

The Shadow and The Goddess

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Introduction

Today there is a lot of talk about a renewed manifestation of the feminine principle or, in other words, a return of the Goddess. Many books are being written today about Her. Amazon.com on-line bookstore lists 1,307 books with “Goddess” in the title. There are books about teen goddesses, the goddess in older women, goddess diets, domestic goddesses, the black Goddess, the white Goddess, and more. A popular Sunday morning news show recently featured goddess dresses in a segment on contemporary fashion. The dresses were elegant and flowing reminding one of ancient goddess statues. But the modern image lacks the substance of the ancient goddess figures. The fashion models on the TV show were all young, thin, and mostly light skinned. When asked about this by the reporter (female), the designer (male) responded, “Fashion is about the ideal.” The ideal feminine in this culture is young, thin, usually fair skinned, and eager to please. Fat, old, dark skinned, rebellious, and independent women do not represent desirable feminine attributes. They exist as the ignored shadow of the ideal.

If there is to be a real return of the feminine principle (which manifests in mythological history as the Goddess) it must include the real thing, not an abstract idealization but the lived reality. The Goddess is immanent, she is present in the world around us; the power of feminine creativity is a lived activity of flesh and blood, not an idealized process. The Goddess Demeter, for example, is the Earth or is inseparable from it; she is not an abstraction or a transcendent being ruling over the Earth. An individual woman is not an abstract ideal but an embodied self—often fat, dark, and independent.

In the biological process of procreation, the male contributes to generation by separating from part of himself; male creation takes place outside the body. The God of the Hebrew Scriptures is separate from His creation. The created is an object

separate from creator, made in his abstract ideal image. The Goddess is creation; She is create-ing, ever changing. In the patriarchal development of the Judaeo-Christian West, with its masculine, monotheistic trend toward abstraction, the Goddess and hence the divine within nature was repressed. She survived only secretly, for the most part in “heretical” and “revolutionary” groups.

Humanity and nature have become polarized. Western thought since Plato and Aristotle is characterized by dualism. It sets up hierarchical thought structures and divides the world into subject and object, giving rise to either/or thinking. Ultimately, it results in what Carl Jung has called the “projection of the shadow,” where the individual denies those qualities in her or himself which are considered unacceptable and projects them onto an external other—another person, an institution, the body, and nature are examples of common hosts for shadow projections.

The patriarchal world is a system of binary oppositions of dominant and subordinate terms. The Goddess has become almost exclusively associated with “nature” as the chaotic force to be mastered, whereas the God has the role of conquering or ordering nature from his counter pole of “Spirit.”¹ The attempt to dominant nature is part of humanity’s attempt to develop a sense of self or individuality as well as a highly developed intellect – everything that we now call human consciousness. In the process we have lost the ancient sense of participation in a sacred cosmos.

This opposition between humanity and nature can be understood as part of the process of the evolution of consciousness. The opposition between creative spirit and chaotic nature, which is central to the Judaeo-Christian tradition, has led to the well-entrenched habit of thinking in oppositions generally. For example, the common assumption that the spiritual and the physical worlds are different in kind—an assumption that separates mind from matter, soul from body, thinking from feeling, intellect from intuition, and reason from instinct. Further the spiritual pole is valued as “higher” than the physical pole. For the last 4,000 years, the feminine principle described in mythology as the Goddess and in cultural history as the values placed upon spontaneity, feeling, instinct and intuition, has been lost as a valid expression of the sanctity and unity of life.²

In psychological terms, the feminine principle has been banished to the unconscious becoming the shadow of patriarchal consciousness. This has created an imbalance within the individual psyche (in both women and men) with disastrous results for both culture and nature.

The Development of Consciousness

According to Carl Jung, individual consciousness evolves from childhood out of the collective unconscious. The root or source of consciousness is thus, paradoxically, the unconscious. The unconscious in Jungian terms is all that is unknown to conscious awareness. The collective unconscious is the realm of the archetypes, patterns or ordering principles of reality and contains the story of the birth and evolution of consciousness. All of humanity and, perhaps, all of creation share a common pool or substratum of wisdom and experience through the collective unconscious. Each life contributes its experience to it, and each individual has the potential capacity to tap into it.

