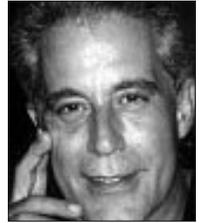


Who Lives Behind the Mask?

Reprinted with kind permission from Winter 2008 UI Update newsletter

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After teaching Therapeutic Imagery & Dialogue through The Upledger Institute for the last few years, a central theme – a central curiosity – has emerged. I use the word “emerged” because that word articulates something coming out of the void, something coming forward from a deep, non-conscious place.

When I image the non-conscious, I see a place as vast and deep as the Universe itself. Along with this image comes a feeling of mystery and awe. It is a place filled with suns, moons, asteroids, black holes, and a great deal of expanding space. A place of great turbulence, violence and peace. A paradox. The psyche, like the Universe and life itself, is a paradox full of new discoveries, new interpretations of old beliefs, new potentials, more questions, and a great deal of energy. Most people are uncomfortable with paradox. We feel we know ourselves well enough. We tie ourselves up into neat little packages with bows, and we say, “Here I am. This is me. This is the way I behave. These are my attributes, my beliefs, my limitations. Therefore, I know myself.” This is by no means a bad place to be. It can bring stability to our personalities and our lives. But for the inner explorer, this is only a place to begin. Once we’ve looked at this “Persona” and the daily masks we wear, we might be ready for a new and deeper exploration. This exploration might be likened to moving from Newtonian physics into the quantum world. Newtonian physics can explain everything from the workings of machines to the motion and tracking of heavenly bodies – in other words, the Persona, or the outward workings of the Universe. But the quantum world acts more like the “Shadow;” more like what goes on in the private, hidden parts of the Universe and our psyches – that which is concealed behind the mask.

Hiding In the Shadow

The Shadow has become that central theme, the central curiosity in the Therapeutic Imagery & Dialogue (TID) class. It is also the first layer of the psyche one meets when moving behind the Persona. But what is the Shadow? How is it formed? Robert Johnson, in his book *Owning Your Own Shadow*, calls it “... that dumping ground for all those characteristics of our personality that we disown...”

The problem is that we try to ignore the Shadow. But sooner or later we will encounter this great, submerged energy in the form of disease or challenging circumstances. First of all, let me say that Shadow formation is a necessary evil, so to speak. Once we learn from our parents and society that certain behaviours are acceptable and others are not, we enter the dualistic world of good and evil. The behaviours, thoughts and actions that are deemed unacceptable are cast into the recesses of the psyche, much like broken toys and old clothes – possessions wilfully relegated to the garbage. If we reflect on the past and remember how many toys and how much clothing we’ve thrown away, we may begin to appreciate the amount of energy stored in the Shadow.

Meeting My Hidden Self

On a personal level, my teenage and early adult years were spent in the entertainment world. I did just about everything entertainers and music personalities are known for. Yet as I travelled around the country carrying on like a musician, I also carried with me a library of religious philosophy and healing. This kept me in some sort of balance.

Years later, getting involved in massage therapy, CranioSacral Therapy and Psychosynthesis, I began the inner work necessary for further psychic growth, though I'm not sure I was truly aware of what I was doing. I was just following some compulsive instinct. I ended up at the Psychosynthesis Institute of Miami and for many years investigated my inner world. I worked on the various characters that emerged until reaching a place of deep-seated rage and hatred. As a child I was not allowed to express anger or dislike toward anyone. Where is that energy to go but deeper into the psyche, gathering more energy and developing into rage and hatred? I learned it was not so important to ask, "What makes me angry?" or "Why am I angry?" but to ask, "Who is the Angry One?" I stayed with the Angry One for months, drawing pictures of him – a fire-breathing dragon – and dialoguing with him.

I still get angry. Anger is inevitable. It has a vital energetic quality. But now anger does not rule me. I can recognize something simple like, "I'm not getting my way right now," and invite that vital energy to solve the problem instead of burning up inside. Much of this insight was not easy for me to admit or to deal with, but actually reaching this point was easier than what was to come.

Finding the Gold in the Shadow

After working with this angry psychic material for a long time, I realized that the Shadow had grown to become the root of my daily actions, and that I had become quite familiar with much of this dark side. Buried much deeper in the Shadow, however, was my own heart, my own worthiness, the light – what Johnson calls, "the gold in the Shadow."

To this day, owning my own noble traits is much harder for me than owning my darkness. Notably, I am both – the Gold as well as the Shadow. The two together make a whole, but owning the nobility is still full of resistance. This is part of my current process in my second half of life.

To be born a child is to be born whole, with both the Gold and the Shadow sharing the conscious psyche. Then society, religion and culture intrude and dictate which traits of the psyche are acceptable and which ones aren't, effectively dividing the child in two and striving to repress the Shadow. The second half of life is the time to resurrect ourselves from this psychic graveyard and find wholeness again by reintroducing the Shadow into our adult consciousness. Awareness of these polarities can truly help balance our lives. We must own both aspects of ourselves or remain bewildered about who we really are. This balance can be maintained through ritual, art, dance, music, or any harmless avenue we choose to play out these darker aspects. But know for certain that they must be entertained. Along with this work comes a newfound sense of understanding. We can see ourselves more easily in others, and we see we are not so different. There is a new feeling of patience, kindness and grounding, and a knowledge that we're all in this mess together. It is the same thing we see and feel on the table in CranioSacral Therapy.

In solitude or wherever men and women gather, the Shadow follows. Every relationship, office, institute, community, political party, religion or country has a Shadow – both personal and collective. Everyone wants more tools and techniques. But, as I say repeatedly in the TIDI class, the best tool to bring to the table is being a more integrated therapist. Carl Jung said, "One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light but by making the darkness conscious." To begin to see the Shadow in this light is to truly begin the journey toward understanding the self and others. The light behind the Shadow Shines through at the end of the day. So don't be afraid of your own Shadow.

Stan Jerome