

“The Shadow Knows”

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Reading – From “*Owning Your Own Shadow*” by Robert A. Johnson

“The shadow: What is this curious dark element that follows us like [some primeval reptilian] tail and pursues us so relentlessly in our psychological world? What role does it occupy in the modern psyche?”

The persona is what we would like to be and how we wish to be seen by the world. It is our psychological clothing and it mediates between our true selves and our environment just as our physical clothing presents an image to those we meet. The ego is what we are and know about consciously. The shadow is that part of us we fail to see or know.

We are all born whole, and, let us hope, will die whole. But somewhere early on our way, we eat one of the wonderful fruits of the tree of knowledge, things separate into good and evil, and we begin the shadow-making process; we divide our lives. In the cultural process we sort out our God-given characteristics into those that are acceptable in our society, and those that have to be put away. This is wonderful and necessary, and there would be no civilized behavior without this sorting out of good and evil. But the refused and unacceptable characteristics do not go away; they only collect in the dark corners of our personality. When they have been hidden long enough, they take on a life of their own – the shadow life...

It is the despised quarter of our being. It often has an energy potential nearly as great as that of our ego. If it accumulates more energy than our ego, it erupts as an overpowering rage or some indiscretion that slips past us; or we have a depression or an accident that seems to have its own purpose. The shadow gone autonomous is a terrible monster in our psychic house.”

“...Unless we do conscious work on it, [this] shadow is always almost always projected; that is, it is neatly laid on someone or something else so we do not have to take responsibility for it. This is the way things were done five hundred years ago, and most of us are still stuck in this medieval consciousness. The medieval world was based on mutual shadow projection; it thrived on a fortress mentality, armor, walled cities, possession by force, ownership of anything feminine by male prerogative, royal patronage, and city-states in perpetual siege at each other’s gates.”

“...Today, whole businesses are devoted to containing our shadows for us. The movie industry, fashion designs, and novels provide us with easy places to invest our shadow. Newspapers offer us a daily allotment of disasters, crimes and horrors to feed our shadow natures outwardly when it should be incorporated into each of us as an integral part of our own personality. We are left as less than whole personalities when we invest our own darkness into something outside ourselves.”

“...It might be argued that ancient and medieval man could cope with his shadow by projecting it onto an enemy. But modern man cannot continue this dangerous process. The evolution of consciousness requires us to integrate the shadow if we are to produce a New Age.”

Sermon -

Stingy Jack was a miserable sort of man, as you might have guessed. He was known far and wide for his penchant for taking things that weren't his, and causing trouble for any he would meet, as he made his shambling way from village to village, doorstep to doorstep, never paying for anything if he could help it, and tricking people out of things that they valued with a surprisingly silver-tongued charm. It was rumored that he could charm the Devil out of his last gold piece if he so wished.

The Devil wasn't pleased with hearing that, mind you, and was never one to resist a challenge. He found Stingy Jack in a tavern one night, and invited him to share a drink with him – he wanted to see what this man was made of. They spent many hours talking of the best ways to part folks from what they valued, each of their own exploits and favorite tricks, and drank with abandon. Until, at last, the barman said it was time to pay their bill.

“I've got nothing in my pockets but this turnip, and besides,” he said, turning to the Devil, “it was at your invitation that we sat to drink.”

The Devil, stunned and more than a little drunk, realized that not only did he not have the required gold piece, he didn't even possess the pockets to carry it in.

The barman, familiar with Stingy Jack, turned away, saying “I'm sure you'll think of something before I close up, Jack, you or your brimstone-smelling friend there.”

Stingy Jack turned to the Devil and proposed an idea, knowing that the Devil could assume any form he wished. The Devil was to become a gold piece, which Jack would pay the barman. Once the barman continued to close up, he'd rescue the gold piece back from the till, and they'd be off again.

“Fair enough,” said the Devil, remembering vaguely with a frown why he’d come here in the first place – something about being charmed out of his last gold piece. He turned into the required gold piece, however, and Jack promptly pocketed that gold piece and walked quickly out of the tavern, followed by the shouts of the enraged barman.

“Nice trick,” said the Devil, “Now let me out.”

“I rather like having a talking gold piece in my pocket,” said Stingy Jack, “Why don’t you turn back into yourself, now that we’re safely away?”

“I believe you know why, since I’m touching a silver cross in your pocket, and I can’t do anything in the presence of the cross. I don’t see any turnip, though.”

“That’s in my other pocket. I must have picked up that cross somewhere and forgotten all about it.”

There was a long pause.

“I notice you’re not letting me out.” There was a longer pause, followed by sigh from Stingy Jack’s pocket.

“What do you want, Jack?”

Jack considered, and answered, “You must grant me good fortune for a year, and not bother me during that time.”

“Fine,” said the Devil. Stingy Jack removed the gold piece from his pocket, and the Devil promptly disappeared, a smoky scowl lingering in the air after he’d departed.

