AIKO: DRAMA THERAPY IN THE RECOVERY PROCESS OF A JAPANESE/KOREAN-AMERICAN WOMAN

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This article relates the therapeutic work of Aiko, a Japanese/Korean-American woman within the context of a Transformational Theatre/Drama Therapy and Sound Healing process. The 30-week program serves as an in-depth therapy group for the participants and, for some, is a professional training program. These groups meet once a week for a four-hour session. In these programs, two women and one man act as facilitators, with the author serving as the consistent presence. Each of the other two facilitators, a sound healer and a theatre director/teacher (drama therapist in training), join the group every other week. The population of Aiko's group included nine people, mostly women. The group participants and facilitators ranged in age from the early 20s to middle 60s.

In these programs, expressive modalities include: classical psychodrama, many other forms of drama therapy, sound healing, expressive movement and journal writing. Within the group sessions, people are guided into Jungian depth work, which explores both the personal unconscious and archetypal unconscious. The process also entails the use of spiritual practices including meditation, visualization, breath and energy centers and techniques with the intuitive arts. The group process culminates in the creation of performance pieces about the life issues and transformation process of the participants. Potential group members are carefully screened for sufficiently healthy ego structures to sustain this type of in-depth work.

As an integral part of this program, the participants keep a journal in which they write prose, poetry, songs, anecdotal stories and other writings at the end of each session. The group facilitators also keep journals. Excerpts from Aiko's journal will be included.

Case Study

The Struggle with Biculturalism

Aiko entered the Transformational Theatre/Drama Therapy and Sound Healing program with great interest, but also with some reticence. She had grown up in a privileged Japanese class. Her early life was characterized by an appreciation for the beauty of Japan's countryside, the wisdom of her beloved grandparents and the intelligence, strength, rigidity and severe wounding of her mother. Her mother lived daily with the unacceptable situation of her husband's six concubines and his total preoccupation with his very successful business life and financial position. Over a period of hundreds of years, Aiko’s father’s ancestors were forcefully brought from Korea as slaves. Gradually, over generations, they were able to climb the social ladder and build wealth and position, managing to erase their Korean heritage. But her father never lost the ancestral stigma of having been subjugated. Because of this, he identified with the abuser. It was an accepted practice among Japan’s social elite for the

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men to have concubines, whom they fully supported financially. In this way, he became the "slave owner" and projected his "dominator" mentality onto these women (Eisler, 1987).

Aiko, at the age of nine, had been sent away to Canada by her mother to study music. She also studied dance, as she had done in Japan from an early age. One of the first things she shared in the group was how uprooted and split she always felt for having been cast out of her homeland.

The work and journey of Jean Shinoda Bolen have been relevant to study, as her oriental inheritance has given her a bi-ethnic conjunction of East and West. Her struggle and what it yielded can be seen in her book, *The Tao of Psychology* (1979). In her 1984 work, Bolen related how her concurrent training as a medical psychiatrist and as a Jungian analyst, interwoven with her awakening consciousness as a feminist in the 1970s, led her to explore new therapeutic pathways for women. "As I see it," she noted, "Every woman is a ‘woman-in-between,’ acted on from within by goddess archetypes and from without by cultural stereotypes." Aiko’s story is a striking example of "a woman-in-between."

To work with Aiko therapeutically, it was important to understand the traditional Japanese values and norms with which she grew up. It was not within her cultural norms to share intimate feelings, especially about dark family issues. Euro-American values for healing, therapy goals and processes are frequently contradictory to Asian, particularly female gender-based values. Lee and Richardson in their book (1991) stated that much of traditional Japanese culture can be traced to the philosophical precepts of life that were dictated by Buddhism. Within this cultural system, the individual is superseded by the family; specific hierarchical roles are established for all family members and rules of behavior and conduct are formalized. An individual's adherence to this code of conduct is a reflection not only on the immediate family, but on the extended kinship network as well.

The father is the leader and decision-maker of the nuclear family. His authority is unquestioned. The welfare of the family rests squarely on the father's shoulders. He enforces family roles and is the primary disciplinarian. The traditional role of the mother is that of the nurturant caretaker of her husband and children. The mother is clearly the emotionally devoted, nurturant parental figure. The stronger emotional attachments, therefore, tend to be with the mother (Lee & Richardson, 1991).

In Aiko's case, the father was able to maintain his lifestyle despite great protests by his wife and uncomfortable, unexpressed feelings by his daughters. Aiko's mother, unlike the cultural norm, was not the emotionally devoted, nurturant parental figure, but was cold, angry and fearful. Aiko feels this was due, in part, to her unhappy marriage.

