

Breaking the Elephant

The Dream That Started It All...

Introduction:

The topic for our group project arose organically from the experience one of our team members had during the first intensive.

Following a very intense emotional experience during the open “fishbowl” flex-flow group (witnessed by the full cohort), Karen had a vivid dream:

“I was at Rebecca’s house with several of my friends. We were staying overnight on our way to somewhere the following day. When we arrived, my friends were not behaving very well. They were going through her house, opening doors to different rooms, poking their heads into cupboards, jumping up and down on beds, and generally being ‘unruly’. My efforts to correct their behavior and requests for more consideration were ignored and they continued their bad behavior. I could feel my anxiety rising, and I was concerned how I would be perceived by Rebecca having brought these rude, inconsiderate friends into her home. I was also concerned whether I had told her that I was coming with several others and not just on my own.

“As my unruly friends continued to move objects around the house I was trying to put them back in their place. As I went to put one back on the mantel shelf above the fireplace, it broke in my hand. When I looked down, it was an elephant and I had broken off its tail! I panicked, unsure whether to tell Rebecca that I had broken one of her items, because I thought it might add to her disapproval of my friends causing so much upheaval. I remember feeling terribly torn and not knowing what would be the best thing to do.”

Karen didn’t immediately consider that all the characters could be viewed as different aspects of her “Self” reflecting the inner conflicts she experienced in the workshop. In our first meeting as a project group, we began unpacking the relevance of the dream. Considering “self as instrument” we were curious about becoming more comfortable with differentiation in ourselves in order to be more effective with differentiation in the room when facilitating.

We designed our project around an experiential exercise that will take participants through a process inspired by work Zara has been doing with her “inner selves” for many years, and Cathy’s interest in archetypes. Our intention is to give participants a practical tool that they can use with themselves when they find their “unruly friends” showing up uninvited or unexpectedly, and how to work with them effectively in service of becoming a better facilitator.

Archetypes:

Carl Jung claims the use of myths and archetypes are essential to the health of the human psyche. In using stories of myth we can make sense of the confusion of the external and internal worlds we live in.

The concept of archetypes is probably most familiar through the stories of Greek mythology. However, the themes of common myths and legends can be found in many different cultures and form a somewhat universal language that we can ground this process of self-discovery in.

There are many different types of archetypes that we can draw upon when seeking to broaden our perspective on the happenings of the world around us, and on clarifying the chaos of our internal worlds. Examples include:

The Bully	The Damsel In Distress	The Devil Figure
The Hero	The Martyr	The Warrior
The Hermit	The Trickster	The Seeker
The Rebel	The Judge	The Inner Child

Many of us have an ancient myth that we never tire of hearing, whose characters we can relate deeply to. Artemis - the indomitable female spirit, or Ares - the masculine champion, Perseus and Medusa, and the Wild Woman of the Woods are just a few examples.

The Multi-Archetypal Self:

We built this process around the idea that several archetypal “characters” are alive within us at any given time. Often, the strength with which these characters show up wax and wane over the course of our lives. Some aspects of an archetype are stronger at certain points in our lives, others do not hold as much weight at any point in our life. It is also possible to identify so deeply with an archetype that expression becomes a perpetual way of being.

As a group, we co-created this process using the symbolic imagery of archetypes to draw out the multiple perspectives that exist within the self. And although the immediate work is internal, we found a strong link to our facilitative practice and “self as instrument” (i.e. strengthening skillset in the Upper Left and Right Quadrants). By bringing our awareness and willingness to engage with the many viewpoints, responses, and emotions within ourselves, we expand our ability to be comfortable with the variety of perspectives that show up in groups we work with (i.e. strengthening skillset in the Lower Left and Right Quadrants).

During the IF course, we have learned to practice taking steps outside of our comfort zone and to expand the perspectives we are willing to be present with. We believe this process embraces many of the concepts introduced in our course work this far, resulting in a deepening awareness of self (UL) that will influence our depth and skill as facilitators (UR) and improve our ability to notice and work with archetypal influences in others, individually and collectively (LL, LR).

One final concept to highlight with archetypes is the depth within each character. There

is no myth that comes to its conclusion without the presence of both a positive and a negative aspect, and the importance of embracing the WHOLE character should not be overlooked. Just as the “dark night of crisis” would be flat without the heroic journey; the hero would be unnecessary without the battle s/he faces. One can’t exist without the other – the darkness and the light of each character are required.

This may have been the most important discovery of our project. When a seemingly negative archetypal quality shows up (e.g. The Bully), we have a tendency to make that quality wrong and silence that aspect of ourselves, when in fact doing so limits the related empowered archetypal quality (e.g. The Hero). Both are a requirement in finding balance.

Finding The Light in The Dark:

A good example of an archetype that embodies this full depth of lightness and dark is the Hindu Goddess Kali. While she is commonly spoken of as The Destroyer [of men], there is so much more to her character. Using her rage to burn through the ego, she is also known as the “purifier/giver of life”. Kali destroys attachments that are no longer useful, creating space for rebirth. Adding depth to her character we can see there is so much more than simple destruction; that the destruction has a hidden blessing.

