



## **GOOD PEOPLE**

### **Chapter Two: Know Your Own Shadow**

"Unconscious" is a scary word because who knows what it means? You can't see it, it's not the same for everyone, and it challenges definition. So, why bother? Maybe it doesn't really exist. Maybe we can just plug along doing what seems reasonable and life will turn out fine.

Actually, that approach works adequately. For a while. But for each of us there comes a time when we realize that something other than our conscious minds is at play in our lives. Something we have not chosen and something which isn't very comfortable. What we would like to be and to present to the world is not really the essence of who we are. Regardless of our conscious choices, there is a part of ourselves we cannot control and direct.

A very, very large part of each of us is not intellectual or focused or self-willed. And after a few months or years of being frustrated, unsatisfied, confused, and, maybe, in pain, we realize that there is a pattern to the situations in which we find ourselves stuck. When our problems come up they are uncannily similar to the problems we had last year and ten years ago and twenty years ago.

Alone in the darkness of our own rooms, we suspect that something in us is creating this pattern. We have ignored it as long as we can but finally this discomfort has become unbearable and we have exhausted our rational resources. We scream "Uncle" and then we look inside.

At this point we acknowledge our unconscious Shadow—the storehouse for all those facets of ourselves which we have rejected, which we feared would lead us into danger, and which we hid from others. We probably adopted a role we could play instead of being ourselves. Identifying with the Hard Worker or the Compliant

Companion or the Gifted Child enabled us to pretend that our enraged Teenager or our selfish Prima Donna didn't exist. By playing a role we could ignore those unpleasant aspects of ourselves as well as hide them from others. For a while. But in the end acting a role doesn't make life turn out right, save us from disappointment, or make our struggles disappear.

And we realize that we can't escape dealing with our own hidden monsters. The anger we tried to kill when we were four didn't die but has lived, hidden but growing, in the dark places inside us. The vulnerability we tried so hard to deny by achieving competence in the adult world still exists. That little Child in so much pain is still in us, waiting to be picked up. We hoped she was gone but she's still there and now she won't let us walk away.

So, defeated in our hopes of constructing an outer life separate from the one inside, we sit down and look into ourselves. And we have to acknowledge our unconscious. Because we would never choose what we find when we look inside, we know something else is operating. Reluctantly we agree to acquaint ourselves with this unconscious Shadow which is so powerful in our lives and so specifically personal.

One way to comprehend the workings of the unconscious inner world is to think in terms of subpersonalities. Subpersonalities do not indicate a split personality or psychosis. Subpersonalities are the different parts of ourselves. We've always known about subpersonalities, we've just called them moods or roles or monsters. "I don't know what happened. Something inside me made me quit my job and give away all my belongings and move across the country. What was I thinking of?" Or, "I don't know why. I never act like that but I knew I had to meet him. So I walked up and introduced myself and started talking. I would never do that again."

The fact that we can identify different parts of ourselves and feel the tension between them is a sign of health. Flexibility is the goal; we want to be able to move

among our subpersonalities as needed. We have many subpersonalities. Over time new ones emerge and familiar ones mature. Our inner world is always in flux.

Recently, I was preparing a seminar and I realized that I needed to listen to my subpersonalities. I knew someone inside had something to say because I was feeling anxious. First I heard from my Wimp. She's a young, emaciated woman wearing a dowdy print dress that hangs from her bony shoulders. She said, "You can't do this presentation. You have nothing to offer. They'll hate you. It will all be terrible and you'll be humiliated." She offered these comments in a whining voice, a bit hysterically. Within a few minutes I heard from another female voice, the Hard Worker. About 50, with broad shoulders and a torso that was solid and unbudgeable, she said, "Don't give in to that hysteria. Just look through every book on your bookshelf and gather all the information you need from what others have written. Compile their quotes and build a presentation from that."

I followed the Hard Worker's direction but after an hour I felt frustrated and fatigued. Fatigue is another way I can tell I need to listen to some part inside me. It indicates to me that one part has been dominant too long and others haven't been heard. When I sat back, I heard from my long suffering, stringy haired female Masochist. She said, "Go ahead and suffer. It's only five more weeks. You can enjoy yourself later. Just forget about having any fun next month." I found that depressing and went to bed.

The next morning, feeling refreshed, I first heard from my Playful Child, an eight-year-old boy dressed in navy blue shorts, a red tee shirt, and a dark baseball cap. He said that he wanted to have fun and he wanted the seminar to be fun. Several minutes later I heard from the Creative Adult. This was another masculine voice, about thirty-four who wore a loose shirt in a deep shade of green. He said, "Don't worry about breaking your back to get a lot of work done. Just allow it to come from inside you." He told me that I already knew everything I needed and to pull the words from within me instead of gathering data from outside me.

Over the next week these five parts met together. I watched as the Creative Adult emerged as the leader of the group. He talked with each subpersonality individually until they agreed on the contribution each would make to the presentation. To the Wimp he said, "I appreciate your awareness that this seminar will take some preparation. You have reminded us that we can't put off thought about this project until the night before. Please keep reminding us every few days that we need to be ready physically by eating well, sleeping adequately, and exercising. And please insure that the right clothes are ready."

To the Hard Worker he said, "I appreciate your sense of responsibility. I need you to make sure that the car is running well, that there is enough gas, and that you have directions to the location." The Hard Worker agreed and diligently assumed her duties. To the Masochist the Creative Adult said, "I appreciate your ability to persist. Please help us work consistently and evenly, not overdoing or forgetting. Sure and steady." She nodded and seriously contemplated her task.