There are three levels to the psyche according to Jung—conscious awareness, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious. The ego is the name Jung uses for the organization of the conscious mind; it is composed of conscious perceptions, memories, thoughts, and feelings. It plays the important role of gatekeeper to consciousness. Unless the ego acknowledges the presence of an idea, a feeling, a memory, or a perception, it cannot be brought into awareness but becomes part of the personal unconscious.

The personal unconscious lies “beyond” or “beneath” conscious awareness and is that part of the individual psyche that contains the suppressed and repressed personal memories of our present life. This is where we find the constellation of psychic content called the shadow.

The individual is linked not only to a personal past but also to the past of the species and before that with the whole process of organic evolution through the collective unconscious. Mythology is rich in images inherent in our psyche.

The great gods and goddesses of old, part of the collective unconscious, were personifications of universal processes, considered from the beginning as divine. Through the centuries, they have been named and

renamed in different cultures and destroyed in iconoclastic frenzy by conflicting fanatics. Yet the Archetypes themselves remain indestructible because they are as fundamental to creation as energy is in its different expressions.³

Despite all our differences as human beings, we share common psychic patterns. The development of human consciousness, which is analogous to physical evolution, begins in a state of undifferentiation at birth and evolves to an increasingly more differentiated awareness.

The Personal Shadow

In order to become “civilized,” according to Jung, human beings had to modify many of our “natural inclinations.” We learned to adapt certain behaviors and attitudes that allow us to relate and get along in groups and reject other “anti-social” behaviors. The acceptable characteristics form what Jung calls a mask or persona, whatever we consider unacceptable is pushed down into the personal unconscious forming the shadow. This collection of feelings, attitudes, beliefs, and impulses, is usually ignored by ego consciousness. It is that part of us which we will not allow ourselves to express. The shadow holds all that we consider irrational, immoral, and evil – qualities often attributed to nature and women in the masculinist culture.

The general characteristics of an individual’s persona are defined by expectations of the society in which she lives.⁴ For example, a woman brought up in a rich white family in the United States would develop a very different persona than if she had been raised with the aboriginal people of Australia. The persona is not fixed; in fact an individual may live in several different social groups and may shift her persona to meet the expectations of each group.

Fundamentally the persona is nothing real: it is a compromise between the individual and society as to what a man should appear to be. He takes a name, earns a title, represents an office, he is this or that. In a certain sense all this is real, yet in relation to the essential individuality of the person concerned it is only a secondary reality, a product of compromise, in making which others often have a greater share than he. The persona is a semblance, a two-dimensional reality.⁵

Even though we invent the persona, it reflects who we are in the sense that we continually make decisions in the process of adapting or not adapting to the demands

that are made on us. If we feel that by following the demands of our society we will not be true to ourselves, we can refuse. But in many cases this takes a great deal of self-knowledge as well as courage. For example, a woman living in the 1950's in small town U.S.A. who is faced with the decision of continuing in her role as a "house wife" or listening to inner voices telling her to follow a spiritual path might be so ostracized by her family and community that she decides the voices are "crazy" or "evil," and denies their existence, relegating the voice to the shadow.

When an individual finds it necessary to deny aspects of herself crucial to her own authenticity, she will often become exhausted and depressed because she is using so much psychic energy to keep down that which she has been told is "unacceptable" in herself that she does not have much left for her day to day life.

In inventing our persona we reject certain possible attitudes and characteristics and these become part of our shadow.

Besides the persona there is another, darker side to our personality, which we do not consciously display in public: the shadow. The stronger and more rigid the persona, and the more we identify with it, the more we must deny the other important aspects of our personality. These aspects are repressed to the unconscious, and they contribute to the formation of a more or less autonomous splinter-personality, the shadow. The shadow finds its own means of expression, though, particularly in projections. What we cannot admit in ourselves we often find in others.⁶

The shadow, as a function of the personal unconscious, consists of all those desires and emotions that are incompatible with social standards and with the persona; it is all that we are ashamed of based on who we think we "ought" to be. Although we usually think of the shadow as negative, it also contains positive aspects that we have denied. This is often true for women in patriarchal culture because much of what is considered negative or evil in a male dominated society is associated with the feminine and projected onto women—such as sexuality, spontaneity, intuition, and diffuse or unfocused awareness.

