Diane: How did you become involved in the use of Imaging?

Dr. Epstein: Originally, I was trained as a physician, psychiatrist, and psychoanalyst. In 1974, I found myself in Jerusalem, where I was introduced to a man who had undergone three years of extensive psychoanalysis — five times a week — to rid himself of depression. His analysis had produced little relief. He then described meeting a therapist in Jerusalem who practiced "visual imagery" — or more precisely, "waking dream" — therapy. He had worked with this therapist, he said, for only four weeks. And all the issues he had been working on in analysis cleared up. He considered himself cured.

I scoffed at this, and was skeptical, because at the time I was dedicated to analysis, and for me that was the only way of answering troubles. But this man introduced me to his therapist, Colette Aboulker-Muscat (a contemporary, I was later to find, of the French clinician Robert Desoille, who developed the imagery technique called "directed waking dream"), and I had my own
epiphany experience with her in the first few minutes of our meeting.

Working with her changed the whole course and direction of my life. I gave up psychiatry, conventional medicine, and psychoanalysis, and went completely in this direction, apprenticing with her for the next nine years. I learned the unity of mind and body, mental and physical, and the therapeutic techniques of waking-dream therapy, which enabled me to help my patients to directly address and utilize the bodymind unity.

Waking dream therapy is a deep, experiential journey of inner life, using a person's night dreams or daily conversation as the starting point for waking exploration.

Diane: How is this work applicable in the territory of relationships?

Dr. Epstein: Relationships form a fundamental basis for this work, since most of the disturbances that we see are rooted in some disordered or disturbed relationship of one sort or another. Out of that comes the difficulties we face. Through experience we begin to understand how the body speaks and how it's relating to these issues.

Today, a man came to see me with a very unusual cancer that exists in the space between his prostate and his colon. He connects it very clearly in his own mind in terms of his emotional or inner turmoil and conflicts. He knows that it started four years ago, when he found his wife in bed with another man. They had previously been in a completely monogamous relationship. The trauma reverberated through him.

In this work, we know that colonic disturbances have the meaning of extreme fury, rage, or hatred, and the prostate has the meaning of love — so he's in a self-acknowledged love-hate relationship with his wife.

Diane: When you were in the early phase of this work, did you learn by observing repetitive patterns?
Dr. Epstein: Yes. At the same time, it was helpful to know the correlation of the emotional life to the physical function of the organs, such as the heart's being related to love. I also came across other people's research. For example, in my studies I discovered that in ancient Greek medicine the liver was noted as the seat of anger. The Egyptians also spoke of the netter function. In the ancient pharaonic wisdom: "Form follows function."

Conventional medicine is based on Greek logical, rational traditions. Conventional training says we are able to see because we have eyes — "Form gives rise to function." That is the reverse of the spiritual path, which says, "Function gives rise to form," or "Belief creates your experience." What you believe, you will manifest. You know this yourself from your own background. The inner gives birth to the outer.

We don't smell because we have a nose — that is the conventional medical way. The possibility of smelling gives rise to the nose. The possibility of seeing, and the quality and function of seeing, give birth to the eyes.

I call this "revelatory medicine." You go inside to the inner sources of knowledge to find what's necessary for yourself. We're born with this wisdom reposing within us. The imaging work gives access and the tools to get at this inner knowledge. You use yourself as your own healer. You become your own doctor.

Diane: In regard to personal relationships, many people are having difficulty within their partnerships these days. How do you approach this in terms of imagery and imagination?

Dr. Epstein: First, we always look to keep the union, or to "make one." And we have two approaches. One is morphology, or face reading. We look at the faces of each partner, and through morphology we can come to understand the kind of person we are with. Then we don't have to take what the other is doing personally. We can distance from the problem and
understand that our partner comes into the relationship with what he has been — what he was prior to the relationship. Knowing this allows a person to begin to find ways to deal with the particular morphology that he or she is married to.

