

# **The Primal Voice of the ‘Shadow’**

## **Introduction**

It was some two years ago that I became aware of the world of voice for the first time - a rich experiential domain and sphere of research that I have been developing in my personal and professional life ever since.

The unique Sesame M.A. programme and the in-depth study of Jung’s archetypal psychological theory, coupled with the realm of metaphor and mythology, enticed me to explore my own voice from a new and totally different angle. My experiences generated new insights regarding voice, particularly in relation to new unconscious contents it helps to reveal and process. The world of the ‘shadow’ and of its voice became a challenging and extensive field of study and made me wish to develop its implications further: to get to know its components, to identify its nuances, its qualities, and also its flaws. My work as dramatherapist enables me to learn a great deal about the ways different clients relate to integrating voice within the therapeutic process: Some of them use it as a creative and versatile means of expressing their emotions, while others sometimes relate to it with suspicion and embarrassment.

I hope that this article will demonstrate the distinct merits of working with the voice, turning it into a powerful therapeutic tool, and will show how it may enable rich expression of the clients’ emotional needs. First the article will present the theoretical background of the ‘shadow’ according to Jung and then describe the ways the voice can be elicited. The main part of the article focuses on a case study, describing my use of voice during the last two years while working within the framework of dramatherapy with an eleven-year-old girl, the daughter of immigrants from Iraq. I conclude the article on a personal note, explaining my perceptions of the use of voice in the Sesame approach.

## **The ‘shadow’**

Pikes (1999:54) quotes Jung, who asserted: “The shadow is the thing a person has no wish to be” (Jung, 1946:470). Stevens spoke about how important it is for us to be aware of the ‘shadow’ within our personality and to express it. He wrote:

“Without some acknowledgment of the devil within us, individuation cannot proceed: coming to terms with one’s own evil is the first...stage in realization of the self. True morality requires that the shadow achieve consciousness, because on that condition alone can an individual become responsible for the events of his life” (Stevens, 1982:241).

### **Giving the ‘shadow’ a voice**

Jung identified the potential within us to give the ‘shadow’ a voice. Newham (1992:324) describes a case study by Jung, in which a young girl declared she heard voices of the dead. When he observed her during a séance, Jung was amazed at the way she used different accents to represent the figures she encountered (Jung, 1902: 3-50).

While Jung’s direct contribution to research of the voice was limited, it was Alfred Wolfsohn, who focused on the way the human voice is able to give expression to the ‘shadow’. During the battles of the First World War, Wolfsohn experienced their horror at close range. He heard the screams of his wounded friends, their groans, their shrieks of terror. Later he called them “voice in extremis”. At the end of the war, Wolfson was diagnosed as suffering from shellshock, manifested in aural hallucinations. He believed that if he were to succeed in voicing the cries that were haunting him, he would be able to stop them (1992:325-6). He saw in Jung’s psychological conception the basis for his research of voice. However, while “Jung observed the way psychological images are expressed pictorially and linguistically, Wolfsohn was concerned with the expression of these images phonically, through voice without words” (Newham, 1992:329).

Wolfsohn believed that, if the voice really expresses “the true nature of the psyche in its entirety”, it has the need to shout, to scream, to sob, and to express the ancient needs concealed in the ‘shadow’.

Roy Hart, Wolfsohn’s disciple, who founded an approach to the theatre based on his principles, described the way the voice helped him express the contradictions within his personality, when he told about his life:

“I’m a South African Jew. But it has been necessary for me to find even Adolf Hitler, a South African negro, a South African white man, and beside all the good, all the evil of the world in myself...realizing that the

relation between the aggressor and victim is in myself” (Pikes, 1999:84-85).

Professionals, dealing with voice and aware of its archetypal significance, sometimes choose to work with voice devoid of verbal content. They believe that language is a secondary process that developed in the course of time and reduced the emotional repertoire, displayed by the voice in ancient times. Pikes (1994:10), similarly to Wolfsohn, believed that work with voice should not be verbal, and that it was important to produce the sound not from the head nor from the larynx, but from within the whole body, experiencing it the way our ancestors did. Armstrong also assists the participants in her workshops to experience the power of tribal non-verbal chants, issuing from the body as it moves. She believes that this helps not only to create a collective identity in the group, but also to express ancient components within our personality (workshop with Frankie Armstrong, Wales, July, 2006).

