

## Honoring Both Sides of the Self

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We all have two halves to our Selves, just as we have two halves of our bodies. We are both “right-brained” and “left-brained,” masculine and feminine, introvert and extravert, conscious and unconscious—the yin/yang of human experience. We tend to identify with one half of each polarity, and the other half lives in Shadow. If we are born female, we may know very little about our masculine sides, and vice versa. If we are left-hemispheric dominant, we may have neglected the development of our right hemisphere. As extraverts, we may ignore the part of ourselves that desperately needs to introvert. And consciousness is the most slippery of all. We may believe we’re acting consciously, when our unconscious is really running the show. The repressed parts of ourselves continue to exist and to influence us in unconscious ways, ways that are not amenable to change until the unaccepted parts become conscious.

There is one other dichotomy I’d like to mention, between higher consciousness—our Spiritual Selves, and our human selves. There is in each of us a Source of wisdom. Some of us are more aware of it than others and rely on its guidance. Others deny its existence. The more we live in denial of any parts of our Selves, the more likely we are to experience inner conflict. The more inner conflict we have, particularly when parts of ourselves are unacceptable, the more likely we are to project the unacceptable parts of ourselves onto others and to experience conflict in the world. Dominance can become domination and denigration of the part of the Self that is not acknowledged. Full actualization of the Self requires development of both sides of the Self, and harmonious integration of the polarities.

How do we begin to recognize the parts of ourselves that are hidden from view and realize our biases against them? Let us begin with the most typical scenarios.

### *Left-hemispheric vs. right-hemispheric dominance*

Most right-handed individuals are left hemispheric dominant. Most of the world honors right handedness, and some parts of the world severely punish left-handedness. Right is good, left is bad. Classrooms, laboratories, work spaces, tools are developed for right-handers. Left-handers are often left to their own devices to adapt to a right-handed world. But newer research indicates that handedness is merely a matter of degree (Ornstein, 1997). Some people are ambidextrous, and use different hands for different purposes. Studies of the gifted have revealed greater ambidexterity and mixed dominance (Benbow, 1986). It is possible to be **too** right handed. This would definitely limit a person who breaks his or her right hand and has developed no facility whatsoever with the non-dominant hand. Some degree of ambidexterity leads to flexibility of thought and action.

The dishonoring of left-handedness has a parallel in the discounting of the right hemisphere. For centuries, the right hemisphere was believed to contribute little to the

thought process. The Western world has placed enormous value on the linguistic, sequential, analytical, deductive, temporal qualities of thinking that are largely the contribution of the left hemisphere (West, 1991). A child who cannot master reading, writing, and arithmetic (linguistic and sequential skills) as quickly as his or her peers is considered “dumb,” a misfit. This same child may be an astonishing artist, phenomenal with computers, able to build anything with Legos—without the manual, mechanically inventive, and able to both read and create maps at an adult level, but these gifts do not make up for the lack of linguistic competence necessary for school success. Schools were developed by and for those with powerful left hemispheres.

These feelings of inferiority remain throughout the life cycle. Adults with powerful right hemispheres often feel like imposters, interlopers, who can “pass for normal,” but really aren’t as smart. “Smart” people know where their ideas came from and can retrace their steps from beginning to end. They can “show their work.” Smart people can cite references to support each of their ideas. Smart people are quick thinkers, can dominate discussions and be heard. Smart people have longer, more impressive resumes. These are deeply held beliefs by both left- and right-hemispheric individuals in our society. This is the denigration of an important half of the Self. Left hemispheric abilities are valued and right hemispheric abilities are not—unless, of course, the person becomes famous. And it is interesting that the analytical reasoners are usually the ones who control the portal to fame.

Individuals who have stronger right hemispheres tend to feel wounded and reactive to the system that has devalued their talents. They also reject left hemispheric thinking, calling it “linear” and “rigid.” We all have two hemispheres because both hemispheres are necessary in order to function, especially to do higher-level reasoning. It is silly to accuse other people of being “left-brained” or “right-brained,” since we need the integrated abilities of **both** hemispheres.

