

Transpersonal Psychotherapy

Graduate Certificate

The Crucible Centre

Shadow and Projection

What is 'shadow' and 'projection', and why won't they allow forgiveness?

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Introduction

Before the ego can triumph, it must master and assimilate the shadow.

(Henderson, 1978, p112)

Jung believed that the goal of the process of individuation was to establish a partnership between the ego and the Self, where the ego becomes the path for the Self to enter into full consciousness (Ha-Kohain, 1999). For this to happen it is necessary for the ego to be of a particular purity, or maturity, largely unencumbered by unconscious actions. The more mature the ego the easier it is for the Self to move into consciousness. Our unconscious actions come from the unowned aspects of ourselves that have been relegated into the unconscious. These unowned aspects are our 'shadows' and one quintessential task on the journey towards full consciousness is to become aware of them and the projections they produce.

Remaining unaware of projections and keeping the shadow aspects of ourselves in the dark recesses of the psyche is not helpful and certainly dangerous. Doing so unbalances our perception of reality, repressing joy and happiness and perpetuating anger, frustration, anxiety, and all the other pains of this earthly existence. Physical, mental, and emotional violence dominates the world of the individual person or culture that remains unbalanced and unaware of shadow and projection. I have recently seen this first hand in Afghanistan, a country that has been gripped by violence, not just for the last 25 years, but for millennia. Everywhere I went, whoever I talked to, the finger of blame was always pointing outward. The children did this; but I expected it from them. The adults did it too. I never expected such deep denial and lack of forgiveness. America too seems to be just as oblivious to the experiences of projection and shadow. Evidence of their denial can be seen daily in the media. However, I also realise, as I point my finger to the Afghans and the Americans that my own attitude to these affairs is governed by my own sense of shadow and the accompanying projections. With this realisation I know I can't fail in seeking to understand my own psyche and its aspects of shadow and the effect it has on myself and others. This 'knowing' empowers me to take responsibility for my own thoughts and actions as they arise.

Into the Darkness

So what exactly is this shadow and the projection that comes with it? And why won't it allow forgiveness?

The shadow lurks in the space opposite to what we know. It is the invisible reflection of the conscious mind. The shadow lives in the unconscious and is made up of all the repressed aspects of our personality. We are born whole - pure, full of innocence and without judgment. As we become more aware of the 'other', the world beyond our own eyes, we learn to divide our experiences into good and bad, generally putting away any characteristic that is considered anti-social and bringing forth only the culturally accepted aspects of ourselves. We do this simply to satisfy the need to belong, to ensure that we fit somehow into our human community. Without the feeling of fitting in we suffer from resentment, loneliness and anger. Civilization cannot be built without the understanding of good and bad, so this discrimination is necessary. However, the aspects of ourselves that are pushed down into the subconscious - these dark aspects, don't simply go away. They hang around and accumulate, building up in intensity that can grow as powerful as the ego itself. This is the shadow - the subconscious archetype that is opposite to that of the conscious ego. If the shadow is allowed to grow larger than the ego, by not being recognised and acknowledged, then, in the extreme, it can wreak havoc on the psyche, creating rage, and turning the person into a monster through their anti-social, uncivilized thoughts and actions. (Johnson, 1991, pp4, 5)

The ego and the shadow are always in conflict (Henderson, 1978, p110). If we choose to repress some aspects of our personality, whether it is anger or joy for example, we will inevitably cast this shadow onto others. This is projection. If someone does something that you detest; a particular way they laugh, cry, or throw a ball, or they earn more money than you, this is the projection of your shadow onto them. It is not their stuff but your own that annoys the hell out of you.

I had a particularly profound experience of this in Afghanistan. After a few weeks of living with my colleague in a Kabul orphanage I began to detest her. At worst I couldn't stand to be in her

presence for too long. As I had to live with her for four more weeks I needed to address the issue, but not with her - with myself. I knew it wasn't her that was making me angry and frustrated but something in me that was being triggered by what she was doing. What was it that she did? I soon realised that I hated how she interacted so well with the children. I clearly felt jealous and inadequate. This realisation brought an almost instantaneous change of attitude within me - transforming my jealousy and inadequacy (which only brought isolation) into respect and an eagerness to learn. I thus proceeded to watch her ways with the children and learn from her 30 years experience of working with war ravaged people. What I learned helped me be more intimate and real with the children. I felt more real within myself, which brought about some happiness and a sense of usefulness. In the end I greatly cherished the community I had been a part of and shed a mass of tears for weeks after returning home. I knew some of the tears were for leaving my young friends, but the greater tears, I realise in writing this, was for the loss of intimacy in communion. Sadness and loneliness seems to overwhelm me sometimes and it is because of this loss. It always has been. It has been the projection of my shadow, the unqualified judgment that has kept me at arms length of intimacy with others.

