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INTRODUCTION: THE SHADOW SIDE OF EVERYDAY LIFE

CONNIE ZWEIG AND JEREMIAH ABRAMS

How could there be so much evil in the world?
Knowing humanity, I wonder why there is not more
of it.

WOODY ALLEN, *Hannah and Her Sisters*

In 1886, more than a decade before Freud plumbed the depths of human darkness, Robert Louis Stevenson had a highly revealing dream: A male character, pursued for a crime, swallows a powder and undergoes a drastic change of character, so drastic that he is unrecognizable. The kind, hard-working scientist Dr. Jekyll is transformed into the violent and relentless Mr. Hyde, whose evil takes on greater and greater proportions as the dream story unfolds.

Stevenson developed the dream into the now-famous tale *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Its theme has become so much a part of popular culture that we may think of it when we hear someone say, "I was not myself," or "He was like a demon possessed," or "She became a shrew." As Jungian analyst John Sanford points out, when a story like this one touches the chord of our humanity in such a way that it rings true for many people, it must have an archetypal quality—it must speak to a place in us that is universal.

Each of us contains both a Dr. Jekyll and a Mr. Hyde, a more pleasant persona for everyday wear and a hiding, nighttime self that remains hushed up much of the time. Negative emotions and behaviors—rage, jealousy, shame, lying, resentment, lust, greed, suicidal and murderous tendencies—lie concealed just beneath the surface, masked by our more proper selves. Known together in psychology as the *personal shadow*, it remains untamed, unexplored territory to most of us.

INTRODUCING THE SHADOW

The personal shadow develops naturally in every young child. As we identify with ideal personality characteristics such as politeness and generosity, which are reinforced in our environments, we shape what W. Brugh Joy calls the New Year's Resolution Self. At the same time, we bury in the shadow those

ego and the shadow, then, develop in tandem, creating each other out of the same life experience.

Carl Jung saw the inseparability of ego and shadow in himself in a dream that he describes in his autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*:

It was night in some unknown place, and I was making slow and painful headway against a mighty wind. Dense fog was flying along everywhere. I had my hands cupped around a tiny light which threatened to go out at any moment. Everything depended on my keeping this little light alive.

Suddenly I had the feeling that something was coming up behind me. I looked back and saw a gigantic black figure following me. But at the same moment I was conscious in spite of my terror that I must keep my little light going through night and wind, regardless of all dangers.

When I awoke I realized at once that the figure was my own shadow on the swirling mists, brought into being by the little light I was carrying. I knew too that this little light was my consciousness, the only light I have. Though infinitely small and fragile in comparison with the powers of darkness, it is still a light, my only light.

Many forces play a role in forming our shadow selves, ultimately determining what is permitted expression and what is not. Parents, siblings, teachers, clergy, and friends create a complex environment in which we learn what is kind, proper, moral behavior, and what is mean-spirited, shameful, and sinful.

The shadow acts like a psychic immune system, defining what is self and what is not-self. For different people, in different families and cultures, what falls into ego and what falls into shadow can vary. For instance, some permit anger or aggression to be expressed; most do not. Some permit sexuality, vulnerability, or strong emotions; many do not. Some permit financial ambition, or artistic expression, or intellectual development, while some do not.

All the feelings and capacities that are rejected by the ego and exiled into the shadow contribute to the hidden power of the dark side of human nature. However, not all of them are what we consider to be negative traits. According to Jungian analyst Liliane Frey-Rohn, this dark treasury includes our infantile parts, emotional attachments, neurotic symptoms, as well as our undeveloped talents and gifts. The shadow, she says, "retains contact with the lost depths of the soul, with life and vitality—the superior, the universally human, yes, even the creative can be sensed there."

DISOWNING THE SHADOW

We cannot look directly into this hidden domain. The shadow by nature is difficult to apprehend. It is dangerous, disorderly, and forever in hiding, as if the light of consciousness would steal its very life.

