



My Shadow Addiction

It started innocuously enough. Several passes through my closets fail to turn up various items of clothing. And then, like rabbits out of a hat, they materialize. Coincidentally, multiple attempts to locate a sunscreen prove fruitless. Eventually, I find it exactly where I put it, obscured by a bottle of Tylenol.

Have I lost my mind? Days later, I'm blindsided by the truth that losing **my** mind is a good thing. Well, not necessarily losing it completely, but certainly not giving it unfettered veto power or allow it to trample my soul.

Relaxing on my back deck, sunscreen protecting my face, breathing in the sounds and sights of nature quiets my mind. Suddenly, a veil lifts, and I'm struck that my decades-long practice of monomaniacal self-exploration mirrors my recent manic search tactics. Despite my efforts to fully unpack my shadow—the good, the bad, and the ugly—just like my clothing and my sunscreen, everything I need to know is revealed **ONLY** in Divine time, not Jill's time. No matter how much pressure I exert on myself, only when I chill does what I am striving to find spontaneously appear.

My manic obsession with excavating and processing the contents of my shadow had become my *raison d'être*. Somewhere along the way, I had deluded myself into believing that the faster I faced my demons and reclaimed my disowned selves and their gifts, the sooner I would gain entrée to the Promised Land of self-acceptance.

I used to label my hunting expeditions a passion. With blinders off, I see that passion for what it is—an addiction that started when, as a teenager, I announced to my parents that I wanted to see a therapist, "to find out what makes me tick."

What strikes me now is how deep that desire was, how it became a hunger, then an obsession and ultimately, an addiction. As introspective as I am, it's also amazing that, until this week, I never questioned that desire as atypical in a thirteen year old, nor did I realize it would come to consume me obsessively.

I knew I was different. Try though I did, I never really fit in my family. They didn't understand me, and I just got smaller and smaller as I struggled to become acceptable to them.

Although I don't recall too many specifics of my childhood, I am clear about my sense of aloneness and its accompanying despair. Strange, though, I have no recollection of feeling depressed, just a strong desire to get to know myself before my "Self" disappeared.



But that was not to be.

A spiritual awakening at thirty rekindled that hunger, and the intoxicating otherworldly bliss of revelation hooked me. Epiphany after epiphany temporarily mollified my Inner Terrorist, the internalized, immobilizing voice of my father.

You're stupid," it blasted. No matter what, I would never be enough. It was hopeless.

So much to learn. So little time. Countless non-traditional therapies—Past life regression, Voice Dialogue, Soul Retrieval, energy work, and other assorted sundry methods—brought me face to face with disowned selves. Fragment by fragment, I filled in the missing pieces of my puzzle, adding nuance and texture. Each new revelation momentarily blotted out my feelings of inadequacy. Armed with a fierce determination, I searched for the flaw I was certain accompanied each life challenge.

Caroline Myss's Sacred Contracts gave me the tools I needed to get to the other side of victimhood, a way to view my life through an archetypal lens, symbolically, rather than personalizing my wounds. It also intensified my quest to illuminate my unconscious, and sent my Inner Pusher (my drug dealer) careening into overdrive.

The folly of my modus operandi continued to elude me. My goal, to empty out the entire Pandora's Box, process the contents, and move on, free at last, was as laughable as it was unattainable. As much work as I had done to resurrect and integrate my disowned Feminine, I was still in the thrall of my masculine programming. Like a district attorney with a hostile witness, it bullied and shamed me.

Miraculously, that day on the deck, the pieces fell into place. My search for the clothes and the sunscreen exposed a deeper layer of my default masculine programming.

Just in case I still didn't get it, I was bombarded with a slew of online missives, threads the Divine had strung together to highlight what I had been doing to myself. For someone so into resurrecting her Feminine, how could I have missed this? Duh!

But this time, no critical voices rose up to harass me. I didn't feel stupid, maybe a little silly. I laughed aloud at the depth of my a-void-dance. And then I surrendered to "Egginess."

The insidious spell of my masculine had finally been broken. Its claw hold on me had been so restricting, I had to be bombarded from several directions to get it.



First, I registered for a nine-month online odyssey, “Writing to Heal,” with Mark Matousek. Writing about my wounds is not new to me; it’s cathartic. Did I need to go back into them, I asked myself, and signed up only when I felt guided, the “why” a mystery.

Then came the emails, all with a common theme. They’re still arriving. It started with an excerpt from Judith Orloff’s new book, “The Ecstasy of Surrender: 12 Surprising Ways Letting Go Can Empower Your Life” that appeared in my inbox. Several clicks later, I had downloaded a sample onto my iPad. Sure, I knew about surrender, but as I read the intro and forward, I realized how little I really knew. The jostling in my gut hinted at my ambivalence. I ordered the book.

Then “‘To Do’ or Not ‘To Do,’” a blog post from Lissa Rankin, M.D., arrived in my inbox. In it, she wrote about an event she attended during which the coach strongly extolled the “no pain, no gain” means of achieving goals. The combination of discipline, hard work, intellect, and the masculine principle of action was the sole formula to maximizing one’s potential. After many years spent living that principle, Lissa was learning to become less “spermy” and more “eggy,” to use her teacher, Christiane Northrup’s words. An egg waits for the sperm to come to her. This egginess is the essence of Orloff’s book about surrender. Set goals without being attached to outcomes. Stop trying to be enough. You already are. Redefine your definition of success. Don’t compare yourself to others.

