

A Vital Clarification about the Human Shadow

by Michael A Green, 2017, www.TheAllowableThoughtCage.com

"Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows!"

Introduction from *The Shadow* radio program, 1937

I want to make an important clarification about the human shadow, after reading several sincere teachers and sages explain how we can 'heal the shadow' or otherwise 'overcome it' once and for all, and move into 'a new age' without it. I hope to convincingly demonstrate the error in this way of looking at our 'dark side'.

To begin, here's a quote by Stephen A. Diamond Ph.D, which conveys the basic notion with sufficient clarity for my purposes in this short article:

“The *shadow*, said celebrated Swiss psychiatrist C.G. Jung, is the unknown “dark side” of our personality—dark both because it tends to consist predominantly of the primitive, negative, socially or religiously depreciated human emotions and impulses like sexual lust, power strivings, selfishness, greed, envy, anger or rage, and due to its unenlightened nature, completely obscured from consciousness. Whatever we deem evil, inferior or unacceptable and deny in ourselves becomes part of the shadow, the counterpoint to what Jung called the *persona* or conscious ego personality.”

The shadow is our dark side; our hungering, lusting, selfish underside. It's the part of ourselves we attempt to conceal behind our veneers of social grace, civilized self-control, good manners, and perennially pleasant personalities—at least in public—at least when we haven't had too much to drink.

Underneath our conscious personality, our shadow is also the part of ourselves we project outwardly onto others when we are not knowingly accepting it as a valid part of ourselves. So we may conclude: “That group is nothing but a bunch of hopeless idiots”, “that guy isn't fit to tie my shoes”, “people who believe in that are morons”, “those in that race, religion or creed are subhuman”, and so on.

When we look a little deeper, under the hood of our habitual prejudices, we typically condemn others for some of their behaviors and attitudes—behaviors and attitudes we can easily wind up personifying ourselves—when we start dismissing others as unworthy of our respect, consideration and human regard.

Then we may hate in them, everything we hate in ourselves, forgetting we also harbor the seeds of these behaviors and attitudes, while we blame others completely for keeping them alive in the world. Temporarily at least and perhaps chronically, we may find ourselves rejecting or suppressing these parts of ourselves and effectively ‘projecting’ them—the behaviors and attitudes we abhor and condemn—outside our skins and onto others. We may hold others responsible for bringing these things to our attention, for reminding us they exist inside ourselves. They do, our experience nevertheless insists, exist.

Some have theories the shadow is created by childhood trauma, conditioning, or abuse, and that if we learn how to raise our children without repressing any of their natural urges or instincts and drives, the shadow will not be created and evil will cease to exist. Yet we will still have to ‘socialize’ our children to respect the boundaries of others in order to develop workable social relations, so this remains an ideal never completely attainable even in theory.

We must eventually learn to contain and incorporate some of our wildest impulses, and encourage others to do the same for our own sake. We must include, accept and consciously manage our most destructive urges, expressing them creatively, or eventually we will likely find ourselves acting them out in insensitive or even despicable forms of semi-conscious or unconscious behaviors.

Still, excellent parenting has gargantuan importance and with more of it, it's very likely less evil will exist. And perhaps more importantly, increasingly healthy parenting, in keeping children more whole, will make them naturally more immune to being corrupted or corruptible. They will have more of a vital appreciation of their unique wholeness, a special feeling-sense

of an individual self they will have some deeply organic passion to preserve.

Currently, too much parenting, schooling, and coaching teach our children to become just like everyone else, emulating or mimicking those modeling 'preferred behavior'. This encourages our individual core of uniqueness to take a back seat to order, efficiency, money-making and 'fitting in' with things as they are, forcing our primal drives and passions underground into the darkness of an inner underworld. Here our deepest desires may remain hidden below the light of awareness and the liberation of daylight expression. Under this tyranny of 'disallowed thoughts' and unacceptable parts of ourselves, the shadow becomes increasingly split off, progressively less conscious, and so grows darker in hiding, building heat and pressure in secret. Eventually these banished subterranean flames will surface, in one form or another...

No matter how good our parenting, however, we will still be susceptible to temptation; to greed, lust for power, opportunities to take advantage of others for our own gain, and so on. We are innately prone to abusing others in the interest of pleasing ourselves, to some degree. This is an ineradicable component of the human psyche that partly defines what it means to be human. It also serves as the basis for some of our more creative efforts, furnishing us with the strength to do something new, to disobey what no longer feels right, to disregard what no longer seems valuable—regardless of who says otherwise. The shadow can furnish us with the strength to break through what those around us tell us we 'should' do in order to find our own way along a path uniquely our own.

Some 'good' traits of the shadow can look like fighting spirit, standing up for ourselves, dissent, investigating secrets and hidden places, breaking taboos, and so on.

Collusion, coercion, and deception are shadow behaviors—even lying to protect someone's feelings can be said to originate in the deceptive nature of the shadow, and I am not recommending an end to 'white lies' in our current situation. We sometimes need to hide the truth to protect ourselves from others who would use it to take advantage of us. Sometimes we need to keep our opinions to ourselves and let others make their assumptions about us in the

face of our silence. Sometimes we need to stand up for ourselves, for our values, in spite of pressures and antagonisms to go along obediently with actions we oppose. For these types of activities we need to tap into the deep/dark strength typically stored underground in our shadow selves.

Any time you don't go along with the crowd, refuse to do as you're told, or disobey established authorities, you're engaging some of the animating energy of the rebel-outcast-outlaw-shadow, insisting on your own point of view even, at times, knowingly risking expulsion or persecution.

The shadow is the part of the human psyche that makes evil possible. The shadow enables some people to prey on others, to dominate or enslave them, to steal from them or kill them. It enables others to rebel against injustice and to actively oppose corruption—whether in open daylight or in hidden darkness. The shadow is the root source of humanity's inhumanity to man—to other human beings.

Yet without the shadow, neither could we lust for someone else, something more, or something other, we couldn't rage against what we oppose or refuse to go along with the established order of things.

Now here's the clarification or correction I initially set out to make, which should come as no surprise by now. The shadow cannot be removed, healed, transcended or otherwise overcome. It is an intimate part of each of us. The best we can do is to accept, include, integrate, and monitor the influence of the shadow in ourselves first, in others second, in our local society third, and in the larger sphere cumulatively over time through many local accomplishments that involve becoming more conscious and accepting of the reality and vitality of the darkness inhabiting each of us.

Healing, transcending, transforming, rising above, overcoming, or eliminating the shadow are false aspirations—doomed to failure due to the essential nature of the human psyche which cannot remain whole and well without its shadow intact. We must instead, increase our

awareness of its presence and accept it as part of ourselves, and as parts of those people we trust. We must “make the darkness conscious” as Jung put it. Ignorance, denial, transcendence or any form of 'conquering' the shadow are pathological in nature—to be assiduously avoided—*not* to be aspired after.

Even to imagine 'assimilating' the shadow can be misleading, as if once this is done your shadow will never bother you again. That attitude alone makes it almost inevitable that it will. The shadow never ceases challenging the ego to abandon empathy and compassion for others, and sometimes, with certain people and in certain situations, we need to heed its dark impulses and demands in some fashion, in order to remain loyal to our own values and principles.

In the words of C.G. Jung:

The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge.



For more writing like this about the various 'components' of the psyche and related topics, check out the articles and posts on theallowablethoughtcage.com and read the book [*Unlocking The Allowable-Thought Cage Imprisoning Our Imaginations.*](#)