That has been of great success in my practice, because couples walking in with blame walk out with understanding and greater responsiveness with each other. That's one way to bring union between two people.

The second approach is experiential. We have a number of imaginal experiences that we use to help create union. We also have a particular exercise which allows us to see, through the use of imagery, the exact state of the relationship. The parties can see exactly what is going on between the two of them, and that then gives them a sense of reality about where they stand and what the truth is of the situation.

This may then provoke a decision. The decision may be to keep the relationship going, or the decision may be to leave. But we certainly look at first trying to find a way to keep the relationship together.

Diane: What about people who are single?

Dr. Epstein: We give them a way to bring relationship into their lives. We have a special exercise that allows them to do this.

You can create your relationship. Remember, your belief creates your experience. We also might look at what belief a person holds that stops the creation of a relationship. We not only deal with the disease symptoms that present themselves to us, but we look to get to the source.

Just yesterday, I was working with a client in his mid-fifties who has always been single. He told me in a plaintive way, "Oh, I wish I could have a relationship — I wish I could be married." But in getting to the root, we found that he lives a very indulgent personal life. He feels that he's completely free to come and go as he wants, buy for himself whatever he wants, sit in his
apartment surrounded by his favorite books, eat whatever he wants, indulge his gourmet tastes — he doesn't have responsibility to anyone or anything.

So all the complaints are a smoke screen, and at the same time a statement of not wanting to give up his indulgent lifestyle, which is what he would have to do to be in relationship with someone. He would have responsibilities; he would have to care and nurture another, and compromise. He would have to rein in some of his impulses.

So what disease does he get? What's the disease of indulgence?

Diabetes.

Because isn't diabetes the element that comes with the hyper-ingestion of sweets?

Diane: Either that or lack of sweetness...

Dr. Epstein: Bitterness. Too much or not enough. You indulge yourself with sweets, or your life is bitter and unfulfilled because of unattained goals or things you haven't acquired. Diabetes is the physical ailment that can manifest as a result.

At the root of this man's difficulty is this whole indulgence issue that he has to contend with, plus the feeling about losing and trading in "freedom" as he perceives it.

Diane: Do you ever address childhood wounds?

Dr. Epstein: No, we don't psychologize. We deal with what's called the phenomenology — the is-ness of what's presenting itself. Psychology to us is just another story that's been added on to the belief systems we are already saddled with.

It happens very often in the helping professions that explanations pass as facts. We have created belief systems about what happened to us in the past, and we think that this is
what has created what we are now. This is another example of "experience creates belief," which flies in the face of all spiritual tradition.

Experience does not create belief — it's the other way around, as I was mentioning before. Belief creates experience. The inner creates the outer. And what's going on in your inner form of consciousness will manifest and reflect itself in the outer form of consciousness. That's my point of view.

Diane: So what I'm hearing you say is that you look at what "is." And then you use a set of images that the subconscious mind will "buy" to assist in making a shift?

Dr. Epstein: With imaging, you create a new belief. Because it is imaging that mediates the belief to the experience.

The image is sort of like the internal action — you do it on the inner form of consciousness first, and that gives us the impetus of doing it in the external form, which is the world in which we live.

If you do it first in the inner, then that gives you the direction to do it in the outer. That's how we view it. That's one of the reasons imagery works.

Diane: What can people do to assess their own relationships and take steps to resolve issues for themselves.

Dr. Epstein: There is one major step to use, to see whether you are on track with your relationship. And I think that would be sufficient to start with.

The question you ask is: "Do I feel more, or do I feel less?"

For example, when you find yourself talking to your partner, the question you can ask yourself is, "Here I am with John. With John, do I feel more, or do I feel less?"

That's the first self-evaluation as to where this relationship
stands. If you're feeling less with someone, pay attention, even if you're giddy with the relationship and you think it's going very well.

