

slips of the tongue, and humor, and by showing how to discover the shadow in the ordinary events of life.

Jung once remarked, in a moment of exasperation about literal-minded pupils quoting his concepts out of context, that "the shadow is simply the whole unconscious!" Though he was not serious, his observation would be true only if a person were completely unaware of the unconscious in everyday life. Once we begin to develop awareness of parts of the unconscious personality, then the shadow takes on an identifiable personal form, which initiates the process of shadow-work. This procedure ultimately yields a profound awareness of who we are. According to analyst Erich Neumann: "The self lies hidden in the shadow; he is the keeper of the gate, the guardian of the threshold. The way to the self lies through him; behind the dark aspect that he represents there stands the aspect of wholeness, and only by making friends with the shadow do we gain the friendship of the self."

SECRET

1. THE LONG BAG WE DRAG BEHIND US

ROBERT BLY

It's an old Gnostic tradition that we don't invent things, we just remember. The Europeans I know of who remember the dark side best are Robert Louis Stevenson, Joseph Conrad, and Carl Jung. I'll call up a few of their ideas and add a few thoughts of my own.

Let's talk about the personal shadow first. When we were one or two years old we had what we might visualize as a 360-degree personality. Energy radiated out from all parts of our body and all parts of our psyche. A child running is a living globe of energy. We had a ball of energy, all right; but one day we noticed that our parents didn't like certain parts of that ball. They said things like: "Can't you be still?" Or "It isn't nice to try and kill your brother." Behind us we have an invisible bag, and the part of us our parents don't like, we, to keep our parents' love, put in the bag. By the time we go to school our bag is quite large. Then our teachers have their say: "Good children don't get angry over such little things." So we take our anger and put it in the bag. By the time my brother and I were twelve in Madison, Minnesota, we were known as "the nice Bly boys." Our bags were already a mile long.

Then we do a lot of bag-stuffing in high school. This time it's no longer the evil grownups that pressure us, but people our own age. So the student's parents (outgrownups can be misplaced. I lied all through high school automatically) try to be more like the basketball players. Any part of myself

that was a little slow went into the bag. My sons are going through the process now; I watched my daughters, who were older, experience it. I noticed with dismay how much they put into the bag, but there was nothing their mother or I could do about it. Often my daughters seemed to make their decision on the issue of fashion and collective ideas of beauty, and they suffered as much damage from others girls as they did from men.

So I maintain that out of a round globe of energy the twenty-year-old ends up with a slice. We'll imagine a man who has a thin slice left—the rest is in the bag—and we'll imagine that he meets a woman; let's say they are both twenty-four. She has a thin, elegant slice left. They join each other in a ceremony, and this union of two slices is called marriage. Even together the two do not make up one person! Marriage when the bag is large entails loneliness during the honeymoon for that very reason. Of course we all lie about it. "How is your honeymoon?" "Wonderful, how's yours?"

Different cultures fill the bag with different contents. In Christian culture sexuality usually goes into the bag. With it goes much spontaneity. Marie-Louise von Franz warns us, on the other hand, not to sentimentalize primitive cultures by assuming that they have no bag at all. She says in effect that they have a different but sometimes even larger bag. They may put individuality into the bag, or inventiveness. What anthropologists know as "participation mystique," or "a mysterious communal mind," sounds lovely, but it can mean that tribal members all know exactly the same thing and no one knows anything else. It's possible that bags for all human beings are about the same size.

We spend our life until we're twenty, deciding what parts of ourselves to put into the bag, and we spend the rest of our lives trying to get them out again. Sometimes retrieving them feels impossible, as if the bag were sealed. Suppose the bag remains sealed—what happens then? A great nineteenth-century story has an idea about that. One night Robert Louis Stevenson woke up and told his wife a bit of a dream he'd just had. She urged him to write it down; he did, and it became "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." The nice side of the personality becomes, in our idealistic culture, nicer and nicer. The Western man may be a liberal doctor, for example, always thinking about the good of others. Morally and ethically he is wonderful. But the substance in the bag takes on a personality of its own; it can't be ignored. The story says that the substance locked in the bag appears one day somewhere else in the city. The substance in the bag feels angry, and when you see it, it is shaped like an ape, and moves like an ape.

