to conscious living.

This concept of conscious living is the most difficult for me to fully grasp and apply to my life. To attend carefully with the expectation of possible deep meaning in one's nocturnal dreams and in one's experiences under other unique situations like shamanic journeying or the ingestion of psychedelic (a.k.a. entheogenic) substances is one thing. To attend in this manner to everything one experiences every moment of every day and night is quite another.

The basic thesis of this book is that attending to all of one's experiences the way one might attend to dreams and psychedelic experiences will lead one to encounters with the extraordinary within ordinary waking consciousness. I find myself thinking of suddenly discovering I am seeing something very unusual and then questioning my sanity. If I then recall that I took some LSD 30 minutes earlier, I can probably relax a bit and surrender to whatever I am experiencing and what it has to teach me, knowing that in a few hours I will be back to "normal." However, if I cannot recall any antecedent event that would account for my unusual vision, it becomes a bigger challenge to surrender to it without fear for my sanity. This is the challenge Robert Moss offers us in *Active Dreaming*.

For those of us who believe that the psychotherapist must always be on a personal path of growth, *Active Dreaming* presents one more path to be explored—a very wide path at that. ▼

References

Harner, M. (1980). *The way of the shaman*. New York: Harper & Row.

Sleep is the best meditation.

—Dalai Lama

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