This Jungian Life Podcast

Episode 55 – Identifying and Integrating the Personal Shadow

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**Introduction:**

Welcome to this Jungian life. Three good friends and Jungian analysts, Lisa Marchiano, Deborah Stewart, and Joseph Lee invite you to join them for an intimate and honest conversation that brings a psychological perspective to important issues of the day.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

I'm Lisa Marchiano and I'm a Jungian analyst in Philadelphia.

**Joseph Lee:**

I'm Joseph Lee and I'm a Jungian analyst in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

**Deborah Stewart:**

I'm Deborah Stewart, a Jungian analyst in Cape Cod.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

On today's podcast, we wanted to talk about this idea about the shadow, which is something that has certainly come up in previous episodes. And we usually take a minute and define it, but we haven't really sunk into it and explored it deeply. It was one of Jung's major ideas. I think it's very important in Jung psychology. I think it has a lot of relevance both personally and culturally. So, we wanted to spend a whole episode on it and we should just say that when we talked about doing this topic, it is such a big topic that we felt it important to limit it in some way. So today we're really going to be talking about our personal experience of shadow. How we find that, how we confront it, what we do with it, how we integrate it.

**Joseph Lee:**

And perhaps how we even work with it in a clinical environment.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Sure. Okay. Well, let's start with the definition.

**Deborah Stewart:**

My simplest definition because it helps me keep it in the forefront of my mind is that I think of it as the underbelly of the ego. It's there, it's connected with my conscious rational, or we hope rational mind. And it is the underbelly that's hard to look at that is hard to feel really connected to. And it's often kind of loaded with feelings of disgust, profound discomfort, and a feeling of wanting to push it away.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Yeah. I think Jung said something, I'm going to not get the quote exactly right, but something like the shadow is everything we would not like to know that's true about ourselves or something like that.

**Deborah Stewart:**

And then why would we bother to even explore it or want to lift it up into consciousness? Jung says it's the doorway to the real.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

That's so great. The doorway to the real.

**Deborah Stewart:**

And so, it helps us become more whole. And sometimes the things that we're very uncomfortable with, you know, are, are not things that are inherently repulsive but might be some creative aspect of ourselves or some disowned aspect of our ability to really be assertive or bold. That could really bring us a greater sense of enlivenment and freedom to be more of ourselves.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

I mean the idea of the shadow has a sort of developmental component. In other words, we have some ideas about what it is and how it develops. And it goes something like this that when we're a child, we get messages from our parents, from our culture, from our teachers about those aspects of us that are not allowable. And of course, this is a totally necessary process. I mean, you know, when you're raising kids, you have to teach them, you know, that they, I don't know, don't use toilet humor at the table routinely and polite society or that kind of thing. I mean, there's all kinds of things that we have to teach our children are not appropriate. And often they relate to, you know, sexuality and aggression are two big things that often wind up in the shadow. But it could really be lots of other things too. For examples, gender roles. It could be something like, you know, in our family we do not boast. You know, it's a family value that we're very humble, for example. And then, so anything that feels, you know, any impulse to toot your own horn, well that's bad, you know, so it gets kind of pushed off in the shadow. And so, our shadow kind of gets bigger as we grow up. And then we come into an adulthood with this you know, the poet I think, was it Robert Bly who called the shadow, the long bag we dragged behind us. So, you know, we spend all this time kind of getting cultured or whatever and deciding which parts of us we're going to split off and not know about that will be in the shadow. And then there we are, we're adults and we have this shadow, this, these parts of ourselves that we really don't want to know about. And then the question is, so what do we do about that?

**Joseph Lee:**

And it's very, very complicated as you said, because much of these potential parts of our personality are banished into the unconscious when we're very, very young, which means the shadow parts of ourselves often remain in a highly instinctive state, making them feel very dangerous later in life. So how I often explain it to my clients is, you know, when you were a little boy, if you were raised in a family where aggression was not tolerated, the aggressive part of you was banished into the wilderness and it grew up raised by other wild animals. So finally, here you are at 30, and you have your first corporate job and you really have to learn how to be very assertive and then you call your aggression back from the forest. It has never been civilized so it first shows up in a very roaring, very primal state, which makes us very ambivalent about our shadow.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Right? It's the ego, doesn't have a conscious relationship with that part of the personality.

**Joseph Lee:**

And then therefore that part of the personality has not been terribly civilized and doesn't come back in a very sophisticated form. But that's secondary to what you were saying earlier about how we create personal shadow. What's the mechanism of that? Robert Bly has a lovely book, The Long Bag We Drag Behind Us, and here's just a little quote from it, “Behind us, we have an invisible bag and the part of us our parents don't like, we, to keep our parents' love, put in the bag. Then we do a lot of bag stuffing in high school. We spend our life until we're 20 deciding what parts of ourselves to put in the bag. And we spend the rest of our lives trying to get them out again.”

**Deborah Stewart:**

Very Poignant. I'm thinking that the parts that we put in the bag are not just things like aggression, strong feelings that we should not have. So, if that was a parental value about not being aggressive, what do we do with our feelings about, you know, I'd like to hit my sister, or I'm really mad at mom. That's what goes in the bag, is my access to those feelings that I have. And then to continue with the example of [inaudible] a person who then is enters corporate life that's the wild animal in the woods is, is this intense feeling about aggression. And now it's really loaded with guilt and fury and rage and envy and a whole host of other things. But we're really talking about integrating these feelings that we were not suppose in quotes to have.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

That's an interesting thing too, because I see it, you know, that the goal, for example, when you're raising kids, and perhaps it's not really a coincidence right now that I have teenagers but one of the things that we're trying to do as parents is teach them to manage their feelings so that you don't want to disallow. Ideally you don't want to disallow the feeling, but you want to try to model and teach ways of dealing with the feeling. It might be okay to be really angry at your sister, but it's not okay to whack her over the head with a hammer, that kind of thing.