Highly developed feelings of obligation govern much of the personal relationships of Japanese Americans. The often unspoken obligatory reciprocity within relationships is a serious consideration in their lives. The individual is expected to express affection and gratitude as well as respect and obedience to parents and others in authority positions. In a social structure where interdependence is so highly valued, the fear of losing face can be a powerful motivating force for conforming. The withdrawal of confidence and support by the family, community or society, and the exposure of an individual's wrong actions for all to see, are profound shaming experiences to be avoided at all costs.

Harmonious interpersonal relationships are maintained by avoiding direct confrontation. Therefore, much of the communication style of the Japanese American is indirect and is characterized by talking around the point. There is a strong dictum that problems be kept within the prescribed family structure and solved there. The ability to endure hardships, demonstrate unflagging loyalty, and sacrifice for the good of the whole is often called upon for resolution of problems (Lee & Richardson, 1991).

When Aiko began this work, she was able to express to the group her discomfort with sharing her family secrets, as well as her own issues. This made it possible for everyone, the group leaders and group members, to actively encourage and support her in her current emotional dilemma. She soon was able to actively appreciate the opportunity to come to terms with and work through several significant issues.

In the first session, one of the group members enacted a psychodrama that focused on that woman's relationship with her mother. Aiko role-played this woman's mother in the psychodrama (Moreno, 1946). Then, after the main drama, when everyone shares something of their own story that was catalyzed by the "protagonist's" drama, Aiko made a connection with her own mother. It was then suggested that everyone remember a moving moment with their mother and give expression to that moment by allowing a spontaneous song to emerge (Moreno, 1947). By doing this, the participants created a positive container in
which the more difficult object relations issues could be addressed.

Aiko referring to her mother in her first journal entry:

Oct. 2. I wanted to remember only beautiful images of her today, and moments when she was in her elements, moments when she was joyful and vigorous. I remember her in her sunflower garden laughing in the sun. I remembered her in the Zen Village of Niigata, (on the Northwest province of Japan, facing the Sea of Japan). I remembered her bicycling, running around, laughing again. Why did I want to remember mainly good and warm memories of her? Because I now see also the tragedy of her life, marrying someone too complicated for her to comprehend. Her family was all heart feeling. My father’s family was almost all mind thinking, conniving and calculating how to survive. From joy to coldness and to madness. It was too much for her. In the end, she entered into the coldness and went mad. In this mad-childlike state for a year, she took her own life.

The Transpersonal Dimension: Zen Buddhism, the Soul and the Unconscious

From the time our work together began it appeared that it would be most effective to relate to Aiko through a transpersonal/spiritual orientation. This was familiar to her from her Buddhist roots, which were naturally integrated into her daily life. Zen Buddhism in its essence is the art of seeing into the true nature of one’s being. It points the way from fear and desire to freedom from suffering. The goal of Zen Buddhism is to achieve Satori or enlightenment through zazen (emptying the mind) and Koan practice. The Zen Buddhist aesthetic of unconscious artfulness provides the basis of classical Japanese culture. Aiko told of Buddhist monks coming often to her home for the community for different life events. Everyone would sit together and, with an awareness of their breath, meditate and chant. As the transpersonal approach that is included in our work was especially helpful to Aiko, optimal opportunities were created to work on that level when it seemed appropriate. It was clear that every exercise and reference to spiritual language and experience opened Aiko to more easily face what was difficult for her in her complex emotional history. It was natural for this Japanese woman to work with an approach that validated the transpersonal dimensions of consciousness through meditation and a variety of exercises that began with an awareness of the breath and developed into techniques employing visualizations, voice and movement. Reference to the purity of her soul’s essence deeply resonated with her. It soon became clear that this approach did help to create the bridge from her reticence to build her trust and open her to deep, less familiar, emotional work. The transpersonal dimension can be significant in anyone’s therapeutic process (Walsh & Vaughan, 1980, pp. 15–24), but with Aiko, because of her cultural heritage, this became the key to opening her buried pain.

In this drama therapy process new creative ways are explored to make the unconscious conscious. According to Landy (1994), the drama therapist helps the client reach spontaneity through balancing the distance between person and persona, reality and imagination.

