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# Me & my Shadow: Reflections on the Counsellor's Dark Side

Greg & Meryem Brown



Ps 51:6

Surely you desire  
truth  
in the inner parts...

outer

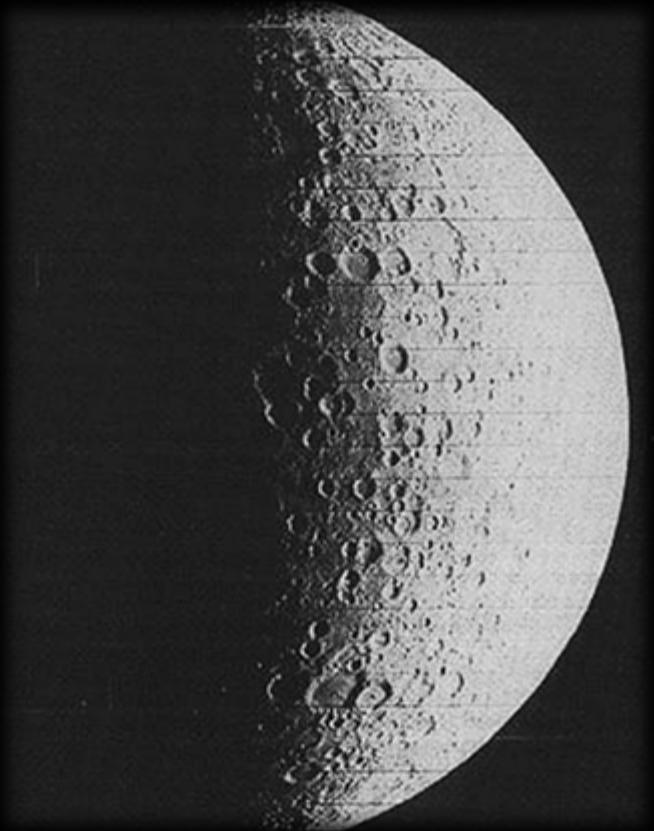
inner



Layers of personhood



What  
is the  
Shadow?

