

WORKING WITH OUR SHADOWS - REFLECTION



I ask for what I desire as we begin this topic



I pray that my entire being become open to God's grace



I imagine these texts being addressed to me, and note my response

Grace: To understand ourselves in our wholeness with our lights and shadows

The recognition of the fact that behind the social role that you assume; behind all your pretensions to being either a good citizen or a fine scholar or a great scientist or a leading politician or a physician or whatever you happen to be – that behind this façade – there is a certain element of the unreconstructed bum. Not as something to be condemned and wailed over, but as something to be recognized as contributive to one's greatness and to one's positive aspect; in the same way that manure is contributive to the perfume of the rose.

Alan Watts on Carl Jung

If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn - The Gulag Archipelago

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow
For Thine is the Kingdom

Between the desire
And the spasm
Between the potency
And the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the Shadow

For Thine is the Kingdom

Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the Shadow
Life is very long

For Thine (yours) is
Life is
For Thine (yours) is the

The Hollow Men (Part V) - T.S. Elliot

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. In which leadership or social contexts do I feel I am not being completely true to myself? What aspects do I often try to conceal? What opportunities become possible as I reconcile with my shadow?

WORKING WITH OUR SHADOWS - EXERCISE

As you are going through the below reflection, take notes of your insights in your journal. Allow yourself to be completely honest. What is most important is not to judge yourself but to feel loved even in your own vulnerabilities.

Step 1: Looking within

- Which are the **characteristics that I prefer people see in me** (strengths; characteristics that I like to have identified with me; the impression I want to make on others when I first meet them, etc.).
- Which are the **characteristics that I would prefer people not seeing in me** (weaknesses; gaps in my integrity; sources of guilt, shame, or embarrassment).
- What are the **things you like least in other people**? Do these characteristics exist within you, too? Can you think of an example when you did (or wanted to do) something similar?

Step 2: Identify a person you might have a difficulty with.

This person may irritate, disturb, annoy, or upset you. Or maybe you feel attracted to, obsessed with, infatuated with, or possessive about this person.

- What characteristics would you use to describe him/her?
- What might this person teach you about your relation to these characteristics?

Step 3: Face this person by imagining yourself in front of him/her.

Describe those qualities that most upset you, or the characteristics you are most attracted to using 3rd-person language (he, she, it). Write down what you are really feeling..

Step 4: Talk to this person in your imagination.

Speak in the 2nd person to this person (using “you” language). Imagine the response they might have. What would you reply back?

Step 5: Integrating the shadow

What would it be like if you were to “own” those characteristics in yourself? How would it feel to take on the qualities that either annoy or fascinate you about this person?

The above exercise is adapted from the work of Ken Wilber “3-2-1 Process for the Shadow”. It was developed by Scott Jeffrey (see his [website](#) for more on shadow work).

ADDITIONAL EXERCISES

A good exercise to get acquainted with the idea of the shadow is to read classic literature that mentions it consciously or unconsciously like Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson or Dracula by Bram Stoker (you can also find other examples of these do not suit your taste)

WORKING WITH OUR SHADOWS - INPUT

INTRODUCTION

Just like any object in direct light, we as individuals also cast a shadow. In psychology, the concept of the shadow was formulated by psychotherapist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung. It refers to everything we cannot see or refuse to acknowledge about ourselves. Working with our shadow and becoming aware of the least desirable aspects of our personality is not simple or pleasant, it is a complex journey that often seems contradictory yet is at the core of our development and maturation.



“There is no light without shadow and no psychic wholeness without imperfection.
To round itself out, life calls not for perfection but for completeness”

Carl Jung, Collected Works 12, Para 208

MAIN IDEAS

"The shadow personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself and yet it is always thrusting itself upon him directly or indirectly" (Jung 1939 par. 513).

Shadow is an inherent and vital part of our life, yet we learned to repress it and keep it hidden from ourselves and others so that we maintain a good self-image and fit in and succeed socially. When we were kids, we displayed aspects of our shadows in a very direct way. As we started growing up, these features became “hidden” in the process of maturation.



According to Jung, “everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual’s conscious life, the blacker and denser it is.” So what differentiates individuals is not the existence or non-existence of a shadow, but the degree to which one is aware of it and has worked to healthily integrate it in his life. The story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is a common metaphor for unaddressed shadow work.

☐ To which extent do you divide your identity in half (Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde), appreciating your good side and judging your “bad” shadow side? What can you learn from the shadow part that you are judging?

Understanding this part of ourselves and addressing it works for our own benefit. Jung uses the term “descend” to convey the message that we need to deepen in the understanding of our self. This descent requires the courage and compassion to encounter aspects of ourselves we initially would rather not face. (envy, laziness, unhealthy pride...)

Projection is an example of defense mechanism that reveals how we tend to deny our shadow, by unconsciously casting it onto others so as to avoid confronting it in ourselves. Shadow work helps us to **recognize the way that we project aspects of ourselves on others**, and similarly recognize when people project both “bad” (and “good”) qualities on us. Consider the following examples:

- For people with a low self-esteem, it is often the case that shadow characteristics include hidden gifts, strengths, and so called “enviable” qualities found in others.
- For people with exaggerated self-esteem, it is often the case that shadow characteristics include essential vulnerabilities such as sensitivity to others, the feeling of one’s own emotional need, and the capacity to depend in a healthy way on others.

