



MAGNUM OPUS: NIGREDO

Module 6: The Shadow

QUOTE

The acceptance of oneself is the essence of the whole moral problem and the epitome of a whole outlook on life. That I feed the hungry, that I forgive an insult, that I love my enemy in the name of Christ -- all these are undoubtedly great virtues. What I do unto the least of my brethren, that I do unto Christ. But what if I should discover that the least among them all, the poorest of all the beggars, the most impudent of all the offenders, the very enemy himself -- that these are within me, and that I myself stand in need of the alms of my own kindness -- that I myself am the enemy who must be loved -- what then?

“Modern man in search of a soul” C.G. Jung p. 241

The Shadow

Compiled by The Centre for Applied Jungian Studies

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Transcript of Podcast

This is our final module in the Nigredo Stage of Magnum Opus and is intended, in part at least, as a synthesis of the preceding modules on archetypes, complexes and projection. One of the most, if not the most, important concepts in Jungian psychology is the shadow. The engagement and work with the shadow is the first step on the journey to wholeness and individuation.

In this lecture, I will give you an overview of what the shadow is, how it develops and is constituted, why we want to work with it, its role in the individuation process, the enormous value it offers and some of the pitfalls one needs to look out for when travelling this road.

To some degree discussion of the shadow is about the personal unconscious. Jung's idea of the personal unconscious is equivalent to Freud's notion of the unconscious as a whole; Jung making the distinction between the personal and the collective unconscious.

Freud gives us a useful description of the (personal) unconscious as constellating the Id, a primitive, instinctive, uncivilized, uncultivated, unsophisticated, barbaric and infantile way of being in the world. It is everything in one's psychology that has not been educated or civilized. The qualities that live in the personal unconscious, and that Freud is referring to by the notion of Id, are primitive, instinctive and animalistic. These express as certain urges or "drives", principally as sexual and aggressive, but these can manifest in many ways, including narcissism, highly critical or self-deprecating

behaviour, sadistic or masochistic, and so on. The Id is an aspect of self that Freud describes as operating in accordance with the pleasure principle, it is desire driven. Freud makes the distinction between the reality principle and the pleasure principle. The pleasure principle is the attitude or frame that the Id brings to bear on the world. The reality principle is the principle whereby the conscious ego mediates the Id.

For example, a person who believes that they are non-judgmental and loving, may, despite such belief, have aggressive, malevolent or hateful feelings, but doesn't allow themselves to consciously experience these. Their conscious identity claims that they are a loving human being and want to engage with others in an open and honest fashion without judgment and hate. But the Id is not interested in such a conscious claim because it is not civilized but primitive. The Id is a screaming child that absolutely demands gratification; that projects that the mother is a good object when she is in service and a bad object when she is absent. The child is the centre of the universe, survival is paramount, gratification is everything. Slowly, through being "disciplined" the child is taught that certain behaviours are unacceptable, that a person needs to be civilized, a delight and get on with others. Greed, jealousy, malevolence and violence are not acceptable. Such emotions must be controlled as displaying them leads to punishment. The initial punishments are administered by parents, then teachers, principals, and ultimately society.

It is not without irony that the most manipulative and controlling of all the institutional voices is ultimately oneself. The ego assimilates the institutional voice to become parent, teacher, boss, principal, government and God -- all of these come to lives in the psyche -- and provides the ongoing moral censure. A person enters the world in an amoral state, wholly driven by instinctive urges, and is then educated through the institutionalized process to conform to society's demands. Such an individual then is obliged to make a psychic migration from a natural to a cultivated state, and such a migration leaves in its wake a shadow.

