

The Shadow and the Devil
A Sermon Offered at Countryside Church Unitarian Universalist
On October 17, 2010
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Readings

Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Poems to God

I love the dark hours of my being.
My mind deepens into them.
....
Then the knowing comes: I can open
to another life that's wide and timeless.
So I am sometimes like a tree
rustling over a gravesite
and making real the dream
of the one its living roots
embrace:
a dream once lost
among sorrows and songs.

Sweet Darkness by David Whyte

When your eyes are tired
the world is tired also.

When your vision has gone
no part of the world can find you.

Time to go into the dark
where the night has eyes
to recognize its own.

There you can be sure
you are not beyond love.

The dark will be your womb
tonight.

The night will give you a horizon
further than you can see.

You must learn one thing:
the world was made to be free in.

Give up all the other worlds
except the one to which you belong.

Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet
confinement of your aloneness
to learn
anything or anyone
that does not bring you alive
is too small for you.

Sermon

There was a time when I really thought there was something scary under my bed... I was in kindergarten. I'd wake in the night certain that something was lurking in the shadows, under my bed. Something with long arms and strong hands that could grab me by the ankles, whisk me out of bed, and spirit me off to terrifying place I couldn't imagine. I remember my father coming in to show me that there wasn't anything there. He'd turn on the light, crouch down to look under the bed, and invite me to look. I'd hang my head slowly over the edge of the bed and upside down, peer under it. Sure enough -- nothing skulked there. At least at that moment.

Where had they gone? How had they hidden so quietly and quickly? He'd have to open the closet door, too.

Once it had been proven that there was no such monster tucked away, I'd have to make sense of my fears. But, in fact, I just couldn't – not then.

This isn't a unique experience – otherwise there wouldn't be so many children's books that use the monster under the bed as a theme. When the movie – *Monsters, Inc.*, came out I was impressed by the realism of it – the hordes of screaming children and the monsters who punch the clock to scare children all night long to collect the energy of their anxieties in order to run the monster world. Brilliant.

It's a childhood fear that there are these things that wait in the shadows of the night -- it's not until we are older that we begin to recognize that the fear we feel is coming from inside us – from some unnamed anxiety – from a misunderstanding of shadows – of so many shadows.

Does this belong in a sermon on Sunday morning – you bet – because the world is being blazed away by our fear of shadows. We want there to be two sides – the source of light and the source of darkness. We want to call the darkness – night, we want to call the night bad and we want to call the light – day and the day – good. And dear ones – these are two sides of the same globe. A world without shadow has no dimension – depth – no shape. A world without shadow is lifeless.

If we are wise and very fortunate we grow up to discover that there is seldom something under the bed – never anything like that which we feared as children. We also discover that, while there are real, live fearsome things in the world, the greatest source of our terrors is tucked away in the folds of our being – the shadows of our minds. It isn't sinful or bad it simply is – and it is what, really, most often – goes bump in the night.

The Shadow is a classic concept in psychology – it is the hidden aspect. It was Carl Jung who first really explored both the idea of the shadow persona and allowed himself to go deeply into that shadow. His recently published *Big Red* book is filled with his fine drawings of his dream world. I am, admittedly, an armchair Jungian – there are people in this congregation actually learned in the theories of Jung. Initially, for Jung the shadow side of the person was, as I understand it, the hidden and also unwanted aspect of the person. It must have been an exciting time – at least for people who were reading and talking about all this – the time when Freud was revealing that there was a subconscious and Jung was taking this idea farther, I think, that Freud might have liked. Exciting because – just as I watched with amazement and fascination as Neil Armstrong stepped onto the moon – the people around Jung and Freud would have been encountering the selves within the self in a sort of understandable way for the first time. Still, as exciting as it might have been, the interior world holds it challenges – and the greatest is the shadow. Jung believed that the Shadow was constituted of those aspects of our selves that were also less safe – even less good – in fact, that our shadow was, in many ways the place where our evil capacity lived and it was that evil that we scurry away from.

In some ways the interior world of Jung was like a great house with many rooms with various aspects of the psyche living in them. As we grow the younger aspects might recede into the backrooms – but they never entirely go away -- and as we experience new things new aspects are revealed. They are unique to us in some ways -- shaped by our own experience and history and they are also archetypal – shared by large swathes of humanity – perhaps all – but definitely large numbers. The aspect with which we most often struggle is the shadow.

I don't want to debate with Jung about the nature of the Shadow – I'd probably be arguing with the wrong thing anyway – but I have deep gratitude to him because he offered a key into the long overgrown, deeply shaded secret garden within the soul and brought the shadow to light.

