

Exploring one's shadow is no easy undertaking. The idea of getting to know what Jung referred to as, "That which I do not wish to be" is rarely considered an exciting prospect. Yet we implore all leaders to be courageous and get to know and learn to work with their shadow. It is only when we do the work to make the unconscious conscious, that we are able to build true compassion for ourselves and others; freeing us to become the leaders we were born to become.

James Hollis is a Jungian analyst, author and lecturer whose work has inspired and influenced us at Reboot. In this episode Jerry and James talk in depth about the Jungian concept of shadow, how shadow shows up in leadership, and what we can do once we become aware of our shadow.

**

Jerry: Hi, Jim. It is a delight to have you on the show today with us and before I get all gushy and fanboyish, if I could ask you to just take a minute and introduce yourself to our listeners that would be great.

James: Certainly. It's a pleasure to be with you, Jerry. This is James Hollis speaking to you from Washington DC where I'm director of the Washington Jung Society and I also have a private practice here as a Jungian analyst and I do quite a bit of teaching and writing. That's what brought us together today, so full speed ahead.

Jerry: Thank you. Just to help folks navigate this, I first encountered your work really when I was at my own middle passage, mid-life crisis although at the time I didn't know that that's what was in fact happening for me. I was about 38. As many people know who listen to this show, I was in the midst of a massive life of transition. I was moving from having been an investor through JP Morgan and my own venture capital firm into to the next half of my life, the second half of my adult life, in some ways my truest adulthood.

I was 38 and read a slim little book of yours called The Middle Passage which then along with a number of books set me on a path that has led me to where I am today. I'll say it publicly, thank you.

James: You're most welcome. Thank you.

Jerry: Your work has been really, really powerful. I would love to spend a little bit of time today talking in depth, again, about the notion, the Jungian notion of shadow and specifically as it relates to leadership. Before we plunge in, can I ask you, and you've probably have to do this many times in your life, can I ask you to just briefly describe the shadow?

James: Sure. The shadow is a term that Jung used to describe those parts of ourselves or our organizations which when brought into consciousness, we find

troubling. Maybe they're troubling because they are contradictory to our values. Maybe they're troubling because they violate our expectations. Sometimes they're troubling because they ask things that are not comfortable like to grow up for example.

I mean, probably the biggest shadow issue we all have to face is am I living the life I'm supposed to be living or I'm living in a much narrower frame of possibilities. Jung said once, "We all walk in shoes too small for us," which was his metaphor for saying we all have to adopt these strategies for survival and adaptation in the world and getting our needs met as best we can in a finite world.

Often we become too identified with or tied to or they're simply operating autonomously. Those strategies that were once seemingly helpful to us in an earlier stage of our life and what was helpful at one point often is constrictive later. It makes sense, intellectually to say, "I'd like to grow. I'd like to move into a larger place psychologically speaking."

It almost always comes at some cost and usually there's some sort of anxiety that one has to face doing that which is why change is so difficult. People say, "Well, I want to change. I want to move in this direction or that direction," and yet they don't and why don't they? It's because the adaptation, limiting as it may be is also many times a deal we've made with anxiety.

It's the way we try to buy out a greater stress. Step into a larger life, a larger level of accountability is very threatening in a way. Paradoxically, that's a shadow issue. Again, shadow contains all that is perhaps evil in the human possibilities. Also qualities in ourselves if we want to repudiate. I don't want to say, "Well, [inaudible 00:04:26]," this or that. I can see it in my neighbor so clearly but I don't want to see it in myself and that's a shadow issue.

Jung's simplest definition of it was, "That which I do not wish to be." The truth is, we carry ourselves, our history, our whole psychological apparatus into every relationship we have whether it's intimate or corporate or whatever. The shadow is continuously spilling into the world whether we're aware of it or not.

Jerry:

Thank you for that. That is really helpful. What I think would be helpful in the context of this conversation would be to really talk about the application of what happens within the organization and even more specifically because we've spent some time in dialogue across these podcasts about identifying this but what do we do when we start to unpack it.

