

AM I JUST MAKING ALL OF THIS UP? **by Stewart Blackburn**

As any kid will tell you, there is an art to making stuff up. It's not just a matter of fanciful details and colorful stories. Something made up must be emotionally satisfying in some way. It must appeal to some part of us that is important. Just as we use imagination in every decision we make, we use imagination in creating alternate or proposed realities. These other realities often show us aspects of our subjective life that need our attention. We solve problems with these creations that don't seem to be solvable in other ways. Einstein used these creations as "thought experiments." As did Schrödinger with his poor cat. They can tell us a lot even though they aren't objectively true.

When I teach a class of people new to shamanic journeying, two things inevitably arise. One, most of them will be delighted by the experience they've just had. And two, when I ask about what they got out of it, someone will ask, "Am I just making all of this up?"

For a long time I would answer that we are dealing with subjective reality here and this has a reality of its own. It is real in the sense we are genuinely experiencing something in our own reality.

But, I don't think that's as good an answer as this question deserves. We must deal with the fact that we are playing in the imaginal realms, and thus, yes, you are making all of this up.

Then the real question becomes, "Who is the me that's making all of this up?" Is it the conscious mind that is doing it? If it's not the conscious mind making these things up intentionally, then what does that leave us? I would suggest that it is a deeper part of our being that we call the subconscious, the superconscious, the Inner Self, the Atman, or maybe the ancestors. But whatever we call it there is a consciousness beyond what we are familiar with in our daily lives. I prefer to call it Inner Self. Please mentally substitute your own preferred term.

We can intentionally imagine some things with what we might call active imagination, that is, we pretend something. This is an important skill we'll look at shortly. What is most interesting, at least for this part of our discussion, are the things that "pop into our head" – passive imagination. One thing we know with passive imagination is that it is responsive to the suggestions or questions that have just been filling our thoughts. Some people regard these thoughts as answers to prayers.

We want to look, then, at the connection between imagination and our Inner Self. Passive imagination seems to primarily come from the Inner Self. When you are asking a question internally, you are asking in your imagination. The answer comes from your imagination. But your imagination is an integral part of your inner self. And if it's not tinged with fear, the answer comes from your inner self quickly.

It's like seeing faces in a fire or on the surface of rocks or pictures in clouds. We softly focus our eyes and let our imagination show us something. The pictures aren't there in an objective sense, but what we see may mean something to us anyway. Like divination, interpreting these pictures is a matter of making up a story. Is it useful? That depends on how we feel about it. If we find that we want to keep this newly created story, then it is up to us to choose how important we're going to make it.

Culturally, we generally take a dim view of things that are just made up. And yet the meanings we give to experiences and things that are important to us are all made up. All the commentary we come up with for the events in our lives are pure fabrications, usually designed to make us feel a little better about ourselves. We could tell any story we like about what's happening for us, but it seems that rationalizing everything is the most popular practice.

Which brings us back to making all of this up. When we ask questions and seem to get answers, whether in prayer, shamanic journeying, divination of any kind, or simply through inspiration, we want to trust what we have received.

An important part of any kind of information or experience coming from the inner worlds is checking it through our discernment. That is, does this new information or experience feel right to us. While power is about choosing what reality we want to live in, we also want to pay attention to whether our choices really work for us. This is what the Seventh Principle is about: Effectiveness is the measure of truth. Without this self-correction mechanism we can easily go on believing things that don't work for us, don't work for those around us, or are in deep conflict with other beliefs we hold.

Let's go back to the powerful skill of pretending. When we pretend, we act as if what we are doing is objectively real. Pretending that something is true means that we are bypassing our doubt mechanisms. We can explore this something more fully and effectively than if we were constantly second-guessing ourselves.

I would suggest that we reframe our questions about whether we are making up what has come into our thinking or awareness. Yes, in a sense we are making it up. But, is what we've received useful to us? If so, then we can say that we have some new information that we can consider along with what our senses tell us, what we've experienced, what others who we respect have said, and how it fits with where we want to go.

Our inner creations shouldn't be suspect because they came from within. They should be suspect if they don't help us live better.

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