

Shrink Rap Radio # 286, November 13, 2011, Understanding Jungian Active Imagination

David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka “Dr. Dave” interviews Dr. Monika Wikman, PhD
(transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Holley Ambrose)

Introduction: My guest today is author and Jungian analyst Dr. Monika Wikman who previously was my guest on episode # 235, Using Alchemical Archetypes in Jungian Analysis. Today we’ll be discussing Active Imagination. For more detail on her background, please visit our show notes at ShrinkRapRadio.com. Dr. Monika Wikman, welcome back to Shrink Rap Radio.

Dr. Monika Wikman: Thank you.

Dr. Dave: I am so pleased to have you back. Last time we discussed your book on Pregnant Darkness and today I’d like to pick your brain on active imagination. So perhaps we can begin with a definition of active imagination. It’s a concept that think has a long history in Jungian psychology. So maybe give us a definition and some sense of the history of the concept.

Wikman: Okay. Great. Well I hope that some of your readers find some of this helpful for their own practice. To start with the activated imagination probably began when first people stared into fire or gazed into reflective ponds and the faculties of the imagination awakened. And the process of using active imagination, as Jung honed it, it’s the process of sitting still with the dialogue with the unconscious and sitting still with what’s outside of ego awareness. And it helps stretch the encapsulated ego, realign it with a source of life—energy that flows in the psyche, through images, through self experiences, sometimes energetics—that realigns life and brings more energy. It also is a confrontation, of course, with whatever arises. In terms of the history of working with the imaginal of the alchemis, of course, have this phenomenon happening. They’d be gazing into their vessels and learning the arts and science of transformations as doorways to the imagination were peeked and opened in the process. And they’d write down their perceptions and even more importantly they drew these emblems of the mysteries that they were seeing. And they used these emblems among themselves, sort of like a trade secret, to portray and hold these alchemical changes that they were both witnessing in psyche and matter and also were experiencing deeply in themselves and affected by the work they were doing.

When Jung landed with alchemy, he saw that he found home; because, he saw that the alchemists were doing this practice of active imagination.

Dr. Dave: One thing that’s never been clear to me is, you know, sometimes the alchemists are depicted as the foundations of chemistry, if you will, of the science of chemistry.

Wikman: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: And then on the other hand it looks like they were engaged in this very sort of mystical kind of practice.

Wikman: Yes.

Dr. Dave: And so I'm not sure how the two connect. Did the alchemists know that they were practicing esoteric knowledge, or did they think they were doing science, or . . .

Wikman: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: Or was it both?

Wikman: It's perfect. Perfect, Dr. Dave. I think that still stands in all sorts of research that happens now a days, where we realize the presence of the observer changes the actual experiment and outcome of what we are observing. This has come, out of course, in current research time and again. And that was true for the alchemists. They would step in thinking they were doing one thing—we could picture them, for example, maybe they were strong sensation, thinking types who'd step in and think they are gonna, ya know, literally transmute certain matter into gold and would be marking down everything they'd be doing very scientifically. And then of course they'd, as they're peering into the vessel, these other processes would start to go on around the imaginal. And there were alchemist, definitely who began to understand that what they were actually doing was another kind of gold. That it was a soul gold that was getting honed in their work and they began like a Gerhardt Dorn and others became aware of this.

Now there are others who didn't know that that's what was happening and they would try to stay with just working with actual matter. But, of course, what we find from alchemy and now physics these days, too, one doesn't just actual matter, because matter is full of spirit, it's full of psyche. There's no such thing as the hard division any longer between spirit and matter. We understand, from many different languages and lenses of perception now that mystery. So the original scientists, yes, tried to get hard science going while all this intuitive process kicked in. It's a giant debate behind alchemy and it's interesting to see when you look at the process of the alchemists which ones were going which direction.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Well you've given me a new thought. Which is that maybe it has some kind of relationship to magic. Not magic in the sense of magician who does slight of hand. But, rather the kind of magic that . . . that functions along the idea that our . . . our emotions and our imaginal world, if you will, may have some mapping too or effect on reality.

Wikman: Very true. Very true. And in fact, this is the beauty behind and inside alchemy, and of course many people are practicing alchemy in different ways

these days. Any time we're working with the imaginal we're working with what you're talking about also as magic. And I think of magic as a change of perception.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Wikman: Literally our lenses of perception learn to see and hear in new ways. And this is what Jung gets at. But the value behind active imagination and the reason for it was what he speaks about as the religious function—honing a new center of consciousness that's beyond the ego complex that relates us to the larger realities of the psyche and that teaches us to see and to hear in new ways. And when we're seeing and hearing in ever new ways, and it really is ever new ways, its soul organs develop since . . . as we work with the imaginal to be able to experience what your thinking of , as you mentioned magic.

Dr. Dave: I'm recalling in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung's autobiographical book, that he describes as a boy sitting on a rock and puzzling over am I the rock that's being sat upon or am I the sitter on the rock. And he talked about person . . . that his own inner experience of a personality one and a personality two.

Wikman: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: Maybe that or earlier experiences he talks about that's in here somewhere.

Wikman: I think he really does. You're right. All throughout *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, if he's looking at the number one personality. Number two is he thinks about himself in his own perceptions as a boy. And then also, he saw it in his mother very strongly. And I think that's exactly what we're talking about. So, you know it's interesting when you mention *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, and you think about how the whole book begins. It begins with that quote from Coleridge, the introduction, and it says, "He looked at his own soul with a telescope, which seemed all irregular. He saw and showed to be beautiful constellations and he added to the consciousness hidden worlds within worlds."

Dr. Dave: Oh, I didn't remember that. That is great that you've got it memorized.

