

Workshop 2: Being Seen in Tribe with Christian Pankhurst

Shadow Work: Integrating the Parts of Yourself for Complete Healing

Have you ever felt like you're only showing the world a fraction of who you are? Like there's a hidden part of yourself, lurking in the shadows, that you're afraid to acknowledge? This hidden part is what I call your shadow self, and it holds immense power to unlock healing and a deeper understanding of who you truly are.

In a recent workshop, I guided participants through an introduction to shadow work, which involves integrating these denied or exiled aspects of ourselves. It's about welcoming everything, allowing all that wants to move to move. The beautiful thing about this work is that it honors every part of you. Whether it's your heartbreak, your fire, or your numbness, it's all welcome and sacred.

What is Shadow Work?

Shadow work, at its core, involves bringing awareness to the unconscious aspects of our personality. These shadows often develop from experiences where we felt shame, judgment, or were told that certain emotions or behaviors were unacceptable. According to research in the *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, integrating these shadow aspects can lead to greater psychological wholeness and improved relationships.

Healing, from a shadow work perspective, is integration. It is not about banishing the negative aspects of ourselves. It's about creating space for all parts. This approach inherently gives you permission to come as you are. There is no performance necessary.

Creating a Safe Space for Exploration

One of the key elements of shadow work is creating a safe environment for exploration. In the workshop, I emphasized the importance of building a "group field," a collective

energy that fosters trust and vulnerability. This is because our wounds and traumas often occur in connection, and thus, they require connection to heal.

I encouraged participants to practice sharing authentically, even if it felt risky. This meant dropping the masks and personas we often wear to present ourselves in an acceptable way. It's about expanding your capacity to feel and welcoming more in. In doing so, we can connect more deeply with ourselves and with others.

Somatic Tracking: Tuning into Your Body

To begin the process of shadow work, I introduced a practice called somatic tracking. This involves paying close attention to the sensations in your body, without judgment or interpretation. You simply name what you're feeling.

For example, you might notice tightness in your chest, tingling in your hands, or warmth in your face. Somatic tracking is a communication practice that is, unfortunately, unusual in our culture. Most of us speak from experience rather than from direct somatic landing. The goal is to anchor into the somatics.

Why Focus on Sensations?

The reason I emphasize sensations is because, as we start to explore more challenging aspects of our shadow, our bodies will react. We might feel contraction, tension, or a sense of closing down.

- By noticing these physical responses, we can gain insight into how we protect ourselves from feeling vulnerable emotions.
- It also gives us the key to unlocking the ability to feel more fully.
- Noticing where your body isn't open is the first key to unlocking that capacity to feel more and to welcome more in.

By learning to identify these closing patterns, we can begin to open ourselves up to new possibilities.

The Power of Shared Vulnerability

A significant part of the workshop involved participants sharing their experiences with the group. I invited people to be seen and felt in the field by starting with the phrase, "May I have your attention?" This simple request created a powerful moment of presence and connection.

Before speaking, each person paused to receive the attention and energy of the group. This practice allowed them to tap into their authentic selves, speaking from the heart rather than from the mind.

“You Are My Medicine”

I shared a mantra for participants to repeat as they looked at the faces on the screen: “You are my medicine.” This idea emphasizes that everyone in the group holds a unique gift or lesson for us. Even those we might initially feel aversion to can offer valuable insights.

This exercise helps to break down the illusion of separation and fosters a sense of collective healing.

Unpacking Shame and the Need to Be Seen

During the workshop, several participants bravely shared their struggles with shame and the longing to be seen. One participant, Anna, spoke about her tendency to judge others, realizing that these judgments were reflections of her own shadow aspects.

Another participant, Katarina, discussed her shame around being “needy,” recognizing that this fear kept her from claiming her right to be seen. This is the point of shadow work: to acknowledge that there is a fierceness and strength within us. This strength may be covering the softer underbelly. To be able to be aware of both is key.

Transforming Tension into Life Force

One participant, Dana, spoke about her struggle to speak up, feeling tension in her chest and throat. I encouraged her to recognize that this tension was actually trapped life force, energy waiting to be liberated. I validated her tension, and commended her for speaking up.

Reclaiming Your Voice

By daring to bring these hidden parts into the light, we can reclaim our voices and transform our pain into power. It allows us to be all of who we are. We can be all of who we are, holding nothing back. When this is allowed, there is a sense of liberation and healing.

From Impact to Medicine: Taking Action

Towards the end of the workshop, I introduced the concept of “medicine shares.” This involves reflecting on how the workshop has impacted you and translating that into a concrete intention or action you will take in your life. It is taking what you’re learning and turning it into something practically applicable in your here and now.

For example, someone might realize that they also have a needy part. The medicine they extract from that is to claim their intention to welcome that part home. They will listen to their needs and practice asking for those needs to be met in their life, instead of allowing it to come out sideways.

Key Takeaways

To recap, here are the key takeaways from the shadow work workshop:

- Shadow work involves integrating the denied aspects of ourselves for greater wholeness.
- Creating a safe and supportive environment is crucial for vulnerability and connection.
- Somatic tracking helps us tune into our bodies and identify patterns of closing down.
- Sharing our experiences with others allows us to break down the illusion of separation and foster collective healing.
- Transforming our shadows into medicine involves taking concrete actions to integrate what we’ve learned into our lives.

Embracing Your Full Potential

Shadow work is not always easy, but it is incredibly rewarding. By embracing our shadows, we can unlock hidden gifts, heal deep wounds, and live more authentically. This work is personal, relational, and transpersonal. We can do it for ourselves and for everyone.

As you continue on your own journey of self-discovery, remember that you are not alone. We all have shadows, and we all have the power to transform them into light.