

Continua of Practice Series

CONTINUA OF PRACTICE: SHADOW TO LIGHT

by Rodney Smith | October 6, 2015

“Awakening: A Paradigm Shift of the Heart,” will deepen your understanding of these talks.

Look at our tendency to see life as either black or white or from any other polarizing perspective. Remember, on the spiritual journey the more definition we force upon the world, the more defined and clear is our individuation and the more isolated we feel. We gain our selfhood from creating physical and psychological boundaries upon our surround. Our self-definition is created by defining what we are as opposed to what we are not, which includes our physical, mental, emotional, psychological, and spiritual definitions. Freedom is coming out of these shadowy images created by our imposed boundaries and accepting the clear light of our humanity on all fronts.

The path can be summarized as “truth in, truth out,” which means seeing things the way they actually are and responding in alignment with that seeing. The distortions come from the egoic center that we place between the incoming data and the outgoing responses. This center tries to arrange the data to suit “my” preferences and respond according to “my” needs. It does this with words, ideas, and opinions. The spiritual path is the elimination of the distorting element through the realization that it is configured around a hollow center.

The ego attempts to hide or distance itself from difficulties and prolong contact with the pleasurable. It turns away from what it fears and by doing so creates a shadow effect in our consciousness. The shadow becomes that part of ourselves that we deem unacceptable. The shadow remains within our consciousness even as we attempt to expel it. The tension from this conflict is enormous. We project the shadow externally and fear being possessed by the powers of darkness even as this self-created force lies within our consciousness. We set up boundaries of tension, fenced lines of protection, to keep what is unacceptable at bay. We are left with the symptoms of tension, anxiety, and fear, which sets the world up to be as terrorizing as we project it to be.

When we want one thing, we are also defining what we do not want - everything else but that one thing. An important dharma principle is that when we assert our influences in one direction, we become bound in the opposite direction by the very tension we use to define what we want. St Augustine said, “To act is to sin, to create is to destroy” This is true of our opinions, beliefs, ideas, attitudes, self-descriptions, etc. We literally create both forces simultaneously. We try to strengthen one at the expense of the other, which in effect strengthens both equally. In order to ward off the opposite influence, we try to proclaim our friendly domain with exaggerated rhetoric. We proselytize, convert, preach, and recruit because if we slow down or stop the tension the antagonizing position gains traction within our minds, which frightens us and sends us back to the pulpit.

The mind separates out and divides. By insisting that everything has a definition, meaning, and purpose we suspend the wonder of the world and place its endless possibilities on hold. This dharma continuum

seeks to move our spiritual journey to the right side through less definition. By dropping boundaries, opening the spaces, and allowing light to flood into the darkened areas of consciousness, we meet life in wonder. We have to intentionally seek out those areas of tension and welcome them in the light of day (this is insight). The false nirvana of this continuum is the hardened certainty that the shadow offers us in terms of our beliefs and righteous actions. To move forward we have to lose that confidence and sureness and fall backward into uncertainty. The counter-influence is realizing that we are the creators of our own heaven and hell, and to give up hell, we have to release both.



See [Series Overview](#) for a description of this diagram.

FOR YOUR CONTEMPLATION

The first step in releasing a boundary is to acknowledge the symptoms that result from cutting part of yourself away. Touch your symptoms with caring attention, without judging or blaming. Allow yourself to feel your symptoms of reactive thoughts, prejudices, anxieties, and disapproval. Feel the symptom fully and ask, “What is this symptom protecting me from knowing about myself?” Notice that when you dislike a mannerism in someone you perceive that trait external to yourself. But you must know it in yourself in order to dislike in someone else. Disliking what you perceive in yourself, you pin the responsibility of ownership onto another person, and the boundary is secure.

This series is based on the book, "[Awakening: A Paradigm Shift of the Heart](#)" (Shambhala 2014).