The story says then that when we put a part of ourselves in the bag, it regresses. It de-evolves toward barbarism. Suppose a young man seals a bag at twenty and then waits fifteen or twenty years before he opens it again. What will he find? Sadly, the sexuality, the wildness, the impulsiveness, the anger, the freedom he put in have all regressed; they are not only primitive in mood, they are hostile to the person who opens the bag. The man who opens his bag at forty-five or the woman who opens her bag rightly feels fear. She glances up and sees the shadow of an ape passing along the alley wall; an *ape*, seeing that would be frightened.

What Is the Shadow in Jungian Psychology?

Understanding the Dark Side of the Unconscious

Jul 12, 2008 Megge Hill Fitz-Randolph

An explanation of how the shadow material of the unconscious works in people's lives and ways it can be brought into healthy balance within the personality.

"Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?" begins that famous spine tingling, radio thriller from the 1930s -- *The Shadow*. No, this is not *that* shadow. That shadow actually did lurk in the rooms, streets and dark alleys of our cities. Still, *this* shadow is close by.

There is, indeed, an actual shadow-like energy that exists hidden from conscious mind yet contributing to the overall shape of the personality. This is what in psychological terms is meant by the *shadow*. It has become so popular in the lexicon it is worth understanding in more depth.

What Is Hidden

According to Carl Jung, the shadow is that part of the personality one chooses not to see. Usually of a vulgar, shameful, or corrupt nature, the shadow is comprised of whatever one cannot uphold in one's idea of oneself. Not being integrated or even acknowledged by conscious mind, the shadow sits and waits in the unconscious.

If Not Acknowledged

But never does the shadow evaporate or disappear; it simply goes underground where it continues to influence the person as complexes and neuroses. The solution from a Jungian perspective is not to repress but to acknowledge this material, to move closer towards it while disallowing its full expression in daily life.

A Life of its Own

Otherwise, the shadow can take on a life of its own, burst out in inopportune moments causing embarrassment or worse. These are the stories that hit the cable news channels by the famous and infamous. Mostly, however, one feels only gripped from time to time by the black dog of depression or malaise which seems to arise for no apparent reason.

Shows up in Dreams

Meanwhile, the unconscious continues to present this shadow material in dreams and daydreams or fantasy life. In this way the psyche is constantly being given the opportunity to become cognizant of its entire range and reconciled, at least in part, to its “unacceptable” aspects.

Energy Block

The effort to handle the shadow by repression only blocks crucial energy from the psyche which can contribute to depression and inertia. Trying to handle it through projection onto others is another unsatisfactory as well as dangerous way. However, once this repressed material starts to be acknowledged, the integration process has begun and tremendous energy starts returning to the psyche.

Causing No Harm

Jung saw that part of the work of the unconscious was to make itself heard by allowing life giving energy to be integrated back into conscious awareness. By transforming the shadow energy into acceptable expressions, the whole personality, its light and its dark side, can be brought into greater balance.

It should be remembered, however, that it is crucial to find appropriate substitutes for this shadow energy. It must be neither repressed nor fully exploited but, through transformation into appropriate channels, brought into balance with the conscious personality

Hiding the Gold

Sometimes it is not the darker aspects of the unconscious but the very best parts, the gold of the psyche, that is hidden. These are the unrealized talents and gifts that can seem as threatening to the psyche as anything else for they demand change of the personality structure and/or lifestyle in order to be realized.

Balance in the Personality

The work of the psyche, then, is to find ways to incorporate the unacknowledged material thereby releasing its energy caught in the backwaters of the unconscious. As this is accomplished more and more of this "stuck" energy becomes released and returned to consciousness. Thus the whole personality, its light and its darker sides, come into greater balance and wholeness. Read [Shadow Work in Eight-Easy-Steps](#) for practical tips on how to handle this awesome shadow energy.

For how to learn more about the Shadow read [Review of Romancing the Shadow](#).

Sources and recommended reading:

Bly, R., (1988). *A little book about the shadow*. San Francisco: Harper.

Johnson, R., (1993), *Owning your own shadow: Understanding the dark side of the psyche*. New York:

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