### *Masculine vs. feminine*

Much has been written about male domination over females (e.g., Eisler, 1987); in some countries, women are still considered men’s property, to be disposed of at will if they do not produce sons. But the inner domination in both genders of the masculine over the feminine is not as easily recognized. Masculinity equates with assertiveness, success, power, and self-efficacy, while femininity equates with weakness, helplessness, subordination, and lack of self-esteem. Boys learn early that maleness is the rejection of everything female within themselves (Silverman & Conarton, 1988). Boys who cry, who are sensitive, who are empathic, who are yielding rather than ready to fight, who are noncompetitive, and who have interests that are more feminine, are outcasts within the male peer group. They are often targeted in elementary school by bullies who like to make them cry, and are rejected throughout their high school years.

While there is somewhat more acceptance of feminine qualities within females, masculine qualities still are more valued. It is an advantage to a girl to be a “tomboy,” to be highly assertive and competitive. Studies of success in females are linked with higher

scores on scales of the masculine characteristic of instrumentality (self-assertiveness), rather than the feminine characteristic of expressiveness (nurturance) (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Service occupations pay a lot less than occupations that promote self-aggrandizement and high corporate profits.

Societies in which the feminine is devalued also tend to discriminate against and devalue children, and child abuse is more frequent. Children are women's work, women's domain, an economic burden, and those who work with children are underpaid and undervalued. Little training is provided in parenting, and childcare tends to be haphazard.

Gender, like handedness, is also a matter of degree (Hubbard, 1996). Androgyny, the development of both the masculine and feminine aspects of the Self, leads to greater creativity (MacKinnon, 1965). Hollinger (1983) found that androgynous gifted girls had higher social self-esteem than those who were either too masculine or too feminine. Men who have developed feminine aspects of themselves are better role models for their children than men who adhere to rigid sex-role stereotypes. Women with greater masculine development have higher self-esteem and are also better role models for their children.

### ***Extraversion vs. Introversion***

America is primarily an extraverted society. Some studies indicate that nearly 75% of Americans are extraverted (Myers & Macaulley, 1985). Extraverts are more popular in school, show more leadership traits, and often become bosses. Introverted individuals often feel that there is something wrong with them because they are not party people, they do not enjoy novel situations, they are not the first to answer the phone, they feel drained when they've been around people too long. These attitudes are often unacceptable to the extraverts in their lives.

In order to survive in an extraverted world, introverts often have to adopt an extraverted persona, a part of themselves that leaves the house and faces the world. It is a mask that enables them to fit in. Some introverts become class clowns, performers, and even public speakers, so that no one knows who they really are. Some masks are so powerful that some introverts begin to identify with the masked Self, and lose connection with the real Self beneath the mask. Introverts' needs are different from those of extraverts. They need more alone time, more think time, more control of the environment because they are easily overstimulated. If these needs are ignored, the introverted Self becomes less capable of functioning in the world.

We are all both introverted and extraverted. Again, it is simply a matter of degree. Introverts are usually called upon to develop the extraverted part of themselves in order to function in an extraverted world, but extraverts may never see the value of developing their introverted side. This leaves them vulnerable during midlife, since they are less equipped than introverts to manage the long, lonely journey inside the Self.

### ***Conscious vs. Unconscious***

Any part of the Self that is unacceptable is pressed (repressed) into the unconscious, so that it does not have to be faced. The unconscious has enormous power over thoughts, emotions and motivation. We can be completely unaware of how we come across to others, how we create misery in our lives, how our tone of voice or facial expression led to an argument. We may believe that we're being nonjudgmental, accepting and kind, when we are being perceived as narrow-minded and controlling. We may think that we've come to a perfectly "logical" conclusion that anyone would have drawn, when we're perceived as rigid. We may fervently desire to move forward in our lives and find ourselves "stuck," without knowing why.

