

THROWING LIGHT ON SHADOWS

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Introduction

Jung wrote :- *'Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is.'*

Maybe the only thing each of us can see is our own shadow.'

Carl Jung called this his shadow work. He said :- *'We never really see others. Instead we see only aspects of ourselves that fall over them. Shadows. Projections. Our associations. In the same way old painters would sit in a tiny dark room and trace the image of what stood outside a tiny window, in the bright sunlight.'*

The camera obscura. Not the exact image, but everything reversed or upside down.'

Jung called the shadow a 'sparring partner'; *'It is the opponent within us that exposes our flaws and sharpens our skills. It is the teacher, the trainer, and the guide that supports us in uncovering our true magnificence. The shadow is not a problem to be solved or an enemy to be conquered but a fertile field to be cultivated.'*

For our Reflection / Meditation this morning. I'd like to play you Cat Steven's song '*Moonshadow*'.

Cat Stevens, now known as Yusuf Islam, considers this his favorite of his old songs. He wrote this about finding hope in any situation. He said of this song: *"I was on a holiday in Spain. I was a kid from the West End of London - bright lights, etc. - I never got to see the moon on its own in the dark, there were always street lamps. So there I was on the edge of the water on a beautiful night with the moon glowing, and suddenly I looked down and saw my shadow... cast by the moon, not the sun - my moonshadow. I thought that was so cool, I'd never seen it before."*

Some believe that "Moonshadow" was inspired by the story of a 9th Century Sufi Master called Hallaj. He was a famous Sufi martyr of the 9th Century who was executed for saying "I am the Truth." His enemies interpreted these words as a declaration stating "I am God" and he was executed for heresy.

Part of the song lyrics of Moonshadow read:

"...If I ever lose my mouth
...If I ever lose my hands
...If I ever lose my legs
...If I ever lose my eyes."

Hallaj suffered torture and had his arms, legs, and tongue amputated and his eyes torn out prior to his final agonising death.

His life's philosophy was to always look for the positive. This may have been a strong influence in this song. The 'light' Stevens refers to in the short bridge of the song, is generally understood as the divine light or God.

Perhaps the definition of a great song is that it can be interpreted on several levels? - this song has been interpreted in many ways.

This following story may be an urban legend.... it tells that 'Moon Shadows' was a name Cat / Yusuf gave to the "Moonies" who would follow him around and try to convert him to their cult while he was living and performing in New York and London back in the 60's and 70's. 'Moonies' was the nickname given to followers of the Reverend Moon, leader of the Unification Church. Whether or not this is true, it does give the song a whole new meaning and interpretation.

Cat Stevens was not converted to the Moonies, nevertheless, he may have recognised their devotion and their willingness to leave everything behind for a new faith and a new set of values - something he himself would go on to do later in his own life, converting to Islam, leaving behind his highly successful career and becoming 'Yusuf Islam'.

Let's listen to the song - (if you have access to U tube, it's well worth playing the film of him singing this song in concert as a young man. It is a delightful performance, full of positive energy.)

Following this, we'll share a time of silence for our own thoughts and feelings. Can I suggest that we reflect and consider what are the shadows in our own lives? and how do we handle them?

ADDRESS

When I accepted a commission to illustrate a children's book about Charles Darwin as a child a few years ago, I decided to take early retirement from Further Education teaching and start a new career as a children's illustrator. After completing '*The Curious Mind of Young Darwin*' I wrote a few of my own children's stories - and among them was a book called '*Happy Endings*'. My idea was to take some of the more frightening, violent nursery rhymes and add a final verse to make things right. As you probably know, nursery rhymes were originally political satyr's and this may account for their darkness and in many cases, cruelty.

Most nursery rhyme illustrators dodge the nasty bits, as far as the images go. The illustrator chooses not to show the mice having their tails cut off....the old woman in the shoe beating her children.... Rock-a -bye-baby crashing to the ground. But I thought if I make it all right in the end, it will allow me to illustrate the cruel bits! And children love the cruel bits! Also, I thought mothers reading to their young kids might like to soften the blow, especially at bedtime.

Samples of illustrations for 'Happy Endings' are shown and read at this point :- (Rock-a-bye baby is caught by Mum ; 3 blind mice take revenge on Farmer's wife; Children of cruel old woman in the shoe phone Childline and ask for a kind mum ; the maid in sing a song of sixpence has her nose stitched on again.)

