

# The Use of Imagery in Healing

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We humans express ourselves symbolically. It is what distinguishes us from other animals. Our languages, music, mathematics, visual and performing arts are symbolic ways in which the collective and individual human spirit expresses experiences of its journey on Earth. From traffic signs to logos and computer icons, symbols are all around, and are part of everyday life. They evoke feelings and inner meanings, and are often used to express a concept which can be better expressed through an image than through words. Words are restrictive in that they have meaning and relevance only to a particular culture. Symbols and images, on the other hand, are more expansive, and can carry meaning across cultures that may not be adequately expressed in words.

The famous psychologist Carl Jung writes in his book, *Man and His Symbols*, that symbols and images can express complex concepts that may not be adequately expressed in words, and make them relevant across cultural barriers, far beyond their point of origin.<sup>i</sup> Jung writes,

...a word or an image is symbolic when it implies something more than its obvious and immediate meaning. It has a wider unconscious aspect that is never precisely defined or fully explained. Nor can one hope to define or explain it. As the mind explores the symbol, it is led to ideas that lie beyond the grasp of reason.<sup>ii</sup>

Jeanne Achterberg writes that imagination is a mental process that is “the communication mechanism between perception, emotion and bodily change.”<sup>iii</sup> It is “the world’s oldest and most effective healing resource, affecting the body intimately on both seemingly mundane and profound levels.”<sup>iv</sup>

Dr. James Oschman, a pioneer and researcher of Energy Medicine writes that, “...looking at a symbol, or even thinking about (visualizing) a symbol results in considerable neural activity involving measurable electrical and magnetic fields.” According to him, writing or drawing the symbol can activate sensory and motor pathways and therefore bring in many more electrical and magnetic fields. Viewing, visualizing or writing a symbol can trigger specific patterns of electrical and magnetic fields in and around the body that can be healing. It is also possible that some of these energy fields might be beneficial to a nearby person.

Dr. Judith Cornell describes the mandala as “a concrete symbol of its creator’s absorption into a sacred center.”

In its most elevated form, the sacred circle (mandala) mirrors an illuminated state of consciousness through a symbolic pattern – making the invisible visible. It is meant to draw creator and viewer into an encounter with animating sources of numinous (spiritual) energy. The Navajo call this center “a spiritual place of emergence” for sacred imagery. By focusing on it, both mandala artist and meditator can open to the divine energies of deities and to the contents of his or her own spiritual and psychological self. When a practitioner willfully illuminates and embodies a sacred image from within the psyche while in a meditative state, spiritual transformation, physical healing, and the integration of personality fragments can result.<sup>v</sup>

For Cornell, the creation of a mandala is about healing and self-realization.

## REFERENCES

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<sup>i</sup> Jung, C.G., *Man and His Symbols*, (NY: Dell Publishing, 1968), 3 – 4.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> Jeanne Achterberg, *Imagery in Healing* (Boston: Shambala, 1985), 3.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid. 2-3.