

FEBRUARY I: Shadowboxing and Care for the Soul  
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On a high winter night this December, between the solstice and Christmas holidays, I walked out into newly fallen knee-deep snow. Silver bowl in hand, my intention was to collect some of the cold, powdery white stuff to make snow ice cream. As I trudged through our backyard toward a stand of white pines, I felt the frosty air waken my lungs and my awareness. I stopped and stood in a stunningly quiet scene to both ears and eyes. Our streets had not been plowed so there was no traffic noise. The winter storms had moved eastward, so the sky was clear. The stars brilliant and the moon nearing full; it was a shining night.

To say the snow was sparkling seems an inadequate description; A slight rainbow of colors resided in the star and moonlit reflection. I noticed the shadows all around. Deeply impressed upon the curving snowy surface. Creating new dimensions across the wintry ground. I noted my stance. Bordered half in a pine shadow and half outside it. I felt empty and full at the same time. Slightly content and slightly irritated. This holiday season was not one in which the words “happy” and “merry” rang true in my soul. I was frustrated with the politics of our time, and the simple losses that come with living. Yet, as I paused to inhale, an odd sense of gratitude grew in the night’s lonely blend of darkness and light. A sense of thankfulness, which compelled me to peer more carefully into the tree’s shadowy silhouette next to me. And there, almost imperceptible to my night vision, the snow still gleamed, as if fueled by the mysterious darkness. Eventually, in the warmth of the stillness, I noticed my body chilling from the cold, so I dipped my silver bowl downward, collected my snow and returned home.

We are living in very challenging times. We are a country at war. The chaotic violence and loss in Iraq continues to mount. We are a nation at war within

our own borders. Civil liberties diminish as our national debt and deficits loom larger every day. And we are a people too often at war within ourselves. Within complaints of meaninglessness and disillusionment, many find themselves stuck in mindless overindulgence. Believing in the fantasy of a quick fix, some seek salvation through **extremes** in such areas as material possessions, appearance, power, food, drugs and even intimacy. Yet excesses in any of these areas, I believe with time, create a cavernous void, which negates the soulful self.

In his New York Times bestseller, *Care for the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Every Day Life* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), author Thomas Moore refers to analytical psychologist Carl Jung as “one of our most recent doctors of the soul”. Jung felt that every “psychological problem is ultimately a matter of religion.” (Moore, pg xii)

Care of the soul [Moore states] speaks to the longing we feel and to the symptoms that drive us crazy, but it is not a path away from the shadow or death. A soulful personality is complicated, multifaceted, and shaped by both pain and pleasure, success and failure. Life lived soulfully is not without its moments of darkness and periods of foolishness. Dropping the salvational fantasy, frees us up to the possibility of self-knowledge and self-acceptance, which are the very foundation of the soul. (Moore, pg xvii)

When Moore speaks of shadow, he is referencing that Jungian concept of the personal shadow self. Our personal shadow refers to the unconscious influences in our psyche, which weave in and out of our conscious understanding of our overall self. It is our unrecognized desires and demands. Our repressed portions of ourselves. In terms of acceptance, the shadow contains those aspects of ourselves we do not accept and may not even acknowledge.

There may be both bright aspects in our shadow (assertiveness, courage, compassion, vulnerability) as well as the more typical unpleasant aspects (violent,

critical, self righteous, fear and loathing). One person's hidden shadow may be another person's outward persona and vice versa. It is even suggested that one may detect a glimpse of our own shadow by paying attention to the qualities in others, which irritate or make us envious. (Claremont de Castillejo, Irene, *Knowing Woman*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1973, pg 30) Then the journey is to grow down into this observation and see if it rings true for your own self.

I spent several days sitting in front of my computer trying to come up with a very simple illustration of the personal shadow influence, and then I had one of those V-8 moments. For there, taped to the top of my church office computer was a newspaper clipping that I've had for almost 20 years. It is by another doctor of the soul, cartoonist Charles Schultz. In this particular cartoon strip, we find Lucy, in an apparent state of peace and grace, strolling by her brother Linus. She remarks to Linus, "From now on, I intend to go through life with total serenity and calmness." Linus, holding his blanket next to him, looks up and innocently asks, "Do you think that's really possible?" Lucy turns to him in a flash of fury and bellows back at her brother, "Well why not!!!?????" And then we see Linus rolling over backwards from the intense energy of his sister's response.

I keep this cartoon as a needed reminder for myself that as a minister part of my job is to be aware of and cultivate my humanness; to embrace it in a manner that allows for perfection and imperfection, for clarity as well as confusion, for light as well as shadow, for serenity as well as discord. In speaking about the shadow archetype, Jung theorizes, "Recognition of the shadow...leads to the modesty we need in order to acknowledge imperfection. And it is just this conscious recognition and consideration that are needed wherever a human relationship is to be established." (Whitmont, Edward *The Symbolic Quest: Basic Concepts of Analytical Psychology*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1969, pg 168).

Recognizing our shadow is also about taking responsibility. For example, if in our cartoon illustration, Linus represents, say, the doubting, questioning aspect of Lucy, which is hidden from her self-confident persona of certainty regarding her serenity. Then, in theory, Linus becomes the enemy...the outward projection of what she unconsciously experiences as her inner enemy of uncertainty. If Lucy can become more aware of this inner self. More accepting. Acknowledging. She will be in a position to make better choices about her perceptions. Her awareness. She can learn to have more moments where she is acting instead of reacting. Having the ability to respond. Responsibility. In the words of another doctor of the soul, cartoonist, Walt Kelly, we have the immortal words of Pogo spoken in the Okefenokee Swamp, "We have met the enemy and the enemy [he] is us."