Prolific Jungian analyst James Hillman says: "The unconscious cannot be conscious; the moon has its dark side, the sun goes down and cannot shine
God has two hands. Attention and focus require

some things to be out of the field of vision, to remain in the dark. One cannot look both ways."

For this reason, we see the shadow mostly indirectly, in the distasteful traits and actions of other people, *out there* where it is safer to observe it. When we react intensely to a quality in an individual or group—such as laziness or stupidity, sensuality, or spirituality—and our reaction overtakes us with great loathing or admiration, this may be our own shadow showing. We *project* by attributing this quality to the other person in an unconscious effort to banish it from ourselves, to keep ourselves from seeing it within.

Jungian analyst Marie-Louise von Franz suggests that projection is like shooting a magic arrow. If the receiver has a soft spot to receive the projection, it sticks. If we project our anger onto a dissatisfied mate, our seductive charms onto a good-looking stranger, or our spiritual attributes onto a guru, we hit the target and the projection holds. From then on the sender and receiver are linked in a mysterious alliance, like falling in love, discovering a perfect hero, or a perfect villain.

So the personal shadow contains undeveloped, unexpressed potentials of all kinds. It is that part of the unconscious that is complementary to the ego and represents those characteristics that the conscious personality does not wish to acknowledge and therefore neglects, forgets, and buries, only to discover them in uncomfortable confrontations with others.

MEETING THE SHADOW

Although we cannot gaze at it directly, the shadow does appear in daily life. For example, we meet it in humor—such as dirty jokes or slapstick antics—which express our hidden, inferior, or feared emotions. When we observe closely that which strikes us as funny—such as someone slipping on a banana peel or referring to a taboo body part—we discover that the shadow is active. John Sanford points out that people who lack a sense of humor probably have a very repressed shadow. It's usually the shadow self who laughs at jokes.

English psychoanalyst Molly Tuby suggests six other ways in which, even unknowingly, we meet the shadow every day:

- In our exaggerated feelings about others ("I just can't believe he would do that!" "I don't know how she could wear that outfit!")
- In negative feedback from others who serve as our mirrors ("This is the third time you arrived late without calling me.")
- In those interactions in which we continually have the same troubling effect on several different people ("Sam and I both feel that you have not been straightforward with us.")
- In our impulsive and inadvertent acts ("Oops, I didn't mean to say that.")
- In situations in which we are humiliated ("I'm so ashamed about how

- In our exaggerated anger about other people's faults ("She just can't seem to do her work on time!" "Boy, he really let his weight get out of control!")

At moments like these, when we are possessed by strong feelings of shame or anger, or we find that our behavior is off the mark in some way, the shadow is erupting unexpectedly. Usually it recedes just as quickly, because meeting the shadow can be a frightening and shocking experience to our self-image.

For this reason we may quickly shift into denial, hardly noticing the murderous fantasy, suicidal thought, or embarrassing envy that could reveal a bit of our own darkness. The late psychiatrist R. D. Laing poetically describes the mind's denial reflex:

*The range of what we think and do
is limited by what we fail to notice.
And because we fail to notice
that we fail to notice
there is little we can do
to change
until we notice
how failing to notice
shapes our thoughts and deeds.*

If the denial holds, as Laing says, then we may not even notice that we fail to notice. For example, it's common to meet the shadow at midlife, when one's deeper needs and values tend to change direction, perhaps even making a 180-degree turn. This calls for breaking old habits and cultivating dormant talents. If we don't stop to heed the call and continue to move in the same life direction, we will remain unaware of what midlife has to teach.

Depression, too, can be a paralyzing confrontation with the dark side, a contemporary equivalent of the mystic's dark night of the soul. The inner demand for a descent into the underworld can be overridden by outer concerns, such as the need to work long hours, distractions by other people, or antidepressant drugs, which damp our feelings of despair. In this case, we fail to grasp the purpose of our melancholy.

Meeting the shadow calls for slowing the pace of life, listening to the body's cues, and allowing ourselves time to be alone in order to digest the cryptic messages from the hidden world.

