

**Shrink Rap Radio #396, March 2, 2014, Dream Tending**

**David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka “Dr. Dave” interviews Stephen Aizenstat, PhD  
(Transcribed from [www.ShrinkRapRadio.com](http://www.ShrinkRapRadio.com) by Nancy Wicker)**

**Introduction:** My guest today is Dr. Stephen Aizenstat, Chancellor of Pacifica Graduate Institute in Santa Barbara, California and author of the book, “Dream Tending” which we’ll be discussing along with other things. For more details on Dr. Aizenstat please go to the show notes on [ShrinkRapRadio.com](http://ShrinkRapRadio.com). Now here’s the interview.

**Dr. Dave:** Dr. Stephen Aizenstat, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

**Stephen Aizenstat:** Thank you, David, it’s good to be here with you.

**Dr. Dave:** I think you and I might have met a number of years ago and I wouldn’t expect you to remember; but I think it was at some sort of state-wide meeting for psychology departments chairs or something like that. At the time, I think this would have been late 1990’s or early 2000’s and I was chair of the psychology department at Sonoma State University and I recall meeting someone from Pacifica and I think that might have been you. Does this ringing any bell at all?

**Stephen Aizenstat:** Well, it does because, certainly, the very root of Pacifica extends back to Sonoma State where there was a man named Gordon Tappan.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh yeah, Gordon Tappan is the person who was responsible for my getting hired there. It’s a big long story but tell me about your connection with Gordon.

**Stephen Aizenstat:** Well, Gordon was a pioneer, as you know, and revered by so many people in the state and in the field and was really supportive when Pacifica Graduate Institute was just embryonic, it was just beginning, just a shoot out of the ground. I’ll never forget this one story that is pertinent actually. I was in a workshop with James Hillman. I was in my late 20’s, Gordon was there and the workshop was going on and on. James was talking about dreams and dream work and so on. I remember raising my hand at one point because Jim Hillman was really suggesting that we need to listen to the voices of the world and sometimes they present in dreams. I raised my hand and I said, you know I’m wondering if the images themselves could be imagined as originating in the *Anima Mundi*, in the world’s soul. James paused, thought about it, and said, “You know, that is a move that hardly anybody makes, but of course that is what’s so.” I’ll never forget Gordon coming up to me, sitting about 3 chairs over and right at the break said, “Steve,

of all things that happened this weekend, that question really moved James into a whole different consideration.” He’s always been supportive of the work and of Pacifica and it was just a pleasure to know the man. It is wonderful to remember right here and now.

**Dr. Dave:** Really, it’s quite a surprise to me, and we could go on and on talking about Gordon who unfortunately is not with us anymore. You were significantly influenced by Hillman and I have had some ambivalence about him so it’s very good for me to read your book and to kind of get your take on that approach. So moving along here, the word tend, your book is called “Dream Tending” and the word “tending” puts me in mind of tending a herd of cattle or sheep on one hand and tending a fire on the other. What do you mean by dream tending, how does one tend a dream?

**Stephen Aizenstat:** Even the word itself you can go a little further, one step along, and you can imagine tending as tendrils going down deeply in the context of tending, like tending a fire, dream tending differentiates from dream interpretation and/or dream analysis in the sense that we don’t go immediately to the meaning of the image or of the dream. Meaning is important, in fact when people approach me and ask me about a dream, which happens all the time, of course, that is what they are interested in. What does this dream mean or why is it happening? To tend a dream gets to that place differently, so the two questions themselves are reoriented and the questions in dream tending would be, not “what does this mean?”, rather “who’s visiting now?”. Not “why is it happening now?”, rather “what’s happening here?”. So, it’s a kind of phenomenological approach in the sense that we are interested in the activity of the dream and we’re interested in the visitors, the figures themselves whether they’re landscapes or whether they’re images that resemble people, familiars or otherwise or creatures. We’re interested in allowing the figures themselves that have voice and to be tended as one would tend a person that would be somebody that one would be interested in. To befriend is to tend.

**Dr. Dave:** I must say it definitely opened up a different slant for me and in the dreams I have had recently while I was reading your book; it definitely shifted my stance a bit towards them. I’m interested in your comment that those who are seeking to interpret dreams are likely to end up in the same place but get there by a different means. We may come back to that idea. What’s your view of where dreams come from?

**Stephen Aizenstat:** Well, I think that is the question. Most often we imagine dreams to emerge from or be shaped by our personal history, the place of developmental psychology, or the circumstances of the day, particularly the last 48 hours or so. We imagine that the dreaming psyches somehow picking that information up and then making comment on it. Of course, there is enormous value in understanding dreams from that perspective; on the

other hand in the actuality of the dream, the dream itself has multiple figures and landscapes, as I said, and creatures. One wonders because when you see yourself or when the person imagines themselves or experiences themselves in the dream which happens many, many times over of course the psychology of the dream ego, is usually what it is referred to. When that figure's imagined as one of the many figures in the dream then the question becomes, if the person that looks like me, who is dreaming the dream? The origination is perhaps out of my personal experience, certainly I am implicated in multiple ways and, on the other hand, perhaps originating out of the figures that are visiting. They may be the artisans of the crafts people that are really creating the dream from the beginning and we are placed within the context of the dreamtime or that dreaming experience.

