

Going to the dark side

*Each of us has a shadow. Even a whole society has a shadow.
Rather than bury or hide the darker side because of fear or shame,
we need to identify it, embrace it and use it for our benefit.*

Words SONIA ZADRO



"One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light but by making the darkness conscious." ~ Carl Gustav Jung

"This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine."
~ William Shakespeare

It's tempting to believe that, if we think enough positive thoughts, recite enough affirmations, challenge our negative thoughts and try to live happy lives, we should be happy. Shouldn't we? Yet why are so many people, including some actively engaged in self-development, psychotherapy or spiritual practice, still experiencing the same negative patterns running through their lives; still struggling with the same difficult relationship dynamics or feeling blocked, numb, afraid or ashamed?

Some might even be lucky enough to move through life with only a few ups and downs and then, when they reach a certain age, have their world suddenly crumble around them.

A likely culprit is the shadow, a concept originated by Carl Gustav Jung. Jung was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who founded analytical psychology during the first half of the 20th century when he deviated from his colleague Sigmund Freud's thinking on psychoanalysis. Jung had a huge impact on not only psychiatry but also anthropology, archaeology, literature, philosophy and religion, particularly with his notion of the collective unconscious and his theory of archetypes.

For Jung, the shadow encompassed the unconscious aspects of the personality, both good and bad, which the ego (or primary self) has repressed, denied or not recognised. He states, "Unfortunately there can be no doubt that man is, on the whole, less good than he imagines himself or wants to be. Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is."

Jung believed that the more repressed and unconscious our shadow

side, the more it runs us. In this way, the most important difference between us is the extent to which each of us is aware of and has accepted our shadow.

The shadow is not to be seen as something bad. Quite the opposite. It's exactly what we need to embrace, love and accept about ourselves in order to feel authentic self-love. It's when we have embraced our shadow that we feel whole.

Furthermore, what is unconsciously repressed in the shadow may involve positive attributes. For instance, growing up, we may have been harshly criticised for expressing positive attributes so we kept quiet and hid them. Uncovering these can be like discovering gold and can unleash enormous potential within us.

The persona

A reflection of the shadow can be seen through the "persona" we create. Jung believed our personas contained all the ways we would like the world to see us. Hence the persona is our mask. Through our masks we unconsciously compensate for the suppressed and disowned parts of our shadows.

Take Ben as an example. Ben sees himself as the epitome of success: he's good looking, at the top of his game in finance and has a very attractive girlfriend. As an adult, the mask or persona Ben projects to the world is one of flawless perfection and achievement.

However, Ben unconsciously feels tremendous inferiority and shame due to underachieving as a child and being humiliated and criticised for this. For adult Ben, even admitting to failure or just being wrong about something is extremely difficult because it triggers repressed unconscious inferiority from his shadow side.

Along with this, being vulnerable is viewed as a sign of weakness, so Ben would never admit to being offended or hurt. Because of these repressed unconscious feelings, Ben suffers from bouts of depression, intense anger at the self and others and alienation from others due to his inflexible personality.



spirit

LOVING YOUR SHADOW

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Deep down, he feels empty and lonely. So Ben's persona of flawless perfection and his tough exterior are how he unknowingly compensates for his unconscious feelings of inferiority and hurt feelings — his shadow. In this way his shadow runs him.

Another way we deal with our shadows is through projection. This is Jung's notion that what we judge in others is sometimes what we unconsciously have judged or denied in ourselves. Ben was often extremely judgmental towards others when they made mistakes. He would scoff at them, lose his temper and say they were being ridiculous and oversensitive if they expressed their hurt feelings. This judgment of others was a projection of his denied self-judgment of his mistakes and his sensitive feelings.

Susan presents another picture. Her persona is one of vivacious popularity and great humour among lots of friends. She is always making others laugh and always wants to please. Growing up, she was verbally abused and later abandoned by her single mother. She was also teased and rejected by her peers at school. This all left her feeling deeply unlovable and defective. She stuffed her painful feelings down and denied them. To compensate, she became the nice, compliant, funny girl as an adult. After all, no one had loved her for just being herself growing up, so unconsciously she

would make them love her through her persona or mask.

While this contributed to many friendships, it also meant Susan often allowed herself to be mistreated and used. Her friendships were superficial and, deep down, she felt unworthy. Susan used her persona of the funny, compliant clown to compensate for her unconscious shadow feelings of being defective and unlovable. She also had a tendency to be highly critical of needy people who seemed to crave affection. This was her unconscious projection of how she judged the part of herself that was needy of love.

