

Psolodrama in Brief

Introduction

Psolodrama is a practice of self-exploration that combines meditation, authentic movement, psychodrama, and solo performance. It can be used in individual therapy or as a mutually supportive practice with a friend or peer.

The purpose of psolodrama is to explore emotions, personal challenges, and life themes through the use of improvisation. Following the body with eyes closed, the improviser—called the psoloist—moves, makes sound, and speaks, tapping into feelings, inner imagery, and inner roles, embodying them fully. As these roles develop, the psoloist improvises monologues, dialogues, scenes, and stories. Through her psolodrama—as well as through the sharing process with her witness afterward—the psoloist can benefit from cathartic self-expression as well as new insights.

Before practicing psolodrama it is helpful to begin with a personal check-in, and, optionally, a brief sitting meditation. The four “entryway practices” are also helpful in the lead-up to psolodrama.

The Entryway Practices

1. **Authentic Movement:** The psoloist enters empty, letting go of preconceived ideas, and finds a place to begin in stillness. Moving with eyes closed, she follows her body and inner impulse, letting the body lead.
2. **Shared Vipassana:** Continuing the movement, psoloist speaks aloud what she is noticing arising in the 6 sense doors (the 5 senses plus mind objects), as well as feelings. As she notices images, memories, and fantasies, she can explore them through moving and speaking, experiencing the imaginal realm.
3. **Role Stream:** Still following the body, the psoloist notices what role or character her movement or body position reminds her of, entering that role through movement, making sounds, and speaking. She can stay in that role as long as she likes, or let it go anytime and return to movement, eventually discovering a new role.
4. **Scene Stream:** As roles continue to emerge from her movement, the psoloist can have roles dialogue with one another, creating scenes and stories.

Psolodrama and the Five Psychodramatic Roles

Building on the characters she discovers in role stream and scene stream, the psoloist begins to explore her own personal connection to the emerging drama, using the tools of psychodrama to deepen and understand the meaning of the feelings, images, roles, scenes, and themes arising. Among the tools she can use are the five psychodramatic roles:

1. **Protagonist:** Oneself in the scene. May be (1) psoloist in the here and now; (2) Oneself in the past or future, e.g., as a child, old woman/man; or (3) The “hero”/“heroine”/central character of the story.
2. **Auxiliary Ego:** Other characters, real or imagined. These can be family members, animals, gods, monsters, historical figures, talking objects, etc.
3. **Director:** One’s own inner guide, wise mind, or therapist. The director can dialogue with and ask questions of the protagonist, such as “How do you feel right now?” or “What do you need?” in order to help the protagonist return to action and move forward in their drama.
4. **Double:** Speaks the inner thoughts/feelings a protagonist or auxiliary does not yet feel able to speak.
5. **Audience:** someone watching the psolodrama, e.g., an inner critic, chorus of support, bored theatergoer, etc. The protagonist can dialogue with the audience and even pull them into the scene.

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The Witness and Sharing

The witness provides a supportive, nonjudgmental container for the work. He observes and keeps time, and if the psoloist requests it, can signal each stage with a word or a bell (or a more descriptive reminder if the psoloist needs it). The witness maintains the container by practicing mindfulness (with the psoloist as the “object” of the meditation), as well as opening to his own feelings and experience. When time is up, the witness says “slowly, in your own time, bring your psolodrama to a close,” and then asks the psoloist “would you like to speak first, or shall I?”

In the sharing process, the psoloist can share anything she wishes about her experience. The witness reflects back what he saw and heard during the psolodrama as accurately as possible, as well as what personally resonated for him. The witness shares with an intention of lovingkindness—kind, supportive, and nonjudgmental—completely in service to the psoloist (avoiding analysis, advice, critique, probing questions, etc.).

Additional Guidelines for Psolodrama

- **Take Risks—but Don’t Push.** A good psolodrama is usually not “comfortable”—it is a powerful way to explore one’s growing edges, and calls for vulnerability, honesty, and courage. At the same time, one must not push for a result, but instead listen deeply to one’s own body, emotions, and authentic impulses.
- **Go for the Heart.** The psoloist aims for the heart of the matter—she does not avoid, delay, or dance around the issue, but instead dives in and completely embodies the images, feelings, and roles arising, fully and authentically. If she encounters an inner critic, hesitancy, or other form of resistance, she can reverse roles with it, embodying and giving it voice, and work with it through dialogue with other roles.
- **Follow Intuition.** At any time, the psoloist can return to stillness, silence, and authentic movement—or any stage of the progression, including shared *vipassana*, role stream, or scene stream—or simply shift roles or scenes at will. The psoloist consciously avoids doing her “good ideas” but instead draws inspiration from what her body is experiencing in each moment, as well as from inner imagery and “gut” feel or intuition.
- **Let Go of Logic.** No distinction is made between fact, fantasy, past, present, or future—psolodrama can mingle them all. There is no need to be consistent or logical; e.g., what began as a monster or villain may turn out later to be the protagonist.
- **Not a Performance.** Psolodrama is not a performance, but a personal process—the psoloist is focused on what is emerging moment by moment, and is not concerned with how she looks or sounds, or whether she is being clear; the witness will get what he gets. The psoloist’s eyes can be closed throughout, which can help her avoid the impulse to perform, as well as lessening self-consciousness about improvising for a witness.
- **Ask the Director.** If the psoloist feels lost or confused, she can always enter the role of director, and provide supportive coaching to herself, e.g., by asking good questions. Another option is to return to stillness and awareness of breath, or sound and movement, to help reconnect with the body.
- **Coaching.** If the psoloist feels a need for additional support, she can ask her witness, either before or during the psolodrama, to be her coach. When providing coaching, the witness, remaining seated, can offer supportive questions or comments to help guide the psoloist. Any guidance given should remain succinct and spare, with the goal of returning the psoloist to action, e.g.: “reverse roles,” “ask the director,” “speak aloud” (for a psoloist doing only movement/sound), “return to movement” (for a psoloist who is talking/intellectualizing and not connecting with her body).

Insight Improvisation—of which psolodrama is a part—is an integration of meditation, theater, and therapy. To learn more, or to read the *FREE Insight Improv book*, please visit www.insightimprov.org. Questions, comments, or feedback can be directed to joel@insightimprov.org.