THE COLLECTIVE SHADOW

Today we are confronted with the dark side of human nature each time we open a newspaper or watch the evening news. The more repugnant effects of the shadow are made visible to us in a daily prodigious media message that is broadcast globally throughout our modern electronic village. The world has

The collective shadow—human evil—is staring back at us virtually everywhere: It shouts from newsstand headlines; it wanders our streets, sleeping in doorways, homeless; it squats in X-rated neon-lit shops on the peripheries of our cities; it embezzles our monies from the local savings and loan; it corrupts power-hungry politicians and perverts our systems of justice; it drives invading armies through dense jungles and across desert sands; it sells arms to mad leaders and gives the profits to reactionary insurgents; it pours pollution through hidden pipes into our rivers and oceans, and poisons our food with invisible pesticides.

These observations are not some new fundamentalism, thumping on a biblical version of reality. Our era has made forced witnesses of us all. The whole world is watching. There is no way to avoid the frightening specter of satanic shadows acted out by conniving politicians, white-collar criminals, and fanatic terrorists. Our inner desire to be whole—now made manifest in the machinery of global communication—forces us to face the conflicting hypocrisy that is everywhere today.

While most individuals and groups live out the socially acceptable side of life, others seem to live out primarily the socially disowned parts. When they become the object of negative group projections, the collective shadow takes the form of scapegoating, racism, or enemy-making. To anti-Communist Americans, the USSR is the evil empire. To Moslems, America is the great Satan. To Nazis, the Jews are vermin Bolsheviks. To ascetic Christian monks, witches are in league with the devil. To South African advocates of apartheid or American members of the Ku Klux Klan, blacks are subhuman, undeserving of the rights and privileges of whites.

The hypnotic power and contagious nature of these strong emotions are evident in the universal pervasiveness of racial persecution, religious wars, and scapegoating tactics around the world. In these ways, human beings attempt to dehumanize others in an effort to ensure that *they* are wearing the white hats—and that killing the enemy does not mean killing human beings like themselves.

Throughout history the shadow has appeared via the human imagination as a monster, a dragon, a Frankenstein, a white whale, an extraterrestrial, or a man so vile that we cannot see ourselves in him; he is as removed from us as a gorgon. Revealing the dark side of human nature has been, then, one of the primary purposes of art and literature. As Nietzsche puts it: "We have art so that we shall not die of reality."

By using arts and media, including political propaganda, to imagine something as evil or demonic, we attempt to gain power over it, to break its spell. This may help explain why we are riveted to violent news stories of warmongers and religious fanatics. Repelled yet drawn to the violence and chaos of our world, in our minds we turn these *others* into the containers of evil, the enemies of civilization.

Projection also may help explain the immense popularity of horror novels and movies. Through a vicarious enactment of the shadow side, our evil

Children typically are introduced to shadow issues by listening to fairy tales that portray the war between good and evil forces, fairy godmothers and horrific demons. They, too, vicariously suffer the trials of their heroes and heroines, thereby learning the universal patterns of human fate.

In today's censorship battle in the arenas of media and music, those who would throttle the voice of darkness may not understand its urgent need to be heard. In an effort to protect the young, the censors rewrite Little Red Riding Hood so that she is no longer eaten by the wolf; and, in the end, the young are left unprepared to meet the evil they encounter.

Like a society, each family also has its built-in taboos, its forbidden arenas. The *family shadow* contains all that is rejected by a family's conscious awareness, those feelings and actions that are seen as too threatening to its self-image. In an upright Christian, conservative family this may mean getting drunk or marrying someone of another faith; in a liberal, atheistic family it may mean choosing a gay relationship. In our society, wife battering and child abuse used to be hidden away in the family shadow; today they have emerged in epidemic proportions into the light of day.

The dark side is not a recent evolutionary appearance, the result of civilization and education. It has its roots in a *biological shadow* that is based in our very cells. Our animal ancestors, after all, survived with tooth and claw. The beast in us is very much alive—just caged most of the time.