In the moment of spontaneity, at aesthetic distance, the unconscious is accessible. In this balanced state, the client is able to give form to repressed feelings without being overwhelmed by them. The unconscious is a vast storehouse of psychic phenomena—wishes, fantasies, complexes, role types and archetypes—not directly available to human awareness but capable of being released in the form of images and symbols. Through movement, sound, and/or language, the client gives shape to his unconscious imagery. (Landy, 1994)

Dreams have been discovered to be a powerful gateway to both the personal and archetypal unconscious. Marion Woodman, well-known Jungian analyst, writer and an expert with dreamwork, offers her perspective (1989) after many many years of working with people in analysis as well as in large conferences and workshops. She considers the relationship of working with the transpersonal level of the soul vital in dealing with early emotional issues:

Woodman: When you work on the rotten foundations, which is what we do in therapy, you have to recognize your own rot. In order to get rid of rot, you’ve got to dig it up. At the same time, you’re finding this magnificent soul that’s buried beneath it.

Interviewer: Did psychologists always recognize the soul?
Woodman: Psyche means soul. Psychology is knowledge of the soul. Jung recognized soul. He recognized the spiritual dimension of dream images that connects a person to what he called the Self. The Self is the God-image within, like the golden ball within fairy tales. That golden ball takes you where you need to be led in order to find all the parts of yourself.

I do think a lot of people start out in therapy thinking they will find the blocks, that they will take the energy that's blocked in negative mother and negative father, for example, and release it from those complexes in order to make it available to the ego. But the journey becomes so fascinating that they tend to stay with it. The blossoming ego begins to relate to its own creativity, to the creation within. That process ultimately leads to surrendering to transpersonal energy, what Jung calls the Self. (Woodman, 1989)

Landy (1994) noted:

From the Jungian perspective of the collective unconscious, the therapist would focus upon archetypal, universal images as well as personal ones. Images in a dream may relate to universal myths and cross-cultural experiences. [We see this in Aiko’s dreams.] The unconscious from Jung’s point of view is not necessarily a source of dark, disguised fears and desires but rather a morally neutral area that embodies the mythic substance of the human race.

In Aiko’s Transformational Theatre/Drama Therapy group, participants are invited to remember two dreams, one from early childhood and a meaningful recent dream. The dreamer then selects group members to enact each of the dream images from both of their dreams. The dreams come back to life before the dreamer’s eyes, triggering memories of parts of the dream that were forgotten, often re-surfacing emotional states from that time. At other times, new feelings surface as new insights and connections are made, catalyzed by watching the dream images enacted. The dreamer is helped to see the inevitable relationship between both dreams in terms of core emotional issues and ongoing life challenges. A transpersonal dimension helps people to identify what is called soul qualities or essential parts of the human psyche that are our source of strength. Examples of these positive qualities are: clarity, magnanimity, sacredness, sense of humor, purity, majesty, creativity, peace, love, intuition. At least one and often more qualities can be seen in both dreams. The soul qualities can be identified as that place we are able to turn to in ourselves that can never be tamished from any abuse or life trauma. Helping people shift their identity from their sense of limitation, low self-esteem, shame and feelings of inadequacy to these positive, essential parts of themselves is perhaps at the core of the healing in this process.

Archetypes and Shadow Aspects

Participants are also helped to expand their identity to embrace the archetypes of Artist, Healer, Educator, Shaman or Spiritual Guide. Integrating these archetypes into their professional identities as well as into their general view of themselves becomes another “source of strength” and tool for transformation for group members. According to Jung (1966), “The experience of the archetype is frequently guarded as the closest personal secret, because it is felt to strike into the very core of one’s being.” When that archetypal shift in one’s own identity genuinely begins to happen, then a person’s whole way of viewing him or herself shifts, influencing all aspects of the person’s life.

To create the accommodation for this to happen for Aiko, a basic Japanese value needed to be understood and addressed in subtle ways. In their chapter on “Barriers to Effective Cross-Cultural Counseling,” Sue and Sue (1990) point out that most forms of counseling and psychotherapy tend to be individual centered, that is, they emphasize the “I-thou” relationship. The chapter points out that U.S. culture and society are based upon the concept of individualism. They note that not all cultures view individualism as a positive orientation, rather it may be perceived in some cultures as a handicap to enlightenment, one that may divert us from important spiritual goals. In many non-Western cultures, identity is not seen apart from the group orientation. The personal pronoun I in the Japanese language does not seem to exist.

There were several things that happened in Aiko’s therapy process that honored this cultural orientation. First, she was a part of a group process where the group became very bonded as a kind of extended family. By enacting other peoples’ dreams, for example, and participating in other group exercises,
Aiko became increasingly more comfortable in honoring and dealing with her own individual issues. Secondly, many process approaches were framed in spiritual language and values so that if there was any sense of loss of one spiritual goal, in this case the valuing of the individual’s privacy, other spiritual goals were honored and expressed. This Japanese woman is naturally very creative with distinct clarity of mind (perhaps reinforced through her meditation experience). Therefore, thirdly, she was fascinated by the depth of dream work and what was to be discovered in the rich terrain of the unconscious, as insights were revealed.