**Dr. Dave:** This is the part that I always struggle with in terms of Hillman, where from what you just said, it sounds like one of the possibilities is that these are figures that have some kind of existence beyond my brain. Would that be fair?

**Stephen Aizenstat:** Yes, I think that's right. The existence – no we don't need to get into the esoteric or peculiar - an existence in that they have an imaginal presence. In the actuality of the dream, when the eyes are closed and the images come awake, there is a sense of them being embodied. They are interacting with one another. They do seem to have an intention that is inherent to their own sensibilities. There is a sense that they are walking about and they are alive and they are creating this map, they are interacting and something different happens. I think there is some sense/idea that there is a psyche that is implicated personally, but has a collective value to it. It has a kind of sensibility on its own behalf and that the figures of the dream are the constituents of that dreaming psyche.

**Dr. Dave:** Ok. What do you see as the purpose of the dream?

**Stephen Aizenstat:** I think the dream for me personally, for everyone dreams, when they come about - they are asking attention in one way or another, right, and so let me just say they often will come and tell what's going on during the day. They might remind me of something I missed or they may bring a different perspective to something I'm considering and too, this is where we go a step further and too, they may have something to say on behalf of themselves that is quite different than what is going on in my particular experience at the time. Again, not to get too abstract for example, people forever have imagined the spirit of place, or the spirit of the lake or the spirit of the tree and those kinds of things. One can appreciate that, when I'm in the world, that the world itself is also in a way effecting or making a claim on our experience and one could

extrapolate and imagine that that claim that's being made, those voices that are in the world, are coming to the imagery of dream.

**Dr. Dave:** What's your view of non-professionals working on their own dreams versus working with a therapist or other professional?

**Stephen Aizenstat:** I'm a big advocate of people sharing dream. I'm not particularly concerned that by a person sharing a dream with a friend or with a family member, that somehow there will be damage done or that it will somehow exaggerate a pre-existing condition of some sort. My sense is the psyche itself is self-regulating in that way. In other words, unless the person uses the dream, the person they are talking with, for their own agenda, in other words they assert their position some way to leverage for one reason, I think there is not any harm as long as we host the dream like you would a guest rather than so quickly come in and interpret the dream to some explanatory system. If a person has an agenda and is working with someone that's sharing a dream confuses, because a dream is so personal, and can take us to very intimate places. So, a person that is very respectful, hosts the dream, listens, the dream comes alive, comes awake and I think people get quite a bit out of it if for no other reason. People are talking stories with one another, just that, just being in contact with imagination, with that kind of intelligence that lives on the other side of reason or ingenuity, creativity or inquisitiveness. I think it's a very helpful practice. I'm encouraging that. Now of course, working with a person with more experience, that adds another dimension and working with a professional again adds even more to the mix. It's something that I encourage.

When I work in classrooms, I'm invited into classrooms, working with sometimes kids in 4th or 5th grade, sometimes high school kids. They want to share a dream. Of course, they've never been given the permission to share a dream because it's not part of our culture necessarily, but they love and want to talk about what's going on. Most often kids will have dreams of monsters or falling – those are common themes for kids and they are frightening. Dreams can be sometimes terrifying, but it's really interesting to watch when people are able to share particularly when kids in schools are able to talk with each other about dreams and it's normalized. In other words, there's permission and protection offered. The energy increases, people are talking about this or that or the other thing and their imaginations get ignited. I was bringing brown paper bags and pastels or crayons or something and let them draw whatever figures come and they have this kinda masquerade with all the dream figures bouncing about - although the teacher hardly ever invites me back into the classroom. We're immediately out of control, so I've learned to do it always before lunch. What I'm trying to get to is that I think it's helpful to just have that level of exchange with one another, particularly as the culture increasing speeds up

and we're so screen oriented. I think it's really wonderful to allow the imagination to have a voice, a place where it can be listened to without too quickly conditioning or making something of it.

**Dr. Dave:** I totally agree as someone who's been in dream groups more than 30 years off and on. I sometimes think of sharing dreams as what do you do after you say, "Hello", and ask the person, "What's your sign?" or "What's your job?". How do you get to something more deep and soulful with a person, and dreams do provide just a wonderful way and very quickly getting involved in a depth full kind of conversation. That's something I really agree with your about and really appreciate. What do you see as the healing power or healing element of the dream?

