

EVIL PERSONA, SHADOW AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF COMMUNITY
[SHORT VERSION]

RUNNING HEAD: Persona, Shadow, Transformation of Community.

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“This bodily appearance is not all; / The form deceives, the person is a mask; / Hid deep in man celestial powers can dwell (Sri Aurobindo, 1970c, p. 23).”

“It is amazing, amazing---this power of self-deception, the mind’s skill in finding an admirable justification for any ignorance, any stupidity whatsoever (The Mother, 2004, p. 225).”

“The spirit of evil is fear, negation, the adversary who opposes life...he is the spirit of regression, who threatens us with bondage...dissolution and extinction in the unconscious (C. G. Jung, 1974, p. 354).”

“O Mother, give to our life and mind the Asura’s strength, the Asura’s energy and to our hearts and intelligence a God’s character and a God’s knowledge (Sri Aurobindo, as reported in Nolini Kanta Gupta, 1977, p. 21n.).”

“Together the patient and I address ourselves to the 2,000,000 year old man that is in all of us. In the last analysis, most of our difficulties come from losing contact with our instincts, with the age-old unforgotten wisdom stored up in us. (C. G. Jung, as reported in William McGuire and R. F. C. Hull, 1980, p. 100).”

An important goal of the opus is realization of the fourfold nature of the mental, vital and physical planes of being organized around the psychic being. This requires coming to terms with the persona and the shadow.

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Introduction: Humankind’s Double Nature

This is a brief essay about the persona and the shadow, two complementary aspects of human nature. Coming to terms with how they interrelate and express themselves in life is important for the realization of a new world. It can potentially broaden and vitalize individuals’ lives as well as bring harmony to the life of the community. The issue is never only personal but also collective as individuals carry both the genius and shadow of their own cultural background.

Sri Aurobindo (1971, p.220) wrote that human imperfection springs from the fact that it is of “a double nature,” an unconscious animal nature, along with

conscious higher self-reflective mental and dynamic natures. The task of the contemporary seeker for self-perfection is to make the spirit “master of life (ibid. p. 225).” Self-perfection, however, needs to be understood as completeness of being, which includes as much shadow as light.

The Evil Persona

The issue raised here concerns ways of coming to terms with the shadow side of life, which involves both what Jung called the persona as well as the shadow. Sri Aurobindo responded to Jung’s writings by describing the “Evil Persona” as a “being” attached to someone intensely involved in the yoga “which is just the contradiction of the thing he centrally represents in the work to be done (1970b, p. 1660).” It is not a question of blaming “hostile forces,” however, for they have the role of making one conscious of one’s shortcomings (The Mother, 2004, p. 228). The recognition of the need to take on the full burden of one’s life, including one’s imperfections, is essential for contemporary seekers of self-knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo’s choice of the word persona, which means an actor’s mask, was judicious. Jung uses the word to represent the conscious external personality and social face, which, he believes, is a “compromise” and concession to the collective psyche (C. G. Jung, 1975b, p. 156).” Typically an individual’s preferred self-image, it can either be adapted to social norms or unconventional. The goal is to shed its false wrappings, taking refuge in the psychic being with its feeling

values as the regulating principle of everyday life, along with devotion and surrender to the Divine.

The problematic reality of daily life, however, generally still needs attending. Ideally the persona is flexible and infused with circumstantially appropriate feeling discernment, and one does not identify with it. It represents the role one plays in life, either professionally or otherwise, and the corresponding attitude, and is filled out in choice of dress, comportment, office space, diploma, business card, residence, vehicle and so on. Although, outside of a variety of “feminine” personas, for instance, ones limited to the roles of wife and mother or a man’s companion, its principal carrier has typically been men. Now women play many different roles and, like men, they too are subject to its dissembling seductions.

