

# OUR SHADOW

*Judging others is a way of avoiding confrontation with our own shadow*

Carl Jung, a famous psychologist, theorized about personality and inner struggle. The shadow side of personality is one of Jung's intriguing theories. It provides a framework for discussing the repressed or denied part of the self. And surprisingly, it points to growth. In general, the shadow dwells in the personal unconscious and represents that aspect of personality which an individual is ashamed of, or will not recognize because it is unacceptable to the conscious personality. It clashes with the conscious identity of a person.

The shadow contains not only negative elements and destructive possibilities, but also potential for greater growth and development of the personality. Jung found that the shadow is ninety percent gold. Much of what is in the shadow is the un-lived life of the individual. This "positive" aspect of the shadow represents potential which could be tapped, but pressures, fears, or unwillingness to take responsibility makes it difficult to "own" this part of the self.

We can recognize the shadow in projection by putting our

problems on someone else and ultimately giving an excuse for our bad behavior toward others. We can be aggressive, violent and make war because the evil is clearly in the other, not ourselves. It is not easy to bring our troops home and to learn to own our own shadow. Rage, fear & admiration can be signs that projection is taking place. In those instances we are giving away parts of our self.

The challenge is to be a good

Samaritan to yourself, but it is difficult to "befriend" that which may be repugnant. As Connie Zweig and Steve Wolf

summarized in their landmark book "Romancing the Shadow": *Beneath the social mask we wear every day, we have a hidden shadow side: an impulsive, wounded, sad, or isolated part that we generally try to ignore. The shadow can be a source of emotional richness and vitality, and acknowledging it can be a pathway to healing and an authentic life. We meet our dark side, accept it for what it is, and we learn to use its powerful energies in productive ways. The shadow knows why good people sometimes do "bad" things.*

*Trust that which gives you meaning and accept it as your guide.*

## SHADOW EXAMPLES

A positive shadow is when I idealize [say] Oprah Winfrey, but think I could never be "as good as her." This is my positive shadow being projected. I have the potential to be everything Oprah is (and more), but I don't believe that about myself and idealize her instead.

A negative shadow is when I am offended by those who display negative behaviors that I do not wish to own in myself. For example, I pride myself on being a generous and giving person. When I am around someone who is "selfish," I get "triggered" and have LOTS to say about how that person SHOULD NOT BE THAT WAY. (Beliefs like this are when we know our shadow is activated.)

The paradox is that I have a very selfish side of myself that I try to disown. When I am feeling bad about myself, I will whine and wonder why nobody loves me or cares about me. It's a very needy, unloved part of myself that I reject. Integrating the shadow in this example is about acknowledging I have this side and developing it in myself. Once I do, I will no longer be "triggered" by other people's "selfishness."

## HOW DO I RECOGNIZE MY SHADOWS?

You can identify your shadows by looking at what you project onto others. When you deny a trait in yourself, you tend to be very aware of that trait in other people. In the twelve-step tradition, they say, "If you spot it, you got it." This means that you are most aware of those traits in others which reflect your own shadows. You may react irrationally to one of these traits in someone else, becoming unduly annoyed and blowing things all out of proportion.

You can also notice the traits which you admire the most in others. Who do you look up to? Who are your idols? We often project our golden shadows onto others, and get stars in our eyes, because these people represent the qualities we have disavowed in ourselves out of a false sense of modesty. You could say that we paint other people with our shadows, for better and for worse.

Another way to spot your shadows is to look for things you find yourself doing by accident. For example, you may promise yourself that you're going to spend more time with your family, when you actually spend more time at work. You may find yourself jumping into a questionable relationship, when you know that this person isn't right for you. You may ignore your own rules about eating, smoking or drinking. When you repeat a pattern of behavior involuntarily, it is a sign that your shadow is running the show.



## THE SHADOW EXERCISE

Think of someone you know whom you don't like very much. Maybe you even hate this person. On a piece of paper, write down a description of that person. Write down what it is about this individual's personality that you don't like. Be as specific as you can.

When you are finished writing, draw a box around what they have written - and at the top of the box write "MY SHADOW."

Consider this, what you have written down is some hidden part of yourself - some part that you have suppressed or hidden. It is what Jung would call your SHADOW. Maybe it's a part of you that you fear, can't accept, or hate for some reason. Maybe it's a part of you that needs to be expressed or developed in some way. Maybe you even secretly wish you could be something like that person whom you hate.

Invariably, reactions to this idea are mixed. Some immediately see the connection; some immediately reject the idea. When I asked how many have friends or romantic partners who fit the description of the "hated" person, many are surprised to see that this is indeed the case. The exercise always leads to interesting discussions about how we project suppressed parts of ourselves onto others, and about why we sometimes choose these "hated" people for our close relationships.

*"We need more understanding of human nature, because the only real danger that exists is man himself . . . We know nothing of man, far too little. His psyche should be studied because we are the origin of all coming evil."*

~ Carl Jung, 1959