**Deborah Stewart:**

And also, boys don't cry. So now we have, you know, Robert Bly's hypothetical young man, since he wrote a lot about psychological development of males of don't hit your sister. You're bigger, you're a boy, boys are gentlemen, they don't hit girls. Neither do they cry. And you could elaborate on this of all kinds of feelings that then get relegated to shadow.

**Joseph Lee:**

But I want to really make a very important distinction between socialization and shadow making.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

I think they're related.

**Joseph Lee:**

I think they are somewhat related, but I think first of all, shadow making is in the realm of repression and repression is an unconscious process. We don't know that we're repressing something. The idea of shadow is it is unknown. Like if you know that you want to do something but you're socialized to restrain it, that's not shadow, that's socialization; that's a conscious socialization process. The shadow for Jung really meant, ‘I am surprised, I don't know where this is and I can't find it’ and then therefore it shows up in projection because the psyche is so desperate to lead us there in some way. So, in the idea of repression something in the core of our personality discovers in one way or another that something is truly unacceptable and as a way of staying safe and staying in rapport with our parents and the other authority figures, it is cordoned away and forgotten. There is an amnesiac quality to the shadow making process so it isn't being talked about but it is absolutely communicated. ‘This is unacceptable’ and often it's not necessarily verbalized, it might be, but it also may just be contextually obvious that certain things are not okay or never have had any space to be acknowledged or verbalized. Also, if a child is raised in an environment and certain parts of their personality are never acknowledged and verbalized, they can also wind up falling into this amnesiac separation and cut off place.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Like these things we don't want to know about ourselves. I mean I think that's a good point. I mean, just a little example. I remember when my kids were small, they would say things to say, you know, the babysitter or the nursery school teacher say something like you know, I hate spinach. And they were told hate is not a nice word. This was very much in the [inaudible] at the time, that you taught kids not to use the word hate, even in the context of something like spinach and it really is the sort of disallowed in the whole range of experience. Right. So, we could imagine that if the kid is kind of repeatedly told, Oh, we don't say hate. No, that's a pretty big thing then that has to kind of get cut off and put into the shadow.

**Deborah Stewart:**

Well, I'm still on the track of the feelings and imagining you know, for your kids that it's related to a feeling that you really shouldn't have. So, it's again, it's loaded of [inaudible] we don't say hate here and that there's that feeling is transmitted of this is something that's really bad about me. I guess I really shouldn't hate spinach. Okay. I kind of don't like it. So, it's a feeling realm that gets disallowed to shame and other kinds of feelings from adults that we catch.

**Joseph Lee:**

And it can be very subtle. I remember realizing in grade school that I shouldn't cry; I might've been in second or third grade and I fell down and I cried, then I looked up and saw the face of one of the male teacher's aides with this look of disgust on his face to see me dissolve into tears. Nothing was said, but I absolutely knew that me crying like that had suddenly had become disgusting. There are numerous other nonverbal reactions that children are given that tell them, without any explicit language, just through this kind of recoil or disgust, and boys are very powerfully informed by what older men find unappealing in their behavior or their character, which is communicated in body language and other kinds of much more primal but definitive information. I remember deciding as a child, I will never cry again. I was a sensitive kid so I wasn't able to keep that contract. But it is something that is powerfully done.

**Deborah Stewart:**

And I'm thinking of course the same is true for girls that we really pick up what is appropriate culturally approved or disapproved gender related behavior. Girls are absolutely not to get into fights and to be caretaking and not to have aggression. And the list goes on and on for, for both boys and girls as children.

**Joseph Lee:**

Absolutely. And it's communicated in many ways beyond simply telling someone, “that's wrong!” It also shows up in rules, you know, the overt expectations of what the rules are in your kindergarten class. Also, in the rules and expectations in other environments; it's reinforced.

**Deborah Stewart:**

You make a good point though about the distinction between socialization and repression and that it takes really powerful, like your incident in the school yard around crying that has an emotional load to say that's it. I won't do it. And you were in the third grade. But imagine if that had happened to you when you were three. You wouldn't have had enough ego, enough consciousness probably to make that conscious contract with yourself. It wouldn't have maybe gone right into the realm of the unknown that dissociated exiled realm where I really don't know that part of myself.

**Joseph Lee:**

And some of that happens in infancy. I mean, parents are constantly responding or not responding or responding negatively to an infant's behavior. Many years ago, I was living in central Virginia back then, and I was becoming friends with a bunch of country folk. It was very interesting because I was a city boy. And this fellow was talking about raising his daughter, he was a very earthy manual labor, and he said, “You know, when my daughter was in the crib, I just got sick and tired of her crying and I went into that crib and I slapped her until she stopped crying. And you know what, she never cried again!” Oh my goodness! And I had occasion to actually come to know this girl many years later as a young adult. That's an incredibly repressive event - and the child didn't cry again. That really put that emotion and that reaction into the nervous system of the child. She absolutely certain that this was not okay. When children receive a stimulus like that from the environment it's as if God has done it. I mean, it goes in as the 11th commandment, ‘thou shalt not cry’.

**Deborah Stewart:**

So, there's a huge emotional charge necessary to relegate something to the shadow realm in us. And then it becomes a huge part of a psychoanalytic or psychotherapeutic process. It's big work. It's not easily done. Right.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Yeah. And you know, Robert Bly kind of ends that quote that you share Joe's of with, you know, we spend the rest of our life trying to get it out. And Jung was very interested in what do we do with this stuff that's in the shadow because we don't think about it usually as we go about our day, but those parts of us are still there. We're still dragging them behind us and they can influence us in many different ways. And one of the ways is we can project our shadow.

