

Dancing with “The shadow”

Recently I taught a workshop which focused upon “*Dancing with Power* “. Within this workshop we explored various interpretations of power, including what we perceived to be a powerful dancer. It has been through this experience, as well as through my own personal journey that I would like to explore how the integration of our shadow aspects may enable us each to express our own sacred power.

The *shadow self*, are traits that we have disowned and refused to accept as being a part of who we are. These include both positive (*light shadow*) and negative (*dark shadow*) aspects. We grow up learning which behaviours and qualities are acceptable to others, as well as those that are not. We may then learn to hide these unacceptable aspects of ourselves deep within the subconscious, where they become disowned and perhaps even forgotten. The resulting ‘masks’ that we then develop and thus reveal to the world are many of those aspects that we feel are ‘acceptable’ to both ourselves and to others. Our masks form as a result of our fears, however they can also serve us by acting as a protective shield throughout our life. By unconcealing our shadow aspects, the masks we have worn are then revealed. Through the gradual chipping away of this mask, the light of our authentic self starts to shine through. The authentic self is in essence whole, and through accepting and integrating *all* aspects of who we truly are, we are then more able to embrace the totality of ourselves and therefore actualise our true potential. In my opinion, embracing the wholeness of our selves is the expression of sacred power.

Because shadow aspects are often forgotten and buried deep within, the main gift that we have in revealing them is through our awareness of *projection*. Every aspect we see in another, especially when it produces an emotional charge, is a projection of an aspect we have not completely accepted or owned within the self. This leads me to believe that if we did not possess a certain quality within ourselves, we could not then recognize it in another. Ken Wilber suggests that the “projection on the ego level is very easily identified: if a person or thing in the environment *informs* us, we probably aren’t projecting, on the other hand, if it *affects* us, chances are that we are victim to our own projections”

One trait that I often found myself projecting onto others was inauthenticity. For me this was an aspect that I refused to accept within myself, thus the universe would consistently present me with people who I thought were being inauthentic. I then began to look a little deeper and acknowledged times that I would put on a 'happy, strong' mask, while deep down I felt insecure and scared. What a classic example of inauthenticity! Once I was able to accept this trait within myself, I noticed that I no longer felt the same emotional charge when I was confronted with this perceived trait in others. I was also able to discover and appreciate the gift that came with the integration of this aspect, which in this case for me was acceptance.

Exercise in discovering your shadow aspects

I invite you to spend a few moments quietening your mind in a private space. I also suggest that you have your journal close by throughout this exercise.

1) Start by making a list of 3 people you dislike and write 3 traits for each of them that you despise. Then write the names of 3 people that you admire, followed by 3 positive traits that you love about them. This exercise may help you to reveal the *dark shadow* aspects as well as the *light shadow* aspects within yourself. Interestingly both can be as equally challenging to accept and integrate.

2) Then become aware of the behaviours in others that really push your buttons (partners and parents are often common subjects of our projections). I suggest that you also become aware of people who really inspire you (teachers or celebrities can be common people we may project our *light shadow* onto)

3) Finally, be completely honest with yourself and answer the following questions: Have I ever displayed a similar trait? Am I capable of expressing it given the circumstances? Do I currently express this trait? If you find this task difficult ask some one close to you to be brutally honest. Then make a commitment to observe your self for the next week and journal your findings.

(For further exercises and information on integrating shadow aspects, I highly recommend "The dark side of the light chasers" by Debbie Ford.)

It is my belief that without taking personal responsibility for our emotional reactions and projections, we remain the victim in our life experiences. The universe will continuously present us with people and situations that mirror back our neglected aspects until they are acknowledged, accepted and integrated. I personally have found shadow work to be one of the most confronting and challenging processes on the journey to awakening. To reclaim and accept lost aspects of ourselves requires commitment, personal responsibility and a deep passion to heal. As Jung mentions, "one does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious". The pain and uncomfortable feelings that may arise are just the ego losing control - so stay with it! Through revealing and owning 'the shadow', our masks are no longer required. We may then be rewarded with the joy of expressing the wholeness of our true magnificent self, which is then able to reflect the love and light of our creator. When we are in alignment with the creator, manifesting our full potential becomes natural and effortless.

Lets learn to dance with the shadow and become a responsive partner to it. Treat the shadow as you would a dance partner; with respect, acknowledgment, intimacy and a willingness to flow as one.

"The only devils in the world are those running around in our hearts. That is where the battle should be fought" Gandhi

I wish you well on your journey to wholeness.