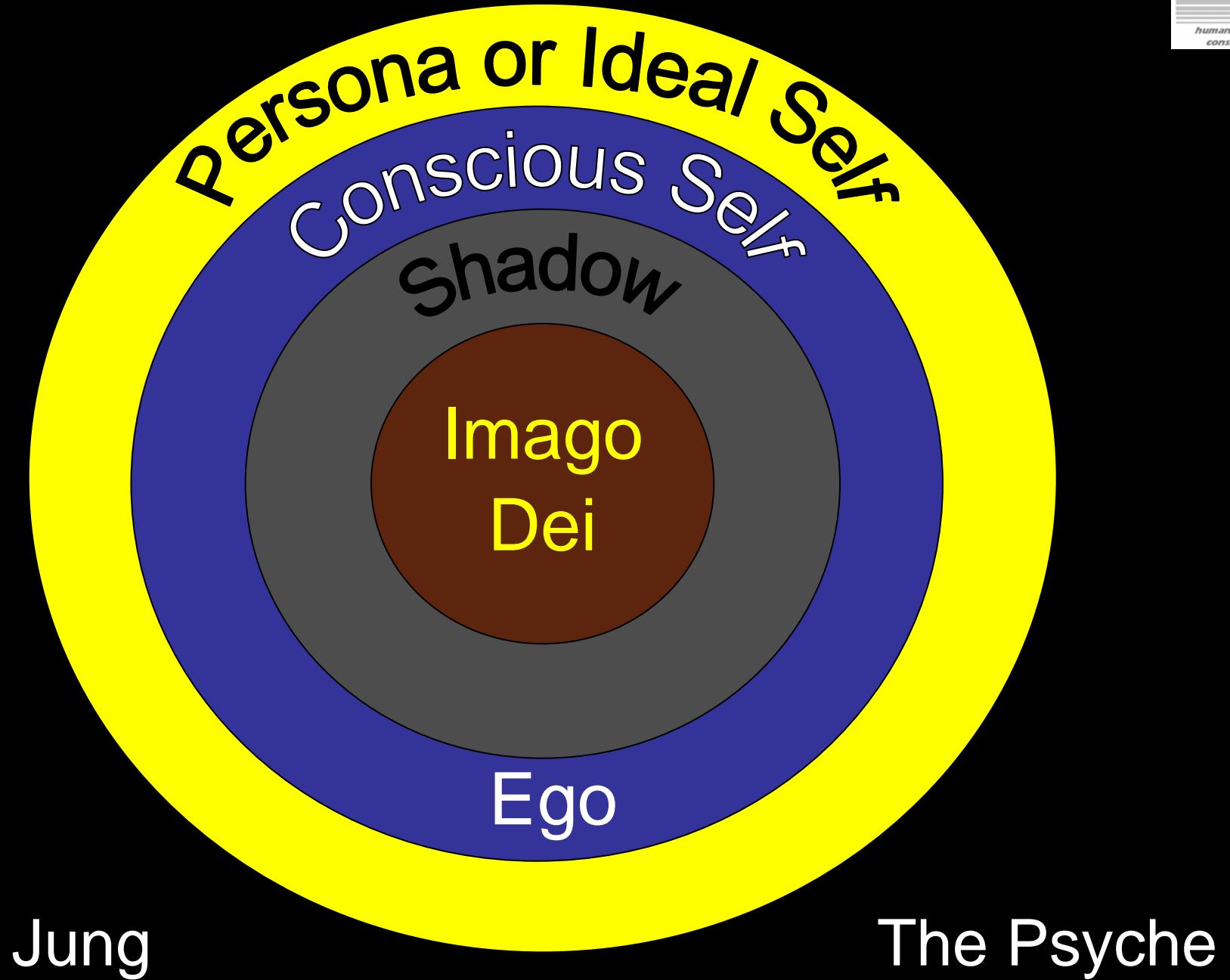


Everyone is a moon,  
and has a dark side  
which [s/he] never  
shows to anybody.

Mark Twain



In Jungian psychology, the shadow is a part of the unconscious mind. It consists of shortcomings, repressed weaknesses and instincts, and is a term used to describe the 'dark aspects of the personality' (Jung, 1959).



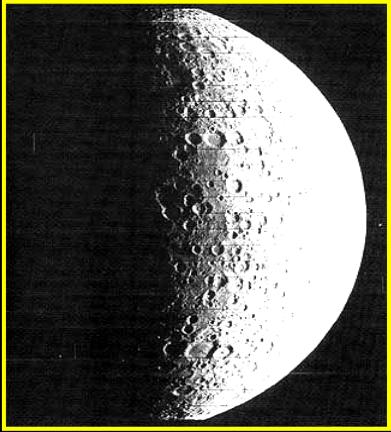
- the *persona* - how we would like to be seen by the world - our public face
- the *shadow* - what we do not see or know about ourselves (*good & bad*) OR what we do not want ourselves or others to see or know



# Jung:



'shadow side of the psyche'  
'the Other in us'  
'the repressed self'  
'the thing a person has no  
    wish to be'  
'the alter ego'  
'the dark side of the self'  
'the alienated self'



... our dark side is not intrinsically evil.  
It is simply a part of being human ...  
but needs to be redeemed ...

(McIntosh & Rima, 1997)



When I accept the dark parts  
of myself as my own, when I  
'own' them ... then I can accept  
the dark parts of others.

(Hudnut, 1989)

...the process of identifying and accepting my unwanted qualities has been instrumental in my quest to become more authentic and genuine in my life and in my professional role as a counsellor. (Inaba, 2006)



It is not uncommon for someone in a helping profession, whether psychological or spiritual, to lack authenticity because they do not pay attention to the existence of their shadow, and their impulses.

This neglect has caused some to commit gross moral and professional misdeeds against their clients, followers or students.



(Monbourquette, 2001, pp. 130-131)

To honor and accept one's shadow  
is a profound spiritual discipline.  
It is whole-making and thus holy ...  
To own one's shadow is to reach  
a holy place.



(Johnson, 1991)

# The counsellor's dark side

Norcross & Guy suggest that, for counsellors, 'it is certainly less threatening, individually & collectively, to look outward than inward', citing Anna Freud who once commented that 'becoming a psychotherapist was one of the most sophisticated defense systems: granting us an aura of control & superiority & avoiding personal evaluation ourselves'. (2007, p. 1)

What is more  
foolish:



the child afraid  
of the dark

or

the adult afraid  
of the light?



