

*The*  
BOOK OF  
SHADOW  
WORK

**ALSO BY KEILA SHAHEEN**

*The Shadow Work Journal*

*The Vibrational Poetry Book*

*The Lucky Girl Journal*

*The 369 Journal*

*The*  
**BOOK OF  
SHADOW  
WORK**

**Unlock the True You: The Must-Have Guide  
to Inner Healing and Authenticity**

**KEILA SHAHEEN**

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## INTRODUCTION

# HOW I GOT HERE



I live in a funky old house with my husband in Austin, Texas. Most days I spend cooped up in my little office upstairs, where the heater hums year-round. Surrounded by paintings, sheet music, and books that contain what I believe to be the greatest secrets of the universe, here is where I hold space for all parts of myself: the good, the sad, the optimistic, the angry. Here I am the creator, the doer, the thinker, the dreamer.

This is also the place where I ask myself hard questions, like “How did I get here?” Some days I know right away. Some days I need to be reminded, and so gravity pulls me down to the floor, where I am eye level with the stacks of my past journals. My current self needs to hear from my past self. Seeing where I came from, recognizing where I’ve gotten to, has a way of making me grateful and inspiring me to dream of more. It is a prelude that leads me to ask myself, “Where am I going next?”

As I write this, I’m reading an entry in one of my old journals, when I was twenty-two. In it, I proclaim (yes, in all caps): “I’VE EXPERIENCED THE SMALLNESS AND THE GRANDNESS, THE POWER AND THE POWERLESSNESS, THE LIVELINESS AND THE LIFELESSNESS. ALL TO HAVE CLARITY. I CAME

HERE TO KNOW WHAT MY PURPOSE IS IN THIS LIFETIME. I FEEL SOMETHING INSIDE OF ME SO BIG. I CAN'T EVEN SEE IT, BUT I CAN FEEL IT. IT CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.”

I penned those words shortly after coming out of a depressive episode, a period when I contemplated my purpose on earth, questioned the callousness of the world, and wondered if, or when, I would ever get my spark back.

Have you ever felt as if the very essence of your being has been dimmed? As if you were a ghost and everyone else was real? The days come and go, and you're stuck in a loop of repetition leading nowhere, concerned only by survival. The thought of restarting each morning is a disappointment.

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In a loop like this, one disappointment leads to another, and the expectation of less and worse reinforces itself. Loops build momentum over time, and they can go on forever if you don't



do something to intervene. The deeper the loop, the less control you have over it, and the more control it has over you. In Buddhism this is called *samskara*. Samskaras are habits, patterns, or mental scars we form through repeated experiences.

**Reminder to affirm: I am not the sum of my habits, but the consciousness observing them.**

When you are suffering from deeply ingrained samskaras, rooted in long-past childhood experiences, how your life looks on the surface might not correlate with the intensity of your emotions. That dissonance can make you feel even further misunderstood, like you're living a dual existence.

That was the case for me. Nothing happening in my life seemed to justify my suffering, so I also felt guilty for feeling bad. From the outside, everything looked exciting and on track: after getting married, I moved from Houston to Austin for a new job at a tech company. I was excited at first, but soon that excitement turned into anxiety and fear of failure. What I thought was my big break felt more like a big mistake. In meetings, the stage fright that haunted me when I was little came back, and I couldn't speak up. The corporate lingo was confusing, and I wasn't even sure what my job was supposed to be.

I felt small, weak, and like a failure, just as I used to in school. Back then, I wasn't part of any clique, and the subtle bullying and judgment weighed on me. Every bad grade felt like a punch in the gut, especially when I was trying my hardest. All those feelings came rushing back in this digital playground of a corporate workplace.

I also started feeling like something important was missing—like I wasn't following my true calling, even though I didn't know what it was. The real me felt hidden deep down inside, far away, and I wanted to free her. I had to. I just didn't have a clue how to go about it.

The hardest part was when my husband would ask me what was wrong, and I had no idea how to explain myself. I felt a wave of relief to be asked, finally, after pretending to be okay for so

long. But I felt suffocated as my emotions pressed heavily against me. Silence settled into the air instead, leaving gaps and disconnects when usually our conversation flowed easily. Then I'd have an emotional breakdown, with a rush of tears and confusing fragments of half thoughts I had to force out of myself.

No matter who you are, it takes tremendous courage to admit your struggles. It's even harder when you're used to putting everyone else's struggles above your own. Growing up with my parents and my brother, I was used to being the strong one. I had to keep it together for them. I was the peacemaker, the mediator, the source of sanity when emotional turmoil arose. Opening up and letting someone else help me, even my husband, the person who really cared, was almost impossible.