Oct. 9. Dreams have power—my first discovery. Interpreting dreams have real power. Connecting two of my dreams, from childhood and adulthood was a surprise. Father image/male image certainly occupies me. My father certainly did and does have a profound effect on my life. All life revolved around him, when I was a child and even now. Saphira said, “Honor the pain. In our society, we numb the pain by drinking, eating, drugs and working, among other things. Do not avoid the pain. Pain will naturally occur in life. When it does, simply embrace it and honor it. If we don’t avoid the darkness, then one can also see the light. If not, then it’s often more difficult to see the light.” She also said, “Breath means inspiration. From breath, inspiration springs.”

Participants are encouraged to identify and to honor and dramatize shadow elements in their psyches within this work. In trying to make the unconscious conscious, people discover that there are many hidden things buried deep within. These things are not always negative and when they reach the light of our conscious self a power is unleashed in our healing and creative processes (Jung, 1966).

Oct. 16. My Truth: I don’t digest my food well. Same with life issues.—There is a black despair about everything I touch.—So many unresolved issues I carry in my constipated life.—Running away literally from difficult issues has been my constant state.

A number of theatre/therapy exercises were presented to help people discover their shadow characters and create them. These characters became an expression of hidden parts of themselves. For Asian people, overcoming the strong value of not sharing the dark side is often more of an obstacle than for Americans, as was mentioned earlier. In the safe, creative atmosphere that was created, it seemed to flow quite easily even for Aiko. Everyone sounded, sang and danced their shadow. Questions helped the process: Who are you? Where do you come from? How do you move and sound? Why have you stayed hidden? They told their story, sang and danced and often cried. Further expression and more developed characters were encouraged to evolve. Not unsurprisingly, Aiko’s shadow side was the culturally devalued individualistic loner.

Oct. 30. My essence being a lone gypsy wandering alone and whatever pleases me—free of the rigors of societal pressures.—Key words: Alone, Wandering, and Free.—I am in essence a solitary soul. I would rather avoid people; avoid meetings, challenges, movements, and life itself.—In essence, I am lifefearing, not lifeaffirming. So I like to escape into anonymous wandering, unconstrained. When I want the contact, I will reach for it, the length of which I will decide, the depth of which I will decide.—At the end of it, I move on, no responsibility.—Fear of contact, fear of people, really. Finding out who I really am.—Nomadic existence is true existence for me.

Aiko learned from an early age to escape—escape from the bonds of her patriarchal, oppressive family and cultural roots. In so doing, however, she discovered that she was also escaping from the potential joys of her current life and the possibilities of deeper intimacy in her personal and spiritual relationships.

Nov. 6. Shadows are dark! My darkness was a hollow hole. Try as I previously did to fill it with harsh discipline of long hours of work, it did not fulfill this emptiness. I needed a power greater than my human effort and sweat could provide. I needed to tap into source power. Grandmother was one who guided me into this power. In this power there flowed a steady, sustaining light. My grandmother was smiling as she led me to this river of quiet energy. “River” is one of the names given to me by a Burmese monk. When I was totally stuck in my life, frozen and broken, he gave me this name so that I may defreeze. I discovered today, that when I release from my
unconscious, away from my head, (which is quick and overactive), amazing things happen. Perhaps in my unconscious is hidden my real self.

Uncovering Archetypal Themes

Another exercise involved a meditation, which helped group participants go more deeply into their psyches and bring old life memories to the surface. In a relaxed, deep state, they are guided to remember three meaningful life incidents, one from childhood, one from adolescence and a third from adulthood. People are asked to recall images from those three times. The life events can be traumatic, ecstatic or meaningful in any way. Similar to the dreams, people are helped to connect significant emotional threads through the three, as well as to see seeds for transformation, as each identifies the strong qualities in his or her essential being that arise from the reenactment of these life dramas.

Nov. 20. First incident: In the Zen mountain village, where I spent my summers at my auntie’s place, one summer day, all the children of the village, carried me on the wagon and everyone ran laughing with joy to the school playground, where everyone played baseball. This village was blessed with purity of nature, with pure mountain water flowing 24 hours, in each household through bamboo poles. The pulsating joy and goodness in the air was one of my last scenes of complete happiness and purity, which I experienced. (7 years old)

Second: Going back forth from Canada and Japan and experiencing inability to say good-byes, so many good-byes. Even now, I find it difficult to say good-bye. (12 years old)

Third: On the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the whole town is manufacturing guns and filled with men. I come to this open marketplace and find a girl selling something in the middle of the open space. She is oblivious to everything and is utterly in her peace, undulating in the wind, her face looking up to the sky. Her peace was so contrasted with the warlike nature of the town. (20 years old)

Selections from these incidents were dramatized. Aiko directed others in the group to play the other roles while she played herself. The earliest of these scenes she developed into a theatrical scene to become a part of her final performance piece.

