



Owning Your Own Shadow: Understanding the Dark Side of the Psyche

Robert A. Johnson

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A bestselling author shows how we can reclaim and make peace with the "shadow" side of our personality.

Owning Your Own Shadow: Understanding the Dark Side of the Psyche Details

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From Reader Review Owning Your Own Shadow: Understanding the Dark Side of the Psyche for online ebook

Nikki says

Another short and fantastic read on the ideas of the shadow and its related elements. Johnson's text is extremely accessible, and goes into a well-rounded understanding of the shadow, examining both the negative and positive aspects we bury into our shadow. Johnson discusses how religion, properly understood, and Christianity, in a full process of the mass, really embraces the light and dark and helps us access/understand that in ourselves. He discusses where we are at in culture right now, and how the collective shadow can certainly be destructive; if we all do our inner work though, as he quotes Jung, we aren't doomed.

I enjoyed this book on many levels. It further enriched and deepened my understanding of the shadow, which is preparing me for writing my Jungian Psych paper. It touched on ideas of the wounded healer, which I will set aside for my possible future dissertation topic. And it discussed embracing opposites and accepting paradoxes, something I am personally interested in. Actually, a lot of what he discussed, including the shadow in marriage, resonated on a real and personal level, beyond the realm of studies and in the realm of real applicable life-stuff. "To own one's shadow is to prepare the ground for spiritual experience" (91). The final concept I want to mention is the mandorla that Johnson has introduced me to. Similar to the mandala, which I've grown to love through Jung's works, the mandorla (the overlap between two circles) offers "safety and sureness in our fractured world" (103). Johnson also discussed language as a mandorla, which really excited the English-teacher side of me! "To make any well formed sentence is to make unity out of duality. This is immensely healing and restorative. We are all poets and healers when we use language correctly" (104).

I have a feeling I will be rereading this little treasure many times!

Sebastian says

In Owning Your Own Shadow, Robert Johnson takes the idea of the shadow, from Jungian psychology, and runs with it, providing guidelines for using the concept to develop ones psychological health and understand ones relationships.

According to these theories, the shadow is those aspects of the self that for personal or cultural reasons we have repressed. We either consciously deny our own expression of them or, more insidiously, they are unconscious. When they are unconscious, we are in danger of expressing them in an uncontrolled destructive way, or projecting them onto other people and seeing them as evil.

Johnson recommends expressing the dark side of ones psychology in a non-dangerous way. For example, he believes that many religious ceremonies exist to allow expression of the shadow. Bring bringing the shadow to consciousness, we are able to deal with it more constructively.

Why would we want to bring out and express our shadow? Because there is "gold in the shadow." Some of our best qualities, or truest sources of energy, may be in parts of ourselves that we keep hidden.

Johnson has many interesting things to say about romantic love, which he believes is the projection of "the gold in our shadow" onto another human being. So, we see in another that which we see as most valuable or

divine. (We do not see this "gold" in ourselves only because it is in shadow. A premise of Jungian psychology is that we have the potential to express any aspect of Self.) Johnson believes that this kind of romantic love--which is psychologically equivalent to contact with the divine--is unsustainable and maybe even unnatural when not contained in a religious ceremony because "it is something like connecting the house wiring to a 10,000-volt power line." Johnson believes that this has important implications for marriage. "When marriages survive, it is because both partners have moved down to the 110-volt human level and learned the art of loving."

I find this depressing but relatable.

How do we reconcile ourselves with our shadow? Johnson believes the answer is to embrace 'paradox' rather than lean into 'contradiction'. By 'paradox', Johnson means that we should accept the value of both sides of a moral dichotomy, and work or wait for a synthesis. So, for example, one should be open to the value of BOTH action and passivity, BOTH possessing and poverty, BOTH sex and celibacy, BOTH freedom and obedience, BOTH sobriety and ecstasy, and so on. If we accept both ends, we have a chance of discovering a middle way that esteems both. This is healing.

Love and power are another of these dichotomies, for Johnson.

