

## Each Road is Unique

There is more than one way to skin a cat, so they say, and all roads lead to Rome. It seems that the road to inner peace is as individual as a fingerprint. Mid-way through life, I've finally found a road-map by which to navigate this foreign territory for myself. This is largely through the work of Carl Jung, who said that what we are searching for is not goodness, but wholeness. Becoming more whole and integrated is bringing more and more inner peace into my world.

What do wholeness and integration really mean? The Jungian map suggests several avenues. One is found in exploring our persona (sometimes a false self), that which we show to the outside world, shaped by our environment, both familial and societal, when we were small. Often persona is a far cry from who we feel we really are inside. Developing congruence between persona and our authentic self is one of the paths to inner peace, when as much as possible our insides match up with our outsides, therefore healing inner conflict. This conflict, for instance, might show up as either guilt or resentment, usually with a lot of "should's" attached. Psychoanalyst Karen Horney coined the phrase "the tyranny of the should's." It is a lifetime's work to follow the thread of the should's in our lives to see whose voice is really speaking inside of our psyches, and how it might be keeping us from living authentically. Another clue is to understand our defense mechanisms, the glue that holds the false self in place.

A further avenue is through our shadow. Shadow is, in a way, the opposite of persona; it's what we *don't* show to the world for any variety of reasons, shame or fear, among others. Shadow is anything un-lived, repressed, denied, excluded, unconscious or hidden in ourselves. It has gotten a bad name, associated with evil, violence, destruction and rage. Rage, for example, is repressed anger which is a way of connecting to our strength, our ability to stand up for ourselves and others, and to respond to injustices, both personal and cultural. Expressed cleanly and openly, anger can have a transformative effect; pushed down and denied, it twists itself into rage and fury. As well, our creativity, exuberance, aliveness or joy can go into shadow, if in growing up those qualities weren't valued, nurtured and supported. In doing the work of integrating our shadow, all aspects of ourselves are welcomed with the light of awareness, without judgment and with compassion.

Working on our persona and our shadow serve a higher function, that of individuation. Jung described individuation as truly becoming ourselves, bringing all of our gifts and talents to the world, being all that we can be. As the modern dancer Martha Graham said, "There is a vitality, a life-force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action and because there is only one of you in all of time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and be lost." Feelings of serenity, tranquility and equanimity are brought about when all the buried aspects of ourselves are retrieved and incorporated into our being, and when we can begin to finally do the unique dance that is only ours, and ours only.

Some say enlightenment is making the unconscious conscious. As the ancient sages advised, "know thyself." The processes of shedding more and more of our persona that hides who we really are, and of reclaiming those parts of ourselves that have been living in shadow are indeed bringing the unconscious into the conscious realm, knowing ourselves. In doing this we find our calling, the thing we are best put on this earth to do.

There is the sense that our life is in alignment with all that is. And in this way, the psychological and the spiritual marry. By doing our psychological work, we remove obstacles and free ourselves up so that the spiritual dimension can live through us, bringing with it a deep, abiding and sustaining sense of inner peace.

Marla Estes is an Ashland teacher, mentor, workshop facilitator and writer. Visit her website at [www.marlaestes.com](http://www.marlaestes.com)