**Joseph Lee:**

Right? So, we do need, by the way, to create shadow. That's just so that we're clear about it. That when we are born we have a huge and whole personality full of primal, powerful, instinctive behaviors and if we are raised in an environment where none of that is shaped or repressed, we're going to wind up in jail, probably, later in life. So, we do need to make a shadow in order to, in the first half of life, accommodate the culture. And so, Robert Bly's quote used earlier does really lean into the necessity of shadow making as an acculturating power and to formulate a personality that's functional for us. And later on in life we begin to find evidence that we have a shadow through projection. So, projection is thought of as, or I think of it as, an almost lifesaving phenomena of the psyche; that there is in the center of a personality a remembered held image of wholeness - of what it was like in the beginning when nothing was split off. And that survives even the most repressive environments. That is still inside you, inside of all of us. And *it* presses upon our personalities to incrementally acknowledge *it*, acknowledge these parts which we've lost touch with. And one of the tools at the center of the personality we'll use, is to cause a kind of magnetic attraction between you and that quality out in your environment, and cause you to kind of hone in on it. And once you're honed in on it the thing that people experience is all the ways that they defend against it. And that shows up as hatred, disgust, avoidance, criticism, accusations, attacking. And depending on how much violence was involved, yes, depending on how much violence was involved in the splitting off process, when the original split happened, is commeasurate to the amount of violence that people feel in their attacking of it when it's finally come to light in the environment. Or at least I think so.

**Deborah Stewart:**

So we split it off and we project it out there on to an in-law or a colleague or a lady across the street or somebody in public life.

**Joseph Lee:**

I'd like to rephrase that. ‘We’ don't split it off and ‘we’ don't project it. It is not a function of the personality. It’s that it is split off and then something deeper than us projects it on the person and ‘we’ have no control over that.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Right. And you know, Jung was very careful to say that projection is normal, that we all do it. And in fact, it's how we first come into contact with those parts of our psyche. Not just the shadow, but other parts as well that are unconscious. So well, it's certainly normal and it can be healthy, but it's sort of like what do we do when we project it? So for example, if, and by the way, another important thing when we're talking about projection from a Jungian perspective is that, you know, if we're going to project a shadow quality on someone, it will be true that the person upon whom we're projecting has a hook. So, let's see, I'll just use this example from my own life actually, that it was definitely a family value in my family that you had to express humility. You had to be humble, couldn't brag, you couldn't draw attention to yourself. That was considered really poor form. So I worked with a woman who, she was pretty and it was pretty clear that she knew she was pretty and enjoyed that. And she sort of, she was a show off. She was a show off and sort of a flirt and kind of enjoyed basking and other people's appreciation of her charm and beauty. And boy, I'll tell you, she got under my skin, man. I just she just, you know, and that's, that's always when you feel unusually provoked by someone. Maybe everyone else is also bothered by the person, but it really drives you crazy. And then you know you're dealing with a shadow quality when it has a lot of energy. And that was very much the case for me now. So the idea about a hook is, it's true that this young woman really was a little bit of a show off. Right? But that's not saying that really the energy for my, that the strength of my irritation with her was about my quality of maybe wanting some times to be a show off that had been disallowed in my family.

**Deborah Stewart:**

So the feeling was out of proportion to the provoking person and incident. And I think that's a little litmus test of yes. You know, when I'm just, you know, driven crazy by it and you know, then can hopefully reflect on, wow. There's something really trying to get my attention right here.

**Joseph Lee:**

And it can also be a subtle connection. You know, there's a hermetic aphorism ‘as above, so below’, but often there's a second phrase that's missed for people, its ‘as above, so below *but after a different manner’*, which is really important. So for instance, we haven't talked about this at least, but I could imagine this in a client where they're really targeting this coworker who seems to be showing off their beauty, or in some fashion, and after deep introspection, the person who's upset by it may feel in their shadow that they shouldn't show off their intelligence. That showing off in almost any category can provoke the energy, the shame, or the upsetness inside of them. So, if we deal with this idea of projection too superficially, which I do hear in some communities, that we look at this person and we say, “Oh, she's showing off how pretty she is”. Oh, so that must mean that *I'm* not allowed to show off how pretty *I* am. Right? It's a formula. Often, it's formulaic and it doesn't really land. And then people think they have this task of, well, I guess I better show off how beautiful I am to get this role in here and really admit that I'm just like everyone else. And then I have seen people work with this and they have not resolve anything because they didn't go into a much more subtle analysis of what is it *categorically*. Sometimes it can be extremely subtle. Like, somebody can hook our shadow because they used a certain phrase or a tone of voice, or they have a posture - the way they set their shoulders can make me land something on them. And Jung talked about this quite explicitly - how subtle a hook can be. So, we have to be very careful about how we unravel the mystery of what has been provoked.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Yeah. When we feel that provocation, the attitude is curiosity. Right? That's perfect. That's the attitude that can lead us into that subtle unraveling.

**Deborah Stewart:**

I'm thinking about the example we've landed on of the coworker who was so very, very pretty, but that the shadow might not be, Oh, I have to get in touch with how pretty I am and how cute I am, well dressed, et cetera, et cetera. I am, but the shadow might be, I have to get in touch with my own feelings of unworthiness and ugliness and the shame around that. And I'm thinking about a time when I was years ago and my first analytic endeavor of having a dream about this alien monster that lived on another planet who was good, but was terribly repulsive and ugly. And now there was an example of a split off Part of me had to actually live way out there in space. And that when I awoke and wrote the dream down, I found myself in tears, flooded with these feelings of, you know, that Monster's ugliness, And I was revolted and I felt sorry for him and had compassion. That is the work of bringing it into consciousness, bringing that green monster, not just a logical and certainly not a formulaic thinking process or not a thinking process only. And it took time and work and more feeling to find, well, what part of me had been so literally alienated.

