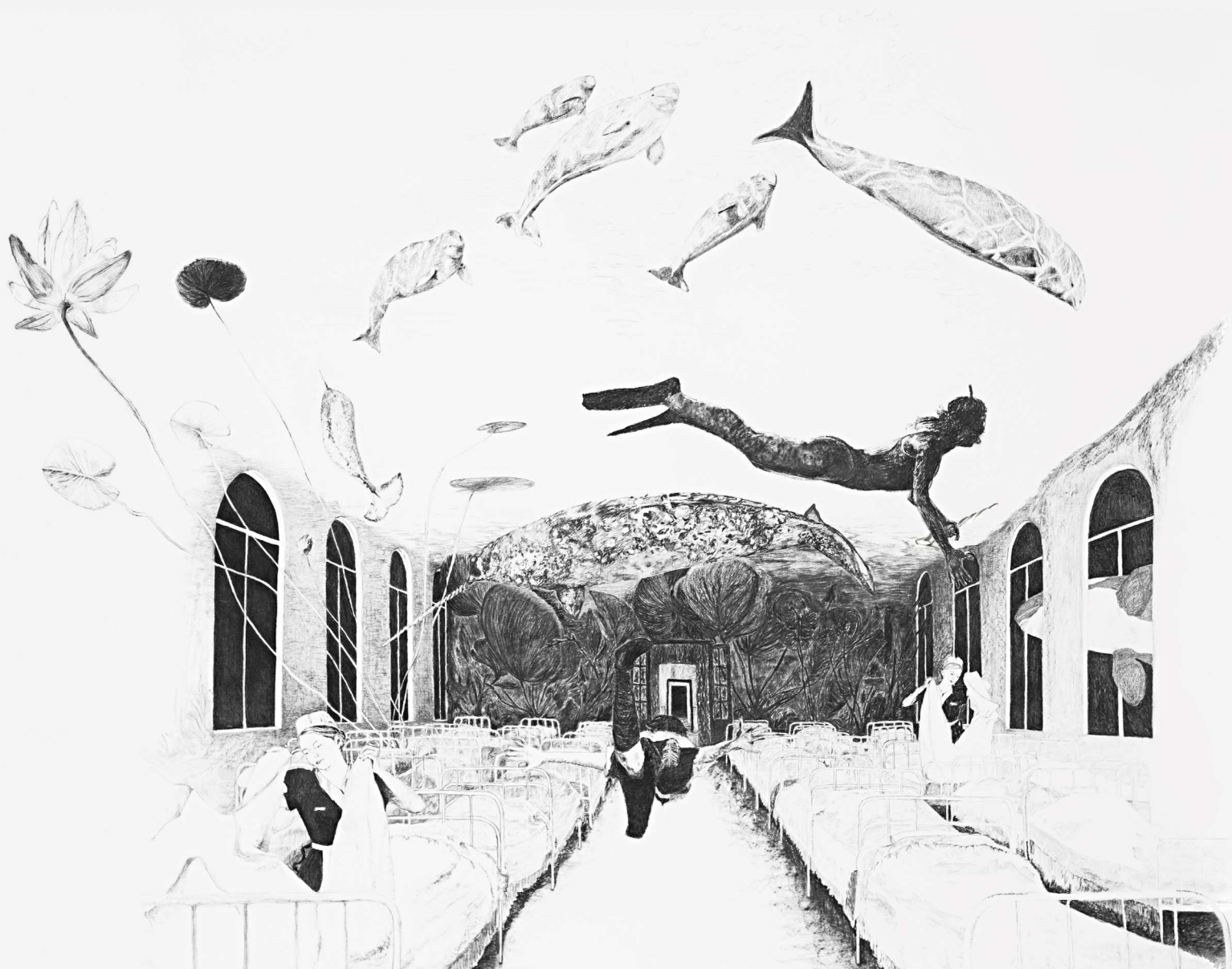


DREAMTIME

M A G A Z I N E



Inside This Issue

- Susannah Benson
- Linda Schiller
- Helene de Winter
- Louis Hagood
- IASD Board VOTE

Moving Into Your Dreams: Embracing Embodied Dreamwork

Linda Yael Schiller, MSW, LICSW



Dreams are alive. As anyone who has ever remembered a vivid dream knows, we do not just *have* a dream, we *experience* a dream. Dreams are not static. We feel, speak, touch, run, fly, jump, crawl, and cavort in our dreams. To add a dynamic level of insight and bone-deep knowing to our dreamwork, it makes sense to add the dimension of the body and of movement to our repertoire of dreamwork skills. A great deal of knowledge about somatic practices exists today, with modern practice perhaps starting in the 1980s with Eugene Gendlin's work on Focusing and his concept of the *felt sense*. He defines *felt sense* as the body's physical experience of knowing or awareness. It arrives all-of-a-piece, by our attending to our body's inner awareness. It is connected to meaning and

establishes a link between our minds and our bodies. Felt sense is the physical place where we locate what the body knows, much as the landscape of the dreams is where we find ourselves in our dream. Gendlin even compares it to the process of sleep. We cannot force ourselves to sleep and dream, but if we relax and allow sleep to come, we may be rewarded with the rich gifts of the night.

More recent somatic practitioners and practices include Peter Levine's somatic experiencing and Pat Ogdan's psychomotor psychotherapy. Robbie Bosnak and Arnold Mindel brought embodiment practices into dreamwork. Among other things, Bosnak teaches us to sit quietly and let the felt sense of the dream emerge from the depths of our being.

