

Integrating For Growth & Healing: How to Illuminate Your Innermost Shadows

I've been told that I am an awesome listener. I am supportive, kind and I really do appreciate what others bring to the table because I love to learn from so many different outlets. But, like everyone else, I can just as easily list out some traits that I often struggle with or am not always proud of. Those parts of me that have often held me back at times, kept me from taking a chance or have just always made me feel not so great about myself overall. One area in particular that I have often wondered about is how some people around me can speak in front of a group with such grace and ease, while even to this day it still makes *me* a bit nervous. What I've learned is that to be a great speaker, it takes *confidence*; a deep security in your own authenticity, along with a connection to who you really are allows you to speak so freely, and to do so in such an engaging way that others are drawn to you and willingly hand over their undying attention.

So, where did I miss-step on my path, that I didn't gain this same amount of self-confidence? What happened to lower my self-esteem where I am not able to speak as freely with as much "oomph" behind my words? What creates the tip of the scale in the various "strengths" and "weakness" amongst the personalities within the human population? Perhaps it is so eluding because it hides deep within us; a manifestation of our childhood experiences. Perhaps we don't often recognize the source, because it right in front of our faces...in our own reflections. And perhaps if we simply turn the light on, we can begin to illuminate these shadows to finally allow ourselves the growth and healing they are calling for.

I know it's easier to put ourselves down for our shortcomings,

especially when we compare ourselves to others that hold traits we wish we had further developed within ourselves, but it does us no good to belittle, as our flaws are just as beautiful as the qualities we admire and are perhaps our greatest teachers. They invite us to peer into areas of our lives that seek attention. These parts are like the little kid within us; tugging at our coattails, begging you to spend some time with them. And when we do, we can learn so much, and it's been my experience with the process I like to call "integrating your shadows", that I've never had more profound, personal growth and healing in such a short amount of time. This process not only has made me realize that we could not see greatness in others if it did not already exist within ourselves (lying dormant), but it has also allowed me to be so much kinder with myself when I am struggling to work through things; to be patient and allow myself to trust the process.

When we are children, we literally soak up the world around us. This is to help us form ideas about the world to that will serve to assist us in navigating through life. And as children, we have no filters, we are pure authentic beings...free of societal constraints, living from pure heart and spirit expressing what comes naturally. That is until we are told NOT to. So, what does that do to us on a subconscious level? As we age, we begin to learn that just being "who we are" is not acceptable. That we must conform and change who we are to please those around us, and follow rules set out by other people to live by. "Don't do that, you're embarrassing me!" (Could make one believe they cannot be themselves or they are not good enough as they are. That they must change to be accepted in the world). "You're so wasteful; don't you know there are kids starving in other parts of the world?" (Could make one feel as if their voice doesn't matter, their opinions are stupid, or they are ungrateful or undeserving). Parents, who of course believe they are just "showing the way" and doing what's best with some tough love, obviously do not realize that they are taking a proverbial hammer to a child's

self-esteem and implanting beliefs that they are not good enough as they are.

While there are some parents out there who truly would rather not be, and some that are so damaged they take out every one of their issues on their children intentionally, I truly believe for the most part that parents today want nothing for the best for their kids. And I think if they stopped to think about this a bit, they might also see how things they struggle with inside of themselves are even from their own childhoods and could also stem from beliefs implanted by their own parents or other adults that were in their lives at the time. It's a cycle, and all it takes is a bit of awareness, a shimmer of light to illuminate the shadows, and then and only then the healing can begin for all.

So, we can identify what our shadows are, and we now know where they come from, but how do we use them to grow and heal? First off, I want to make it clear that you don't want to look at your shadows as something to be ashamed of, or something you want to dissolve or get rid of. Your shadows are parts of you, after all. Rather, you want to bring them to light, find out what they want from you now, and what you can do to heal them, so they no longer hold you back in areas of your life, but instead propel you forward. The ultimate goal is to meet them with love, get to know and understand them, integrate them into your heart, and move onto another day lighter, more peaceful and stronger than you were yesterday.

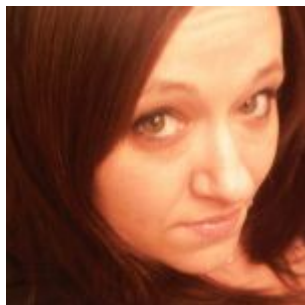
Shadow Integration Visualization

- Close your eyes and picture your sacred space. Imagine it is a quiet, peaceful place where you can sit in solitude and meditation. It could be a warm beach as you listen to the waves roll in, a fragrant garden, a forest waterfall; whatever you like. Once you find your sacred space and settle in, take 3 deep breaths.
- Next, focus on one particular area of your life where

you are struggling. An area that often causes you pain, anger, suffering, and/or sadness. An area that no matter what you do always seems to bring the same disappointing results. This is the shadow we will focus on.

- Ask your shadow to show itself and come forward into your sacred space. Pay close attention to what it looks like; what form it takes. Invite it to sit down with you.
- Inquire as to when you created it. Ask it to show you that moment in your life. Sit with this for a while if you need to as you go back in time as it may bring up some intense emotions.
- Ask your shadow what it needs from you at this time, so you can grow and heal. Really connect with it here and make mental notes of what it tells you, so you have clear action items to work on.
- Finally, sit with your shadow and tell it how much you love it. Thank it for all it has taught you and see it getting smaller and smaller so it fits in the palm of your hand.
- Put the palm of your hand over your heart and feel your shadow integrate into your entire being, but no longer a broken fragment, but now as a stronger piece of you.
- Take 3 deep breaths and sit for a moment in your sacred space.
- When you are ready, open your eyes and take note if you feel more at peace, lighter and more confident in that area of your life.

“Someone I loved once gave me a box full of darkness. It took me years to understand that this too, was a gift.” – Mary Oliver



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