In Jungian terms, an individual in search of healing and wholeness needs to acknowledge the shadow. The shadow is an important element of the psyche, even if it were possible, we would not want to get rid of it. A person would be incomplete

and shallow without the shadow aspect. It adds vitality and spontaneity in a healthy individual who is not afraid to allow the play of the shadow in her life.

The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspect of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance.⁷

When we attempt to live only out of the conscious, adapted attitudes of our personality, the opposite side remains in the unconscious, waiting for some situation that allows it to break through. “When the ego identifies with the persona, when the major concern of the ego is to appear as the public image demands, then the repressed shadow will sooner or later find a way to collapse the out-of-balance persona.”⁸ When this happens the individual acts out in “anti-social” and often violent ways.

The ego often identifies with the persona in an attempt to deny the shadow. But in so doing the individual is separated from the Self, which is the true center of the personality, not the ego. When the individual identifies with the face she presents to the outer world, she ignores her inner life and fails to face the shadow.

What distinguishes Jungian psychology from practically all other psychologies is the idea that there are two centers of personality. The ego is the center of consciousness awareness or waking consciousness; the Self is the center of the total personality, which includes conscious awareness, the unconscious, and the ego. The Self is both the whole and the center. The ego is a self-contained little circle off the center but contained within the whole.⁹

The Self, in Jungian psychology, unites the personality, giving it a sense of oneness and wholeness. When a person feels in harmony with herself and with the world, she is functioning from the level of Self. The Self is the organizing principle of the personality and when one feels seriously conflicted or like she is “going to pieces,” the Self is not doing its job. The Self functions as an inner guide and is very different from our conscious ego. The goal of Jungian therapy, and of most spiritual traditions, is self-realization. This requires acknowledging the shadow and shifting our center of consciousness from ego to Self and thus acquiring a sense of wholeness.

This is the task of each individual as well as humanity as a collective. To recover a sense of wholeness requires coming to terms with the feminine. According to Richard Tarnas, we are now in the midst of a great awakening of the soul (or the Self, in Jungian terms).

The driving impulse of the West's masculine consciousness has been its quest not only to realize itself, to forge its own autonomy, but also, finally, to recover its connection with the whole, to come to terms with the great feminine principle in life, to differentiate from but then to rediscover and reunite the feminine, with the mystery of life, of nature, of soul.¹⁰

To regain our balance as individuals and as a culture requires acknowledging the "dark" side, the feminine, the shadow of patriarchy contained in matter, nature, woman and all things "other." Meeting the shadow is the first step in Jungian analysis and necessary before the individual sets forth on the journey to the Self. Many therapists today offer workshops in "shadow work." The approach to the shadow differs but the goal is always to learn to accept and respect the "dark" side of ourselves in our quest for wholeness.

Whereas Jung and many of his followers approach the shadow through the symbolism of the mental realm others approach the shadow through the body. Jung himself called the body "the personification of the shadow of the ego."¹¹

The Body as Shadow

It is usually thought that the shadow is invisible, hidden away somewhere in the back of our minds. But massage therapists and others who work regularly with the body know that touching and being touched awakens a whole dimension of being often denied by the conscious mind. The body is usually considered the opposite of and inferior to the mind. Instead of a relationship of mutuality between mind and body, it is the role of mind to control body. Modern society has objectified body, disowned it, and only pays attention to it when it breaks down. But if we reclaim and respect body as a living reality, it responds and comes alive. The development of an over-rationalized life is promoted at the expense of a more "primitive" and natural vitality.