### **Case Study: Jemma**

#### Background:

Jemma (fictitious name) is an eleven-year-old girl, studying in a regular junior school. Her traditional Iraqi family immigrated to England several years ago. She was referred to me for dramatherapy almost two years ago. She suffered from social and behavioural problems in class and outside, including getting into physical clashes with other children at school, leading to social ostracism.

#### The first stage:

We worked together for some eight months, during which Jemma demonstrated great vocal energy and bravely examined the main themes in her life, in particular the possibility to express emotions such as anger and envy, while at the same time remaining loved and included. She rarely expressed her emotions verbally, but gradually, as her self-confidence grew, and as she was exposed to creative possibilities through our work, she learnt to channel the creative devices I provided to meeting her needs through play, movement and drama. However, it was her openness to the use of voice that was particularly noteworthy: She expressed herself spontaneously and freely, and knew how to channel the emotions that surfaced during the treatment into rich, unique physical and vocal expression. The nonverbal sounds issued from her, expressing a wealth of images, figures, sensations and channels of communication. These sounds expressed, for instance, anger and aggressiveness,

cunning and laughter, the need for control or for closeness and affection. The sense of relief Jemma expressed through dramatherapy, sensing that there was someone attentive to her needs, helped to stabilize and calm her state at school. Gradually, her relations with the children improved and she appeared calmer in the classroom. In view of the positive change, it was decided she no longer needed treatment. It later transpired that this step had been premature.

#### Regression:

About four months after the end of the first period of dramatherapy, the school principal turned to me and reported a serious regression in Jemma's behaviour and asked me to resume the treatment. Jemma had become very introverted and rarely spoke to other children. She had also been caught stealing valuable objects from the children's bags and throwing their clothes into the school toilets.

At that time the relationships within her family had also become clearer to me. Jemma was the third daughter born to the family. The parents, who had hoped for a boy after the birth of two girls, were very disappointed, and their frustration and disappointment at her not being a boy were projected onto her. She was considered 'the black sheep'. Maybe to please them, she took upon herself to play the role of 'the son' in the family. At school she chose to play only with the boys, mostly Football, and avoided any outward sign of being a girl. Moreover, in the course of the first stage of the treatment, a change in her appearance had been forced on her by the religious customs of the society in which her family lived – she had to cover her hair.

#### The second stage:

When I met Jemma four months after the first intervention, it was obvious that she had undergone a profound change. She seemed to have no energy left, she appeared totally drained, she spoke little and quietly and looked weary and sad.

#### *The snow figure*

During our first meeting, I asked Jemma to create a figure out of plasticine, hoping this would help me identify possible themes for us to work on. Jemma created the figure of a snowman without arms. She said that the figure was frozen and was feeling cold. When I asked her to try to create an image of the figure with her own body, she stood rigid, frozen stiff, staring and totally detached. She declared that the snow figure was unable to move. When I checked whether the figure could produce a sound, Jemma did not react and continued to stare. I turned to her, representing 'the warm

person', and suggested I would try to warm the snow figure a little by touching it with my hands or using my voice. Jemma shrank back and said she was afraid this would melt the figure down. She asked to envelop herself with a wide, long piece of blue cloth and tied it tightly round her body and then moved silently in space. The investigation of the theme of the snow figure substantiated my perceptions of her emotional state, but also aroused other dilemmas. Jemma looked frozen stiff and devoid of vitality, just like the snowman; she appeared similarly detached from her emotional world and from her surroundings, fragile, voiceless, projecting a sense of ephemeral existence and profound anxiety. Where had the expressive girl I had worked with recently, gone? What led to the disappearance of her joy in her own creativity? Did she feel threatened? And if so, why? Whatever the reasons for her feelings, it appeared that a menacing shadow was sweeping over her, and her way to prevent the storm from breaking out and the pain it would cause was to stop feeling, to freeze.

Referring to the physiological effects of stress, Carl Jung called the throat "a ring of fear", thus describing the locking of the throat muscles in its wake. Pearce supports this view, mentioning that in a state of stress or trauma, the muscles in the body tighten, impairing breathing, and the sounds we are able to utter become fainter (2005:28).

