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“My Name Is . . .” An Exercise to Embody the True Self

In our search for ourselves, we often see qualities in other people, places, objects or animals that are slowly waking in ourselves, but which we have not yet fully claimed. We might spend years before we learn to recognize and claim these strengths, essences or beauties as our own. Meanwhile, we live merely in a reflected image, not knowing that we intuitively but unconsciously are looking into a mirror that is showing us important aspects of ourselves.

This is the “**Light Shadow**” in Jungian terms, where we project onto others the vital positive qualities that we don’t yet claim. Other theoretical orientations, such as Jon Eisman’s *Re-Creation of the Self* or Dick Schwartz’ *Internal Family Systems*, call this part of us “**The Spirit in Exile**.” This part keeps us involved with people, places or animals that deeply embody qualities which we cannot yet fully inhabit, and which we take in only vicariously by their presence. It keeps us living small in the shadow of others, rather than stepping fully into the light of our own True Self. So we go to an art show when we really want to take up our own brush, or dream about the high mountains in Tibet instead of also owning the bigness of our own spirit right here, right now, this moment, without having to travel anywhere.

As therapists we assist our clients in becoming aware of the difference between:

- The True Self who claims and embodies the qualities of their unique essence,
- and their defensive parts who in the service of protection say it is unsafe to claim these qualities,
- or denigrate their worthiness to claim them,
- or in the case of the Spirit in Exile, keeps them dwelling in the shadow of others who are shining, but does not allow them to shine themselves. The Spirit in Exile is not willing to risk the belief in the mandate that calls them to step into their own the light.

Our work is then to help our clients step into and live more and more fully from the True Self.

The following exercise arose out of my many years’ working with clients using the *Re-Creation of the Self* model. I have found it to be a very profound and helpful exercise which assists clients to claim qualities for themselves that they previously only admired in people or nature or creatures outside themselves. It is an exercise that helps them establish a felt-sense knowing of their True Self or Wise Self (or Organic Self in Rc-S terms) or whatever name the client prefers. In fact, early in our therapy sessions I find out what name the client wants to use for the True Self and we use that, as it is more evocative and more easily embodied when it is in their heart’s language. One client, “Betty,” used the term “The One Betty.” Another used “My Core Self.” I have found that “Wise Man” and “Wise Woman” are among the most popular!

Clients—and all of us humans—unconsciously gravitate towards those images which resonate with the truth of our being. Carl Jung said, “Mankind heals through symbols.” We connect our hearts and minds with, hang on the walls of our houses, place on our altars, thrill to in our walks through nature, soak up from our pets those essences which are medicine to us. Our work in healing is to realize that the beauty, love, vitality, mystery, strength or other qualities we are beholding are the same ones that essentially reside in us, too. Instead of merely basking in the reflected light, the task is to meet that light equally with conscious recognition of our own light.

In therapy sessions, clients unconsciously speak about those qualities that they long to claim but haven’t yet when they speak poignantly about friends, mentors, animals, or favorite places in nature. We know they are in the territory of that reflected light when we track a palpable sense of longing arising up in them—for *longing* is the doorway to the True Self, and is a more embodied state. These “mirrors” of True Self may also arise in visualizations. Or we can prime the pump by asking them to choose a sand tray object or Tarot card that represents a quality of True Self that they are longing for. Or a quality may arise out of doing a sand tray, or in the telling of a dream.

Using any of the avenues I have just named, I offer this exercise focusing on a quality of True Self that is

important to the client but that he or she is projecting and not claiming. I propose an experiment to the client, such as, "Wow, you really come alive when you talk about your dog's aliveness (the redwood's strength, the mentor's wisdom, the dream figure's courage). Would you like to explore that? I have an idea." Once I get the client's agreement (they are generally very interested because this is about their own truth, though they may not at first *know* it is *their* truth) I verbally explain the three steps, then lead them through it.