Also, know that usually there are signs that are being given to you which are being swept under the rug. Within the first week of a relationship, both parties put their cards on the table — always. And usually one party, because they so desperately want the relationship, sweeps what they know under the rug. When this is done, it is guaranteed to come back and bite you on the foot. It's also a red flag. Be true to yourself. That's the key. Don't lie to yourself. The signs are always there if there's something amiss.

Diane: Once the person determines the answers to those two questions, then what is the next course of action?

Dr. Epstein: Don't depend on the other person for your happiness or well-being, or think that he or she has to change in order to fulfill you.

Diane: Let's talk about imagination. As a hypnotherapist, I've worked extensively with the technique of regression therapy. Are the images and stories that people connect with "real"?

Dr. Epstein: Images are the language of truth. It's not a function of "real," it's a function of truth.

Diane: But it's so easy to make things up.

Dr. Epstein: Yes, you can fool yourself. But a true image experience is the language of truth — the invisible made visible. And the invisible always furnishes us with truth.

Diane: Thanks, Dr. Jerry.

Below are two exercises that Dr. Epstein suggests for increasing connectedness in your primary relationship, or for ending a relationship to a specific person.
Two Healing Visualizations

1. Blended Colors Experience

Partners do this together every morning when they get up, with the intention to bring closer their connection with each other.

Each person breathes out 3 times slowly. See the color coming out of your partner and see the color coming out of yourself. See the two colors blending, knowing that the two of you are becoming one.

Breathe out and open your eyes.

2. The Sands of Time

This exercise is designed for help in ending a relationship to a specific person. It is to be done twice — early morning and at twilight — twice a day for 7 days. It should take about 3 minutes each time.

- Close your eyes and breathe out slowly three times.

- See yourself walking along a beach holding hands with the one with whom you are ending. The two of you are dancing, skipping, and cavorting along the beach.

- Then you drop hands, say good-bye, and retrace your steps backward toward the shoreline. As you do, thoroughly clean out everything that you see before you. See and sense your effort.

- Finally, you reach the shoreline. The waves wash up on the beach, clearing away all the residue of the relationship that remains.
• You then swim out to the horizon, using a regular overhand or crawl stroke, seeing your arms and legs becoming very long and your torso also elongating. Breathe in the pure air from the horizon.

• Meet the horizon and come back to shore using a backstroke, your arms stretched out far behind your head, your legs stretched out far in front of you, kicking. Again, your torso is elongated. Keep breathing the pure air from the horizon.

• When reaching the shore, come out and let the sun dry you. Then, put on a clean robe or gown that you find there, and return to your home.

• Open your eyes.

Gerald N. Epstein, MD, is the foremost practitioner of integrative medicine for healing and self-transformation. Trained as a Freudian analyst, he abandoned this direction in 1974 to study the therapeutic uses of the imagination under Madame Colette Aboulker-Muscat. Since then, he has been a pioneer in the use of mental imagery for treating physical and emotional problems. As his work has evolved over the years, he has become a leading exponent of the Western spiritual tradition and its application to healing and therapeutics.

In 1981, as a result of his clinical experiences, he wrote Waking Dream Therapy. Dr. Epstein has also authored: Healing Visualizations (1989), now considered the classic book on the therapeutic use of mental imagery;
Healing Into Immortality (1994), a clear account of the reasons and remedies for illness; and his most recent book, Climbing Jacob's Ladder, in which he takes the reader on an experiential journey through the Bible.

Dr. Epstein maintains a private practice in New York and is an Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York. He is Director of The American Institute for Mental Imagery, a post-graduate training center for health care practitioners. In addition, he holds public classes and workshops in imagery, dreams, and Kabbalah. He also lectures worldwide and teaches online Internet courses.

Dr. Epstein conducts research in "mindbody medicine." He completed a National Institutes of Health Office of Alternative Medicine grant to study the effects of mental imagery on asthma, and continues to research the effects of mental imagery on various illnesses. You can visit his website and purchase his books at www.drjerryepstein.com.