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## **Psychedelic Psychotherapy and the Shadow**

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We're going now from the outside world to the inside world. And though this is called *Psychedelics and the Shadow*, it's actually more *Psychedelic Therapy and the Shadow*.

A long, long time ago, in a place far, far away (at least from Jamaica), I worked for about three years as a lay therapist. For two of those years, I became the partner of a very skilled hypnotherapist. I joined her about twice a week, when we would guide one or another of her patients through a session with, mostly, MDMA. With certain patients, after some time and much hard work we would give them a session with 2CB or perhaps LSD or mescaline, depending upon what the patient needed and wanted.

All this took place before MDMA or 2CB were scheduled; LSD and mescaline were, however, already illegal, so this was not what you would call "out in the open" therapy. This was at a time when a great many of the more innovative therapists were trying MDMA out with certain of their patients, and we were urging all of them to publish as soon as possible. And of course they wanted to take their time, because this was not generally approved medical practice; with the result that when, all of a sudden, the government explained that MDMA was going to be scheduled, nobody had put anything on paper; and so it was very easy for the government to declare this a Schedule 1 drug, because there was high abuse potential and obviously no medical utility: nobody had published on any medical utility... so that was a sad thing to have happened.

In case you are wondering, the frequency of MDMA use in these sessions varied considerably. For some patients, one session seemed to be all they needed; this was, I would say, not frequent, but more often than you'd think, that the patient would be tremendously satisfied with one experience and simply didn't particularly need to have another one. A single experience gave them all they wished to have, or reach, or accomplish; but for others, one session a month for several months, or once every six weeks, would allow them to complete their inside work. The single session with a true psychedelic (remember that MDMA is not a real psychedelic drug) – one exposure to 2CB, or another of the classic psychedelics – was usually given toward the end of the therapy. For one patient, it might break open images and emotions held deep in the unconscious which had to be brought up to consciousness for there to be resolution; for another person, this single session would be a kind of graduation ceremony – a celebration after long, difficult work.

Now, those three years were a time of intense learning. For me, every patient or client was a completely new universe, and I had to learn almost as much about myself and my own psychological barriers as I did about those of the patient. The learning about myself had to happen very fast – on the spot, so to speak; because what was at stake was my ability to do my job, and often the patient's trust in me as a guide.

I'll give just one example for the moment, which is certainly not myself, but very well could be another therapist. Let's say the therapist has been brought up as a church-going Catholic (or even a Methodist, for that matter) and the patient begins talking about memories from a previous life. The therapist's mind is going to stumble over what the patient is saying, and suddenly there are going to be a lot of conflicting thoughts getting in the way of her ability to hear and tune into the patient's story. She will have to spend a bit of time reminding herself that her own belief system has no place in the therapy situation, and that she must remain completely unjudgmental and accepting of the patient's truth. Not only that, she has to be sure that her feelings toward the patient are not clouded by deep-seated negative judgments which are inherited from a childhood that might have been steeped in religious teachings which emphasise the error of such concepts as reincarnation.

Now, the only way I know of to avoid this kind of problem is constant practice of an attitude that might be described as "No matter what I hear from my patient, I will open myself to his world and his beliefs, as well as his feelings and emotions, and I'll put aside any information to decide the wrongness or rightness of his views until much later, when we'll work together to evaluate what works in his life and what doesn't work." I'm talking here about therapy, but a lot of you may find yourself, or have found yourself, in a situation where – because you may have lived long enough, and you have some sort of ability, an interest in this sort of thing – people start coming to you for sessions, and so you too can find yourself being a lay therapist without realising that that's what was going to happen; but I'm presenting it as more of a sort of established therapeutic practice.

By the end of my third year doing this kind of therapy, I had come to realise that the most important part of the process was working with the Shadow.

I think you've all heard of what Carl Jung calls the Shadow. The term most often used in society at large is "the dark side". I think it's safe to say that this shadow aspect of the human psyche, while it remains unconscious, can be blamed for all wars, from tribal conflicts to battles between great nations; it causes racial prejudice; it underlies jealousy and resentment; you'll see the human shadow in every vampire or werewolf movie, and its face is the face of a very popular figure called the Devil, or Satan. In our present time, we have Darth Vader; however, there is a difference between Darth Vader and the earlier demonic figures, in that Darth Vader was created by a filmmaker who understood what he represented – after all, George Lucas was a student of Joseph Campbell.