Preparation

- We've identified, via the client's musing, visualization, picking a sand tray object, report of a dream, etc., a quality that is clearly important to the client, but one the client invests others with and does not inhabit: strength, peace, aliveness, etc.
- I ask if they want to explore that quality, and propose we do an experiment.
- I give the steps of the experiment (listed below) and speak aloud as if I were the client and **use the potent word they've been using** to fill in the blanks. For step three, **I leave the end open for them to fill in when they get there** telling them, "You'll finish that sentence when you get there."
- The client usually needs to hear the steps out loud a couple of times, often because it includes saying their own name aloud and pairing it with good qualities. This can be a little "outside the box" for them at first.
- The client will then often rush headlong into saying the words of the experiment the moment after I've given the steps, so I gently stop them and suggest we slow down . . .
- . . . and get them mindful. **Mindfulness is essential** so that they can tap into their truth and not merely repeat what they've heard or get waylaid by rote left brain responses, "shoulds" or "ought to be's." Generally the client is partly prepped for a dive because they have been talking about something so potent and meaningful for them, and I've taken care to deepen them as we go along. I then ensure mindfulness at the beginning of the exercise before we continue.

Here are the Steps, with some Examples and Tips:

Step One

My name is _____ (client's full name) and I am/have _____ (the quality they project).

Step Two (with three ways to say it)

- This _____ (object, person, landscape, animal they are projecting onto) **is a mirror of my own** _____ (name quality again).
- This _____ (object, person, landscape, animal they are projecting onto) **is a mirror reflecting my own** _____ (name quality again).
- This _____ (object, person, landscape, animal they are projecting onto) **reflects my own** _____ (name quality again).

Step Three

And my new story is _____. (At this point, after having proclaimed steps one and two, and being mindful, the client's longing will spill over into a declaration of their truth).

Full Example

One of my clients, "Jane," was habitually very contained and controlled. In one session she began to speak at length, in rapture, about how her beloved dog "Jingo" played and loved and was excited by everything. I immersed her further in her experience. She said, "Oh, I see Jingo jumping in the air after her ball just for the pure joy of it. She's so naturally joyful! Oh! Oh! Oh!" Clearly this joy was important to her, and quite the opposite of her limiting, protecting patterns. But she was letting her dog have all the fun! So I proposed and explained the experiment and spoke aloud what she'd say:

1. My name is Jane Smith and I'm full of joy.
2. My dog Jingo is a mirror of my own joy.
3. And my new story is _____.

We established mindfulness and began the exercise. The client spoke the sentences with awe and tears, and filled in step three with, "And my new story is that I get to just be full of joy, love, happiness and peace." We deepened into and explored these qualities of her True Self, and continued to help her inhabit

her truth in future sessions. The exercise became a touchstone for her.

Step Two Examples

Each of the examples begins with what has inspired the client. It is followed by the exact words the client has used to describe the qualities they admire—and need to own.

- The redwood tree is a mirror of my own peace.
- Big Bird reflects my own strength and kindness.
- The angel in my dream is a mirror that reflects my own free spirit.
- Jenny and her show are a mirror of me believing in my own voice and vision.
- The horse running in the meadow in the dream is showing me my own aliveness.

Tips

- The client may, in mindfulness, go straight through the exercise and then we deepen into and study what that evokes.
- Alternatively, each step is potent in itself and we may deepen and study after each step.
- It is very evocative for a client to say their own name out loud, and that in itself may be a time to pause and explore.
- The client is free, of course, to say the sentences in their own language if they request that (some of them do), as long as they keep true to using language that *owns* the quality. This is important and I will talk with them about the use of language if they try to hedge their bet. Examples: Instead of saying, “My name is Sally and *I am free*,” a client might try to get away with, “My name is Sally and *I want to be free*.” (Or: *I’m working on being free. I wish I was free. Someday I’ll be free*). I’ll say, “That’s interesting that you’re using *want to be free*. How about saying, “My name is Sally and ***I am free***.” The exercise won’t work unless the language is direct. Indirect language is the province of the Self in Exile. Direct language arises from the True Self. Clients know what I mean, and they know that they’re trying to get away with playing it safe, and they know how important it is to speak directly and in a way that claims the quality. Though it might be edgy at first, they make it past the hesitation and I have found them to be game for it!
- Using “I” and “My” in mindfulness help the client step into the True Self and own and embody the formerly only-reflected qualities. They begin to seat themselves more deeply in their True Selves: “**My** name is” and “This ____ is a mirror of **my own** ____” and “**My** new story is ____”
- I am always delighted to hear how the client finishes the sentence “And my new story is ____.” We have evoked this right from their True Self so it is alive and potent!
- The named quality and “new story” we deepen into for the rest of the session. I help the client to consciously and mindfully connect the quality to their experience of their True Self. Future sessions find us referring and deepening them into a more fully-fledged sense of the qualities of True Self, and continuing to integrate them.