"Power without love becomes brutal; love without power is weak. Yet when two people get close to each other, there is generally an explosion in their lives. Most of the recrimination between quarreling lovers or spouses involves the collision of love and power. To give each its due and endure the paradoxical tension is the noblest of all tasks. It is only too easy to embrace one at the expense of the other; but this precludes the synthesis that is the only real answer." p.89

"The high energy of fanaticism is a frantic effort to keep one half of the truth at bay while the other half takes control. This always yields a brittle and unreliable personality. This kind of righteousness depends on 'being right.' We may want to hear what the other is saying, but be afraid when the balance of power starts to shift. The old equation is collapsing and you are sure you will lose yourself if you 'give in.'" p.90

The way out of this is courageous encounter with ones own shadow, deliberate exploration and acceptance of the dark side of personality.

In the weakest and third chapter of the book, Johnson rambles about the "mandorla", a tool for working with ones shadow. A mandorla is the almond shaped intersection of two circles, and for Johnson it is a powerful metaphor for the synthesis of opposites. He believes that many works of art and religious ceremonies can function as mandorlas for us, teaching us the value of unity and bringing wholeness and healing.

This is a powerful book if approached with an open mind; I am healthier for it.

Margie says

A worthy premise lacking an appropriate depth.

Anima says

'Many people fail to find their God-given living water because they are not prepared to search in unusual places.'

....'Anyone who does not go through this process remains a "primitive" and can have no place in a cultivated society. We all are born whole but somehow the culture demands that we live out only part of our nature and refuse other parts of our inheritance. We divide the self into an ego and a shadow because our culture insists that we behave in a particular manner.'

'It is interesting to travel about the world and see which characteristics various cultures affix to the ego and which to the shadow. It becomes clear that culture is an artificially imposed structure, but an absolutely necessary one.'

'Wherever we start and whatever culture we spring from, we will arrive at adulthood with a clearly defined ego and shadow, a system of right and wrong, a teeter-totter with two sides.* The religious process consists of restoring the wholeness of the personality. The word religion means to re-relate, to put back together again, to heal the wounds of separation. It is absolutely necessary to engage in the cultural process to redeem ourselves from our animal state; it is equally necessary to accomplish the spiritual task of putting our fractured, alienated world back together again.'

Sherrie Miranda says

I originally posted this on a post looking at creativity & depression

There is a school of thought that says we ALL have a shadow side that we try to sublimate or push down. It often comes up when we are partying & do something really stupid that we normally would never do. Or if someone is attracted to children, they act on it when the urge becomes too strong.

I believe the original idea comes from Carl Jung, but Robert A Johnson writes about it in "Owning Your Own Shadow.

He says that we all need to find a creative way to let our dark side out. Otherwise, we will be either self-destructive OR destructive of others.

Even before reading Johnson's book I had a sense of this idea. (Honestly, I don't really understand Jung so I sat mutely through many conversations with grad students when I was younger.)

When I went to Iceland at around 25 years of age, I discovered a country where everyone is encouraged to express themselves creatively, whether it be dance, painting or photography. (I didn't meet any writers, but I did visit a farm house that was filled with books!) Sadly, it occurs to me now as I write that most countries don't want us to feel good so they convince us that only the chosen few are artists. That way, they have plenty of unhappy young men (& now women too) who are willing to express their dark side by going to war. Also, content people don't buy as many products to try to make themselves happy.

Later, I discovered the Popul Vu, which is the Mayan bible. The Mayans believed that we are all little creators. The Popul Vu was filled with little creators of art, whether it was clay dolls they made or paintings or houses. I was fascinated with this idea.

Later, I went to Agape in LA, the one with Michael Beckwith. I learned there that we could heal and in the process, make art that expressed that healing. Rev, Michael's wife was the chorus director, as well as the musical director for the Agape International Spiritual Center and not only did the chorus travel the country (and sometimes the world), but Ricki Byers Beckwith brought musical groups to Agape every Sunday, often more than one.

The lesson I learned was "Don't try to push down your 'shadow side' or act it out by getting drunk and going

home with a stranger." "Instead use that dark side to make the world a better place through your art." These ideas may have saved my life!

