

Dealing with the Shadow in the World (presented at the 2007 SoulCollage® Pre-Conference)

Mariabruna Sirabella, MFT

When we explore our personal shadow in the safe container of the SoulCollage® process, we "invite" those inner disquieting voices, our demons, for tea. Such civilized circumstances inform the inhabitants of our disavowed unconscious that we accept their existence and are open to courteous exchanges of news, mutual requests and beneficial negotiations, but we do not expect them to stay for dinner, spend the night or ever crash our parties. In SoulCollage terms, their presence at the round table of our Committee is made official. No longer are they allowed to sabotage the assembly from under the table and, while they may not take over the meeting, their mysterious instinctual vitality make us freer and more authentic.

Our encounters with the external shadow require a different approach. We are not dealing with a set of contradictory behaviors, ambiguous feelings, thoughts and impulses that our Ego would rather deny, but whose acknowledgment is oddly liberating. Violence, terror, ignorance, disaster, greed, discrimination come uninvited and at a scale our mind can seldom comprehend. The external shadow is beyond the negotiating power of a single individual. Its magnitude may pierce through our protective shields and affect us deeply even when we are not personally involved. It is difficult for us to ignore the pain caused by war and exploitation, and the damage inflicted on our planet by policies inspired solely by profit. Sometimes these experiences come at a comparatively smaller scale, in our community, our circle of friends, or our family through lack of attention, manipulation and malice.

Having recognized that our interactions with the external shadow in daily life are inevitable, Seena and I designed the Pre-Conference to explore how the SoulCollage process can empower us to meet its constant invasions. We began by naming some of the reactions we observed, such as numbness, depression, grief, or the desire to avoid and deny. We saw anger and intolerance mixed with confusion and anxiety. Once again the importance of recognizing our own reactions became evident as the first step to implement change. We could have spent hours, days or even weeks naming and analyzing the collective shadow and its damages, only to risk finding ourselves more tense, angry or hopeless. It became obvious that many of these emotional reactions, although human, have the potential to energetically 'feed' the external shadow and negatively affect our personal balance. For example, numbness, depression or denial may paralyze us and render us ineffective, while excessive fear, anxiety or a political involvement that over-taxes our personal subjective resources may leave us depleted and equally ineffective in the long run.

We identified a few key steps to render our inescapable cohabitation with the external shadow less harmful. 1) Recognize that we are personally impacted by it and identify in which ways and how much. 2) Explore our personal limits and subjective needs in order to sense and know where our balance resides. 3) Find the allies in our SoulCollage deck that can support our emotional and physical balance or make new cards that represent these psychological and archetypal allies. 4) Evoke a Neter that will act as a protector/filter to support our desire to be aware of reality while simultaneously avoiding a toxicity that could weaken us.

Since the Shadow in the World is too large for us to meet face to face and to approach without protection, we decided to explore what we can do to avoid contributing to it or being depleted by it. Laughter, Gratitude and Beauty immediately came to mind as great antidotes that we can cultivated daily and include in our SoulCollage decks. Yet something was still missing, we needed to activate an additional energy to take this process a step further.

The entry point came from acknowledging that each person has a different threshold of vulnerability that no one has the right to judge or violate, and that trespassing it results in a loss of balance and in extreme cases perhaps even of soul. Without the awareness of where our threshold lies, we may overprotect ourselves and underestimate our strength and power, or we may overstretch and weaken ourselves. This threshold deserves to be guarded and protected, and it is our responsibility to do so. The idea of the "Filter/Protector" archetype was born.

In the workshop, we explored the threshold of our vulnerability and affirmed our right to protect and care for our soul. As you can imagine, many beautiful cards were created and shared. The "Filter/Protector" appeared in many guises responding to the intuitive inner need of its creator. Some are surprisingly delicate spider webs like mine, some are fierce warriors, and others are flexible barriers.

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Mariabruna Sirabella, MFT is an artist and a psychotherapist who practices in Watsonville, California. She is Adjunct Faculty at JFK University, a SoulCollage Facilitator and an authorized SoulCollage Trainer. Mariabruna teaches internationally and her workshops offer California MFTs and LCSWs Continuing Education Units. She is also available for private consultations. Learn more at www.sirarte.com