Wikman: Yeah. Well, it's so potent. Because I think this is what we're . . . we begin to see. And certainly Jung's . . . the biography . . . autobiography starts off right with that quote for a reason; because, once I learned there's a perception of that lens and we're opening to active imagination and the number one and number two personalities and these other realities. Then, we literally have a cosmological shift that happens. And, our sense of the cosmos that we're a part of, it grows and shifts. And, it's not an idea or a religion, it's an experience. So, it literally worlds within worlds start to open. And I think it's great brought in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. I just love how he stared it.

Dr. Dave: Well, I think that's a really interesting. Coleridge's poem has the image of looking through a telescope to examine the soul.

Wikman: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: And, I think we've all speculated at one time, we've wondered, you know we know so much about the microscopic and we know so much about the macroscopic at this point. Of course, there's also a whole lot that we don't know.

Wikman: True.

Dr. Dave: But, it's probably the rare person who hasn't wondered. Well, I wonder, if we're like the microscopic world, if we're just like the molecule or something that's much larger. So that image of somebody looking through a telescope, looking out to examine the soul. And it also makes me think of images that I think I've . . . either alchemical images or perhaps images I've seen on a tarot card of a guy with a stargazing pointy hat who's looking through a telescope.

Wikman: Mm-hmm. Oh, yeah.

Dr. Dave: As a kind of alchemist who's using a telescope but also in search of the soul.

Wikman: Yes. There's a beautiful woodcut from the 1300s by Flammarian, and it shows this alchemist peering through . . . he's kind of crouched on the Earth and he's looking beyond the known stars to the realms beyond and there's a telescope and other images as well. What's really fun is that someone on the internet changed that image around and they have him sitting outside in the unknown worlds looking back in on this world.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Wikman: To me that's really important because I think once we get contact with these experience or realities of the psyche that are much larger, we literally appreciate the minute so much more for the mysteries it contains. It changes the way we relate to things in life, to our bodies, to each other, to having a little human life. That becomes much more mysterious. Our lenses of perception see matter and the tiny in new ways.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. It's all pretty astounding actually.

Wikman: Yes.

Dr. Dave: Whether you're going down or you're going up. It's astounding in both directions.

Wikman: Yes.

Dr. Dave: And . . . now I know the name Barbara Hannah at some point is associated with active imagination. Who was Barbara Hannah and at what point did she come along?

Wikman: Well, Barbara Hannah was an English woman living in Zurich and she lived with Von Franz for many years, which made her leave Von Franz for many, many years which was Jung's right hand basically in his work on alchemy. And . . . she had a strong feeling, intuitive personality and she wrote a tremendous book called *Active Imagination Encounters with the Soul*. And it's very potent. It's not for the faint-hearted. It does really show active imagination at work. And I think of it in terms of people around you who really grounded the work and wrote about it. It definitely would be Barbara Hannah who was a very heart full friend of Jung's as well.

Dr. Dave: Well, I remember, too, there was a series of films coming out of the UK: *The story of C.G. Jung*. And I think it was either there or *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* or both—an account of Jung . . . of his water works that he used to play with stones in a stream building dams and . . .

Wikman: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: . . . and little structures. And it reminded me of my youth growing up part time in the mountains outside of Los Angeles and there was a creek there. And I used to spend hours and hours, you know, trying to dam up this stream . . .

Wikman: Mmmm.

Dr. Dave: So, that also seems to be an important root for . . . of this active imagination approach.

Wikman: Well, Dr. Dave, I think what you're saying is so dear because, you know, play and the child at play is exactly where the imaginal comes in. And thinking about you as a boy playing in that creek—and you could play endlessly for hours . . .

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Wikman: . . . life in nature. That's so beautiful. And Jung definitely tried to get back to this divine child-energy that . . . that would help to open the imaginal doors. In fact, at one point he keeps bringing alive the reality that the self—capital "S" Self, the larger self is a child playing. So, this . . . what we're talking at, with the imaginal realms as natural as you playing at that creek . . .

Dr. Dave: And that reminds me of the New Testament quote of Jesus saying, "Unless you become as a little child" . . . I can't finish it, but . . .

Wikman: Yes. Yeah, something like it's hard to get into the kingdom, isn't it? You know, unless you become as a child, you can't get in.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Wikman: So that's interesting. So, if we think of the kingdom of Heaven, you know, as seeing the spiritual and the material world as intertwined in a fluid dance. But, that puts us into a . . . you know, a feeling of the numinous, of something that feels ecstatic to us—assuming our rightful place—that the child knows how to do that. And, this is . . . and I'm glad you brought this up. It brings alive just how much this is about life itself and these instincts . . . I mentioned, you know, first man and first woman looking in the first fire of the first gazing pond and the imaginal waking up. But, it's also true in our lives that the child in us and in our early years had natural access and means to this. I also grew up, by the way, in the mountains behind Los Angeles . . .

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Wikman: In a creek called Beep Creek. And I would get lost down there for hours, and hours, and hours, and hours playing in the water and taking the hem out of my pants and trying to catch fish. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: Oh, yeah, yeah. We actually did . . . I actually discovered that I could catch fish in my hands by plunging it into the dark space under rock. Which I've since learned is illegal.

Wikman: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: But as a child I didn't know . . . you know it was kind of exciting to plunge your hand into this dark space where you couldn't see and then to feel a wiggling trout in your hand.

Wikman: Yes. Absolutely. . . . and everything we'd . . . I shouldn't really laugh. The metaphor in which you're saying is just the same impulse behind the religious instinct. To plunge one's little hand into the dark where we can't see and wait for the life force of something other than us to make itself known. And it like . . . as a child it's like the sensory . . . sense of this little fish that lay in your little hand. And now, like with, you know, going to active imagination or working with dreams and such, it's the same thing. We literally want to be able to reach into the darkness where we can't see and feel the life force of the psyche that's infusing and living with us, and informing us, and playing with us. It's the perfect metaphor. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: I love that. You're really bringing it to life. And you talk about staring in the pond and looking into the fire. That brought into mind the Greeks looking up at the skies and . . .