At this stage in the process Aiko was able to receive a great deal of solace in connecting to her strong sense of peace and purity (soul qualities), which she experienced in nature, surrounding her aunt’s country house, in which she spent her early childhood. Her ever-present life challenge of being split between two cultures in two distant countries and the deep pain of good-byes surfaced in the second incident. Her experience of men as violent, warlike and powerful, symbolizing the oppressive patriarchal roots of her culture, presents itself in the young adult third incident as it did in both of her dreams. Male violence was experienced in contrast to the girl’s peace, undulating in the wind, looking up to the sky. These images point the way to the possibility that she can be her true self in the context of a violent world and that owning her own female shadow and inner male (animus, in Jungian terms) is a key in her own healing process. Carl Jung also said that if we don’t face our shadow, it will become our fate (1977). If we don’t own our own rage and violence we could well play it out.

Aiko shared with the group that she has had an abortion, without her husband’s knowledge. Much later she told him what she had done. The news devastated him. She described the process as being driven to do that by her own destructive impulse, without even thinking about all the pros and cons. She had told no one about what she had done until working with the group.

Through the life incident exercise, which was just presented, another woman in the group revealed and dealt with the intense emotions around sexual abuse. This woman dramatized a powerful scene with her older brother, who had molested her. This triggered other sexual abuse memories in the group, many of which had been repressed and some of which had never been shared before. Through the other woman’s drama, which the group helped to enact, Aiko got in touch with two traumatic events in her own life. One was an incident with her father, who took her away with him on a trip and tried to molest her as a young girl. The second situation was the abortion, which she first shared at this time.

In Aiko’s third life incident, the scene on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan in the marketplace, the girl she saw represented her essential peaceful being. The men represented the violence and rage of the aggressive inner male, which played out in the
cold, angry, silent and passive-aggressive way she aborted her baby and hurt her husband.

Nov. 27. I am very shy about acting, absolutely no confidence in it. Why can’t I get into someone else’s shoes? Why am I so obsessed with being myself? Self-obsessed? Is that me? Yet I am still not in touch with my true feelings. Dispossessed? Being out of the body? Yes, this is how I survived my teen years. The feelings that filled me were so filled with pain that I passed onto another plane to survive. I think I still do it. Because I am not always grounded and centered in my own body, some think that I have Attention Deficit problems. Living on another plane enabled me to create my own world. The world of solitude, peace and comfort. I still live often in this world. It separates me, isolates me and comforts me. This session dealt with Divine Trust. These thoughts flashed through my mind about today’s session:

* digging into the pain repeatedly to clean it up
* the courage to really touch the pain to heal
* the courage to reveal the family shame
* to continue to love your family members after acknowledging and examining the wrong they caused you

Soul Singing

Aiko now realized the difference between entering into transcendent states of consciousness as an escape, a coping mechanism she developed in her younger life, and coming into an authentic centered or peaceful state by being fully in her body and facing her pain and the fullness of her emotional life. To continue to balance the shadow work and what is called the soul work, the sound healing exercise called “soul songs” is woven through the process (Benson, 1995). This is an improvisational structure in which people are helped to sing from the core of their beings, unrelated to notes or melodies. There is no expectation, in this exercise, to sing in any particular way and so it becomes possible to fully express the depth of one’s essence or soul. This process serves as an effective opener of individual energies to break through blocks and resistances. The song is often moved into a spontaneous dance so that the person’s entire being is involved in the process.

At this stage in the process Aiko related to the group that she felt peaceful in the midst of moving to a new house and relieved that she is here in this healing process. “It’s happening,” she said. She shared that she finally realized that she has to express these things that have not been expressed.

Jan. 28. Still feeling blessed, grateful and amazed by the events of the week. [Referring to visiting a mosque between sessions, she wrote:] How these Muslims took me into their lives, a total stranger, still staggered me. The beauty and the strength of their belief in God sank deeply into my soul. It was suggested that to be able to transform the sad song to the joyful song, one must fully tap into the grief—the yin and yang of the energetics of the life force. How true, how true. I realize that what is stalling me is my inability to share fully my trauma. I was raised to cry the tears of joy, but never the tears of sadness.