### *The saviour*

The theme that appeared in the dramatherapy that followed was of 'being stuck' and of hopelessness; therefore in one of the following sessions I chose to work with the story *Hemi and the Whale* (Crimmens, 2006: 79). The story describes attempts by a small child to save a whale, swept up onto the shore. I believed that during the story's dramatisation, Jemma would choose to portray the figure of the whale stuck on land, just as she had chosen the snowman. To my surprise, she actually chose the figure of the child and let me portray the whale. Jemma tried as hard as she could to push the whale into the water, but to no avail. She covered me with pieces of 'life-giving cloth' to protect my cold body, as in the story she had heard. I began to utter sounds conveying my inability to move, the whale's helplessness; sounds of frustration, confusion and pain that I felt actually reflected the voice in Jemma's psyche, unable to find expression. I wished to present Jemma with a challenge. I could have chosen 'to return into the water' when she first pushed me, but I felt it was not what Jemma

was asking of me. I believed in the latent forces within her, striving to fight for the whale's life, to act, take the initiative and spark hope in the helpless creature, lying at her feet, so similar to the passive snow figure she had previously chosen to portray. My portraying the secondary figure in the dramatisation enabled Jemma not only to act for the first time the life-saving figure of the 'saviour', but also to observe how the way my figure presented the helplessness she felt in her life. Pearson (1996) mentions that in addition to the role of the therapist 'to hold the space' and portray secondary figures, he/she should also "bear witness and mirror the achievements of the hero - reinforcing these achievements in a manner comparable to the mirroring role of the mother" (p. 186).

Jemma did not succeed in pushing the whale into the water and maybe as a last resort went to the piano and began to play on it and sing a song to encourage the whale, calling on him to return to the ocean. It was the first time that her voice broke the wall of silence that had encircled her until then. The whale sensed it and returned into the water, after a long struggle. Our figures, 'the child' and 'the whale', went on to celebrate 'the rescue operation', singing and playing merrily, with me joining Jemma at the piano from time to time. This activity was the turning point that later led to therapeutic voice-based treatment.

Gradually the space warmed up: Jemma started to move about a little more, and her eye contact improved. She began to speak a little more, but was still very cautious and restrained in the use of her authentic voice.

### *The fire keepers*

The theme of warmth and cold continued to fire Jemma's imagination and inspire our work. In one of our sessions I suggested to Jemma that we work on the story *The Coyote steals Fire* (Gersie & King, 1990:163). It is centred on the theme of cold and warmth. In this tale, the coyote rescues people who are freezing by stealing fire for them from the fire keepers, figures living at the other end of the world, who do not want to share it.

While telling her the story, I invented a song the fire keepers sing while guarding the fire: "We are the fire keepers, we keep the fire alive!" Jemma loved the song and asked to act the figure of the fire keepers. She wanted to go back to the scene in which the coyote tries to steal the fire. She created an imaginary bonfire, placed stones into it, calling them "fire stones", which I, the coyote, was to steal.

Jemma began to walk round the fire in circles, singing the fire keepers' song. At first the song sounded pleasant and soothing, as she walked rather calmly round the fire. From the corner of her eye she observed the coyote, approaching the fire, stooping.

Encircling the fire monotonously and watching the wild animal facing her, snorting, helped Jemma dive into 'the land' (Slade, 1954), straight into the world of metaphor, and imbue the fire keeper's figure with life. She behaved more and more wildly and started to circle the fire very rapidly, bent and aware of her body, as though sensing the natural environment within which she was moving. Gradually the song changed its tone, it became rasping, aggressive, belligerent, interspersed with menacing cries and growls. The figure of the coyote I portrayed moved on towards the fire until it exposed itself. Jemma screamed at the coyote as he tried to steal the fire from her and drove him away. When he came back she hit him, and in the end imprisoned him and tortured him, touching him, shouting and threatening him.

Newham (1999), relating to the therapist's role as a voice model, believed that his/her voice encourages the client to expose unconscious vocal components in the psyche. Newham created analogy between the role of the therapist and that of the shaman in ancient times, and pointed out how the songs and sounds the shaman uttered during the treatment promoted the divulgence of "unearthly vocal sounds" from the patient's unconscious (p. 122).

I felt that the obstruction had given way and feelings of anger, fury, sorrow and frustration, stored up by Jemma for so long, erupted, uninhibited, like lava out of a volcano. The frozen persona she had worn so long was shattered and it enabled the voices of the shadow that she had stored up within her to find expression. At this point, the synthesis between her voice and movement, so genuine and unabashed, surprised me, even though I had already experienced her vocal creativity.

Moses (1954) relates to the way ecstatic activity may assist in the loosening of the chains of the conscious mind and transfer a person into the primitive and unconscious realm of the personality.