However, when work on the Shadow is underway, and it begins to drift towards conscious awareness, it carries with it gifts for its owner. To give you a brief clue to what I mean, think about the great works of art in painting and music, for instance, and recognise that pure light and beauty, sweetness and gentleness by themselves will give pleasure only for a short time. For what we experience as greatness and fullness and authenticity, there needs to be an edge – a touch of darkness; a bittersweetness, even a shade of sadness or pain – contained in the work. If you want an illustration – I hope I don't really offend too many people saying this, but if you want an illustration of too much sweetness and light becoming cloying, to say the least, you may have seen the paintings of a very famous and very wealthy artist called Thomas Kinkade... that sort of illustrates what I mean! The Shadow made conscious becomes an ally for us: a fearless, brash, not-quite-housebroken ally and friend.

I want to go back to the beginning: *a newborn baby has no shadow*. He has a survivor function – all those instincts that are hardwired into him to maximise his chances of survival; but he has no Shadow. At the risk of oversimplifying a somewhat complex matter, I think the best way to understand how a

Shadow is created is to remember that it is the part of us that we have learned, and have been taught, to reject. We learned from our parents, our teachers, our rabbis and priests, and our neighbours what parts of ourselves were not lovable, not acceptable, not OK. Certain actions were punished, or at least disapproved of, so we came to feel that whatever it was inside us that made us *want* to do those forbidden things must be “bad” or “wrong”.

Every society and every community has to socialise its young. In different countries, there are different rules to be obeyed. In some societies, boys and girls are treated very differently – think of Moslem societies, for instance. But in all cases, there are certain actions and words that are not acceptable, and children are gradually moulded into what their particular communities regard as good citizens. In some places, and at certain times in history, the desires and the urges and inclinations which led children – and even some adults – to act in ways that their societies considered inappropriate and wrong were blamed not on simple human nature, but on demonic forces. The Devil, in other words, made them do it. In fact, in some societies like those of the Puritans, what we call human nature was equated with *evil*; it was referred to in certain religions as *original sin*. In such communities, both kinds of nature – the natural world around us, and human nature – were regarded with suspicion and distrust. This attitude, sad to say, is still alive and well in the world.

If you’re brought up in such a community, the general attitude toward the natural world is one of taming and controlling it – not letting the natural forces in the world have their way; and the attitude towards human nature is pretty much the same. In a very restricted society, it’s inevitable that most of the citizens will develop very big, ugly Shadow monsters, because so many of their natural instincts have been labelled “wicked” and “bad”. In such places, the most artistic and creative people will run into the most trouble, because creativity springs from forces in the unconscious that don’t easily allow themselves to be controlled and shackled.

In order to be loved and accepted, to be smiled at by our parents, we learned gradually to control certain urges and speak and act in the right ways. So, what happened to those bad desires and unacceptable urges? They got stuffed down into the basement of ourselves, pushed into a dark corner, and the door to that secret room was locked with a heavy iron key. If you hear echoes of some fairytales, you’re absolutely right: one of the reasons that many of the classic fairytales have lasted hundreds of years is that they contain spiritual truths which were disguised, I think, as tales for children; and these continue to resonate within the child and the adult. *Beauty and the Beast*, for instance, is the tale of the encounter of a soul called Beauty with its Shadow – the Beast. And the lesson couldn’t be more clear: not until you can embrace and love and accept your shadow as a part of who you are, not until then can the rejected, feared, horrendous monster transform into a prince, and join you in making a whole human being – which is of course the part that goes “...and they lived happily ever after”.

So, what’s wrong with letting the difficult and unacceptable parts of yourself get banished to the cellar, where they can be kept chained in the dark and eventually forgotten?

Well, the first problem you’re faced with is a philosophical one, which I’m not going to pursue at the moment – namely, who is defining what is acceptable and what is not? Whose standards are to be followed? Whose philosophy and view of the universe – and their place in it – is to be regarded as the one and only truth, which all citizens will accept, believe, and follow?