Jack went on to have a prosperous year, by his standards. Pickings were good, drinks paid for, and never at a loss for a turnip in his pocket, which was always good for a meal on the road. True to his word, the Devil waited precisely a year and one day, then appeared by the side of the road as Jack wandered by.

“You’re coming with me, Jack. Get over here so I can wring your stingy neck and I’ll carry your soul back home with me.”

“Hold on, hold on... can’t a man have a last meal before he goes?” said Stingy Jack.

“Eat your turnip quickly, and then I’ll finish you off.”

“A turnip isn’t a fit last meal! How about one of those lovely apples from that tree that you’re leaning on there?”

“Have at it,” said the Devil, who was not completely without sympathy.

“I’m too old to go climbing trees now... if you climb up and get me one of those apples, I’ll be on my way quietly.”

“I have your word on that?” asked the Devil, cautiously.

“...and I’m a man of my word,” said Stingy Jack, and the Devil sprang into the tree. After a few moments, he found a suitable apple and prepared to spring back down.

“I see you’ve carved a cross in the trunk of this tree,” said the Devil.

“So you see,” said Jack.

There was a very long pause, and the Devil sighed.

“What do you want, Jack?”

“I want you to leave me alone for another ten years.”

“Fine,” said the Devil.

“Annnnd... you have to promise not to take my soul after I die.”

This pause brought a fuming smoky smell from the trees branches.

“Fine,” said the Devil.

So Stingy Jack scratched out the cross on the tree's trunk, turned on his heel, and was on his way quietly. True to his word.

They were miserable years after that, pickings were poor, he was turned away from taverns and doorsteps, and it was a rare turnip that found its way into his pocket. After seven years of this, Stingy Jack's health failed, but he went to his deathbed with a smile on his face. He knew that the Devil was a man of his word, and that his soul would not be carried off to Hell.

Upon his death, Stingy Jack made his way to Heaven instead, where he was greeted at the gates.

"I'm sorry, but you're not welcome here, Jack."

Stingy Jack couldn't believe his ghostly ears. "But I'm not to be damned, I know it!"

"You're not to be saved, either, Jack. You're not the man for us." And with that, the gates of Heaven closed to him forever.

Stingy Jack wandered away, to find himself at the gates of Hell. The Devil was waiting for him there, leaning on the gatepost much as he did an apple tree, seven years before.

"Hello, Jack. Nice to see you again. By now you must have realized you forgot something when last we met?"

Stingy Jack thought on this, "There was some trick, and my soul is yours."

The Devil gave him a broad leer of a grin, "I meant that perhaps you should have asked for better fortunes, but no, your soul is your own. You're certainly my kind of man,

so I'm almost sorry to say this, but I gave you my word: You're not welcome here, Jack."
And with that, the gates of Hell closed to him forever.

"But, where am I to go? What am I to do?" asked Jack through the bars of the gate, to the back of the retreating Devil.

"You'll do what you do best, I suspect, making your way from village to village, doorstep to doorstep, taking things that aren't yours and causing trouble for those you meet."

"But... I'm just a spirit, now. My eyes, they seem so dim, and I'm so cold," said Stingy Jack miserably.

And the Devil, who was not completely without sympathy, pulled a burning ember of Hell's fire from the ground, and returned to hand it to Stingy Jack.

"If I know you, you have something with you to make a lantern of this, right in your pocket."

Stingy Jack produced a turnip, which he hollowed out to hold the burning ember.

"Goodbye, Jack," said the Devil, and disappeared.

With that, Stingy Jack turned on his heel, and was on his way, quietly.

On dark nights the ghostly flicker of light that told of the presence of Jack of the Lantern, as he was called, was a sight that brought fear to travelers far and wide, most of all on the night of Halloween, when the spirit world crept closer than ever to the living realm. Some would carve out turnips and light them with candles, placing them on their doorsteps so Jack wouldn't come calling, feeling mocked in his cursed wanderings, or perhaps not wanting to look upon that broad glowing leer of a grin.

Nowadays, we find that pumpkins work best, and use our Jack O' Lanterns as a Halloween welcome sign, meaning come on up and grab some candy. Kids carry around plastic pumpkins with scary faces to carry their loot. The story of Stingy Jack is all but forgotten, but the tale of a man wandering through a cursed existence somewhere between Heaven and Hell is a perfect one to tell to each other on Halloween, in the dark.

The ancient Celtic festival of Samhain (*pronounced Sow-in*) held on October 31st, marked the end of summer and harvest, and the beginning of the cold, dark winter – a dangerous time bringing possible starvation and death. On this night between bounty and loss, life and death, the spirit world was said to be closer than ever, and the ghosts of the dead would return to the earth. While these spirits were believed to cause trouble and ruin crops, their presence provided an opportunity to divine the future, to guide the way through the upcoming months of bitter cold.

People celebrated this passage into the darkness of winter by gathering around bonfires that night, sacrificing crops and animals, dressing in skins and animal heads and attempting to predict each other's fortunes. Hearth fires in their homes were lit from the remains of this bonfire to bring luck in the coming New Year, which began the next day.