**Stephen Aizenstat:** Dreams, I think, are innately healing, actually. In Santa Barbara we have something called the Healing Sanctuary where people who are suffering from acute disease syndromes come together for a period of 10 days and the center itself, the Sanctuary, orients around the dream. That was a tradition, a practice that was developed for many years in classical Greece where the Asclepian idea came forward which has to do with the wounded healer which has to say that, in dreams, for the most part there is that aspect that is wounded and yet at the same time, almost homeopathic, there is the quality of the healer that is also present. In that tradition it is referred to as "The Divine Physician" of the dream. In working with people who are working with their own dreams, when we are hurt, when we're injured psychologically or physiologically, dreams will come forward and they will pick up something of that difficulty, that illness and they will provide both the cure, in other words, they will provide clues or hints as to what's being asked for in relationship to dealing with the condition and too, they will picture, often, the wound or the illness even before it becomes symptomatic – see it visually.

**Dr. Dave:** You mentioned the Santa Barbara Healing Sanctuary and I did have a chance to interview Robbie Bosniak and we talked about that some in passing. I think the focus was a little different in that conversation. Now, you distinguish between association, amplification and animation so maybe you could kind of give us a brief overview of those three.

**Stephen Aizenstat:** That would be helpful because they're very practical skills and orientations. Just to put it easily, the first idea is association, of course, that was developed from pre-association in the classical method of Freud, matching the dream as a manifest part of the personal unconscious - manifesting and coming forward. To associate to an image is to hear an image, experience it and then associate to what it could mean - this image, this

lion that's visiting now, or this ocean that's visiting now in the dream. This ocean that's in the dream has to do with either: A – I've gone the ocean in the last 48 hours and something happened that's memorable, or something happened that I missed or that ocean (you keep moving in that direction) or this ocean is something that I'm terrified of with a big tidal wave that scares me, so we start associating to the image.

To amplify the image is to bring the wisdom stories of the collective psyche. That's the place in Jungian Psychology, the collective unconscious, in imagining that ocean has collective implications, it somehow evokes the deeper archetypal stories and we begin to think of what the ocean - the place of the night sea journey or the place where all life is generated – on and on it goes. How many stories are there about oceans?

The third step, and I would say like 90% perhaps of dreams therapy/dream psychology, orients around the associative process or amplification process. Animation though is something quite different. Animation is to allow the image to come to life, to enliven, to present itself on behalf of itself and from inside out it talks about its intelligence, its knowledge. To animate is to allow oneself to be in the immediacy of the experience, in other words, in present time, in dialogue or conversation with the image as if it were here in the room and had a life of its own, so I'm not projecting my idea onto the image nor am I placing the image necessarily in conditions of the last 48 hours nor am I so quickly going to the wisdom stories. I'm first allowing the image itself to present, to really be experienced - as if it were an actuality, which it is, in the dreamtime. - as if it is an actuality in our own life and then to get to know it that way. And then there's certain skills that I talk about in the book, that really tell us how to do that per se.

**Dr. Dave:** I should pause a moment here to say that the book is so well written and you really bring these ideas home in a very clear down to earth way. I just really have to admire the simple flow of the information. It's both deep and you're talking about complex topics but you make it so very accessible.

**Stephen Aizenstat:** Thank you, that's always because of the audiences that I'm with, both graduate students at the MA and PhD level and yet public audiences as well. It's so important to communicate these ideas in ways that are just so, not overly complicated, those that are the scholarly papers. The book itself has to do really with – if I'm working with myself or another person whether it be a dream that's disturbing nightmarish, horrific, intolerable or I dream of something out of the ordinary, how would I come to that dream and bring to it a sense of this idea of tending, to animate the image, to allow the images to come forward. You see, it's very curious, when the images come forward, when the ocean comes forward first and has a voice of its own. You know, I've lived in

Santa Barbara so long, along the coast that it's hard to imagine that the ocean we are everyday interacting with, when the rains come, hopefully they will come again soon, when the rains come, then all the runoff goes to the ocean. We know when that happens the ocean gets distressed and they put up all the signs, "It's toxic in the ocean", "Don't go into the ocean" Those of us who have been here a long time, have raised our kids here, it's just heartbreaking. The sea getting increasingly contaminated and toxic, one just pauses there because if that's happening and we are so connected to the spirit of place or that idea of the ocean being ensouled in some way, it's something more than a living part of the ecosystem that were all engaged in then one can imagine, that the pain of the ocean or the suffering of the ocean effects the creatures in the ocean and would be picked up somehow emotionally and if that's the case then we can imagine that the images of ocean in the dream may, in addition to originating in our personal collective psyche, have a sense of originating in the world soul as well. I listen to ocean and ocean being ill may have something to say – play a role in my affect, in my despair, my depression, my anxiety and in fact, when that ocean gets sick out there many people in town, in Santa Barbara feel the pain and the distress.

**Dr. Dave:** I'll bet they do. Maybe you can take us through major steps of your approach, including what you refer to as the two core questions.