Peace, love & Art,

Sherrie

Sherrie Miranda's historically based, coming of age, Adventure novel "Secrets & Lies in El Salvador" is about an American girl in war-torn El Salvador:

<http://tinyurl.com/klxbt4y>

Her husband made a video for her novel. He wrote the song too:

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/P11Ch5c...?>

Mahya Moq says

James says

The author, a Jungian analyst, reminds that we have not entered adequately into our consciousness, especially our own shadow. Let's face it, typically we do not integrate the shadow (unlit aspect) of our self as a pure and real unity. Help in reaching out to aspects of our true consciousness lies in the sign of the Christian mandorla. The union pictures two overlapping circles. The overlap looks like an almond (It. - mandorla) of the shadow and the individual persona (ego).

Caryn says

Very interesting and quick read. Brings to light the constant contradictions we live everyday and that trouble everyone on some level. The key to living a happy life is by living a balanced life and honoring all parts of yourself, not just the parts that society/religion have told us are worthy of attention. We've got to let out the animalistic parts of us in healthy ways or it will come out in a destructive way. It's OK to have them and a balance of both light and darkness is to be close to the universe/god/spirituality/infinity (whatever you want to call it).

I like how the author doesn't tell you step by step on how to do this in your personal life. It's going to be a different answer for everyone anyway.

I like any book that makes me analyze why i do the things I do. If a book does that it stimulates my brain more than anything, which is my goal these days, i only want to learn.

Mohammed says

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Becca says

This is one of those books that's easier to describe by what it isn't than by what it is. It's not a how-to self-help book, and it's not a scholarly analysis of myth. There are no therapeutic instructions or any data sets or graphs. It's religious but not a tract for any religion.

So what is it? This book is a winding conversation with a thoughtful, spiritual, aging Jungian. It's a mix of meditation, Jungian worldview and interpretation of myth, and gentle guidance.

Reading it again I felt like it has a great deal to offer, if I can internalize some of the seismic ideas presented so demurely. The central idea is (I think) that we all have a shadow-- all those parts of ourselves relegated to the dark because they are unacceptable in society. These can be our worst impulses or attributes but also our best-- all the gold that would make us more exposed, more creative, more kind. When the gulf between our "light" and our "shadow" becomes too wide, we experience depression or breakdowns. So in order to have a healthy psyche, we need to welcome our shadow-selves into our conscious lives.

The goal(?) is not to bring light and dark (or any other polarity) into contradiction (you are good or bad, male or female, right or wrong), but to bring them into paradox (you are good and bad, masculine and feminine, right and wrong). In the sacred space of paradox, in the mandorla-- the almond shaped overlap of two circles, like the center of a Venn diagram-- you touch the divinity of I Am, of It Is, frantic but static opposition is pulled into a still but dynamic unity. This is the liminal space-- the place where ritual can heal the rifts in reality.

How does one accomplish that? As Master Oogway says in Kung Fu Panda, "I donno!" But I think it has

something to do with awareness, with openness, and forgiveness. And religion, meaning to re-unite things that have been separated.

Worth reading, worth mulling over.

Goran says

First off, let me state that two stars on goodreads mean "it was OK" - which is exactly how I feel about this book. It was sort of OK.

It's grounded in Jungian analysis, so anyone looking for a shred of scientific approach will find that the author really needed to put a few thousand instances of "perhaps" in there. It takes the concept of "shadow" and "shadow projection" and applies it, rather ham-fistedly, to all of history, culture and behavior - which results in sentences such as: "It seemed as nothing less than a miracle that the shadow projection between the United States and the Soviet Union had subsided, after years of the Cold War". Or similarly confused: "God grant that evolution may proceed quickly enough for each of us to pick up our own dark side, combine it with our hard-earned light and make something better of it all than the opposition of the two. This would be true holiness." The book is chock full of sweeping generalizations and simplifications which I, as a reader, frankly often found insulting.

The central premise is interesting and the value of this book to me is that it made me think about certain things, at a personal level. It's sort of like reinventing Buddhism, but with an obligation to use Jungian psychoanalysis and lots of symbols from Christianity in the process.