**Joseph Lee:**

And that image of the monstrous object having to be put so far away, that it's on another planet, that really speaks to the incredible distance that the psyche will try to put between waking personality and whatever the unacceptable impulse is. I had a client who's just a wonderful, determined young man and we had been doing a lot of shadow work over many years. And we were in a session once where the shadow figures had come back in a clamoring way and he put his hand on his heart and had this sweet look on his face and he said, “Oh! My beloved degenerates.” That’s perfect.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Yeah. Because you know, one of the things Jung famously said is something like 99% of the shadow is pure gold. And it's this idea that what we put in the bag contains often, I mean there may be stuff that needs to be, you know, Joseph, as you said earlier, kind of repressed. But it's possible that there are so many treasures in the bag and there's so much energy in that bag.

**Deborah Stewart:**

That's why we do work with shadow because there's something really enlivening, worthwhile and whole making to be found there rather than, you know, are we just pawing through the slag heap of our a repressed feelings? No, there's treasure to be found

**Joseph Lee:**

And it's the timing of finding the treasure that's very important because, and this goes back to child rearing, that there really are things that have to be put into the shadow bag when one is a child because the ego cannot grapple, is not muscular enough, to sublimate it or to turn it into something useful. So, some things really do have to be put away, which is why the psyche creates a shadow but the shadow is also called a functional complex in the psyche, that there are certain psychological structures on the inner landscape, like the ego, like the shadow, the Self, a father complex, a few other things that we need in order to kind of have a basic ground in the psyche. We need a shadow or else we couldn't evolve an ego

**Lisa Marchiano:**

And that's part of it is that the ego does have to have primacy of place as we grow up so that we can operate and decide and steer our lives.

**Joseph Lee:**

So, Jung felt that his work was often the work of the second half of life, but partially because the personality was then muscular enough to confront the shadow, which is often thought of as the first stage of Jungian work.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Yeah. So that the ego could have a conscious relationship with these qualities

**Joseph Lee:**

And not be overwhelmed by them. We talk about confronting the shadow, but one of the dangers of confronting the shadow is shadow possession, where we discover some very complicated and perhaps socially unacceptable part of ourselves and then an individual can become possessed by it and begin living it out in a very fluid and sometimes dangerous way.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Yeah, and I mean of course a famous literary example of that would be Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, right? I mean this is probably one of the clearest literary examples of shadow dynamics is that we had the very, we have the very urbane and gentlemanly Dr. Jekyll who is experimenting in his laboratory with a substance that changes him into Mr. Hyde, who is capable of doing all kinds of monstrous things, all the things that are disallowed in Dr. Jekyll's life. And this is also, this is a good place to mention by the way, that we also think of the shadow as compensating the persona. So, the persona is the mask that we wear in the world. It's what we project about ourselves. It's what we want people to think of us. And, and the shadow would, would sort of be exactly the opposite. What we don't want people to know about us. And in the story of course eventually Dr. Jekyll is unable to control the changes into Mr. Hyde and I, it's been a long time since I've read it, but I think he kind of gets stuck there. But that would be that idea about possession.

**Joseph Lee:**

So, let's just summarize the first half of our conversation, which was about identifying personal shadow, which we've kind of walked around for a bit. There were a couple of concrete things that the listener could do, which has to do with very intensive and determined journaling. One could begin to write about what you absolutely hate in other people. Yeah, the thing that really just gets your goat - really gets your goat. It may be something that irritates you strongly and irrationally or disgusts you, these qualities that are just so provocative to you and other people. Also add in, noticing things that happen in the dream life; That you can often dream about people or figures that you find abhorrent or highly negative. And to be able to really write it down and then try to analyze and deeply describe and understand what those qualities are so that it's not just a superficial statement. For instance, even in the idea of the beautiful woman who seems to be showing off, to *really* write about that. In what ways does she show off and, and what is it about that that bothers you?

**Lisa Marchiano:**

What bothers you about that the most?

**Joseph Lee:**

Yeah, that's a good question. What is the psyche honing in on? Because it wants you to learn something. We project because the psyche wants to bring something to consciousness. It is not a failure - it's a function of the psyche. So, doing that intensive and very honest self-confrontation sets the stage. So, that's part of identifying personal shadow. And now we're coming into the idea of how do we *confront* the personal shadow, which is the next stage of it, at least theoretically, saying, “this must be part of me. Somewhere in there. I've got to have this someplace in me.”

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Yeah, Jung said something. Oh gosh, I wish I could remember this exactly. Said, you know, but to deal with the personal shadow, we really have to go right into it and kind of drink that cup to the dregs. So, when you find someone that has a shadow, you know, you say that someone in your life is getting right up under your skin, just, you know, just fingernails on a chalkboard.

**Deborah Stewart:**

Don't we all know someone who we felt that way?

**Lisa Marchiano:**

So then, you know, follow the process that Joseph outlined of really getting curious about what exactly is it that really bugs you about that person. And then see if you can feel a resonance in yourself. And then it might be time to kind of get curious about that, either imaginably or perhaps in real life to really make friends with that person, you know, to really approach that person and get curious about that person or that the inner figure of that person and try to move into it a little bit. That would be one way of exploring that.

**Joseph Lee:**

So, we do that by externalizing the ritual of ‘befriending your own beloved degenerate’ or beloved despised function. That's one way. If we were to move that to an introverted way, we could create or call forth an imaginal figure. You know, “What would an inner show-off look like?” And Jung was very much in favor of these imaginal journeys. So, imagine that and imagine interviewing them, talking with them. Even if you were to write that down, you know, to even write a little play where you might imagine, in your mind, meeting the inner show-off. And what would you talk about that would help you understand them, not attack them. This is a really important thing.

