

“Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? ... *The Shadow knows! ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!*”

Perhaps some of you remember the old radio show, *The Shadow*. It was on the radio from 1930 until 1954, and even those of us who aren't old enough to remember it know that opening line. It's an American classic. The Shadow is a good guy, though in many ways he's a menacing character. In fact, he uses his menacing persona to fight crime – he uses his mystical powers for good, not evil. The Shadow traveled to the East to learn psychic tricks and to gain mental powers – in fact, he learned the ability to cloud people's minds so that they couldn't see him, making himself invisible through mind tricks. Like so many comic book heroes, he had a wealthy alter ego. (I suppose it's a useful plot device if a character that spends his time fighting crime anonymously happens to be independently wealthy.) The Shadow is actually a rich man named Lamont Cranston, but only he and his girlfriend know it.

It was a simpler time, those radio show days. But the Shadow strikes me as an archetypical character – that is, a prototype that shows up again and again in our lives and in the arts and culture – and as an archetypical character, the Shadow is, of course, timeless.

It's impossible to talk of archetypes – and shadows, for that matter – without thinking of Carl Jung. Carl Jung was a great Swiss psychiatrist, the founder of analytical psychology. I spoke about him once before, in a sermon on synchronicity – the first sermon I ever delivered here. Carl Jung created the notion of the shadow in the psychological sense.

Our shadow, or shadow side – or “dark side” – the shadow is, in part, that stuff that each of us carries inside – negative characteristics, like envy, rage, lust – basically the seven deadly sins and other foul traits can be found in our shadow side. But that's about as far as the lay understanding of the shadow side goes.

Carl Jung's concept of the shadow side is a little more complicated, of course. Now, this is just a sermon, and I'm not a psychologist, so my explanation is still at the lay level. (I'm using some basic ideas from Maggie Hyde's book, *Introducing Jung*.) Jung wrote about the ego and the shadow together, two archetypes that are related. The ego is our “personality number 1” – it's our “sense of purpose and identity”, and it includes our persona, the personality we show to the world. But our “personality number 2” is the shadow. The shadow includes our animal-like qualities and undesirable traits that we try to hide from others, and maybe even from ourselves. It's like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde; Dr. Jekyll is the ego, or personality number 1; and of course Mr. Hyde is the shadow, or personality number 2.¹

According to Jung, to know yourself fully, you need to understand not just your ego and persona, but also your shadow. You won't have full mental health without walking through the valley of the shadow of ... the shadow! It can be dangerous to be completely oblivious to your shadow side. It can make you more dangerous to yourself and even others to be unaware of hidden

¹ Maggie Hyde and Michael McGuinness, *Introducing Jung* (Totem Books 1992), pp. 86-88. Text by Maggie Hyde, illustrations by Michael McGuinness.

tendencies in times of duress. Jung wrote, “Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual’s conscious life, the darker and denser it is.”² In other words, the less aware you are of your shadow side, the greater its power over you. But though Jung acknowledged that examining the shadow is scary, he also wrote that the shadow is 90% “pure gold”. There are many wonderful things that we can tap into if we can come to understand our shadow, and integrate our shadow. This is known as “shadow work” in “the biz” of psychology. And it takes some courage to look at our shadow side, to do this shadow work.

What Jung knew was that not everything hidden in our shadow side is “bad” *per se*. He knew that *any* parts of our essence that we reject and repress are part of the shadow. That’s where a lot of the “pure gold” is. So in other words, perhaps deep down in your shadow side you are incredibly creative – perhaps the sort of person who could paint beautifully, say – but somewhere along the way you learned to reject and hide your creative self. Why would you reject something positive about yourself? Well, we do this all the time. Somewhere along the way – most likely when you were quite young – you learned an internal script and decided that being creative wasn’t for you. Perhaps from a traumatic experience or from something that your family of origin said you learned that being creative wasn’t safe for you or something of the sort. You learned an internal script that “you can’t make a living being creative” or “you’re not that talented, stick to something practical”. Things like that. And without even being consciously aware of it, you put your creativity into your “shadow box”³ (as some have called it). So along with some negative traits – perhaps jealousy, or sloth, *etc.* – you’ve rejected and tucked some neutral and even positive things into your shadow side. Being out of touch with one’s dark side can be dangerous when we are under extreme duress, but being out of touch with the rest of one’s shadow side can also mean that we never nurture some of our talents... it can mean that day after day, year after year, we are out of touch with our true abilities and potential, and we are not all we can be. *What untapped potential lurks in the hidden hearts of women and men? The shadow knows!*

So how can one do “shadow work” – or to integrate all the things hidden in one’s shadow side? Well, you could see a proper Jungian psychologist, if you have access, financial or otherwise, to a Jungian psychologist. But the good news is that there are many modern shadow work experts and gurus who have written books and who have conducted seminars and so on. So if you’re motivated, you can do quite a bit on your own, or in a group.