Wikman: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: . . . and how they came up with all these imaginal entities in the constellations and related it to their mythology.

Wikman: Yes. And of course that's a whole other topic for us at the time.

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Wikman: That is so . . . and it's so juicy for us to look at how also indigenous people along with classical Greek people would come up with the same name for stars even.

Dr. Dave: Really?

Wikman: Not all the time. But, yes. It's really striking to see Sirius, the dog star, through time and through many cultures keeps getting named the dog star.

Dr. Dave: Oh, I didn't know that.

Wikman: Yeah. The way relate to the star strewn sky and find mystery in it is a beautiful projective screen of the psyche. That's a whole topic. It'd be fun to do. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: So, Barbara Hannah writes this book about active imagination, which I guess establishes it as a . . . as a solid piece of the Jungian world. Have there been subsequent developments or other contributors that stand out?

Wikman: Yes. Two are ones that stand out for me for certain. I think in answering that, I'll also mention, of course, Von Franz, who's worked with active imagination, is incredibly striking. It's throughout everything she's doing. Her book on synchronicity, divination and synchronicity, brings alive very much the activated imaginal field with which the goal of which is to live inside that field. So, I think this important too, that the goal of individuation from Von Franz's point of view is to live the active imagination life—it's the symbolic life. Everything we're doing, we have this . . . we have a level of hearing that's, you know hearing the field of synchronicity and what's . . . what's getting communicated from the whole world around us continually. So, Von Franz's work, I would certainly have to name as just completely the corner stone behind this. And, currently, Jeff Raff's work I find to be incredibly illuminating and he has . . . each one of his books get into what it's like to hone this new center between consciousness and the unconscious. And as you see Jeff Raff's work develop with active imagination, you see that he has become very related to what he calls the ally. And this, of course, well, links us to shamanism—and other peoples, through time, have had these experiences as well—that active imagination begins to show

a partnership between the human and the divine, that both parts are working on this new center. So, Jeff Raff, R-a-f-f, I would certainly recommend his work. He's got a current book that came out called *A Practical Guide to Ally Work*. And this is very easy to read. His other books *Jung and the Alchemical Imagination*—that's been translated into a number of different languages. It's sold wonderfully around the world for real reasons. It's extremely substantial piece of Jungian psychology in the world today.

And then, where I looked is other developing active imagination, I would definitely say the Sufi. Sufi people have a giant handle on this and have for eons. And it's very, very fresh. The Sufi, of course, is the mystic tradition behind the Muslims who definitely are beyond dogma and remarkably free of dogma and fixed thought; and so, their relationship to the inner partner who helps in active imagination, and very strong. And then, a sort of playful sideline, I have to say is I've had opportunity to work with the Gross community. And I have to say they're doing quite a bit with active imagination, though they don't call it that.

Dr. Dave: Hmm.

Wikman: Yeah. So . . .

Dr. Dave: Now, Jeff Raff, that's a new name to me. Is . . . is he a G-E-O-F-F or a J-E-F-F?

Wikman: Yeah, J-E-F-F and then R-E-Y. Jeffrey Raff, R-A-F-F, and he's a Jungian analyst in Denver, Colorado. And, he taught at Pacifica in the past and his works are gripping. Just in terms of something very alive that's going into new directions with Jung's foundation I look to Jeff's work.

Dr. Dave: Now, when you talk about his work and the work that he has done on the ally, that brings to mind Jung's *Red Book*, which came out so recently. And, it seems that maybe the character of Philemon would qualify there. What are your thoughts about that?

Wikman: That's perfect. Yes, you're well read. Well, that book is not for the faint-hearted, Dr. Dave. And, yes, Philemon, definitely, you can see the emergence of Philemon and the beautiful, beautiful painting, I think that we all just can really identify with is the . . . take a look at Jung honored that relationship. That definitely became his guide. And as Jung says, the work that he did in that time with the *Red Book* becomes what informs the whole rest of his career. And that relationship with Philemon ends up informing him the rest of his life.

Dr. Dave: Well, what else can you tell us about *The Red Book*. I mean, it's . . . it seemed like he really ran with this, or it ran with him.

Wikman: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: The idea . . . you know this active imagination, it's clear . . . you know, some people had . . . somebody wrote a book years ago, I think, referring to Jung as the mad something or other, suggesting that he was actually crazy. But, if you . . . if you look at what was going on in his life at that time, he was actually carrying on a clinical practice and having regular relationships with people all the while he was having this other . . .

Wikman: Yeah. Yes.

Dr. Dave: . . . other contact. Right?

Wikman: Yes, absolutely. All right. You know, Jung speaks again and again in the collected works about the need to meet the unconscious halfway. And Jung is speaking about something he knows. Because, in *The Red Book* that's what he did. He made sacrifices in his outer world, a number of them. He let go of . . . of being president of . . . the psychoanalytic group there and also being the head editor of the major publication. He let go of, also, his work at the Burgholzi Clinic, where he was becoming quite famous. So, the shining star energy that was driving the ego complex out into the world so strongly . . . he made a very distinct sacrifice in the outer world to meet the unconscious halfway and then dive into this . . . these experiences with the imaginal that we see in *The Red Book*.