Psychologically, the narcissistic self-centred little brat seems to have disappeared, but has in fact simply become unconscious. Although consciously denied, it continues to exert an influence, all the more malevolent for being unconscious. It lives inside you, impacting your feelings and decisions, emerging in states of heightened emotion and lowered consciousness, or states of heightened stress. From a young age, you were taught that it is not appropriate to express yourself in particular ways. For example, one sibling gets a toy and the other flies into a rage, perhaps taking the toy or breaking it, or hurting their sibling in spite. If caught in the act by a parent, the behaviour is corrected, the child told that their behaviour is unacceptable. A constant "civilizing" process takes place throughout development, and even into adult life, requiring ongoing adjustments to behaviour. To the degree that the superego incarnates in the self, a person becomes their own sternest critic. Others do not even have to be around for the self-critical process to be in effect. Even when alone, the people that one has encountered are carried into

one's psychological life, with questions arising such as, "What will they think? Is this okay? Am I allowed to behave this way?"

The Id remains in a state that is primitive, animalistic, uncivilized, infantile and instinct-driven. It has not disappeared simply because the personality has been civilized, but has merely been brought under control. And every time there is a failure to control it, others point out unreasonable and irrational behaviour. We are told that our behaviour is unacceptable, that we need to get a grip on ourselves and, stop being emotional or behaving in a particular fashion. These strictures and criticisms are designed to ensure that you conform to being a particular way in the world. Compliance is rewarded and deviations are punished. This creates psychological duality between the conscious and unconscious aspects of your psychology. This is, to a large degree, the foundation of depth psychology that attempts to bring to consciousness the specific aspect of the personality that is repressed.

Jung's notion of the shadow is roughly equivalent to this. Specifically, these are qualities that have either been disavowed, because when they surfaced they were met with disapproval. At the point that these qualities were exhibited, the society in which they were displayed gave the idea that this quality was for whatever reason inappropriate or undesirable. All of those qualities which have been disavowed, are reprehensible, impolite and unwanted, would constitute a significant aspect of the shadow. It is everything about yourself that you reject. In 1945 Jung gave a direct and clear-cut definition of the shadow: "The thing a person has no wish to be." It is the opposite of your ego ideal inasmuch as one aspires to be a highly motivated,

successful, charismatic, efficient and intelligent human being, one necessarily rejects those aspects of self that do not conform to that ideal.

Anything that conflicts with the image of who one wants to be, is repressed. Feelings such as being unsure, ambivalence about one's goals, uncertainty about one's abilities and capacities, concerns about one's ethical self, or morality, has to be pushed out of the conscious mind. Because how can those feelings be held in consciousness, when one is aspiring to reach the pinnacle of a mountain. In order to summit a mountain there are many things on the way up that have to be repressed or ignored. So, to the degree that one strives for the ego ideal, everything that detracts from that way of being, that detracts from that goal, has to be rejected, otherwise the goal could not be realized. This entails a sacrifice of part of a person's humanity in order to achieve that which they set out to achieve. The very notion of sacrifice is a quality which is idealized in our culture, reinforced by statements such as 'nothing comes easy', 'you need be disciplined' and 'you need to make sacrifices'. Society teaches that certain things must be put to the side in order to achieve. So, all of those aspects that are put aside, that which is denied and that which is rejected, does not go away, but constellates as the shadow. It is all still there but it is has simply been disowned.

The shadow also includes that which is constitutive of an individual's unique identify, but which through circumstances has never been allowed to flower or manifest. Given other circumstances, such as being born in a different culture or era, being raised differently, attending a different school, living in a different country or having a different upbringing, one could well imagine that a person

would have developed in a significantly different way. While there would certainly be similarities and convergence, significant alternate aspects that would have come to life because the alternate circumstances allowed and cultivated those things.

We are the results of two streams of determination that interact: one is who we are at birth, our genetic makeup, our disposition that we bring into the world; and the other is the circumstances in which we develop. There are aspects that may not be given the opportunity to evolve, but that are still part of the individual. Those potentialities still exist in some form, they simply have not manifested consciously and reside in the shadow. The shadow then consists of both that that which has been disowned as well as those aspects that a person has never come to know.

To understand how the shadow is formed from an archetypal perspective, Jung's notion is that the fundamental nature of consciousness is that it is dualistic. Consciousness necessarily differentiates, posits opposites, and reaches value judgments, dividing experience into desirable or undesirable, wanted or unwanted, yes or no. It is the very essence of consciousness to split your experience in the world. Everything that is considered unwanted, undesirable and without value, sinks into the shadow.