Also, there is lots and lots of repetition - it seems almost like an attempt at indoctrination at times. The central idea can be summed up in two sentences, which get repeated so often that the book (although short) got really tiring for me about halfway through. This book needs heavy editing - it would make a nice ten-page pamphlet, garnished with lots of illustrations. It might even help someone.

Metta says

"To stay loyal to paradox is to earn the right to unity.

One of Johnson's short booklets on some of the key issues of life, in a jungian perspective. Clear and concise, still poetic and with that typical quality of some of the best jungian authors to leave room for the unspoken, to open windows, and doors to new/timeless perspectives of the soul, to tickle and appetite for more...

The last chapter entitled "The Mandorla" is such a gateway, a glimpse of the power in a symbolic act, where art - action - symbol - psyche - poetry are united.

"The shadow as entree to paradox

To own one's shadow is to prepare the ground for spiritual experience. (...) the pearl of great price is to be found in our everyday conflicts and tensions. (...) Conflict to paradox to revelation: that is the divine progression.

People come to the consulting room and lay out a collision of values with great embarrassment and agony. They want resolution but would have something even greater if they could ask for consciousness to bear the paradox.

Jung once said, "Find out what a person fears most and that is where he will develop next." The ego is fashioned like the metal between the hammer and the anvil.

This is for the brave and one does not easily find a moral or ethical nature strong enough for the process. Heroism could be redefined for our time as the ability to stand paradox.

So, in practicality, what do you do? Just to ask the question takes you off center, for it makes you choose between doing and being. (...)

Paradox is brought to its next stage of development by a highly conscious waiting. (...)

To consent to paradox is to consent to suffering that which is greater than the ego. The religious experience lies exactly where we feel we can proceed no further. This is an invitation to that which is greater than one's self."

Britt says

I found myself writing down lots of quotes from this book. Here's one I liked at the end:

"People often asked Dr. Jung, 'Will we make it?' referring to the cataclysm of our time. He always replied, 'If enough people will do their inner work.'"

Frahmani110 says

Mary Overton says

loc. 315: "Jung used to say that we can be grateful for our enemies, for their darkness allows us to escape our own.

“Heaping abuse [on those who abuse us] does great damage - not only to others but to us as well, for as we project our shadow we give away an essential ingredient of our own psychology. We need to connect with this dark side for our own development, and we have no business flinging it at others, trying to palm off

these awkward and unwanted feelings. The difficulty is that most of us live in an intricate web of shadow exchange that robs both parties of their potential wholeness. The shadow also contains a good deal of energy, and it is the cornerstone of our vitality. A very cultured individual with an equally strong shadow has a great deal of personal power. William Blake spoke about the need to reconcile these two parts of the self. He said we should go to heaven for form and to hell for energy - and marry the two. When we can face our inner heaven and our inner hell, this is the highest form of creativity.”

loc 333: “Goethe’s FAUST, perhaps the greatest example in literature of the meeting of ego and shadow, is about a pale, dried-up professor who has come to the point of suicide because of the unlivable distance between his ego and his shadow … Faust meets his equally impossible shadow, Mephistopheles, who appears as his lordship, the devil. The explosion of energy at the meeting is extreme. Yet they persevere and their long, vivid story is our best instruction in the reception of ego and shadow.”

loc 366: a lengthy quote from Jungian analyst and Episcopal priest Jack Sanford:
“The ego is … primarily engaged in its own defense and the furtherance of its own ambitions. Everything that interferes with it must be repressed. the [repressed] elements … become the shadow. Often these are basically positive qualities.

“There are, in my view, two ‘shadows’: (1) the dark side of the ego, which is careful hidden from itself and which the ego will not acknowledge unless forced to by life’s difficulties, and (2) that which has been repressed in us lest it interfere with our egocentricity and, however devilish it may seem, is basically connected to the Self.

“In a showdown God [Self] favors the shadow over the ego, for the shadow, with all of its dangerousness, is closer to the center and more genuine.”

Hence the maddening preference shown to the prodigal son while the dutiful son is sidelined … excellently expressed in Tennessee Williams’ play “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.”
