Nonhuman Parts in the IFS Room Meditation: A Case History

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Abstract

During sessions using the IFS Room Meditation, some clients identify parts which are not human, including animals, insects, angels, and fantasy beings. This case study explores issues of how to support the patient's Core Self in communicating with nonhuman parts and helping them to heal and transform, and how to develop as a therapist to do this more effectively. It also explores the relationships between nonhuman inner parts and nonhuman companions, including pets, power animals, spiritual guides, and angels. It includes resources for further exploration of this topic for both therapist and client.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last several years, offering therapy sessions in person and over the phone, I have supported clients' self-exploration through the use of the Room Meditation tool from the Internal Family Systems method. The majority of my clients are psychologically healthy individuals pursuing therapy as part of a program of self-development or spiritual growth. Most meditate, many are artists, and some have beliefs which might be classified as New Age, while others are distinctly Christian, Buddhist, or of no particular faith.

A number of these clients discovered parts that were not based on human models. Pets, insects, power animals, fantasy beings such as gargoyles, and religious figures such as angels have all appeared during these sessions. In each case, the patient was able to establish truthful and loving dialog between his or her core self and the part or parts. Generally, the parts transformed, often not only in emotion and attitude, but also in physical form.

This article describes some of these experiences in the hopes that, if therapists are aware of and prepared for the possibility, they will be able to facilitate patients who meet nonhuman parts more effectively. It also discusses some techniques and attitudes that the author has found effective in these encounters, with a section focusing specifically on ways of making the encounter safe for both client and therapist. In the final section, resources are offered which present holistic frameworks for images of nonhuman parts and processes for meeting and deepening one's relationship with nonhuman parts in healthy, expansive, and transformative ways.

Background

The Internal Family Systems (IFS) model proposes that individuals have parts, but largely does not require that the parts be pre-defined by the therapist or the model. As therapists, we may identify roles for the parts, such as manager, or firefighter, or exile, but the focus is not on the identification we impose, but rather on the clients own experience of parts of him or herself, and the relationship the client can build between his or her own core self and these parts. Through this relationship, when the core self leads, the parts often transform into more supportive roles within the dynamic system of the person's internal psyche. This flexible model makes room for parts to be seen as the expression of the client's creative imagination coping with and relating to the experiences of life.

Therapists using the IFS model, including its creator, Richard C. Schwartz, Ph.D. have experienced that clients have a Self, true self, or, in the language of this article, core self. (Schwartz, 2001, pp. 31-35). The IFS model then posits that this core self is present in all people, and that it is fundamentally loving and wise. In many ways, it is similar to the witness consciousness of certain spiritual and meditative traditions. (Schwartz, 2001, pp. 36-41). However, unlike the witness consciousness, the core self does more than just observe. It can actively engage with parts, and lead the system of parts that make up our personality into new ways of responding to our experience. This phenomenon is called self-leadership, and one goal of IFS therapy is to assist the client in self-leadership.

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Since the core self has, intrinsically, the love and wisdom appropriate to the individual, there is no need to build a self, or to heal the core self. The job, rather, is to assist the client in separating the core self from parts which are close enough to it to be obscuring it or distorting its expression. In some cases, it is also important to help the client bring the core self forward as a leader. The goal is a balanced system in which the core self can relate to each part without other parts interfering, and can mediate among parts with different positions, and can grow to lead each part and all parts in our lives effectively.

One way of assisting clients is by using the IFS Room Meditation, briefly described here. The therapist asks the client to write down thoughts or voices that come up in relationship to a particular issue, and then circle each one. These are then seen as initial names or identifying tags for parts which come up in relation to this issue. The therapist then asks the client to picture a room or other environment, and to be present and calm in that room. The therapist then helps the client explore that self, seeking to identify and remove any parts, so that the client's self-image in the room is the core self, expressing wisdom and love. The therapist guides the client into meeting with one part at a time, and guiding other parts to wait in comfortable places. This allows the client's core self to relate to, and establish healthy relationship with, each part. Parts often transform, taking a healthier role in the constellation of relationships that form personality.

