

Section 3: Practitioner's Corner

Enacting God's Dream:

An Interconnected World of Peace

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This essay describes a sociodramatic exercise, *Enacting God's Dream: An Interconnected World of Peace*, that enables groups to co-create their own communal dream of an ideal world. Through imagination, enactment, and reflection, participants explore the internal and external factors that facilitate and obstruct fulfillment of their shared vision while helping them better discern and train to realize their own roles in realizing "The Dream" in lived life. After providing a theoretical rationale for the exercise based on previously published research, the article describes the enactment's steps, including: the warmup, the selection of the "cultural characters" to be embodied, their placement in the drama tableau, as well as their subsequent repositioning and interactions with the director and each other. A case study is offered depicting one small but particularly poignant enactment of the drama that highlights some surprising insights that can arise both from the enactment and the reflections that follow. The article concludes with reflections on the applicability of the exercise to various types of groups.

KEYWORDS: Sociodrama; dreams.

We anticipate the fulfillment of the hope shared by both God and humankind... to dream in league with God, to envision God's holy visions.

Heschel & Heschel, 1997, p. 353

One of the reasons that sociodrama works so well is that it taps into the truth about humanity that we are each more alike than we are different.

Sternberg & Garcia, 2000, p. 4

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RATIONALE

In an all too fragmented and hostile world, *Enacting God's Dream: An Interconnected World of Peace* gives participants an opportunity to explore “. . . the complex mixture of internal and external factors that influences current attitudes and behavior” (Kellermann, 2007, p. 17). By selecting past and present figures to embody within the “dream,” and by co-creating and periodically resetting the dream tableau in response to interaction with other characters and the director, participants are able to achieve catharsis, the releasing of deeply felt and even pent-up emotions concerning human aggression and apathy, and gain greater insight into their own visions and aspirations for a more harmonious world (Moreno, 1943, p. 434; Sternberg & Garcia, 2000, pp. 21–24). By playing “roles of cultural leaders interacting with each other or with [lesser known] members of the community,” participants can gain a deeper understanding of the roles they might play and the qualities needed to help actualize their enacted shared dream (Garcia, 2010, p. 60).

DESCRIPTION

I. The Warmup

After the group has gathered, the facilitator invites the participants to enter into contemplative space by closing their eyes, if they feel comfortable doing so, with John Lennon's “Imagine” softly playing in the background. Once the music has concluded the facilitator gently invites the group to open their eyes and introduces the exercise, indicating that the group will have the chance to co-create and enact their own vision of God's dream of an interconnected world of peace.

Each member receives a copy of a two-sided handout entitled “World Day of Prayer for Peace” (Appendix). It contains abridged and adapted versions of prayers offered during a multifaith conclave convened by Pope John Paul II at Assisi, Italy on October 27, 1986. For those whose spirituality doesn't incline toward classically liturgical expressions, Judy Chicago's “The Merger Poem,” St. Francis' Quantum Prayer, and a selection from the 14th century Sufi poet, Hafiz, are also included. Participants are requested to draw their attention inward as Lennon's music resumes and then either to remain in their own meditative state or to contemplatively read from the selections on the sheet. They are to continue in silence until each feels imaginatively called to embody a particular figure who s/he feels should be present in God's Dream. The figures may be living or deceased, human or not, publicly renowned or known only by their intimates or within their own circles.

Once everyone has “been chosen” by a figure, the participants are invited to either sit or stand in a circle. In turn each names his or her figure, gives a little background on the individual and why s/he especially belongs in this dream tableau. After the sharing has concluded participants enter into a moment of silence to mark the sanctity of that which has occurred and the enactment that is to come.

II. The Enactment

The enactment begins with setting the “Dream” tableau. To avoid any value judgments concerning the characters’ relative merits, the director begins with the figure who lived longest ago. Thus, if Buddha, Jesus, Anne Frank, and Nelson Mandela were all to be in the scene, Buddha would go first. The director invites that figure to place him or herself in the tableau, including the posture s/he wishes to assume. In chronological order the other characters situate themselves until the scene is set. As they assume their places the characters may comment on why they chose the places they did.