Many anthropologists and sociobiologists believe that human evil is a result of curbing our animal aggression, of choosing culture over nature and losing contact with our primitive wildness. Physician-anthropologist Melvin Konner tells the story in *The Tangled Wing* of going to a zoo and seeing a sign that reads: "The Most Dangerous Animal on Earth," only to discover that he is looking in the mirror.

KNOW THYSELF

In ancient times, human beings acknowledged the many dimensions of the shadow—the personal, collective, family, and biological. On the lintel pieces of the now-destroyed temple of Apollo at Delphi, which was built into the side of Mount Parnassus by the Greeks of the classical period, the temple priests set into stone two famous inscriptions, precepts that still hold great meaning for us today. The first of these, "Know thyself," applies broadly to our task. Know all of yourself, the priest of the god of light advised, which could be translated, know especially the dark side.

We are in direct lineage to the Greek mind. Our shadow self remains the great burden of self-knowledge, the disruptive element that does not want to be known. The Greeks understood this problem all too well, and their religion compensated for the underside of life. It was on the same mountainside above Delphi that the Greeks annually celebrated their famous bacchanal

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Marie-Louise von Franz acknowledges the relationship between the devil and the personal shadow when she says, "The principle of individuation is actually related to the devilish element, insofar as the latter represents a separation from the divine within the totality of nature. The devilish aspects are the disrupting elements—the affects, the autonomous power drive, and such things. They disrupt the unity of the personality."

NOTHING TO EXCESS

The other inscription at Delphi is perhaps more telling of the times in which we live. "Nothing to excess," the Greek god proclaims from his now-crumbled earthly shrine. The classicist E. R. Dodds suggests an interpretation of this motto: Only a people who knew excess, he says, could have lived by such a maxim. Only those who knew their capacity for lust, greed, rage, gluttony, and for all things excessive—who have understood and accepted their own potential for inappropriate extremes—can choose to regulate and humanize their actions.

We live in a time of critical excess: too many people, too much crime, too much exploitation, too much pollution, too many nuclear weapons. These are excesses that we can acknowledge and decry, though we may feel powerless to do anything about them.

Is there, in fact, anything we *can* do about them? For many people, the unacceptable qualities of excess go directly into the unconscious shadow, or they get expressed in shadowy behavior. In many of our lives these extremes take the form of symptoms: intensely negative feelings and actions, neurotic suffering, psychosomatic illnesses, depression, and substance abuse.

The scenarios might look like this: When we feel excessive desire, we push it into the shadow, then act it out without concern for others; when we feel excessive hunger, we push it into the shadow, then overeat, binge and purge, trashing our bodies; when we feel excessive longing for the high side of life, we push it into the shadow, then we seek it out through instant gratification or hedonistic activity such as drug and alcohol abuse. The list goes on. In our society, we see the growth of shadow excesses everywhere:

- In an uncontrolled power drive for knowledge and domination of nature (expressed in the amorality of the sciences and the unregulated marriage of business and technology).
- In a self-righteous compulsion to help and cure others (expressed in the distorted, codependent role of those in the helping professions and the greed of doctors and pharmaceutical companies).

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- In a materialistic hedonism (expressed in conspicuous consumption, exploitative advertising, waste, and rampant pollution).
- In a desire to control our innately uncontrollable intimate lives (expressed in widespread narcissism, personal exploitation, manipulation of others, and abuse of women and children).
- And in our everpresent fear of death (expressed in an obsession with health and fitness, diet, drugs, and longevity at any price).

These shadowy aspects run the width and breath of our society. However, the tried solutions to our collective excess may be even more dangerous than the problem. Consider, for example, fascism and authoritarianism, the horrors that arose in reactionary attempts to contain social disorder and widespread decadence and permissiveness in Europe. More recently, the fervor of religious and political fundamentalism has reawakened on our own shores and across the seas in response to progressive ideas, encouraging, in W. B. Yeats's words, "mere anarchy to be loosed upon the world."