Now, it's interesting think about, you know, for many of us who live with the rational world, you know, so identified with it. To think of what Jung did seems just completely impossible. My god, he sat down with himself and every night was taking all the time he needed to just write down everything that came to him in his visionary states. And yet, the truth is, in Zurich at the time, that's what people were doing. There is actually . . . I live in Santa Fe now. I have for 22 years and, you know I have to say when I read about what's behind Jung happening in Zurich at the time. There was a foundation for everything that we think of as quote the new age movement . . .

Dr. Dave: Yes. (laughs)

Wikman: (laughs). And I just said it in quotes. So, they . . . they were . . . they were talking to . . . with automatic handwriting—sub-personalities, as they called it—this was the rage of the day in Zurich. And so this is, of course, what Jung begins to do when he sits himself down. He, you know, this is the . . . the using a candle, the gazing into a crystal, the consulting the unconscious and trying to lower the threshold of consciousness that *basement nuvo* that's so important. Jung . . . Jung linked himself to Flunoy and to some of those . . . the . . . the mystics of the time. I think Swedenborg and such, when he started to do *The Red Book* he really disidentified from Freud and the rational mind being in complete charge. So, yes, he does goad on that edge. You know, when people say, you know, "It's not for the fainthearted" to read *The Red Book* that's absolutely true. Jung completely

confronts the edge of madness. And it does it exquisitely, very honestly you get the feeling of him way in there with the fluidity of the imaginal world. And, having met the unconscious halfway with making sacrifices in his outer life you really see the unconscious meet him; and, as you said, it leads to Philemon.

But, you know, Dr. Dave, it's interesting we talk about *The Red Book*. I have to say the part that tickles me the most, is that, you know, it's this huge laborious work. My god! You know, the suffering that goes on and the birth that goes on, and when you really look at the trajectory, which my friend Robin Van Lowenfeld [?] likes to point out—I've find it to be really true—he starts off, you know, at the beginning with the quote . . . you know, that the sacrifice is the cornerstone of what is to come. And so he makes all these sacrifices in the outer world and he does this inner work really, really deeply. And when he merges out the other side, you know, we see the death of the hero complex is completely bent based on *The Red Book*. And, at the very end, what does Jung become, but a womb, W-O-M-B. He's become a womb. And that is this receptive vessel to be able to be capable of holding what his soul's about. And he had to learn receptivity and yin. Jung had a lot of yang—and certainly early on, my god, he's 38, 40 while this is happening. He's at a time in life when the ego complex belongs being in charge. So, he makes the sacrifice, he takes the plunge, and in the end he learns this deep yin, feminine receptivity to be able to balance the yang and he ends up being able to hold his own soul and then dot, dot, dot, he walks off into the world. And so that's . . .

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Wikman: . . . what we see. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: Wow. Wow. Wow. It's a tourative force that you're giving us here.

Wikman: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: I was intrigued about your observations about the *Zeitgeist* of Zurich at that time. I didn't realize all that was going on and . . . the question that was on the tip of my tongue that I think you kind of, maybe, answered was to wonder, well, geez . . . you know there have been all these books of channeled wisdom and you know in the last twenty years or so.

Wikman: Mm-hmmm.

Dr. Dave: And in a sense, I mean, we could look at *The Red Book*, maybe, as an example of channeling, or not?

Wikman: Well, I think you're asking a really good question because it has to do with . . . in fact your telescope's looking way into Jung psychology, I think, when you ask that, Dr. Dave, because he's . . . his anima is definitely a media mystical medial

anima. As hard as that is for the rational side of Jung, who is a scientist in the phenomenologist own, part of his anima is definitely the medial woman. And his . . . you know his dissertation for his doctoral degree was, of course, on the séance material of his cousin, Helen Preiswerk.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Wikman: So that's what starts and it doesn't stop there. He goes to . . . you know, all the way through the collected works. He's interested also in women who have that gift. And that's a mirror to him. He . . . Frank Miller . . . kind of a difficult and there's a complex story about her . . . but, anyway . . . his work with her and his contact with her material—I should say, 'cause it was really contact with the material that did it. It really showed him his own soul. He even says that as he's looking at her material. And she's a completely needy mystic poet and living in France at the time in Paris. So, anyway, I think you're looking in on something really huge about Jung. That . . . He had a hard time pulling together . . . could have seemed irreconcilable spirits to him, at the time. You know here he is identified with being medical doctor and doing, you know, real research, that has some real back bone to it and he's feeling really satisfied by that, and then . . . then he's suddenly getting into, "oh my God, I'm investigating complexes and, you know, psychological phenomenon and spiritual phenomenon and . . . So, I've think he's landed on something very big.

Dr. Dave: I seem to recall, too, a story that I think he relates, of that he was present with Jung. . . . They were having some kind of conversation where some kind of young paranormal knock on the wall or something happened

Wikman: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: And Freud was totally taken aback . . .

Wikman: Uh-huh.

Dr. Dave: . . . and refused to acknowledge it. Do you recall that story?

Wikman: Yes. And it links to your earlier question, too, about, you know, channeled material versus *The Red Book* and the synchronicity field that operated around Jung and his [?] anima. So, he didn't believe in totally channeling material. He really believed in the ego getting much more centered and part of the creative work than just pure channeling. At the same time, automatic writing and such was important to him. But the cohesiveness of the center of the personality instead of a part that channeled of a . . . energy of the higher self. So this is why he called it a partnership . . . that's so important—and yet, if we're talking about the synchronicity field—yes this image . . . this moment in time that happens to him with Freud . . . they're in a big disagreement at the time and there's a giant report that just rockets through the bookcase. There's also a knife that breaks into

four parts and images of that . . . You can see a photograph of that. It's really striking. So, and Jung had Para psychological phenomenon happen around him. I'm sure Freud wouldn't know what to do with that. It would have been, you know, so huge. But, Jung for example, when he writing *Septum Sermones*, which is included in *The Red Book*, he's, you know, living at his house and he has, you know, his family's sitting down for dinner and the door bell is ringing and everybody knows there's nobody at the door. They get up and looked and in fact there's nobody there. And . . . There are many stories of the Para psychological phenomenon around Jung that would happen in this field of synchronicity. But, yet, the ones with Freud are very moving.