Maurice Freehill



Take a candle  
into the darkness  
and redeem it.

Lead us into the darkness  
that we may find what is  
concealed;

That we may confess it  
towards the light...

Amen



Leunig

# Shadow work:



an integrated self





# Counsellor Jane: an unintegrated self

*Jane was driving home from after a full day of counselling followed by an evening staff meeting, where she had (once again) agreed to take on an extra role. It had not been an easy day. Startled by a sudden noise, she looked up to see the driver of the car behind beep his horn, & make some angry gesture. Jane realised the traffic-light had turned green & drove off, swearing under her breath. She turned on the radio just in time to hear an advertisement inviting people to an upcoming workshop where someone Jane used to know would be the keynote speaker. They had completed their Master's programs in the same year.*

*'Looks like he's made it to the big-time now', Jane ruminated. 'He's even had a book published ... Bet he's feeling pretty cocky ... Probably lost touch with what it's like for the rest of us ... Who has the time to write books, anyway? Probably counsellors who don't counsel!' By this time Jane had arrived home. The house was quiet & everyone was asleep. The kitchen was in a shambles. 'That would be right', she muttered, 'It seems I'm the one who always has to clean up after everybody.' Jane took a tub of ice cream out of the freezer & a bottle of wine out of the fridge, went into the lounge room, picked up a DVD of the soaps she had previously recorded & pressed the 'start' button ...*



What could be happening  
below the surface in Jane  
that may be pointing towards  
shadow content?



How is the  
professional caregiver's  
shadow formed?

As I reflect upon my desire to become a member of the counselling profession, I continually ask myself, "Why do I desire to become a counsellor?" Am I compelled by the belief that I am a good person if I help others? Do I believe I have a special gift to help others? Do I identify with the wealth & social prestige of being a psychologist? Do I gain a sense of pleasure & importance from the belief that my clients need me? Do I experience a sense of power & control over my clients? My honest answer is 'Yes'.

(Inaba, 2006, p.9)



## How is the caregiver's shadow formed?

Monbourquette (2001) defined the shadow as 'everything we have driven back into the unconscious for fear of being rejected by people who played a determining role in our upbringing' (p. 11).



3 'tribes' that form me:  
family of origin, church,  
professional formation



Shadow (inner me)  
- my rejected self

Persona (outer me)  
- my idealised self



# How is the caregiver's shadow formed?

- Family of origin:  
my first 'tribe'



No-one is a born therapist. We are sculpted to be caretakers in early relationships ...  
Innate dispositions combine with environmental & parental influences to determine which children grow into caretakers ...

[P]sychotherapists often come out of childhood with strong conscious & unconscious needs to:

- Be perfect;
- Be liked;
- Avoid conflict;
- Not have negative emotions;
- Protect others from negative feelings, &
- Have few needs and no strong opinions.

(Cozolino, 2004, pps. 176, 177, 184)



# How is the caregiver's shadow formed?

- Family of origin:  
→ a failure to have  
needs met



*In his family of origin, Jack suffered daily rejection because his two siblings were the favourite of either their mother or father: he was the third wheel. Pushing this pain deep inside, but harnessing its energy as a passionate sense of injustice, Jack took on many causes throughout his life, eventually becoming a counsellor. Now, serving in a team, Jack finds it very difficult to cope with what he perceives as the team leader favouring other members of the team over him. He starts avoiding team meetings & isolating himself, whilst seeking affirmation & a power-base amongst admin & ancillary staff & sometimes clients. He doesn't realise he is doing this, much less why.*

What were Jack's unmet needs? What might be operating in his shadow as a result?