This is merely a brief summary of the format and process of the room meditation. There are many elements not described here, including elements that provide safety for both client and therapist. Some of these elements are unique to this format, and others, such as methods for guiding the client into and out of meditative states, are common to many forms of experiential therapy. Therefore, this article, itself, is not a guide in how to perform the room meditation.

The room meditation creates an enriched inner environment through visualization. This can allow some clients to picture their parts more clearly than is the case of using IFS therapy to engage discussion between parts without creating images of rooms, walls, doors, and windows that establish boundaries between parts within the imagery. For example, if a part is asked to step back, it may step forward again unexpectedly. If it asks to, and agrees to, go to a room by itself for a while and enjoy some activity while the core self speaks with another part, this can reinforce the boundary and strengthen the experience that the part is not present while the core self works with another part. Working with this imagery actively, by opening and closing doors, for example, reinforces the sense of clear and appropriate boundaries through the use of inner symbolism.

In doing this work, the therapist is most effective if acting from his or her own core self, and managing any parts which arise in the therapist without allowing them to interfere with the client's process. The therapist may or may not appear as a figure in the room with the client's core self. It is important to note that I have my primary training in Hakomi therapy, so that leading the client into mindfulness is brought to the fore when working with patients, and also that I believe that the unconditional quality of my own regard for the client is of paramount importance.

Richard C. Schwartz, author of the Internal Family Systems Model says, "As our parts feel more accepted and less threatened or attacked, they transform – once we kiss them, our frogs become princes" (Schwartz, 2001, p. 14). He also quotes the poet Ranier Marie Rilke, "Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are princesses only waiting to see us once beautiful and brave" (Schwartz, 2001, p. 17).

This article hopes to help move such thought from the realm of the metaphorical and poetic into the realm of the client's own actual experience.

In all cases, the clients' names are changed, and references to the clients' outer life are kept minimal and generalized to protect confidentiality. The sessions recorded here took place between the years 1994 – 2001, inclusive.

THE CASES

These three cases are illustrative of encounters with nonhuman client parts in the IFS room meditation.

Insects to Angels

The client, Max, was a professional musician seeking greater self-awareness who worked with me for about half a dozen sessions. In all our sessions using the Room Meditation, the client described parts that were initially somewhat like insects. They were the size of children or adults, but had hard shells and came in various colors. They were usually thin and long. Some of them would not, or could not speak, or hear. Others appeared frightened or withdrawn.

Max cleared his core self before meeting with each part individually. When he met with the part, his attention began with curiosity, but moved into expressions of love. His favorite expression of love was to cultivate a light within the heart of his own core self, and then send that light into the heart of the insect-like part. When he

did this, each insect began to glow in its own color, different from the color of Max's own core self. As it glowed, the part sometimes grew in size, and always grew wings and flew. Along with the physical transformation, the part expressed a new role and attitude. The parts were less withdrawn, clearer and stronger. They were able to express themselves to Max's core self, either through light or movement, or telepathic transmission of ideas. They could relate to issues and to real world situations more realistically than they had been able to before. Parallel with these changes in parts, Max was able to make certain definitive decisions about his living situation and relationships that had been uncertain to him at the beginning of the therapy period. As a therapist, I observed these transformations from my own core self. I found myself in awe of the power and speed of the transformation of Max's parts. Each recognized within itself a power, love, which had been lacking in the initial insect, but which then expressed itself through the unique form of that insect, turned angel.

Pets And Power Animals

Telephone sessions with Harry had interesting elements related to nonhuman parts. In one, as he described the situation he wanted to address, one of the parts which came forth was a protective, ugly bulldog. The bulldog was internalized from a pet he had had as a child. In interactions with other parts, the bulldog was initially an uncompromising protector in relation to other parts, but also would not stand down from its role as a guard. During the IFS Room Meditation, we treated the bulldog as a part, just like any other part. At first, it insisted on remaining in the room with the child part it protected. Harry's core self befriended the dog, and the dog allowed Harry to ask the child to wait outside. Harry then spent time alone with the bulldog, and developed a closer relationship with him, the way any pet owner might befriend a dog, first radiating love from a distance, then a cautious approach leading to a good romp. Once the bulldog trusted Harry, Harry was able to spend time with the child protected by the bulldog. At first, the bulldog stood aside in the room, but later, seeing how Harry was with the child, the bulldog was willing to leave and let them spend time alone. Harry's perception of the bulldog went from one of seeing a dangerous attacker who wouldn't stop to seeing a helpful protector taking an appropriate role in helping him set boundaries in his life.

