

Chapter 2: The Shadow at Work

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Introduction

In chapter 1 we explored the idea that your unconscious mind contains programs that have strong negative emotional content associated with them. These programs are triggered by situations that arise in your life or your mind, and, because they live in the unconscious, they react with enormous speed and strength. They are not controllable by your conscious mind. Even if we control ourselves outwardly we cannot stop the emotional reaction internally. This I call the “Tyranny of the Mind”. In this chapter we will explore in detail how the unconscious functions and then we will look at ways of healing it.

How Unconscious Programs are Created

The vast majority of unconscious programs in the shadow are acquired through our developmental learning experiences. Two people having the same experience will perceive and react to the experience differently, depending on their unconscious programming. For example, in the situation mentioned previously where you see your significant other talking with someone at a party, some people will react with insecurity or jealousy, other people may be very happy to see their significant other enjoying themselves. Others may have reactions in between these two extremes. It all depends on your programming.

During the first 7 years of life, children develop behavioral strategies that are needed to cope with being a member of a family and growing up in a civilized society with rules and values. Every child is expected to behave in a certain way and if they don't they are reprimanded one way or another.

Imagine a young child, and let's call him Mark, whose experience is “never getting enough” (toys, money, love, food, etc.). Let us assume that Mark's desires are quite normal but his parents are under stress from not having enough money. Every time Mark complains that he is not getting enough of whatever, he is soundly criticized for it. He is also told that he does not

deserve things. Due to this reaction by his parents, Mark feels he is undeserving and unworthy. For Mark it is a traumatic experience each and every time it happens, and emotionally very painful. It makes him very angry with his parents. Please note here that Mark's parents are reacting due to the stress in their lives, and not through any deliberate cruelty or unkindness. It is their way of coping with their own unconscious programming.

To behave in an acceptable manner, Mark has to continually suppress his needs and suppress the anger that comes up. He has to be a "good" child. This is emotionally debilitating for Mark, as it is usually not acceptable for a child to express anger towards its parents. On the contrary, it can be detrimental for the child, because the parents would retaliate by punishing the child for being angry making Mark feel worse about himself and thus creating a vicious cycle. By continually "stuffing down" his feelings, the feelings move from the conscious to the unconscious and become hidden from view.

Only emotional and painful experiences like these, the expression of which are not socially acceptable and had to be "stuffed down" in this way, are moved into the unconscious. The experience that he is unworthy and undeserving, together with the associated painful emotions, are now invisible to Mark, but are still there in the unconscious. At the conscious level Mark can get on with his life without being continually upset. However the emotions will "pop up" again whenever they are triggered. A typical trigger would be when a parent once again says "no" to what Mark perceives as a perfectly reasonable request.

So from now on, anytime Mark experiences not getting his due, this program will be triggered and he will react with anger. When Mark becomes an adult, the unconscious unworthiness and anger will still be there. It will cause him to perceive, and believe, that the world is a place that does not meet his needs and is not fair. He will feel his anger is justified and will accept it as normal. He would be perceived by others as an angry loser, or a complainer, or something similar. He will carry this wound until he chooses to do the shadow work to clear it.

Again summarizing the key points about unconscious programs:

1. The program lives in the unconscious, which is part of the subconscious.
2. The program is triggered automatically by some event.
3. The program contains emotional content that, when triggered, creates an emotional reaction.
4. The emotional reaction happens before the conscious mind could (or wanted to) censor the outburst.

5. The reaction lasts more than 30 seconds.

So how can you tell if a reaction to a situation is coming from the unconscious or is just an appropriate emotional reaction to a specific situation that arose in your life? When faced with a sudden emergency, the body kicks into fight or flight mode very quickly and initiates a surge of emotion, usually fear, designed to make you react quickly and decisively. So some situations can trigger an appropriate automatic emotional response. Imagine your child or a friend steps into the street in front of an oncoming car. You grab them and pull them back just in time to save a nasty accident. The instinctive reaction when this happens, and as soon as they are safe, is to be angry with the child or person. It is just a natural release due to the adrenalin surging in your body.

To pose the question again, is this an unconscious program or a valid response to the situation? How do we judge? Elizabeth Kubler-Ross said, “Any emotional reaction that lasts longer than 30 seconds is old stuff.” So if 30 seconds later the anger has dissipated never to return, then it was an appropriate reaction and not the unconscious being triggered. However this scenario happens rather seldom.