Once everyone is in place the figures are invited to quietly look at the scene to see what arises for them. The director then begins by interviewing the oldest character, the one with the longest purview, about what s/he sees in this scene based on his or her experiences and the current world situation. The director then has choices about how to proceed: Each character may be subsequently interviewed, or the director can invite a response from another character whose life experience might have particular relevance to the comments of the first speaker. The drama then proceeds as the characters interact with one another, trading insights and supporting, emending or challenging each other’s views. Role reversal can be particularly effective in helping characters with divergent outlooks understand each other and consider novel ways to move through an impasse.

After this initial round of interaction the director freezes the scene and asks if any of the characters would like to reposition themselves and comment on why to the group as a whole or to engage with specific characters. As the interactions pick up again the enactors are now free to reposition themselves as they experience internal shifts or gain new insights as to what positions they’re called to assume to help actualize God’s Dream. The use of doubling can broaden and deepen the alternative ideal futures that the group might enact while encouraging participation from those who did not at first step forward to embody a character. When the director senses that the drama seems complete, s/he invites the characters to make any final adjustments and offer concluding comments. Participants are asked to silently observe the Dream tableau that they have created, to take it in and seal it in their hearts, minds, and souls.

III. Sharing and Closure

The sharing begins with the participants seated in a circle, preferably on the floor. In response to their experience, participants are invited to offer one-word prayers, which continue around the circle as many times the expressions continue to flow. Participants then share how they felt in their roles, what occurred to them as the enactment was unfolding and what they might have learned about themselves and the issues facing our world today. They might also reflect on what alternate scenes and endings might have transpired from the enactment and how their sense of social justice and calling might have shifted, if at all.

There are different methods to formally close the session. One approach offers participants a final opportunity to encounter each other face to face. The Unitarian Universalist Association has crafted one such exercise based on Nathan Segal's lyric: "From you I receive, to you I give, together we share, and from this we live" (Segal, 2007; Unitarian Universalist Association, 1992) A variety of Sufi Dances of Universal Peace can be found on YouTube.com and adapted for this purpose.

A simpler closing has everyone standing in a circle and offering a fourfold chant of "Peace." These four single-word chants can be seen as corresponding to the *Olamot*, "Worlds," or four dimensions of reality set forth in Kabbalah, the Jewish mystical tradition: *Assiyah*, physical action; *Yetzirah*, emotional formation; *Beriah*, creative intelligence; and *Atzilut*, emanating spirit. (Pinson, n.d.) Interestingly enough these mirror the "ABCS," the four aspects of our human reality addressed by the sociodramatic process: Affect, Behavior, Cognition, and Spirit (Garcia, 2017). To further emphasize our human interconnection amid ethnic and cultural diversity, each word of the chant may be offered in a different language, including *Shalom*, *Salam*, *Shanti*, or any others the group might choose (Stop War, 2003).

CASE STUDY

I have offered this workshop in several multifaith and Jewish settings with as many as 25 enactors. Each has brought new learnings and insights. I'm particularly indebted to Nina Garcia, who first suggested to me the idea of creating a communal dream, and my fellow students in her then Tuesday night training group, who suggested the one-word prayer sharing circle and the Sufi dance closing during an enactment of the drama in May 2016.

A most poignant enactment of God's Dream occurred at the end of May 2017 during the annual Haden Institute Summer Dream Conference held near Hendersonville, NC (The Haden Institute, n.d.). Only five enactors participated that night, the fewest I've ever directed in this drama: two Catholic sisters, two Protestant laywomen, and a male pastor now serving a Protestant congregation after retiring from the military. Predictably, certain cultural figures had appeared regularly in previous enactments—Buddha, Jesus, St. Francis, Mother Teresa, and Ticht Nacht Hahn, to name but a few. Except for the Trappist monk and noted proponent of interfaith dialogue, Fr. Thomas Merton (1915–1968), none of the "usual cast of characters" was portrayed during this session. Interestingly, all five of the chosen figures had lived in or into the 20th century, marking the first time no cultural notables from other eras would appear in this drama.