Discussions with Harry at the beginning of another session revealed that Harry was interested in the idea of power animals, and felt particularly drawn to lions. As a therapist, I asked Harry if he wanted to address parts of himself related to a particular issue he had identified, or if he wanted to spend time with the lion. He chose to spend time with the lion. We built a room meditation with himself and the lion just as we would with any other part. It did not matter if the lion was a power animal, separate from himself, or a part of himself. At first, he was scared of the lion's power. We identified scared parts of Harry and help Harry escort them out of the room, until only Harry's core self was with the lion. He was no longer afraid. He and the lion gazed at one another, sharing love through their eyes. He approached the lion, and realized that, to receive the lion's gift, he would have to come close enough to allow the lion to tear him apart, if it wanted to. He came close, and he and the lion held one another. Strength passed from the lion to Harry, and they exchanged lessons about being strong. Images of the willingness to risk death in order to gain strength evolved during the interaction. The lion appeared in an additional session, and Harry said he was learning to draw on the presence and power of the lion at other times.

As a therapist, my willingness to follow the client to the experience waiting to happen was key. Also, my own non-fear assisted Harry in finding a process he was comfortable with. It is possible that my own extensive meditation experiences with my own power animal, also a large cat, helped me be comfortable leading Harry into an intimate encounter with a powerful, and potentially dangerous, ally.

From Gargoyle To Girl

One other remarkable encounter related to a highly intellectual and literary woman named Susan, and involved an ongoing and evolving relationship with a part over a period of about six months. During this time, Susan had some IFS room meditation sessions, a number of Hakomi sessions, and experiences of relating to this part in ordinary life. The part first appeared as a gargoyle, stone, with a fierce expression. In the first session, we worked with both love and humor, radiating a light of love from Susan's core self and my own to the gargoyle, and also playing with words: gargoyle, Grrr-goil (anger, and a girl with a Brooklyn accent), heal the Grrr with love, goil, girl. The girl was an innocent blonde, very shy and scared, who turned herself into a gargoyle to protect herself in an unloving environment. Given love over a period of months by both Susan's own core self and also the therapist, the gargoyle transformed more and more into a girl, and into a girl with a wonderful creative spirit and artistic talent. For a time, the girl was a very distinct sub-personality who acted quite differently from Susan. Over time, however, the girl took her place as a part of Susan's life, most involved with Susan's colorful artwork and other creative projects.

THE THERAPIST'S ENCOUNTER WITH NONHUMAN PARTS

Encountering nonhuman parts was, needless to say, a surprise, though less perhaps, for myself than it would be for some other therapists. Long before my involvement with IFS, I had learned guided meditations similar to the path exercise (Schwartz, 2001, pp. 69-73) in which one travels with an animal, and had also received shamanic initiation experiences with a number of animal beings. In addition, I have studied Jungian archetypal images through both reading and meditation.

However, I do not believe that such experience is necessary to allow a therapist to effectively assist a client in interacting with nonhuman parts. I believe that a therapist can enable patients to relate well to nonhuman parts even if they are not part of his or her own inner experience. I believe this, in part, because of my encounter with Max and his bulldog. I do not like dogs, especially strong ones. Parts of me fear them; others dislike them intensely. Yet I was able to remain with my core self and support Max, and appreciate his own experience of his pet part.

Here are some of the key approaches that I have found useful in these encounters:

- Acknowledge the presence of animal and other nonhuman parts. Do not disregard or skip over them.

- Remember that the key qualities of the core self: love, humor, and wisdom, can be expressed nonverbally through eye contact, radiating light as love, and bodily motion.

