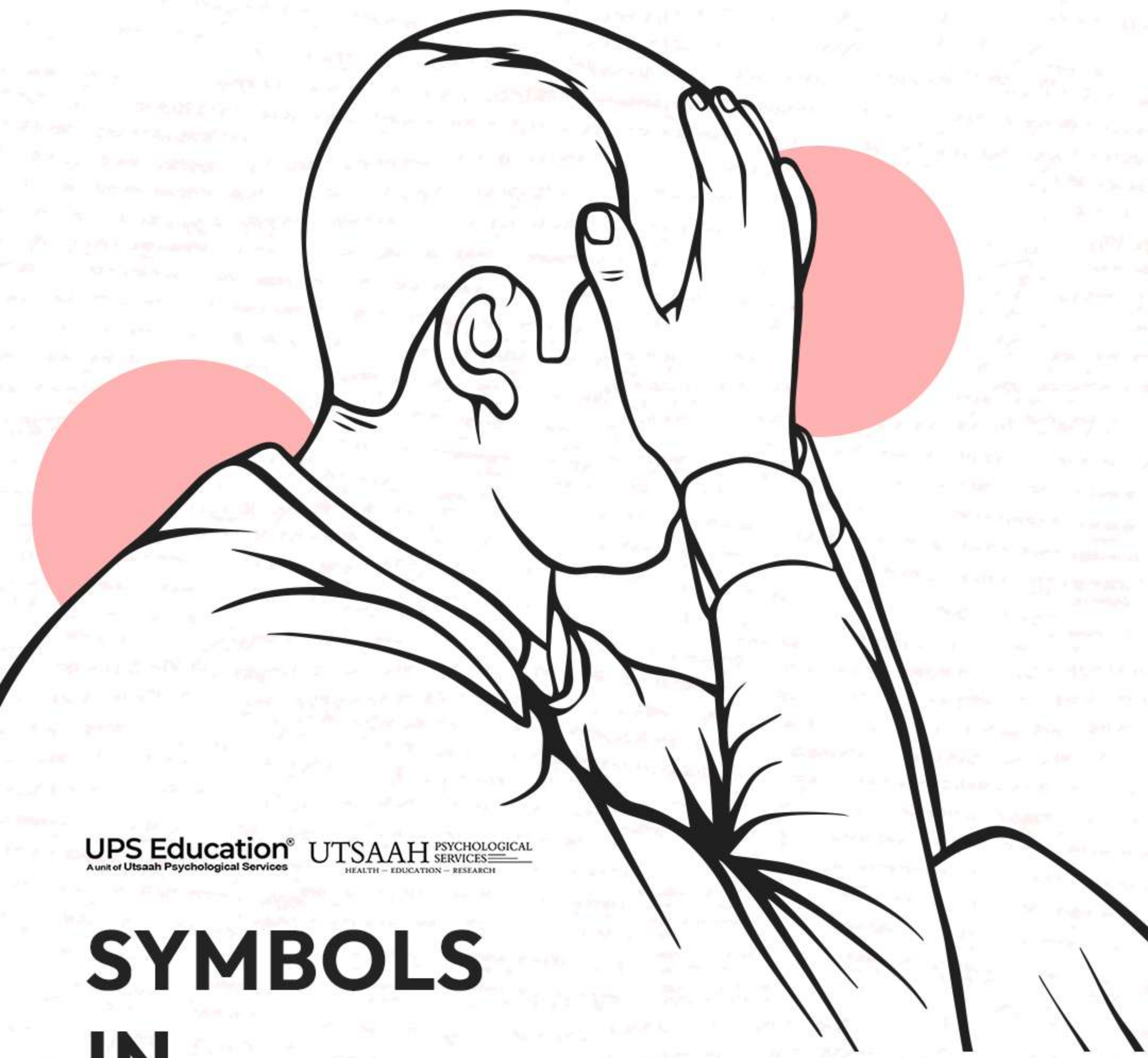

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SYMBOLS IN PSYCHOANALYSIS

When the unconscious speaks in images.