If you don't mind and I know this could be difficult for an author, I'd like to read back to you something that really struck me in a book that you wrote, I think in 2006 or 2008 called Why Good People Do Bad Things. In it you write, "It takes a strong sense of self and no little courage to be able to examine and take responsibility for these darker selves when they should turn up. It's much easier to deny, blame others, project elsewhere or bury it and just keep on rolling."

"It is that these moments of human frailty when we are most dangerous to remove ourselves, our families and our society. Examining this material is not a form of self-indulgence, it was a way of taking responsibility for our choices and their consequences. It is an act of great moral moment for it brings the possibility of lifting our stuff off of others. Surely the most ethical and most useful thing we can do for those around us." That was powerful.

James: I stand by those words. I can't say I didn't write them. Again, Jung said once in a sentence that haunts me in a constructive way is that, "We can't take people further than we travel ourselves. Wherever I'm stuck, wherever I'm caught in an old adaptation, a complex or a fear, an avoidance, an evasion, is going to play out again in my intimate relationships and that in my work relationships," and so forth.

Something else that Jung said that was so troubling and yet so challenging, he said, "The greatest burden a child must bear is the unlived life of the parent. When we have a large message to force, so a life example, our tendency is to repeat it, to serve it because it's a powerfully charged message or something in us senses danger or a difficulty or constriction so we run from it.

I either become in some way of repetition of my family of origin dynamics where I spend my life fleeing them and I lead a kind of fugitive existence. I'm not untouched by that. Then the question comes to the surface are what is it that has attached itself to me as a provisional story about who I am, who you are, how we relate to each other and that's operating pretty autonomously, pretty unconsciously, and yet as I mentioned before, it keeps spilling into the world as a set of choices, avoidances, consequences and these things pile up.

Jerry: One of the reasons we at Reboot spend so much time working if there's an issue whether it's in our workshops or boot camps or one-on-one coaching relationships is that in my observation, the way it tends to spill out and we either flee from it and I love your construct around this, we're attached to it and so we either reenact it or be free from it which in a sense is as a Buddhist teacher once said to me, "Dog tied to stick. Dogs runs away from stick, dog still tied to stick." Dog runs to stick, dog still tied to stick."

James: Exactly.

Jerry: What we see often times in your organizations and this is the question that I use to prompt people how am I complicit in creating the conditions that my company that I say I don't want.

James: Sure. Any group is the individual at large. The greater the person's capacity to affect change or leadership within an organization, the greater his or her capacity to influence it for good or ill obviously. You can't take an organization farther than you travelled yourself. In other words, one shouldn't be asking something of others that I really need to address myself.

[inaudible 00:09:45] for moment about living in good faith versus bad faith. I think something in us knows the difference. It's not about the kind of external moralism. We're not trying to measure up to someone else's expectations. We're trying to be faithful or truthful around what is our core or our essence. For example, I've asked people through the years and I don't say this casually or lightly and it's always in a very serious context. However you understand the term, do you think you have the soul and if you do, what is it asking of you?

Now, the people I ask are often people who have zero religious background. They're not hearing that as a religious term. That's why I say, however you understand the term. To this point, I never had anybody say, "No, I don't have a soul," because it's a metaphor for something very profoundly deep within each other. We all have some kind of troubled relationship with that entity whatever else you want to call it.

Yet, it keeps calling us to accountability in some way. Whenever I run from that, guess what? It shows up in my troubling dreams, it shows up in anesthetizing addictions. It shows up in unconscious behaviors. It shows up in self-sabotaging patterns in my life.

Jerry: Or it might show up in the conflicts we run into in our organizations.

James: Or generate the conflicts as a matter of fact, absolutely.

Jerry: There's another quote from Jung that I adore which is, "Until we made the unconscious, conscious, it will direct our lives and we will call it faith."

James: Absolutely. That's a pretty scary thought.

Jerry: Yes, it is.