- Follow the client's language and belief system closely. (See more on this below.)

- Do not impose beliefs or ideas about nonhuman parts. Just as it is a mistake to think all children are weak, it is a mistake to think all lions are strong. In the client's own imaginative self-perception, a child might represent creativity, and a lion, like the lion with the thorn in its paw in *Androcles and the Lion*, a wounded part in need of healing.

- Be sure to check for other parts attaching to the client's core self and relating to the nonhuman part, and help the client manage this appropriately.

- If you are not sure how to proceed, ask the client's core self. For example, if you don't know how to love an insect, then ask the client, "Do you want to send love to this being?" When the client says, "yes," ask, "How would you do that?"

Remaining clear within our own core self and having a deep respect for the client's imagination and its role in both the process of coping with life and in the healing process, we can facilitate clients improving their relationship with all of their parts. This allows those parts to reveal their gifts not only in the therapy session, but, more importantly, in the client's life.

THE ABILITY TO RELATE TO NONHUMAN PARTS

Trusting The Client's Core Self

There have been times when I have been genuinely uncertain how to proceed in a session. How do you ask an insect how it is feeling? How do you love an angry bulldog? What I have found from experience is that the client's core self does know. This is really not so surprising. Each of us has parts which are uniquely our own. Schwartz writes, "The most amazing thing of all was that, once in that Self state, clients seemed to know just what to do or say to help each inner personality." (2001, p. 40) For example, I may know how to talk to my inner critic, but not know how to talk to your perfectionist. Your perfectionist is part of you, and therefore, your own core self, the natural leader of the system which is you, knows how to relate to your perfectionist. The difference may be greater when the parts are not human, particularly if they lack language. However, I have found consistently that a person's own core self knows how to communicate respect and love, and any other needed quality, to each of his or her own parts. The client's core self also knows how to receive feelings and communication from that part, and communicate with it. I strongly encourage the therapist to maintain a deeply respectful attitude towards the client. Often, what the client discovers about how to communicate to particular parts may be of value, along with the communication itself.

As a hypothetical example, if a client has a nonhuman part that does not speak, he or she might learn to send it love through an image of radiated light. That works for this client's core self, and for the client, as well. Thus the client may then find that sending love through radiated light to an image of a real person in his or her life in meditation may help that client relate more effectively to that person.

Our fundamental role, then, appears to be the same as it is in any IFS therapy work. If we remain in our core self, open, curious, respectful, trusting, and loving, we allow the client to discover leadership capacity within the core self which is appropriate to his or her own life. Any specific detail, such as whether you should remain in the room with the client, should be left to the client's

own wisdom. The combination of respect and curiosity will show us how to ask the question.

Although allowing the client to lead is primary, it is also important that we are open to our own intuition. The client and we are unifying as a system during the therapeutic time. The wisdom of the system is greater than the sum of its parts, and our own core self may be open to intuitions about the process which can most easily come through us and which can be offered to the client as options.

THE ROLE OF THE ROOM MEDITATION

The use of the room meditation may have two or three key components that are significant in relation to the encounter with nonhuman parts in particular. The first is that the room, itself, is a nonhuman part. Walls, doors, and windows are not human, and are expressions of the client's inner psychic structure. We generally don't think of these imagistic embodiments of relations (walls for separation, etc.) as parts, but they do express either parts of our system, or relations among those parts. Second, in using imagery of rooms, I suspect we strengthen the imaging of the physical bodies of the parts. Both in our outer lives and in our inner lives, when we just talk to parts, we are not particularly aware of their bodies, or ours. When we hold a door open for someone, or see them close a door, we notice bodies--theirs and ours. It may be that this noticing of bodies makes it easier to notice the nonhuman parts, in that their nonhuman qualities lie in the shape and color of their embodiment.

