

The Startling Truth about Your Own Dark Side

By Aimée Cartier

From an early age we learn about “the dark side.” Even our modern day mythical stories tout the danger of following this darkness or shadow side of ourselves. We’ve all seen Star Wars – we know what happens when you turn to the dark – you become a breathing mask of blackness, making decisions based purely on their ability to create evil. But is this really true? Is this really what happens when you explore your own darkness?

I remember the first time that I explored my shadow. I was sitting in meditation at a spiritual retreat site when it happened. I didn’t do it on purpose, at least not consciously. But I remember the feeling of piercing through a barrier (one I now know I created myself)

into a place of total darkness. At first it felt formidable. Alone in this darkness I wondered what to do. My outer surroundings at the retreat site gave me a sense of protection, so even though I felt uneasy, I allowed myself to breathe into this space, trusting that I was safe. What I found there totally shocked me.

Rather than containing evil, as I had always believed, the space held none other than parts of my own being. It was a vault full of old wounds, misunderstandings, half-baked conclusions, and other damaged pieces of myself that I hadn’t had the

courage to look at, much less heal. The place wasn’t scary at all. It was derelict, and a little cobwebby, but it was completely familiar, astonishingly so. It was the chamber where I stored the pieces of my experience that I feared gave evidence to my



Aimée Cartier says that in contrast to what I formerly believed, exploring this dark side of myself has brought me to wholeness, not distracted me from it.

own unworthiness. They were transgressions I had made in my life, thoughts and desires I had deemed bad, and events of isolation and rejection that I had endured: this was the place where I hid all of the things I feared made me unlovable.

Opening the vault that day was pivotal for me. What I discovered as I wandered through the familiar darkness, was that most of the secret shames I had been carrying were really misunderstandings. For example, those experiences of rejection by my childhood girlfriends were not a neon sign indicating my total inadequacy as a person, as I had formerly believed.

They were instead, moments in time fraught with both learning and mistakes – on all sides – nothing more and nothing less. They were the experiments of my life, some done by me, others done to me, some changing me for the better, others less so. But what I realized for the first time was that the darkness in each of us wasn’t evil or bad, it was misunderstood. If given the proper attention, where wounds existed, so too could healing.

Wandering through my own shadow land, I discovered that most of what I had been carrying around just needed a little light. It needed me to look at it again, from a different perspective than I had when I stored it there. Instead of being a holding ground for damaged parts, when scrutinized, this place became a storehouse of valuable lessons, keys for understanding and living this particular life of mine.

Even the worst of what I had done had helped me understand the limits of certain actions, and most of it, at its core was motivated by a profound desire for love, and an ignorance of how to truly

Shadow Meditation

- Shutting your eyes and going within, first consciously reach out and feel your shadow. Where is it located in relation to your body? From the outside what does it feel like? Is it velvety or rough? Is it easy or difficult to penetrate?
- Now entering in to this familiar space, look around and see what it holds. Is there a little person or piece of yourself there, grieving something from your past? What story does this part of yourself have to tell?
- What antidote can you now provide, given your current understanding? What key does this experience hold for your life? Administer the antidote to yourself, helping yourself understand the learning and strengths that you gained from this experience.
- Continue to move through the space of your shadow with the intention of providing light and healing to those wounded aspects of yourself, exploring in depth whatever you like.
- When you feel complete, say a prayer for restored wholeness. Thank your shadow for keeping safe these aspects of yourself that needed your care and love. Thank it for holding the keys to so many answers and for always providing a safe and nurturing place of darkness where you can go to be healed and restored.

receive it.

I finished my meditation that day with a sense of peace. I felt whole again. For the first time I understood that the darkness, and even the worst about myself was not scary. It wasn’t evil or sin-

ister, or something to avoid or disown, it was in fact an aspect of myself that needed regular exploration and care. And that to not do so would be to waste the pain, by letting it determine me, instead of learning its precious les-

sons.

Today there is a breezeway into my own shadow. The night dark velvet curtains part easily when I choose to visit there, and the candle I bring to the wounded parts of myself that I haven’t had time to care for is welcome and well known. Instead of being a dusty and neglected vault, it is a useful and supportive envelope of nurturing, protective energy. Most of my old wounds have transformed into gleaming tools and powerful antidotes that I now know how to wield and administer, to both myself and others. In contrast to what I formerly believed, exploring this dark side of myself has brought me to wholeness, not distracted me from it.

So I encourage each of you to explore your own darkness. Take the shadows from your own past and with the light of your awareness turn them into something valuable.

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Eating with Soul: Seven Steps to Body, Mind, and Spirit Nourishment

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• **Love (heart chakra):** Food is often used to show love. Since love and foods are both nourishing, it would seem only likely that the two would come together. However, when we feel out of touch with our ability to love due to emotional trauma or loss, we may substitute our need for love with overeating. At this level, food as love may not serve us entirely. On the other hand, we may open our heart energy through the spirit of giving and receiving that which serves us.

Example of an eating practice for love, giving, and receiving: Donating food to a shelter; Foods: Vegetables, flaxseed, soybeans, green-colored foods.

• **Truth (throat chakra):** The throat is the conduit of alchemy, bringing forth the passion of the heart. Do we embrace truthful choices in our lives and make them with highest intentions? I have noticed that people often say that “they know they should be eating differently” and yet they make food choices that are not in alignment with their instinct or intuition. Do we allow foods to be “forced upon” us? How do we take foods in, with active mindfulness?

Example of an eating practice to bring forth truth, authenticity, and choice: Choose foods for your highest self and eat them mindfully; Foods: Fruits, soups, sauces, sea plants.

• **Insight (third eye chakra):** We can access what is best for us through our body’s instinct (in the survival center) and our intuition (the wisdom of the soul). Many times we do not allow our insight to guide our life’s

choices, including those related to foods that would benefit us. We shut off our intuition by putting our intellect on overdrive. Sometimes we numb our intuition through substances we take in such as drugs and alcohol. Eating in line with our intuition and divine insight is an essential healing path.

Example of an eating practice to encourage insight, intuition, and wisdom: Practice selecting foods intuitively; Foods: Spices, purple-red colored foods, tea.

• **Unity (crown chakra):** With all the stress of living, sometimes we can be unearthed from our sense of belonging to all of life, whether to other people, animals, plants, and nature. We may also be impacted by the lack of purity in our food supply. By connecting with the lineage on the plate – from beginning to end, including the field the food was grown in, the elements of nature that helped grow it, the people who tended to it and ultimately picked it – we form a sense of a community just by acknowledging the miracle and mystery of the journey of the food.

Example of an eating practice to bring forth interconnection, purity, and unity: Buy locally-grown, organic foods from a farmer’s market; Foods: Feasting on sun, moon, stars, love, pure air.

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