James:

I have to ask myself, “Now, what am I unconscious?” By definition, I can’t answer that question. I’ve said to people the best place to start ... Oh by the way, if you’re married, you can just ask your spouse and they’ll be willing to tell you what your issues are and many times your friends as well as you’ve pointed out but the best place to start in a personal analysis, is a kind of frank and sober analysis of the patterns of one’s own life.

Particularly patterns that you see where you have patterns of avoidance, for example that maybe make sense at the time but begin to pile up in terms of consequences or patterns of complicity or patterns where the power complex kicks in and you wind up using the other person or controlling or manipulating the other person and all of that shadow material because if brought to consciousness, we might repudiate the hidden agenda there, but there is a hidden agenda often.

What you were alluding to before in the middle passage is where are this false self, the adaptive self that is frankly obligatory because we’re born here tiny, vulnerable, dependent on the world. We have to figure out a thousand forms of adaptation and strategies and so forth to manage and survive all that, but later again, those become attachments we have, stories that we carry intrapsychically all the time and serve over and over and over.

In a peculiar way, I work as a psychoanalyst of course and where we look at a person’s life patterns, we know there’s a logic to it. In other words, we don’t do crazy things. We start with the pattern and say, “This pattern is a concretization or an embodiment of an unconscious situation or of an unconscious motive or of a complex of some kind.

Now, seeing the patterns allows me to work back into the unconscious. In other words, how do we discern what is unconscious because by definition it’s unconscious. That’s why we pay attention to dreams because they are autonomous. We average about six per night. They are commenting on our lives and when you track that overtime with an experienced observer, it’s amazing what they will tell you about your own life journey.

We pay attention to symptoms. In other words symptoms, the whole idea in North America with modern psychiatry is how quickly do I get rid of the symptom. From a psychodynamic standpoint we ask why does the symptom come? It’s a whole different attitude. What is it asking of me? What is it bringing to my attention? What corrective is called for here?

Then to say, if I read the symptom then I began to realize something inside of me autonomously is already responding critiquing commenting on how I’m conducting my life. We also have the feeling function. We also have energy systems. We can will all those things and often we have to, but if overtime,

one continues to will oneself into agenda that is not right for your soul, your psyche will abandon you at least the burnout, numbing addictions, it leads to bitterness, it leads to anger and of course it leads to depression.

Jerry: What I often say is that, and it was really only through examining my experience of depression and suicidal feelings and my own dreams and as the listeners know, I have been in psychoanalysis now for 24 years. It's only through that process that I come to understand that when the outer actions of my life do not map to the inner sense of who I am and who I want to be then I lead to a disassociation which then leads to even deeper depression and disconnected.

James: That's absolutely amazing. Absolutely. You've expressed that very well. That's why in a way what we're trying to do is "read" our lives in terms of the symptoms and the energy systems and the dreams and say, "All right. What is psyche saying about all this?" I know what my attitude is telling me. I know what my quotas are. I know what achievement goals I have. I know what expectations I'm trying to serve but what is the soul say inside.

The greater that discrepancy, the greater that split, the deeper the pathology comes. In other word, pathology means simply an expression of the suffering of the soul. Psyche is a great word for soul. Pathology means the expression of the suffering of the soul. That already puts a different hue on this matter because then you realize how important it is not to repress the symptomatology but again to ask what change is it asking for?

What adjustments in my life? Maybe what revolution in my approach to my own life? Then we're engaged in some kind of ongoing cooperative conversation because what you talked about someone from outside your experience, when I say 20 some years, it announces, "What's wrong with that guy?" There's nothing wrong with that guy. You found that it is the deepest, most intimate conversation that you can have which is a conversation with your own soul.

Jerry: Actually, the only conversation that I have had that's deeper and more intimate and longer lasting is my daily journal and practice that I have done since I'm 13.

James: There you go. That was a form of facilitating that dialogue. [inaudible 00:17:29] always knows what's right for us, you see. That's the paradox.

Jerry: Where I really wanted to get to with our conversation which is so we've been at Reboot and in the work that we're doing, we're trying to send a message

about looking into it. I think you said it so brilliantly, this notion of looking at the symptoms. Again, if we look at the organization and we say there is symptoms in the organization.