However, life is not full of happy endings - everything does not always get sorted - and perhaps we do children a disservice to promise that everything will work out well - that life is a rose garden!

A masterpiece comes to mind as a wonderful example of how a writer can communicate about the darker elements of life to children and to adults.....

J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* remains one of the most well known and best loved literary fantasies of this century. While pirates, mermaids, and fairies give the story intrigue and adventure, Barrie's underlying themes are seen most clearly in the play's subtleties.

Of particular interest to me, is Peter's shadow which gets trapped in the Darling's nursery window and 'falls off' in the first act. The notion of a free shadow, detached from its source object, is intriguing. In order to explain its purpose in the text, Barrie's embraces themes of courage and fear, fantasy and reality, happiness and sadness, strength and weakness, and past and future. Peter Pan's extraordinary shadow can be seen as a possible symbol of each of these elements, and this sheds light on childhood and the process of growing up.

The shadow contributes to the fantasy of the play. In reality, a shadow is simply a dark spot on the ground. In *Peter Pan*, the shadow has shape, texture, and mass; it is tangible. It has human shape. Barrie develops the concept of a shadow with such complexity that it becomes a character in the play! In many productions of *Peter Pan for the stage*, an actor plays the part of the shadow. In Barrie's stage directions, he personifies the shadow. He writes in Act 1 :- '*The shadow awakes and is glad to be back with him as he is to have it. He and his shadow dance together.*'

In reality, a shadow is the projected image of a blocked light source. In a more abstract sense, a shadow is the darkness that results from the absence of light. Darkness and light are prevalent elements throughout the story. Traditionally, darkness represents sadness, ignorance, and fear, while light represents happiness, knowledge, and courage. In order for a shadow to exist, light and darkness must both be present. Once Peter's shadow is attached to him, it does not come to life until the lights are turned on. The light 'awakens' the shadow.

The same concept is true for happiness and sadness. How can we experience happiness if we have never known sadness? In *Peter Pan*, childhood depends on both of these elements. The children of *Never Land* are playful, free, adventurous, and happy. Yet at the same time, they are stranded, lost, and without a mother.

One of the most common childhood fears is that of the dark. Being surrounded by darkness is similar to being lost. Although most children are afraid of the dark, Peter Pan is afraid of light. The fact that he is 'in the dark' and ignorant of many things helps him continue to be a child. Part of growing up is seeing the world in a new light, a task that Peter refuses to do.

Shadows can also symbolise the past. They are distorted images, lingering behind people at all times. An essential element of Peter's eternal childhood is his lack of memory. Without a memory, he cannot gain knowledge from his experiences and therefore cannot grow up.

When Peter finds his shadow, he is filled with joy. But, when he realises that it will not stick to him, he begins to cry. When Wendy suggests that Peter is crying because he does not have a mother he replies: "*I wasn't crying about my mother. I was crying because I can't get my shadow to stick on. Anyway, I wasn't crying*". Peter obviously has more of an emotional attachment to his shadow than he does to his mother. In a sense, his shadow is a kind of mother figure. He loses his shadow the same way he loses his mother - by leaving through the window of a nursery.

Barrie's intriguing yet subtle development of the simple notion of a shadow greatly contributes to the richness of *Peter Pan*. The shadow carries different meanings for the different characters.

To children watching this play, the shadow is simply an element of fun and amusement. They are not aware that the shadow helps define childhood. To Tinkerbell, the shadow represents competition for Peter's affection. Mr. Darling believes he can make money by selling the shadow to a museum. The shadow provides Wendy with an opportunity of being a mother, as she sews it on to Peter.

What does it mean for Peter? - the boy who didn't want to grow up? At some deeper level, he knew he needed it and that he wasn't complete without it. Barrie's use of the shadow gives the adult audience insight on childhood and growing up. Whether as an element of fantasy, amusement, or symbolism - the shadow plays a fascinating role in the intriguing and imaginative world of *Peter Pan*.

How does the shadow operate within spiritual and religious thinking? The concept of the shadow has been both championed and critiqued by opposing philosophies. Most traditional theologians say we cannot solely rely on ourselves and the limited power of the ego to deal with the shadow. Instead, we must call on the power of God to overcome evil. "*You can't do it alone... lean on the Lord!*" the traditional religious person exclaims.