The third element is that one can elaborate the physical environment to introduce other nonhuman parts. Recently, in order to do a bit of deep healing work, I created an IFS room meditation environment that included a room and an extensive garden full of living plants and attended by angels. In my core self, I deeply cared about several wounded parts of myself that were unwilling to separate from each other much of the time. In this environment, I was able to walk with each part to a beautiful, healing place, and to know that that part of me was watched by a guardian angel while I spent time with another part. I was able to help several parts of me grow and transform. In addition, the experience of not having to do it all myself, of having help and support from deeper dimensions of myself and of reality (represented by the angels, and by the garden itself) allowed me to relax and heal.

Identifying And Relating To Nonhuman Parts

Nonhuman parts, like all our parts, arise in our inner life, created from, and as a response to, our life experience. It is easy to see how a faithful pet can be internalized as a protector. It was not too surprising to me that Max, a sensitive-analytic artist, peered at parts of himself and saw them as curious insects. But rather than analyze the client or the parts, I believe it is best to respect and appreciate the role of the client's creativity in coping with life, and then help the core self bring that creativity forth in a new way, opening a door to transformation.

Some therapists may have encountered nonhuman parts in themselves or clients and not realized it. In other cases, the therapist recognizes the nonhuman part as such in practice, but perhaps not clearly in thinking. For example, Richard C. Schwartz illustrates the process of the client's Self as relating to individual parts with a client named Patricia. (Schwartz, 2001, pp. 83-90). The session is a fairly typical IFS session, with the therapist helping the client distinguish parts and asking them to step aside. This continues without surprises until Patricia's core self sees the part she wishes to address clearly without anger. At that point, she describes the part as "a little bit like a dog. A dog that hasn't been fed for a long time that wants to move toward a person that's offering it food, but it's afraid because it has been beaten too many times."

The therapist guides the interaction using the term "it," not distinguishing the part as a dog. As the dialog continues, the therapist uses the term "it" and "part," but, in the partial transcription, never the term "dog." The client tends to follow the therapist's lead, and rarely refers to the part as a dog. Most of the client's interactions are not described as what one would do exclusively with a dog, as opposed to the more general terms, such as "reassure it," which one would do with any part, human or nonhuman.

In summing up the case, Schwartz says, "As I hope is clear from the transcript, I encourage people to work with their parts as if they were inner people."

In terms of this article, I think that this case study from Schwartz illustrates two key points. First of all, it is possible to work with nonhuman parts much as we work with human parts. The key points of the client's and therapist's relationships to parts are the same whether or not they are human.

The second point, though, is that it is possible to work with nonhuman parts and not even realize it. Schwartz, in this case, was not encouraging the client to work with the part as an inner person. He was encouraging the client to work with the part as an inner dog.

I would suggest that our willingness to embrace the specificity and uniqueness of the client's experience might enable the client to relate more comfortably and

more deeply with his or her unique parts. Certainly, if a part is male or female, it helps to say "he" or "she" rather than "it." This encourages the client to treat the inner parts, which are in the form of people as inner people. We also like to encourage age-appropriate language and activities in relation to inner parts. Just so, I suggest we also recognize nonhuman parts as nonhuman, use appropriate language and ways of relating to them, and recognize their uniqueness, which is an expression of the client's own creativity.

If we look closely, the border between nonhuman and human is a bit vague. Is a Buck Rogers part human? Certainly, the part has no supernatural powers; but it is based on a fictional, rather than human, source. What about a superman or supergirl part? Here, the bodily form is human, but the abilities are not. And even the parts most nonhuman in appearance have many of the key characteristics of people: the ability to feel, the ability to be transformed by love, and, in most cases, the ability to communicate in language, or in some other form which can be interpreted into the client's spoken language.

INSIDE OR OUTSIDE?

In working with client's nonhuman parts, it is very important to respect the client's perspective on the issue of whether these parts are part of the client, or external allies or companions the client relates to. Normally, we view parts as internal when they appear in a client's meditation or inner experience, and we apply the term external to members of the client's family, friends and associates in the normal world. Working with nonhuman parts can bring in another dimension to the question of internal or external. Inside the imaginal realm, it can be important to define aspects that are internal to the self, and those that are external.