**Stephen Aizenstat:** We started there so let's do that. The core questions have to do with, who's visiting now, what happening here. To get started, a person shares the dream. I think the easiest part is that we share a dream, we take out the punctuation and we just share the dream as if it were happening in present time. People are familiar with that because a lot of people have had experience in doing that kind of thing. We share the dream with another person. The next thing is to reorient, so quickly not to go into making meaning and of course, that's our temptation A: Because many of us are trained in that and B: because the person that we're listening to is expecting that or had an expectation and because deep understanding and making meaning is very comforting. It's not that were not going to make meaning, it's just that we pause and don't jump so quickly. For example with the ocean, it's not that the ocean in the dream is befriended and then we forget about the stories of the collective and the personal circumstances. Just the opposite, we love the image of ocean to come first, to really fill the room, to get a sense of its living presence and its intelligence, and then from that position we revisit the great stories it's brings to us, the stories that are in the myth, literature, the religious tradition. It will then bring to us the aspects of our personal history where the circumstances of the day that are particularly understood now in a particular way in that point in time. When we start the other way, we make something of the ocean, immediately it's the ocean that equals the ocean of tears, my suffering, my hurt feelings or my mood. If we go there so

quickly you can see that we start to go into explanation and we leave the image. We can explain the ocean 10 times over or we can explain the creature in the dream 100 times over and yet the creature, the figure in the dream, in some way really hasn't yet been fully attended to. What's to prevent it from coming back again and again and again, which they do, and recurring dreams often are an indication that the figures have not yet fully evoked, nor has there been a relationship that's been deeply felt, as yet. So, we can interpret them away, which happens, or we can listen to them deeply and fully and then allow ourselves to become more image centered, allowing the image to take us to the places that we need to explore. So, getting back to the question, the first idea is to reorient oneself, not to make meaning but to develop a sense of patience and the skill set is to listen, and then bring particularity. How is this dream image choosing a few images that are presented: how is this ocean, how is this tiger, or how is this person, different in the dream than any other tiger or any other ocean. So it's not a category or ocean or tiger as a particular ideal. It is rather, this one, what color are its eyes, how big is it, what's its shape, what is it doing – watching its activity. And then the next skill is to use senses, can we touch, smell. Is there any way that tiger can be felt in the room, to that extent – the figures come to life. They are animated and once they're animated we can engage in a different quality of conversation.

**Dr. Dave:** Earlier you said not projecting and so that seems like it's a delicate balance. A lot of people would say, "It's gotta be projection, it's all projection, but you're talking about a subtle shift of attitude, as much as possible to be very receptive and let that image have a voice."

**Stephen Aizenstat:** Yes, I think that is the heart of what I'm saying, the main idea. We imagine that we're projecting something of ourselves in the image – the image is a personification of an aspect of either a physical condition or an emotional condition or a personality tendency. That's primarily how most of us have been trained and how we would think about it. Many, many cultures go the other way around. That the images are central and they have a place, in fact in some ways they're projecting their experience onto us. Our life, our moods, our way of being is shaped by their presence as imaginal figures in psyche and of course you know, the Red Book made the map. That's the journey that Jung went on. I don't know how – his journey in that book, we know that the figures became incredibly essential for him. When I visited Bollingen, where his tower is, where he's done lots of work, you can just experience, or just noticing the Red Book, you can experience a person like so many other people in the world, people that have drawn paintings on cave walls or kept journals or paint their dreams or compose out of the dreams or engineers that really wait for dream to inspire. It's the figures that come forward that then shape life, in my mind, so that the individuation, for those that are



following that psychological track, the individuation is as much with the image first and then us as people second, rather than the other way around. If we explain the dream and we imagine that dream being explained as the map for our individuation, there's value there for sure. At the same time there's also value in allowing the images to evolve on their own behalf and then they in turn will affect us and initiate us into our own evolution or development. It's a very image centered idea.

**Dr. Dave:** Now, the first core question again was, "Who are you?"

**Stephen Aizenstat:** No, "Who's visiting?"

**Dr. Dave:** And the second core question?

**Stephen Aizenstat:** "What's happening here?"

**Dr. Dave:** "What's happening here?" Ok. I liked your observations in treating the dream images as guests and the importance/attitude of hosting the guest. It put me in mind of Rumi, who I think has some of his poems kind of talk about that. Can you say a bit more about that?

**Stephen Aizenstat:** Yes, the last line of that Rumi poem – there's one from Kabir – the last line is that there's nothing in the world that satisfies like a meeting with a guest. The signature line from that particular poem, translation by Robert Bly, (I think that is essential when we imagine who's visiting now) we imagine meeting the guest, we image hosting that presence. When a person comes to our home and we're going to host, and if we meet the person at the door we start barraging them with lots of questions - "Hey, what's happened during your day" "Can you tell me something more about your childhood?", "You know it's really interesting, it's been awhile since we've gotten together", "How's your marriage going?" etc. etc. – one question after the next, right? You can see how that's going to distance me, if I'm not conscious and mindful, from the person I'm hosting. One the other hand when the person entered the home, if I'm quiet, or any encounter, any relationship, if I'm first quiet, listen first, wait, speak, talk, extend second. So often we already have the answer to the question that's not even been asked in their mind before we communicate so rather than being so busy in our mind, we slow down. The key there is to meet the dream in the attitude or the way of the dream. It's a more patient slow availability so we are able to get into the attitude of hosting the figures as if they're guests. We want to put out the nice silverware, the china, light the candle. We want to create an ambience so the images themselves have an opportunity to be part of the conversation. Without that ambience, we talk over the images. We use our mind to make something up so quickly that we lose the opportunity to really settle down into that