One Catholic sister felt called to embody St. Raphaela Maria Porras (1850–1925), who lived the final decades of her life in prayerful isolation having been deposed in 1893 as Superior General of the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the order she had co-founded 16 years earlier (McNamara, 2017). The other enacted a noted Franciscan, Sr. Pat Farrell (b. 1947), whose ministry has stretched from her Iowa home to Pinochet's Chile to wartorn El Salvador to challenging a Vatican plan to subsume and control the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, a 57,000-member umbrella organization, which she had served as

president (Gibson, 2012). A homeless man was also portrayed that night, introduced as Harold by his female enactor, as was Luke, a golden retriever, described by his male enactor as the most welcoming, trusting, and trusted of God's creatures.

I placed an electric candle, representing the "Light of God," in the middle of our open space to help participants orient themselves while choosing positions within the tableau. St. Raphaela, the eldest, went first, standing next to the candle with hands cupped in a quiet, prayerful pose, reflecting her lone service of faithful surrender in the face of betrayal during the last decades of her life. Fr. Thomas and then Sr. Pat each placed themselves more on the periphery, representing their work of ministering to those marginalized by society. Farthest from the middle in a reclining pose was Harold, whose homelessness had made him an outcast. To complete the scene, Luke the Retriever lay down next to Harold and sympathetically nuzzled his lap.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the enactment was the characters' flow as they changed positions in relationship to each other. Sr. Pat and Fr. Thomas quickly moved close to Harold and engaged him by asking about his circumstances and how they might be of help. St. Raphaela at one point moved the Light of God from the contemplative center point of the tableau into the midst of the characters' interaction. Luke would shift his affectionate attention among the enactors depending on how heartfully they were responding to Harold.

The biggest surprise came when Harold stood up and moved to the opposite side of the room with Luke in tow. While acknowledging their sincerity, Harold indicated he was overwhelmed by the intensity of the others' attention, which felt somewhat intrusive. He thanked them for their concern but reminded them that the world needs constant prompting if there is to be any deliverance for the countless millions of homeless others across the globe. The enactment concluded with Sr. Pat and Fr. Thomas opening the room's door to draw attention to the needs of the world's homeless and our responsibility to them. St. Raphaela resumed her prayerful, intercessory vigil at the center of the room while Harold and Luke looked on hopefully from the side.

A sense of quiet sanctity filled the room as we assumed our places in the prayer circle, offering round after round of single word entreaties for unity, hope, service, and connection. As sharing from the roles unfolded, the group noted a number of ways the drama resonated with their lived experience. Given that all the enactors were Christian, it wasn't surprising that the dog shared the name of the Apostle Luke, whose enactor confessed to "feeling God's presence in all beings and things" while playing the role. His felt sense in effect reflected the "Good News" which the Apostles were called to spread near the end of Luke's Gospel. The moving of God's Light from the contemplative center to the midst of the others' interaction with Harold reflected Jesus's dictum that the way we treat the least among us is how we treat him (Matthew 25:40). It was perhaps more than coincidental that the homeless character's enactor chose the name Harold, "One who announces," as the bearer of this truth to society from his own marginality and suffering.

In addition to Luke's felt experience of divine Presence pervading all things, Sr. Pat cathartically exclaimed, "deep down in me I got a fire going on." St. Raphaela reflected on how we're all living complex, irresolute, bumbling lives the best we can. This observation led to other insights including the realization that we must continue to share with one another since life is always incomplete. Perhaps the most important role training occurred in response to Harold's sense of that his benefactors' overflowing care had transgressed his boundaries, inadvertently turning him from fully human into an object of their concern. Fr. Thomas Merton called upon all there to more fully consider the complex dynamics that affect "how we reach out to others."