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When you're on the outside looking in, everything seems clear. But when you're on the inside trying to look further in, it's often dark and confusing, like trying to see your reflection without a mirror. That's why it's so much easier to help a friend out, and it's much harder to do the same for yourself.

I finally found the courage to seek help. The pandemic was raging, so I approached the Zoom session I had booked with a therapist with hope and excitement. From her profile, she seemed like she could really understand someone like me: introverted, intense, sensitive, with a strong sense of justice. (I am a Myers-Briggs INFJ, if that means anything to you.) But then the universe decided to add a twist to my story. Technical glitches kept me stranded outside the virtual meeting room for the first

five minutes. That delay was too much for the therapist, who cut me off, reacting without any understanding. She sent me an email, brimming with frustration, expressing her disappointment over my delay and concluding that we weren't a good fit.

I wasn't in a great state for that. It felt like the universe was serving me up even more of the isolation and misunderstanding I was struggling to escape. I was finally ready to open up, and yet the world seemed to turn its back, leaving me with so many unanswered questions and a heavy heart.

Sometimes starting once isn't enough. You have to get knocked down some more times before things start to look up. It takes a few forceful interventions to stop the loop's momentum before you can break out and begin to move in a new direction.

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My sadness started turning into anger. We live in a world that is terrified of women's anger, but I assure you that it can be an exquisite catalyst. I was angry because I wasn't getting over feeling cast aside, lost, and unaccepting of myself. I also knew I didn't want to get used to that feeling of being adrift and self-hating.

Sometimes anger is beautiful, transformative. The anger of when you've had enough. The anger that makes you set

boundaries. The anger that transforms passivity into change. This anger signals that you are ready for more.

As it went from a simmer to a boil, my anger at myself and at the world turned into passion and fire. I decided I would just go find myself on my own, whatever it took. I was raised in a primarily Catholic household, which laid the foundation for my belief in a loving, omnipresent God. However, deep inside my being, I held a more universal understanding of this divine love. I began waking up at the ungodly hour of 4 a.m. to read and study works of spirituality and self-help, meditate, and do yoga. I looked for new techniques and insights into how I could transcend my pain by engaging with it, not trying to escape it or wish it away.

Somehow, even then, I knew that facing it all was key. Somehow I approached myself with reverence and compassion and gave space to the emotional storms I was still going through. It was as if a light had turned on in the darkness, showing me the way forward. I held my chest to feel my heartbeat, and I remembered that I was connected to all that is. I remembered, too, that I was the driver of my life. I realized that I could soar, despite my trauma, my conditioning, my anxieties. I understood that the way to all that was within me, not outside me.

I started to ask myself questions and listened with an open heart and an open mind to what came back. When I felt triggered by something or someone, instead of instantly reacting to the trigger, I would slow down and ask myself, “What would someone who truly loved themselves do right now? What would my highest self do?”

The answer I got was to journal.

So I started to pour out my fears into notebooks, unraveling them to understand their roots. Soon the process was not simply writing, it was transferring the weight of my emotions from the depths of my being onto the lightness of paper. It was a physical and symbolic act of separation, a way of disentangling myself from my

convoluted feelings inside and making sense of them. It was more than mere reflection; it felt like an energetic cleansing, a healing.

Amid this cathartic process, I kept poking around online, and in books, for spiritual and therapeutic information wherever I could find it. During one long session in front of the computer, I stumbled upon the term “shadow work,” and the writings of the Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung.

*Shadow work sounded elusive  
and dark, but also like it might  
be a missing piece of a puzzle.  
Something in me responded  
to it instinctively. I'm glad I  
paid attention.*

Jung was a therapist and thought leader who helped define the modern notion of the human psyche. Even though he spent a lot of his time studying and treating human pain and dysfunction, he saw people as inherently sovereign and powerful. For his inquisitive, spiritual bent—he was fascinated by shamans, astrology, and the *I Ching* and frequently discussed the human soul—some consider Jung the father of the New Age movement, too. He took a poetic, broad-minded approach to people and their problems and was vexed by the developing modern era for how it thwarted a more genuine experience of individuality. He wasn't afraid to dive into and write about his own personal life either, which I find incredibly brave given the premium his profession put on dry objectivity and holding oneself as the ultimate authority.

A prolific writer, Jung expressed himself with complexity and

nuance, which can make some of his vast body of work challenging to read. But I have found it a pleasure anyway, to experience the hope and frustration in his voice, which comes through clearly and often.

Jung was the person to conceive of and define the shadow as an unconscious aspect of our personality that we don't readily see in ourselves but that is integral to our whole being. It's the part of ourselves we repress from our conscious waking life, because we, or society, don't approve.