**Deborah Stewart:**

So, sort of an empathic extension into an engagement with your own imagination, maybe with a real-world person. And of course, I'll add to that, writing down dreams and then engaging in a process of kind of dreaming the dream on of what the figures in that, but moving toward it with what you talked about, Lisa, curiosity of what is this? What is it about? Rather than quickly judging it and saying, well, that's terrible. I would never be like that. I don't know. I don't want to go there. Go there.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Yeah. And it might even be, you know, depending on what the quality is. Right. And it might even be, well, okay, I never do that. I never you know, to my own horn. Maybe I'll give you, I'll try it next week and at that staff meeting and see what that feels like, you know, sort of almost Stepping into it a little bit.

**Joseph Lee:**

Which goes into the idea of ritualizing the shadow. So, it may be like you said, very uncomfortable to, you know, go and have a makeover and show up like a glamour shots model at the next business meeting. But it might be very empowering to simply *remind* your team of coworkers that you accomplished a really successful task that you'd all been working on. So there's indirect ways that we can express it. I mentioned this before, I think, but Robert Johnson in his little book on shadow, you know, he had discovered this inner hostility and aggression inside of himself. And Robert Johnson, for those of you that may have ever known him or heard a lecture from him, he's passed now, but he was incredibly introverted and not a terribly expressive person. So, to imagine Robert Johnson really raging at you is a very strange kind of idea. But upon discovering this part of the shadow, he noticed that he really needed access to that before he would walk on stage, because he was such a withdrawn person. So, he would wet a big bath towel in the hotel, so it was very dripping and wet and then with all his might, he would slam it into the basin of the tub. And there was something about the slamming of this object and the way it would spray and its loudness that he would suddenly have this upwelling of aggression and then he would stride down towards his lecturing venue and felt that that was a real gift. And so that was a kind of confronting but also honoring of his aggression. That worked really well for him.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

You know, I wanted to bring up a fairy tale if I might, because there's a fairy tale that I have right at the top of my head right now that is an excellent tale of shadow dynamics and it's Snow White. So Snow White of course is very sweet and pretty and demure and helpless and her evil stepmother is mean and wicked and vain. We have that vanity thing there. And envious. And so we can imagine, you know, one way of thinking about fairytales from a Jungian perspective is that every figure in the fairytale is an aspect of the dreamer's psyche. I'm sorry, of the main character's psyche. So, you sort of have to pick a character and sort of say, okay. So, if we're looking at it through the psyche of Snow White say or that's sort of the equivalent to the dream ego, if you will. Then the evil stepmother would be her own split off aggression, vanity, wickedness, savvy. And so, Snow White still kind of trapped in this kind of innocence complex. And boy, you know, snow white is such a picture of an innocence complex and you know, she's out in the woods, she runs away. And who does she come to? She comes to these seven dwarfs, these kind of earthy characters. Well, it turns out that in the earliest version of this fairytale, the dwarfs were actually thieves. So, she's living with these kind of shadowy little figures and I think most versions of the tale, they do mine, don't they? They certainly do in the Disney movie, they're miners.

**Joseph Lee:**

So stalwart, hardworking, blue collared.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Yeah. But they're also cathartic. They're like earthy, they're of the earth. So that's that kind of right.

**Deborah Stewart:**

They work underground which we might compare it to the unconscious extracting its treasures.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Right. But she still hasn't, even though she's living with these shadowy figures. She still hasn't integrated the shadow. And we know that because her stepmother comes and says, oh, would you like these laces? And you know, as when we're cut off from our own shadow, we are in danger of being victimized by others because we don't have access to our own aggression. Right. So, you know, she's so, excuse me, but she's so stupid. She's like, oh, you know, sure. I'll take the laces. And then, you know, she dies down almost. She dies and falls down almost dead. And the dwarfs have to come home and rescue her and say don't open the door. But then it happens again the very next week. It's like ah sweetheart, what were you thinking of? But she can't. She is susceptible to being preyed upon right by these kind of aggressive dynamics in her own psyche. They're not integrated. And the very last thing of course, is the Apple, which is a symbol goes along with temptation, right? She cannot resist the temptation of that Apple. She falls down dead. The dwarfs can't do anything now. This fairytale always bothered me for a while. I couldn't figure out why she just had to lie there dead in a glass coffin before she figured it out. Right? And some people say, well, it's a terrible anti-feminist fairy tale because it shows that she's just passive and she needs to be kissed to wake up. But I actually don't think that's what's going on. I think it's important that she dies with a piece of Apple in her mouth. And I see this as that she goes through a long period in which she seems passive and fallow, but really, she's metabolizing the kind of poison of the stepmother. So, she's integrating those qualities while she seems in her outwardly. And so how do we know that she's actually integrated the shadow when she wakes up with the Prince and they're going to get married? She invites the stepmother to the wedding and they give her iron shoes and she is danced to death by the iron shoes. So Snow White's no longer so sweet and pure and innocent. She's happy to torture her stepmother to death. And so that's how we know that she's integrated her aggression and oftentimes in fairytales when a figure dies, it just means that the quality has been integrated.

**Joseph Lee:**

And this shows up in dreams. I think about a dream that a client had. He was an elderly, tremendously sweet, kind, appealing guy. And he had a dream once about this very hirsute muscular guy who swaggers up to him and stands-off with him. Then the dream ego, who's this gentle old man, is roused to fight and he winds up pummeling this guy who easily could of mastered him. So one interpretation that I have of the dream is that he really represents this potential to be aggressive and that when he just comes into the proximity of the dream ego or just approaches the conscious life of the dreamer, it fills him with this capacity to fight, which is then played out in the dream, which is also exactly the kind of medicine that this fellow needed in his life. Right? He needed to learn how to fight. So just being in the proximity of the queen over time allows the innocent psyche to absorb some of the shadow's power, as it did for this fellow that I was working with. And then we are enlarged. Yes, yes. And one of the risks always is we are enlarged in a way that other people might not really love about us -and that's part of the initiation of integrating shadow.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Yeah. I mean everyone likes snow white. She's so sweet. Absolutely. But you know, at the end of the tale, she's kind of a bitch.