deeper conversation. David, I think you were talking about dream groups. When the dream group happens, there's always that moment when I believe there's a ritual element like lighting a candle or something, where the outside begins to fade a bit and that soulful, as you were saying, deepening place begins to come into the room and dreams begin to present and images take on a different valence. They're not there just to be psychologized, they're there to be deeply related to and hosted - tended. When they are, it's extraordinary what happens. They come awake and the stories they can tell, just like a guest - if you talk over somebody - you haven't really created an opportunity to listen to the deeper stories. If we find patience and really have the capacity to listen deeply and meet the dream in that kind of dreamlike way, then something quite different happens.

**Dr. Dave:** Well said. You have a whole chapter devoted to working with nightmares. You see nightmares as offering a special opportunity I think. Do I have that right?

**Stephen Aizenstat:** They do. First they scare us, or most people, when they come. They get our attention. The dreams that most people remember and want to talk about are either dreams that are terrifying, nightmares, or dreams that are out of the ordinary, or dreams that are of ecstasy. Certainly, nightmares play an essential role as most all of us that tend to dreams can testify. For me, when the nightmare comes, certainly it's getting our attention and certain motifs ask of us, as professionals, to make inquiry. If a nightmare comes, there's an intruder and there's children involved, we're going to need to make inquiries to see what's being offered. If there's a history where there is something nightmarish that's happened, the nightmare might point to that and instead of something being terribly wrong, at least half the time the nightmare will come when we are strong enough to yet again deal with that which has been problematic from the past. There is that aspect, and too, the nightmare breaks through the kind of conformity that we're all experiencing in modern culture. You know, we're all so involved with screen time. We now have more screen time, particularly people 30 and under. They're on the screen, more screen time than dream time. They're on the screen more hours in the day than they're sleeping and dreaming during the night. Nightmares will come and they will break through the conformity, through the advertising industry, through the cultural imperative, through that norm and they will more often than not, offer something of our uniqueness, something that is particular to us that is really pulling at our shirt sleeve, demanding attention. So I do like working with nightmares when they come.

**Dr. Dave:** How would you describe the broad outline of your approach to working with nightmares?

**Stephen Aizenstat:** With a nightmare, because again, I think it's helpful to tend to the nightmare rather than so quickly interpret it. When I'm listening to somebody else's dream, if I'm a dream therapist/psychologist and the nightmare comes and it frightens me, the person that's listening, I'm gonna to get anxious. If I get anxious, the first thing I'm gonna do is make meaning and somehow fix the nightmare into a system because I'm relieved, and the person that's having the nightmare is also relieved. I do believe that it's very helpful, when we're companioning another person, not to re-traumatize, so when I hear a nightmare, I don't, any longer, go for making that nightmare into something more than it is. At the same time, I want to take the time to really allow the nightmare to be in the room along with us, but to do that, there's a couple essentials. One is safety. There needs to be a sense of safety in the room, so the dreamer, where the nightmare has visited, there needs to be some sense that I have support, so either the dreamer's talking with me or another person that's tending to the dream, there is a sense of support of that. Another sense of support has to do with other figures that are in the dream that are feeling less threatening and supportive, more caring. More often than not, people will have figures that they remember from times past that have been very nurturing, very caring. It may be ancestors or an ancestral figure. It may be an animal, a figure that they have visited multiple times over that's been comforting and supportive and capable in certain ways. I'll invite that one into the room, either from the dream with the scary figure in it or from another dream so they have two places, first me, or the tender, and the allied figure from that place. We then pause. There has to be a stop because if I'm overly anxious, I'm going to gallop. I need to stop. When the nightmare comes, I'm in the swirl of it, there needs to be something where I can put a stop to it, either write it down, create an activity, jump in a cold ocean, take a shower - something to put a stop, because I need to come into a quality of presence and if I'm fearful and reactive that's very difficult to do. Stop, support, listening - listen to the image present and one of the ways to create an easier relationship with a very frightening image is to get particular - that's what I'm talking about - a particularity. If a giant bug comes, if you watch a child, a three or four year old, and a big horrible awful bug comes, at first your reaction is a very scary reaction. "Ugh, that's the biggest, scariest thing I've ever seen. It scares the life out of me", If you watch a kid after the first reactive move then they'll look more carefully, get curious and they will look at it with a more particular eye because they feel safe, there's more of a feeling of safety. As soon as you look with particularity, something else kicks in, which is a sense of curiosity. If we can get curious about that which is so frightening then the figure begins to depotentiate in terms of its grip and its terror factor, and it begins to present itself. We know that in movies, many, many movies, have that scary threatening figure in them - Darth Vader (the one that people always point to. People point to Darth Vader as the most frightening of all figures. It's filled with the capacity to