"Only when our controls get out of hand, when we become excited or intoxicated, do we become savages again. We forget our civilized range limitation and the primeval cry can be heard again" (p. 333).

Through the figure of the fire keeper Jemma ensured that 'the warmth of the fire' remained under her control, maybe as a metaphor of the sense of security and

protection she was seeking in her own life. Like the fire keeper, Jemma wished to struggle and overcome the forces of cold and darkness, trying to extinguish the fire, the vitality within her.

During the following months, Jemma continued to investigate and portray a wealth of primeval figures and wild animals by means of voice and movement. Her voice was rich and deep and mostly expressed aggression, and territoriality. We used various devices to encourage her to deepen this liberating experience: for instance, during one activity, we wore cellophane glasses in a variety of warm and cold colours, and experimented with the way colour might promote vocal expression. We also used large tom-tom drums that helped us produce tribal rhythmic vibration, which we accompanied by songs we invented together. Sometimes the drumming and singing helped create a sense of partnership, to counter the attacker-victim relationship that characterized the relations between our figures in previous sessions.

However, during rest of the time, Jemma's attitude to my figures continued to be menacing and authoritarian, maybe to counter the sense of inferiority she felt in her life outside the therapy room. It appeared that the need to feel in control, to remain on guard, was mentally and physically exhausting for Jemma, and as we shall see later, this led to a surprising development in the process of our work. However, at this stage she did not forgo these themes, since she interpreted lack of assertiveness and vulnerability as a sign of weakness that might enable 'the wild world' around her to exploit it and harm her. She was suspicious of every type of assistance and support, since they undermined the fictitious confidence she had created in order to cope on her own.

### *The temple*

In one of the following sessions, while still at the warm up stage and during a vocal/movement exercise, Jemma went to the corner with musical instruments. She picked up a carved wooden pipe and using dramatic play, began to show me how she sticks it repeatedly in her stomach, breathing heavily and uttering sounds of pain. Suddenly she froze, and a moment later collapsed on the floor, moaning softly in pain. It took me a few seconds to come to my senses. Jemma had surprised me, not only by the timing of the dramatic scene of self-inflicted harm, a mere five minutes into the session, but also by the meaning of that type of self-harm. Jemma, stretched out on

the carpet and calling for help, displayed vulnerability and helplessness that I had never encountered with such intensity in our work before.

I wish to focus on a specific moment of the dramatic event of self-harm engraved in my memory, which reminds me of an article written by Rafael López-Pedraza (1995). It was the moment when Jemma froze, immediately after sticking the knife in her stomach the last time and just before she fell to the floor. It was a moment of dense silence that seemed to exist in a vocal vacuum, and yet it contained something that turned it paradoxically significant in its vocal context. How is that possible? Why just when ‘nothing was happening’ vocally, this voiceless moment succeeded in creating such a dramatic effect, far greater than the aggressive sounds which with which she had turned towards me in the past? I think the answer lies in the question itself. The intensity of that moment was sharpened precisely owing to its uniqueness within the welter of sounds that preceded and followed it. It created an undiluted presence in the space that made it impossible to ignore it, just like when an actor pauses in the middle of a monologue.

Pedraza describes how rare moments of harmonious clarity in a person’s life enable the person to step into a space he calls “a temple”, a space different from the familiar one, one that produces a type of slow motion, thus helping the psyche to process the loaded visual-emotional experience at a slower pace. To exemplify what he means, he describes such a formative moment experienced by spectators, watching bullfights:

"When some bulls die in the ring, in that moment of agony between the final sword thrust and death, time seems to stand still and a *temple* is created, a space which stirs our senses" (P. 63.).

I went up to Jemma as ‘a doctor’ and gently examined her, as though assessing the seriousness of the wound, and began a slow therapeutic process, lasting the whole session and including covering the place of the wound with pieces of cloth, using touch, calming and comforting sounds and songs. Jemma closed her eyes, rarely uttered a sound, but occasionally quietly murmured: “Daddy, daddy”.

Looking back, I tried to understand what made Jemma express with such intensity feelings of vulnerability, yielding, and the desire to give herself up. What made the ‘determined fire keeper’ decide to step straight into the fire that had served her as a source of security and hope? It seems to me that one reason was the large

amount of energy Jemma had invested in forging power and control. Her control was obviously fictitious and paradoxically concealed her unconscious yearning for support - to be loved and cared for. Her uncompromising persona prevented any immediate expression of compassion, but did not prevent this need from continuing to permeate her unconscious mind and exert increasing pressure on the dam her persona had created, until it broke through it.