The persona has the function of greasing the wheels of life, while giving one the confidence that the role being played is up to collective standards and expectations. Its other function is self-protection in the harsh reality of life. Ego identification with the persona and relying on it for one’s self-esteem, respectability and self-definition, still often the case is, however, problematic and can pejoratively affect people in one’s immediate environment. Community life organized with only minimal concern for the persona would therefore potentially help to improve both individual psychological well-being as well as the functioning of society.

Amongst spiritual seekers and idealists aspiring to bring in a new world there are other relevant considerations. In such circles, people may constantly re-invent themselves in the search of some form of utopian fulfillment of being. In these cases there is the risk of a “*regressive restoration of the persona*,” taking on a lesser role than one’s true capacity and assuming a simple life, which is not genuine (Jung, 1975b, pp. 163-168, *passim*). Hard necessity, however, often drives work values in idealistic or spiritually oriented communities and, in some cases, doing menial or other humble work can be an act of devotion [*bhakti*] and surrender to the Guru or Divine, ultimately for the sake of realizing a more authentic life. Reformulating one’s life in a way that reflects a sincere self-expression of being benefits both the individual concerned and the community and is a sign of vocation and living according to one’s *swadharma* or self-law. The final answer to the persona is withdrawing energy from its false standards and living according to the values of the psychic being and related expressions of the archetypal psyche.

Another hurdle for spiritual seekers and idealists in relationship to the persona concerns ambition for goodness and virtue, which the Mother (2004) saw as a hindrance to “true self-giving...the origin of Falsehood... and hypocrisy,” and the unwillingness to accept “one’s own share of the burden of difficulties (p. 229).” In a like manner, Jung (1975b, pp. 169-171, *passim*) pinpoints moralists, would-be-prophets and prophet’s disciples who have a special link to “truth,” along with an apparently modest persona, as being inflated and living a lie. False

understanding misapplied ideals and attraction to the Evil Persona, surely a creation of the Asura of Falsehood, can be misleading.

The Shadow

With consideration of the shadow one moves from the province of the Asura of Falsehood to the unconscious and the Asura of Ignorance. The shadow is the dark side of the coin and compensates for the seductive light of the persona. For pragmatic reasons, Jung (1975a, p. 10) conceptually differentiates between the personal shadow and the archetypal Shadow, which he once referred to as “absolute evil.”

The personal shadow is contained in the personal unconscious, the contents of which are acquired during one’s lifetime through repression, denial, faulty perceptions and forgetting. From the point of view of the conscious persona-identified ego, the shadow is inferior, threatening, shameful, and awkward. It comes laden with emotion, and works autonomously with an impulsive, obsessive or possessive quality. It is consequently tied up with projections, which means it is disowned and displaced onto somebody else, object or circumstance.

One needs to concentrate on “one’s own self-perfection instead of blaming or seeking perfection in others (the Mother (2004, p. 218).” Moral judgements about others are both subjective and ignorant and, by judging others, one is also

condemning an aspect of oneself. The real task is to withdraw projections from other people and discover the shadow within.

The shadow is morally inferior and susceptible to unrighteous behavior, values and attitudes, including those that are opposite to one's normal conscious attitude and quality of being (ibid. p. 272). With insight and good will the personal shadow can be recognized as an aspect of oneself and either extirpated or assimilated to consciousness, while undergoing a process of transformation. This requires the light of consciousness, moral values, high ideals and sincerity and, in the darker corners, the penetration of a spiritual light (ibid. pp. 210, 211).

Yet, there is considerable wisdom in the Mother's (2004, p. 229) advice to "not try to appear virtuous," but to accept one's relationship "with everything that is anti-divine." She encouraged people to accept their impurities and falsehoods, to "take up the shadow and offer it (ibid.)." Following the Mother's counsel is advisable on both psychological and spiritual grounds.