Culture and civilization requires a social contract per which we mutually agree to moderate our behaviour and drives. We are aware that where the rule of law breaks down, society breaks down. It seems that civilization, or civilized societies, require that we marginalise certain natural aspects of our psyches.

That in order to enter into the social contract, individuals are obliged to repress part of themselves. It is not acceptable to behave like beasts of the jungle. Anarchy would prevail if people felt that they could act on every sexual or aggressive urge, or could take whatever they wanted. Necessarily, as part of the social contract, speech must also be moderated. There are people who are always honest, and who believe that this is a good thing, but they are, of course, an absolute menace to society. Notwithstanding Sam Harris' comments to the contrary. Society and culture demands that we repress and split-off a part of ourselves.

Religious and social norms govern behaviour towards that which is considered moral, ethical and good. That which does not conform to these religious or social ideals is marginalized and suppressed or repressed..

As an example, the so-called 'New Age' ideals of hugging trees, saving the planet and loving one another are desirable and to be encouraged. The opposite of someone who aspires to these ideals is the unadulterated, unapologetic, chauvinist, sexist, who drives a large monstrosity that is destroying the ozone layer. In order to be part of the solution and not part of the problem, means leaving some of those things behind. But that doesn't mean that all desire to drive that monster truck, to have a wife and a mistress and to make lots of money, disappear. To the degree that one conforms to the ideals by dressing and behaving in certain ways, they must leave part of themselves out of the picture.

Parents and peers play a big role in teaching conformity to societal norms. It is considered a parent's moral duty to whip their children into shape so that they can be successful human beings, adapted to the world.

By this point I trust it is clear that we commit acts of repression as a necessary condition of civilized life. Failure to do so could have undesirable consequences, such as being institutionalized for being insane or being imprisoned, to name two rather obvious ones. It seems an essential part of getting on in society requires sacrificing aspects of who we are. In order to achieve in the world, to get ahead, a narrow focus needs be developed where certain things are left out of the picture. An example of this would be if one had the notion of oneself as a successful, dynamic wealthy businessman, then watching TV and drinking beer every night – while these may be really nice things to do – would not align with that desire. A person has to make certain choices and sacrifices if they are genuinely engaged with their goals.

If we take Freud seriously, we understand that in the shadow lives a primitive uncouth crude uncivilized unsophisticated narcissistic and selfish being that we do not necessarily want to bring into the world. To some degree many feel that they already bring these qualities into the world too much and they try, for instance, to be less narcissistic, or to get on with others better. In other words, they aspire to be a better person. In that context, the question is whether the shadow is simply a necessary evil, that we cannot live fully if we're asked to sacrifice aspects of our humanity in order to function optimally in the world. The short answer is yes, that is true, that society would break down, if everyone decided to embrace the shadow and cease following the rules. It

seems clear why the shadow can be seen in a negative way, as something that is not allowed to be brought into life, since it could be chaotic and completely upset the equilibrium of life and sense of conscious identity.

In spite of this, it is necessary to engage with the shadow. From a psychological perspective, in order to move towards wholeness, psychological health, authenticity and individuation, the shadow needs to be taken seriously. While it is not desirable to liberate it in an unqualified frenzy of orgiastic behaviour (which some people do), it needs to be recognised as that part of oneself that has been disavowed. It is, nevertheless, still there, and it impacts on everyday life. The soul is in mourning for that part of your psyche that has not been allowed to live, that which has been sacrificed on the altar of your ego ideal. This mourning is experienced as an inexplicable sense of absence, emptiness and sadness that is either there perennially or engulfs you from time to time.

