



Judgments—Criticism or Mirror?

You could see the red flush of rage start to rise on the mother's face. "I have never, ever experienced a more defiant, stubborn, selfish child," she said to her friend through clenched teeth.

Washing the dinner dishes for the fifth time that week, her husband was nursing a resentment against his wife's "laziness" in the kitchen, while their son was in his room calling his parents "mean" and "unfair" for requiring that he complete his homework before going out to play.

There's one thing they all agree on: *It's the other person's fault.*

But there's another thing they're all missing: Every judgment we pass on other people is a revelation about ourselves, an expression of our own needs and values.

For example, the mother may need to look at the rage she felt as a child, when defying her own parents resulted in physical punishment, something she would never do to her own son. The husband may need to work on his assertiveness, asking for more shared responsibility in the kitchen. And the son may need to understand the consequences of the choices he made regarding his homework.

In each case, the judgment itself provided a clue for what needs to be looked at, acknowledged or brought out.

"Can't I just have an opinion, though?" we are tempted to ask.

Of course. But judgment is different from the kinds of opinions that come from assessment or objective appraisals. Blame, insults, put-downs, labels, criticism, comparisons and diagnoses are all forms of judgment, all ways of saying that another person is "wrong." Other types of judgments:

"And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" —Matthew 7:3

Judgments based on beliefs and expectations. "You're 11 now, and you should be able to remember to turn the lights off in your room." ["*You're inconsiderate; you're an airhead.*"]

Judgments based on fears. "*She's cold and distant lately; I think she's getting ready to leave me.*"

Judgments based on prejudices and preconceived notions. "*Doesn't he have any decency, flirting around with the receptionist like that?*"

Judgments based on generalizations. "*Believe me, all bosses are mean.*"

Judgments that make us feel better about ourselves. "*How could you not know where Brazil is?*" ["*You're stupid; I'm smart.*"]

Judgments that distract us from taking responsibility. "*She gets all the parts she wants; she's the director's daughter.*"

To enjoy the benefits of being nonjudgmental—more effective communication, reduced misunderstandings, enhanced relationships at home and work, and a sense of emotional freedom and safety—try these actions.

Be aware of where and when we are judging others. This is a necessary first step.

Practice empathy with a soft heart.

What's it like to be the other person?

Listen and keep an open mind. Learn to make objective evaluations about ideas, people, and situations.

Be curious. Ask about the circumstances of someone else's life. Most of our assumptions are based on extremely little real information.

Accept differences. If we can accept each others' choices, and trust in each other to take responsibility for the impact of each choice, then there is so much more freedom for all of us to be ourselves.

Focus on feelings and needs—your own and those of others. This will take you out of judgment and into aliveness. ■

10 Signs of Strength

Flash the Morse Code signal SOS and help is sure to come your way. Master these 10 Signs of Strength (SOS) and the help may appear in the form of improved relationships, greater joy and connection with yourself, better self-care and enhanced communication. All in all, quite a life raft!

1. Respond instead of react.

When we react, we give away our personal power.

2. Identify and learn from your judgments. Judgments are often a reflection of our own inner needs and values.

3. Reach out when you need it.

Asking for help is *not* a weakness.

4. Keep your word—especially to yourself. Beautiful palaces are built on this foundation of integrity.

5. Speak what is true for you.

Authenticity begins here, now.

6. Take time for yourself. This isn't narcissistic or indulgent. Caring for yourself helps you care for others better.

7. Know what you want. Take the time to figure out this one. It's worth it.

8. Don't take things personally. Even if it sounds personal, it usually isn't.

9. Honor your limits. Setting boundaries is an act of caring.

10. Recognize fear as a guide, not a barrier. Your dark side is a friend when seen in the right light. ■

A Letter From

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The days of summer stretch out like a yawning, gold-colored cat awakening from a nap. The heat thaws the last vestiges of chill, and the fruits of our labor begins to ripen, while our northern hemisphere tilts toward the sun, eager to drink its warm rays.

Oddly, it may seem, the tilt results in extremely short shadows, the shortest of the year. Perhaps this is the best time to look at our own personal “shadows,” or “dark sides”—when they aren’t so big and scary. The feature story this issue (page 3) explores this aspect of ourselves and discovers that the dark side comes bearing gifts, if only we can see them.

The page 1 story on judgments uncovers a related gift: Our judgments actually say more about us than the person we are judging. What are yours saying for you?

