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## The Synergy of Energy Psychology and Dreamwork: Developing the Dream to Freedom Protocol

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### Abstract

The healing process often begins with addressing the symptoms of what might be a deeper issue, and proceeds with the peeling away of emotional layers until the core issue surfaces. By integrating energy psychology (EP) with dreamwork, it is possible to begin the energy healing at a deeper level, as well as to take the dreamwork to deeper levels. Dreams focus on unresolved emotional events of recent days, as related to deeper emotional conflicts which lie within the psyche. Dreamwork can therefore quickly bring to consciousness an issue that a person is dealing with on an unconscious level. Dreamwork alone - in the absence of other therapies - is not designed to reduce emotional stress that may surface, nor to help move through the emotional barriers which it reveals. Energy Psychology (EP) complements dreamwork very nicely, providing a method for reducing the stress and emotional barriers to healing, once an issue is identified. Integrating the two disciplines into a therapeutic protocol, which we call the Dream To Freedom™ (DTF), provides a healing method that is useful in a therapeutic setting or for self-help. This method includes Gestalt role-play and Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT), a fairly rapid EP method which reduces anxiety, stress and fear responses. DTF has been shown to work well with traumatic memories, phobias and unresolved emotional conflicts and anxieties, particularly in cases where it is difficult to identify the underlying cause with dialog alone.

**Key words:** dreams, dreamwork, energy psychology, EFT, tapping, Gestalt role-play

### Introduction

Ever since Sigmund Freud revealed dreams to be the “royal road to the unconscious,” many psychologists have augmented their therapies by exploring their client’s dreams in order to understand their challenging inner emotional issues. Dreamwork, if properly applied, is able to quickly bring to consciousness the deeper unconscious emotional issues and impasses behind a client’s symptoms. However, dreamwork alone is not designed to reduce the emotional stress that may surface, nor to help the individual move through the emotional barriers it reveals.

Energy psychology (EP) methods such as EFT complement dreamwork by reducing the stress and emotional barriers to healing, once an issue is identified. Conversely, understanding the deeper core issues through dreamwork increases the effectiveness of energy psychology methods such as EFT (tapping). Gestalt therapy methods further enhance this therapeutic process. Combining these disciplines integrates the primary benefits of each into one technique, which is useful for self-help or in a therapeutic setting. This combination into a therapeutic protocol we have named Dream to Freedom™ (DTF).

There are three parts to the DTF protocol, summarized below and presented in greater detail the *Dream To Freedom* handbook (Hoss and Hoss, 2013): Part 1 explores dreams using a Gestalt-based approach for discovering the unconscious emotional issues the dream is dealing with; Part 2 applies the energy work of EFT in order to reduce the anxiety surrounding the issue which stands in the way of progress; and in Part 3, after some of the emotional barriers are reduced, the dream is explored for cues as to how the unconscious was attempting to resolve the problem, as an aid in defining how best to progress beyond the situation.

DTF works well with trauma memories, phobias or unresolved emotional conflicts and anxieties which can result in dysfunctional behaviors, particularly in cases where there is difficulty in identifying underlying causes for problems with dialog alone. Because DTF can be used in both a therapeutic setting, for research, as well as for self-help, we will term the dreamer or client the “subject” in this discussion.

### **Protocol Theory and Research**

We wanted therapeutic sessions to be devoted to healing, not overburdened with a lengthy interpretation of a dream or approaches that trigger only surface associations. We knew from neuroimaging studies (Seligman and Yellin, 1987) and psychological theory (Hartmann, 2011, pp. 54 - 57) that dreams and dream imagery contain the emotional material we are looking for. We selected Gestalt Therapy role-play (Perls, 1976) as our dreamwork tool because of its long history of effectiveness in rapidly surfacing underlying emotional issues that subjects are dealing with, as revealed in their dreams.

Carl Jung, the founder of Analytical Psychology, was one of the first to recognize that dream imagery contained underlying emotional content. He stated that “dreams reveal the unconscious aspect of a conscious event” whereby the unconscious meaning (the deeper emotional impact of an event) is expressed as a symbol or picture language (Jung, 1964, p. 5).

This concept finds recent support in neuroimaging studies indicating that in REM sleep, where our more vivid dreams take place, our “emotional brain” (the limbic system and particularly the amygdala) is highly active (Maquet et al., 1996; Braun et al., 1997; Nofzinger et al., 1997; and Maquet et al., 2000; 2005; summarized by Hobson et al., 2003 and Desseilles et al., 2011). This has lead researchers to conclude that dreams selectively process emotionally relevant memories via interplay between the cortex and the limbic system (Seligman and Yellin, 1987) and that the amygdala “orchestrates” the dream activity such that dream action reflects emotion (Dang-Vu et al., 2007).