Dr. Dave: So, it's interesting that there are these two aspects to Jung; because, you know, you mentioned that he was also . . . had this rational physician researcher side. And, I'm struck, too, to discover that there's a lot of contemporary research that uses reaction time as a variable, as a measure.

Wikman: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: And . . . and, I think maybe he was the first person . . . he used reaction time as a way to try to get at the complexes.

Wikman: Exactly. What . . . Yes, that's exactly right. But . . . He was the first person to use reaction time and interestingly a biofeedback measure. He had the galvanic skin response going with his measuring of complexes.

Dr. Dave: Oh, my goodness.

Wikman: Yeah. And so he . . . It's interesting, you know, if you take a modern psychology course at a regular university these days, the one and only place you're gong to hear about Jung is the Galvonic skin response that he had the first biofeedback going along with measurement time for response.

Dr. Dave: I certainly didn't hear that when I was in school, no. (laughs)

Wikman: (laughs). Yeah. Yeah. Well, I went to TCSD for undergraduate, and that was the only place they had Jung in there, and it made me laugh. Uh, yeah.

Dr. Dave: When I was in graduate school there was a big tome, and I think I've forgotten the title, but it was "Theories of Personality" by dot, dot, dot. It was sort of required reading in those days.

Wikman: Uh-huh.

Dr. Dave: I think there was one page on Jung in there and different personalities. (laughs)

Wikman: (laughs) Yeah. Isn't it amazing.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. It is amazing. And also, given the things that we've been talking about here, it's really clear why Jung kind of became . . . people got so excited about Jung in the 60s and since. That there's so much that's happened in the culture now that makes us so much more receptive to what he was doing to that mediumistic side.

Wikman: I think that's so true. And the unification of these sides, that's what's so interesting; too, about like for forever world religions have talked about many dimensions of being. And, Shamanism is spoken about many dimensions of being and they're into experiencing at a, you know, brining in a new unification and a new adhesion between the worlds . . . have come through at like indigenous cultures throughout time. And, now, we've got physics talking about basically the same thing. From a scientific languaging lens. And, I think this place that the worlds are meeting and our sense of the human being's place in a larger cosmos is really expanding sense of psychology. Thank God, because psychology has been so defended against the psyche itself for a long time. And this is what I think brings Jung back in, because he wasn't defended against it in that way. So, the larger that we get back to that telescope in Coleridge we get back in its worlds within worlds that we're looking at.

Dr. Dave: Where does active imagination tie in—if at all—to say, something like a practice of meditation?

Wikman: Well, that . . . think it's a provocative question, because, meditation we often think of as a stilling of the mind and emptying and quieting, centering, and all of those are important in active imagination; but, in active imagination you add the other element of engaging the other—engaging otherness of spirit—that comes in through these images themselves . . . Images, also kinesthetic self experiences. Some people experience active imagination, you know, through literal image, also through voice, through automatic writing, through . . . also through movement. Sometimes it's shivers and a felt sense or it's a vibration in the body somewhere. So, it . . . the way it wants to communicate with us can be wide. It can be quite varied. So, mediation . . . we think of it as working to calm and quiet. But, active imagination says, "Well, you do that by getting into dialogue with it first. Then it moves towards the quieting and the centering and the new peace." And I think that's where these things are different. Relationship to the void—very important in Jungian psychology. Especially all the fluidity of the imagination and, you know, spirit Mir curious archetype of everything. This phantasmagoria the psyche completely expressing itself in images all the time. The little person in one's little center, and the way one engages with the images that come, and gets it to still itself, and dialogue with one, and bring something fruitful out of the dialogue is extremely important with active imagination as meditation. The fruit of the work comes . . . you see then the peace and then the centering. The relationship to the void is in meditation and it's certainly in active imagination.

Dr. Dave: You know, you just gave me a thought that I hadn't thought of in this way before. I have, on a number of occasions, I've thought I heard somebody call my name. You know . . .

Wikman: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: . . . I've just heard, "David."

Wikman: Yes.

Dr. Dave: You know, and there's nobody there. (laughs) Maybe I'm looking in the wrong place.

Wikman: Mm-hmm. Oh, I am very moved by that. Recently, I was teaching a week on *The Red Book* for the Grof community, for the training program. And, this came up, that often times there's something in the unconscious and even something we might think of as the ally or the inner partner that is literally calling your name and trying to call you force in a new way. It can be quite tender, even. One of the women there was mentioning, for example, hearing the great mother call her name down the hallway. And, it was evoking her to get up and walk toward this . . . she wasn't even being called and it was evoking something in her about being loved. But, she had never been loved. So, yes, when a name is called it's so important . . . and this gets into the Sufi window because they have a great alchemical mystery around the names . . . that they call "the names." And that names themselves have an inhabiting of one's true essence in them. So to use the name of anything is to call forth its divine essence.

Dr. Dave: Are you saying Goth G-O-T- H.?

Wikman: G-O-T-H.

Dr. Dave: The Goth. You said you were working with Goth community.

Wikman: Oh, sorry, sorry, sorry. I'm sorry. What actually . . . The Goth would actually be the teenagers who are really in the negretto experiences, but no . . . Grof, G-R-O-F.

Dr. Dave: Oh, so as in Stan Grof?

Wikman: Yes, exactly, Stan Grof.

Dr. Dave: Oh, okay. (laughs)

Wikman: Breathwork training community. I'm glad you asked.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Me, too.