It is difficult to become aware of what lies buried in our unconscious minds. Therapy is one way to uncover the repressed memories, beliefs, attitudes, feelings, parts of ourselves that have been rejected along the way. The developmental process of inner growth also enables us to bring unconscious material into consciousness so that it can be seen, understood, and transformed. This growth process seems to happen to us when we are ready for the next step in our development. For myself, my need to feel that I was perfect was so great when I was younger that I could not allow into consciousness elements of myself that were "imperfect." It took 60 years to develop to the point at which unconscious material could surface, uninvited, into my consciousness, and I could look at it without fear, rejection and further repression. I often say that "Shadow work is doing me."

This development requires unconditional acceptance of all parts of the Self. Our judgments are so overpowering, and so much a part of our upbringing, that it is difficult to truly love and accept all of ourselves. And when we are incapable of loving ourselves, we are incapable of fully accepting others—our mates, our children, our friends, our colleagues, our teachers.

### ***Higher consciousness vs. the human predicament***

I believe that we are all partly mortal and partly immortal—that there is a part of the Self that transcends the human experience. It is the Witness, the Observer, the Spirit of the human being. It is very hard to understand how we can be both human Selves and infinite Spiritual Selves. This seems to make no logical sense.

I am reminded of one of Annemarie Roeper's wonderful stories. She was teaching her staff at the Roeper School about Piaget's theory of development, particularly his concept of multiple classification. She writes:

To understand the world, we must realize that things, people and ideas can be simultaneously classified in more than one way. A woman can be a mother, daughter, sister, and teacher, all at the same time. A young child, who is in what Piaget calls the *preoperational stage*, can classify only according to a single criterion (e.g., a mother can only be a

mother). Imagine how this child feels when his mother goes out and becomes a teacher. He feels that he has lost her, for within the constraints of his ability to think and reason, she is no longer a mother.

This helps to explain why a three-year-old child might go off to school happily, then suddenly refuse to attend, even though nothing at school has changed. The only change was that his mother had taken a teaching job. Previously, he felt safe knowing that Mother was being Mother at home—even while he went to school. But when she became a teacher, she stopped being a mother for him. (Roeper, 1995, pp. 39-40)

Perhaps in an analogous way, most of us are preoperational in our understanding of our spirituality. We cannot understand how we can simultaneously be humans on this planet, with finite life spans, and finite capacities, and at the same time be infinite. Within the constraints of our ability to think and reason, we cannot be both.

But an understanding of spirituality requires grappling with paradoxes. One of the main paradoxes that we must cope with on this plane of reality is apparent polarity of male/female; black/white; good/bad; left/right; introvert/extravert; etc., and the simultaneous appreciation of the Oneness of all life. Higher consciousness demands that we take on the arduous task of transcending the polarities in ourselves so that we can evolve to a place where we are in the Oneness.

The more aware we are that we exist in different dimensions simultaneously, the more likely we are to bounce back and forth between these dimensions. Having a sense of one's infiniteness is inspiring; then, by comparison, the finiteness of the human experience is depressing. As consciousness on the planet continues to evolve, I imagine that we will see a rise in bipolar-like experiences in the population. Not that they all require medication—only those whose depression or mania is serious or life-threatening will need medical intervention. Instead, we will need a better understanding of the human condition, the difficulties of transition into higher consciousness, and acceptance of the necessary highs and lows in ourselves and others.

Each time we judge ourselves, each time we judge another, we enter into separateness. Only that which is separate can stand in judgment as if it were outside the Oneness. Each time we react—positively or negatively—to someone or something around us, we must ask ourselves, “Is this some part of myself that I have rejected, cast out of consciousness, repressed into my unconscious?” This goes for the positive as well as negative. If you have the capacity to admire someone, what you admire is buried within yourself. If you spend a great deal of energy identifying what is you, and what is **not** you, you miss seeing that *all that you see is a reflection of Yourself*.

Full development requires recognizing and bringing into the light of consciousness the rejected, repressed parts of ourselves. If we are infinite, then we must be both masculine and feminine, “left-brained” and “right-brained,” introverted and extraverted, conscious and unconscious. We accept all of this in ourselves and seek to develop all of it. Only then can we help others actualize themselves.

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