### **Protocol design**

Ernest Hartmann observed that “the dream image is a picture of the emotional state of the

dreamer” (Hartmann, 2011). Fritz Perls (1976), a founder of Gestalt Therapy, developed a method or role-play to reveal the emotions and conflicts (the impasses) contained within the dream imagery. He saw dream images as “alienated fragments of the personality;” alienated because they represent upsetting emotional conflicts or material which the dreamer doesn’t want to allow into conscious awareness, to express or to deal with. Gestalt role-play reveals the emotions by having the subject imagine that they “become” one of the elements in their dream, experiencing that dream image, giving it a “voice” and expressing the emotions it contains. We adopted this approach, simplifying the application a bit by using a script (described in the summary protocol below) that guides the dreamer through the process.

A solid, well established and fairly rapid EP technique was also required for the protocol, one which reduces anxiety, stress and the fear response. Although dreamwork can be adapted to most any EP technique, for the standard DTF protocol we chose EFT (“tapping”) due to its simplicity and the wealth of research which has demonstrated its effectiveness (Feinstein, 2012). EFT is a form of acupressure, combined with cognitive exercises, aimed at bringing about extinction of an emotional response or treating other conditions including phobia, addiction and post-traumatic stress. It is based on stimulating the same energy meridians used in traditional acupuncture for treating physical and emotional ailments. Tapping with the fingertips is used to input kinetic energy onto specific meridian points (called acupoints) while a specific problem or emotional memory is brought to mind – which in theory replaces a stressful association and response with a calming association and response. Stimulation of meridian points in this manner was introduced as Thought Field Therapy (TFT) by Roger Callahan. and, Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) was later formulated by Gary Craig, who was a student of Callahan.

While DTF will accommodate almost any “tapping” protocol, we use an adaptation called “Clinical EFT” (Church, 2012). In order to adapt EP to dreamwork, however, we suggest three alterations to the traditional protocols in order to stick closely to the unconscious issues that the dream is dealing with, avoiding as much distortion as possible.

1. In the DTF protocol we use the dream (doorway to the unconscious) to discover and define the underlying problem to be worked on rather than working on a symptom.
2. We alter the standard “setup statement” suggested in traditional EFT protocols, substituting emotional problem and desire statements which surface from the dreamwork.
3. Finally, rather than simply ending the session with a reduction in stress (a wonderful achievement in itself), we take advantage of the calmer mental state that results from “tapping” to return to the dream for help in defining next steps in moving forward and dealing with the situation if it arises again.

Once the emotional barriers to progress are reduced, some form of closure is needed so that the subject can progress beyond the situation. This combination of Gestalt and EFT work is therefore followed by a closure approach, which returns to the dream to understand how our unconscious mind was attempting to resolve the problem. The theoretical work of Carl Jung, (Jung, 1964) and recent research findings from the neurobiology of REM sleep (Hoss, 2013) supports the hypothesis that our dreaming mind is working to resolve emotional problems, and that those problem solving actions can be observed in the dream story. If these inner restorative activities can be observed in a dream, they can perhaps help guide our waking actions. Jung stated that the general function of dreams is to “restore psychological balance by producing dream material that re-establishes psychic equilibrium” (Jung, 1964, p. 34). He further stated that dreams have a “transcendent function” (Jung, 1971, p. 279) which operates by

“compensating” or correcting for misconceptions that stand in our way, such that we can transition from one state of mind to another. McNamara (2002) observed the testing of compensating themes (“what if” scenarios called counterfactuals) in 97% of the dreams studied. Other researchers (Stewart & Koulack, 1993; Revonsuo, 2000; Coutts, 2008) have concluded that dreams have an adaptive learning function whereby they test or practice conceptual, social, and threat scenarios so as to better prepare us for dealing with issues we encounter in our waking life. It is possible to recognize some of these activities in dreams if we study the brain centers that are active during REM sleep.