# How is the caregiver's shadow formed?

- Church Family:  
my second 'tribe'

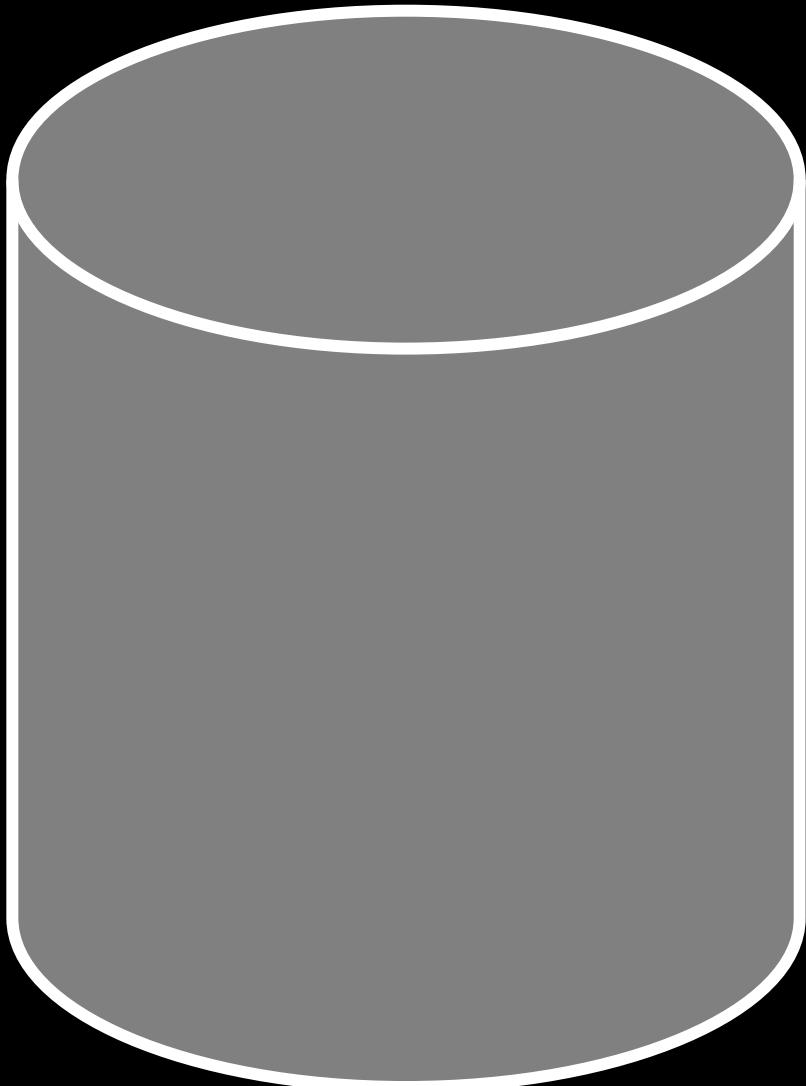


# Acceptable



Keep

# Unacceptable



Reject

'For Christian people, who are trained to be nice, kind, loving and unselfish,

the shadow is typically hostile, aggressive, conniving, ambitious and self-serving.'

(Sanford, 1982)





What is kept in the  
dark will inevitably become  
the dark side of ourselves.

Charles Ringma (2000, # 102)

Keep something in the dark long enough  
and it will probably behave badly.

Masters (2010, p 20)



# How is the caregiver's shadow formed?

1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> tribes ->

Personal shadow

3<sup>rd</sup> tribe ->

Professional shadow





# How is the caregiver's shadow formed?

- Professional formation

my third 'tribe'

(Early training & subsequent professional communities)



# Motivations for becoming a therapist: (conscious)

Help people

- compassion
- moral duty
- guilt

Pleasure - own, or vicarious pleasure  
in seeing others made whole

Power

Need to be needed



(Sussman, 2007)

# Motivations for becoming a therapist: (unconscious)



Master personal conflicts

Personal satisfaction & psychological  
benefits

Instinctual aims: sexual, voyeuristic,  
exhibitionism

Narcissism & self-development

(Sussman, 2007)

# Socialisation into the role



# The Idealised Self



The rejected self



Page (1999) believes that he lost some of his sense of fun and mischief when he commenced his professional training.



Page suggests that any number of aspects of the personality can reside in a counsellor's role shadow, including bluntness, impatience, jealousy, envy, pessimism, cynicism, teasing behaviour, unrealistic idealism, a desire to gossip, and the need to be the centre of attention (1999).





As counsellors our shadow  
will be present in the  
counselling room. It will have  
an agenda, and 'there are  
likely to be items on this  
agenda that run contrary to  
the best interests of clients'.