The human body has lived for two thousand years in the shadow of Western culture. Its animal impulses, sexual passions, and decaying nature were banished to the darkness and filled with taboo by a priesthood that valued only the higher realms of spirit, mind, and rational thought. With the advent of the scientific age, the body was confirmed to be a mere sack of chemicals, a machine without a soul.¹²

The mind/body split is completely entrenched and a necessary assumption of Western patriarchal culture. Right-brain processes, intuition, and sensuality exist in the shadow of left-brain logic and the striving of the individual ego. In accordance with the dualistic separation of heaven and earth, spirit has been valued over matter, reason over passion, intellect over emotion, mind over body, culture over nature, and individual over communal life. The first term of each of these binary oppositions is considered male and the second “inferior” term as female.

We all, women and men alike, live within the dualistic structure of patriarchal culture. The shadow takes on a form or “personality” of its own as the “enemy” or the “other.” Thus the emotions, the body, and nature are all shadow figures. Throughout history patriarchy has projected onto women the unacknowledged fears, needs, and desires of both sexes, and then defined women as weak and irrational (emotional); sinful and self-indulgent (sensual); dependent (relationship-oriented); possessive (nurturing); and illogical (intuitive).¹³

Rather than participating in and perpetuating this us-versus-them structure, many women have realized the urgent need for self-insight and have developed processes and techniques to come to terms with our own “darkness” rather than project it onto an externalized other. By coming to terms with our own bodies, developing a fully embodied self, we take a step beyond patriarchal structure altogether. Being wholly in our body requires refusing the Barbie-doll image promoted by mass media and allowing ourselves to experience our lived bodies.

The prevalent conception of the body is a scientific, biological one. The body as a biological entity refers to the physical body as an external object of analysis that can be measured. From a scientific point of view, the body is defined by certain fixed anatomical features as well as by a certain genetic and hormonal makeup unique to its sex.

A reconceptualization of the body entails going beyond or beneath this fixed, scientifically measured body to an experiential body that includes personal and social experiences that are outside biology's sphere of analysis. If we explore and listen to body we will find that it holds the record of our rejected side, revealing what we dare not speak, expressing our current and past fears. All that is rejected by the conscious ego is lodged in the body and shows up as rigidity and self-consciousness and often as disease—often in the most “mysterious” and feared parts such as the breasts, cervix, and ovaries.

The body is not only the carrier of the content of the personal shadow but also suffers collective abuse. Epidemics like AIDS, or Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, for example, are symptomatic of the destruction of the immune system of Earth and an expression of the collective shadow.

The body as shadow is armored, rigid, and often riddled with pain. Although everyone needs some armor as protection in today's world, there is a difference between the rigidity of an unconscious defense structure and the flexibility attained through conscious choice. The shadow contains not only the qualities rejected by our conscious life but also our primitive, undifferentiated life force, a vitality whose presence enhances our awareness and strengthens us. As we acknowledge the shadow – develop a relationship with it instead of projecting it outward—we find that we spend less energy on pretending and posturing, live more fully in the body, and feel more authentically present in our day to day life.

Shadow-work is not about dismantling the personal shadow, but rather refers to the on-going process of balancing and depolarizing, healing the split between our conscious sense of self and all else we might be. Shadow integration means developing the capacity to carry an expanded and more unified awareness, enabling us to reduce the shadow's inhibiting or destructive potentials and to release trapped, positive life energies that may be caught in the pretense and posturing required to conceal the shadow.

The feminist practice of consciousness raising groups developed in the 1970's, which consists of women coming together in a circle to share their innermost feelings and thoughts, is a means of releasing our authentic selves and becoming alive

in our bodies. More and more women are refusing the projections and fears of the dominance culture. A strong ego and highly developed “masculine” consciousness are her allies in the process of “sorting through” her shadow and retrieving aspects of her authentic self.

Patricia Lynn Reilly asks us to imagine a woman who has escaped the inhibiting and destructive effects of the shadow in her poem “Imagine a Woman.”

Imagine a woman who believes it is right and good she is
a woman. A woman who honors her experience and
tells her stories. Who refuses to carry the sins of others
within her body and life.

Imagine a woman who trusts and respects herself.
A woman who listens to her needs and desires.
Who meets them with tenderness and grace.

Imagine a woman who has acknowledged the past’s influence
on the present. A woman who has walked through her past.
Who has healed into the present.

Imagine a woman who authors her own life. A woman who
exerts, initiates, and moves on her own behalf. Who refuses
to surrender except to her truest self and wisest voice.