Jung understated the case when he said, "We have in all naiveté forgotten that beneath our world of reason another lies buried. I do not know what humanity will still have to undergo before it dares to admit this."

IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

History records from time immemorial the plagues of human evil. Entire nations have been susceptible to being pulled into mass hysterias of vast destructive proportions. Today, with the apparent end of the cold war, there are some hopeful exceptions. For the first time, entire nations have become self-reflective and have tried to reverse direction. Consider this newspaper report, which speaks for itself (as cited by Jerome S. Bernstein in his book *Power and Politics*): The Soviet government announced that it was temporarily canceling history examinations in the country. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* of June 11, 1988, reported:

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Reporting the cancellation, the government newspaper *Isvestia* said the extraordinary decision was intended to end the passing of lies from generation to generation, a process that has consolidated the Stalinist political and economic system.

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This astounding confession by an entire nation could mark the end of an era. According to Sam Keen, author of *Faces of the Enemy*, "The only safe nations are those who systematically inoculate themselves by a free press and a vocal prophetic minority against the intoxication of 'divine destinies' and sanctified paranoia."

Today the world moves in two apparently opposing directions: Some leap away from fanatic, totalitarian regimes; others dig their feet in. We may feel helpless in the face of such great forces. Or, if we feel about such things at all, surely it must be the guilty conscience of unwitting complicity in our collective predicament. This bind was expressed accurately by Jung at mid-century: "The inner voice brings to consciousness whatever the whole—whether the nation to which we belong or humanity of which we are a part—suffers from. But it presents this evil in individual form, so that at first we would suppose all this evil to be only a trait of individual character."

To protect us from the human evil which these mass unconscious forces can enact, we have only one weapon: greater individual awareness. If we fail to learn or fail to act on what we learn from the spectacle of human behavior, we forfeit our power as individuals to alter ourselves, and thus to save our world. Yes, evil will always be with us. But the consequences of unchecked evil do not need to be tolerated.

"A great change of our psychological attitude is imminent," Jung said in 1959. "The only real danger that exists is man himself. He is the great danger, and we are pitifully unaware of it. We are the origin of all coming evil."

Cartoonist Walt Kelly's Pogo said it simply: "We have met the enemy and he is us." Today, we can give renewed psychological meaning to the idea of individual power. The frontier for action in confronting the shadow is—as it always has been—in the individual.

OWNING THE SHADOW

The aim of meeting the shadow is to develop an ongoing relationship with it to expand our sense of self by balancing the one-sidedness of our conscious attitudes with our unconscious depths.

Novelist Tom Robbins says, "The purpose in encountering the shadow is to be in the right place in the right way." When we are in a proper relationship to it, the unconscious is not a demoniacal monster, as Jung points out, but only becomes dangerous when our conscious attention to it is hopelessly

A right relationship with the shadow offers us a great gift: to lead us back to our buried potentials. Through *shadow-work*, a term we coined to refer to the continuing effort to develop a creative relationship with the shadow, we can:

- achieve a more genuine self-acceptance, based on a more complete knowledge of who we are;
- defuse the negative emotions that erupt unexpectedly in our daily lives;
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- recognize the projections that color our opinion of others;
- heal our relationships through more honest self-examination and direct communication;
- and use the creative imagination via dreams, drawing, writing, and rituals to own the disowned self.

Perhaps . . . perhaps we can also, in this way, refrain from adding our personal darkness to the density of the collective shadow.

British Jungian analyst and astrologer Liz Greene points to the paradoxical nature of the shadow as both the container of darkness and the beacon pointing toward the light: "It is the suffering, crippled side of the personality which is both the dark shadow that won't change and also the redeemer that transforms one's life and alters one's values. The redeemer can get the hidden treasure or win the princess or slay the dragon because he's marked in some way—he's abnormal. The shadow is both the awful thing that needs redemption, and the suffering redeemer who can provide it."

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MEETING THE SHADOW

*The Hidden Power
of the Dark Side
of Human Nature*

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