Becoming more conscious of my shadow aspects I can see now that my projections are almost constant. This harassment from the dark side of the mind keeps me from being present and 'real' with people. At the moment it seems to take great effort for me to be real. Johnson (1991, p11) describes the balancing of ego and shadow as a seesaw (teeter totter). Keeping the 'balance intact... often requires a very great expenditure of energy' (Johnson, 1991, p12). And the fulcrum is 'the whole (holy) place' where one can keep the left side, the ego, in balance with the right, the shadow. In doing so we can reach 'sainthood - or personal effectiveness' - or realness. (Johnson, 1991, p14)

Examples of this balance can be seen in religions such as Hinduism and Judaism. In India Vishnu is the fulcrum between Brahma the god of creation and Shiva the god of destruction. In the Kabbalah there are some *sefirot* (energetic pathways of emotion) that provide the balance between the other *sefirot*, ensuring an energetic balance of emotional energy. (Wolf, 1999)

All nature lives in polarity - light and dark, creation and destruction, up and down, male and female, etc. It is not surprising that we find the same basic laws functioning in our psychological

structure. (Johnson, 1991, p15)

I noticed a huge polarity swing in Afghanistan where the men, on one hand, seemed extremely gentle and loving in a very romantic masculine way. Then on the other hand, they would kill if they had to, and might have done when they were defending their communities. My friend and driver for my two-month stay in Kabul kept a pistol and machine gun in his home and had taught his young son to use them. He is the kindest, loving man, yet I noticed often in conversations that others were always to blame. His attitude was typical, common in any society, but amplified right there in war torn Afghanistan. There are huge weights influencing the psychological seesaw of the Afghan men. It seems to me that they have less emotional balance than the rest of us. And this isn't really surprising after all the country has gone through in the last few decades. The Afghani men can be easily moved from one extreme to the other.

America too has gigantic mood swings showing what seems to be compassion on one hand and barbaric ignorance on the other. During the 'war on terror' humanitarian aid distribution is bundled together with aggressive military 'peace keeping' operations. America and the Coalition of the Willing are trying to use the seesaw plank as a fulcrum for peace and freedom (to oppose the 'axis of evil'). However, as any kid in the park will tell you, it just won't work, 'you've got it upside down'.

It seems both cultures have no fulcrum that can bring a truly moral and compassionate balance to the situation. Both claim to have God on their side, but the leadership are up to their necks in religious fanaticism and are drowning in their own dogma - constantly pointing the finger at each other. Here is where forgiveness is impossible.

Fanaticism always indicates unconscious uncertainty not yet registering in consciousness. (Johnson, 1991, footnote p9)

'Uncertainty' is the key word to Johnson's obscure footnote. Uncertainty is OK, but if the uncertainty is unconscious and remains so, then all manner of demons are unleashed and projection is the dominant game that is acted out with words, fists, or weapons of mass destruction. Unconscious uncertainty creates unconscious emotional behaviour that can be

physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually destructive. In this state forgiveness of any sort is impossible, because, 'It wasn't my fault, I didn't create it!'

Believing that outside forces are capriciously controlling one's experiences can lead to the desire for revenge, to the constant need to 'avenge' the arbitrary and fickle vicissitudes of life. Research (Stuckless, 1998) has found that the stronger the vengeful feelings people have, the less comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful their experience of life is. McCullough *et al* (2001) corroborate these findings, noting that vengefulness is positively correlated with being less forgiving, having greater rumination about the offence, having higher negative affectivity; and having lower life satisfaction. (Judge, 2001)

If the uncertainty is brought into consciousness then the destructive behaviour can be reflected upon and the fanatical doctrine deeply questioned. This is where realisation dawns and forgiveness is born. Forgiveness can only come by owning one's own shadow. Once this is achieved balance quite naturally follows.

Conclusion

I know this much, that I can change my state of being by becoming more aware of my shadow projections, thus owning them. From this forgiveness based on the moral principal of love, rather than obligation, will naturally flow from the heart and saturate my soul. The quality of my life depends wholly upon this. Forgiveness of myself? Wow, what a concept!

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