And to the Playful Child he smiled and said, "I appreciate your enthusiasm. Please share that with our group. That would be a welcome contribution." The Playful Child beamed, glad to be acknowledged. As for himself, the Creative Adult said that he would be responsible for the content of the presentation. He would create a seminar from his imagination and experience.

Each part agreed to do his or her appropriate task. I certainly didn't want the Masochist to be responsible for the content of the presentation or the Playful Child to be in charge of getting the car ready. Each subpersonality was satisfied to do a job appropriate for his or her talents.

We get into trouble when we expect one subpersonality to do a job which fits another subpersonality. When it's time to play, we need a Playful Child, and when it's time to work we need a Responsible Adult. We also get into trouble when we give one subpersonality an inordinate amount of time and energy. If the Hard Worker is dominant

ninety percent of the time, the other subpersonalities will feel stifled. If one subpersonality is disproportionately large, we are expending our energy in an imbalanced way.

For those of us super-responsible Good People, there is an imbalance in the time and energy we divide among our subpersonalities. We favor the duty oriented figures and neglect the more spontaneous ones. Consequently, we have too many headaches and too much gastrointestinal disorder; we grind our teeth too frequently and the insomnia is draining. Someone is pressing for recognition through all these symptoms and now we must listen. We need to discover who is there and what s/he wants.

When I work with clients the first thing I do is listen to the different subpersonalities as the client talks. In that way, we can define the conflicts and identify the unconscious beliefs aligned with each subpersonality underlying the client's experience. To say: "My Rebellious Teenager is angry and refuses to cooperate with my Controller" describes the client's internal experience of always being late even though she says she wants to arrive on time. She owns and respects both parts of herself and takes responsibility for the conflict being internal.

Differentiating the parts of ourselves, owning each one, and speaking clearly for them is like turning on a light in that dark inner world. We can then recognize that the feelings of the Scared Infant ("I'm so scared to be alone. I need someone to love and protect me.") are different from the desires of the Loser ("Who cares anyway. I'll never get a promotion. Why even try?") or the needs of the independence-seeking Adolescent ("Don't tell me how you do it. I'm not you. Watch and learn how I do it.")

When we can identify our inner world experience specifically by putting the words with the particular subpersonality who utter them, we realize that we are not crazy or insatiably needy. When we feel hysterical or mixed-up it's just two or three subpersonalities whose voices have become tangled. We can clarify our inner world jumble by listening to and knowing each subpersonality. The forces at work in our inner

worlds are identifiable and, more important, ready to be healed. Our subpersonalities want to be known and heard.

Just like children, the subpersonalities in us change and grow. As their needs are met, they move into a new fuller way of being. All they need in order to mature is to be accepted and acknowledged. When we give them what they need, they continue on their growing-up path.

It's when they haven't received what they need that they remain stuck. It's then that they need to be listened to. Our inner worlds have their own schedule and standards and logic. They operate consistently and make sense in their own terms. When we learn to speak to and listen to the unconscious we can know our inner worlds.

Do you doubt this process? Skepticism is normal; it will not diminish the efficacy of the exercises. Do the following exercise (or another from this book) daily and write your experience. See if you notice patterns in your inner world. See what patterns occur in your outer world experience. Notice what happens when you make a commitment to know and accept your inner life.

The first step in this process of knowing your inner world is to listen. Shift your focus inside and temporarily disregard the outer world with all its activity and distraction.

## EXERCISE

Do the Relaxation Exercise from page 14.

And then follow it with this imagery exercise:

Breathe and move your attention inside. Let your breath carry your attention from your head down into your body. (pause) Notice how easy it is to breathe. You don't have to think about breathing or try to breathe. You just breathe. (pause) All your attention is focused inside your body. If thoughts run through your head, that's fine. You

just don't have to pay attention to them now. Watch your inbreaths and your outbreaths. (pause)

Your breath carries your attention to a spot in the center of your body. (pause) Your mind doesn't have to know where this spot is, your breath will carry you there. (pause) Breathe into that spot and focus your attention right there. (pause) Then your breath carries you through that spot. You find yourself in a small clearing with a semi-circle of trees bordering it. Focus on the clearing and breathe. (pause)

From the trees a figure walks into the clearing. Just watch. (pause) What do you notice about this figure. It may be human, animal, inanimate. Notice the details of this figure. (pause) Notice what the figure is doing. (pause) If you don't know which part of you this figure represents, ask. Listen to what it tells you. (pause)

There is some message that this figure wants to give you. Listen receptively. You don't need your mind. (pause) What do you hear? Be still and feel this message in your body. (pause) Ask the figure if it has anything else which you need to hear. (pause)

Ask the figure anything you want to and listen. (pause) When you have no more questions, thank the figure, assure it you will return, and let your imagery fade. (pause)

## REFLECTIONS

Write about your imagery experience. Describe the figure and what it said to you.

What part of you is it? What was surprising about this figure? What was familiar?

Do you trust what you were given? What does your mind say to you to limit your trust?

Your unconscious communicates with you in pictures. What did you learn about your inner world from seeing the images?

Write any associations you have to what you have just experienced. How is this figure now involved in your daily life? How could it possibly be involved in the future?

Call on this figure once or twice this week and ask it for its suggestions about handling whatever is going on inside you or outside you.