Why are the people around me so greedy? Great question. Who hired them? Why are the people around me, why do they work around the clock? Great question. Who hired them? Who set up the systems here? Now, we've encouraged people to go back to Plato's analogy of the Allegory of the Cave, the man trapped at the back of the cave. The mistaken shadows in the wall for reality.

Now, we've encouraged people turn around and look over your shoulder. Here's the question I would put to you. We glanced and the shadow. We glanced at the unconscious using dreams, using these kinds of questions, asking good people around us to mirror our blind spots. Then we start to discover things that are really troubling or maybe disturbing.

I know the answer is some ways go to analysis but what would you have the person do in that moment. I have looked in the mirror and I have seen that the source of greed in my organization is myself, is my own desperate need to make sure that I do not ever feel want again.

James: Sure.

Jerry: What would you have that leader do? That young person, who's just glimpsing for the first time the unconscious in that way?

James: That's why this takes courage or desperation, either one, because it obliges one to see, remember I defined the shadow as that which when brought to consciousness is troubling. You can see I have a motive not to bring it to consciousness, just keep rolling along and the consequences began to pile up overtime.

That's why I say, we either have a certain kind of intentionality or something happens that obliges us to try to make sense of all this. When you talk about having that depression at mid life, no matter what you try to do from a traditional standpoint didn't work. It dug the hole deeper. You had to go back to the drawing board and say what's going on here. What's this about really?

It's clear that something is not serving your life. Something has to die and it's calling on you to consciously pay attention to that. Again, talk is cheap in practical life. This is a very difficult kind of conversation so don't have the conversation. Again, the problem continues.

The paradox is many employers, many bosses are very narcissistically driven. It's about power, status, wealth, ambition, et cetera, et cetera, their name up on the building, that sort of thing. These are the people who are least capable of self-awareness because their sense of self is so fragile that they constantly have to try it to see it reinforced by taking credit for the employees behaviors and productivity or by exercising power in a certain way.

That's the kind of person who frankly makes it a terrible employer because everybody realizes that the telling motive that our relationships is about power not relatedness. You'll wind up serving someone else's problem and those are the person least capable of self-awareness. What one has to realize here is the strong person or the contentious person who's able to recognize that what's wrong in the world is in me as well.

I mean since when am I exempt from the human project? I don't want to think about the murderer in me because I've never murdered anyone to my knowledge but maybe I've murdered some of my most creative thoughts so I spoke murderously.

Jerry: Or I've carried the wish to murder.

James: Yeah, of course. That's part of our human nature. The wisest thing ever said about human nature was from a Latin playwright Terence 21 centuries ago who said, "Nothing human is alien to me." Now, even whole we would condemn someone else for their violence or their jealousy or their attitudes, we have to find those same attitudes within ourselves. The more we're split off from them, the more that they're going to operate unconsciously.

That's why Freud said once, "People deny my theories by day and I dream of them at night. They come out somewhere else. They come out at unconscious behaviors.

Jerry: Part of what we try to express is that The Work, with a capital T, capital W in a sense, The Work involves a welcoming home, those aspects of ourselves, those very aspects of ourselves that we would consider attributes of the human project and in a sense metaphorically to blow them a kiss and tell them that we love them as much as we love those other parts of ourselves, does this resonate?

James: That's why it's so difficult. I mean the way we could put that as you just did is it's [inaudible 00:23:38] to love the unlovable parts of ourselves. In 1931, Jung gave a speech to a group of clerics in Strasbourg, France and he said to them, what if you find the most wretched person on the earth is lurking within your own soul, what will you do then. You might be able to be generous and

compassionate towards someone else but could you possibly come to an acceptance of yourself. That's why I always was drawn to Paul Tillich's concept of praise. I accept the fact that you're accepted just by the fact that you're unacceptable.

Jerry: That's brilliant.