kill, the capacity to do bad things to other people. It's very threatening. At the same time to the extent that you begin to develop relationship is the extent that you begin to take that mask off and allow the figure something that it's never had, which is a quality relationship. The most curious thing happens, nine times out of ten, not always, but many times over; that figure that has been so threatening shifts and it begins to present itself, because it's now known differently. The kind of antagonistic posture gives way to something much more revealing and there's something about the figure that begins to open up and present itself. What are we gonna do, the truth is, if we don't attend these nightmarish figures, it's not like they go away. They come back again and again, so better to develop relationships. If you draw that figure, if you construct something in the world you see craft – anything one can do to create a little distance but at the same time allowing the figure to be present, in front rather than inside. To put it simply, we move from that figure being so threatening – I get so identified as being the victim of this threat so I move from identification into a quality relationship with the figure. Once I can do that, develop a quality relationship in dialog then I move from relationship to revelation, allowing the figure to offer its intelligence. What role is it playing, in terms of itself, in terms of my life? Really better to have that one in front rather than behind, hidden away in the corner someplace.

**Dr. Dave:** One of the most distinctive features of your approach is that you advocate a life practice that you call the Dream Council which, when I first hear that term I thought, oh, he's gonna talk about dream groups, actually it is something quite different. Tell us about that?

**Stephen Aizenstat:** Yes, that's a great segue from what I just said. Let me just frame it in personal experience a little. I think the most interesting thing - when dreams come in the morning, I'll wake up and I'll write them down. The next thing that I'll do with dream in the morning is to write down some of the context of the day or days that just happened. Then I'll notice image or images come forward and make a claim on my experience, somehow affect me more deeply than others. Then I'll begin to befriend that image in the ways I just talked about. I'll allow it to animate, to vivify. Then from there I'll, once it's open and I'm in relationship, then I will listen to the stories, the wisdom stories from the eclectic, the archetypal valence. I too then will notice what it's implicating in my personal history, in my family of origin or my family that is current contemporary experience. I'll also notice how dreams are commonly of the workplace, friendships, all kinds of things. Now, once that occurs, for me personally, what I'll do is I'll write three things I'm going to do this day on behalf of this dream - not psychological – that's my rule. It can't cost more than \$3 and it can't be psychological. What three activities on the base of this dream will I do this day?

**Dr. Dave:** What would be an example?

**Stephen Aizenstat:** So last night a dream comes and there was a path that presented itself and the path everybody's going, this freeway, and then this path emerged and I start walking down this path instead of it being problematic or difficult, it became very easy to walk. Today I made three particular tasks for myself, what I'm going to do as a result of having that dream – rather than psychologize, which I could, like psychological reverie or reflection, but rather than that, I am going to do three things today. One thing I'm going to do is walk alone at the beach at sunset - just walk without any psychologizing, just walk. The second thing I'm going to do is write one of my kids who is having an experience of doing something on his own in his own unique way. I'm going to write something of support to him. Then I'm going to do the third thing also which is a little more personal. So I do three things every day that has to do with a particular image. I do that for two reasons. 1. It was Jung that suggested that once we open this up there is a responsibility to kind of act on behalf of, so when I do that I activity in the world I am contributing something back to myself and to the world and then also when I'm in that activity I'm remembering the dream, so the dream gets remembered at the time of the activity. In fact, some people imagine that the real interpretation of the dream is not the explanation that's offered but the action we take as a result of the dream occurring. When we're in the action then we understand the necessary, the impulse, the initiative being brought. The interpretation is in the activity or in the engagement. That's one thing I do and the other thing that I'll do – I'll do three things – the other thing I do is Dream Council. Dream Council is a way of bringing myself to a place where I actually will discover something, for example tonight because I'll walk on the beach, I'll be walking on the beach, and I will, without overly thinking this, I will allow shells, stones, seaweed, twigs, coke bottle caps, rusted cans, whatever. I'll allow those to be noticed and I'll gather some without really particular intention. I will just notice what I'm drawn to. I will then go to the beach something like the sandtray.

**Dr. Dave:** It reminded me very much of the sand tray process.

**Stephen Aizenstat:** It's a big sand tray.

**Dr. Dave:** The Dream Council process where you array objects that represent different parts of your inner dream world.

