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Creativity lies at the Edge of Disintegration: Addressing the Shadow of Power and Leadership within Psychotherapy Training Organisations

Rupert Kinglake Tower

“One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious. The latter procedure, however, is disagreeable and therefore not popular.”

(Jung, 1967, par. 335)

I want to begin by telling you a Russian fairytale loosely taken from Marie-Louise Von Franz (1987, pp. 236-9). This tale, called “The Black Magician Czar,” describes an encounter with the Shadow and how to cope with it. In the discussion that follows, I will also draw upon six informal qualitative interviews that I conducted with senior, experienced psychotherapy colleagues outside of the Centre for Transpersonal Psychology who act as representatives for their training organisations within the Humanistic and Integrative Section of the U.K. Council for Psychotherapy. Based in large part on their experiences of encountering the Shadow during difficult transitions and periods of conflict within their organisations, I will examine how power and leadership are held, and how later generations may unconsciously carry the Shadow for the founders. Finally I wish to suggest innovative forms of holding authority and leadership for the 21st century.

The Black Magician Czar

There was a czar who was a black magician and a very powerful ruler. One day he gave a dinner party for all his subjects and said to them: “Whoever can run away and hide himself from me shall have half my kingdom and my daughter as his wife, and after my death he can rule over my whole empire.” Everybody who sat there remained silent and turned pale. But a very bold young man got up and said, “Czar, I can hide from you and escape.” And the czar answered, “All right, bold young man, hide yourself. Tomorrow I will hunt for you and if you don’t succeed in hiding yourself, your head must come off!” The bold young man went off to hide, but the czar read his book of magic and found out where the youth had gone, and sent his servants to find him and bring him before him. And he himself, the czar, took a sharp sword and

cut off the youth’s head (and found great pleasure in his evil game). The next day the czar issued the same challenge and again a bold young man suffered the same fate.

On the third day there was another dinner party and the czar made the same offer. There was a third bold young man who said he could escape him, but only on the third attempt. He went out of the city and shape-changed into a weasel, a drill, and then a falcon and flew in front of the czar’s daughter’s window. She saw him and opened the window and he flew in. Inside her room he turned himself back into a young man and had a nice private dinner with the czar’s daughter. Then he turned himself into a ring she put on her finger.

However, the czar again consulted his magic book and discerned the youth’s hiding place. “So,” he said, “now your head must come off your shoulders!” But the youth replied that it had been arranged that he should have three tries, and the czar let him go.

The youth departed once more, shape-changing into several animals, and was again admitted to the czar’s daughter’s room where he turned into his own form. They had a nice feast and spent the night together and tried to plan a way to escape the czar. The next day he went to open fields and turned himself into a blade of grass. But once again the czar consulted his magic book, found the youth and demanded that his head must come off his shoulders, but the youth said “No,” as he still had another chance to hide, the last one, and the czar agreed.

The youth left the palace, and shape-changed into a grey wolf, a pike, and then a falcon. Flying over mountains and cliff, he saw the nest of the Magovei bird (a magic bird in Russian fairy tales) on a green oak tree and dropped down into her nest. The bird was not there at the time, but when she came back and saw the bold youth sitting there, she said, “What impertinence!” She seized him by the collar and flew with him out of the nest, across the blue sea and put him on the magician czar’s window. The youth changed himself into a fly, flew into the palace and then became a piece

of flint, a firestone, and lay down by the fireplace.

Meanwhile the black magician began to read and search his magic book, which told him the youth was in the Magovei bird's nest, but his servants found the nest but no youth. The czar looked in his book and thought that he must be there. The czar himself joined in the hunt. They hunted and hunted. The czar thought that, since he had not found the youth, he could no longer be alive on the earth.

So they went back to the empire. The second and third day passed. One morning the maid got up and started to lay the fire. She took the flint stone and rubbed it on some steel; the stone flew out of her hand and there stood the youth.

"Good morning, mighty czar", he said.

"Good morning, bold young man. Now your head must come off your shoulders."

"No, mighty czar," the youth said, "you have sought me for three days and had given up the search. I have now come voluntarily. Now I should have half the kingdom and your daughter as my wife!"

The czar could do nothing, so the two were married and had a wonderful wedding feast. The youth became the czar's son-in-law and got half the empire, and on the death of the czar he was to ascend the throne.

The "Black Magician Czar" describes a kind of incestuous situation between the father and the daughter where the feminine principle is a captive of the masculine principle. The czar is a diabolical "negative shadow" figure whose primary drive is to dominate and retain power. Those young men who also attempt to adopt a power attitude are swiftly beheaded.

The black czar's magical book seems to represent a closed system of magic, which misinterprets the way of the feminine, misuses power, and seeks possession through personal will alone. The hero in this tale succeeds because he is able to receive knowledge directly from its natural source, which cannot be misused by evil forces, and he knows a way to approach the feminine principle so that he is helped three times. He represents openness to a wider, deeper consciousness that utilises wit and emotional intelligence, connects us with our spontaneity, immediacy, and an instinctual living basic nature of the psyche.

