

Visualization

from Trauma Healing and Transformation, Chapter 3, p. 32-35
—Patricia Mathes Cane, Ph.D.

Visualization or Guided Imagery is a powerful practice that focuses the mind on healing images to bring about physiological changes in the body-mind-spirit. Through the conscious creation of positive images or thoughts, and the connection of these with the body, many positive outcomes can result, including the cure of disease, alleviation of physical and emotional pain, elimination of traumatic stress symptoms, and change in behavioral patterns. Through internal images or mental pictures a template is created in the energy system that can manifest in physical reality. Visualization has been recognized and used in many cultures and traditions throughout the ages. It is only recently that the process has been studied by researchers in the Western world and applied to health and healing. Visualization is now used to lower blood pressure, cure cancer or put it into remission, promote the healing process after surgery, alleviate pain, improve stamina, and enhance performance of athletes and artists. Oncologist Carl Simonton, M.D., developed meditation and visualization to control the immune system and actively remove cancerous cells from the body. He works not only with patients' immune systems, but also to change dysfunctional emotional patterns and attitudes that contribute to illness. For persons suffering from traumatic stress, visualization promotes many of the factors critical to the healing of trauma. Visualization actively involves the person, empowering them in their own healing process. Through the Safe Space and Visit with the Wise Guide visualizations, the capacities for safety, trust, and intimacy are developed. Boundaries, protection, and a sense of control can also be created through visualization.

Safe and Sacred Space—Refuge of the Soul

One of the most important visualizations is the Safe and Sacred Space—the refuge of the soul. Each person has a different place they consider to be their refuge—a garden, the beach, a place in the mountains, a waterfall or stream, a chapel, a place from childhood. The following visualization may be tape-recorded with soft music to use personally or adapted to use with groups. Read slowly with a soft voice, taking plenty of time for each part. The first part of the visualization involves the complete relaxation of the body. The second part is an interior journey to the safe and sacred refuge of the soul. A visit with a wise guide may also be added at this time. The third part consists of a complete return to the body, to present time. The part for relaxation of the body may be shortened because of time constraints. The visualization may be done with participants comfortably seated or lying on the floor. If used with a group there should be time after the visualization for processing the experience in the large group or in pairs using active listening. Time can also be taken to write or draw the experience which is usually very

Visualization: The Safe and Sacred Space

- **Body Scan and Relaxation**

Take a comfortable position seated or lying on the ground. Close your eyes and breathe deeply. Let go of all the concerns of the day and be present in the moment. Feel your connection with the earth. Imagine the energy of the earth flowing up through your feet and throughout your entire body.

You will now go on a journey through your body, letting go of any tension, and relaxing each part completely. Connect with your toes, feet, and ankles. Stretch and flex them getting in touch with any tension you may feel there. Breathe deeply and as you exhale, let go completely, releasing all the tension in your toes, feet, and ankles. Feel deep peace and tranquility in all parts of your being.

Breathe deeply again and imagine the energy of the earth moving up into your legs and pelvis. Connect with your legs, knees, thighs, and pelvis. Stretch and flex these parts of your body getting in touch with the tension you may feel there. Breathe deeply and as you exhale, let go completely, releasing all the tension in your legs (very relaxed), your knees and thighs (very soft and relaxed), your pelvis and inner organs (very soft and relaxed). You feel deep peace and tranquility in all parts of your being.

Breathe deeply again. Imagine the energy of the earth flowing up into the trunk of your body, moving through your abdomen, stomach, and chest, circulating up your back and spinal cord to your shoulders. Connect with these parts of your body and observe any tension you may have there. Stretch and flex your abdomen, stomach, and chest. Stretch and flex the muscles of your back and shoulders. Breathe deeply and as you exhale, let go completely, releasing all the tension in your abdomen and stomach (very relaxed), your chest (very relaxed), your back, spinal column and shoulders (very soft and relaxed). Feel deep peace and tranquility in all parts of your being.

Breathe deeply again and imagine the energy of the earth moving up into your arms, elbows, forearms, hands, and fingers. Connect with your arms and hands and stretch and flex these parts of your body getting in touch with any tension you may feel there. Breathe deeply and as you exhale, let go completely, releasing all the tension in your arms, your elbows, your forearms (very soft and relaxed); your wrists, hands, palms, and fingers (very soft and relaxed). Feel deep peace in all parts of your being.

Breathe deeply again and now imagine the energy of the earth moving up into your neck and head. Scan your neck and head to get in touch with any tension you may feel there. Gently flex the muscles in your neck. Open your mouth in a wide yawn, flexing your tongue and jaw, letting go of all the tension and feelings caught there. Make a grimace and flex all the muscles in your cheeks, forehead, and around your eyes. Breathe deeply and as you exhale, let go completely, releasing all the tension in your neck (very soft and relaxed), your tongue, jaw, and cheeks (very relaxed) your forehead, eyes, ears, and scalp (very soft and relaxed). Feel deep peace and tranquility in all parts of your being.