Another reason was the trust built up between us in the course of the many months of our work together. Jemma felt that I not only had no problem with her vocal exposure of the dark recesses of her mind, but I even encouraged her to find additional richer and deeper ways of giving them expression. She believed that if I had been able to contain the anger, aggressiveness and control she had displayed in the space, I would also do so when she revealed another, more vulnerable side within her.

### *The football episode*

Jemma gradually appeared more relaxed in the space. The wild animals, the fire keepers, the rhythmic chant and drumming continued in some of our sessions, but at the same time new elements entered into our activities: Jemma gradually began to reveal her hobbies to me, brought various objects from home and suggested we play with them. We gradually spent longer on our games together, and Jemma looked more cheerful and smiled. We created houses out of chairs and pieces of cloth and invited each other for visits. Jemma asked me to come and watch a Football game with her, in which her favourite team, Arsenal, was playing. She looked forward joyfully to my coming and to the game we would watch. We sat facing an imaginary television screen, described aloud the players' juggling with the ball, sang songs in support of our favourite players, screamed "goal" in jubilation, moaned when our side got one and told the referee in no uncertain terms what we thought of him.

In another session Jemma brought a medal from home that she had won in a school competition, and it was given her again in an impressive dramatic ceremony, after she beat me in a Football game we played.

These and other games enabled us to investigate optimistic aspects of her world, such as her hobbies and things she loved. However, these activities had another dimension, a no less important one: They were proof of the long journey Jemma had made in the previous two years, which had brought back hope and joy into her life. It

enabled both of us to celebrate with a sense of pride and satisfaction the way Jemma had struggled with determination against the difficulties she had encountered in her life and succeeded, even if not totally, to respond to them in a creative and effective way.

### **Conclusion of my work with Jemma**

After the events described above, I continued to work with Jemma for about six months. The treatment focused on the investigation of important themes from Jemma's personal world, such as her relations with her surroundings. Work with the voice continued to serve as a prominent channel for the treatment, and it was frequently combined with other creative devices such as drama, movement and creative play. Our work ended finally in December 2008.

From talks with the school staff it became evident that a fundamental change had occurred in Jemma's social functioning and in her studies. She participated more frequently in the children's games; her communication skills improved and became more normative; she was less involved in physical clashes. Thefts and vandalism disappeared totally. Jemma looks happier and more involved in the various activities taking place at school, such as concerts or dramatic performances.

### **Epilogue**

My work with Jemma and other clients in the course of the last two years has taught me a great deal about ways of using voice for therapeutic purposes within the framework of dramatherapy. I am aware, however, that this device must be integrated carefully and sensitively when it is used with a variety of clients. It may be perceived as embarrassing and even deter a client, when he is not yet ready to exploit it to the full. It must therefore be introduced gradually and creatively for it to become truly beneficial in dramatherapy sessions. In order to arrive at the point when the use of voice exerts an influence on the treatment, the therapist must also have the necessary self-confidence and daring. A therapist who is curious, interested in revealing the covert possibilities of his/her own voice, ready to surprise him/herself by bursting out laughing or crying out spontaneously, will not only not frighten the client, but will serve as an important model for him/her, proving that such use of voice for self-expression is legitimate and pleasurable. To make this happen, it is necessary to eradicate the assumption, not always conscious, that "voice should be pleasing". In

my opinion, a “pleasing voice” is first of all a spontaneous and sincere one. It is a voice that struggles and does not give in to the filter of the conscious mind, watching over and inhibiting self-expression, in obedience to social dictates. Therefore it is the Sesame approach to drama therapy that may provide us with the opportunity to outwit the conscious mind and find original and creative ways to integrate the use of voice in our work. If we succeed in expanding the possibilities of authentic expression of our voice by means of the metaphorical and archetypal experience that Sesame offers us, we will enrich the creative potential of dramatherapy.

The voice, movement, touch and stories are symbiotically and productively inter-related. Merging such use of the voice with movement or drama not only does not blur the original quality of these components, but expands their expressive potential. Thus we may find, for instance, that touch has qualities fostering rich vocal expression, just as voice assists in the development and maintenance of images created by movement in space. Perceiving voice as a versatile creative device will enable authentic expression of the clients’ needs and free them of the need to use their voice in the accepted and “pleasing” way, which usually does not truly express what is going on within their souls.

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