Emotional restoral may be a result of the high activity, in REM sleep, of the limbic system as well as adjacent centers (medial prefrontal cortex and basal ganglia) known to be involved in emotional control and extinction [of stressful thoughts and feelings (Quirk, 2000; Seligman & Yellen, 1987)]. They appear to dampen emotional response in a neural process similar to that thought to be employed by EFT. EFT stimulates acupressure points, while bringing a disturbing emotional memory to mind, which are thought to be calmed through the limbic regions thus extinguishing the emotional reactions to that memory (Feinstein, 2012, pp. 12, 13). Dreams also appear to replay emotional memories (Wilson, n.d.) and ~~may~~ facilitate emotional regulation of the limbic system, particularly for negative emotions such as fear and stress (McNamara, 2011). The medial prefrontal cortex, which is involved in emotion regulation and extinction of conditioned fear (Sotres-Bayon and Quirk, 2010), has been found to increase functional connectivity with the amygdala in REM sleep (Van der Helm, 2011). ]

In addition to emotional restoral, and of importance to the design of the DTF closure protocol, is the apparent cognitive activity in REM involved in the aforementioned psychological restoral, transcendence and adaptive learning activities. A number of centers active in REM sleep have the capacity for problem resolution, decision making and adaptation, including the anterior cingulate, basal ganglia, insula, parts of the orbofrontal cortex and the medial prefrontal cortex (Pace-Schott, 2007; Hoss, 2013). In the waking state they network in various combinations to: detect when something is wrong; initiate and mediate a resolution; imagine, plan, and test action scenarios; provide cues (with a “sense of knowing”) to guide our actions; monitor the consequences of our actions; emotionally reinforce (reward) a scenario that is judged to lead to the anticipated outcome; and adapt our behavior in order to achieve that outcome. While their capacity for similar functioning in the dream state is yet to be fully researched, these activities can be observed in dreams. Specifically we can observe dreams to: 1. detect when there is a problem and present it in the form of a picture metaphor; 2. plan and test a “what-if” scenario with a compensating or corrective theme; 3. provide cues in the form of a guiding event, insight or surprise that appears to influence the action and bring about a reversal in thinking or direction; and 4. emotionally reinforce (reward) actions that lead to the anticipated outcome. The DTF closure protocol returns to the dream to explore the possible presence of these activities, as illustrated in the protocol and accompanying example below.

### **The Dream to Freedom protocol summary**

#### *Part 1. Dreamwork Discovery (Underlying Problem Identification)*

The protocol begins with the exploration of a recent nightmare or dream, which the subject has associated with the problem they are concerned with. The subjects are asked to “re-enter” the dream and narrate it as if they are re-experiencing it. Afterwards they describe any emotionally important or impacting situations in their life around the time of the dream, or any situation the dream brings to mind. Initial associations between the dream and the waking life situation (if any) are discussed.

A Gestalt role-play is then employed in order to explore the deeper emotions that might be contained within the dream elements. The subjects again re-enters the dream and pick something in the dream that draws their attention or seems important. The subjects are taken through a short breathing exercise to bring them into that dream element, to “become” it as best they can, and “give it a voice.”

The practitioner then asks six questions which the subjects must answer as the dream element would answer them: 1. What are you? 2. What is your purpose or function? 3. What do you like most about being this dream element? 4. What do you dislike, about being this dream element? 5. What do you fear the most? 6. What do you desire the most? The subjects are brought out of the role-play and the answers read back to them. However, the subjects are to switch their perspectives and listen to the answers as if they are making those statements about a recent situation or feeling in their own lives. Any connections that the subjects make between the statements and their waking life feelings are noted. The subjects are asked to pick the most emotionally charged role-play statement and to discuss the waking life situation associated with that statement.

*Note: the questions were designed to reveal three layers of emotional content that might be contained within the dream element. The “what are you” and “what is your purpose or function” questions were designed to reveal role perception. The “what do you like” and “what do you dislike” question pair was designed to uncover underlying emotional conflict. Finally, the “what do you fear” and “what do you desire” question pair was designed to explore the motivating factors that leave the subject stuck in the conflict.*

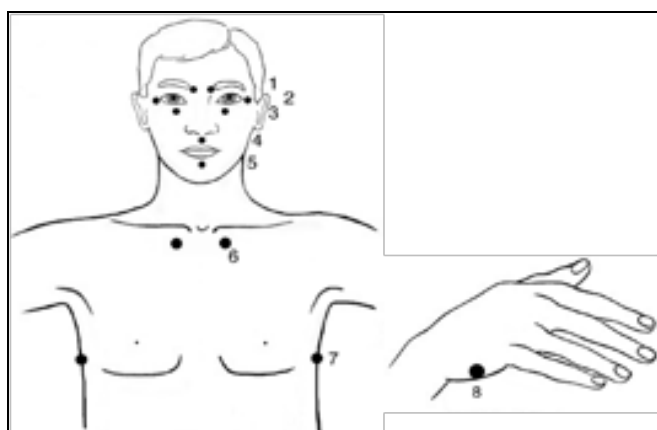
### *Part 2. “Tapping” for Stress Reduction*

