

## Confronting the Shadow Self

“Out of sight, out of mind” is the mantra of our Shadow Self, the part of our being which is tucked away, not so neatly, within our subconscious mind. Our Shadow aspect is part of our secret, suppressed self which serves to hide our own pain. It acts as a counterbalance to the positive attributes we purposefully project to the world. We all have a Shadow Self and we cannot escape its formidable presence as we meet our own darkness within our reactions and interactions with family, friends, co-workers, and strangers every day. These outward projections of our own pain are often painted with rage, anger, irritability, criticism, and self-loathing; however, each encounter with our Shadow is also an opportunity to empower ourselves, to confront that less desirable side of ourselves, and heal our deepest wounds. The process of confronting our Shadow Self is a journey into the depth of our mind, body, and spirit. It begins by defining the Shadow Self, understanding how it manifests within each of us, and making a commitment to our own self-healing through Holistic practices.

When we walk down the street on a sunny day, and the sun is shining behind us, a shadow is created. It appears to be separate from ourselves, but this dark projection on the ground is a part of us; the shadow goes where we go, and it reacts to our movements. We understand that it exists because our physical body is blocking the light of the sun from striking the surface in front of us. Now internalize this concept. The Shadow Self is born when our pain, negative feelings, and false beliefs about ourselves creates a blockage within us, and blocks the light of our own divine nature, which we will call our “positive reinforcement.” We cannot escape ourselves, and our attempts to do so creates fragmentation within us. Fragmentation happens when our thoughts do not align with our speech, and our behavior does not express our highest intentions. When our external environment triggers our suppressed pain, we subconsciously go to great lengths to push it down, distract ourselves, and avoid suffering at the expense of our health, happiness, and most important relationships.

So, what could possibly create this blockage within our bodies? Haunting memories of trauma, abuse, neglect; feelings of personal failure (both rooted in actual events, or perceived); heart-break, heartache, unrequited love; lack of feeling supported; feeling unsafe and fear of abandonment. These are just a few examples of blockages I have encountered either personally, or within others in my daily professional career, yoga teacher, and Reiki Master Teacher. Generally speaking, a blockage is any

residual energy that feels “yucky.” This energy is low vibrational energy carried by feelings of shame, guilt, failure, and fear. These blockages are often accompanied by a physical sensation somewhere in our bodies which overpowers our senses. We then attempt to remedy these uncomfortable feelings by engaging in activities which trigger the release of feel-good hormones within the brain, and numb the undesirable sensations we are experiencing. These “medicines” include food, alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, shopping, hoarding, gambling, and sex. These temporary escapes often provide immediate relief, but only contribute to further pain and fragmentation through avoidance of responsibility and reallocation of blame. Everyone knows someone who believes, “I’m sorry, I was drunk,” is an acceptable apology.

Alcohol and drugs are wonderful scapegoats. Food and material items provide comfort, as well as a plethora of obstacles and physical maladies; Sex can replace numbness with feeling, and for several minutes create the illusion of intimacy and understanding. These maladaptive, toxic behaviors are coping mechanisms which can lead to addiction, and only cause further fragmentation as we watch the breakdown of ourselves, and our most important relationships.

So, where do we find our Shadow Self? It manifests symbolically within our dreams, when our subconscious mind reveals to us at night that which we attempt to reject by day. And we meet our darkness subtly within our judgments of others; we often dislike qualities we meet within other people because those same qualities are somehow related to the parts of ourselves we do not wish to be seen. We most often notice the parts of ourselves which we dislike as the most as unacceptable qualities in others, especially those with whom we are closest. But, we are not always repelled by that undesirable energy, sometimes we are attracted to people and situations which help us act out our Shadow energy, in subconscious attempt to take control of the root energy and the situation which haunts us. We easily find situations which give us the perfect excuse to drink alcohol, or experiment with drugs; and our sexual escape partners are often running from the same demons. Cigarettes confirm our self-destructive nature, and our feelings of unworthiness, and food helps us hide, often behind extra weight. Within these repeated patterns of thought and behavior, and our intense physical, emotional, and psychological struggle, we come face to face with our shadow aspect, and we can either choose to further distract ourselves from our own darkness, or we can view these toxic experiences as guideposts along our path, and an opportunity to heal.

So, how do we heal when we feel desperately lost within our own self? We must venture into our

darkness through holistic practices. The word holistic came about in 1926 by Gen. J.C. Smuts (1870 – 1950) and is based on the Greek root *holos*, which means ‘whole.’ (Omniglot.com – source Online Etymology Dictionary). The philosophy and practice of Holistic Arts is based upon the theory that everything in Nature is interconnected; from the cosmos, to the planet, and all of its living creatures. Holistics further recognizes each individual as a microcosm of the macrocosm, and within us are systems and energies which must be balanced for optimal function and health. There are many cultural “roadmaps” which are meant to illustrate the inner workings of our being, but there is one simple way of summarizing each of these complex systems across the globe; human beings consist of mind, body, and spirit / breath. Holistic practices move our bodies in time with our breath, and bring us to stillness, where we become quiet enough for our Shadow’s voice to be heard. This point of intersection (mind, body, and spirit / breath) is the entry point into our own dark aspect. This is the edge where our healing begins. We move ourselves to this doorway through practices such as yoga asana, pranayama, walking, running, hiking, martial arts, writing, painting, holistic based psychotherapy, and Reiki. These are only several examples of practices which unify mind, body, and spirit / breath and move us away from fragmentation, toward wholeness. When we begin with the dense physical body of our existence and we actively engage our dense physical body with our environment, we “ground” our energy, much like an electrical circuit must be grounded in order for energy to flow properly and safely.

Grounding through holistic practices gives us a sense of safety, presence, and connection with our bodies and all that we see around us. Once we are grounded, we recognize the subtle energy that is our breath moving through us, and the two sides of our brain sync with one another; the active left side brain and the passive right side brain communicate harmoniously with one another, creating the balance necessary to open to the full human experience and every part of ourselves. Once we successfully obtain brain balance, we can use our breath to take us deeper, expand our consciousness, and open fully to the entire human experience. When we open, light can get inside, and we can see the positive reinforcement that already reside within us; those feelings of safety and strength, peace, and love; we recognize our worthiness, our holiness. In those moments of illumination, we can allow our imagination to create scenes of serenity, we begin to understand the symbolic absurdity of our dreams, and we can act out scenes of our best self in action, both mentally and physically, moving us closer to our highest

expression.

In summary, as we continuously commit ourselves to our chosen holistic path, we eventually accept what we are fighting is our own self, and “both sides” surrender within a state of balance as we realize our darkness is just as important as our light. As human beings, we are continually caught within the ebb and flow of our emotions and the experiences delivered by life. Consistent holistic practice brings us back to a state of wholeness time and time again as we move out of a judgmental mindset, no longer distinguishing good from bad, and pleasurable from pain. We move into our heart space, where there is only self-love. Our health improves, our outlook on life goes from black and white to color, and our interpersonal relationships flourish. If we truly love ourselves we are capable of loving others unconditionally. So, the challenge is now yours. Can you love even the parts of yourself which you deny? Those places within you which you feel are shameful, lustful, angry, unworthy, and undesirable? The road toward healing is not for the timid, but the method of travel is as easy as connecting mind, body, and spirit / breath. Happy travels.

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