



Getting to Know Saddama

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I recently attended Miriam Droor's five-day workshop on core energetics, held at the Karuna Institute. The group was co-led with Carey Morning from Brooklyn, New York. They have both just finished a four-year training with John Pierrakos, who co-founded the work with Dr Alexander Lowen of Bioenergetic Analysis. There were nine of us in the

group, including some who were training with Karuna in the core process work that is compatible with Pierrakos's formulation.

Miriam did not waste any time. We started immediately with looking at one of the main features of the work — the concept of the mask. We took time to experience in ourselves the masks that

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we present in everyday life. When we had done this, we introduced ourselves to one another by describing our mask. We also drew our masks and showed them to the group. We shared with the group what we had experienced underneath the mask — this proved to be very revealing. The parts of ourselves that we do not want to reveal and hide away were already seeping through the cracks in the mask. I went for my tea break with a cracked mask and seeping edges, wondering what we could possibly fill our time with for the rest of the week.

We went on to discover our lower self, and Miriam explained that inside the mask is a negative judgement about the world. We asked ourselves, "What is the picture that I hold of the world to make me put up this mask?" I enjoyed this. I drew my very wonderful, outraged and brutal self, capable of murder and carnage, then jumped up and down on the picture and thoroughly destroyed it. I received a lot of praise for the passion in the 'Ms Saddama Hussein' lower self who I usually keep under wraps (or at any rate try to) because she is so ugly and destructive. This was very energising for me, as it seemed to be for most of the group. Carey and Miriam were highly skilled at encouraging and supporting individuals in the exposure of the bits we'd rather leave behind.

We finished the day by presenting ourselves from the higher self, being or spiritual part of the self. Many hearts were broken open during this session — including my own. I found it very difficult to take the time to present the being part of myself, and to admit that there is an angel in me somewhere just dying to be

seen. It's hard to have an angel inside when she's battling with a Ms Saddama Hussein who has little time for such airy-fairy notions. But with skill and encouragement I got there: I allowed myself to be seen, and to let in just a little of the love that I need and usually block out with the mask. I went to bed in a stupor — would I last the rest of the week?

During day two we did a lot of talking about the links between the higher, lower and mask self. We were introduced to the concept of the core, which was familiar to those of us studying core process psychotherapy. In core process we see the core state as a flowing sense of beingness, the unconditioned part of ourselves, containing the qualities of compassion, equanimity, loving kindness and sympathetic joy. The Pierrakos version of core is the same, but he refers to it in more physical terms such as 'pulsating', 'light' and 'movement'. The core is seen as the source of energetic movement and creativity.

We then went on to look at the development of the human being from conception to maturity, presented by Carey. She painted the ideal picture for us — what we would be like if we had a perfect upbringing in a perfect world. It provoked a lot of feeling, particularly from the mothers in the group, for whom child development was a very real and present experience.

Seeing the possibilities during childhood for healthy development helped us to see how this organic progression can be stopped by inappropriate parenting, insensitive handling, or life-threatening situations. This part of the work we called the wound. It is the wound around which

we build the mask in order to survive life. Believing that we have to move off in a certain direction to survive, we remain stuck in that direction, and form our persona around it. It never occurs to the self-protective mechanism within us to look and see if it is safe to come out now, or to shake loose from the tension of the original wound.

Carey and Miriam illustrated this to us by an exercise. The whole group went for a moonlit walk on the moor. It was full moon, cold and very beautiful. We were encouraged to look at the world with wonder, through the eyes of a child, which we did with relish, dancing off in different directions and enjoying our freedom. We returned home to a set of picture projections accompanied by music — images of conception, gestation, birth, life and death, together with some serious and obvious wounds — war, famine, violence. These things were hard to encounter, especially with the eyes of a child. Having been promised creation and limitlessness, we were now crushed, bound and insulted. I felt miserable.

Usually I turn away from images of war and violence because they are too much to bear. Something, though, held me to watch these, even though I found it painful. Many people in the group even spoke of feeling safe around these images — some sense of the divinity and healing behind the wound.