Reaching psychological maturity, in the true sense, means growing up and not living the illusion of narcissistic fantasy. It is necessary to outgrow the narcissistic fantasy self, the ego ideal held at the developmental stage. To the degree that you remain in your narcissistic fantasy, you have not grown up. An essential part of reaching psychological maturity is the recognition of your shortcomings, vulnerability, nastiness and the evil that lives within. It is very easy when the evil lives in someone else and it is the other that carries it, but this is an infantile state. It lives in you as much as it lives in anyone. You can only take responsibility for that which you acknowledge as your own. The activity of fixing others, judging and correcting them, is an avoidance strategy, or ego defence in Freudian terms, against dealing with your own shortcomings.

It is hallmark of an infantile consciousness. Part of growing up is recognizing exactly what you are, rather than holding onto a narcissistic idea of what you would like to believe you are. In other words, it is taking responsibility for who you are and what you bring to the world.

Projection is the mechanism whereby we disassociate from aspects of ourselves that are unappealing. For example, the ruthless, dishonest person who puts himself first, does not feel comfortable thinking about himself in that way. Every time he is selfish, ruthless, or dishonest, he rationalizes his behaviour. He tells himself that under the circumstances, he did the right thing, or that the other gave him no choice, constantly justifying his actions. But he is in an unconscious, repressed state, and desperately despises these aspects of himself, he begins seeing them in others.

For example, a particular person could be the worst person in the world to render a service to or to lend money to as he makes others wait a long time to get paid. He feels no particular pressure or rush to settle his debts. He believes that as long as the money is in his account it is in a pure state and, at some stage, it may pass over into the account of others, but there is no rush to do that. But, on the other hand, if he is owed money, he will continually ask the other person where his money is. What happens here is when he sees the quality in the other, he does not trust them. Not wanting to own the sin that lives in his soul, he deals with it psychologically by seeing it in another. In the other it can be castigated and, at a deep psychological level, part of the anger he has at the other for not paying him, is the anger that he has with himself for

living like that in the world. As the other reflects what he is in the world, he becomes angry because it is difficult for him to remain in denial about himself.

The way that he remains in denial about himself is to reprimand the other. They must behave better, they must play the game, they must be reasonable, stop being so selfish and must pay their debts. When they behave in certain ways it makes him feel uncomfortable, because he sees something of himself in them. He cannot change them but he can repress them and make their life a misery. He can whip them into shape, but he cannot birth an ethical, moral self in them. In order for a person to realize their humanity and morality, it needs to arise in them and cannot be carried by another.

The only thing that each of us can do, is to work on the evil that lives in ourselves. But in order to do that, we need to recognize, accept and come to terms with our shadow. As long as you live in denial, it is difficult for you to engage with the shadow because, as far as you are concerned, it is not even there.

The good news is (yes there is some good news!) that although it is difficult to do this work, it is also the most rewarding thing you can do. It takes enormous personal courage to face oneself. It is not simple. It is painful, dangerous and problematic. Friends and loved ones may be lost along the way, because their sense of identity is threatened to the degree that you change and evolve. Coming to terms with your soul, making friends with it, accepting yourself, both your strengths and vulnerabilities, that which is attractive and that which is less so, is a profound spiritual experience. A process of soul retrieval. Finally,

it is about “you”. Others cannot accept that about you which you have rejected about yourself. When you accept yourself then some sort of relationship can be entered into, then the world can start to accept you. To the degree that you can recognize and acknowledge yourself, the world can too.

There is a calcification of consciousness that keeps us constrained and locks us into a narrow way of being in the world, but which can be expanded, liberated and energized by our serious engagement with the shadow. The possibilities of salvation, a brighter future, living a different life, and of expansion, all starts with the engagement of the shadow. You cannot move forward in a meaningful sense whilst fragmented. And inasmuch as your shadow is disavowed, you remain in a fragmented state. You need to embrace yourself, to husband yourself. To work with everything that you are means embracing yourself, but this cannot be done without a willingness to own your shadow. Embracing only part of self is insufficient because then you remain fragmented and in denial. What if that which is denied is an invaluable, beautiful and profoundly human aspect of who you are? The possibilities that open up are spectacular, perhaps the most spectacular that you will ever encounter, since ultimately it is about becoming fully “you”.

The only transformation that can take place is that of the shadow.