This is another East/West struggle. The “seen and not heard” syndrome and the value of sharing the joy, not the pain, is a well-entrenched value in the Japanese culture. Aiko was holding enormous grief for her mother’s suicide, for her father’s death, with very mixed feelings about him, for the loss of her homeland and for her aborted baby.

Sometimes people can connect with their grief more easily through enacting their “inner child” and engaging in play. Participants were asked to create a song, this time a nursery rhyme that gets at the essence of their story from a different perspective. The group members delight in becoming their “playful child,” who creates a whimsical, but poignant nursery rhyme. Play in different ways is valued as a powerful and effective transformational approach. Winnicott (1971) and Sutherland (1980) strongly agreed that playing becomes the prototype for the therapy experience both with children and adults. “It is only in playing that the individual—child or adult—uses his whole personality in creative activity, and it is only in creative activity that he discovers this self” (Sutherland, 1980, p. 852). Playing occurs within an intermediate area—it is a transitional phenomenon that bridges the inner and outer world, (Lewis, 1987). Winnicott (1971) wrote that the goal of the therapeutic process is “to afford an opportunity for formless experience and for creating impulses, motor and sensorv, which are the stuff of playing and on the basis of playing is built the whole of man’s existence” (p. 75).
The light play of the child often leads into organic connections to the child's grief. As an evolution of this exercise, each group member becomes their "wounded child," allowing each of them to get in touch with early grief and sadness. Then each one enacts their "soul child," with the qualities that served them even as children as their source of strength when things were difficult.

Aiko's next few journal entries reflect her discoveries and experience with her sources of strength, the light and the dark, transpersonal dimensions and the nature of the healing process that she was experiencing at this time.

Feb. 12. Sources of strength—what a wonderful phrase and they are all already inside ourselves, waiting for us to tap into them. What are my sources of strength? My kind and merciful God, forest and animals surrounding our cabin, who constantly surprise and delight me with their resourcefulness. Thousand stars and the moon, who descend so close to me every night. My patient husband, who truly has embraced me with all my faults. Rekindling what I feel in my innermost being when I move. Transformational theater where we bring our darkness into light and make friends with them.

Feb. 19. Life challenge dissolved by source of strength. Darkness dissolved by light. Seriousness dissolved by play. Shutting down dissolved by love. Tonight I really felt the power of love. When P. [group member] put her hands on my heart and sang, her love breathed into my soul and body and her intent of goodness towards me confirmed for me that life was good. Also, when we felt each other’s aura emanating heat and whatever else, we confirmed for each other that we were creatures, not only of this earth but of places beyond.

In a small gathering of women exploring the interface between art, healing and consciousness, in relation to the inner feminine voice, after a long work session, Marion Woodman said, "At the core of what it's all about, of course, is love" (1989).

Feb. 26. We are the containers for vibrations from below and from above. When we open ourselves to the pure energy from above, healing happens. This is what happened today. I swam contentedly in the all embracing arms of highly opened, well intentioned beings whose soothing vibrations flowed through my body. I floated into another energy level. I surrendered myself to their deep care. The most interesting part of the class for me is when we share our week just past. What rich and varied lives! What rich and excruciating sufferings! Sufferings to which we can all nod to, the common denominator to the living human condition on this earth.

The Body Unconscious

An exercise was introduced that helped people connect with where they hold pain in their body. Many people somatize their emotional issues. The healing process can be helped by working with the parts of the body that are currently in physical pain or where there is a chronic problem. In the following exercise group participants select a part of the body that calls them because of pain or for any other reason that this body part is significant for them. They begin to dialogue with that body part and let it speak to them about what is going on and what they need. At the end they sing a lullaby to the body part and then physicalize it. In essence they role-play that body part with their whole body. Group members are directed to move around the space, speaking and/or singing as they encounter another participant who has enacted a different body part. They connect in sound and movement in whatever way feels right and evolves organically. This exercise allows the participants to confront the emotional underpinnings of the somatization.

March 8. Is the pain in my lungs reaching out for mother's true love? Do I have courage enough to admit that the abuse I've received has hurt me down? Abuse always includes helpless victims. This forced loss of power creates immeasurable anger. I identify myself with that beautiful dog who was beaten in front of helpless adults just watching and with helpless M. [another group member] being made a victim of a horror show in front of a similar horrified crowd. Crowd petrified. Victim frozen. Was there enough anger in the people to tear these innocent girls away from their chilling situations? What would we have done if we were in those crowds?