**Stephen Aizenstat:** Exactly, again, it gives me the opportunity to make actual and tangible and visceral that which is imaginal and then I can develop relationship to it. Then I allow the images to present and I notice how they not only interact with me but with one another

and then I bring myself to that council and listen. The biggest thing is that once the council is put together I listen and notice what comes forward from the council of images that are now in physical form, and so you know, it's all in the eye of the beholder. The piece of seaweed that I pick up or the shell that I pick up to kind of simulate the figure in the dream is not going to look like that figure to anybody else, but to me, it really carries the essence of the figure. Often in council, I will put figures that are very essential to me and that have been around for a long time. In the book I'll write about my great-grandfather and I use his story as part of the continuity of telling about dream tending because since he was so pivotal in my work and in my life. Great-grandfather will come and he will often - there'll be a rock or a stone that will present his image, and I'll place that on the council.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, that was such a wonderful devise of your great-grandfather, the memories and opening each chapter with some reference to that. You know there's a lot more that we could discuss about the book and I actually prepared a lot more questions but there's some, you know but we can refer people to the book and let them get it from there - straight from that source because there are a couple other things I wanted to take advantage of this time to ask you about. So let's talk a bit about the educational institution you head up, the Pacifica Graduate Institute. I think I have many listeners out there who are either in the process of getting their graduate education or contemplating it. How would you describe the program at Pacifica?

**Stephen Aizenstat:** Pacifica Graduate Institute is here, located in the Santa Barbara area, geographically there are two campuses. They are very lovely campuses. We attend to the spirit of the place and really put a great deal of thought and care into the landscaping and into the buildings and really appreciate that it's a place of study that people come to. It's a temenos - a sacred place of some sort. It is nine graduate degree programs an MA in Counseling-Psychology, PhD in Clinical Psychology, MA in Humanities, MA/PhD in Mythological Studies. We are the home of the Opus Archives Library which has the collections of Joseph Campbell, James Hillman, Marion Woodman and many others. It's a place where people can study in the field of psychology and study in the way that the curriculum's infused in multiple voices, diverse voices around the world and varieties of fields that are all anchored in the idea of the Depth Psychological approach. In our Community Liberation Ecology Program, which we call the LE program - students from all over the world are coming and they're doing field work projects in their communities or in landscapes or with peoples throughout the world. We're teaching in those community advocacy programs, a depth perspective, in other words, how do I utilize the skills from the depth psychological point of view in the work that I do whether it be in research, whether it be as a practitioner/clinician or whether it be as a social activist,

whether it be in my field that I am currently involved with like law or engineering or any of the healing sciences and healing traditions. It's a place where people come together once a month for a period of two or three years. It's a place where some people will come twice every year for longer periods of time and then on line for the other part of the time. We have a program in depth and Jungian archetypal psychology which is a hybrid. That program's just enrolling now. There's actually just about three or four spots left for the spring in that program. That's a bi-coastal program where they meet once in California and once in New York. I would say all the curriculum is underpinned by this notion of a depth psychological orientation.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, actually, I've been working on line with a couple of your grads. I'm guessing you will recognize the name of Machiel Klerk who has created the on-line portal known as the Jung Platform and also Bonnie Bright of the Depth Psychology Alliance. The three of us are providing kind of mutual support as strategic partners in as much as we have shared interests.

**Stephen Aizenstat:** Yes, and it's happening again and again. Now from Pacifica 42, I can't even imagine, 42 regional coordinators of the alumni association. There are many alums now that are beginning to develop strategic alliances, collaborations and really partnering with each other to bring the work, really the genius of this essentially in the tradition, into the world more actively.

**Dr. Dave:** How old is the program and how many students are currently enrolled?

**Stephen Aizenstat:** The school – we're almost to our 40th anniversary if you go all the way back to our origins when we were just a little social service agency in Isla Vista at the University of California at Santa Barbara. I think you have to go up 10 years or 15 years until it became an actual graduate institution. There are about 1,000 people in either classroom education or in their dissertation thesis process and about 4,000 to 5,000 alumni that are in the world. The essential theme of the school, or the motto, the mission, orients around this notion, *animae mundi colendae gratia* - for the sake of tending soul of and in and of the world. It's tending to the psyche of world that I think is really the organizing principle that all of this orients around. Pacifica uniquely is a faculty and staff ownership model, so in fact it's an ESOP – employee ownership model. The people here all participate in a shared stewardship of the school at this point. We bring in students and alumni voices. We really try to listen carefully to everybody and to dream – because we experience dream as ground.

**Dr. Dave:** Do you have core faculty and sort of a large cadre of affiliated part time faculty?

**Stephen Aizenstat:** We have a significantly large core faculty, people that work full time in all the programs. All the programs have a full time core person, the chair of the program and multiple professors that are fulltime core professors and then orbiting around the full time core is a cadre of adjunct professors that offer courses in their particular specialization. When people come to school here they really are met by a core faculty. One of those core faculty members will be their advisor, another one might be their thesis or dissertation lead person, their advisor, and then from there it spreads out. We really think it's essential. People will come and they will be in a cohort, they'll be in a learning module, so they'll develop very important and deeply felt relationships with the members of their particular group.

**Dr. Dave:** What about students who are interested in becoming a licensed clinician? Is your program recognized by the various licensing boards and so on?