The idea that to be whole I needed my shadow too intrigued me. Shadow work, or the act of confronting and embracing the shadow in a spirit of openness, curiosity, and acceptance, wasn't just about managing or taming the parts of myself I wanted to deny or that I disliked. It was about achieving a fuller understanding of who I was, including my potential strengths and points of genius that I might have hidden from myself too. That *really* appealed to me.

Jung described the shadow as always there, trailing quietly behind you, and evolving alongside you as you grow and mature. It's in every personal joke you tell, every overthought decision, every unexplained mood swing, every impulse drink or text, and every quick overreaction, every envious or jealous moment, every romantic projection. It's this subtle part of you—influencing, but not often enough acknowledged—that you can't transform unless you face it and feel it. Isn't it ironic that to truly heal, you must first fully feel?

Jung's mainframe emphasized integrating our fragmented selves into a more cohesive, honest, and powerfully genuine whole through contact with and the acceptance of our shadows. It's not a question of escaping your shadow or making it go away, but simply loving it as a part of you. This felt to me like the way out of a prison of self-hate and into one part of the purpose I had been missing. I would do this, I said to myself. I set myself the challenge.

As I immersed myself in Jung's works, I recognized in him a fellow seeker with a valuable perspective on just how enormous

and special humanity is. For all his worry about how society was evolving—away from nature and instinct, over-reliant on machines—he never gave up on our potential. As someone who has also had premonition dreams and who possesses a vivid imagination and deep curiosity about herself, Jung’s work spoke to me on a profound level. The more I delved into his theories, the more I uncovered about the intricate layers of my own mind. It felt like having a conversation with my soul.

Jung defined the self and society as bound up together, even if they sometimes seem to be working at cross purposes. Though Jung believed that change always had to start with oneself, he also said that facing and integrating the shadow isn’t something we do just for ourselves, but for the whole world and the future.

Any journey into shadow work is not about getting lost in the darkness but about illuminating it, accepting it, and, in the process, transforming what you find into a source of strength and self-awareness.

I started doing shadow work in my diary. I’d give myself complete permission to write the truth about a fear or hang-up or part of myself I didn’t like without judgment or self-censorship. If I could freely admit everything to myself with no fear of censure or guilt, at least I’d know what I was really dealing with.

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It was by engaging in this process that I realized my so-called dream job doing marketing for a tech company was someone else's vision and not my own. Anxious to find my place in the world, I had gone so far into my adult, responsible self that I had forgotten about the child inside me.

You have probably heard of the term "the inner child." You may even have a clear vision of your own: the inner child is the "little you" you may have forgotten about or who was neglected by the conditions of your upbringing, but who still calls out, from deep inside you, to play, create, self-soothe, or cry. It was Jung who came up with the concept of the inner child, and it was Jung who argued that we all needed to meet, listen to, and heal that part of us before we can truly become who we were meant to be. He wrote, "In every adult there lurks a child—an eternal child, something that is always becoming, is never completed, and calls for unceasing care, attention, and education. That is the part of the personality which wants to develop and become whole."<sup>1</sup> If you close your eyes and ask, your inner child will reveal itself to you, in all its emotional distress and mischievousness and capacity for boundless joy.

Much of doing shadow work, I discovered, was welcoming my wounded inner child into my waking adult life: identifying her needs and finding opportunities to allow her to express herself, unencumbered by conventional notions of how I was supposed to be. So, as I continued on the path of shadow work, I naturally asked myself, "What are my abandoned passions?"

I quickly flashed onto how I had all but abandoned playing the flute. It had once been such a sustaining activity for me, and I dropped it in search of a more "responsible adult life." I kept going. One realization led to another, and another, and with each one came another liberation. It turns out that shadow work is a lifelong process, and that's just fine. I took pieces of myself on, one at a time, because none of us can know the truth all at once,



we can just meet it as it comes, bathing each instance of pain in acceptance until eventually neither the light nor the darkness overpowers the other. In the clarity gained from a true, full perspective, you see how much space there is between you and your shackles. That's real freedom.

In 2021, after a period rich with introspection and discovery, I asked myself, "Why doesn't everyone know about shadow work? Why don't more people talk about it?" With each revelation of another hidden part of myself, each moment of recognition, through journaling and mirror work, and those 4 a.m. mornings of searching, bit by bit I healed my inner child. Not only healed her—I gave her some powerful tools. I reincorporated play into my life. I began going on hikes, looking for fossils like I used to when I went camping as a kid. I picked up the flute again and explored sound healing, which allowed me to soothe my inner world during moments of anxiety. I remembered how to be curious and expressive. I decided to open up and release whenever I felt like I was contracting and holding in. What came out of all that was healing. In moments when I could have broken down, I was able to create a new path for me to break *through*.