As overt expression of angry feelings is discouraged in the Asian culture, many Japanese people so-
matize these feelings and are encouraged to present an appearance of peace and joy even when they are in conflict and pain, as was presented earlier. Participating in someone else's drama, and identifying with both the dog and the other group member as frozen victims, became moving transformational experiences for Aiko. The combination of enacting one of the roles in another woman's drama, to help her and then, from within the role, observing and identifying with the victim position, Aiko had a total, full-bodied, emotional experience. This is a striking example of the therapeutic value of drama therapy.

March 17. Memories overtook me. Tapped into unconscious. Memory of climbing onto Mt. Sinai and descending into a dark hole, and the fear of entering into darkness, desert. Fear and fascination with the dark power of night and the power of stillness of the forest. Beginning of meditative day at the Zen temple of Eiheiji, tapping into aura, dissatisfaction with myself in general and in this class. Always looking for approval. Not standing for my truth. Trying always to be a goodie goodie girl, always looking for approval.

As stated in the beginning of this article, the Japanese values of obedience, conformity, 'being good,' and as a female not expressing her feelings and views, are reflected in this last journal entry. This is what made the final project so meaningful for Aiko.

Transformational Theatre Performances

People were helped to create final performance pieces. They were to present their challenging life material as well as their transformational possibility, including their source of strength. They were encouraged to speak their truth. The final pieces were created by each individual and they could have other group members play the different roles in their drama, enacting people, environments, sound textures, as individuals or as an ensemble. People write their story as dramatic monologues, scenes, in prose, poetry, song, naturalistic or stylized or a combination of the above. They can choreograph movement pieces within it. They can incorporate music in whatever way they choose. They can build in costumes, props, masks, set pieces or whatever helps them tell their story more authentically. The group invites family and friends to be their audience. The process of ob-

jectifying the issues, after working through them in part, creating an artistic form to express them and then giving it away to the audience as a gift offering, has proven to be a very effective therapeutic tool. The process of creating the pieces takes everyone through struggle and creative tension, proving in the end, almost always, to be a very cathartic, healing and satisfying process for the participants. This was certainly the case for Aiko.

She chose to dress in a traditional Japanese costume and white face. She created her piece within a movement/dance structure. Aiko had not danced for some time, but had studied dance when she was younger, so it became important to her to work in that form. She also chose to insert phrases in Japanese at specific dramatic moments in her piece.

Final Performance Piece

1. When I was born, I was immediately taken away from the warm breath of my mother. [movement]
2. She had already decided to leave my father. He had six concubines. (In Japanese, my mother speaking): How filthy! How disgustingly dirty! How long do you think you can continue to lie to me!! [movement]
3. Yes, the blood of incest and misguided sexual energy runs in my family. [movement]
4. When I was twelve, my father took me on a little trip, just the two of us. In the middle of the night, I felt Father's big hand descend on me. (In Japanese): What are you doing, Dad?! What are doing? [movement]
5. Today, I no longer feel, [movement] breathe, [movement] or play [movement].
6. (The group gathering around me.) Chieko-chan asobo, chieko chan asobo, little chieko, come and play! [movement]
7. Yes, sexual impurity appeared in me, too. I aborted my first child, my only child. I killed her death. [scream, movement]
8. (In Japanese) Please forgive me, please forgive me! [movement] I love you, I love you very much.
9. [As if holding the baby, sing lullaby in Japanese]
10. [With music accompaniment, dance improvisation]
11. [Bringing the cloth and the group across the stage, start the transformational dance-song]
(The whole group rocking),

Licking our wound, licking our wound.
Burning in the fire, burning in the fire.
Honoring our pain, honoring our pain.
Breathing dearly, breathing dearly.
Looking into our darkness, looking into our darkness.
Loving our soul, loving our soul.
Trusting our impulses, trusting our impulses.
Forgiving ourselves, forgiving ourselves.
Loving the God in us, loving the God in us!

[Grab the cloth in the center and start the dervish whirl as light fades.]

The Influence of the Self: The Archetypal Pull Toward Wholeness

In a separate day-long Drama Therapy Workshop, following the group’s final performances, another deep breakthrough happened for Aiko around the abortion of her baby. In the group she had expressed deep remorse about this and that for her, emotionally, she was realizing that killing the baby was a reaction to her frozen self from the abuse from her father, his abusive treatment of her mother, as well as from her mother’s cold rigid behavior with her. It was felt that though she was able to share her feelings about this for the first time with anyone, within the group, she had not really worked out the complex emotional underpinnings and cultural influences associated with this trauma.