You can now understand why these programs are stored in the unconscious. The question that now arises is why they don’t simply lie there dormant? Why are they trouble?

The Real Law of Attraction

If you saw the movie “The Secret”, you will be aware of the notion of “The Law of Attraction”. It is suggested that you fill your mind with what you want in your life: a better relationship, a new car, happiness, peace with your aging parent, etc. The principle is that you will attract to yourself whatever your mind is filled with. So let us explore a little deeper into the mind and it’s workings and explore what is going on here.

Carl Jung, the influential thinker and the founder of analytical psychology, discovered that all parts of the mind, including the content of the unconscious, need to express themselves from time to time. They need to act out their program on the stage of life itself. So your programs need to be acted out in your life. He was not kidding! How many triggers and their emotional programs did you identify in the previous exercise? I promise you that you have many more programs that can be triggered than you are aware of at this point in time. We all do.

You and everybody else have certain emotional situations that are triggered and recur again and again throughout your life. They continue to do so until you eventually remove the program all together from the unconscious. Think about it this way. Imagine that there is a DVD player jukebox inside your unconscious mind. Each DVD in the jukebox is an unconscious program with attached emotional feelings. When a particular DVD needs to be played you will attract to yourself a situation in your life, which will automatically press the “Play” button of the player and will play that specific DVD. We even refer to events such as these in everyday language as “he/she/it pressed my buttons!” So imagine that whenever you experience your buttons being pressed that the appropriate DVD is being played.

Why is this? If such a situation never arose in your life, then the unconscious program would never be triggered, and thus would never be played. This, as Carl Jung clearly said, is not acceptable based on the way our minds work. All the DVDs in the jukebox need to get played from time to time. The ones that have the strongest emotional content, are the ones that need to get played more frequently and intensely than the others. For this to happen we need situations that will “press our buttons” and play the DVD.

You may be thinking that this is impossible. When first introduced to this idea most people refuse to believe it. I was no exception. However, I guarantee that if you look carefully at your life, you will be able to identify situations that are emotionally painful and seem awfully familiar and repetitive.

The conventional instinctive viewpoint is that someone or something is **doing it to me**. For example, you are always the one the boss/parent/teacher picks on when he needs to criticize someone, even though you know that you don’t deserve it. You may say to yourself each time that it happens that your boss is just a jerk and blame it on him/her. We blame it on the other, making them the active agent, when all the time it is us calling it forth.

Note that your boss in the situation above is not totally innocent. Every situation that has emotional content is co-created so that we can act out our unconscious programs. Co-creation means that the other person’s, unconscious, your boss in this case, has attracted you to them in the same way as you attracted them, your boss, to you. His need to criticize comes from his own unconscious programming and the need to play one of his own specific DVDs within him. We can only be critical of some situation, some event, or some aspect of another person, which we have not accepted

within ourselves. The process of co-creation in this context is what I term “The Inter-Unconscious Conspiracy” discussed later.

Exercise 2.1: What are your attracting?

Goal:

To become aware of what situations you are attracting to yourself.

Steps:

1. Find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed for 20 minutes or so.
2. Spend a minute or two remembering the most recent times that you were emotionally triggered. Try to remember a dozen or so different events. For each incident write down the following briefly:
 - a. What was the event that triggered you?
 - b. What were you attracting to yourself (e.g. criticism)?
 - c. How frequently do situations such as these crop up in your life.
3. When you have examined the list ask yourself:
 - a. How many of these are repetitive?
 - b. Which ones have I been attracting to me for most of my life.

Projection

Beliefs stored within the unconscious are invisible to us. Jung also said that, in essence, all our perceptions are projections. This means that we see the world through the lens of our unconscious programming even though we are not aware of it.

We do not see things as they are; we see things as we are.

The Talmud

Projection is a multi-step process as follows (assuming we are totally unaware of how we function):

1. We have an unconscious program with its associated negative emotional energy.
2. We can't see the program directly; we see it only by reflection (the effect it causes).
3. When triggered, we project the situation on to the thing, person or situation.
4. That thing, person or situation is separate from and external to you.
5. We make that thing, person or situation responsible for the experience of our negative emotions.