Transformation in this context means working with and transforming the shadow. The shadow contains the libido and energy for movement and change and it must be confronted to release this. The shadow, somewhat counter intuitively or paradoxically contains not only darkness but light. Only by going down into the shadow can this light be revealed.

TRANSFORMING THE SHADOW

How do you do this?

AWARENESS

The first step is to become aware of the quality. This is a recognition of that which lives in you, bringing it from the unconscious into consciousness.

The process of becoming conscious means being wide-awake to life and listening to what people say. The natural reaction to a statement like, “You know, you’re a selfish son-of-a-bitch!” is to be in denial. In defensive mode the idea of projection is a wonderful tool, a shield against all criticism. “You’re projecting”, could be our response, “it’s your stuff.” But being awake means listening, allowing the possibility that something is being presented that holds truth, to acknowledge that one may be selfish or unreliable. These are examples of negative qualities, but sometimes it is more difficult to accept the positive. For example, statements such as, “You are beautiful” and “I really value your friendship” could be received as attempts to flatter and manipulate. Both criticism and praise are deflected

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Awareness is insufficient in itself, in the same way that there is a difference between hearing and acknowledgement of what has been heard. You can experience insights, seeing yourself in a new and honest way. But this lucidity

requires acknowledgement of those aspects if the shadow is to be engaged for integration. To acknowledge the aspect that you have become aware of ask questions such as, “Is that me, does that describe me in some way, is it possible that that could be me?”

The process of acknowledgement begins in considering the possibility that there may be something to think about in what one is told, and a start is made in processing it.

ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance is a profound process. Being aware of a quality, such as not paying your debts, and acknowledging it, does not mean that there is acceptance. It could simply be another way to deflect, by saying, “Yes I am bad at paying my debts, I know I have that quality.” Owning the quality implies that something would change. Acceptance is the recognition of a fundamental problem that needs to be addressed.

ASSIMILATION

It is difficult to articulate the magic that happens with the process of assimilation. Becoming aware of something, acknowledging it and accepting it, are distinctly different from assimilating it. Assimilation requires a psychic ingestion, an actual swallowing. The quality has to become part of you, it

cannot be external, and it has to be owned. It is no longer out there, but in here.

ACCOMMODATION and ADAPTATION

Once this has been done, most of the work is probably in accommodation and adaptation. Having processed the steps of awareness, acknowledgement, acceptance and assimilation, something else must be done with it. For example, a person with unconscious rage may lash out violently when provoked by driving like a maniac or being violent with their family. However their rage expresses itself, it is unchallenged, unconscious and unmediated. An awareness of the need to find a more appropriate way of expressing the feelings of rage needs to be developed. Acknowledging the rage, a process of education begins as to whether there is a way that the rage can live in the person, questioning if there could be an appropriate place for rage, or what may be the constructive function of rage. The process of adaptation is active, engaged, constructive and directed towards change.. The quality is learnt and is adapted to. It is not only about migrating the unconscious drive to consciousness, but transforming the conscious identity in order to accommodate that which it has become aware of.

To take responsibility means that something has to change. Taking responsibility implies taking action and actually doing something, it's not simply intended as a pithy phrase.

Applications

The applications this month are split into two broad categories, confession and projection.

Confession

In the confession component we are going to approach the shadow from the perspective of *desire* and *shame*. What is wonderfully perverse about these two spirits is that they typically animate us in equal measure and exist in a state of tension with one another. The result is that both realising our desires – and not realising our desires may result in shame.

In the first instance the shame is at our hubris (arrogance) and at our necessary rejection of the moral prohibition in order to realise our desires; and in the second case our shame is at our inadequacy, at our inability to realise our desires. Both of these elements: unrealised desire and shame fragment our soul. The purpose of our work this month is to reclaim, or more modestly, to begin the project of reclaiming, some of these fragments.

The two images I want you to work with are:

1. **Your greatest unrealised desire**; here I want you to cast your mind back to your childhood, your youth, and adulthood, and to see if you can find a shiny fragment of desire in the sea of memories. A fragment that when you see it, examine it, touch it, smell it, taste it, evokes a pang in you.