The Six Blessings of Kali:

- **Blessing of Discernment** - the sword of truth, speaking and acting from her wisdom, cutting through denial and illusion.
- **Blessing of Heartbreak** - deep heartbreak awakens you to the devastation of illusions and the healing power of unconditional love.
- **Blessing of the Dark Night** - she annihilates the false self and fortifies you amid chaos and the fear of the unknown, illuminating your eternal Self, at one with all that is.
- **Blessing of Great Peace** - emerging from the Dark night, we enter the deep peace of our innate divinity - compassionate, lucid and strong enough to hold opposing forces.
- **Blessing of Sacred Passion** - Now activated within you, Kali sparks a humble nobility, profound courtesy toward all beings and an unshakeable fortitude for completing the tasks given to you.
- **Blessing of Sacred Action** - Acting from the knowledge that all life is sacred. Having been set free from illusion, Kali illuminates your path of “Sacred Activism” which can help you embody your truest Self and your Divine Humanity.

By embracing the full spectrum of Kali we find compassion in her destruction and can embrace the positive intent of The Destroyer. Every archetype you encounter will have the gift, in some form, of destruction and salvation. When working with the archetypes within and within groups, pay attention to how they are disruptive and how they are helpful, especially noticing the light and dark qualities within individual archetypes.

Facilitating Seemingly Oppositional Perspectives

In gaining comfort and capability to embrace and truly listen to any of these perspectives internally, we can uncover the positive intention of each archetype, especially those we initially perceive as negative, or disruptive of status quo (The Victim, The Bully, The

Trickster, etc.)

Learning to embrace all aspects and the full depth of character of the humans around us (the positive AND the negative) assists us in building a container of psychological safety for those we work with. In learning to hold multiple perspectives within ourselves, we can hold more in the groups we work with and create more space for movement, discovery and resolution during facilitation.

The Process

- **Recognize that the self is having a differentiated experience internally.**
Consider a recent experience that you have been replaying in your mind. Any time we have conflicting thoughts or feelings regarding a situation or relationship, we can assume multiple perspectives are present within. Times of challenge, conflict, or discomfort often provide doorways into this work as they hold a lot of separate emotions for us to examine.
- 0. Give your attention to all of the perspectives you have about a particular situation.** Are there parts of your internal experience that you were not aware of in the moment that you can now see/ hear/ feel? Allow all of them to come through without judgement. You can do this by talking out loud, writing in a journal, or meditating on the experience. Were there ways you intentionally limited a perspective? Or ways a perspective almost took over you? Notice the one that has the most energy for you and move on to the next step.
 - 0. Imagine a “being” who embodies one of the perspectives you identified.** Visualize their appearance, clothing, and age. Imagine meeting this person at your favorite place in nature, or a party, or coffee shop. Are they male, female, or neither? Are they perhaps unembodied or not human at all? If a visual representation is not coming to you, try moving with their energy, speaking like them, or writing their thoughts with your non-dominant hand.
 - 0. Identify this Archetype and engage them in dialogue.** As you witness this new persona what archetypal qualities do they carry? Are they The Hero, The Victim, The Judge, The Rebel, The Trickster, The Mother? You can ask them what role they believe they play in your life to help identify their archetype. Is this archetype one you judge as negative? Ask them their positive intent for you. What do they believe their purpose is? If this archetype is one you easily identify as, challenge them by noticing the ways they may also be disruptive in your life.
 - 0. Continue the work.** Continue the conversation with this archetype through meditation, journaling, artwork, dancing, sitting across from them at a literal or figurative table, placing symbolic imagery of them in your home or office, or any other way that comes to you. Essentially any way you can step into the irrational, and open yourself to receive insight or information that may be surprising and yet deeply familiar (and ultimately a step beyond your cognitive creation) is the goal here.
 - 0. Rinse and repeat.** Use this process to identify multiple archetypes within yourself. When you begin working with more than one, they can also begin working with each

other. The tools you'd use in any relationship, personal or professional, one-on-one or in groups, can be used to work with them individually and in concert with each other.

A Reflection On The Experience and Benefit of this Process

During our project, Zara facilitated a session that led to Matthew becoming acquainted with "Hector," a manifestation of his Trickster & Clown. Zara engaged Hector for a bit, an experience Matthew found enlightening:

"I wanted to better understand how I use - and misuse - humor, so Zara and I started there. I was expecting to encounter an immature aspect of myself, basically an adolescent nuisance or something. I was surprised to find a rather developed and even nuanced self in Hector, someone who was supportive and protective of me. He was a bit dismissive of how anxious I can be, wanted me to experience more joy, and could appreciate he was disruptive at times when I wasn't holding him back. Zara was able to make him see his playfulness and sense of humor was sometimes being expressed at the cost of what he (and I) deeply value: being connected with others. That insight formed a bond between us I was quite surprised by - it has served as a touchpoint for me to check in and curb my humor. This new relationship with an aspect of myself manifest in Hector has allowed us both to relax and be a bit more genuine."

Conclusion

Your Self is made up of many of these archetypal traits and much like the facets of a diamond, the completeness of your true Self can't be reduced to any one archetype on its own. In learning to include the diversity of these personas in your internal dialogue you will have a greater capacity to know yourself, understand your personal power and find your spiritual center. You can then bring these qualities forward when working with others, recognize the internal complexity in others, and better support diverse perspectives in the groups you work with as a facilitator.

Pod Participants:

Cathy Jensen
Karen Boskemper
Matthew Klein
Zara Shallbetter

Archetype Resources:

Mythologica: A Treasury of The World's Myth and Legends, by Janet Parker
A Gallery of Archetypes, by Caroline Myss
The Fierce Feminine, by Andrew Harvey

Influences for the Process:

The work of Clarissa Pinkola Estes
Books from Arnold Mindell- primarily *Sitting in the Fire*, *The Shaman's Body*, and *The Quantum Mind and Healing*
The book *Identity and Violence* by Amartya Sen

Big Mind Voice Dialogue