**Joseph Lee:**

Or she has that capacity. She has the capacity to defeat her enemies and people that are incredibly innocent often can't access that.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Yeah, that's right.

**Deborah Stewart:**

And in a fairy tale of course, things are really out pictured as if it's happening out there. So, somebody, a snow white type of real-world tale, you know, would not literally involve having the stepmother in iron shoes being danced to death. It would be a now I have access to my feelings of fury and aggression and I can protect myself and I don't have to actually do anything. I don't have to act it out. That's right. Because now I know you know, I can't stand that bitch.

**Joseph Lee:**

But sometimes the enacting of the energy is actually very constructive. So, for instance, if we have a very collapsed passive worker, maybe their supervisor is tremendously sadistic and aggressive, at a certain point aggression, hopefully, will rouse up in the collapsed worker and they'll quit. And quitting is a way of expressing aggression, like saying, “Go to hell, here's my resignation, I'm out the door!” And that is a mobilization of the shadow that's being projected onto the aggressive supervisor. It's very common. We probably can all think of a moment like that. We can also think of how much we would cheering our friend on. We were like, “Yes, you finally resigned!” It's almost a relief to see them expressing a little bit of that heat in their personality.

**Deborah Stewart:**

And taking care of themselves. Of knowing that he knows what he knows or you know, the woman who has a difficult stepmother really and truly. And now I take care of myself. I'm not locked into an interpersonal battle either of how do I tell my boss off or talk back to somebody in my life, but he quits. Well, I'm moving on. Goodbye!

**Lisa Marchiano:**

It feels integrated and I think you said Joseph, it's a question of having access to it. It's not like we become that thing. It's like we have access to it, which is different.

**Deborah Stewart:**

With access and it can be in consciousness and we can choose, be in choice about what am I going to do about this? Well, maybe it's time for me to move out of my home, my family of origin. Maybe it's time for me to quit and get some training and get a new job. But it's a choice rather than just a reaction.

**Joseph Lee:**

Right? So, somebody, let's say, who's raised in an extremely conservative home where all forms of sexuality are tremendously degraded so that any time something seems remotely sexual, mother has a face of disgust, father shakes his head. The fantasy is that your parents immaculately conceived you, when sex is highly denigrated. Then all of a sudden, this young person winds up in college, you know, the pressure to be sexual inside of themselves finally comes out of the forest. It begins to inhabit their body. This can go a lot of different ways and one is shadow possession, which sometimes can be a kind of wild, dangerous promiscuity. And this shows up in popular culture in this idea of the ‘preacher's daughter syndrome’, which I know can seem kind of sexist, but it's pointing to a kind of archetype of being possessed by the shadow in a way that, in this day and age, can really put you at risk. An integrated example of that, which shows up a lot in our offices as therapists, is somebody comes in and says, “You know, my sex life in my marriage is just awful. It's just dead. It's always been dead. As a matter of fact, I've never enjoyed sex and maybe I'm even non-orgasmic.” And then as the sexual shadow begins to be invited in and integrated, you know, it might show up as just taking a couple of sexy little risks in the marriage. And trying on different ways of expressing the sexuality or roleplaying or a lot of the other fun things which can happen within the structure of the marriage, but still invites the shadow in a ritualized way to enliven something that's lost its life.

**Deborah Stewart:**

What I think you're pointing to is that the integration of shadow doesn't have to be overwhelming or destructive. We take steps that are safe, that we can choose, whether it's journaling or trying out a new behavior, or are finally getting ready to quit a job. So, we do it step by step, not in one big sort of overwhelming whoosh from the unconscious because I know people are often anxious about it and even afraid of it of am I going to be overwhelmed? And no. And it can feel good to finally quit that job that you've hated with the bad boss or to try something new in the bedroom or to sit down with yourself every morning over coffee and journal and write about Anything you want, just self-expression. There are real rewards to this. Otherwise it would just be such an awful process. People feel good about these things. It's a victory and it brings back that which has been exiled.

**Joseph Lee:**

And some of the stuff is explicitly golden in as much as the culture really would applaud you if you took it on. One of the examples I love to use is brought forward in that movie Educating Rita, which is just totally charming movie, where this very expressive woman, I think she's a hairstylist in midlife, discovers and honors this impulse to go back to college. And it absolutely lights up her entire personality. And over the course of the movie she really discovers that she is a scholar and a philosopher and how enormously important it is for her to have that validated and to be lived out. And when you see the movie, you think, well, why would anybody resist something that fabulous inside themselves? But people resist their positive potential all the time if they were raised in an environment where that positive potential was disallowed in one way or another. And many things are disallowed when we're children, both culturally and circumstantially, which in hindsight, being informed 30 years later, seems ridiculous. But you may have lived in a really different world 30 years ago, as most of us did. So things like you know, scholarship and emotional sensitivity in men and sexuality and the impulse to be enterprising or to take appropriate risks or to publish a book, to quit your practice and retire because you're ready to move into another kind of different expansion in your life or to come out of the closet if you're gay - I mean there's all kinds of examples of things that when they're added into us that the people around you will start applauding and say, “wow, it's about time.”

**Lisa Marchiano:**

And I think it might be about time for us to switch to a dream.

**Joseph Lee:**

Hi, this is Joseph from this Jungian life podcast. Lisa, Deb, and I have been deeply moved by your responses to our work producing, editing, and distributing. It involves substantial expenses and now we need your help. Please stop by our website, thisJungianlife.com and click on the heading be our patron. You'll be redirected to our Patron funding page. Patron helps creators connect with people who believe in projects like ours. There you can sign up with your credit card to support us with as little as a dollar a month. And at higher levels of support we'll provide special episodes behind the scenes photos and stories, and a chance to join a select pool of listeners for dream interpretations. Thank you.

