

Shadow belongs to light

What is shadow, and how does it arise? From a scientific point of view, shadow is found in places where light cannot reach, where obstacles, or in a figurative sense resistances, obstruct the direct path to the light source. And thus greater darkness prevails. Areas that want to elude the eye of the beholder, and where perhaps one does not like to look at all. One possibly does not want to know more precisely what might be hidden there.

But does it change reality if at a certain moment some things are faded out of the field of vision? Whether consciously or unconsciously. Like the proverbial ostrich, we bury our heads in the sand in order not to see the supposedly unpleasant things. The real ostrich is already a little further here, he sees the danger in the eye, and usually flees, or fights, if this seems unavoidable. And I think, if there had really been head-in-the-sand ostriches in the past, they would probably have been sorted out by evolution relatively quickly and become extinct.

Shadows are a part of this world, just like light. Light and shadow are mutually dependent, could hardly exist without each other, as long as not everything is seen or felt. The light permeates everything. But how could one characterise shady sides of being human, shadows on the psyche, the soul? For me, a characteristic, a feature, would be that shadowy sides have the capacity to cause suffering, for oneself, for others, or for all involved; at the moment, or in the future. The dualism of light and shadow, darkness, can also be interpreted as the dualism of the supposedly good and the supposedly harmful, evil. This is one of the most frequently addressed themes in all the arts. From the paradisiacal Fall of Man, to Goethe's Faust, the Lord of the Rings or Star Wars.

According to the second Noble Truth of the Buddha, suffering arises from desire. Through things that one is clinging to, that one cannot let go of, even though there may be the wish to do so. Such as addictions, dependencies on alcohol, tobacco, drugs, video games, pornography, or problematic sexual practices such as paedophilia or sadism. This does not mean that alcoholic beverages may not be enjoyed in moderation, that one or the other video game may not be played, or that some pornographic films may not be watched. It becomes problematic when the freedom to do one of these things, or by the same token not to do them, gets lost, compulsiveness, loss of control in our actions prevails.

Moreover, these examples illustrate that there can be shadowy sides that are tolerable, livable, even if they cause some suffering, and others for which I would deny this possibility altogether. Especially when a shadowy side causes great torment, possibly lifelong emotional injury and trauma for other people, in particular children. Which, of the examples given, would make paedophilia one of the dark sides that must not be practised under any circumstances.

But what might be Tantra's view of our shadowy sides? In an earlier text for the Tantra Network, I wrote about my understanding of Tantra, and I should like to apply these ideas to dealing with our shadowy sides. For me, Tantra is a tool, a means to grow connection, love in the broadest sense. The connection of a person to himself and his environment, the outside world.

In relation to our shadowy sides, this connection means that the darkest areas of the soul are also perceived and allowed to be there. For would it be helpful to condemn these dark sides? Could this bring about a change for the better in the moment? From experience, trying to push them away or repress them tends to have the opposite effect. Because even pushing things away requires a certain amount of holding onto, special attention. Which in turn makes letting go more difficult. But consciously noticing our shadowy sides does not mean that one has to react to them with an action. Ideally, one can notice the impulse and then leave it to itself, like thoughts in meditation. This offers the best chance for the light to penetrate further and further, to reach and illuminate ever more diverse realms.

Finally, I would like to tell a personal story showing that shadowy sides may also have a meaning, a function, in development, growth. For Christmas 2010, as a present, I gave my son a video game, *Monster Hunter Tri*. I had already enjoyed playing computer games from time to time in the past, and so I had the idea of possibly playing this game together with my son, as a father-son activity, so to speak. But it turned out that the game was rather complex, and my son was perhaps still too young back then. In any case, he didn't show much interest in it at the time. Still, the game fascinated me all the more, and I spent a lot of time with it. More than would objectively probably be considered "good".

Until around 2015, I played *Monster Hunter Tri*, and also its subsequent titles, at times quite excessively. Sometimes I thought I was close to video game addiction, at least on the borderline, which caused me clear remorse when I neglected other things that were supposedly more important. On the other hand, I felt very happy while playing, could completely forget about emotional and physical pain that plagued me at that time. And at some point, after another step of personal development, growth, I could let go of the game. It had fulfilled its function, and I haven't touched *Monster Hunter* since. I only sometimes watch videos of outstanding players on YouTube.

As the wise Chinese farmer said in a rather well-known story: "Who knows what's good or bad?" All that remains, at a given moment, is to follow our heart's feelings as best we can. So that the love may grow.