Wikman: That's an important distinction.

Dr. Dave: Me, too. I was going to say, I didn't know the Goths had training. (laughs)

Wikman: (laughs) Yeah, they're really quite the negretto community. They're really working with the dark and, I guess, counterculture. Looking at the goth people are interesting as well. But, I was saying Grof, G-R-O-F.

Dr. Dave: Oh, that's a fascinating intersection. You know, I interviewed Stan not so long ago . . .

Wikman: Mm-hmm,

Dr. Dave: And he brought . . . he has a book that's very autobiographical and it's just filled with synchronicity, some really dramatic things.

Wikman: Mmm.

Dr. Dave: Fascinating, so, that's really interesting that you're doing some work with, you know, in that environment.

Wikman: I've been so fortunate to have as my very, very dear friend Diane Haug, who's been Stan Grof's right hand for over twenty years. She's invited me in to teach with her and it's been such a rich interfacing. I've really enjoyed watching what the Grof community grounds in terms of active imagination. They are using, of course, music and breath as real central. That it is a very long time period there of containment on one's map dropping into the imaginal and feeling it and experiencing it and then taking it right to drawing Mandalas. Very Jungian. I'm going to have to say . . . the interfacing is quite easy to do. And it's fun to work with the Grof people because they are deep in the experiences and they appreciate getting some pieces of the map that comes from the Jungian tradition. So it's a good interfacing.

Dr. Dave: That . . . That's very fascinating. That might need to be the subject of a future interview.

Wikman: How fun! Great!

Dr. Dave: There's enough to say around it . . .

Wikman: Yes. There surely is.

Dr. Dave: Okay. Yeah, because that sounds fascinating. I just had a few tastes of that work. And . . .

Wikman: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: And I think it's . . . it's fascinating work. So, so what are some of the types . . . oh, I guess I wanted to ask you, too, about the relationship to dreams and dream work. That's probably an important question.

Wikman: Oh, yes. Really good to start in active imagination from a dream you've had because a dream is such a pure transmission from something of the unconscious. It draws you in with, for example, a figure you may have met in a dream or a tension, or something that feels unreconcilable to you. Take a piece from the dream, or even the whole dream itself. And then sitting still in the quiet asking the figure or the presence of what it is to communicate to you and allow it to . . . the energy will move. You'll get either a felt sense or an image if it comes, or you try and get it to talk to you. Then the imaginal starts to flow, and then the bridge gets built, then you're starting to get related to what it is that came in the dream. And that goes forward then in the active imagination. It's classic pattern for Jungians to want to take the dream work to active imagination to get the relationship to grow and to be able to have it move. And it's also fun to watch when you do that, that the dreams also pick up that theme and the dreams that dreaming it further along, as well. They continue the field of the active imagination you've done to show you what connects,

Dr. Dave: Well, since . . . I think a number of therapists and therapists in training will be listening to this interview. Let's move into its uses in psychotherapy and we might also . . . we might start with your own personal experiences as you were going through your own analytic process, psychotherapy process and your training. What training, what kind . . . what role and what kind of experiences did you have with active imagination during that period?

Wikman: (laughs)

Dr. Dave: If it's not too personal. (laughs)

Wikman: No, no it's not too personal. It's just poor Dr. Dave. I've . . . I'll be careful not to grab the ball and run too far.

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Wikman: The core of my own healing as a Chiron wounded healer is absolutely come from contact with the imaginal. That's . . . And that started way back when I got into analysis in the early 80s. And the way that working with dreams and the active imagination helped me heal from ovarian cancer. So, in my own life—physical and psychological—healing has definitely come through work with the imaginal. And that would whole topic, I bet. I guess if I were to give an example of something . . . working with the body, working with physical symptoms—it

can be a very allied process to use active imagination with. To get the part of the body that is having trouble . . .

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Wikman: . . . to talk, to move, to communicate somehow. Sometimes it would come through color, or vibration, or a felt sense, or sometimes it'll even, you know, communicate a song lyric to you, or, you know, actual words—by getting certain parts of our psyche and body and lives to somehow speak to us if it's stuck. So it's really about when energy's stuck, how do we help. How we free its spirit by using active imagination field; and certainly in my life that's been the ongoing cornerstone for my own life and work. So, um . . .

Dr. Dave: You use phrase a Chiron wounded healer and I'm not sure what that means.

Wikman: Well there's . . . the myth of Chiron is a lovely Greek myth that shows the archetypal pattern behind all of us wounded healer and it puts us on good humble ground. And Jung was certainly a Chiron figure. I mean he was certainly . . . Chiron was the head of the centaurs who suffers a wound when he comes out of his cave one day. There's this ruckus going one day, and a stray arrow from Hercules bow lands in the back of his heel. And he tries to get it out. They call in all the shaman. No one can heal it, no one can fix it and he crawls off into his cave and eventually gets the arrow out. But, the wound won't stop weeping and being infected. And, he learns in his cave with the help of the imaginal realms a number of healing arts; and he learns active imagination, and he learns shamanic journeying, and he learns acupuncture, and he learns all the healing arts--this apothecary as he starts to grow and grow and grow. And he walks into the world then with this apothecary healing gifts and tools and his wound is never completely healed. And that's an important piece, is that the wound weeps still. And I . . . This wounded healer puts us all on really good humble ground. A lot of us are attracted to this deep work with the magical and amazing realm between psyche and psychoid and the reality of the wound grounds it. It keeps us in . . . very connected to the human and with also humor, for sure.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah, that's an interesting way to think about it: the wounded healer as a grounding reminder.

Wikman: Mm-hmm. Yes. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: I hadn't heard that aspect before. And that's an important one to remember.