One of these shadow work gurus is Debbie Ford, who wrote *The Secret of the Shadow*. She writes a lot about our internal scripts, our “shadow beliefs”, she calls them. She writes that our “shadow beliefs [are] the unconscious beliefs that control our thoughts, words, and behaviors. Our shadow beliefs establish our limits.... But our shadow beliefs [also] contain the very wisdom we need to transcend our current limitations and [to transcend] our discontent.”⁴ Many of the themes of our shadow beliefs are pretty predictable. Some of them include, “I don’t

² C.G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion: West and East – The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 11* (Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 131. I noticed this quotation at <http://psikoloji.fisek.com.tr/jung/shadow.htm>.

³ One who uses the term “shadow box” in this context is Debbie Ford, author of *The Secret of the Shadow*.

⁴ Debbie Ford, *The Secret of the Shadow: The Power of Owning Your Whole Story* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), p. 10.

belong”; “I’m a doormat”; “I’m unlovable”; “I can’t trust anyone”⁵, and so on. And we keep telling ourselves these negative scripts over and over again, not so much with conscious awareness, but kind of subconsciously, or subliminally.

But if we do shadow work, we can start to pay attention. We can discover what our internal scripts are – those things that we tell ourselves subconsciously over and over again. Spend a little time thinking about it. If you think about your life, perhaps especially some of your regrets in life, you’ll discover that there is a theme, or maybe you have a couple of themes. If you think about it, you’ll see that there are certain themes that you use to explain things that happen in your life. Maybe your theme is “I always have to take care of others first and never get to think of myself” or maybe “my shyness always holds me back” or what have you. Once you realize your shadow themes, you can start to notice them consciously when they come up. And then, you can get beyond those internal scripts and the limits they’ve been putting on you.

But this is easier said than done. The devil we know is always less scary than the devil we don’t know, and so getting beyond our internal scripts – no matter how harmful they are – feels scary. If I’ve been telling myself, subconsciously or even consciously, all my life that “I don’t make friends easily”, for instance, then that feels like part of my identity. It’s scary to let go of it. But as Ford writes, “Holding on to what we know is the biggest reason we remain stuck in our stories.”⁶ Letting go of the internal script requires change, but even positive change is scary.

But shadow beliefs have another aspect to them. Your shadow beliefs can perform other functions. I have a wise colleague with whom I did some shadow work. When one of my shadow beliefs revealed itself in our work, she did not try to talk me out of it immediately. Instead, she would ask, “How is that belief serving you?” Because usually, we use our shadow beliefs to protect ourselves in some way. If your internal script is, “I can’t make a living being creative”, then how is that belief serving you? Perhaps it has protected you from making high risk career choices, for starters. Perhaps it has protected you from the inevitable rejection and criticism of some of your creations. Perhaps it has protected you from being ostracized by your family. And so before you throw away that shadow belief, it makes sense to pause and make sure you understand how your internal script has been serving you all your life.⁷

This time of year, I always think about – and invariably watch – one of the best stories of “the shadow side” in cinematic history (at least in my opinion). Of which movie do I speak? Why, I speak of *It’s a Wonderful Life*, of course! I know most people think of *It’s a Wonderful Life* as syrupy-sweet. Even when the movie was released in 1946, it was panned by some critics as corny. But I was pleasantly surprised and a little amazed the first time I actually watched the movie as an adult. Sure, it has some corny moments – okay, *many* corny moments – but I am always struck by how dark it is, in a way. The movie tells the story of George Bailey, played by Jimmy Stewart, and his small town life in Bedford Falls. On the surface, both George Bailey and Bedford Falls are old fashioned and decent. But that’s “personality number 1” of both Bailey the

⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 48-49.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 77.

⁷ A book on the shadow that I read during the time of my shadow work was *Make Friends with Your Shadow: How to Accept and Use Positively the Negative Side of Your Personality*, by William A. Miller (Augsburg Publishing House, 1981). I found this book to be useful. It should be noted that it is from a decidedly Christian perspective.

person and Bedford Falls the town. That's the ego, the persona. Both George Bailey and Bedford Falls have a "personality number 2", or a shadow side that's a little darker. Bedford Falls, after all, is constantly under the thumb of nasty Mr. Potter, the richest and meanest man in town, played by Lionel Barrymore. And George Bailey? Well, he's a great guy – everybody loves him – but he's a tormented soul, really. What's his shadow script, what's inside his shadow box? Something like, "I'm stuck taking care of my family and friends – stuck in this two-bit town, stuck with the measly ol' Bailey Building and Loan, stuck in this life". And there's a real rage inside him that he hides. But the bitterness is just below the surface most of the movie.