The Shadow is, certainly the hidden part of ourselves. In many ways it is not one shadow

but many. As small children – again – if we are lucky -- we are surrounded with teddy bears, soft toys, and, perhaps the scariest thing we are allowed to encounter is the heffalump. People coo at us – this is good – it is tender and much needed. At the very same time – we have deep needs -- we have hunger, cold, discomforts of many kinds, we experience fatigue, overstimulation, we are moved around by other larger folk. There are loud noises. There was the initial surprising emergence into the world. We yearn to be held and sometimes are not -- we yearn to be free to crawl around and sometimes cannot. And we have a relatively limited vocabulary for getting our needs across – so we scream and cry. We surprise ourselves and those around us. We have unconstrained passion that is constrained as soon as the nearest adult can figure out how to. This is the first aspect of our shadow – the fierceness of our living nature. Neither good nor bad, but fully alive – feeling, expressing, tasting, beating with the primal rhythm of our own heart and the heart of the woman who bore us. We do not understand the world, nor how we arrived here, we do not understand our place in it – frankly, the information we gain through life – does not touch the awe we feel – we gain new ways of explaining how we were born, what we see around us, even develop our own theories about why we are here – mystery, mystery -- but there are no engraved answers delivered to our grown up selves that settle the deep questions of living – song

We remain in mystery most of our lives and in that mystery live all the shadows of our being: passion, anger, sorrow, and the part of ourselves that is hardest to tame. We are given an ordered world – we do our own part carrying it on – but it’s an order set over – superimposed on things. It only makes a sort of sense because we agree that it will.

Then there are the terrible things that we experience – hurts, losses, inexplicable suffering – you each know it from the inside. Sometimes we remember and sometimes we suppress. For some sitting here all this may be resolved history after hard work. There were generations who believed that the past was the past – now we know that the past lives on in our memories and bodies – haunting us with unresolved questions and unhealed wounds. And that, too, is part of the shadow, as I see it.

Finally, there are the unrevealed strengths within us – stifled at some point in life – when someone said you couldn’t sing, or that you had a good face for radio or were too fat or too thin or that you would never be able to fill in your blank here.

But all of it stews together in the shadows – in the shadow. And as long as it is left in shadow it is dangerous.

Jungians would argue that the more we suppress or deny the shadow aspect the more trouble it can make as it tries to sneak into the light. For it does not want to dissolve – only to marry the light and be as one.

Another great children’s book is [There’s a Nightmare in my Closet](#) by Merced Mayer. In it a monster weeps and wails until the boy it was scaring pats it and holds its hand and they curl up together and fall asleep. And as they are sleeping you can see another monster starting to tiptoe into the room. That’s how it is with shadows – they want to be seen and held and known.

This is as much a theological problem as it is a personal problem because over the ages we have lost touch with the reality of the shadow. If you read ancient creation stories they are full of gritty gods – fighting, bloody, cranky, needy, hungry, immature, powerful, and immense. When I call myself a Torah humanist – I mean that the God of the Hebrew Bible looks like reality to me – and the stories resemble the terrors of our world – the violence, the lies, the abandonments. It also resembles the poetry and beauty, the devotion, creativity, loyalty, joy, wisdom. It is wholeness. Yet over time this God was divided in two – not only by Christians – there was a growing need to deny the hard edge of being – and divide reality in two – the one side – just, orderly, good, and loving – the other wild, mad, evil, and disorderly. The order was decided by churches and other houses of worship and the one side was named God and the other

was named Satan. And so the world was ripped in two and so were we. Our troubling aspects – the primal pulse of desire, the edge of creativity, as well as our weaknesses and flaws were consigned to the shadowed depths where the devil lived and held his evil court.

As we grow up the shock comes again and again as we realize that the world is more complex than our nursery might have let on. Only a few messages remain in a few fairy tales and still the split is fairly clear. Evil in the shadow and good in the light – the devil machinating behind the curtain and god giving selective stage directions. Instead of the recognition of the genuine challenge and complexity of life the answers are made more simple so that doctrinal sound bytes can pretend to ward off evil. So as we face those shocks we have to reach pretty far to make sense of this mixed bag we call life. Or to put up a good show.

And the human shadow squirms in the darkness made of our lost innocence, lost dreams, impulses to cruelty, wild streaks, our desires to dance in the deep night and cry out our joy as well as the pain in life.

And then – because shadows can seep through cracks and small spaces they do. Only too often there are no guides for them as they emerge.

Let me be clear that I don't condemn people of good faith who have found path that keeps them close to the good and grants them true wholeness.