Learning from our judgments is evidence of emotional strength, as noted in the Top 10 list of Signs of Strength. The *Thriving* quiz in this issue asks the poetic question, “How do I love thee, let me count the many ways”—but this time with the object of our affection being our own bodies. And finally, the back-page article looks at how moving those beautiful bodies can move our stuck inner places.

May all the possibilities of life ripen for you in this summer season of plenty.

How Well Do You Love Your Body?



On hot summer days, when bodies are typically more on display, we may feel particularly vulnerable if our bodies are even a fraction off of the culturally defined male or female perfect 10. Focusing on the ways our bodies serves us and how we can serve them helps us to accept—yes, even love—our bodies and stop obsessing about their appearance. Take this *Thriving* quiz to find out how well you love your body. (The more “true” answers, the more loving your relationship with your body.) Our own opinions of ourselves influence others’ opinions of us much more than we realize.

True False

- 1. I appreciate that my arms enable me to hold someone I love, that my thighs enable me to run.
- 2. I wear comfortable clothes that I really like and that feel good to my body, rather than try to hide or camouflage my body or to follow uncomfortable trends.
- 3. I judge myself as a whole person, not just as a body.
- 4. I do things that let me enjoy my body—dance, take a hot bath, walk, get a massage.
- 5. I act the way I would if I had a perfect body.
- 6. I notice that the appearance of people I admire is unimportant to their success and accomplishments.
- 7. I do things I enjoy and don’t let my weight or shape keep me from them.
- 8. I tell my body at night how much I appreciate what it has allowed me to do throughout the day.
- 9. I exercise to feel good and love my body, not to lose weight.
- 10. I count my blessings, not my blemishes.
- 11. I think of my body as a source of pleasure.
- 12. I wear clothes only if they give me feelings of power, beauty and comfort.
- 13. I consider myself the expert on my body, not magazines.
- 14. I am as “in love” with my body as an infant.
- 15. I think of my body as a tool, as an instrument of my life, not just as an ornament.
- 16. I act as though I am my body’s ally and advocate, not its enemy.
- 17. I listen to my body and take its needs and wishes into consideration when making decisions.
- 18. I refuse to waste time criticizing my body or worrying about my appearance. Instead, I spend my time on something more precious or productive.
- 19. When someone says, “You look great today,” I enthusiastically respond, “Why, thank you so much!”

We may find ourselves more satisfied with our bodies and ourselves if we aim for lifestyle mastery, rather than mastery over body, weight, or appearance. Lifestyle mastery has to do with developing our unique gifts and potential, expressing ourselves, developing meaningful relationships, learning how to solve problems, establishing goals and contributing to life.

Finding the Gifts of the Shadow

Imagine a résumé for your “shadow”—that unconscious part of us that holds all the feelings and beliefs we deny, discount, disown, bury or pretend do not exist:

Vengeful, easily victimized, lazy, bad, untrustworthy. Excel at hopelessness and rage, expert on greed. Not creative. Never finish what I start. Stupid, a loner, damaged goods. Nurture murderous thoughts. Definitely unlovable.

No one likes to admit to a dark side. We spend huge amounts of energy denying and repressing this shadow self. But the more we do, the more havoc it wreaks in our lives.

What many of us don't realize is that the shadow can be a loyal friend, bearing the gifts of depth, integrity, vitality and wholeness—if we choose to meet it and love it.

“Perhaps all the dragons of our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us once, beautiful and brave,” wrote poet Rainer Maria Rilke. “Perhaps everything terrible is in its deepest being something that needs our love.”

How the Shadow Develops

Many forces play a role in forming our shadow selves: parents, siblings, teachers, religious leaders, friends, the culture all have their part. One example:

Little Elsie's mother suddenly entered the hospital two months before the birth of twins. When she returned with the newborns, the overwhelmed woman encouraged 2-year-old Elsie to “be independent” and a good big sister. Anger that erupted was severely reprimanded.

Afraid that her mother would leave again, Elsie learned not to rock the boat. She took care of herself, became a pleaser, kept her needs and feelings to herself.

The Shadow's Gift Revealed

Today, Elsie, a single mother, is uncomfortable with much intimacy in her personal relationships. She smiles a lot and has trouble saying “No” to requests for help, works late into the night, and rarely takes a day for herself. She doesn't “do” anger publicly, but at home, she sometimes explodes at her children.