Something you once dreamed of, something you once longed for, something perhaps that you wanted very, very much but were too afraid to really ask for. Maybe there was a time in your life where you reached a crossroads between desire and duty; between impulsiveness and circumspection, between what you wanted and what you believed (or others believed) you should do. It is this fragment of your soul I want you to look at now and reflect on and let us see if we may thread it back, even if in some modest way, into the tapestry of your life. Once you have it, even if it is a little dull, I want you to reflect on and answer the following questions¹:

- a. Name it- what is it?
- b. What memories and associations does it evoke?
- c. What does the desire look like now? (Give it an image either a literal or symbolic image).
- d. What feelings does the memory of this desire evoke in you?
- e. Where does this desire live?
- f. Reflect on how your life path may have diverged had you committed yourself to the realisation of that desire.

¹ When doing an exercise like this first prize is to share this with a confidante, one to whom you can entrust your soul; failing this I recommend giving expression to the images in some form, typically (but not exclusively) through journaling your answers. The phrasing of some of the questions is purposely intended to be slightly opaque so as to oblige you to use your imagination – so do not get frustrated if their meaning is not 100% clear.

- g. Is it possible to reconnect with that desire – can it find some expression in your life right now, however far removed from its earlier form?
- h. Building on g. Is there an equivalent desire that is open to you now? And if so 1) should this be pursued – justify your answer, and 2), if you answered in the affirmative, what prevents you from realising it?

2. **Your greatest shame.** Before we tackle this question, identify the following:

- a. Your greatest public humiliation.
- b. The greatest injury you have ever suffered.
- c. Your greatest sin.
- d. Your greatest failure.
- e. Your greatest incompetence
- f. Your greatest inadequacy.

Once you have identified the above, select from amongst them, or if they did not capture it from an alternate category, your greatest shame. What you are looking for here is that which weights heaviest on your conscience, the darkest

blight on your being, that which given a second chance you would not do, or would do differently.

Once you have identified your greatest shame, consider the following questions:

- a. What is it (name the shame)?
- b. What do you feel and think about it?
- c. Where in your body does it live?
- d. What does it look like? [Not the act that is the source of the shame but the shame itself. Find a symbolic or literal image for the shame.]
- e. Who stands in judgment of the shame – and what do they say?²
- f. Is redemption possible and if so how?³
- g. What have you learnt about your own psychology from this shame?

² Not literally, but in the confines of your imagination. The question is who (do you imagine) would be the absolute worst person to confess this shame to?

³ Is there anything you could do now to mitigate this shame, to redeem yourself in some form?

Shadow Projection Application:

For the purposes of delving into shadow projection, I would like you to consider the following projections onto the other:

Encountering the shadow in the world (the shadow projected). In this exercise verbalize/journal in as much detail what you dislike about:

- Global baddies (these are typically organisations, corporates, individuals heading corporates)
- The bastard or bitch in your own back yard.
- The turncoat (one who was previously a friend and well-loved but turned out to be a bastard in the end).
- The baddie of multiple returns (the same irritating experience with individuals of a certain type).

The idea here is that following the concept of projection that there is something in these projections (your image of these various “baddies”) that lives in you. The challenge is to identify what is it in you that you are projecting onto or (being provoked by) these various rather unpleasant characters. You can approach this in one of two different ways: either see if you can find a red thread (a commonality) in the various projections; or, simply select from amongst these characters the one that is the worst, that provokes you above all the others.

Encountering the shadow in myself (the shadow introjected). Again try to verbalise and journal this in as much detail as possible:

- Mea culpa (the evil inside me).
- Destructive patterns (neurotic behaviour).

Re-imagining the shadow

- Identify one specific aspect of your shadow that has come up through the shadow projection exercise that you would like to work with.
 - Consider the pay-off
 - What is the opposite of this?
 - Pros and cons of both the shadow and the opposite.
 - How does or how could this complex serve you (and others)?