In this way, when the shadow is denied it will run the personality. If Ben and Susan were able to access their unconscious painful feelings, feel them deeply and recognise how they act them out in everyday life, their shadows would lose much of their power and lessen the degree to which they act it out. Jung said, "To confront a person with his shadow is to show him his own light," and he stressed that this is no easy task but takes "considerable moral effort". After all, how can we know our shadows if they're unconscious?

Furthermore, why would we willingly want to know that which is too painful to feel to begin with? It takes a deliberate willingness through therapy or personal development to explore feelings that we often do everything and anything

to avoid. Therapy approaches that help access the unconscious, such as hypnotherapy, inner child work, somatic psychotherapy or even voice dialogue, can be of great benefit here.

As mentioned earlier, the shadow can also contain positive material about ourselves. There may be something positive about yourself you struggle to acknowledge for fear of others feeling jealous of you or because it doesn't fit with how you want to see yourself.

Susan, for instance, loved science growing up, especially physics. However, she was teased by her peers and criticised by her mother whenever she topped her science exams. In her need for love she unconsciously suppressed her talent and worked in pharmaceutical sales. Once she realised her fear of judgment around success, she was able to process much of her fear and pursue this passion.

Jung believed that not just individuals but entire collectives or societies contained a shadow. The Australian tall poppy syndrome, along with the tendency towards self-deprecating humour, might be viewed this way. While such humour could be seen as humble, it can also mean we Australians disown our positive attributes and judge other cultures that are more accepting of them, such as Americans.

The archetypes

To grasp an understanding of the shadow also requires an exploration of archetypes. According to Jung, archetypes are sets of instinctual ideas that inevitably unfold at each stage of our development. Some common archetypes include the Mother as feeding, nurturing and soothing; the



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Hero as rescuer and champion; and the Wise Old Man as providing knowledge and guidance. The choices we make define whether or not we express the archetype's strengths or its shadow.

Bestselling American author Caroline Myss defines the archetype as a "pattern of influence ... ancient and universal ... that becomes part of your individual psyche". To her the archetype is an active inner guardian or ally alerting you to when you might succumb to the shadow's power. Like Jung, she says we give the shadow power when we deny its existence. When we face it, we "neutralise" its negative influence.

Take the idea of the Rebel archetype. This formidable energy enables us to reject illegitimate authority and break free into a new path of freedom. Those with a strong Rebel archetype include Gandhi, Martin Luther King and American suffragist and social activist Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

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Myss identified 70 archetypes, including Warrior, Athlete, Alchemist, Divine Child, Addict, Prostitute, Clown

and Detective. It can be interesting to explore which archetypes operate in your own personality and to what extent you may be acting out their shadows.

Embracing your shadow

In her book *The Dark Side of the Light Chasers*, American self-help author Debbie Ford describes how after years and years of personal development she still hated a hidden part of herself. One day at a leadership intensive, when she was speaking in front of a group, the facilitator, Jan, looked at her and said, "You're a bitch."

Debbie's heart sank. This was a shameful secret Debbie despised about herself, one she had worked so hard to hide behind a mask of sweetness and generosity. Then Jan asked, "Why do you hate this part of yourself?" Debbie said it gave her the most shame. Jan said, "What is good about being a bitch? If the contractors on your house ran way over budget, or something expensive you bought had to be returned, wouldn't that part of yourself be helpful?"

Debbie says, "It was as if I had just dropped a hundred-pound weight from around my neck." She realised that when she no longer resisted and denied her inner "bitch" she stopped acting it

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out in a destructive way. Instead, she only chose to access it when there was a situation where it was appropriate to take care of herself.

So how can you identify your shadow? According to Ford, some good questions to start with are:

- What am I most afraid of?
- What aspects of my life need transforming?
- What am I most afraid of that someone else will find out about me?
- What am I most afraid of finding out about myself?
- What's the biggest lie I've told myself? Someone else?
- What could stop me from doing the work needed to transform my life?

Once you have uncovered aspects of your shadow, Ford says it's good to give these subpersonalities names and then find the gift in them. In this way you have fun with them and become more accepting. For example, Ford outlines some of her own shadow personalities as Resistant Rita, Dominating Dixie and Controlling Carrie. When she confronted each of these sides of herself she recognised they came with lessons about herself and her gifts.

Ford came to realise that being divine is not about being good, but integrating the bad — the Holy Man and the Devil. Jung said "the gold is in the dark" and we each have to dig down deep to get the gold. For, until we make the unconscious conscious, he said, "It will direct your life and you will call it fate." 🌟

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