Day three arrived. I felt dreadful, and was only comforted because everyone else in the group was feeling pretty much the same. I was being thrown around by my mask; my lower self wanted to throw everyone else around, while my higher self was definitely out to lunch and uncooperative — life seemed impossible. We did some clearing work (mainly cathartic in my case). This was a chance for Saddam Hussein to control the group and blame everyone else because she was feeling terrible and it wasn't her fault. I was full of dread. Who really wants to unwind years and years of holding on anyway? I'd managed to survive up to now. Part of me decided to hold on really tight to who I thought I was, while the other part giggled and trickled and enjoyed some





freedom, gained from the energetic movements inside. This was all probably triggered by the exercise from the night before.

Miriam encouraged me to go for blaming in a big way, because I usually blame others but keep it secretly inside. The group gave me encouragement too. Lawrence let me blame him for ruining my breakfast because he had cooked the porridge with an added secret ingredient of banana. I do not like bananas. I especially do not like them in porridge. This creative culinary act had ruined my whole morning — it had probably jeopardised my future. Lawrence tried not to snigger while I screamed, raved and cursed the bananas in the porridge. The blame turned into rage, then hysterical laughter, and then back to blame. Sadama certainly had her day. The rest of the group joined in the fun by jumping up and down in pairs and letting out deep belly roars. At one point I thought we looked like gorillas at the zoo, but maybe this was just continuing the theme of the

banana. The group had a good laugh, and then we settled down for some more serious learning.

We went on to look at character structures, another part of the framework of core energetics. In core process we use the Hakomi framework model of body structures. This is the structure, created around the wound, that becomes our mould, formalised self or personality. For anyone who is interested in this subject I would suggest reading *Body Centered Psychotherapy: The Hakomi Method* by Ron Kurtz, for a more detailed look. Essentially these structures can be categorised as oral, psychopathic, narcissistic, masochistic and schizoid. We all contain elements of these types, but there will often be one uppermost in the personality. The model provides a good entry to the core — an open window. We look at the body and ask, "What structure have they formed in order to protect themselves?"

Miriam's method of teaching us all this was to describe the image of the structure and then to ask us to become it. For example, the schizoid person may be thin and feel a long way from the ground. She or he would have little contact with the earth, have a mask-like face and shallow breathing. Some of us fell about with the effort, while for others it was no effort at all. Once we had become the schizoid structure we talked about the qualities that we felt within this structure — both positive and otherwise.

We spent two days on the structures. There was a lot to look at, but we loved it and wanted more (we were generally an oral group). We looked at the muscle-bound masochistic structure, the needy

oral fixation and the tough, held-in, highly-charged psychopath. It was fascinating to journey through these types, become them and acknowledge them in ourselves.

On our fifth day we worked with the body, in pairs, noticing each other's breathing. Where was she holding; where was she not breathing? From this we moved onto noticing the body. Where was it collapsed; where was it bound; where was it occupied? We were encouraged to imagine healing for our client, to visualise the energy moving through the body, and also to touch and hold and receive the client as much as possible. I liked being encouraged to visualise for the client, and felt very occupied with this aspect of the work. I was using all of myself — my body and mind, Saddama Hussein (who became passionate instead of angry), and the angel (who is more of a goddess than a fairy). This was while I was the therapist — imagine the space I took up as a client!

One thing Miriam offered us that I very much enjoyed was the possibility of prayer. She said, "If there is something you are grappling with or working with, then why not offer it up as a prayer?" I had always wanted permission to do this, and until now had kept the part of me which prayed and knew prayer a secret (Saddama didn't like it). One thing that

praying does is to give the mind a breather from trying so hard. We can pray for help and let healing take place of its own accord (assuming that you can believe in a place of healing). I liked this.

We had to end. We spent some time winding up the group, negotiating the whole thing with grace and a lot of humour. Carey led us out with a visualisation and meditation, during which we travelled to someone who had been waiting for us for a long time. I assume that this person was the core self. My core self quickly passed me a gift, the space and time to unfold — a truly precious gift. We ended by sharing these experiences in the group.

It took me several weeks to integrate the experience of this group and assimilate all that I had learned. I spent two weeks coughing and spluttering continuously. I felt that this was a continuation of some of the releasing and healing that took place during the group. I do hope that I have managed to capture some of this learning and passed it on through this account.

I understand that Miriam may return next year to teach again, and I would definitely recommend a look at core energetics as a possible tool for your therapeutic practice. Carey is now living in Scotland, where she will also be teaching and working.

For more on core process work, see Laura Donington's review article on page 35 of this issue.