Two additional (Freudian slip) emails from Lissa offered other fragments. One asked the reader to contemplate the degree of connection we have to our soul’s integrity. In other words, are we congruent? Do our head and our heart agree? Do we walk our talk? It gave examples of ways we rationalize selling out our integrity. Her last email asked, “Why are you in such a hurry? Don’t you realize that sometimes the best course of action is waiting and becoming?”

As if this wasn’t enough, a Mark Nepo poem arrived in an email. Entitled “Bareback,” the synchronicity was unmistakable.

“No question I’ve been knocked
from my invisible horse and the
one with the tools in his hands keeps
prodding: Get back in the saddle.
What are you waiting for? But the
Timeless one affirms: You’re not
listening. There is no more saddle.
We’ve done away with all that.
The driven one keeps looking at
His watch: you didn’t work all these
Years to walk away now. But the
One who breathes like a flower
Replies: We worked all these years



Precisely to unfold this way.”

Lastly, my Feminine Amazon bluntly ordered me to review Caroline Myss’s writing on addiction. This material was not new to me. A number of years ago, I had taken Caroline’s weekend workshop on the Addict archetype.

Phrases jumped out at as I re-read my notes. It was as if I had never before seen them. We are all born addicts, according to Caroline, defined as a lack of congruence between the head and the heart. We use our drug or behavior to control the speed of change in our lives. To resist change, we use our substance or behavior to avoid the truth and the discomfort of our incongruence. Our addictions are strategies we use to rationalize and deny responsibility for our choices and the pain of self-betrayal. By temporarily blocking out the voice of our soul, we can pretend it doesn’t exist. We can avoid moving in the direction of our true selves.

Sitting quietly as these messages percolated, it became increasingly clear that what I really wanted was the discomfort I felt with the parts of myself I have yet to accept to be miraculously gone. And no matter how many years I’ve been at this, no matter how many epiphanies I have, discomfort remains. The voice of my ego drowns out my soul’s unconditional love. Congruence is still a fragment away.

The two discordant voices that stymied me were “Nothing you ever DO will make you good enough,” its companion, “Shining and being visible is courting danger,” and on the other side, “You’re good enough. You were always good enough. Only you fail to see your light.” These dueling messages kept me on a hamster wheel striving to find that one game-changing piece that would silence their constant bickering and put an end to my self-condemnation. Only then would I give myself permission to put myself out there as a healer. It was as ludicrous as it was impossible. I needed self-acceptance not perfection.

My addiction, I realized in a head-slapping moment, was to “striving to find that one game-changing piece.” I had always been proud of my ongoing passion to confront my demons, to move beyond my self-imposed limitations. Awakening at thirty, I felt like Sleeping Beauty, with the emotional maturity of an adolescent.

Each time my teachers praised my efforts, and declared, “Nobody works harder than you do, Jill,” it spurred me on to work harder. The high of my epiphanies and my excellent grades as I completed a B.A. and then a PhD drowned out the derogatory voices that made me feel bad about myself, that accused me of being a fraud. The highs temporarily exorcised my Inner Critic.

My Pusher tormented me. “How do you expect to help others when you still have so much of your own baggage?” I pushed myself even harder. I was addicted to using my intellect to force my soul to give up its treasures. What hubris to “think” I could use my mind to overpower my soul. All I succeeded in doing was keeping myself distracted and hemorrhaging energy.



When Ecton, the channel, counseled me in December, he explained that early on all that excavating was productive. But now, almost forty years later, it was a waste of time and energy. The leftovers, he said, will rise to the top when I need them. Just because I have challenges doesn't mean I'm flawed.

What had, in the past, been one of my biggest assets, was now keeping me from the truth that I am exactly who I have been striving to be. Continually striving immobilized me. It implied I would never arrive *there*. As Caroline so aptly put it, my addiction to incessant self-exploration was the speed control button that put the brakes on my career development. Truth was, I was terrified of failing, and rationalized that I wasn't good enough to make a difference in other people's lives. As long as I was at the mercy of my critical mind, I wasn't going anywhere. So entrenched was I in the messages of my childhood, that I was like those monkeys, only instead of "Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil," my tagline was "Hear no soul, see no soul, speak no soul."

When I signed up for the "Writing to Heal" course, my old addiction reared its ugly head. In Mark's comments on my second entry, "I am Needy," he suggested that I explore where my terror of expressing need came from, and asked if I could recall when I was first rejected, reviled, or shamed for expressing my needs.

Fair question. Reasonable question. Only for me, it rallied my Pusher. I needed those memories *now*. I needed that high. I deluded myself into believing I had permission from the gods for this dumpster dive, and in the process, turned myself inside out struggling to resurrect shadowy memories.

I willed myself to dream them. I referenced years of journaling. I twisted myself inside out attempting to unearth those memories. All I did was frustrate and exhaust myself. And then, miraculously, just as Ecton said it would, what I needed rose to consciousness.

It isn't what I was seeking. It's infinitely more valuable. Decades of my imperious masculine mind completely overpowering my feminine soul was finally exposed, and with it, the truth of an addiction that has consumed me for almost forty years, and been a blessing and a curse. A blessing because of all the demons I've faced down. A curse, because obsessively and compulsively ransacking my unconscious for demons is like a broken record stuck in survival mode. It's kept me from thriving.

Finally I get it. A challenge is often just a challenge, nothing more, nothing less. Vital information will rise to awareness. Answers will come in Divine time. In the meantime, I will use my energy and creativity to develop my healing practice.



Face to face with my addiction, I am resolved to continue to “lose my mind” and to be filled with non-sense—intuition, wisdom, guidance, creativity, and especially soul. I vow to be “eggier” and to foster a more vibrant connection between my head and my heart.