One of the underlying principles of my recent book *Modern Dreamwork: New Tools for Decoding your Soul's Wisdom* is called the *Integrated Embodied Approach*. This dreamwork approach incorporates into dream exploration our physical awareness and bodily senses as well as our cognitions, our dream images, our associations, our emotions, and our spiritual connections. In other words, it is a full-court body/mind/spirit approach to dreams in order to best access our most robust understanding of these nocturnal messages. By using this approach, we gain access to multiple layers of depth dreamwork. We feel our emotions in our bodies – that is why they are called feelings! How much more juice can we then get out of our dreams when we add the feeling/moving/embodied dimension to our work with them? These principles and methods

allow us to both move more deeply into ourselves to experience the dream state and emotions; and then to move ourselves into the dream to enliven the dream action, see what it feels like in our body, and move the story line forward as needed for a good dream resolution.

Here's an example of this style of dreamwork. My friend Bethany had the following dream:

"I am trapped in a room with a large lion lying on top of me. It is terrifying. I need and want to get up and go, but am afraid that if I move I will disturb the lion and he will attack me. So, I stay very still; that seems easier somehow."

Bethany gave this dream the title "Trapped and Frozen." When I asked her to describe her sensations and feelings, she said that she



could feel the weight of the lion on top of her, and that it felt both warm and heavy. She didn't know whether she could push him off, because she was afraid to try. Bethany had an immediate association that this dream was connected to a current life situation where she felt immobilized and scared about her child's health. She was both afraid to intervene in case that would make her health worse, and afraid that if she did nothing it would also get worse: She was trapped under this ferocious lion of fear. Rather than move directly from the dream association to waking life solutions as we might more typically do, I invited her to first tune in to what it felt like under that lion. She said that while it was heavy, she also felt warm and ironically safe to be in that "do nothing" frozen place. She knew it was not a permanent solution, though. (Notice the irony or paradox of simultaneously feeling both warm and frozen. That can be explored as well.) Together we connected with her desire to throw off the lion and get some movement in this situation in spite of her fear. We first added some needed resources using active imagination; then I encouraged Bethany to crouch down on the floor in a runner's stance with a heavy blanket on top of her symbolizing the lion. When she was ready, I counted out loud "One, two, three..." and she jumped up, threw off the blanket, and ran out of the room into the hallway. This physical movement helped to free up her emotions as well. After some shaky laughter and well-deserved congratulations, she was then able to brainstorm some useful options for her daughter.

Since we *experience* our dreams, not just *have* them, we ideally need methods of working that allow us to be actively engaged in the journey of the dream while using as many of our senses as we can access. Bethany *felt* that lion on top of her. I invite you to notice your own physical responses to the images and emotions in your dreams. Pay attention to where in your body you have a sensation, and what it feels like. Is it in your chest, your belly, or your fingers? Is the sensation agitated, peaceful, tight, hard, constricted, warm, tingly? This is the *felt sense* of the dream. Our physical responses resonate in us at a level that bypasses our analyzing and thinking brain, thus containing an unmediated core of inner truth and integrity.

Here are a few integrated embodied dreamwork questions and actions to ask or do with the dreamer:

- What are the physical body sensations you felt in your dream?
- Where do you feel them in your body?
- What are the emotions that accompany these sensations?
- How would you move that sensation or emotion?
- If you were to put your body into a position that represents these feelings and sensations, what would your body look like right now? Enact it. (You can do this together with the dreamer.)
- If that pose was uncomfortable or scary, what is the opposite or alternative position you'd rather put your body into that represents the opposite of that feeling? Do that one now, and then exaggerate it.
- If your body could talk after you sculpt or enact or move, what would it say?
- Notice if the movements or enactments give you any additional insights or ideas or action plans related to your dream.

We can also use this integrated embodied approach to enter into and enjoy or appreciate the physical qualities of the dreams we have. Here are two of my own favorite "feel-good" dreams that emphasize sensation:

"I am swimming in the ocean. A wondrous dolphin acts as my surfboard. My friends are all on regular surfboards. I feel delighted and love the connection with my dolphin. I can feel his smooth skin under my feet and hands."



"I am at a dance competition like Dancing With the Stars. The cutest dancer chooses me as his partner. We whirl around the floor in front of a big crowd and the crowd goes wild. He tells me that he is also falling in love with me. I am enjoying the dance, but not wanting anything more than just to dance with him. As I make my way back to my seat, a man from the audience asks me if I fell for him, and I reply 'No, that was just for fun,' and he replies, 'Good for you!' I laugh out loud from the whole-body sensations of sheer delight and my female power."

Movement, reenactment, dream theater, and dream image sculpting are avenues of allowing the body to express the felt sense of a dream. Allow yourself to dance to express the dreamed emotions; act out the sensations; let them move through you physically. When you embody the emotion, you discover new dimensions of the dream. Engage your friends, your family, or your dream circle to act out a scene from your dream. Try embodying a dream scene or character to tune into the emotional story that emerges. Using the Gestalt perspective that everything in our dreams is a part of us, allow yourself to embody that lurking dream creature in the woods, or the tree it is hiding behind, or the bridge you or it needs to cross over to connect. Our emotional resonance and body sensations can provide another avenue to follow on the path to understanding our dreams. Let your body participate in sharing its dream knowledge with your heart and mind, and remember to also have fun with it.



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Linda Yael Schiller, MSW, LICSW is an author, body/mind/spiritual psychotherapist, consultant, and international teacher and trainer. Professor emeritus at Boston University School of Social Work, she is the author of numerous articles, book chapters and blogs on dreamwork, group therapy, and integrative trauma treatment. Her recent book, *Modern Dreamwork: New Tools for Decoding Your Soul's Wisdom*, Llewellyn Worldwide was published in December 2019. Learn more about this psycho-spiritual and embodied dreamwork approach at www.moderndreamwork.com. Visit Linda at www.lindayaelschiller.com and her blog at www.awaketoyourdreams.com, and contact her at lindayschiller@gmail.com.