**Stephen Aizenstat:** Yes, the Masters of Arts in Counseling/Psychology is recognized and people can get their Marriage Family Therapist License and also, at the same time, they are able to achieve progress towards their professional license that has a more national accessibility, but certainly they're able to be licensed in the State of California MFT. The Clinical Psych Program, they are license eligible in the State of California for sure and in many other states as well. I don't want – each state has so many particular rules and regulations so we have to work each state carefully, but certainly in the State of California the school accredited fully and licensures offered in those two programs in particular. That's the biggest program is the Marriage Family Therapy program that's over 350 active students at the moment either in the classroom or in their Master's Thesis work.

**Dr. Dave:** I see that you're gonna be the keynote speaker at the upcoming Association for the Study of Dreams Conference in Berkley, California that runs from June 4 through June 8. What's the topic you're gonna be speaking on there?

**Stephen Aizenstat:** Well, I was delighted to be invited. I think somebody there did read the book, "Dream Tending" actually and what I'm going to be talking about there is something called the Global Dream Initiative. That is something that I'm very keen on and it grows right out of the approach that we've talked about because if we buy into the notion that the world is always dreaming – that it's just not we humans that are dreaming - but we can pick up the subtle messages, of course, that are different then people of the world, obviously, but the subtle message, the voices of the planet, the voices of the world, the spirits that are populated throughout the oceans and the mountains and the cities and the buildings. If we can imagine those voices coming through we can hear the collective



voice, the global voice, that's beginning to move through people's dreams. The Global Dream Initiative is an attempt to harvest, to listen to the imagery in dreams from the global perspective and listen into how that might be helpful in relation to offering or contributing that dimension to the cultural conversation. When I was at the United Nations working with the Earth Charter International, I was at the Hague and I remember we were thinking about how this might work and we were put into the Peace Palace where some of the world leaders and diplomats were, and I was presenting the Depth Psychological approach and the question, and we worked for 5 days and 6 nights, and we just didn't get there. I remember it was Gorbachev who was saying that we just didn't get there. I just spontaneously put up my arms and said, "Perhaps we're asking the wrong question, it's not what we can do to save the planet rather the question is, "What is the Planet asking of us?" And the way we can hear what the planet is asking of us, I believe, is through listening to dream as the images carry the voices of the planet through that mechanism so that's the Global Dream Initiative. Now there are people all over the country that are beginning to develop dream groups listening to dream from that prospective, the collective, the cultural and the world perspective, and contributing back into the project and then we can take that information and share it in particular conversations.

**Dr. Dave:** In fact, I'm under the impression that the International Association for the Study of Dreams, the sponsor of that conference, that they've had a group, one of more groups that have kind of been doing that over time as well. Now will you be around for the entire conference or are you conducting any other sessions at the conference.

**Stephen Aizenstat:** I will be around at the conference. I'm gonna stay for two or three days. I think they do have me scheduled for one or two other events and yes, there are multiple groups. What we're discovering, what we've known for some time - there are multiple groups and association and organizations worldwide that are contributing into this initiative so we're going to be partnering with a whole alliance of people which is, I think, fantastic. I'm very pleased because I've been a part of the International Association for the Study of Dreams for some time now and it's wonderful that they have yet again come back to this orientation and offer this as one of their venues.

**Dr. Dave:** I will probably be there so I hope to come up and introduce myself to you at some point.

**Stephen Aizenstat:** That's how our interview began, so we'll come full circle and we'll talk to one another, and then we'll talk about going into more depth.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, we can definitely do that. As we wind down now, first of all I want to thank you for being so generous with your time. I'm struck by how much you are holding in terms of running that very diverse and much larger than I realized institution. As we wind down here I wonder if there are any final points you want to make?

**Stephen Aizenstat:** Perhaps, more than anything, as I've been working with business leaders now, CEOs of different companies, working with that group and also working in schools with junior and senior, middle school kids, high schools, elementary schools. I work at universities as well as here at the school. You know the incredible importance of keeping a place for the imagination to have a voice. We are so quick to systematize, to move into a kind of teaching to the test, assessment oriented educated process, that we often forget to make room for imagination and dreams. I guess I have one advocacy in the world it would be to really remember that so many of us come into the world with that sensibility and that sensitivity and the capacity to access the incredible intelligence and capability that is offered to the dream. Frankly, when I'm going into schools now, when children are dreaming and the dreams that frequent their lives, so many of them are nightmarish and in addition to them relating back to their family of origin or their school or social situation or cyber-bullying, in addition to that, what they are picking up is the stress of the planet. They're picking up the nightmare that is the environmental stress that all of us are confronting at this time. Dreams will talk about that and if we give them an opportunity to be listened to in that way I think they will offer, not only the bad news, which is painful but they also offer some possibility for creative solution making.

**Dr. Dave:** Wonderful wrap up there, Dr. Stephen Aizenstat, it's great to speak with you and I want to thank you for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

**Stephen Aizenstat:** It's been a pleasure, thank you David.