

Integrating the Shadow in Awakening

by Amoda Maa

The striving for spiritual attainment while excluding the personal dimension of life, is often a big error on the path of spiritual inquiry. Ignoring unresolved psychological contractions is a danger that is frequently overlooked in the process of awakening.

Of course, for some, awakening happens spontaneously even when psychological contractions have not been faced. We may call this “grace” and there may be a sense of being “blessed”. But it does not necessarily make any personal problems go away. Mostly life continues along the same groove, and this is fine if there is a deep acceptance of this fact and there is no expectation of any particular expression of what is experienced as “my life” to change. What happens all too commonly, however, is that there’s a denial of any inner blockages. And this prevents a deeper surrender that is a part of the maturation of awakening as it becomes embodied into everyday life.

In disowning the parts of ourselves that we believe to be unacceptable or unenlightened, they get thrown into a shadow-bag. And when these unconscious inner forces remain unacknowledged or unexamined, they inevitably take possession of the pristine peace of the unconditioned awake state and play havoc with our internal and external environment, often revealing themselves in distorted and catastrophic ways. Mental and emotional breakdown are a symptom of this, as are power struggles, inappropriate and even abusive sexual relationships, and hidden greed or corruption that have come to the surface in many spiritual communities. These unconscious forces are not necessarily malevolent, but they become troublesome because they’ve been pushed away for so long. And since every energy longs to come home, to be loved, to be embraced, it knocks on the door, and if it’s not truly met in the light of truth, it smashes the door down.

If there has not been an honest opening to all psychological contractions, then inner division will continue even if we have awakened. This is especially so in the initial stage of awakening, when the ego easily takes ownership and obscures any suppressed energies. If this subtle identification with the awakened state remains hidden, the full integration of awakening into ordinary life, as it descends from mind to heart to body, is hindered. Even Buddha had to sit under the Bodhi tree, immovable, while Mara, the Lord of Darkness, tempted him with desires and tormented him with fears before enlightenment became his living reality. And even Jesus had to meet his demons in the desert before he could abide permanently in the light of true spiritual awakening.

The embodiment of awakesness requires a healing of inner division and this is more likely to happen if body-mind contractions are fully met and dissolved. Here, psychological work can be a great support. Awakening is not about self-improvement; it's about, the intelligent investigation of hidden inner dynamics that may otherwise remain inaccessible. And while awakening *can* happen in any moment, it doesn't necessarily unstick things in the human realm or heal any woundedness that may be held within the subconscious.

There seems to be a need for the integration of the shadow, especially in the Western psyche. Where there is a pervading culture of dysfunction and abuse that solidifies the belief in the wounded self and stories of victimhood created by the mind, there is still a constructive role for therapy - when rooted in awareness - that can facilitate the meeting of painful feelings that are habitually avoided. Anxiety, depression, traumas, and addictions can all be invited into the meeting place of psychology and non-dual spirituality. Here, there is a gentle allowing of all energies while pointing to the unconditioned space of awareness throughout it all. When trauma or emotional suppression run deep, energetic blockages can often more easily be released through bodywork within the same context of awareness. In the bowl of love, without expectation of any particular outcome, there is a natural unfoldment of awake awareness and a stabilization of awakened consciousness.

Most people hope that awakening will make all the pain disappear. But the wisdom and humility to allow support where support is needed, even after awakening, is a great support in itself. This is especially so as the personality and sense of self reappear within awakened consciousness, and there may be ensuing disappointment or confusion – and even more so if there is unresolved trauma or addictive patterns and no previous inner work has been done. The clearer the vessel, in other words, the more transparent the personality vehicle, the less likely it is for dense energetic contractions to coalesce on re-entry to three-dimensional earthly reality.

Whether support comes in the form of therapy, the continuation of meditative practice, the reflection of unconditioned awareness from a spiritual teacher, or an open-hearted conversation with a friend, the important factor is the willingness to meet in tenderness all that continues to reveal itself, to sit back and water the soil and wait, like a wise gardener, as the bud of awakening grows into a flower.

It's the capacity to be fully with what is, to allow being-ness itself to infuse the darkest spaces from the inside out, that creates the authentic wholeness that is a hallmark of full-bodied awakening.

Awakeness does not deny the past, the history of our lives, the memories, the disappointments, the heartbreaks, the regrets, and even what appear as past-life experiences. All these can be embraced in present moment awareness so that past and future are seen to occur in the eternal now. And in this deep embracement of what is here now, we are given the opportunity to see that light is the nature of darkness.