Meanwhile Jungians warn of a 'projection trap' into which, some traditional religious people seem to fall. Jungians tend to say that sanctimonious individuals and related religious organisations project their own dark impulses on to others instead of facing the evil within themselves. As a Unitarian, I can appreciate a bit of both of these concepts. Funnily enough, there's a great deal of overlap within the two camps. Jung, for instance, often speaks of God and mentions the idea of grace, and many liberal religious thinkers, try to integrate Jungian ideas within their belief systems.

Deepak Chopra writes :-

'I believe that the shadow is one of the greatest gifts available to us.

One of the futile strategies in dealing with the shadow is that the "good me" takes aspects of the "bad me" and stuffs them out of sight. In the end, these stuffed behaviors eventually surface with rage. There is a holistic approach to the shadow whereby we can move towards a vision of unity. The split self is the most pernicious illusion. Instead of feeding the shadow by keeping secrets from ourselves and others, by harbouring guilt and shame, or by needing someone to blame, we turn things around and stop projecting - we detach and let go - give up self-judgment and rebuild our emotional bodies. Wholeness overcomes the shadow by absorbing it - Wholeness grows in a field beyond good and evil, light and darkness.

When we label ourselves or anyone else as bad, wrong, inferior, unworthy, and so on, we are looking through a narrow lens. When we expand our vision we become aware that everyone, however flawed, is complete and whole at their deepest level. . . . This is how figures like Jesus and Buddha could have compassion for anyone. By seeing the wholeness behind the play of light and dark, they found nothing to blame.'

I would like to end with a personal story. We mostly associate the shadow side of life with darkness and fear. My brother David took his own life at the age of 29 in 1976. Our son Mark was born just a year later, in 1977.

As Mark was growing up, I could see many similarities between his nature and my brother's and I began to feel there was a shadow of fear following me. The fear was that Mark would grow up to be like David - vulnerable and prone to suffer from depression. We now realise that my brother was probably Bi Polar, but it was undiagnosed.

When Mark was in his final year of Glasgow University, studying Philosophy, he went through a severe crisis which led him to go to his Head of Studies for help. He felt he had to leave, could not finish his Dissertation and was dropping out of his honours course. His professor recognised severe stress-related depression and asked him to accompany her, there and then, to the University Campus doctor. When she, in turn, learned that there was suicide in the family, Mark was given immediate treatment and medication. I am eternally grateful to both of these professional women - they probably saved Mark's life.

When I pondered this situation, which appeared on the surface, to have justified all my darkest fears, I came to realise the paradox here - the shadow - the fear that had haunted me for years, *in real terms turned out to actually be a protective force in our son's life*. Not only was he aware of where severe depression can ultimately lead....but he also had witnessed the grief and pain left over from a suicide within his own family. He knew to ask for help, unlike his uncleand again, unlike him, Mark received it.

In conclusion :- It is extremely challenging to recognise and to face up to our shadows, be they dark with fear, grief, pain or distorted by the past. It is so difficult to accept that we need them to be whole. It feels almost impossible to embrace them.... far less to *dance with them* like Peter Pan! - but paradoxically, our shadows help us to appreciate the light. Most people go through life trying all the time, not to feel dark things. Coming to terms with our shadow-self helps to unlock our subconscious and to get out of our heads and into our hearts.

If we can embrace our own fears and vulnerabilities, we can more fully forgive and empathise with others. We might even find that our shadow-self can help our spirits to grow and to heal - and as Jung believed, is not a *'problem to be solved or an enemy to be conquered but a fertile field to be cultivated'* - a teacher or even a protector - and who knows, like the mystical, musical 'Moonshadow' ... it may even carry within it, a touch of natural magic!

Closing words :-

These are words from the Buddha -

*'We are shaped by our thoughts;
We become what we think.
When the mind is pure,
Joy follows like a shadow that never leaves.'*

Let's read together words written by Theodore Parker :-

'Be ours, a religion which, like the sunshine, goes everywhere;

It's temple, all space;

It's shrine, the good heart;

Its creed, all truth;

Its ritual, works of love;

Its profession of faith, divine living.

May it always be so. Amen.

Thank you for listening.