Imagine a woman who names her own gods. A woman who
imagines the divine in her image and likeness.
Who designs a personal spirituality to inform her daily life.

Imagine a woman in love with her own body. A woman who
believes her body is enough, just as it is. Who celebrates
her body’s rhythms and cycles as exquisite resource.

Imagine a woman who honors the body of the Goddess in her
changing body. A woman who celebrates the accumulation of
her years and her wisdom. Who refuses to use her precious
life energy disguising the changes in her body and life.

Imagine a woman who values the women in her life.
A woman who sits in circles of women.
Who is reminded of the truth about herself when she forgets.

Imagine yourself as this woman.¹⁴

Nature as Shadow

The experience of dualism and the opposition of humanity and nature has resulted in estrangement. We are estranged from nature and each other. Feminist scholars and writers have offered evidence that in pre-patriarchal times, nature was experienced as an all-encompassing, vital presence. nature was felt from inside herself, her heart beating strongly in the hearts of all. According to Owen Barfield, in early times:

The world was more like a garment people wore about them than a stage on which they moved...Compared with us, they felt themselves and the objects around them and the words that expressed those objects, immersed together in something like a clear lake of – what shall we say? – of “meaning.”¹⁵

Within a Jungian model of consciousness, nothing in the psyche is ever lost. The experience of nature from the inside, like a “garment,” is part of the collective unconscious and if consciousness is to function at the highest level of which it is capable, what is lost must be found. Underlying the condition of estrangement that we all experience, are collective memories and intuitions of the essential interconnection of all life within the universe. This intuition, long submerged in the collective unconscious, has been resurfacing in a renewed awareness in Gaia, Mother Earth, as living presence. Whereas patriarchal thought describes reality in terms of oppositions and fragmentation, the “Gaia hypothesis” views the universe as an organic whole, and life as an all-encompassing web of interconnectedness.

It appears as if the Goddess is re-emerging in a new form, not as a personalized image of a female deity, but as what that image represents: a vision of life as a sacred whole in which all life participates in mutual relationship, and where all participants are dynamically alive.¹⁶ For example, according to Heisenberg and Einstein, in subatomic physics the universe can only be understood as a unity, and this unity is expressed in patterns of relationship, and the observer is necessarily

included in the act of observation. Many images of modern science are expressed in images that belong to the Goddess.

Today many human beings are attempting to live in a new way, allowing their feeling of participation with the Earth as a whole to affect how they think about it and act toward it, aware of the urgent need to comprehend the world as a unity. Einstein pointed out this need when he said: “With the splitting of the atom everything has changed save our mode of thinking, and thus we drift toward unparallel disaster.”¹⁷

The new science and the ecological movement may be expressions of impulses coming up from the unconscious, both in our personal and our collective life as members of the human race attempting to grow into wholeness.

Conclusion

Health and wholeness require that we acknowledge and integrate the hidden or concealed elements of our selves. However, this does not mean that the content of the shadow becomes conscious in such a way as to eliminate the shadow. To acknowledge and integrate the shadow is not to destroy it. Rather, the hidden needs to be known in its hiddenness. This is a difficult thought. Within our accustomed “masculine” rational ways of thinking, what is hidden is in opposition to what is revealed. From this perspective consciousness strives for revelation.

The trick is to let the feminine show up as concealed, not to unconceal it as a hidden source of power.¹⁸ The need perceived by feminists to transform patriarchal dynamic of power-over in order to save ourselves and the planet might suggest that we must retrieve our own uniquely feminine power from the depths of psychic and historical denial and stop the swing of the pendulum turning it back “in our favor.” But this would be to participate in the us-them dynamic that has rendered women and minority peoples powerless.

The dynamic of concealment, a notion developed by Martin Heidegger, encompasses what in the history of Western thought is associated with chaos, mystery, darkness, silence, the earth, and the primitive. Concealment, whose characteristics today are associated with the feminine, is suppressed, feared, and

understood as that which must be overcome and brought into the light of unconcealment.