Meeting, understanding, and accepting my own shadow sparked a profound transformation in me that only continues to accelerate the more I feed it. I realized next that I needed to share the process I had put together for myself with the rest of the world.

I got the idea to create a simple workbook, with clear prompts and cues, in plain language, to guide people through doing their own shadow work. If I could do it, I figured, anyone could. They just needed tools they could understand and an easy way to get started. I felt inspired to support Jung's late-in-life mission to bring his teachings to a wider audience, too. Jung's publisher had been frustrated that while his mentor Sigmund Freud's work was well-known, Jung's contribution remained inaccessible. It took

Jung having an important dream one night to get him to move on it, though. In that dream, he saw himself addressing an audience who truly understood him. Finally, right before his death, he wrote a book with a lay public in mind. It's called *Man and His Symbols*,<sup>2</sup> and I highly recommend it.

Jung's desire to reach a broader audience beyond academia reaffirmed my commitment to this project. It felt like a continuation of Jung's mission, a way to honor his legacy by helping others embark on their own journeys of self-discovery and transformation. I do not take a strict or orthodox approach to Jung. I am not a credentialed Jung scholar or a trained Jungian analyst, but I didn't have to be for his work to empower and inspire me, and I wanted that for other people too. I didn't see what I was doing as a substitute for therapy, either. Despite my initial bad experience, I revere the work of counselors and shrinks. But I also know that therapy remains out of reach for a lot of people and that we all can do much to bring healing to ourselves.

The idea ignited a fire within me. I felt as if I was tapping directly into a divine source, in harmony with every part of myself. This wasn't just a project; it was a calling. I felt a deep responsibility to bring this work into the light in the best way I could, to help others navigate the complexities of their inner worlds with kindness. Engaging in intentional self-reflection at the peak of a trigger can halt the destruction before it takes over our bodies and minds. I saw this as a tool for awareness before turmoil and an approachable start to a life-transforming healing journey. It could ease the suffering of millions, a little or a lot, if I got it right.

Creating that journal became my lifeline. It drew me back into wholeness, allowed me to reclaim my own authenticity and put myself back together.

I never anticipated it would have such a profound impact. Since I published *The Shadow Work Journal* at the end of 2021,

its reach has been extraordinary. In 2023 alone, over one million copies were purchased, and it was recognized as an Amazon number-one bestseller four times. *The Shadow Work Journal* has not only received over forty thousand five-star reviews from readers around the world, it has garnered immense support from social media and even caught the attention of legacy media, featured on *Good Morning America* and in the pages of the *Atlantic* and the *New York Times*. Therapists started to contact me to say they were using *The Shadow Work Journal* as a tool with their patients. And journalers created a supportive community, via social media, sharing their experiences with the world.

*The Shadow Work Journal's* widespread acclaim speaks volumes about its efficacy and resonance with those seeking deeper self-understanding. It illuminated how universal human suffering and pain are and how everyone has a soul that wanders the desert of existence, searching for a divine source to keep going. We all need softness, depth, and meaning to navigate the harsh, boxed-in, artificial world we live in. No matter how deeply we may find ourselves in despair, there is always a path that leads back to our essence, to that inner bright flame that can guide us through our darkest moments.

We haven't been alone. The practice of delving deep into the self, of exploring the shadows and light within, is experiencing a global renaissance. People from all walks of life are awakening to the importance of self-exploration, recognizing that true understanding and growth are in our own hands and souls. *The Shadow Work Journal* has proven itself to be a valuable tool, but there was context and insight I gathered during the process of writing it that necessarily got left on the cutting-room floor. *The Journal* is a starting point for something much bigger. A baby step in my journey, and maybe in yours.

With this book, I wanted to write something more expansive than a workbook—more like a primer or a comprehensive guide

to how shadow work unfolds on a grander scale, and what we can all do to better meet and mesh with our shadows. Here there is more context and material for continued reflection, wise perspective from experienced experts, tips and stories from people who took the plunge into shadow work for the first time, and expanded techniques and resources to facilitate greater self-healing. *The Shadow Work Journal*, with billions of social media engagements and thousands of testimonials, is part of a long chain of human self-inquiry. The book you're now holding, *The Book of Shadow Work*, shines a brighter light on that chain and looks back to explain how the shadow, and shadow work too, has been present in religion, literature, and ritual throughout time and history. I also wanted readers to benefit from understanding more of the *why* behind the global reach of shadow work, from the many conversations I've had with therapists, thinkers, teachers, and healers since the publication of *The Shadow Work Journal*, to capture how shadow work, as a set of diverse practices, continues to evolve.

