

This is the last of Moira's regular columns. We thank her for her thoughts over the last year, and look forward to hearing from Tony Morris, who will be taking over.

What if our dreams are not, or not only, about our personal lives, but also about the Earth of which we are part?

What if our grief is not only for our immediate personal losses, but also for our loss of the forests and animals which are dying and leaving our planet forever? Perhaps we feel their grief, too?

Increasingly often, clients arrive in my therapy room bringing dreams of ecological disaster. Recent dreams have included floods, swimming in polluted seas, a plague on the moon, a storm which destroyed the client's home, and eating poisoned food. In conventional therapeutic style, we have explored their personal meanings of feeling out of control, contaminated, invaded etc. They seem to have found this helpful. Then I have asked them, 'And what if this dream is also about the wider situation on Earth at this time?' With relief, they begin to talk about feeling helpless, sad, despairing and powerless to make a difference.

A client recently told me that she had been longing to talk about these feelings, but felt that somehow it wasn't 'appropriate' to bring this sort of material into therapy. Other clients have been afraid to allow such feelings, as they seem overwhelming and without any possibility of assuagement. Nevertheless, connecting with this sadness and despair has meant, for these clients, connecting also with their love for the Earth and its creatures, moving to a connectedness with life and the world which they were denying themselves while numbed and isolated in the attempt to avoid feeling. I believe it's

only through this painful work of reconnecting with ourselves and the wider life of which we are part, that we can truly heal ourselves and find the energy to be active in healing the world that we are currently destroying.

For those of us with conventional therapy trainings, whose clients have equally conventional expectations, it can be difficult to change the perspective of our work to encompass ecopsychological issues. But far from being something we impose on our clients, I'm realising more and more that it is something we owe our clients.

I have heard of psychotherapists who, in discussions with colleagues, have vehemently denied that there is any planetary crisis at this time, and have asserted that addressing the issue in work with clients undermines the therapy. This view seems to me to be so profoundly and wilfully ignorant as to be deeply unethical. Can we imagine ourselves working with Jewish clients in Germany at the time of the Holocaust, or in Bosnia during the war there, while ignoring the devastating conditions in which our work took place? How can we call ourselves therapists, if our work has no room for the issue which, at a deep collective level, is the most dangerous and frightening in all our lives? Or are therapists only able to deal with clients' individual issues which are alienable and thus manageable, while being unable to address issues which belong to us all?