According to Heidegger, concealment is not the negative of unconcealment but a positive source of unconcealment. In Jungian terms: the unconscious is not the negative of consciousness, but its source—the common pool or substratum of wisdom and experience available to each individual. Mystery, darkness, chaos, absence, ambiguity, the play of chance all belong to concealment (and the unconscious, in a Jungian sense). In our contemporary age, concealment, whose cluster of characteristics are similar to those historically associated with the feminine, is suppressed, feared, and understood as that which must be overcome and brought into the light of unconcealment.

In Western metaphysics the mutuality of concealment and unconcealment has been radically transformed. Nature no longer abides deep and secure within its mysterious concealment or density, freely bringing forth, but is driven to increased elevation and escalation. The silent, dark depths of the earth (concealment) are forcefully drawn up to the highest heights to become pure light. Movements of concealment—like receiving, sheltering, holding, and reclining—are suppressed nature is pushed to create beyond its limits, to overcome, expose, resist, and compel.¹⁹

The re-emergence of Gaia, the ancient Earth Goddess and the rebirth of the long-repressed feminine elements in life must happen without destroying nature and the “feminine principle.” Nature disconnected and described within a dualistic, separatist worldview is a one-dimensional, many times removed, false image.

In order to allow nature and the feminine to emerge as themselves we must turn to modes of perception excluded by modern Western rationalism. Feminist theologian, Nelle Morton, offers a vision of a holistic consciousness in which the senses are not separate but experienced as interwoven (synesthesia) and integrated with other aspects of the psyche such as thinking and feeling.

Holism gathers up the totality of living experiences—eating, talking, dancing, waking, discovering, discussing, studying, and worshipping into a new environmental space and a new kind of time. It may be seen as a unified focus of all the faculties of one’s being, each feeding on the others and many of them surfacing simultaneously. Holistic recovers gesture and movement as essential to theologizing. Learning to listen

with one's whole body. Learning to hear with the eye and see with the ear and speak with the hearing. Knowing the Spirit in movement and not in stasis.²⁰

The "return of the Goddess" is taking humanity beyond the oppositional dualism of patriarchy into a whole new mode of perception and experience. It is not a matter of integrating an abstract "feminine principle" with an abstract "masculine principle." It is a growing beyond dualism and creating a new humanity, no longer at war with nature and the body, but existing in a state of mutuality and partnership with all aspects of the of the web of life.

Notes

- ¹ Anne Baring and Jules Cashford. *The Myth of the Goddess*. (London, Penguin Group, 1991) xii.
- ² Ibid., xii.
- ³ Alice O. Howell, *The Web in the Sea: Jung, Sophia, and the Geometry of the Soul* (Wheaton, Illinois: Quest Books, 1993), 22.
- ⁴ June Singer, *Boundaries of the Soul* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 209.
- ⁵ Carl Jung, *Two Essays in Analytical Psychology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 155.
- ⁶ June Singer, 215.
- ⁷ Carl Jung, , 159.
- ⁸ June Singer, 220.
- ⁹ "Facing The Evil Within: An Interview with John Sanford." www.fearlessbooks.com
- ¹⁰ Richard Tarnas. *The Passion of the Western Mind*. Quoted on-line: www.annebaring.com
- ¹¹ John P. Conger. "The Body as Shadow" in Connie Zweig and Jeremiah Abrams, editors. *Meeting The Shadow*. (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1991), 85.
- ¹² Ibid, 83.
- ¹³ Marlene Shiwy and Steven Rosen. "Spinning the Web of Life: Feminism, Ecology, and Christa Wolf." On-line: <http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/content/v7.1/schiwy-rosen.html>
- ¹⁴ Patricia Lynn Reilly. On-line www.openwindowcreations.com
- ¹⁵ Cited in Marlene Shiwy and Steven Rosen. "Spinning the Web of Life: Feminism, Ecology, and Christa Wolf." On-line: <http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/content/v7.1/schiwy-rosen.html>
- ¹⁶ Anne Baring and Jules Cashford., xiii.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 14.
- ¹⁸ Carol Bigwood. *Earth Muse*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 98.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 88.
- ²⁰ Nelle Morton. *The Journey is Home*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 83.

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