*The Book of Shadow Work* joins all our hands in collective awareness and the search for truth. This is an exploratory book, and I am the navigator. I know you will find gems along the way just by opening your heart and allowing the words to press against your soul wherever it feels tender. Whenever it pangs with resonance, that is a spark of light, and more will follow. In that sense, this book is not just an essential companion to *The Shadow Work Journal*, but a bigger, more fulsome road map for anyone seeking to deepen their self-awareness and heal their inner wounds. It offers insights and guidance toward a deeper understanding of yourself and the world around you and includes inspiring stories and tips from the community that has sprung up around my company, Zenfulnote, illustrating the expanding power of shadow work to radically improve daily life, relationships, trauma, the stress of making your way in the

world, and society at large. These bits of good news are like finding golden apples on the darkest parts of the yellow brick road, and this book is filled with them.

My strongest wish is that the experience of reading this book will be transformational for anyone who takes it seriously. My intention is clear: by the time you reach the end, you will not only have a richer understanding of what shadow work is, you will be empowered to play and dance with your inner self, and you will meet your unconscious and experience moments of transformation where once you simply might have felt out of control. Profound revelations, renewed emotional stability, and resilience can be yours if you let them come.

There is another payoff with shadow work that I hope this book will help you put into motion. When you begin to live authentically, to speak and act in harmony with your true self, your life inevitably shifts. When you begin to show up as all of yourself—loudly and proudly, or even softly and subtly—the people who are meant for you will start to take notice. They won't just hear you; they'll connect with the essence of who you are. They'll find joy in your presence and value in your words. If you're feeling afraid about showing up in the world as the real you, remember that this fear is not yours to bear alone.

Remember also that you are infinitely more than the sum of any imposed identities. Your inherent worth lies in your authenticity, in being seen and loved for who you truly are. Your unapologetic self is not just a right; it's a beacon for others, modeling for them how to find their own truth.

How do you start? Turn the page with an open heart and open mind, and consider gently peeling away the layers that aren't truly you. The universe has got your back. I've got your back too.



## ONE

# WHAT IS SHADOW WORK? HOW DO YOU START?



*Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is.*

*If an inferiority is conscious, one always has a chance to correct it. . . .*

*But if it is repressed and isolated from consciousness, it never gets corrected.*

—C. G. JUNG, *PSYCHOLOGY AND WESTERN RELIGION*<sup>1</sup>

*Sometimes the things that break your heart end up fixing your vision.*

—MUSICAL ARTIST UNKONFINED

The shadow sounds scary, doesn't it? Dark, ominous, formless, foreboding, morally shady, elusive, creepy, even evil. When we talk about the shadow as Jung defined it—the part of our unconscious mind that contains what we reject and hide from—the very thought of its existence can put us on edge, like we're not really our own masters. Like we're carrying around this bag of

toxic garbage, and it's weighing us down. But according to Jung, the shadow will always be with us, and it serves a clear purpose. It's not trash; it's compost.

I always knew, even before I read Jung, that childhood experiences laid the foundation of our emotional frameworks. Traumas leave imprints. They shape our reactions, our fears, and our joys, and then as we grow, they get buried under the façade of responsible adulthood. When these old wounds are triggered, the reaction is often disproportionate to the present situation, leaving us confused and overwhelmed. It's a journey to unpack these layers, to understand that our present self is in constant dialogue with the shadows of the past, and the shadow of the present too. Acknowledging this is not a sign of weakness; it's an act of bravery, a step toward healing not just the present, but also the past that silently guides us.

Can you imagine yourself as a small child, born helpless into a family with its own dynamics and value systems? You knew, even in infancy, that you needed to adjust to the powers that be to survive. As you started to understand how some behaviors or moods got rewards or punishments, you shape-shifted to your best advantage, structured your inner world, and showed up accordingly. Was your nature, or your behavior, considered too loud? Too needy? Too competitive? Too sad? Too hungry? Too angry? Too sensitive? Too shy? You learned that Mom and/or Dad didn't approve. Society didn't approve. Red alert. Start camouflaging yourself, even from yourself.

It is the self-preserving, self-protective part of us that pushes away what is deemed unlovable, unacceptable, and dangerous by our families and the larger world. As we grow up, that lifesaving reflex develops into a crucial skill for getting by. What is successful moves into the limelight. Everything left over that doesn't fit, that feels shameful or enraging or destabilizing, or even too brilliant and visionary, is relegated to the shadow.