For example, one client might believe in and work with a higher self or witness consciousness that the client views as part of herself or himself. It operates by being in the room with the client, shining light, and perhaps offering guidance. For this person, the higher self or witness consciousness is part of himself or herself. Another client might say that he or she has a spiritual guide, or perhaps a patron saint. In the room meditation, the spiritual guide is likely to take a role similar to that of the higher self or witness. However, it can be crucial to the client's belief system that the spiritual guide or patron saint is another being, outside the client's self. We can affirm the client's experience in terms acceptable to the client, such as, "Your higher self is part of who you are, and is welcome in the room," or "It's fine to have your angel with you."

In my opinion, the client's own view on this issue should always be respected. In the room meditation, and in the healing process in general, what matters are the interactions among the parts present, not their technical status as internal or external. If a part is present, sending light and love, it strengthens the experience. It does not matter if the client views that part as internal or external, and raising the issue is more likely to interfere than to help.

The same applies to power animals. For example, we might be drawn towards analyzing a dragon part and seeing that the dragon is the client's own creativity. However, we should respect the client's view of the role of the ally, or power animal, in his or her own consciousness.

Of course, if a client begins to question this relationship, we can support that exploration. In doing so, I suggest that the client's own wisdom is a better guide than our own ideas, or than any model or theory we might have learned.

SAFELY WORKING WITH NONHUMAN PARTS

As therapists, we are all aware that there are risks in the therapy process, both for client and for therapist. This may be especially true when the therapeutic process induces altered states of consciousness, as the IFS room meditation has the capacity to do. (Indeed, it might be argued that the therapist's own preparation for an IFS session, in clearing the way for the core self to lead the session, is an introduction of an altered state of consciousness.) In any case, it is clear that both therapist and client sometimes have experiences of parts with enormous power, and sometimes deal with rapid transformation and unfamiliar experiences.

The basic situation in the case of nonhuman parts is not substantially different than a situation involving human parts. Whatever methods the therapist uses to manage a session apply to a session in which nonhuman parts participate. For example, a nonhuman part may be an exile, a manager, or a firefighter, and can be recognized as such. In the case studies above, the bulldog was a manager. The gargoyle was a manager with an exile hidden inside. The insects were exiles. I can't recall meeting a nonhuman firefighter, but I expect some people have them. I believe that, in working with nonhuman parts, you can expect that the basic concepts of IFS are as likely to work as they are with human parts. If the bulldog is a manager, then it is likely that it is both protecting and exiling some other part. It also probably would enjoy a chance to stand down and have a good romp. If the insect is an exile, it will probably respond well to love, if it feels it can trust that love and its source. In my experience, the relationships, and the

potential for transformational change, are the same with nonhuman parts as they are with human parts.

However, it may be that some nonhuman parts are particularly powerful parts, or raise strong reactions in other parts (of the client or therapist). It may also be that the forms of communication that one uses at times with nonhuman parts, such as radiating light and love, or communicating telepathically, are unfamiliar, and produce psychological or physiological changes in the client. An example of a physiological change would be a heightened sensitivity to light or sound.

As a result, in each session, a bit more caution than usual regarding a sense of balance and safety may be called for. One particularly useful tool is to help the client be aware of, and feel, his or her own body in its real physical surroundings. It is certainly good to do this at the end of a session, after the room meditation is closed. One might close the room meditation and complete other aspects of closure about five minutes before the end of the session, then spend some time asking the client to feel his or her body kinesthetically and to engage in a tactile activity, such as rubbing the arm of a chair or the leg of his or her pants, noting the texture. After these activities, it can be good to check the client's orientation, clarity, and mood. The discovery of our own multiplicity can be disquieting, even leading us to ask if it is some kind of psychological disorder such as Multiple Personality Disorder (Schwartz, 2001, pp. 22-23). The same is true also of the discovery that parts of us appear in nonhuman form. Some clients may be concerned about schizophrenia or delusional disorders, and others about demonic possession. It is important to address such concerns respectfully and help the client normalize the experience. Among the case studies, this was particularly true for Susan with her gargoyle-girl, as this part tended to appear in her daily life, as well as in healing sessions. As therapists, we are in a role that allows us to affirm the client's basic health and stability. We also have a number of tools that can assist the client in developing clear boundaries and healthy relationships with parts. If we are comfortable with nonhuman parts, it is easier to create ways of applying these tools to the client's relationship with them. Therefore, it is valuable for the therapist to be familiar with the possible sources of images for nonhuman parts.