For EFT to be most effective, it is best to recover a moment when the emotional response related to the stressful situation was encoded, or at a minimum a specific stressful memory that evokes the response. The subjects are therefore asked to define the feelings surrounding the situation just discussed, then to recall a specific incident when they felt that way and picture it in their mind. The subjects then rate the stress they are feeling from 0-10 as they picture the scene. This rating helps guide progress through the “tapping” protocol.

The subjects are then guided, while tapping on their body, through the creation of two phrases to be used to keep the emotional scene in mind and set intention. The first is an *affirmation* phrase (or “set up statement”) which pairs the negative feeling statement with a positive intention, in the following format: “Even though I feel (negative feelings), I chose to (positive intention).” The negative feeling statement comes from recalling the specific incident, and the positive intention is developed using the positive role-play statements as a guide. The second phrase is a short *reminder phrase* which is used during the later “tapping” sequences to keep the problem in mind. It is simply the negative feelings part of the affirmation.

Standard acupuncture points for the DTF protocol include eight meridian points: UB-2, GB-1, ST-2, GV-26, CV-24, KD-27, SP-21 and the “karate chop” point SI-3 (per Figure 1). Tapping begins with a preparation or “setup” exercise; tapping on the SI-3 point while saying the full affirmation three times. This is followed by two rounds of “tapping” on all eight points (typically about 7 to 10 times on each one) while keeping the problem in mind by saying the shorter reminder phrase. After two rounds the subjects are asked to picture the scene again and re-rate the stress level. Subsequent rounds of tapping (omitting the “setup” exercise) continue until the stress level is near or at zero.

**Figure 1. “Tapping” Points Recommended for the DTF Protocol**



After any round of tapping, if the level of stress remained or increased due to another memory, then the situation is explored, a new affirmation and reminder phrase created around the new memory, and the tapping protocol repeated until the stress level around this new aspect is reduced to near or at zero. Once the stress level for the new issue has been reduced, the stress level on the earlier problem is checked and tapping is resumed until it too is reduced to near or at zero.

### *Part 3. Closure Protocol*

Once the stressful reaction to the memory is reduced, the subjects should be able to think more clearly about the situation without negative reactions. At this point the dream is revisited for possible guidance in creating an action plan for closure and moving forward.

The subjects again re-enter the dream and briefly review it to the end. The subjects are asked if they experienced any of the following events in the dream: 1. a *surprise* or something unexpected; 2. guiding *actions* including a discovery, insight, a guiding character, or written or spoken words; 3. a *reversal* in attitude, decision or direction by the character the subject identifies with in the dream; and 4. *emotional reinforcement* – a positive ending to the dream. These events are discussed in terms of how they changed, or attempted to change, the direction of the dream story and what insights or analogies are apparent in relation to the subject's waking life situation.

If the dream ends in an upsetting manner, or simply ends or fades without an apparent conclusion, the dream can still be used as the basis for stimulating a concluding metaphor. A process of dream re-entry and spontaneous imaging is employed, similar in nature to Imagery Rehearsal Treatment (Krakow 2001). This is a treatment designed for working with trauma victims through their nightmares, whereby a new ending is imagined for the nightmare that gives the dreamer a degree of mastery over the situation presented in the nightmare. In the DTF closure protocol, the subjects re-enter the dream at the end and focus on their feelings and what events in the dream brought them to this point. They are then asked to just let the images flow, without rationalizing, as they imagine continuing and finishing the dream from that point with a new positive ending.

The final step is to use the insight gained from the previous two exercises to define a specific solution that will allow the subjects to move ahead in their waking life situation and avoid getting stuck again. If the subjects, working with the practitioner, are successful in relating the

dreamwork to an imagined solution, then that solution must be mentally checked out to make sure it is healthy, practical and appropriate, or if it might leave them stuck again. If the solution checks out positively, then one or more specific next step(s) are determined that can help bring it about, and a positive image from the dream might be chosen as a reminder of the solution.