In terms of our spiritual journeys, embracing our shadow is about wholeness and holiness. It is about delving deep. In his book *Swamplands of the Soul* (1996), Jungian author, James Hollis shares this old saying "religion is for those who are afraid of going to hell; spirituality is for those who have already been there..." Hollis suggests "we embrace the sunlit meadows as well as swamplands of the soul. For it is in the swamplands, where soul is fashioned and forged, where we encounter not only the *gravitas* of life—but its purpose, its dignity and its deepest meaning. There is an incredible sweetness that comes to those who have 'gone through,' though one could not imagine such a thing while enduring the torments of Hell." (Hollis, James, *Swamplands of the Soul*, 1996)

The thing to remember about all of this is that Jung suggested that 80% of our shadow is gold. The snow is sparkling there in the shadows if we are willing to peer deeply.

I remember attending a writers' seminar almost ten years ago. I was in a small group of about 10 women ranging from ages 18 to 75, whom I'd never met before. One of the women, whom I'll call Wilma, was impeccably dressed, a little

uptight and visibly irritated and resistant to having the younger women in the group. She didn't share her writing until near the end of the workshop. She read only a few lines.... lowered her head and began to cry, she then looked up to us gathered there. "I am 72 years old," she told us, "and I just recently discovered that I am gay. Oh, and the worse part is I've fallen in love. I feel so silly. Immature. Confused. Stupid. I'm 72. I should be grown up." The room was silent. And then I observed an amazing thing happen. It was the younger women of the group who attended to her. Comforting Wilma in her confusion. Slowly offering wise words of acceptance and affirmation. As Thomas Moore would elucidate, Wilma was in "the archetypal conflict of youth and age, maturity and immaturity" known to us all. (Moore, pg 15)

As I watched the younger women gently tend to Wilma's soul, it was obvious that Wilma herself was a very wise woman. She just needed a place to begin to let her older self and younger self own a voice and slowly, over time, live her way into some modicum of reconciliation. "Oh and I just have so much energy," she complained, "I don't know what to do with it." We all laughed through our tears with Wilma. That's one of the gifts of embracing shadow. It unleashes energy. Anger often becomes tears...and tears can become laughter. There is a flow in the cycle of our being. (pause)

In philosophical Taoism we find the principle of the interdependence of opposite movements in nature, society and the individual. For example, in nature: the cycles of night and day; heat and cold; life and death...in society: wealth and poverty, war and peace, chaos and order...in the self: youth and aging; fortune and misfortune; joy and sorrow. Jung would view much of this as archetypes.

The Yin Yang symbol on the cover of our Order of Service, expresses this cosmological theory of interdependence; the words originally meant the dark side and the bright side of the mountain. (Crim, Keith, Editor *The Perennial Dictionary*)

*of World Religions*, Harper and Rowe, 1981, pg 813) The flow between shadow and light. In this school of Taoism, certainty is viewed as suspect. Persons who are inflexible in their viewpoints and way of being are seen as going against nature, the natural flow, the tao (the way); “they are subject to a false sense of security, which refuses to let them come to terms with new realities”; this can occur on the level of individuals, society and the state. (Crim, pg 739).

For these Taoists, care for the soul means reducing the obstacles that block one’s ch’i or life force. The literal translation of ch’i is breath. Through movement (tai chi chuan), matter (nutritional focus) and meditation (awareness of the inner self as well as the outer persona), ch’i is maximized and the natural flow of being is brought into balance. (Smith, Huston, *The World’s Religions*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1986, pg 130-131)

I believe seeking our shadow mirrors some of Taoist thought. It is about the quest to be an integrated individual. It acknowledges the awkwardness as well as the great potential of humanity. It values imagination, intuition and our place in nature. In the actual art of shadowboxing, if done properly, the boxer usually does not yet have his or her gloves on. The exercise is about visualization and imagination.

Shadow work and caring for the soul acknowledges the animal beast in all of us, which is hidden away in a cage most of the time. Caring for the soul is an inner, and sometimes outer, allowing of who we are.

Listen again to these words from poet Mary Oliver:

## Wild Geese

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees  
For a hundred miles through the desert repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal  
Of your body love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours,  
and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles  
of the rain are moving across the landscapes  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile, the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.

Whoever you are,  
no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese,  
harsh and exciting—  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.

As a spiritual practice, shadow work, is about finding our place in the family of things. It is about coming home to ourselves. It is discovering those safe places to nurture and create a relationship with our unexpressed self. It is care of the soul.

Next Sunday, I will continue this conversation on “Shadowboxing and Care of the Soul”. We will explore how Gollum got into my Christmas nativity scene,

in conjunction with the collective and national shadow. Singer and songwriter Beth Lodge Rigal will join me with her original poetical/musical creations in the areas of shadow, awareness and gratitude.

In gratitude for this time in this pulpit this morning, allow me to close with a few shadow quotations which say “yes” to life.

So the person who has eaten his shadow spreads calmness, and shows more grief than anger. If the ancients were right that darkness contains intelligence and nourishment and even information, then the person who has eaten some of his or her shadow is more energetic as well as intelligent. --Robert Bly

If you bring forth what is within you,  
what you bring forth will save you.  
If you do not bring forth what is within you,  
what you do not bring forth will destroy you. --Jesus of Nazareth

I dreamt last night, oh marvelous error, that there were honeybees in my heart, making honey out of my old failures. --Antonio Machado

May we all take time to care for your soul. May we say yes to life.

So may it be.

Amen.

Shalom.