In time, the conquering Romans introduced their own rituals of honoring the dead and celebrating the harvest into this night, and later, Christians designated November 1st All Saints day, or All-Hallows, memorializing saints and martyrs. The night before was

All-Hallows eve, and was celebrated with bonfires, costumes and masks of saints, angels and demons, and parades. Still later, All Souls Day parades included the town's poorer citizens getting food, Soul cakes, by going door to door, promising to pray for recently departed souls of each house. Frightening masks were worn to disguise oneself as the ghosts and spirits, said to be abundance on that night where the veil between living and dead was at it's thinnest, or even scare them away.

Today, you can still find bonfires, and we have a parade in the center of West Brookfield along with many other towns, neighbors and friends gather for parties and games, and children, adults and teens go to doorsteps with merrily burning Jack O' Lanterns on them, and threaten that if they aren't properly treated with candy, the homeowner might be in for some mischief. And just like they did over 2,000 year ago, they put on masks.

We're no longer seeking a prosperous hunt or bountiful harvest, but one thing remains the same. We're afraid of the darkness, and what it might bring. Robert A. Johnson spoke of this in our reading this morning. We turn away from the darkness that is our shadow, that place where we put those pieces of ourselves we don't want to look at. And then we project them away from us, individually, and as a culture as some frightening "other" whom we fear and despise. Celtic Druids feared the coming months that would bring their mortality into question, and saw ghosts reminding them of their frailty, questioning their future. The church saw demons to tempt and trick us. And before and since then, we've seen many many monsters in the dark.

Mary Shelley looked upon the works of science that seemed to fly in the face of God's plans, and created a man obsessed with immortality, and his monster, a human being made in a laboratory. In Robert Louis Stevenson's laboratory, the most civilized doctor produced an elixir that when drunk, would transform him into a primitive, raging monster of a man. A horror with diseases, sexual diseases that infected the blood drove Bram Stoker to bring the folklore of the vampire into the modern age. Folktales from around the world spoke of human beings that not only wore the skins of animals, but became them when the moon was full.

You might think that as our future gets brighter and brighter, with the comforts of civilization becoming more commonplace, we'd have rooted out the monsters in our closet. Maybe not. Our fascination with immortality gleaned from test tube potions is as strong as ever – these days, the fountain of youth is injected directly into the face, rather than drunk, however. The tale of human beings being made in the laboratory is no longer in the realm of fiction, as human cloning looms on the horizon. The world of sports is plagued by a drug that enhances raw strength, while reducing it's users to fits of rage. A disease of the blood, it's primary transmission through sexual contact, sweeps nearly unchecked across an entire continent. We hear on the news of the quiet man who lived next door, who committed heinous atrocities, apparently a wolf in sheep's clothing. As our future gets brighter, our shadow only becomes clearer, more sharp and darker.

Fated to wander somewhere between salvation and damnation, the human race lives in fear. More and more frequently, our lives are ruled by it. Our own nation's collective shadow looms so large over us, that there is no part of our lives that aren't affected. The way we gather together, travel, raise our children, talk to and entertain ourselves all are influenced by acts of terror, and our war on the "others" across the ocean that we portray to ourselves as godless demons from the desert. Has this helped us? Has naming our monsters thus, giving them a home in a far away land, brought us peace, security or wholeness?

No. Perhaps we should look within, and realize that seeing our shadow in the guise of another doesn't mean we've actually given it away. It's still very much our own, our home to those feelings we don't wish to have, of anger or jealousy, envy or loneliness, perhaps even our passion, our creativity, our vulnerability to the emotions of others, that connection we feel to others when we'd much rather remain distant and secure, our secret hopes and our fears.

Robert A. Johnson writes, "As we project our shadow we give away an essential ingredient in our own psychology. We need to connect to this dark side for our own development, and we have no business flinging it at others, trying to palm off these awkward and unwanted feelings.... The shadow also contains a good deal of energy, and it is the cornerstone of our vitality. A very cultured individual with an equally strong shadow has a great deal of personal power. William Blake spoke about the need to reconcile these two parts of the self. He said we should go to heaven for form and hell

for energy – and marry the two. When we can face our inner heaven and our inner hell, this is the highest form of creativity.”

So what can we do, wandering somewhere between Heaven and Hell, balancing the lightness and darkness within us? We can gather together, light fires and visit with one another, think of the future, and share some food. We can take our fears and wear them proudly, wearing scary enough faces to frighten away ghosts, or travel in their company, disguised as one of them. We can honor our dead with stories and prayers. We can wear masks of the saints or angels instead, putting on the faces of those we wish to be, telling of our secret hopes rather than our fears. We can light our Jack O’ Lanterns and open our doors to the wandering ghoulies and ghosties and long-legged beasties that come to haunt our doorsteps, looking for candy.

We can celebrate in the darkness.