(Page, 1999)

# The Shadow in the Counselling Room

- an emphasis on the power differential between therapist & client;
- projected inferiority onto clients;
- development of a saviour complex;
- imposition of one's own values & morals onto the client;
- over-overstating professional competence.
- coercion of various forms.

Zweig & Wolf, 1997

## The Shadow in the Counselling Room (2)

- the therapist being blind to an important area of exploration;
- focussing on an issue more relevant to the therapist than it is to the client;
- the client being used for the therapist's vicarious or real gratification;
- consciously or unconsciously leading a client;
- choosing interventions that are not in the client's best interests.



# How is the caregiver's shadow formed?

- Helping personality profile



Karen Horney's (1942) seminal work on the idealised self identified ten neurotic needs, including:



*approval and affection  
power  
prestige  
personal admiration  
personal achievement  
perfection and unassailability*

# The Helping Personality

- An idealised self-image;
- Guilt, personal dissatisfaction & self-criticism;
- Obsessive-compulsive characteristics;
- Affective controls on sexuality & aggression;
- Passivity;
- Inadequate conflict resolution strategies;
- Intro-punitive hostility;
- Stress symptoms.

(Eadie, 1975)

# The helping personality

- inferiority;
- defense systems to compensate for inferiority;
- an idealised self or persona;
- elements of narcissism.

Inaba (2006)  
qualitative study of 6 therapists

Cozolino describes a dream he had soon after he commenced his counsellor training. He was sitting in with a client whose face was an amalgam of the faces of a number of his counselees merged into one:

*'I sat, not really listening, but rather thinking of what to say next ... [I felt I was] about to say something profound. A chorus of angels began to sing. Beams of sunlight penetrated the ceiling. I half expected God to walk through the door – until I realised I was playing [God's] role ... [When I woke up I realised] ... My fantasy of my role as a therapist was connected to salvation. I realised that I saw my job as saving my clients by saying or doing something miraculous.'*

(2004, p. 14)



*...the all-too-common tendency for therapists to see themselves as emotionally healthier & morally superior to their clients.*

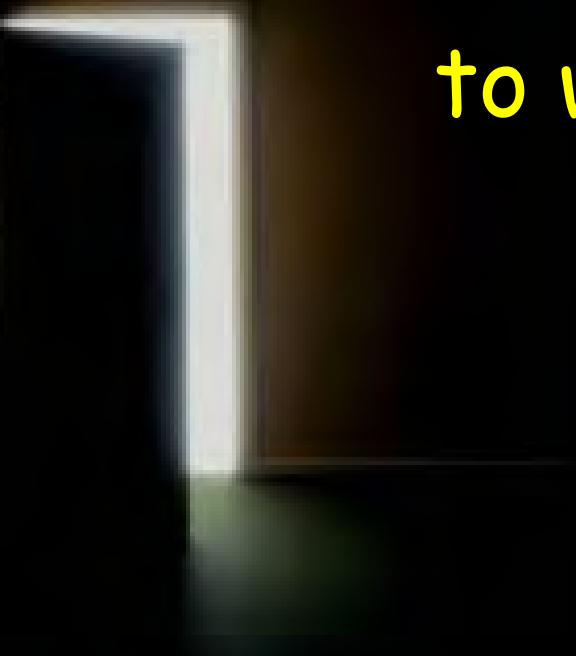
Karen Maroda, (Sussman, 2007, p. xi)

# Layers of personhood



*... we come to maturity  
by integrating  
not only the light  
but also the dark side  
of our story  
into our selfhood.*

Henri Nouwen



The shadow  
is the door  
to what is real.