As I said, we’re not going to step into that morass right now; but going back to the original question – What’s wrong with suppressing and then forgetting the more ?? parts of yourself? Wouldn’t it make

for a much more peaceful life, and a happy society? Well, it doesn't work out that way. The problem is, those suppressed parts of you include not only destructive impulses – they also include creative ones; and above all, the Shadow Beast does *not* remain quiet and docile. The longer it remains in the dark, and the deeper it's hidden in the cellar of the unconscious, the more powerful it becomes. In fact, the name of the Shadow's game *is* power.

I'll give the most obvious and well-known example: the gentle, sweet-natured man who changes when he drinks alcohol. Suddenly, everyone's best friend becomes a sarcastic, mean-spirited, even vicious enemy or destroyer (and, by the way, this applies just as well to women, of course; it's just easier for me to stick to one gender. I usually refer to therapists as female and patients as male, but that's simply a matter of convenience, and I assume you realise that). Alcohol is, in our society, the most commonly used way by which the Shadow gets released from its chains for a while, but it's certainly not the only way. Some people under extreme stress, or in situations involving intense emotions, might burst out with words that shock with their hate and malice; others with even less control over themselves will actually become physically abusive and destructive. Certain drugs will allow the same kind of thing to happen, for some people in some situations. Neither the alcohol nor the drugs are responsible: what *is* responsible is the unconsciousness of the Shadow.

Just to make things more complicated, let me remind you that while I'm talking about the most common kind of Shadow – common to *our* society, anyway – a Shadow composed of repressed and forbidden anger, resentment, destructive impulses, malice and jealousy, among other nice things – there are multitudes of Shadow Monsters. For instance, just take a family in which the father is a career military man. The mother is the daughter of a military family, and most friends are in the military. Very often, there is a family tradition of military service, and the male children are expected to follow in their father's and grandfather's footsteps. Let's take the boy child (because the girls in this family will be treated differently): as he grows up, the scorned aspects will be "soft" ones. They will often be referred to as "woman's" feelings or inclinations, and the word *woman* will be said with a shade of contempt. Inclinations toward gentleness and empathy – trying to understand other people, for instance – will be squashed. Professions such as social work, psychology and psychiatry will be talked of with sarcasm. People who follow such professions will be dismissed or laughed at. [*laughing*] I'm sure you're met some of those particular people!

The boy's Shadow in this case will be composed of all those feelings and ideas that tend toward compassion, sympathy and the feminine. Aggressive acts – as long as they aren't aimed at authority figures – will be tolerated or shrugged at. Any signs of artistic ability will be ignored or even discouraged. Since acceptance and affection depend on the boy's acting like a little warrior, his Shadow will be made of artistic impulses, whimsicality, offbeat humour, empathetic feelings and all desires to nurture small wild animals instead of shooting them.

I exaggerate, but not much. One of my best friends was the son of two physicians. His siblings were doctors, and he was expected to go to medical school too – which he did. He had a gift for intricate drawing, and he made absolutely delightful pictures, which I first saw in the margins of an autopsy report which he put on my desk. When I made a fuss over the exquisite artwork, he was really taken aback. He explained that nobody in his family had ever commented on – or even noticed – his drawings, so he'd come to think of them as doodles of no importance; and when I expressed some outrage at his family treating his gift this way, he said that – well, he could understand that attitude, because their entire world was medicine and only medicine; and art simply didn't matter to them.

So – all right, back to the point – which is that the Shadow is not in itself evil or bad. It is only whatever is repressed, whatever has been forbidden and treated with contempt by the authority figures surrounding the child. It is those aspects of the person which he has come to think of as unacceptable, awful, terrible, unlovable, and even dangerous. And all of those so-called “bad” aspects of himself have become unconscious, gradually gathering power in the dark.