Now scan your body and if there is still any place where you feel even the slightest tension, go back to that part of your body to flex and tense it, increasing the tension you experience there. Breathe deeply and now let go completely. In all parts of your body you feel deep peace, calm, and tranquility.

• Journey to the Safe and Sacred Space

Imagine that you are starting on a journey to a very special place at the center of your soul. This is your inner refuge, your safe and sacred space where only you can enter. Take time to journey to this place and to discover your special refuge.

What is your refuge like? Perhaps it is a garden, full of flowers and beautiful trees. Or maybe your refuge is in the mountains, by a lake, or in a meadow with clear blue sky and passing clouds. Or perhaps your safe space is in a chapel or house from your childhood. Decide now where you will go to be in your safe and sacred space. Take some time to explore and create this place, filling it with all that will support and nourish you. Are there colors, sounds, smells, textures that you are aware of? How do you feel in this place? What is it like for you? Take some time now to enjoy your special place. Feel very safe, secure, and peaceful. Fill yourself with great peace and a deep sense of security. Take time to open yourself to receive whatever you may need at this moment.

Take a few more moments enjoying your refuge of peace. You might want to look around for some image that you can bring back with you to remind you of your refuge. And when you feel ready say goodbye to your safe space, knowing that you can return here whenever you desire.

• **Return to the Present Moment**

Begin now to return to your body, breathe deeply and feel the energy of your feet and toes. You might want to stretch and flex your feet and toes to feel the connection with your body. I will count from 5 to 1 and with each number you will feel more and more present in your body, in this room. Five. Breathe deeply. Stretch and flex your legs feeling the energy flowing fully throughout your body. Four. Stretch and flex the trunk of your body, feel fully alive in your pelvis, your abdomen, your chest and shoulders. Three. Stretch and flex your arms and hands feeling the energy flowing fully through your arms. Two. Very gently stretch and flex your neck and facial muscles feeling very alive and relaxed in your head. One. Breathe deeply and when you are ready open your eyes, feel very alive and relaxed, present in the moment and in this room. Feel very peaceful and tranquil in all of your being. Take a few moments in silence to reflect on your visit to the refuge of your soul. You might want to write about it or draw your experience. Or you might want to share this with a partner or friend.

Visualization: The Wise Guide

This visualization may be included with the visit to the Safe Space, or may be done by itself.

• **Body Scan and Relaxation** (as above)

• **Visit with the Wise Guide**

Enjoy your safe space for a few moments. When you are ready invite a special person, a wise guide to join you—a person important to your life, a guide or mentor who has wisdom to share with you. Perhaps this person is a friend, a grandparent, a sister or brother, a saint, a holy person, or a model for you. Invite this person to your refuge and enjoy a few moments

with them. What are they like? How do you feel in their presence? Take some time with them. Ask this person if they have any special words of wisdom to share with you. Do you have any questions for them concerning your life? Take a moment to listen to what your soul needs. Imagine that this person gives you a gift or some special symbol that is significant for your life. What is that like for you? Receive this gift with joy, love, and gratitude. Take a few moments more with this special person. When you are ready thank them and say goodbye. Your guide is always within you. You can always return to your refuge to seek their counsel and companionship. Take a few moments alone again in your refuge. Feel the warmth and love that surrounds you. Know that you are able to return to this place whenever you desire. And when you feel ready, say goodbye to your safe and sacred place and begin to return to your body and to the present moment.

- **Return to the Present Moment** (as above)

Resources for Further Study

Books

Achterberg, J. Imagery in Healing. Boston: New Science Library, 1985.

Gawain, S. Creative Visualization. Mill Valley, CA: Whatever Publishing, 1978.

Houston, J. The Possible Human: A Course in Extending Your Physical, Mental and Creative Abilities. NY: A Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam Book, 1982.

Macy, J. & Brown, M. Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World. Stony Creek, CT: New Society Publishers, 1998.

Rossmann, M. Healing Yourself: A Step-by-Step Program for Better Health Through Imagery. NY: Walker and Co., 1987.

Simonton, O.C. Getting Well Again. Los Angeles, CA: J.P. Tarcher, 1978.

Music

Babbling Brook. Interludes, Great American Audio, New Rochelle, NY.

Streams of Dreams, Solitudes, Toronto, Canada.

Visualization Tapes with Music

CAPACITAR Tapes (Safe Space, Wise Guide, and other visualizations) with Pat Cane—in English or Spanish, MJB Productions, 314-227-7445

Contacts

Academy for Guided Imagery, P.O. Box 2070, Mill Valley, CA 94942, 800-726-2070

American Imagery Institute, 4016 Third Avenue, San Diego, CA 92103, 619-298-7502

International Imagery Association, P.O. Box 1046, Bronx, NY 10471, 914-423-9200