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

I believe sociodramas that invite diverse groups to co-create and enact shared dreams could yield quite positive results. Well-conceived and directed exercises that bring together ethnically heterogeneous groups could reveal our shared human aspirations as participants contribute to fashioning and enacting their common dream. The shared dream process can also help unearth underlying biases, misunderstandings, and antagonisms that can be addressed honestly and respectfully through action and reflection within the context of how the group might actualize its common vision of possible futures.

I have directed this drama with individual groups whose members' ages have ranged from their late teens to early 80s as well as with groups of Christians, Jews, and adherents of both faiths. While I most often work with faith-based or spiritually oriented groups, I believe this drama could be successfully adapted for a wide range of audiences. In communal, civic, or even business settings, the warmup could be focused more intentionally toward nontheistic selections similar to "The Merger Poem" and "Imagine" or toward articulated visions of hopeful futures particularly germane to the specific group. As we know, the participants are ultimately the ones who fashion, enact, and reflect upon the vision they co-create.

In 1969 the noted dream researcher, Jeremy Taylor, developed a volunteer retraining exercise to overcome "liberal racism" as part of his work with Unitarian Universalist Project East Bay. He offers the following reflection on the program of projective group dream sharing he introduced into that Northern California training:

as soon as sharing dreams became a focus of our shared attention, people suddenly became much more interested in, and respectful of each other. (Taylor, 1989)

His observation parallels my own experience when directing Enacting God's Dream. The drama amplifies the interest participants have in what prompted their fellow enactors' behaviors and their own characters' responses. It also heightens their respect for the host of apparent and underlying factors that help to fashion our aspirations and interactions. As one enactor during the above described drama

observed, Enacting God's Dream reminds us that the inclusive circle of our common humanity "needs to continually grow."

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APPENDIX

World Day of Prayer for Peace

(worldcommunityofsaintfrancis.org/peace-prayers)

Pope John Paul II organized the first World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi on October 27, 1986. Included below are versions of selected prayers offered that day that I've abridged and adapted for the "Enacting God's Dream" warmup.

The Hindu Prayer for Peace: Oh Lord, God Almighty, May there be peace in celestial regions. **May** there be peace on earth. **May** the waters be appeasing. **May** herbs be wholesome, the trees and plants bring peace to all. **May all** beneficent beings bring peace to us. **May** Your Vedic Law propagate peace through the World. **May** all things be a source of peace to us. **And may** your peace itself bestow peace on all and may that peace come to me also (from The Vedas).

The Buddhist Prayer for Peace: May all beings everywhere plagued with sufferings of body and mind, obtain an ocean of happiness and joy by virtue of my merits. **May all animals** be free from fear . . . **May the** hungry ghosts be happy. . . **May the blind** see forms, may the deaf hear sounds . . .

May the frightened cease to be afraid and **may the bound** be free; may the powerless find power,

and **may people think** of befriending one another. **May the celestials** bring timely rains so that harvests may be bountiful. **May rulers** act in accordance with Dharma and the people of the world always prosper. May all beings experience happiness.

The Muslim Prayer for Peace: In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. **Praise be to Allah**, Lord of the Universe, the Beneficent, the Merciful, Ruler on the day for repayment. **You** do we worship and you do we call on for help. **Guide us** along the straight road, the road of those whom you have favored, with whom you are not angry, nor who are lost (from The Fatiha). **And the servants** of God the Most Gracious, are those who walk on the earth in humility, and when we address them we say, Peace (Sura xxv, v 63). **O humankind**, we created you from a single pair of a male and a female and made you into tribes and nations, that ye may know each other, not that ye may despise each other. **Verily the most** honored of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted with all things (Sura xxv, v 63).

The Sikh Prayer for Peace: God adjudges us according to our deeds, not the coat that we wear; that truth is above everything, but higher still is truthful living. Guru Nanak preached that if there **is one God**, the creator and sustainer of us all, then humankind also is one, irrespective of creed, caste, color, or nationality. **Whom shall** I call bad, he said, when there is no one other than You? **The rays** merge with the sun; the drop merges in the sea; the light merges in the light; We are fulfilled. **Oh God**, save us not for the hereafter, but now, and from ourselves: I would not ask for anything more.

