

Shadow Work – Try, Fail, Get Back Up, Hurt & Heal

BY KRISTIN LEWIS

There has been a lot of talk in the spiritual community about embracing the shadows within ourselves to become whole and find our inner light.

I wholeheartedly agree because it is increasingly important work for us as human beings to do. But it is not an easy, overnight process, as it can often be portrayed in some clever post or meme online.

Shadow work is not simply some trendy concept that is buzzing around the ethos, flitting around like some chibi Halloween devil sprinkling red glitter. And it is certainly not sugar-coated or soft around the edges like the “love and light” movement can be.

It is a deep, raw, and complex inner process that can tear our very existence to shreds in a matter of minutes, leaving our souls bleeding on the floor of what we come to know as the first levels of rock bottom.

Those who delve deep into their shadow work know very well there are many levels of rock bottom, each with their own very distinct qualities. It is not pretty. It is not simple. It is not a process that can be skimmed over like cliff notes in college.

And it is also not linear, sometimes only giving us a moment

to breathe as we rise to the surface before another wave pulls us under to face the same demons once more. Very often, shadow work is not polite in its timing and will show up unannounced to turn life upside down, sending us spiraling down a deep rabbit hole of despair.

During the past several weeks of my life, I have been initiated through some very intense shadow work of my own that was extremely unexpected in its arrival. From the fires raging close to home and being cooped up in a dark house with almost no contact with the outside world, to a series of unexpected life changes that were forcing me into a mental headspace of personal crisis. I have hardly had a moment of peace in the midst of this internal chaos.

It's been a deep dive into my own shadows that has been intensely uncomfortable. The pattern loops of life-force and death-force energies in my system have both taken me into places of deep, loving expansion and joy – down into a terrifying spiral of mourning, rage, and self-destruction.

Deep wounds that I was sure I healed through my spiritual work have been rising to the surface with a vengeance.

I have been forced to face my fears as well as my own ugliness, the places I pushed away for fear of not being loved or accepted as I am – which has manifested as erratic and embarrassing behaviors, as well as deep unending anger and depression.

Needless to say, it's been a vast and shadowy place to navigate. But this is the very nature of what shadow work entails. As a fellow spiritual entrepreneur, Charlotte Eléa, mentioned: "Real shadow work and real release are not pretty processes wrapped up in chants, sacred objects, prayers, and

images of sultry goddesses. Real shadow work involves swimming in a river of your own sh*t and then crawling out.”

It is so true.

The shedding of skins is not always smothered in rose petals and poetry as it's often portrayed. It is an ugly process that creates monsters within our own minds that threaten to destroy us. The oozing pustules that have long been hidden out of sight that start to bleed through the satin of our souls, ruining the image of perfection we feverishly tried to paint in the night before the light of day exposes us for who and what we truly are – humans who falter, as humans who fail, who bleed, cry, scream and fall apart at the seams.

That is the *me* I have been facing – the ugliest parts of me that I have, for too long, ignored because they were not convenient to look at and deal with. Learning to embrace this entire journey has been extremely difficult and at times left me in shambles, crying in torment with tears streaming down my face and feelings of unworthiness surging through my body.

But what has been more challenging is learning to embrace the side of me that is truly compassionate, loving, and forgiving. The part of me that is in the light.

This has been the part of me I have desperately pushed away for fear of having to be vulnerable. Vulnerable with family and friends. Vulnerable with clients and fellow entrepreneurs. Vulnerable with myself and my own mortality.

It has been a terrifying and wild ride, diving deep into the realm of my internal underworld as I grasp at what kept me tethered to my own sense of safety. My grip being pulled away

with bloody hands as I free fall into the abyss – the terrifying unknown.

But shadow work is not without its gifts. It is not always easy to see when we are in the midst of our own conflict and pain, especially when we are unsure of how to survive the impending darkness we face. When the fog clears and the tears dry up, the gifts are there waiting for us regardless.

There is a cathartic release of pent-up emotions we never had time to process and acknowledge. Facing our shadow side forces us to take a long, hard look at what we've been avoiding and how we really feel – and by doing this work we can more easily see the warning signs of this behavior in the future.

We are forced to take a long, hard look at how we've been showing up in the world and truly living our lives. How are we actually acting and is it in accordance with the values we've portrayed to others? Without all the filters, cropped photos and edited posts – who are we in the real world?

From that point, there is an opportunity to align with who we desire to be, as well as embrace ourselves in the moment as we are.

Shadow work also offers us a true gift – of deep acceptance of this mortal journey. That we are not perfect and never will we be. It is an impossible task and we need to stop kidding ourselves that we can achieve this. We are dropped down off the high horses we've been riding to make ourselves feel better and see life from the perspective of a human being having a physical experience.

It is not something we can easily bypass with more meditation, yoga, and self-help books. Rather, it is one that can be

nourished and embraced with these practices, as well as the life lessons learned from falling down and skinning our knees. Because that's what being human is all about – trying and failing, falling and getting back up, hurting and healing.

It is a process. It is life-long. It is not always pretty, easy, or timid.

But it is *our* journey just the same.

KRISTIN'S HEART HOWL:

Art is my greatest form of meditation – each pencil stroke a colorful mantra that opens up my spirit for deep healing, inner exploration, and spiritual expression. By embodying our greatest gifts and trusting in that small still voice we can heal the wounds that have long been ignored...

For more self-study, [The Urban Howl](#) recommends [The Universe Has Your Back: Transform Fear to Faith](#) .

Sip a little more:

What Will You Do Now That You've Embraced Your Shadow?

Exhale: Surrender To Shadow Goddesses & Dwell In Places Of Discomfort

The moon is a loyal companion.
It never leaves. It's always there, watching,
steadfast, knowing us in our light and dark
moments, changing forever just as we do.
Every day it's a different version of itself.
Sometimes weak and wan, sometimes
strong and full of light. The moon
understands what it means to be human.
Uncertain. Alone. Cratered by
imperfections.

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