SOURCES OF IMAGERY

The most important source of imagery that may bring forth nonhuman parts is the client's own inner life. For the most part, I have worked with nonhuman parts because they arose in the client's own imagery during discussion of an issue or during the IFS room meditation itself. Of course, if one discusses a client's dreams, then nonhuman parts may be discovered in dream imagery. This is true whether one works with a traditional therapeutic recounting of dreams, with lucid dreaming, or with a method such as Arthur Mindell's Working With the Dreaming Body.

There are also other sources of imagery and meditation processes and which can bring forth nonhuman parts. These are perhaps particularly valuable to therapists who wish to become more comfortable with nonhuman parts through study or experiential work. They can also be exciting and enriching components of workshops.

SYSTEMS OF IMAGERY

There are many mythological, folkloric, and other systems of imagery that could give rise to material that would help discover or evoke nonhuman parts. One that I have worked with extensively is the Tarot. The Tarot imagery includes twenty-two images called the Major Arcana. These figures are considered by some to be the essential archetypes of our consciousness, the eternal aspect of the collective unconscious through which the full radiant power, love, truth, and beauty of the Universe radiate into our consciousness, and, through it, into the world. Some systems link the Major Arcana to the bodily chakras (energy centers), to astrological symbols, and to other mythological systems. A meeting with one of the Major Arcana within oneself can be a powerful experience of guidance. For those who are interested, many such meditations can be found in John Randolph Price's *The Angels Within Us* (1993).

Another system of imagery comes from indigenous and shamanic traditions. It is the notion of a power animal, or ally. The notion is that each of us has one or more guides from nonhuman realms that support, teach, and guide us. Power animals may be not only mammals and birds, but also insects, reptiles, and mythical creatures. The simplest way to discover a power animal is to ask someone if there is some animal that they particularly like. Perhaps they have only seen it in pictures or read about it in stories, or dreamed about it, or perhaps a combination of all of these. Perhaps they have seen them in daily life. In any case, if the person has experienced an interest in, or an admiration of, or a curiosity about, a particular creature since childhood or over a period of years, that creature may be an ally. Its appearance in the person's external life would be an example of what Jung called synchronicity. A guided imagery meditation introducing the core self to that ally can be a powerful, revealing, and nourishing experience.

One other system of imagery is worth mentioning here because of a particular concept that is relevant to the therapeutic experience. It is important to realize that our parts affect more than just our inner lives and our

emotional relationships. They also affect our physical health, both directly and indirectly. Schwartz (2001) recognizes, for example, that people operating from strong pessimistic managers can be inclined towards depression. And, as we know, depression has a number of physiochemical indicators as well as psychological ones. An example of parts that affect physical health indirectly can be found in those cases where individual's parts affect their eating and exercise habits, either for ill or for good. I suggest that it is very important to recognize this psychophysical link. One system of self-awareness that does this is *The Way of the Peaceful Warrior*, developed by Dan Millman (1992). In a model that he developed from the Hawaiian Kahuna tradition, he proposes a Higher Self, a Conscious Self, and a Basic Self. The Higher Self has the role of the Witness. The Conscious self is similar to the core self and most parts in IFS, and, as we work to transform it, becomes more like the core self, leading other parts. The basic self has some similarities to the Inner Child in other psychological literature, but some important differences as well. The Basic Self has childlike qualities, but also has qualities of an animal as well. It includes our body-consciousness, and is potentially strong and vigorous. It exerts a strong psychosomatic influence over physical health. It also can be stubborn, determined, and unresponsive in ways that can lead to difficulties such as addiction. If supported and befriended, it becomes a vigorous ally, increasing the power of our immune system, our vitality, and our general health. This model has the value of bringing forth the deep interactions between body and mind, illustrating how work with parts, including nonhuman parts, can affect our physical health, and how changes in our physical health can, in turn, support psychological health and clarity in a mutually reinforcing spiral towards health and clarity.