The Bahai' Prayer for Peace: Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. **Be worthy** of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon others with a bright and friendly face. **Be a** treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy. **Be as** a lamp unto those who walk in darkness, a

joy for the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, and an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. **Let integrity** and uprightness distinguish all your acts. **Be a** home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive, be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring. **Be a** sun in the heaven of bounty, a gem on the diadem of wisdom, a shining light in the firmament of thy generation, and a fruit upon the tree of humility.

The Native American Prayer for Peace: This pipe was given to my people by the creator, for peace and friendship, so I offer it to you my brothers and sisters of this world, as we pray together for peace.

O Great Spirit, this is my prayer. Help me to feel thine urge and thy message. **Help me** be just and at all times help me to be kind. If my brothers and sisters are weak and faltering, help me to the good thoughts, and show me the way that I may help them. **Move me** so that I may find a way to help all who are in need

Give us the wisdom to teach our children to love, to respect, and to be kind to each other, so that they may grow with peace in mind. Let us learn to share all the good things that you provide for us on this earth.

The Jewish Prayer for Peace: Our God in Heaven, the Lord of Peace will have compassion and mercy upon us, and upon all the peoples of the earth who implore Your mercy, your compassion, asking for peace, seeking peace. **Our God in Heaven**, give us the strength to act, to work, and to live until the spirit from above manifests itself upon us, and the desert becomes a vineyard, and the vineyard is seen as a forest. Then justice will have a home in the desert and charity will have a dwelling in the vineyard.

Bring to fulfillment for us and for the world the promise you made through your prophet Micah: . . . **God shall** judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations afar off. And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall sit, every one under their vine and under their fig tree, and none shall be afraid: for the **Lord of Hosts** has spoken. Amen.

The Christian Prayer for Peace: Jesus lifted up his eyes on his disciples and said: Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God. Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and revile you . . . Rejoice on that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven . . .

But I say to you that hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To those who strike you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from those who take away your cloak, do not withhold your coat as well.

Give to everyone who begs from you: and of those who take away your goods, do not ask them again. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. Amen.

The Merger Poem: **And then** all that has divided us will merge. **And then** compassion will be wedded to power. **And then** softness will come to a world that is

harsh and unkind. **And then** both men and women will be gentle. **And then** both women and men will be strong. **And then** none will be subject to another's will. **And then** all will be rich and free and varied. **And then** the greed of some will give way to the needs of many. **And then** all will share equally in the earth's abundance. **And then** all will care for the sick, the weak, the old. **And then** all will nourish the young. **And then** all will cherish life's creatures. **And then** all will live in harmony with each other and the earth. **And then** everywhere will be called Eden once again (from Judy Chicago, <https://jwa.org/media/chicago-judy-1-still-image>).

The Quantum Prayer of St. Francis: Beloved, I AM an instrument of your peace. **Where** there is hatred I AM Love; **Where** there is injury I AM Pardon; **Where** there is doubt I AM Faith; **Where** there is despair I AM Hope; **Where** there is darkness I AM Light; **Where** there is sadness I AM Joy. **Divine Master I seek** to console rather than be consoled. **I seek** to understand rather than be understood. **I seek** to Love rather than be loved. For it is in giving that we receive, In pardoning we are pardoned, and in dying to our limitations we live. **I AM** an instrument of your peace (from worldcommunityofsaintfrancis.org).

The God Who Only Knows Four Words: Every child has known God. **Not** the God of names. **Not** the God of don'ts, **Not** the God who ever does anything weird, **But** the God who only knows four words and keeps repeating them, saying: **Come dance** with me. . . . **Come Dance** Hafiz (trans: Daniel Ladinsky, from <https://faith786.wordpress.com/2008/07/18/islamic-poetry-hafiz-poems-from-the-gift-i/>).