At the end of the movie – and yes, this is a "spoiler alert", but you've had 64 years to see the movie, so get with the program – at the end of the movie, George Bailey has a nervous breakdown. The Bailey Building and Loan is missing eight thousand dollars, and George Bailey is going to take the fall for it (though it wasn't his fault – it was that inept Uncle Billy and that mean Mr. Potter). Yes, at the end of the movie it's Christmas Eve, and the police are coming to arrest George. George is beside himself; picks fights with his wife and kids; and runs out of the house. He goes to the local bar and gets a bit drunk – which is all out of character for him, at least for personality number 1. But under extreme duress, personality 2, his shadow side, has gotten hold of him. In fact, he's thinking about killing himself. But then, his guardian angel, the lovable Clarence, appears.

What happens next is a brilliant reverse-telling of *A Christmas Carol*. In *A Christmas Carol*, the nasty Ebenezer Scrooge is shown by "ghosts" – angels of sorts – all the wrong he has done, and the negative ways he has impacted the world around him. But *It's a Wonderful Life* does this in reverse. Namely, Clarence the angel has the brilliant idea to let George see what Bedford Falls would be like if he'd *never been born*. George sees what his family's lives and his friends' lives and the town's life would have been without him. And as you probably know, it's not so good. Without George Bailey, his family falls apart. His brother died as a child without George around. The low income people of Bedford Falls live in Ghettos since, of course, the Bailey Building and Loan went out of business long ago. Mr. Potter owns the whole town, and everyone in it. George's children have never been born, and Mary, George's wife, is lonely and alone. And as Clarence says, "You see, George? You've really had a wonderful life!"

Debbie Ford asks, "How would your life look if seen through the eyes of an angel?"⁸ That's exactly the gift that George Bailey receives in *It's a Wonderful Life*. He gets to see his life through the eyes of Clarence. Sometimes, if we can see ourselves from the eyes of an angel – if we can see the story of our life with all its imperfections through a gentle set of eyes – we'll see that we've really had a wonderful life, too. We need to tell ourselves different stories about ourselves. We need to tell ourselves different stories about our lives.

And just as Bedford Falls has a shadow side, so does this town of Andover, and so do all the surrounding towns and cities. And this congregation has a shadow side, just as all congregations do. Another thing we can ponder together as the year goes on is, what are our shadow beliefs about this congregation? What collective internal story are we telling ourselves about this place?

⁸ Ford, *ibid*, p. 188.

What hidden gifts do we have – and how has it been serving us to hold on to our shadow beliefs? How would this congregation look through the eyes of an angel?

I can't help but wonder, what was the shadow story that John Pierpont, composer of "Jingle Bells", told himself?⁹ [Note: see erratum in footnote.] What script was running through his head? We can only speculate. But based on his failed ventures in teaching, law, politics, writing, and ministry, we might guess that "everything I do goes wrong" was part of his shadow box. And yet, as Robert Fulghum put it in our reading this morning, to compose "a song that every one of us, large and small, can hoot out the moment the chord is struck on the piano... well, that's not failure."¹⁰ We don't need an angel to look back on John Pierpont's life. We can look back on his life ourselves, 144 years after his death, to recognize and celebrate his values, his worth, and his talents. I, for one, am very glad that John Pierpont – who died almost a decade before Carl Jung was born – managed to get beyond his internal script and tap into his hidden talents long enough to write a song as joyful and timeless as "Jingle Bells". He managed to do this without the benefit of psychologists and self-help books. What excuse could we possibly have for not getting past our shadow beliefs or ignoring our hidden gifts?

In closing, our shadows really aren't that different from the character The Shadow on the old radio show. Our shadows can be menacing and scary – they seem invisible and sometimes you don't even realize that they're there. The internal scripts work to cloud our minds, keeping us from knowing that we're getting in our own way. The trick? Introduce your own Lamont Cranston – your own "personality number 1" – to the secrets and potential of your Shadow, your own "personality number 2". It might be spooky, but you can use the Shadow for the good. *The Shadow knows!*

Please, if you take nothing else away from this morning, please do remember that your shadow side includes good things about you along with the bad. Please remember that without light, there are no shadows. Or as Carl Jung put it, "... it is only at night that no shadows exist."¹¹ May we have the courage to explore our shadows. May we find there "pure gold". Blessed be, and amen.

⁹ Our reading was Robert Fulghum's story of John Pierpont from *It Was on Fire When I Lay Down on It*. Since preaching this sermon, I learned that Fulghum made a mistake; the song was written by John's son, James Pierpont. This error will serve as fodder for a future sermon or newsletter column! I apologize for passing on the error. From <http://www.jazzstandards.com/compositions-2/jinglebells.htm> : "Pierpont was originally credited on the sheet music as 'J. Pierpont' which led some to believe that it was written by his father who was somewhat of a poet. After James' death in 1893, the song was variously credited to Anonymous and to a Dr. Uriah Pierpont who had renewed the copyright. Because of the efforts of James' family, authorship of the song was finally properly credited."

¹⁰ Robert Fulghum, *It Was on Fire When I Lay Down on It* (New York: Villard Books, 1989) p. 20.

¹¹ Jung, *ibid*, p.286. I noticed this quotation on <http://psikoloji.fisek.com.tr/jung/shadow.htm>.