**Joseph Lee:**

So, here's a dream submitted by a 34-year-old male who works in the IT field and I'll provide a little bit of context that the dreamer had this dream a few months after his dad had died who had been very much in his thoughts. Here’s the dream.

"I'm in my Dad's wood shop, in the basement of the home where I grew up. I need to unscrew a panel on a metal box, and I'm finding the right screwdriver. The first one I pick up is too small. Mom hands me a better-sized one, a Phillips head with four fins. Somehow it is a very large size, and I notice the fins on the head are rusty. I sand away some of the rust on one of the fins, but when I come to the second, it is covered in masking tape. Instead of peeling off the tape, I try to sand away the masking tape, but the sandpaper continues to sand into the screwdriver fin itself, which is somehow made of corrugated cardboard. I am puzzled. I feel a pit in my stomach, like I've made a mistake. I find that only the first of the four fins is made of metal, the rest are cardboard. I "undo" (like you would on a computer) to get back to where I was after sanding the metal fin. The cardboard fins are intact again and I'm relieved. I then unscrew and open the panel of the box."

The feeling he had in the dream was puzzlement and unease. He also mentions that while he was growing up, he and his dad would work together in the woodshop. It's a really wonderfully complicated dream of doing and undoing and seeking, but I feel overall that it's such a positive dream in as much as the task of opening the box is finally achieved, although it has to go through this various interesting circuitous process.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Yeah. And it's all about finding the right tool.

**Deborah Stewart:**

It feels like a bit of a fairy tale where there's a task or searching for the treasure of the quest. I need to unscrew a panel on a metal box and then there is all the stuff with the screwdriver and the fins and sanding it away and not to be skipped over the masking tape, has help from mom, made a mistake. But in the end, he finds the way to tool it, he accomplishes the task. It's sort of like pulling Excalibur out of the rock or finding the, as a special fountain that has the water of life or something like that.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Yeah. And it does, I mean, I like your Excalibur reference because this does seem to be a task of the masculine. Right. And there is something phallic both about and screwdrivers, I might add. But just sort of start right at the beginning. It's the setting, you know, we always pay attention to the setting and it's, I'm in my dad's wood shop in the basement of the home where I grew up and he does tell us later that he and his dad would often work together in the wood shop. So somehow this is the realm. The dream places us right in the realm of the father. And it's particular to the father because I'm guessing, of course, I don't know here, but I'm going to assume that mom didn't usually hang out in the woodshop. I mean, maybe she did. That's not saying that's not possible, but that this seemed to be a place, a kind of crucible that kind of contained father and son energy, this wood shop.

**Joseph Lee:**

And in that father-son environment, my grandfather on my father's side had a wood shop in his basement and it was a really functioning wood shop. So, my grandfather wanted to introduce me to it - there was also a lot of hovering because you can hurt yourself. My grandfather actually cut one of his fingers off and he used to love to turn on the table saw and then wave his little stubby finger at me in this kind of ‘be careful’ admonition, which clearly had an enormous impact on me. So, there's a way in which the woodshop was the kind of a male initiation; it's like these tools are real and this table saw is serious stuff. He really did allow me to learn how to cut wood and measure it and do some of that work.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

And so, there's a real mentoring that happens there.

**Joseph Lee:**

There was this introduction to danger in the woodshop. I think a lot of people have an acute feeling of that in a woodshop, that these tools can both help you and they can hurt you. And these power tools are seriously powerful. I think that’s a wonderful initiatic and mentoring environment and there's a mystery that, as much as the boy was with his father a long time in the basement, it's the mother who hands him the tool to unlock the mystery. So when he first picks up a screwdriver, he picks up one that is too small and it's the mother principle in his psyche that says you can pick up something that's bigger and approach the father mystery - if you approach the unlocking of the father as if you are small and boyish, you won't unlock the mystery. The mother knew him as her lover and her husband and has perhaps her equal. So, she has the authority to say you can have and you need the bigger attitude to unlock this mystery. You have to come to him as a man.

**Deborah Stewart:**

There is a phallic imagery going on here, absolutely, of unscrewing and screwing and phallic in its symbolic sense. Not simply sexual to reduce it to that, but that ability to operationalize, to make it happen, to insert. It's phallic in its most symbolic sense with help from the mother, except that there's one fin that's made of metal. The others are made of cardboard. And so there's something that hasn't maybe fully developed or fully solidified.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

It's provisional or something.

**Joseph Lee:**

Maybe. But I want to say that the real problem is not that it's made out of cardboard. The problem is that he misinterprets the rust on it. Because he looks at one of the fins and notices there's rust on it, then he decides, Oh that's the most important thing here. So then he goes through the whole rest of the dream sanding off the rust and then it's tape and then it's cardboard and then he's kind of mucked up its utility and then he has to go and undo all of that sanding stuff -all of the manipulation of the object returning it to the state it was in when the mother gave it to him. It's intact. And then he can unscrew the panel. So, it's this reaction to the larger screwdriver, which is part of this journey, like a personal journey searching for the grail. He has to go through this whole complicated process of relating to it. And in a certain sense, misunderstanding what's important about the tool in his hand. Like thinkingthat removing the rust is really the pivotal thing.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Well, and it's sandpaper, which is abrasive. Absolutely. So it's this sort of you know, is there something in this dreamer's psyche, perhaps a tendency to kind of self-abrade, you know.

**Joseph Lee:**

An OCD thing actually, where people decide everything has to be scrubbed and clean before it can serve its purpose.

