

Understanding Our Shadow

The shadow self was a term coined by the Swiss Psychologist Carl Jung. It is the part of the personality which contains all the aspects of ourselves we wish we did not possess, actively disown or are reluctant to accept.

We are predominantly unconscious to our shadow and it takes significant 'work' and awareness to become cognisant to these parts of shadow portions of self.

Shadow behaviour is a triggered habitual, unaware, and automatic response to an activity, person, or event. When triggered we may rationalise or exhibit defence mechanisms such as aggressive or self-justifying behaviour, or conversely, we may show resistance or attempt to people please.

The shadow has its origin in childhood and is formed within the relationships we have with those who cared for us. At that time aspects of ourselves are labelled 'good' and so are accepted and praised, whilst other parts are deemed 'bad' and rejected. 'Bad' parts are exiled into the shadow.



You will need.

Childhood photos
Pen
Paper

Create a safe space for a childhood review.

Choose an area of your home which you will reclaim as 'safe space'. Make yourself comfortable and spend some time looking through childhood photographs. As you do this reflect and list your caregivers' 'rules', and expectations, plus which behaviours were praised, and which were punished or criticised. You will start to get an overview of how your personality was conditioned and which ways of being you may have shadow work to do. Be kind, compassionate and loving to your inner child. Go gently with this.

Use your judgements and triggers to create awareness of your shadow.

Who and what behaviours do you 'hate', criticise and judge in others?

Observe your emotional reactions. Write them down, as many as possible. Consider people, their qualities and characteristics, behaviours, actions, and words. Look for commonality and repetition. These are clues about shadow aspects of yourself.

As we become aware of them and accept them, our reaction becomes less extreme, and we are less triggered when we see them exhibited externally. Empathetically review them in a grounded and centred way. Loving recognition and giving the shadow aspects space to express their needs helps reduce reactivity.

Journal or draw what the shadow parts want to express. Hold space for them to speak to you.

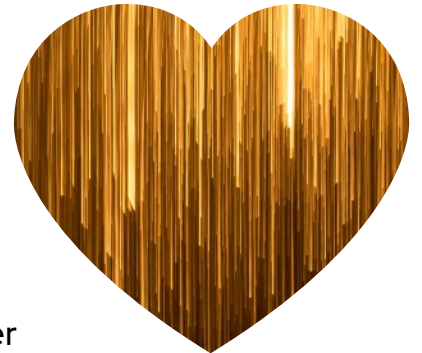


Shadow aspects for empowerment.

Those we revere and admire reflect to us qualities and attributes that we can reclaim from our shadow. Idolising others is a projection of 'positive' qualities we had to exile into the shadow as a child to be safe. Part of the individuation process is to reclaim and embody them, to support our empowerment. It is useful to reflect on who, why and what you hero(ine) worship. Those aspects are in you, they are gifts waiting to be integrated and brought to life.

Integration and assimilation are key.

The aim of shadow work is not to further shame or banish the shadow parts of self. The objective is to integrate your shadow through compassionate understanding, listening, and meeting needs through mature self-leadership and self-parenting.



Finding the inner gold.

Within the shadow there are beneficial aspects of self. For us to individuate this inner gold needs to be made conscious and assimilated into the ego. Once the gold is integrated, we often get clear on our life purpose and mission.



The benefits of shadow work numerous.

Benefits include increased wellbeing and health as we are no longer in conflict with ourselves and so stress reduces. We are more self-compassionate and understanding. Relationships improve as we own our triggers and express our needs more transparently. We can unearth and unlock creativity and we think and feel with more clarity with less judgement of self or others.



Useful links to find out more.

<https://www.jungcentre.com/the-origin-of-the-shadow>

<https://www.audible.co.uk/pd/Inner-Gold-Understanding-Psychological-Projection-Audiobook/BO7S4CH5MP>

<https://scottjeffrey.com/archetypes-psychology/>

This was produced in collaboration with Kay Turner, you can find her courses, support and experiences at Happy House Masham.

