

# The Light of Creative Imagination



The possibilities of work of imagination interested me since my teens but this interest didn't take a firm root until I met a teacher of mind-body medicine Colette Aboulker-Muscat in 1992. At that time she was already eighty three years old, which did not stop her from seeing patients and teaching six days a week. At that point, introduced to her by my uncle who is a clinical psychologist, I attended one of her Saturday salons where she led group imagery exercises. This was in Jerusalem, Israel and, as myself, many participants were visitors from other countries—France, USA, Canada. All classes were held in English.

The fact that she did not charge or accept money directly or indirectly from her patients or students made it easier to realize that this was a genuine teacher, interested only in the well being of her patients and students. There was no sign of a cultism. In fact, it was known among the students that if one were to show signs of attachment, Colette would tell that person that he or she is ready to be on their own and would break a tie permanently. She did not teach any doctrine, knowledge she imparted always came

from within the learner stimulated by the imagery exercise she offered. In my nine years of learning (1994-2003) I did not learn a single concept from Colette. Instead, I learned through the experience of doing the mental exercises myself, observing how my teacher was using them to help patients and students, and by asking questions. I also witnessed treatments of patients with serious and “incurable” diseases (both physical and mental), and saw many of them returning with thanks after being cured.

Colette Aboulker-Muscat was born in 1909 in Alger. She was a daughter professor of neurosurgery Henry Aboulker. Her mother was a known novelist of the time in France and North Africa. Her parents came from a line of Sephardic Jewish aristocracy. Her father taped her mouth closed from age 5 to age 9 due to a condition involving larynx and vocal cords. Tape was only removed for meals and at nighttime.

As she writes in her hand written CV that I have been given after her passing, she began to discover and apply her method of imagination first as a child in the hospital of Dunkerque during the First World War in France, where her father was sent to be the French army head and neck surgeon. She was married to a scientist and has two sons; one is a high level engineer, the other is a professor at Sorbonne University in France. During the Second World War she applied and developed her way of therapy in Algiers military hospital, while at the same time teaching philosophy. Colette and her family have contributed to the preparation of the American landing in Algiers on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1942. Colette completed a doctorate in philosophy and had known personally Martin Buber and Hugo Bergman. She was also a student and a friend of Robert Desoille, a French psychologist who named his method “*Reve Eveille Dirige*” or directed waking dream. (Desoille devised a set of motifs—mountain, cave, meadow, forest and others—that he invites the patient to explore in their imagination).

Colette remarried to Dr. Arye Muscat and had been living in Jerusalem, Israel since 1954 until she passed away in November of 2003, being almost ninety five years of age. There, as she wrote, she “tried to help those who needed her knowledge, given advice to many artists and some scientists in their search for their discoveries, and sustained a great number of people who needed to be listened to, or to have an answer to a question.” At the same time she had been giving classes in personal development

followed by a large number of students from Israel, France, and USA. Between the classes Colette was receiving people with physical, emotional, and mental illness. Among many of her achievements she, being a Jew, received a medal of exorcism from a catholic monastery for achieving great success in the treatment of possession. Colette's autobiographical book in French—*La Vie n'est pas un Roman* (Life is not a novel), which she wrote as a legacy for her children, speaks of many of her life's adventures. This book has been translated into English.

One of her main students Dr. Gerald Epstein is a practicing psychiatrist in New York City and an author of several books that are based on her method. He is also heading the American Institute of Mental Imagery (AIMI) where he teaches this method in his own way. AIMI is a New York State Regents-chartered post-graduate training center offering a Certificate of Completion for all mental health practitioners; doctors, nurses, psychologists, osteopaths, social workers, chiropractors, acupuncturists, physical therapists and licensed massage therapists ([www.drgerryepstein.org](http://www.drgerryepstein.org)).

As I mentioned, the knowledge that Colette imparted was non-conceptual yet not beyond being described. Colette's work has no real limits yet it is not formless, it is subtle and precise. True to her non-conceptual but experiential way, she imparted her teaching into her book of poetry *Alone with the One*. The nature of poetry is to reveal itself to the learner to the degree that the learner is ready to receive. Larger part of what she offered were short mental imagery exercises. Most of these last about two minutes including the preparatory breathing. Colette taught that in this work often less is more. She also did more lengthy exploratory exercises, and longer (about 30 minutes) exploratory/therapeutic exercises based on patient's night dreams called waking dream. She applied the knowledge of numbers, colors and directions in space in her work, as well as morphology—reading the shape of face, profile and body type. She helped children with the use of semi-structured drawings that was used for diagnostic and therapeutic purpose. Her interventions, on some occasions, included physical and ritual

exercises (on one occasion with a group ritual action she successfully treated a collective possession—an incident that she describes in her book *Mea Culpa or Tales of Resurrection*).

In a short mental imagery exercises an image is used to give a micro-shock that overcomes person's defenses (an inner wall that one builds to remain status quo, not the defenses of psychodynamic model), and initiates an inner movement in the direction of healing. A shock or an element of surprise is achieved by a variety of means that are discovered in the moment. An image, for example, that resonates with a deeply held belief is one of the ways of achieving a surprise. This image can be found in the person's language (I feel like I'm in a cage), from repetitive themes of their night dreams, or created in accordance with person's morphology—which reveals their innermost tendencies. A certain similarity with a battlefield can be drawn. As in a battle, there are unlimited ways of achieving an element of surprise. This surprise is subtle, as is this work. Following it, or at the same time, elements of cleansing, reversing, or connecting with something greater than oneself are used, to name a few. All of this is derived from and not imposed upon the patient. To give an example, a writer known in Israel and throughout the world was brought to my teacher paralyzed from the neck down from a neurodegenerative disease (I do not know what kind). He was a person for whom living in Jerusalem had a very special significance, and who had written about Jerusalem. One also needs to know that the city of Jerusalem is built on hills and mountains. Colette asked him to imagine rolling over all of the hills and mountains of Jerusalem, sensing how his spine from the top to the bottom was being massaged. There was a surprise, a movement where before the problem was a lack of movement, there was Jerusalem and there were the mountains each with its significance and all at once. As I was told by the witnesses the man regained some movement immediately after the exercise. I last saw this man in 2003, more than 10 years after this work was done he walked with a cane but otherwise was independent.

Colette said that she provided the key to the doors, the doors that we had to open and go through, the doors that separated parts of ourselves from the rest, that kept part of us locked away for a variety of reasons. She provided the light needed to regain wholeness—healing and cure usually followed.

Oleg I. Reznik, M.D.                      Oct. 2004

This article (in edited form) was published in the Alternative Journal of Nursing, March 2005, [http://www.altjn.com/ideas/light\\_imagination.htm](http://www.altjn.com/ideas/light_imagination.htm).