Elie Hunbert

# Counsellor Jane: towards an integrated self

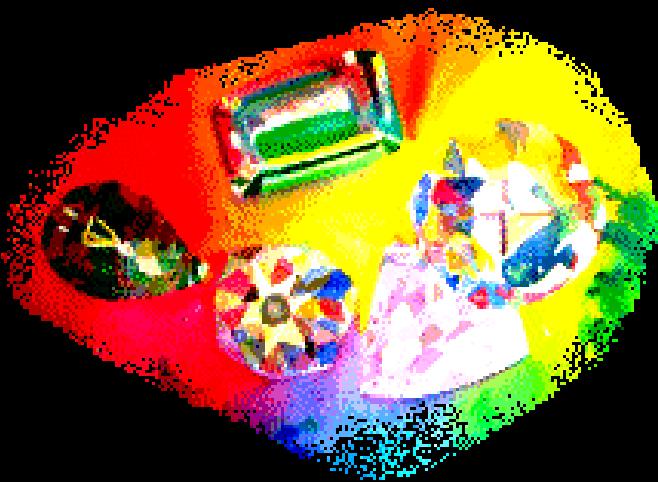


Jane was driving home after a full day of counselling followed by an evening staff meeting – it had not been an easy day ... 'I knew it would be a tough one', she reflected, 'but not this hard! I feel like I've been run over by a truck! ... I sure am glad I have my Supervision appointment this week. I'll need to work out with Barb whether I didn't prepare enough for this meeting ... How come I didn't read the dynamics properly? And why did I get so angry with the receptionist?' Startled by a sudden noise, she looked up to see the driver of the car behind beep his horn & make some angry gesture. Jane realised the traffic-light had turned green, mouthed 'Sorry' into the rear vision mirror & drove off. 'Man, I must be even more exhausted than I thought'.

Jane turned on the radio just in time to hear an advertisement inviting people to an upcoming workshop where someone Jane used to know would be the keynote speaker. They had completed their Master's programs in the same year. 'Looks like he's made it to the big-time now', Jane ruminated. 'He's even had a book published. Bet he's feeling pretty cocky ... Whoa - just a minute! ... Where is all this coming from? Am I jealous? Probably ... a bit. But I think it's more about tonight's meeting. Sometimes, it all feels so hard ... I guess I have more to unpack at Supervision than I thought.'

Jane had arrived home; everyone was asleep. As she walked from the garage, Jane did her usual 'soul stock-take' ... 'Hungry? No, not for food – at least tonight's caterers were good! ... Angry? Yep, but mainly frustrated because I didn't handle that meeting as well as I should have ... Lonely? Yeah – I wish Jack was awake so I could talk to him ... Tired? My body's wrecked, but I'm still too wound up to sleep for a while.'

Remembering that last time she felt this way, she'd slumped on the couch & watched DVDs that just made her feel lonely & depressed, Jane took a DVD out of the boxed series of her favourite comedy. She'd asked Jack to buy it for her last birthday for times exactly like this ...



I will give you  
the treasures of darkness,  
riches stored in secret places.

Isaiah 45:2-3



Psalm 139:13

*You knit (wove)  
me together  
in my mother's  
womb.*

# knit together

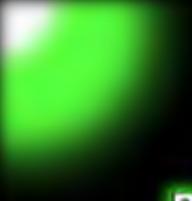
## integration



## whole



## holy



Dedicated to  
**Holiness**

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Trust us. We've never hurt a soul,  
never exploited or taken  
advantage of anyone.

*2 Cor 7:2 (The Message)*

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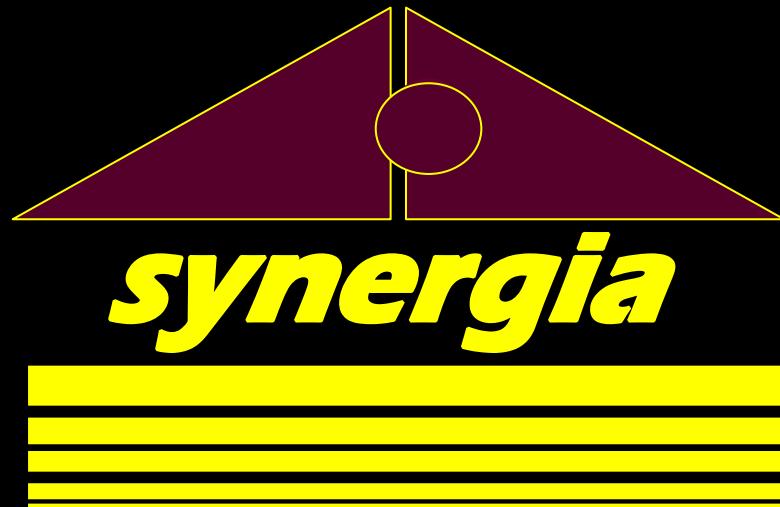
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