Now, power to do what? If the Shadow aspects of a person remain unconscious, they get projected. One of the best illustrations of how this works is something like this. Let’s say you go to a party and you see a person you haven’t met before. Now, you in this case are a woman; you dress well, you are always carefully groomed; your fingernails are clean, and so is your hair. This stranger is also a woman, but she appears to be just a little sloppy. Her movements are loose and unguarded, and her voice is just a fraction too high for your comfort. You find yourself watching her with increasing dislike. After a while, you realise that you are feeling *more* than dislike – it’s closer to hostility – and you don’t seem to be able to look away or focus on anybody else. You leave the party early, disturbed by your own feelings of antipathy toward a complete stranger. You think to yourself, “All she was doing was enjoying herself; why do I feel such – you know – *dislike*? It doesn’t make sense!”.

What you’ve just experienced is a projection. The stranger has reminded your unconscious of certain aspects of your repressed self – your Shadow. But since your Shadow has been buried in the unconscious, in the dark, for years, you are unaware of its existence or what it contains. Certain traits have projected themselves onto this other woman, where you have been able to see them and react to them with revulsion. And any time you find yourself reacting with unusually strong negativity to a person, or a certain group of people, you should suspect that you are experiencing a projection of your Shadow. This applies, of course, to racial prejudice: this is where it originates.

Now, under the influence of a psychedelic drug, projections are common. We’ve all seen the faces of friends or lovers distorted; sometimes pleasantly, and sometimes not. And the first inclination is to assume that what you’re seeing is some hidden aspect of the other person. After a while, what most of us learn is that what we’re seeing is a projection of a part of ourselves. As long as the Shadow remains unavailable to conscious awareness, it can determine a lot of how we live our lives and respond to others around us. It can erupt unexpectedly with malicious words, and do damage to a really valuable relationship. We are not in control of ourselves as much as we would like to be, because this Other inside us can take charge suddenly, leaving emotional or even physical wreckage behind it.

Now, most of us don’t have to be afraid of a hidden axe-murderer lurking in our psychic basement – though actually, more of us are afraid of something equivalent to that than you’d expect; I suspect this is one of the reasons people are very frightened of psychedelic drugs (you know, people who haven’t taken them). But there are people who have grown up with parents so dysfunctional and hostile that by the time they reach young adulthood, their Shadows are indeed murderers. Eruptions of these Shadows will truly cause death and destruction around them.

Our society is presently in the Dark Ages when it comes to understanding, much less knowing how to handle, such traumatised and ruined people; and part of our Shadow as a nation is we don’t really want to understand them. It’s not only individual human beings that have Shadow identities; nations do too. Again, it’s easy to oversimplify such matters, but our own country [the United States] can serve as an illustration of this. Our consciously accepted identity is one of generosity, kindness, tolerance, lawfulness and respect for the individual citizen’s rights. To give just one example, the instant a person is placed under arrest he becomes a victim of the society’s projection of its own

Shadow. Our press, without which I think our country would be a huge nuclear-armed totalitarian menace on the world scene – this valuable press of ours gives voice to our national Shadow by trying, convicting and all but executing the arrested person before he ever sees the inside of a court room. All of us have seen it happen over and over time. Adopting the British system, which forbids discussion in the press of any criminal matter before the accused is tried in court, I think is just wonderful. It simply cannot be suggested for this country: we need our bad guys too much as scapegoats for our hidden desires and unconscious Shadow selves. How the British ever got that through I don't know, but it would be a great thing for our country if the press could be persuaded just to leave alone anybody who is arrested for anything until they've been tried and found guilty or innocent.

So, what is it that happens to our Shadow – our individual Shadow – if we manage to bring it up to the light? It transforms; it changes. It's still there, but no longer as a monster. When you allow yourself to acknowledge, without fear and without hatred, the part of you that wants to punish or even kill the guy who cuts in front of you on the highway; when you can accept the fact that along with the love of your grandmother there exists a purely selfish hope that she will leave you some of your money when she dies; when you can allow yourself to have those darker thoughts and feelings, along with the more lovable and admirable ones, you become free. And you become authentic; or at least, you're on your way to authenticity.