Wikman: Yeah.

Dr. Dave: And that motif finds its way again in the grail legend again, doesn't it? The wound to the heel and the weeping wound that won't heal.

Wikman: Absolutely true. And see now, that's so important that you bring that in 'cause that, that's the grail legend and the grail cup, and we talk about *The Red Book* and Jung's own experiences with the depths of the imaginal world. Here's . . . he becomes at the end, that wound which is the grail cup that can contain some of the mysteries of the soul itself and let the soul have its own life. And the grail legend is also about that. It's the healing that's trying to happen for the grail came but it's also the healing of the world and the ability for what lives in the spirit world to find its way into our world. And it requires us working with our wounds in order to do that. When we work with the wound we get connected with something bigger. And that's . . . to me that's . . . if we lose that piece we've lost the map and we've lost the flow of life energy. And, so, bringing up that piece about the wound and the grail legend is really important.

Dr. Dave: What about your own clinical experience as a Jungian analyst yourself? Are there any case examples that you could share of . . . of a time when you introduced some kind of an active imagination approach and, you know, what that led to?

Wikman: Um, let's see. In clinical work, I mean it's just—all the life happens when people are getting connected to . . . there doing more than active imagination because they're getting other points of view and the way the psyche is stuck you suddenly get different points of view. So, I think about for example, one man I knew worked with me, who, in the middle of a divorce in which he saw as nothing of his own fault would dream . . . would get active imagination figures, you know, telling him song lyrics that would just shock him awake.

Dr. Dave: (laugh)

Wikman: About being blind then waking up. Right before he even knew the divorce was going to even happen which was clear to me it was going to happen before he could sense that it probably could . . . every one around him. The dream message that he had was you know was "you better start swimming or you'll sink like a stone, for the times they are a changin'." So for him you know the times are definitely changing and his alchemical stone was thinking, he was going quite unconscious and it was time for him to really dig in with his work. And, what was really interesting for his active imagination experience was it never stopped using song lyrics. (laughs) It would . . . so if you watch—this would be for all your listeners, too—you know, when you wake up in the morning, what song is on your mind? And how is that communicating something, and to listen in, and this is the, I think the part that is where we need someone sometimes to help train us to get the attunement of the symbolic ear to hear the way the psyche is communicating. So if you wake up with a song lyric for example, that's the activated imagination speaking to you and to get you know what is it saying and what does that mean for me. It would be the part, the art of learning to really hear it.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. I've had that experience many times. It's not . . . not upon waking up but just in the middle of my day, I'll notice there's a song running through my head and then I look at the lyric and I realize with a shock what a profound commentary it is about what is going on with me right then.

Wikman: Perfect. Exactly.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Wikman: Oh, and I think . . . honestly, Dr. Dave, that's so important to me. Like we've talked about clinical work and daily life. The point is, as Von Franz said, is to live with the activated imaginal feel and to be open to all the times and ways its communicating, so it's a way of life. So, yes we work on it when we sit down to do an exact active imagination. And yes, clinical work, trying to get people to bring that material in or get it up and help them work with it is really important. But, we do that as . . . so, as to learn a way to really hear so that, for example, like when you get that song lyric and you pay attention and you listen and then you can have a laugh as you're getting realigned; because, usually as communications, their realigning as they're doing some kind of course correction, or attitude correction. That puts us in better alignment with the larger self and that brings more life energies. So, it's about flow of life in the end. But, you have to have a sense of humor and agile—you have to be agile because, you know, it's confrontational . . . with what we don't want to see about ourselves.

Dr. Dave: Now, you've used the term activated imagination and active imagination, and even in an email exchange we had before this, you mentioned you wanted to say something about activated imagination.

Wikman: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: What's the distinction there?

Wikman: Well, I think the activated imagination gives us a feeling of the aliveness of the field of the imaginal realms is actually moving. And, you know, we say activated, it's like we kind of lean into that a little bit more. It's . . . umm . . . alive. Like, for example, [unintelligible] in water, that might be moving. The vibrational field of . . . we lean into the activated field of the imaginal with all of our sense organs open. I think sometimes when we say the active imagination, we're . . . we can get, like all things, can get lost in . . . kind of static words. So, we want to remember it's a completely alive field that's alive and ongoingly open all the time. So, for me, activated touches it more as something we're living with all the time.

Dr. Dave: Are there examples from film that help to illustrate the kind of things we've been talking about here?

Wikman: Yes. In fact I had meant to bring those in earlier. There's a moment, for example, in . . . I think what we begin to realize when we start to tap into the activated imagination field, is that it's informing everything all the time. And all creative process is deeply informed by the activated imaginal field. Think of Shakespeare and all these characters that get birth. He gives them a life, you know they get to get realized. This is . . . also it's important, the images themselves, the presence of themselves is seeking their realization just as we're seeking healing, a realization. And in film, if we go to Tolkien, there's a beautiful image in there where Lady Galadriel is giving all of the sojourners gifts. And she is standing over a skrying field, Cate Blanchett at its finest, and she holds in her hands a gift for Frodo. And she says to him, "You Frodo, last but not least, I give to you the light of Earendil star. May it be a light for you when all other lights go out." Now, that is a really profound moment. She hands him then this vial that has Earendil's waters. The living waters for the ability to skry and to see. So she's a medial anima figure. She's handing our humble little sojourner, Frodo, this vial, that then is gonna have a light in it for when all other lights go out. Now, what's important about that is the light of the ego is not enough to get us through our lives.

Dr. Dave: Mmm.

