

Gulf Coast Grandmother Gathering 2023

Small Circle Topic & Talking Points

FINDING WHOLENESS: MEETING THE SHADOW

When we shine our Light on the appearance of our Shadow, we reveal the Wholeness of our True Self.

As Spiritual Beings having a human experience, we have developed two faces. One face is the face we show the world. The other face we keep private and was named the "Shadow" by Carl Jung. The shadow self is so private that we may not be aware of it and only glimpse it when we are upset, strike out in anger, have nightmares, act out in revenge or pettiness, or practice addictions (such as uncontrolled shopping, eating, exercising, sex, drugs, alcohol, etc.) The shadow holds forgotten memories and buried aspects of ourselves.

Our shadow contains everything we consider unacceptable in life - the parts of ourselves that have been shunned, denied, rejected or otherwise negatively condemned by our parents, family members, and society while growing up. In order to be loved and accepted, each of us learned to hide away those parts of ourselves that were not met with approval. We learned to practice only the behaviors and traits which ensured we were loved and valued.

Ignoring or repressing our shadow limits us. In times of anger, stress, temptation, or fatigue we may be surprised by our words or actions. It is as if we are our own worst enemy; however, a willingness to recognize our wounded parts, to acknowledge and befriend them opens us to our Wholeness and Power of Oneness with ourselves and the universe.

"Embracing our shadows is the ultimate act of self-love. There is no greater love than the one that allows us to shine a light on the aspects of ourselves that we have judged and made wrong. Embracing our dark side gives us a newfound freedom to be with the darkness in others. For when I can love all of me, I will love all of you."

- Debbie Ford, Transformational coach, teacher, author

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Day 1- Connecting Hearts

1. Introduce yourself by sharing a little such as where you live, how many Gatherings you have attended, your experience with Peer Spirit Circles, and your expectations of the Gathering.
2. Share some of your story as we begin Connecting Hearts. What would you like your small Circle friends to know about you? You might share your family/living situation, any work you do/did outside your home, your special interests or hobbies, something else?

Wisdom of the Shadow

*Perhaps all the dragons of our lives
are princesses who are only waiting to
see us act, just once,
with beauty and courage.
Perhaps everything that frightens us is,
in its deepest essence, something helpless
that wants our love.*

Rainer Maria Rilke, Poet

"Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate."

Carl Jung, Swiss psychiatrist

"The first step in defeating the shadow is to abandon all notions of defeating it. The dark side of human nature thrives on war, struggle, and conflict. As soon as you talk about "winning", you have lost already."

Deepak Chopra, Transformational teacher, doctor, author

3. Have you ever heard of the shadow or done any shadow work? Is it possible that a dragon in your life turns out to be a princess waiting for you to act with beauty and courage?

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Day 2 - Finding the Shadow

We're often afraid of looking at our shadow because we want to avoid the shame or embarrassment that comes along with admitting mistakes.

Marianne Williamson, Teacher, author

1. Share something that random strangers might do that really upsets you. Describe what it is and why it bothers you so much.

Most elements of self in your shadow - your wildness, your carnality, or selfishness - were disowned and repressed during your childhood and adolescence in the process of your attempts (successful or not) to win acceptance from your family and peers. Far from being a mistake, this self-rejection was necessary in order to form a socially adaptive ego and personality, your first identity.

Now, to be initiated into your soul identity, you must descend into those dark realms to retrieve lost pieces. Therein lie key elements of your destiny.

Bill Plotkin, PhD, Depth psychologist

2. Why do you think you react strongly to the situation you described? Were you taught that this action is bad or have you had experiences where you decided it is wrong? Is the "thing" that bothers you something you might have done?

The shadow contains the secret of our true nature. It is the dark twin which we need if we are to discover our own wholeness. Those aspects of ourselves which we dislike, despise, or find uncomfortable, need to be loved and brought out of the darkness.

Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, Sufi mystic, lecturer, author

3. Can you think of a way to forgive this action or trait in others and in yourself using compassion or empathy which leads to Oneness? Can you find a reason where it might be ok in some situations?

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Day 3 The Shadow's Gifts

I believe that the shadow is one of the greatest gifts available to us. Carl Jung called it 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. When we dig our hands into its rich soil, we will discover the potent seeds of the people we most desire to be.

Debbie Ford, The Shadow Effect, author

1. Thinking of what you love about your romantic partner or a close friend, share what quality attracted you or inspired you that you think you don't possess.

2. What do you admire and value about this quality? The positive trait you chose is likely a golden shadow of your own (a positive shadow quality) that you were never encouraged to develop. Reflect on how this positive quality was shut down as you grew up.

We possess every human characteristic and emotion, whether active or dormant, whether conscious or unconscious. There is nothing we can conceive of that we are not. We are everything- that which we consider good and that which we consider bad. How could we know courage if we have never known fear? How could we know happiness if we never experienced sadness? How could we know light if we never knew dark?

Debbie Ford, author

3. Seeing a quality in another is a projection of that same quality in ourselves. Can you find this quality in yourself and see how it can bloom in you?

The challenge we face is acknowledging that a whole human being comprises both his or her higher and lower natures. To access our totality as human beings, we must come to know both.

Mariana Caplan, PhD, psychotherapist, yoga teacher, author

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Day 4 - Shadow and Power

"One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious." - **Carl Jung, Swiss psychiatrist; founder analytical psychology**

"It may seem paradoxical that we voyage into the shadow to discover and recover the bright light and radiant energy that is stored there, but this is how the shadow is retrieved and integrated. The light that will heal the world will shine brighter to the degree that we are willing to know and accept our own darkness. The challenge we face is acknowledging that a whole human being comprises both his and her higher and lower natures. To access our totality as human beings, we must come to know both." - **Mariana Caplan, PhD, MFT, yogi, author**

Reclaiming our shadow side leads to Wholeness from which True Power emerges.

"There are two different types of power; one that comes from ego and one that comes from soul. Ego-centric power is hierarchical and appears as "power over" other people and situations. When we are in a state of ego-centric power, we seek to control, manipulate, and push for our way to be done. Soul-centric power, on the other hand, is egalitarian and appears as "power within". It is quiet, solid, deep, steadfast, gentle, and humble. The message here is that true power doesn't come from acts of the ego. Soul-centric power acts from a place of gentleness, humility, awareness, and compassion. True power is the ability to wield greatness and not use it until the situation calls for it."

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Circle talking points:

Choose the question that speaks to you and share your thoughts.

- Do you agree with the definition of true power? What does "true power" mean to you?
- What are some signs that you recognize that your ego is taking charge as opposed to signs that your soul is whispering the way?
- What belief do you want to release to act from a place of humility, awareness, or compassion?
- How will you take your new awareness of the Shadow with you when you leave the Gathering?