### Case Example

'Karen' was struggling with an anxiety response that was altering her life in a detrimental way. She was about to end a beautiful relationship, not due to any rational reason, but driven by a growing anxiety related to helping her boyfriend through a medical procedure. Tapping on the symptom might have been helpful, but without identifying and treating the underlying issue, the problem might have persisted. Fortunately, Karen had a dream: *"I am in the home I shared with my ex-husband, looking out over trees that contained black things. My mother is there and we are trying to decide whether they are birds or bats."* Although this dream seemed unrelated to Karen's situation, as we will see it contained the very origin of her anxiety in explicit emotional detail. (Hoss & Hoss, 2013, pp. 77-81)

We asked Karen to re-enter the dream and look for something in the dream scene that attracts her attention that curiously draws her to it. She was drawn to *"a lone bird's nest"* in the tree. We took her into the bird's nest and, once there, asked the bird's nest to speak – guiding her with the six scripted statements. Role-playing the bird's nest, she stated, *"I am a lone bird's nest, my purpose is to be warm, and enveloping, and to provide a safe landing spot;"* and *"my desire is to be there and strong when needed."* This was an apt description of how Karen's saw her role in helping her boyfriend through the procedure.

We then explored the opposite side of the conflict, asking the bird's nest what it disliked and feared. The bird's nest said, *"I dislike getting crapped and fear getting blown out of the tree!"* It is apparent that this is not just a "bird's nest" speaking, but Karen's own unconscious expression of the conflict - and the fear that created it.

We then asked Karen to recall a specific incident where she felt she was *getting crapped on and blown out of the tree*. She stated, *"The moment I decided to divorce my 'ex'. I had gone all out to help him and he showed up two-hours late and began yelling at me for not having done enough."* This was the moment when the stress reaction was encoded along with a decision to avoid this vulnerability in future relationships – a decision which had generalized and had now become dysfunctional. Assessing the intensity she felt on a 1 to 10 scale, she stated that her stress was at "12" when picturing the scene!

It was time to apply EFT. We began by using the words from her role-play to create the affirmation: *"Even though I feel taken for granted, I choose to be there and be strong."* We used this and the reminder phrase *"taken for granted"* for the setup exercise and subsequent tapping rounds. After four rounds of tapping her stress level reduced to zero.

Although Karen could now recall the traumatic moment without the emotional reaction, the work was not done. The decision she made at that moment, about herself and her relationships, required some adjustment so that she would not fall into the same pattern again. We returned to the dream for clues. The dream had guided Karen to an important decision point related to identity; deciding whether that aspect of her personality represented by the black things is *"birds or bats."* This metaphor appeared to reflect her own conflicted identity regarding her role in relationships.

In order to sort out the metaphor we engaged her in a visioning exercise, asking her to “spontaneously let the images flow and finish the dream with a new, positive ending.” What came forth was, “*I fly away with the bats!*” Then, in sorting out the personal associations with this new metaphor, she said, “*Bats, like birds are free, but unlike birds are helpful and come home to the cave at night. I can be like the bat, be there, be helpful and still be me (free)!*”

Reflecting on her next steps, she stated, “*I will tell my boyfriend today that I have decided to stay in the relationship.*” As it turns out, her boyfriend happened to walk into the room just at this moment when the session ended. A change had indeed taken place; she went up to him and embraced and kissed him.

## Summary

The DTF protocol is designed to be used by either a practitioner or individually for self-help. It has been shown to work well with problems that originate from past trauma or unresolved internal conflict, problems which exhibit emotional and even physical symptoms such as migraines (Hoss and Hoss, 2013). Using dreamwork together with EFT in this manner is particularly helpful in cases where it is a resistance or difficulty in identifying the underlying cause with dialog alone, as in the case example above. Nonetheless, it is not a substitute for training in psychology or psychotherapy, nor is it intended to treat all conditions and practitioners should use common sense and good professional and ethical judgment in applying the protocol. The three part structure of the protocol permits it to be divided and used in parts or in total, perhaps adapting the dreamwork (parts 1 or 3) to other Energy Psychology methods, depending on the objectives of the session. Gestalt role-play is a rapid and effective tool for uncovering underlying emotional conflict regardless of what therapeutic technique might follow, however, it should not be used in cases where individuals have dissociative or other disorders for which such techniques should not be applied. The dreamwork protocols should not be applied to extreme PTSD nightmares which appear to be replays of the original traumatic event. The imagery in such replay nightmares is rarely symbolic and thus not something that should be interpreted as metaphor nor role-played.

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