Sri Aurobindo (as reported in John A. Sandford 1998, p 28) contended "the discords of the world are God's discords...." opening up the question of the role of the individual ego. It is possible to integrate the personal shadow and experience it as an aspect of one's nature, but not the archetypal Shadow, the dark side of the Godhead. With moral effort and meaningful suffering, however, the ego can play a role in its transformation and integration in the Self (Von

Franz, 1997, p. 48). At an archetypal level, the problematic relationship between good and evil does not belong to the ego, but to oneself as “a vessel...filled with divine conflict (Jung, as reported in Edward F. Edinger, 1996, p.111)” while “suffering the problem of opposites to the utmost (von Franz, 1997, p. 48).”

The Shadow as Positive Value

With time and increasingly differentiated ethical decisions, positive shadow qualities can become a vital aspect of life. Indeed, the difficulties in life that frustrate one's best efforts are indicative of what needs to be assimilated and one's individual path to God (The Mother 2004, p. 208). The psychological quest for wholeness involves integrating what Jung (1974b, passim) refers to as the inferior attitude and function of conscious, which is variable and depends on one's individual inclinations. The inferior side is the place of suffering and yet holds “the secret key” to wholeness of being (Marie-Louise von Franz, 1975, p. 7). The goal of psychological wholeness is psychic balance with all the elements of being harmonized around the psychic being.

Although humans consist of both divine and asuric tendencies, inasmuch as one identifies with the ego [and persona] one is acting out of an asuric nature (Nolini Kanta Gupta, 1977). Associated with the Asura are the violent and passionate ego of the Rakshasha and the ignorant and obscure hostile forces of the Pishacha (Sri Aurobindo, 1970a). According to Sri Aurobindo (1972), the Rakshasha, in particular, has replaced the animal soul, which translates as there

being no trust in the natural person who lives close to the animal soul and its dynamism.

Individual Transformation and Transformation of the Community

For community life to be effectively changed from its present mental organization, driven by the pursuit of pleasure and power, to subjective spiritual principles, it needs to be first accomplished in “individuals and in a great number of individuals (Sri Aurobindo, 1971, p. 231).” According to the Mother (2004, pp. 268-274, passim), the first step for the individual is the unification of the different aspects of the psyche including the shadow, around the psychic being. This is the fundamental requirement for creative renewal at the level of the community for the very reason that the psychic being in relationship to the Self is the ground of all social instincts. Over-emphasizing transformation at the level of the collectivity underestimates the power of the archetypal psyche or the Divine Mother to effect a spiritual renewal of culture.

Spiritualization of the Animal Shadow and Its Healing Effect on the Community

Marie-Louise von Franz (1997) made some interesting observations on the spiritualization of the animal shadow and its reconciliation with the higher person in the case of the fifteenth century Swiss saint Niklaus von Fluë, also known as Brother Klaus. Jung writes that an extraordinarily influential individual like Brother Klaus typically “surpasses the ordinary man not only upwards but downwards (As reported in Gerhard Adler, 1973, p. 364).” He went on to declare

that Klaus was “healed, holy, whole” due to the fact that he consciously suffered within himself the opposites of the Self, containing both “the highest united with the lowest (ibid. p. 365).” The dark side of the Self was transformed and put into the service of a superior will and divine love.

The saint had a numinous vision in which the destructive wrath of the bear, as the shadow side of the Self, was transformed and reconciled with Christian spirituality. Von Franz believes that assimilation and transformation of the bear in a Christ-like figure gave Klaus “an invisible inner authority,” which allowed him to influence other individuals and the community either directly or indirectly (1997, p. 55). This was the case, she believed, because, as a representative symbol of the paradoxical Self, the berserker/pilgrim, “embodies the greater personality of the Self in Brother Klaus as well as...the Self of the whole community (ibid. p. 56).”

Building a new world with healthy relationships and communities depends on individuals becoming vessels reconciling extreme opposites. It depends primarily on their ability to integrate both light and shadow aspects of the psyche, the higher person and the animal soul, around the psychic being. Only then can objects and individuals begin to find their right place in the economy of life.

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