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## Only the Shadow Knows...

Billie Ortiz

*One morning while rushing to get my daughter to school, we realized she had left her backpack in the trunk of my husband's car, which was miles away as he had already left for work. I told her, "You shouldn't put your bag in the trunk, we so rarely look in there." I immediately thought of how this scenario, something important being hidden from view and forgotten, was a perfect metaphor for the Human Shadow.*

Our shadow contains all of the forgotten, repressed, unexpressed and lost parts of ourselves that we have cast off into the darkness of our psyche. Robert Bly in *A Little Book on the Human Shadow* describes it as "the long bag we drag behind us." When the first-grade teacher tells us to be quiet and sit still, part of our exuberance goes "into the bag." When we are criticized in our teenage years for a controversial piece of writing, part of our creative expression goes "into the bag" and so on throughout our formative years.

It is important to remember that this process is a critical defensive mechanism. Often we need to tuck away these delicate parts of ourselves until later in life when it's safer for them to emerge into the world. If we are too young, too fragile or too sensitive to handle the disapproval we are sure to face when genuinely expressing ourselves, then it's best to protect our creative energies rather than have them damaged by others. As Debbie Ford points out in *The Secret of the Shadow*, when we bury these parts, sometimes we do such a good job, "not only do we convince others that we are not that, we also convince ourselves, all because we are being a good parent to the gift that we hold." This is the trick of the shadow. We disown the personality trait so completely; we eventually forget it was ever a part of us to begin with.

If we don't retrieve these orphaned elements of our psyche, they eventually begin to rebel due to neglect. We might be surprised at our deep-seeded resentment of a friend succeeding in her new photography career, or our unexpected burst of anger when we hear that a



colleague has finally started his own business. Whenever we encounter abrupt, intense emotions that seem to come from nowhere, we can be assured that we are dealing with our disowned shadow material. Some part of us longs to be recognized and accepted in the world for our hidden talents and, seeing others manage to manifest their dreams into reality, pushes a button inside and we can't help but react.

Our challenge is to shine light on these rejected parts and examine how we can better integrate the positive side of their energies into our lives. For instance, a deep desire to lead others may morph into bossiness and tyrannical behavior. A keen eye for detail and organization may deteriorate into obsessive, compulsive behavior. Marie-Louise von Franz explains this dilemma in *The Realization of Shadow in Dreams*, "The shadow usually contains values that are needed by consciousness but that exist in a form that makes it difficult to integrate them into one's life." It is our challenge to embrace our shadow elements and search for the positive energies that lie within.

Our dreams often give us clues to these lost treasures of the soul. Whenever we describe a dream and find ourselves using the words "I forgot about this part of the house" or "I didn't even know this cellar was here," we are guaranteed a journey into the deep recesses of our shadow material. The time is right as we would not have remembered the dream if we were not ready to reintegrate these long-lost talents we successfully hid from the world (and ourselves) so long ago.

Carl Jung often said, "I would rather be whole than good." He understood that our shadow holds the key to our true essence. Ignoring our shadow rejects a large part of our psychic and physical energy. When we fully accept all parts of ourselves, we expand into our complete power and become who we are truly meant to be.

*Billie Ortiz is a certified dreamworker who, since 1997, has helped scores of dreamers on the path to self-discovery through a better understanding of their dreams. She offers private sessions, groups, workshops and bi-annual weekend retreats featuring dream book author Jeremy Taylor. Visit [www.wakeuptoyourdreams.com](http://www.wakeuptoyourdreams.com) or call 303-929-6122 for more information.*

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