**Deborah Stewart:**

As if ego has to be in charge here. Okay, well this has to be sanded away. And sand away the masking tape as well. It reminds me at the end, the TS Elliot thing about you know, going through a whole process and then understanding the original situation as it really was that there's more understanding of, well, I don't have to do anything here. I don't have sand and peel and so on and so forth. It was fine as it was. And it does have four fins. It's interesting that it's a Phillips head and the structural meaning of four may be stretching this a bit but four stands in Jungian theory for a kind of wholeness.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

And if you think about the shape that Phillips head makes, I mean it's really a cross. Yes, it is.

**Joseph Lee:**

So, what we could imagine between being given the Phillip's head and then sanding it until its not useful, reminds me of analysis paralysis. This idea that you're being given a tool, you know what you want to do with it and then you fuss with it so much that it actually can no longer have its utility.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Yeah. And if you think about it, I mean if you, if you had a screwdriver that was a little rusty. Ordinarily, unless it were very rusty rust is not going to impede the functionality and utility of the screwdriver.

**Joseph Lee:**

And if you're really driven to get the job done, you're going to stick a rusty screwdriver and you're going to do it. And then maybe when you have some luxury of time, you can go back and tend all your tools; which actually is an interesting fatherly thing, to take care of your tools well, but if the central mystery is ‘get that panel open’, the timing of sanding is something to look at.

**Deborah Stewart:**

Well I'm thinking about when we say we're rusty. Yeah, okay. I'll give it a try, but I'm kind of rusty on making this or doing that. That there is a place I'd be curious about, you know, where do you feel you're rusty? Is it in the realm of the father energy, a sense of agency because you make things in a woodshop? You know, what's that about for this particular person?

**Lisa Marchiano:**

You know, what I'm really struck by is this box because the box, so what is this box? And of course I would want to ask the dreamer is this a real box. You know, what do you think was in the box? But somehow this is, it feels sort of like an approach to the mystery that Needs to be unlocked and it feels somewhat initiate.

**Deborah Stewart:**

I agree completely.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

And there's this way psychologically that when a parent passes, you almost feel the wheel of the generations turn a click. And you know, I mean I think this is something that can happen. This is a relatively young person to have lost his father. He's only in his thirties and there's a way that when your father passes, you realize that you are next in line and you now stand at the head of the generation. It's a very deep process.

**Joseph Lee:**

So, whatever is in the box is now your responsibility.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

And so, I would be really curious about what that is and even what's the feeling around the box?

**Deborah Stewart:**

And I'm thinking about the panel, it starts off, he says a panel on a metal box right at the outset, and I need to unscrew it. And then at the end I then do my word unscrew and open the panel of the box. But that it's a panel. I'm thinking about my fuse box at home and there's a panel of all those connections to this light and that electrical appliance.

**Joseph Lee:**

And that the panel protects the circuits and the fuses from being meddled with or being injured by the environment in some way. So, there's a certain kind of power beneath the panel perhaps that only now does psyche think he can begin to relate to, perhaps even safely or responsibly. And that may go to why he became so fussy with the rust on the screwdriver. As we approach learning about our deceased parents, as they really were versus how we imagined them, we can have this sense of, ‘are we ready to know that? Are we ready to see them that way?’ And to go through a kind of fussy feeling of anxious preparation, a kind of neurotic preparation, to just know what's true. The mother principle just gives them what's necessary to go with, because she's already seen him as her companion. She doesn't think about his father as this iconic figure. It was a known equal. So, there's a casualness, to me, about the way the mother offers the screwdriver as ‘here this is all you need.’ But the boy has to kind of perfect or purify the screwdriver in order for it to be worthy of opening the mystery of the panel. Because he sees it in a much more heightened way. Like, ‘I couldn't possibly approach the mystery of the father with a rusty or a dirty screwdriver. It has to be all be sanded down and be clean.’

**Lisa Marchiano:**

I want to lean into that a little bit with this, the figure of the mother that, you know, it might be a dream about the personal mother. And what I would imagine, by the way about this Dreamer's mother is, I mean, this seems like a pretty positive figure in the dream. But there's also a way that the mother is the thing that kind of you know, what I'm thinking of here is the book Iron John actually by Robert Bly whom we referenced earlier in this episode that really is about the task of masculine initiation and about how part of that is that the boy needs to take something from the mother that the kind of guards the secret. And in the book, which is based on the grim fairy tale Iron John, the boy needs to retrieve the key from under the mother's pillow. It's like somehow the secret to manhood needs to be taken from the mother. And you know, in this sense, I mean, in a literal sense, if you have something behind a panel that's screwed in place, it's almost like the screwdriver really is the key, you know? So here, you know, and it seems not insignificant that the mother is handing him the key. Okay. So something from the mother part of the psyche. The mother complex is standing beside him as he approaches the mystery of manhood. Really.

**Joseph Lee:**

I think that's great. I think that just nails it.

**Deborah Stewart:**

And I would just like to add what a very positive lysis or ending to the dream that I then unscrew and open the panel of the box. The treasure, hard to attain has been attained. He does it, the task has been completed

**Joseph Lee:**

And the main feeling of the dream was puzzlement and unease. And I think that's a natural reaction to taking on the responsibility of the father-box and the contents of it. But it isn't going to all be power and sunshine. But this is the beginning of a whole other journey in the same way that getting the key to let Iron John out of the cage was just the start - It was just the start.

**Lisa Marchiano:**

Yes. And I imagine that this dreamer is just at the start of something.

**Deborah Stewart:**

The box is open

**Joseph Lee:**

And, and the way it's cleared, and the only thing that's getting in his way was his fussiness in the dream, that once he got to the task it opened - that any stumbling block to opening the father box was really just in him. But the psyche's saying, ‘you've got our support.’

**Deborah Stewart:**

And there I think we can leave it. We all have smiles on our faces.

**Conclusion:**

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