That said – as terrible story after story emerges from one parish after another about the abuses by Catholic clergy – I am reminded that the shadow – suppressed and denied cannot be guided. I cannot imagine the state of repression that lifelong celibacy requires – and that coupled with the constant reminders of the weakness of the body and the power of the priesthood can all too easily result in acts of violence. I am amazed at the number of priests who serve whole lifetimes and are truly servants of the good and never break the trust they are given. But it is all too easy for those who are running from their shadows to seek out the cloister and then discover that the shadow is even deeper behind those heavy doors.

When I think of Bishop Eddie Long and his paid affairs with young men – again I see the shadow. He preached with such vehemence against the so called sin of homosexuality all the while engaging in the lowest form – sex and companionship in exchange for money and luxury. It goes farther than simple hypocrisy – it is the failure to allow that something that is not in the prescribed order might be good and wholesome, so it is suppressed until it becomes the very thing most feared – empty sex and the exploitation of others. Power over instead of power with.

When I think of the young people that we loose to suicide year after year – this year we are more aware of it – but it is an old story – something wild and, in fact lovely, is so feared because it lives in society's shadow and is made into a demon. So young people forget the beauty and purity of the love they feel – as sweet and mysterious and powerful as the love that society sanctions. They are demonized by people who are, themselves hounded by their own shadows – the love and softness they fear – the sweet boys and tender men, the strong girls and independent women. And in that demonization they feel a need to strike out at an evil they wish lived outside them – rather than facing the complexity and wildness in their own hearts and minds. Instead of taking their shadows into the light and holding them tenderly until they are understood they become, themselves as devils committing acts far worse than anything they have feared or condemned or even imagined.

The shadows may be hidden from sight in one way but they leave evidence everywhere in suffering. Not because the shadows are evil – but because when people are not whole there is tremendous suffering. Recently I attended a remarkable workshop on racism with my district clergy. It reminded me again that white society made people of color into an other – a feared repository of the shadow – and you can see the evidence in ghettos and fences and militias.

It makes me angry that – so long after we have uncovered the richness of our souls there is still a fight to impoverish us – to make us flatter than we are – simpler than we are – mere

shadows of what we could be.

The ability to welcome the shadow – to look it in the face and assess it and work with it – is not native to us. We need practice. We need help. But we need this ability because our world depends upon it. As long as we want to think that evil is out there and not in our own hearts – we are in danger – because in our pride we can destroy the world. As long as we think that facing what is within us will destroy us – we may turn and destroy others.

Robert Bly, the poet, referred to the shadow as the long, dark bag that we drag around behind us. The art that we need is to take out what is in that bag and with care for every life and with love for our world, turn each thing over and examine it, own it and guide it. I am reminded of the words of the poets David Whyte whose words on grief apply to all else unrecognized in shadow -- Those that will not slip beneath the still surface of the well of grief, Will never know the source of which we drink. The secret water, cold and clear...

Always there are other possibilities. More often than not – the very thing we have suppressed is the key to the life-giving force we most need – whether we know it or not. True for poets facing grief, true for people fearing their wildness, true for societies fearing change or some imagined Other..This is true in each one of us.

Yesterday a colleague sent a link to a project called yak – that involves young people in dancing in the streets. I wish I could show it to you – because it is a perfect example of the positive emergence of the shadow. There are two young black men at street corner – like waiting for a bus. A police car turns the corner. Slowly, with fluid motion, one young man begins to dance – like break dancing but unbroken and the guy standing with him begins to dance as well – even more fluid – pirouetting and going up on tip toes and flipping over. They are like angels. Another video by the same group takes place on a run down busy street. The contrast between the run down scene with the utter grace of their movement is startling. People emerge from cars and stores and begin to dance a little, too. The faces turn from curious and a bit shy to full of joy and energy.

All that energy sucked away by monsters of fear and alienation in a harsh world suddenly released in a knowing joy that, in truth, they are good, soft, sweet, and free. All that energy ready to create and love and make whole our hidden and lost world.

There is no devil – no evil that lives outside of a human heart. Yes, this is my theological assertion. I do not believe in the devil nor in free floating evil that human lives did not create. No Other out there that can be easily bracketed away – nor cloistered against. No evil tempters trying to lure us out of a garden of pure innocence. We are wild and dangerous, creative, and new.

We have to know ourselves – know our strengths and weakness, our goodness and our evil, our sins and our saving grace, our so called civilized agreements and the authentic lives straining to emerge, know our joy and sorrow, know birth and death. We have to know our own wholeness. And in knowing that wholeness the world is again made whole and holy – like an ancient god – terrifying, powerful and beautiful, and we will find one another in a wild dance of reclaiming, healing, and knowing.