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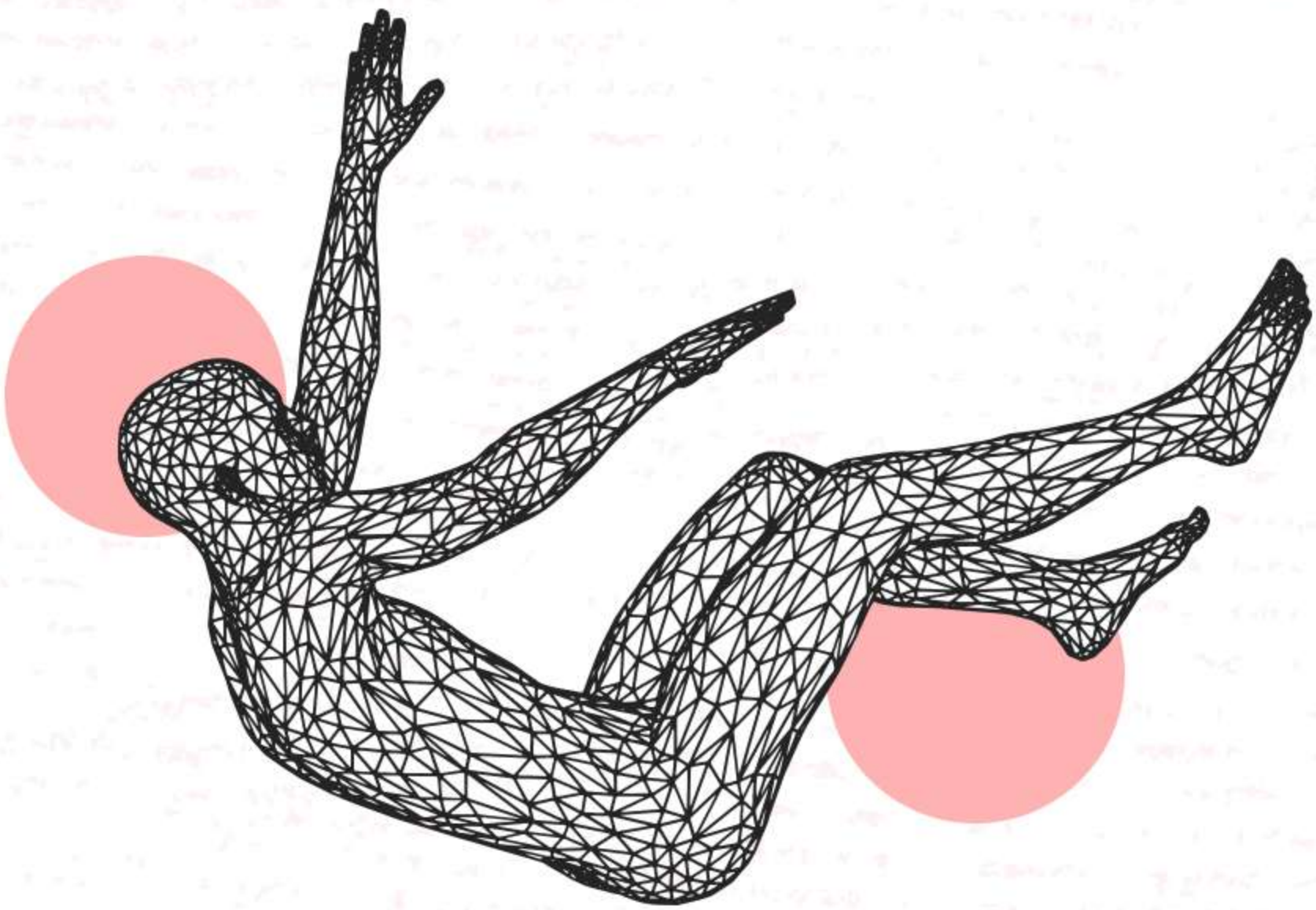

WHY DO SYMBOLS MATTER?

In psychoanalysis, unconscious thoughts and conflicts may appear indirectly through **images, objects and situations.**

But here's the catch: there is no universal psychoanalytic dictionary.

The same symbol can mean something completely different depending on the person, their associations and the context.

So what might these symbols represent?

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WATER

Unconscious • Affect • Birth • Maternal environment

Water can represent the unconscious and emotional life. Its state can change the interpretation: calm, deep or turbulent water may carry very different associations.

HOUSE

Self • Psyche • Family • Childhood

A house can represent the self or psyche, with its rooms suggesting different parts of inner life.

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SNAKE

Instinct • Sexuality • Danger • Transformation

A snake may represent instinctual or sexual life, danger, aggression or an autonomous unconscious force. In Jungian thought, it can also suggest transformation.

DOOR / THRESHOLD

Transition • Separation • Connection • Change

Doors, windows, bridges and tunnels can represent movement between psychic states, separation from something or entry into something unknown.

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MIRROR / DOUBLE

Identity • Projection • Shadow • Unrecognised self

Mirrors, strangers, masks and doubles can represent aspects of the self that remain unfamiliar or unintegrated.

FALLING TEETH

Vulnerability • Loss • Shame • Castration anxiety

Bodily loss may symbolise vulnerability, loss of potency, ageing or fear of bodily disintegration.

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CAVE / ENCLOSURE

Womb • Containment • Protection • Interiority

Caves, rooms, boxes and vessels can evoke the maternal body, protection and containment, but also feelings of confinement.

FLYING

Freedom • Escape • Omnipotence • Transcendence

Flying may represent freedom from bodily limits, escape or a sense of omnipotence, but it can also reflect anxiety about losing control.

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NAKEDNESS

Shame • Vulnerability • Exposure • Authenticity

Nakedness can represent vulnerability, fear of judgement or the collapse of a social persona. Who is watching can matter just as much as the exposure itself.

DEATH

Loss • Separation • Transformation • Ending

Death imagery can represent grief, separation, the end of an identity or psychological transformation.

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BUT SYMBOLS DON'T COME WITH A TRANSLATION KEY.

A house isn't always the self.
Water isn't always the unconscious.

The symbol matters. But so does the person seeing it.

Because in psychoanalysis, the same symbol can mean very different things to different people.

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