James: Often we get a notion in childhood or through our religious or cultural education about moral perfection. Good luck with that project. We are all stumbling through life doing best we can most days messing up along the way and welcome to the club. To be able to call ourselves to accountability and be compassionate about that is a dual task. It's very difficult to do because the more we become aware of this the harder it is to truly accept oneself.

Again, it's the thing that's most intolerable to the true narcissist because he or she is being capable of acknowledging the darker parts of his or her personality and therefore again they're acting out in unconscious ways. Their children carry them and their employees carry them and so forth.

Jerry: Violence to the soul get perpetuated day in and day out and then that employee goes home and projects that violence up to their children or their significant other. One of our core beliefs is that within work and I don't mean psychic work but within our career is an opportunity to do this work.

James: Yes, because it's one of the prime arenas in which we're spending our lives. It's not like one can take care of this outside of work, it's the person we bring to the place of employment as well every day. Of course people bring their human needs, their fears, their apprehensions, their defense strategies to work and it's like a larger family so to speak with all the dynamics of family.

There are projections on to each other. There are complexes that are dueling. It's often not about what it appears to be about. It's really about something else because underneath everyone wants to feel of value. I am valued by you. I am valued by this company and not just because I'm a work horse, but someone at some level cares for the well-being of my own soul.

Of course the bigger the corporation, the harder to have that kind of understanding or feeling state. I had a friend years ago who was an HR director of a major corporation in the east and he always told new employees, just remember this. It sounds pretty harsh but he's motive was actually very beneficent. He said, "Remember this. The company does not love you. The company rents your behavior and it rents it as long as it's productive for the shareholders and the top executives. The day it's not, they will cease to rent your behavior."

This was his real point. Your worth here is going to have to come from the degree and attitude that you bring to your daily task, the camaraderie you developed with your colleagues and the life you have at home. In other words, don't expect the company to love you. It's a non-entity in a sense. It's a corporate fiction.

On the other hand, we bring our emotional needs to every structure and every relationship. Part of what happens with people is there's a lot of disappointment and frustration because people who want to accompany to be their parents or to take care of them or to do whatever and that's understandable is just that's again part of my shadow.

That's something I'm not accepting in myself. In the meantime, how do I conduct my relationship with my colleagues at work? I mean that's where this plays out over and over and over again. I think what we recognize is not as if the shadow can be left at home. It comes with us to the work environment.

Jerry: Given that, if I'm the founder of an organization because we talked about power and leadership and we've talked about the ability. If I'm the founder or one of a pair of founders, there seems to be a particular capacity to replicate and re-enact whether it's family of origin or other source material for that work. What is the moral responsibility of that founding leader?

James: Again, it comes back to this question of I can't take my company farther than I travelled myself. Wherever I'm stuck, I might not be able to make difficult decisions because I desperately need to solicit the approval and approbation of everybody around me or I might not be able to address a problem because I'm afraid of conflict. I mean that's a common problem.

Jerry: Very common.

James: I mean power is not the problem. Power is the energy to address life situations. Power can become diabolic what is caught in people's complexes, when it's caught in the scenarios of another time and place. It's what we bring to the world. There are two dynamics in all relationships. It's projection and transference. Briefly, projection means every moment is new and yet I continuously project at my own psychological history.

A transference is what have been my strategies historically to deal with a situation like this even while every moment is new, we are continuously imposing on it, our behavioral patterns in the past and that's why people often replicate that work, their family of origin and dynamics because where have I

been here before? Oh, it's a group of people that matter to me that I'm spending a lot of time and energy with. I've been here before and outcomes you say that the transferential strategies or family life and it plays out over, and over, and over.

Jerry: In a sense, the moral responsibility is to step into the practice of self-examination and your introspection?

James: Absolutely. Again, it sounds so obvious, but what does that mean? It means that I have to continuously examine where is that coming from in me? Where have I been here before? What's that about really? I mean I have to add that word really there because I can't trust my first response. My first response will always be my rationalization, where complex is hiding, there's always a rationalization protecting it.