Now, how does one go about bringing the hidden beast out of the cellar and into consciousness – in other words, how do we turn that nasty monster into a prince? Well, it takes work. It also takes a therapist who has undergone her own confrontation with her Shadow. Only someone who has done this kind of work on herself can begin to understand the overwhelming fear that can threaten to overtake a patient at certain stages of this process. After all, he is being asked to go down a long stairway to a place inside himself where there is no light, or barely enough, and to allow himself to see a figure of darkness which is the embodiment of everything he hates and fears about himself; everything he's ashamed of, everything he wants to reject and forget. Not only is he being urged to face this... this *thing* – which, by the way, often takes the form of a huge, dark, sometimes vicious animal – but after he has faced it, he has to deliberately go up to it and *step into it*, and turn around and look out of its eyes.

This is something that my hypnotherapist friend and I developed, which is one stage beyond what the Jungian therapists will have you do. The Jungians encourage the patient to first see, let themselves see, this figure – this animal, or whatever form it's taken – and then, with a lot of help from the therapist, they begin to understand where it evolved from: What was the beginning? What words were said, at what times? – if that's possible. We took it one step further, and had the person step inside the skin of his own Shadow, and then *feel* what it's like inside, and look out at the world through the Shadow's eyes.

It's quite an amazing experience. Remember, all this time a part of him – the patient – believes that this Shadow Monster, this horrid, putrid, evil beast, is actually the bedrock identity, the real essence of who and what he is; so I believe that this process takes more courage than just about anything else anyone could ever expect to be asked to do in his life. That's why his therapist must have undergone this experience herself. Only someone who has made the same journey can be believed when she tells her patient that "What you'll see is *not* your true self; it is part of you, certainly, but it's not what you truly are. Once you're inside it, you'll discover that there's no more fear. The only thing your Shadow is afraid of is being discovered. It prefers to stay in the dark, where it can keep its power. Once you've found it and stepped inside it, you'll feel only power and total lack of fear". Or she'll say something

like that; and that's actually what happens. There is no more fear inside there – it's just this great *power*.

So, when does the princely transformation take place? It begins at the point where you find yourself looking out of the monster's eyes, which is also the point at which you forget to be afraid. When you've reached that place, you can step outside the beast again and go back up the stair, because you have nothing to be afraid of any more. What is there to fear?

This confrontation with the Shadow usually takes a long time – several days of intense work. However, I have seen it happen – I think it's twice – in one day. I think we were using MDMA, and the person, the patient, was a very positive-minded, optimistic kind of person; she (she or he, I think there was one of each) – they were the kind of people who just didn't let things get them down in life, you know? – I love people like that – I wish I were one! And they somehow managed to discover a lot of courage to actually do that whole thing in one single day – it was a long day, as I remember, probably close to 8–10 hours; but it can be done. But most people take quite a few sessions. It usually takes several days of intense work. And of course, it isn't finished until you've gone back, and gone back in again, to look at the Shadow Monster, who will be shrinking in size and beginning to look quite different: no longer hairy, and probably without its sharp teeth, so to speak. The process is not truly finished until you have, with the help of your therapist, learned to feel compassion, then affection for your Shadow Beast (if you remember the fairytale).

The compassion is not so terribly difficult once your therapist helps to point out that all of this Shadow form took place because of things that were told to you, done to you, that you are not responsible for; that you dealt with all of this rejection and repression the only way you could. And that it is important as the patient to look back on the completely vulnerable child you were, and how helpless you felt, and how completely lacking in understanding you were about these things that you were being told were bad; so after a while, you can begin to feel a bit of compassion for this horrid self-thing. Feeling love for it takes a little longer, but – you know – eventually, it will happen.

Now how, and in what way, does the transformed Shadow become your ally? Well, if you've faced aspects of yourself that you used to be ashamed of and tried to deny, you will be able to deliberately decide whether or not to make use of any of these aspects at certain times in your life. To give a relatively minor and benign example, when I sit down at a chessboard I can give myself permission to turn on my aggressive side; you know, no more Mrs Nice Guy – and if my opponent doesn't like it, to hell with him [*laughs*]: *Isn't that just tough!* Or more seriously, if I find myself walking a dark street in a strange city, and hear footsteps behind me, I don't have to hesitate before I become my growling, big cat killer self: it's OK. My killer is there to be used if he's needed. The difference is that I'm not in danger of being taken over by one of these aspects of my Shadow without my consent and under the wrong circumstances, which is what happens when it remains unconscious. I can make conscious choices about whether to use my darker ally or not.