Wikman: Its light, its way of seeing is not enough and the light literally can go out at certain times: You know you go through a divorce, or depression, or go through some dark change and you can't see the way. Really important to getting lost. So when he goes lost it has to reach for a deeper source. And in film that moment is really depicting what will happen for Frodo. He gets in a dark situation and needs a light that is more than his ego light. And, it's coming from this soulful work with the imaginal. Then it creates a light force that helps him see in this dark cave and find his way. And that's true for us. We do our work with the imaginal it creates this like that light of Earendil star. There's a way that it has a presence that works to have a life with us and helps guide us when we're quite lost. So, that's one image from film. I could go on. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: (laughs) Well, that's a good one. That's a good one.

Wikman: Good.

Dr. Dave: I think active imagination has kind of worked its way into lots of . . . non-professional and semi-professional settings. So . . .

Wikman: Yes.

Dr. Dave: So, I'm wondering, you know, who and when is it good for? Are there contra . . . are there contra indications? Are there dangers?

Wikman: Yes. I think certain personalities are more permeable to the imaginal realms and can also sometimes be . . . sometimes because of that be more compelled. When, in fact, to balance themselves in the world and to grow that stone they may need to do actually some things that are kind of functional and earthy to help the ego learn how to separate out. So, we have a little careful about what's guiding the urge to do active imagination work. And, sometimes having a Jungian analyst who knows their territory well . . . of course I'm from that tradition and I would of course say that . . . that can help one orient, because, one can get very deep into the imaginal and need actually more ego function in the world. That's one of the things that can happen. So, I joked too with the Grof community in September in England that we have to be careful, also, of the 'Triple A Club'—The Archetypal Addicts Anonymous Club. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: (laughs)

Wikman: Where we're constantly looking for the next experience of the numinous and it doesn't like that. And it gets us out of balance. So, doing active imagination for the wrong reason, just . . . I think you have to be aware that it will of course correct us. It'll give us a course correction. It's not for entertainment. It is for the realigning and it will confront us with several [?] pieces. So, I think be ready for whatever you get and get help as necessary to understand what's happening. If a process gets too hot do what the alchemist say and turn the flame down; but, also when you get quite stuck in life turn the flame up. Turn up the flame of looking in with the imagination and . . . you know, get it to help you. Shake the tree, some of you . . . some of your relationship to those trees and help it wake up with you. And . . . But that regulation of how high, how low—sometimes people need help that. I think that, actually, can be quite often important to get an outside person help you out.

Dr. Dave: What would be your advice to therapists and therapists in training who want to develop this set of skills to add to their tool box?

Wikman: Umm. Let's see . . . I would recommend, if people were really wanting to be able to have it for themselves and their own practice and also use it in their practice, to read those two books of Jeff Raff's. Read *Jung and the Alchemical Imagination* (first one), and then do the second one, *The Practical Work to Ally Work . . . Practical Guide to Ally Work*. That one has really good step by step pieces in it. I also think that Von Franz's message that she says, "we have an ethical responsibility to what it is that we receive when we do active imagination." There's a really important piece here because at the center of working with the imaginal is the development of the integrity of one's character and not only are these other dimensions realizing themselves, but human beings are getting more integrity to how their character actually moves and operates in the world. And that integrity of character, I think as a therapist, is really something to see. You get a chance to see how the psyche confronts people—all of us—with pieces of shadow elements that we're not aware of, with parts of our

wound that may be unconscious. And so the fruitfulness for therapists is that it's a direct inroad to the kind of work we want to do to help ourselves and those we work with, integrate more fully. With more glue to the . . . and more consciousness to the center of who we are. So, I think knowing that there's ethical responsibility to deal with what gets produced and to face it—whatever's coming up—helps a sober note in there that therapists then can help their clients with. Because it is a confrontation with the unconscious after all. It's not all so easy. So, again, that agility and humor helps. So, I think for therapists to introduce it to . . . in their work is to experience it themselves. Pick up those two books, get it going inside themselves, and watch how the fruitfulness starts to appear. But, definitely keeping the eyes wide open and some humor and agility helps.

Dr. Dave: Well, that sounds like a great place for us to wrap up this wide ranging and wonderful conversation.

Wikman: Oh, good. (laughs)

Dr. Dave: So, Dr. Monika Wikman, thanks for being my guest, again on ShrinkRapRadio.

Wikman: Thank you, Dr. Dave. A complete joy to talk with you again.

Dr. Dave: Wow. It felt really great to connect with Dr. Monika Wikman again. I really like the fact that she's not only really knowledgeable but also that she's very down to earth and open. And, of course, I also appreciate the fact that she's very supportive of and is very accessible as a guest. As a matter of fact, she sent me an email right after our interview proposing a topic for future conversation on Jung and the Star Strewn Sky. I definitely plan to take her up on that sometime down the road. In the same email she also gave me the contact information for the authors she mentioned several times in the interview: Jungian analyst, Dr. Jeff Raff. I will definitely be contacting him quite soon about a possible interview.

Some of the high points for me in this interview were the times Monika's remarks triggered my own musings and recollections. For example, about my own water play in a mountain creek as a boy. The name of which just comes back to me as Mill Creek. It's in the San Bernardino Mountains where my grandparents had a cabin when I was growing up. I wonder if Monika would have recognized that place. Also, she stimulated that memory of me occasionally hearing my name called as if from without, but nobody was there. The next time that happens I hope I'll have the presence of mind to wonder what might be going on inside me that's trying to get my attention. I also appreciated our discussion earlier in the interview about alchemy and what for me was a new thought which was the connection to magic. I also like the way that Monika's perspective helps us to see active imagination in a much broader context than specific activities such as

journaling or dreamwork. As she pointed out, it's part of a larger activity of tuning into, perceiving and communicating with the imaginal dimension which is around us all the time in our daily lives. I look forward to more such conversations with Monika Wikman and I hope you do, too.