I did this because you did that or the situation demanded this or I didn't have time to think it through. There's always a rationalization. Underneath that the real question is it's not so much what I'm doing at any given moment, it's what it's in service to inside.

Jerry: Your question and this line of inquiry reminds me of an experience that I often had in my own analysis with my therapist. She would say to me with a tremendous amount of love in her voice, "What are you up to?" The love in her voice was as powerful as the question itself.

James: That word was really implied in her sense.

Jerry: That's right.

James: What are you really up to, Jerry?

Jerry: Yeah. What are you really up to? It was a teaching moment therapy because it was twofold. In that moment is the question, what am I really up to, to use your word which is call to really stripping away my own tendency to delusion while simultaneously saying and whatever you're up to, I'm going to love you nonetheless.

James: See, that's unconditional acceptance. That's actually rather rare experience isn't it?

Jerry: Yeah. Now, I'm going to cry remembering that because that desperate wish for unconditional acceptance to my own self.

James: That's right.

Jerry: It's been there since as far back as I can remember.

James: Of course. That's why even tough-minded old Freud said toward the end of his life, it's love that heals not technique because it's about something going on in the relationship between 2 people and it can be iatrogenic or disease producing or it can be healing and it depends on the psychology each of those person is bringing to that moment. [inaudible 00:33:26] from it too that we receive. They can project all kinds of things on to us. We can be encountering some pretty sinister stuff from others too. It's not just what we're producing yet it's what it's produced in others of which we need to be mindful also.

Jerry: To be slightly reductionist here in a sense, I think we're coming to is that in that process of glimpsing your blind spot, glimpsing your unconscious, glimpsing the ways in which your childhood strategies have led to a shadowed structure in which you're operating that the answer is not only to address that with a kind of fierce introspection but with love.

James: Yeah. To a degree you can manage that, you see because remember that the core shadow strategy for each of us is how can I survive in this world, get my needs met as best I can and avoid pain wherever possible? That's rational at one level. It also leads to all kinds of complexities and evasions and denials and that sort of thing and that's where the shadow comes in.

That's why I say it's not what I do, it's what it's in service to inside that makes the difference. If I do a good thing, it may not be a good thing because it's coming from a needy place in me that's soliciting the approval of the other person, let's say.

Jerry: Or conversely if I do a bad thing, it may not in fact be in service to a bad aspect but understanding the good aspect that I'm trying for might enable me to alter my outward behavior in a way that that now is in sync with my inner aspirations.

James: There's a strange paradox here and that is the larger the group, the lower the level of consciousness, I mean which is why nations can get caught up in war fever or manias of various kinds or corporations seem to be big lumbering giants with no relationship to each other and yet each of those collective groups is made of individuals.

The world is no better than what I bring to the table and if I can just clean up my small piece of the territory, I'm doing something for the world and it may

seem very insignificant but it's not. It's an ecological slogan, think globally but act locally.

Jerry: I love that. I love that. It reminds me of something a friend of mine once said to me in criticism of Buddhists. She said, "You Buddhist, all you want to do is sit around and be happy. What if everybody just sat around and focused on being happy? I just laughed and I said, "Yeah. Wouldn't it be kind of nice?"

James: Maybe so. Then you'd have no clients, Jerry.

Jerry: Say that again?

James: I said, then you'd have no clients.

Jerry: Then we'd have no clients. You know what, that's okay. I'll find something else to do with my life.

James: Find another day job to do, yes. Sounds like a good idea.

Jerry: I can't thank you enough. What a delightful conversation this was.

James: [inaudible 00:36:54]

Jerry: Again, I'll get all gushy and fanboyish but I must have done something karmically correct in the past life to be able to encounter and be in dialogue with people who have helped me along the way. I thank you for that and what I'll say to you is I will pay it forward by helping other people.

James: Very good. It's a privilege. The people who are the heroes of my life were my teachers, I've always just tried to be a teacher and I think that's all we can do is play it forward as you said.

Jerry: Thank you. Thank you so much for joining us. I look forward to the next book and reading some more of your work. Thank you.