Now, having worked with a hypnotherapist as a co-therapist for two of my three years doing this sort of work, I have tremendous respect for and faith in hypnotic trance as a tool for this kind of work. We used MDMA for most of the work, and it seemed to do very well with the hypnotic state. Her patients had already gone through six months to a year of hypnotherapy with her, and they all knew how to induce the trance state; what MDMA brought to the situation was its magical way of allowing insight while illuminating self-rejection. I don't think there is any other drug – no – that will do that in that way. But this is what you have to begin with if you're going to do Shadow work: insight into your

darker side, but without self-hatred and without shame. It's very hard to manage, for most of us, and MDMA is the only drug I know that can show you how to open up that way of feeling towards yourself: acceptance of all the things you are with love and compassion.

As for the duration of each session when you're doing Shadow work, it's pretty much the same as when you're doing so-called psychedelic therapy that isn't mainly Shadow work, which is a minimum of six hours if you're using MDMA, and up to eight hours if you're using the other "best therapy" drug, the real psychedelic 2CB. Sadly, they are now both illegal in the US, though 2CB held out for a long time.

My hypnotherapist friend and I used the term "intensives" to describe such sessions. They also could have been called "the long, long sessions"! One of the unbreakable rules was that if a patient got into an interior struggle at about the time the session would ordinarily have come to a close, which sometimes happens... those of you who have little kids know that the most riveting and important question are asked just before bedtime! – and you know you've got a long hour or so of very careful, delicate talking ahead of you; the same thing happens in therapy sometimes... One of the unbreakable rules was that if a patient got into an interior struggle, OK, we kept going, no matter how long it took – especially with Shadow work, we would not close down until the patient had worked through whatever he was confronting and had come out the other side. You cannot do the classic 50-minute hour with this sort of work; there's no question of doing that.

Now, this didn't happen often, but it did mean an occasional 8- to 10-hour day, and you can't take too many of those in a row! – they don't happen that often, but the rule has to be maintained. If there is something important in progress, you do not cut it short. There is no excuse for doing that.

I wouldn't hesitate to recommend doing Shadow work with hypnosis only, now that MDMA and drugs like 2CB are unavailable. Hypnosis can open the same psychic doors as the drugs; it may take a bit longer to bring the patient to a point where he can allow himself to feel acceptance and compassion for his Shadow self, but it can be done. It will still take a therapist who has done that work herself, however.

The Buddhists teach that immediately after death, the soul will meet demonic figures known as – I think it's Guardians of the Gate – I don't know if it's *at* the Gate or *of* the Gate – [audience input] of the Gate? – OK – but you must keep in mind that they are all aspects of himself, and that he cannot move ahead into the spiritual world until he has acknowledged and embraced them; until he has owned them, which is another way of reminding us that spiritual wholeness requires that we accept and own all parts of ourselves, and that we must find a way to love all that we are and eventually to love all that other living things are, rejecting none. I don't know whether it was Oscar Wilde, or somebody before, who made that wonderful statement, which came up in the middle of a *Northern Exposure* [laughs] – if you remember *Northern Exposure*, that is – the quotation is, "Nothing human is alien to me". That's what we have to get to.

The closest most of us will come to looking in the eyes of God is when we look at the face of a newborn baby. Look in the eyes of a newborn, and it's quite an experience. And what does a newborn show us? All the possibilities for light and dark, good and evil, love and hate; the potential is there for everything and anything that a human being can be. Now, those of us who have used psychedelics to achieve greater consciousness have sometimes managed to understand just a little bit that the Great Mind we call God, if we believe in such a thing, contains all things, all dualities, all opposites, all light and all darkness. The difficult part of that is that some psychedelic travellers, like some non-

psychedelic travellers, in these realms also come back and state that everything that exists is contained in love... which makes no sense whatsoever, though it seems to be part of the truth. In doing work to bring our own Shadow selves into awareness, and in finding that we can feel compassion for our dark, twisted, ugly aspects, thereby transforming them, we might come a little closer to understanding – not with the mind, but with the heart – what is meant by that otherwise incomprehensible phrase, “God is love”.