The Abuse of Power and Authoritarian Leadership

The tale of "the Black Magician Czar" expresses the debilitating effects of the ruthless drive and desire for power. The czar's willingness to kill the bold freshness of ardent youth reflects a drama prevalent with an omnipotent fantasy of omniscience, and his primary

motivation to possess power. He is unable to recognise the limits of reality or the existence of the other. Any possibility of dialogue is prevented through an atmosphere of terror and dehumanisation (Biran, 2003).

An organisation is an ongoing drama enacted by fallible players, where the idea of the organisation as a unity (the ego ideal) contrasts radically with reality, where the character of organisational life more viscerally resembles a "snakepit" in which "there must be for each of us, individually and collectively, a shameful, secret underside to organisational life" (Schwartz, 1990, p. 10).

Experience of power dynamics within psychotherapy organisations seemed to indicate that more often than not leaders promoted initially a visionary drive towards personal and professional excellence and integration, which contained many inherent strengths, but over time this gradually tipped over into a narrow form of perfectionism and inflated "magnificence" with an exaggerated focus on an organisational ideal that denied and became rapidly out of step with reality, eventually in some cases leading to organisational decay and breakdown.

What seemed increasingly to be held in the Shadow in these instances were the qualities of ordinary humanness—the permission to express fallibility, fragility, or vulnerability, to be unsure or unclear sometimes about where the project was going, and to acknowledge limitation—and a degree of trust in staying with the mess and chaos of a creative, processing space of not knowing, where it felt safe enough to question, debate, disagree and voice criticism. Alongside this, there was a loss of recognition that a necessary part of being human was the acknowledgement and ownership of one's own capacity for envy, competitiveness, nastiness and destructiveness.

It was the denial of this reality, the failure to recognize faults within themselves and to discern the fantasy nature of the organisational ideal, that caused a rot to gain hold from within. Typically, any perceived challenge to the leaders' authority, or anyone who dared to hold a different vision to the status quo would be isolated, and these shadow qualities would be projected onto the imagined perpetrators. Anyone that metaphorically speaking wished to "grow up" and assume responsibility for new ideas and new input that deviated from or appeared to threaten the organizational norm, was likely to be cut down in czar-like fashion.

The interviews also showed that when an organization goes through the demise or departure of a founder, a distinct transitional stage showed itself

amidst the vacuum and chaos, prior to finding a re-framed identity. The Jungian analyst Robert Hobson calls this the “*therapeutic community disease*” (Hobson, 1979, p. 232). He outlines three phases: (1) The coming of the Messiah; (2) the Enlightenment; and (3) the Catastrophe. A gifted individual steps forward within the vacuum with revolutionary ideas opposed to the original Vision and is experienced by self and others as magical, a potential Saviour Hero who will bring revitalizing purpose to the organization. Initially a period of intellectual stimulation follows, there seems to be inner cohesion; but outer groups are constellated, individual differences and anxieties are denied, and the Shadow goes underground. However, inevitably the pain, death, rage and mourning for what was lost with the original founder has to be faced, and disillusionment, breakdown and usually unnamed destructive components of the process force themselves into consciousness (Perry, 1991). The saviour fantasy must be relinquished, and only then can the organization begin to remain present with what Nigel Wellings and Elizabeth McCormick refer to as “*Fallow Chaos*” by facing the unpalatable but unavoidable journey that “*to do or be something new we must first let go of something or some part of ourselves that is old*” (Wellings & McCormick, 2005, p. 98).

There is an African proverb that holding power is like holding an egg. Hold it too loosely, and it may drop and fall; hold it too tightly, and it may break. It is in the holding of the tensions of these polarities that the “*unthought known*” (Bollas, 1987) of the transcendent function can reveal itself.

There are several methods for mediating with shadow influences that can aid such a process of internal self-examination. “*Social Dreaming*” is increasingly used within analytical training institutes and mainstream organisations to build a communal relationship with the Shadow and unconscious processes. (Gordon-Lawrence, 2005). Another emerging approach to leadership and service is “*servant-leadership*” which emphasises an ethical awareness and appropriate use of power by the encouragement of a long-term, transformational philosophy to life and work – in essence a way of being – that is committed to an individual’s personal growth within organisations and promotes a sense of community (Greenleaf, 2003). Collective leadership is yet another paradigm in which mutual interconnection configures the presence of collective leadership, where difference, messiness and diverse ideas remain and flourish but are held. The nature of leadership is no longer that of a spiritual parent to a child, but of peer to peer, allowing leadership to shift,

devolve, and be shared by individuals that are able to provide many differing qualities of leadership in differing circumstances according to their particular style, strengths and personal attributes.

Creative methods such as these may help us to own, name and respect the destructive and creative forces of the personal and archetypal Shadow that will always be present in some form or another within our organisational life. It is within the oft unspoken, unnoticed, unassuming acts of determination to bear difference, and in open-hearted gestures of kindness and the courage of forgiveness, that possibility lies to co-habit more fruitfully with our Shadow sides and remain open to our unruly complexity amidst all its savagery and beauty.

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