



Sober Buddha
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THE SHADOW AND THE INNER CRITIC

THE LEARNING BENEFIT:

Your personal shadow is made mostly of cognitive distortions that create negative pictures about who you really are. These negative beliefs generate pessimism and apathy. When you learn to confront and correct the shadow's negativity, you can generate alternative self-talk. Your contentment increases, and you are less prone to seek drugs and alcohol as a way to cope with challenging situations.

THE FACTS:

The personal shadow starts to develop in childhood when you first introject false messages about your value as a person. You are subjected to critical messages from early caregivers before your brain is strong enough to know the difference between right and wrong. As you mature, peers, mentors and other adults subject you to their criticisms and your self-esteem continues to suffer. These negative messages stem from the other people's shadow projections and are reinforced by real traumas you suffer such as medical crises, career failures, relational dissolutions, financial hardship and spiritual crisis. By the time most addicts are in their early adulthood, they have lost that spark of unique personal style, confidence and imagination that characterize a healthy psyche.

Conformity and Shadow Consequences

The personal shadow becomes stronger in adulthood as you try to conform to cultural and social norms of thinking and behavior you do not believe in, simply to get along at home, at work and elsewhere. This is when the shadow aspects of the Wounded Child, Victim and Prostitute archetypes eventually lead to the addictive behavior of the Saboteur. You drink and use and wreak havoc on your life, all because you know intuitively that you have given up on your true inner self.

While everyone must conform to some norms of socially safe behavior in order to avoid institutionalization, too much stifling of individuality, whether from within or without, kills the personal creative voice. A person who continually represses their thoughts and feelings suffers a lowered emotional intelligence, ends up weakening their interpersonal boundaries and begins to look for ways to cope with the increasing cognitive emotional dissonance between how they feel and how they wish they could feel about themselves. This is the point where drugs and alcohol become so attractive. They offer instant unconsciousness from discomfort and with repeated use, create an addictive homeostasis in brain chemistry.

THE WRITING EXERCISE:

The writing exercise that follows helps you confront some of the most common negative self-beliefs that most addicts absorb as they move through childhood into adulthood. You will be writing two series of self-thoughts. In the first, write down any negative shadow messages about yourself you may have absorbed. Shadow messages can come from physical trauma, emotional mistreatment by other people or from experiences of failure or disappointment.

What does your Shadow or Inner Critic say about your . . .

Physical body?

Addiction?

Spirituality?

Social life?

Intimate relationships?

Career?

Education and intellect?

Mental health?

Finances?

Legal issues?

Personal creativity?

Family life?

Now reverse the process and write down what you believe to be the deeper personal truth about the person you are in each area.

What is your personal belief about your . . .

Physical body?

Addiction?

Spirituality?

Social life?

Intimate relationships?

Career?

Education and intellect?

Mental health?

Finances?

Legal issues?

Personal creativity?

Family life?