Shadow work can therefore help us better understand ourselves and others and avoid taking things so personally.

There is a lot of potential in working with our shadows, the Society of Analytical Psychology says: “What needs to be emphasised very strongly here is that the shadow contains all sorts of qualities, capacities and potential, which **if not recognised and owned, maintain a state of impoverishment in the personality and deprive the person of sources of energy and bridges of connectedness with others**. For example, a person might believe that to be assertive is to be selfish; so he goes through life being pushed around by others and deep down seething with resentment, which in turn makes him feel guilty. In this case, his potential for assertiveness and his resentment both form part of his shadow. Analysis might challenge his value system, track it back to its origins, help him to become more embodied and thereby more in touch with his needs, and open up areas of choice, which would probably lead to his resentment diminishing.”

Because shadow work is so delicate, it helps to keep in mind the following thoughts: Shadow work takes a lifetime and is never completed. It is not linear, concrete, or predictable, and requires that we live with ambiguity, exploring dreams, symbols, and experiences filled with mystery. It also requires a proper support structure for the journey. **Exploring our shadow should seldom be undertaken alone.** Exploring the deeper parts of ourselves is often well supported by a skillful counselor, a mature spiritual director, a wise friend. Shadow work is also facilitated when we have loving friends who can share their perspectives gently and honestly. How poorly served we can be if our so called friends only offer us compliments?

We finish with this part with a quote from “Aion: Phenomenology of the Self” published in The Portable Jung and edited by Joseph Campbell. *“The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance. Indeed, self-knowledge as a psychotherapeutic measure frequently requires much painstaking work extending over a long period.”*

IGNATIAN NOTE

The deeper we get in our spiritual journey (growing in transcendence, deepening our relationship to God), paradoxically, the more aware we are of our shadows. This is the experience of many saints and holy people throughout history. Imagine God's love as a spotlight on a rose... the brighter the light, the more distinct the shadow becomes. This, however, need not lead us into distress, but rather, to humility, gratitude, and a profound compassion for others. Shadow work is a reminder for us that a purity that is not also earthy and human is suspect and possibly false (consider that the word "humility" shares the same roots as "humus," "humor," and "human.") This is why, when working with our shadows, it is important to be aware of our motives for doing it in the first place. If our motive is not to respond in a more loving way to the infinite love of God for us **as we are**, then our motive may be an egoistic and deceiving desire for perfection. Let our motive be that of love, remembering that true holiness is not rigidity or perfection, but a profound acceptance of God's loving embrace of our whole selves, including our shadows. In this light, growth becomes more a matter of transcending and **including** our old patterns, habits, and previously disowned characteristics, rather than solving or ever leaving them entirely behind us.

EXPECTED LEARNINGS AND OUTCOMES

1. Discovering basic elements of understanding the operation of the shadow (Carl Jung)
2. Identifying preferred elements of my *persona* and characteristics I try to hide from myself and others
3. Discovering the basic dynamic of projection and a method for recovering and re-owning shadow

"Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves".

Carl Jung

WORKING WITH OUR SHADOWS - RESOURCES

GENERAL RESOURCES

Title	Author	Publisher	Year	Link
The Handbook of Jungian Psychology: Theory, Practice and Applications	Renos K. Papadopoulus	Routledge	2012	Link
A Definitive Guide to Shadow Work: How to Contact, Get to Know, and Integrate Your Dark Side	Scott Jeffrey	CEOsage		Link
Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 12: Psychology and Alchemy: Psychology and Alchemy v. 12	Carl Jung	Princeton University Press	2014	Link
2017 Personality 07: Carl Jung and the Lion King (part 1 and 2)	Jordan B. Peterson	YouTube	2017	Link 1 Link 2

WORKING WITH OUR SHADOWS - RESOURCES

IGNATIAN RESOURCES

Title	Author	Publisher	Year	Link
Unlikely Companions: C. G. Jung on the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola	Kenneth L. Becker	Gracewing	2002	Link
Jung's Commentary on the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola	Thomas Patrick Lavin	C.J. Institute of Chicago	1988	Link
Personal transformation : a study of the spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius and of Carl Jung's lectures on them	Hayes, Florence Perrella.	eScholarship@McGill	1983	Link
Four stages of Spiritual Experience: A comparison of the Ignatian Exercises and Jungian Psychotherapy	Mary Jo Meadow	Pastoral Psychology	1989	Link

QUOTES

- “Self awareness is the ability to take an honest look at your life without any attachment to it being right or wrong, good or bad”. Debbie Ford
- “The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change”. Carl R. Rogers
- “If you seek to change the world, you must first seek to change yourself.” - Ignatius of Loyola
- “The person whose eyes see more clearly has a heart that feels more deeply.” – Robert Kegan
- "In spite of its function as a reservoir for human darkness—or perhaps because of this—the shadow is the seat of creativity" - Kaufman
- “The greatest and most important problems of life are fundamentally insoluble. They can never be solved, but only outgrown.” Carl Jung