PROCESSES FOR MEETING NONHUMAN PARTS

A simple way to meet a nonhuman part is to follow the path exercise (Schwartz, 2001, pp. 69-70) and add an additional element. After your core self is alone, allow it to meet an animal or creature on the path. It is useful if the interaction has these stages: noticing, greeting, sharing, thanking, and departing. At each point during the exercise, you may stop and notice if you are responding with curiosity, wisdom, and love. If not, identify the part that is present, and ask it to step aside. You can also carry the exercise only as far as feels comfortable, noticing without greeting, or sharing without touching may, in fact, be what feels comfortable. Some of these elements that expand the path exercise are found in Bartholomew (1989, p. 114, 1987, pp. 113-138).

Once you are comfortable with an ally, you may ask it to lead you or carry you to somewhere, someone or something else. Personally, I have developed a path journey, which takes me first to a safe place (in a cave underground) where I rest and become clear. From there, I journey to a new land, where I meet an ally, and then go on to visit a guide or Archetypal figure. At times I go with no particular agenda, and at times, I go to work on and request help with a particular problem.

One particularly valuable set of resources for relating to allies, nonhuman guides, and archetypal figures through meditation, imagery, and art are books by Bartholomew, most particularly, *From the Heart of a Gentle Brother* (1987).

Just as we can develop healthy relationships with human parts, and have them function in certain parts of our lives (Schwartz, 2001), we can do the same with nonhuman parts. About four years ago, I met a new power animal in a dream. Over the last four years, I have gotten to know it better, developed a much more intimate relationship, and learned from its power and wisdom. I have used all of the techniques described here, plus journal work and creative writing, along with study and research, as ways of connecting with my ally. I have healed numerous exiled parts with the help of this ally. I have also learned to live more and more consistently in the present moment, aware, alive, and led by my core self. I still have a very long way to go (just ask my wife, or my friends). But I know that the practice of being loving and clear in my imagination has helped me do the same in my daily life.

THE VALUE OF NONHUMAN PARTS

Overall, I have found that helping a client develop a rich relationship with nonhuman parts, and helping those parts transform and heal, is not substantially different from doing the same with human parts. Doing it, however, may require a deepening of our own qualities of being nonjudgmental and accepting. As therapists, we have more experience dealing with hurt, or even threatening, human parts than we do with wounded animals or strange insects. I don't think we need to go out and take classes in veterinary medicine and entomology, but it can help to read fantasy and esoteric spiritual texts, explore folk tales from Native American or other shamanic traditions, and cultivate a joy in the unexpected and a sense of humor.

I have not found any particular dangers in working with nonhuman parts. However, it should be noted that encounters with angelic figures and power animals, and, in general, the use of the image of radiant light as love, has a powerful effect on both the body and mind of both the therapist and client. Appropriate time and means of

closing the session and reorienting both the client and ourselves to daily life are appropriate, and one may find that this takes a bit longer, and should be done with a bit more care than usual, as also during the session.

This extra effort at acceptance, and this willingness to spend time with these powerful beings, is highly rewarding for both client and therapist. We, as human beings, are both animal and angel. Exploring our animal parts and improving our relationship with them can increase our physical vitality, health, and balance. Encountering angelic and spiritual beings allows us to spend time in states of consciousness that have a purity of love, truth, and beauty not generally found on Earth. As we integrate those parts and their powers, we find ourselves more able to be unconditionally loving; able to serve and lead and love without fear in daily life.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation to Greg Johanson, Ph.D., for guidance, mentoring, and support, and to Richard C. Schwartz, Ph.D. and Steven M. Kemp, Ph.D. for encouragement. I also wish to express appreciation to my wife, Kristen H. Lindbeck, Ph.D., for intelligent critique and assistance, and to my clients, from whom I have learned and continue to learn a tremendous amount regarding the creative and imaginative ways in which we manage in life, and also grow and heal.

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