Working to integrate these lost and neglected parts of her is challenging, Elsie says. But doing so is helping her to commit to a deeply nurturing relationship, “indulge” in more self-care and bring more humor to her parenting.

“I'm realizing how much energy it has cost me to keep this stuff underground,” she says. “I'm trying to say ‘Yes’ more often to myself. And I cheer inside when my children tell me how mad they are!”

These, then, are the gifts of shadow work:

- more genuine self-acceptance
- less guilt and shame associated with our negative feelings and actions

- fewer emotional eruptions during our daily lives
- a clearer and more accurate picture of others (uncolored by shadow projections)
- the opportunity to heal relationships through more honest self-examination.

What's in Your Shadow?

Awareness of the elusive shadow is always the first step towards the treasure box that lies within your shadow. Here are some effective detective tools:

Examine your exaggerated negative feelings

about others. Look at the characteristics of the people in your life whose behavior pushes your buttons, at people you dislike or hate, at what irritates or angers you the most. When we are blind to our own shadow traits, we often “project” these traits onto others.

Notice what you really admire in others. Perhaps, growing up, it was not acceptable to be powerful, creative, intelligent or empathetic. We can also project this “greatness” onto others, not realizing that it is actually our own.

Examine your impulsive and

inadvertent acts. A slip of the tongue can reveal shadow traits. So can “forgetting” things or getting sleepy when it's time to talk about uncomfortable subjects.

Study your dreams.

The shadow often appears in our dreams as a figure of the same sex whom we react to with fear, dislike or disgust.

Observing this figure's actions, attitudes and words can help identify shadow traits.

Examine situations in which you feel humiliated.

Keep an “over-reaction diary” to record when you are possessed by strong feelings of shame or anger, or when your behavior is off the mark in some way.

Observe your distractions. Do you work too many hours? Overeat? Numb your feelings with drugs or alcohol? What feelings are you avoiding?

Track down the inner critic and victim. Write the internal dialogue between the powerful, critical, demanding part of you and the weak part that apologizes and makes excuses. Both are voices of the shadow.

Ultimately, as author James Hillman says, the cure of the shadow is rooted in love.

“How far can our love extend to the broken and ruined parts of ourselves, the disgusting and perverse?” he writes. “How much charity and compassion have we for our own weakness and sickness? How far can we build an inner society on the principle of love, allowing a place for everyone?” ■



Move Your Body, Move Your Soul

Try This Way of Giving Expression to Your Inner Life



Drop the word “exercise,” throw out the term “physical education” and stop cowering when you hear “dance.”

Replace those dreary and loaded terms with the sheer joy and the simple pleasure of moving your body. No matter your size, your shape, the flesh that jiggles, the bones that stick out, the maleness or femaleness of your contour—you will find in your moving body an expression of your deepest desires, your visions, your dreams, your one true voice that is inside you always. Just try it.

“Nothing is more revealing than movement,” said pioneering modern dancer Martha Graham.

Graham understood the body as a source of insight into some of the core issues of one’s life—a source of knowledge and transformation, a pathway to awareness. If given half an opportunity, the body will offer perspectives and ideas never before imagined by the intellect.

When we “move to learn,” rather than “learn to move,” we enter unknown inner territory. We begin to discover aspects of ourselves and our lives from fresh and refreshing perspectives. The personal history stored in our body becomes accessible for examination and dialogue.

The value of movement in giving expression to one’s inner life traces back to earliest human history, when disease

was seen as a loss of soul and dance was an integral part of the healing process. In many cultures today, dance and movement are still vital and profound ways to touch the center of one’s being. When we reduce our body’s movement to losing weight or burning calories or winning over someone else, we lose so much. We keep ourselves locked in a perfectionistic self-consciousness about our bodies. We stay strangers to ourselves.

So go ahead. Find a quiet, private space. Suspend self-criticism and your habitual directives to your body. Engage your curiosity, respect, honesty and courage. The language of your body is one of your most powerful ways to communicate, so express it, don’t suppress it!

Now, move your body and listen to its magic.

Here are some suggestions to help in the process:

- If it helps, move to music.
- Love the space you move through and bless your body for taking you there.
- Think of the expressiveness in the curl of your toes, the crook of your finger, the bend of your knee, the thrust of your shoulder, the roll of your hips.
- Remember that your total commitment to your body and to your deepest self will transform you and those around you. ■