In this drama therapy session, near the end of the day, Aiko, compelled by the self-archetype, asserted her disappointment that every person was not worked with individually in the workshop. She was adamant in her expression of her feelings, with a covert message about her clear readiness to work. This strong expression was antithetical to her cultural background in which females are literally trained from an early age to be subservient to the wishes and demands of men and other authority figures. Her assertiveness was supported by the group. Her clear initiative to take a major next step to work deeper levels of this traumatic event was acted on and celebrated. One of the group leaders in this workshop enacted the voice of her guilty conscience, exaggerating Aiko’s worst feelings about her abortion process. Other group members reinforced her guilt feelings. Aiko resisted much of this at first, but the group persisted strongly until she owned those feelings and expressed them.

Another colleague, who had worked with Aiko all year, engaged her in a “defreezing” process by catalyzing her to dance her sexual and artistic energy.

Within the same drama therapy process she was encouraged to connect to her strength, which helped her to feel safe to go fully into the depth of her pain and her shameful feelings. By this time the soul qualities, her source of strength, were well identified and she had a greater fluidity in being able to access them more easily. She was more consciously able to maintain that concentration as she entered the pain and the shame more fully. Somehow her psyche had gained more confidence that she could do that. Even though the group population was different, she could trust the new container with the same therapists/facilitators who were with her through her whole process. She was able to trust a guest colleague as well.

After Aiko’s deep catharsis around her guilt and shame and unfreezing her sexual and artistic energy, she was moved out of that physical and psychic space to another place in the room. It was felt that she might now be ready to converse with the soul of the baby she aborted. There was an assumption by her therapist/facilitators for some time that this would be an important part of her healing process, but that the timing was a delicate issue and had to clearly come from her. Aiko was encouraged to feel the freedom to speak to the baby in her native language. She could move in and out Japanese and English as it felt right.

People like Aiko, who have a different native culture and have felt pushed out of their native country and have always felt split because of it, can be helped in the following way: In emotional role plays, the expression of deep feelings in both languages, moving between both, as it feels most authentic to them, can serve as an integrating force in the person’s emotional being. Sometimes a whole dialogue may better be expressed in one or the other language; sometimes one part is expressed in one language and another part in a second language. For example, an early childhood scene may play emotionally truer in her native tongue, whereas an adult scene that took place in this culture may best play with a combination of English on the outside and Japanese in her inner monologue in between the outer scenes.

Much to her amazement and with our support, Aiko spoke to her unborn baby with her emotion connected and experienced within her whole body. Everything in her poured out in a beautiful, heartfelt expression of sadness and love. Aiko described this
moment in her final self-reflective evaluation of her work, in her year-long process. The following were the questions and her responses:

What was the most significant moment in your own process?

The moment when I broke down and confessed my love to my aborted baby. Because for two years, I had felt no true remorse or love for my child. I froze in order to not feel the real pain or love.

How did trauma and/or abuse lead to low self-esteem and how did this work support your healing and transformative process?

I think for a long time I unconsciously blamed my mother for my sexual abuse by my father. Through this work, I realize now that what my father did to me was not right. Also, that my mother was not to be blamed for what happened. I am now able to look at the whole circumstance and to forgive them and to love them.

Aiko expressed her feelings that, with the new understanding she had gained, and the surfacing and purging of so much pain and suffering, she now could forgive her parents. Our assessment was that she has done a significant piece of emotional work and that most likely she will discover that the depth of forgiveness will take more time. Furthermore, in many sexual abuse cases, after the initial anger is expressed with the perpetrator father, the often deeper feelings of abandonment by the mother surface: Where was she when I needed her and why didn’t she protect me? Aiko’s feeling that she unconsciously blamed her mother needs to be further explored and those feelings validated rather than dismissed.

Other concluding reflections written by Aiko in her evaluation of her process:

1. Externalization of my trauma enabled me to defreeze my trauma and start to move it and to be objective about it.

2. Defreezing of my trauma enabled me to go deep into my darkness which subsequently allowed me to go into my light.

A specific group exercise that was particularly transformative was the exercise in which I dramatized my family by becoming my father one moment, my mother the next moment, and myself the next moment. This experience, revealed to me how the whole world changes when one is in another’s shoes. It allowed me to sympathize.

As a group, we became very close and caring for each other. In order to really help each other, our individual faculties as the artist, healer, educator, and Shaman were demanded to be polished to the highest degree.

My sympathies went to all members of the group who were struggling with their families. I was profoundly shocked and assured, at the same time, of our common human struggles on this earth. During this process, my patience with other peoples’ struggles (outside the group) became larger.

References


