

Shadow Work Isn't a Cure — It's a Relationship With Yourself

Hello and welcome to Mediumship Matters, with me, Hannah Macintyre. Let's kick off Season Nine's listener questions with one from the lovely Erin, who's been binge-listening for a few weeks now (thank you, Erin — you've made my week).

Erin had a spiritual awakening in early 2024, and after seeing a medium last October who told her she could do this too, it clicked — she'd always felt she was here to help people, just never knew how. She's deeply empathetic, but carries a lot of early trauma, and believes everything she's been through will ultimately serve her mediumship. Her question: everyone in the spiritual world talks about how important shadow work is, but nobody ever explains what it actually looks like, or how to do it. Could I help?

Trauma and mediumship

Let's start with the trauma. I've thought about this a lot recently, and while I believe mediumship is available to everyone, I do think it disproportionately attracts people carrying trauma. There's something about it that cracks you open — it changes your energy body, your awareness.

Here's something I've noticed in the gym, of all places. I've been lifting for two years now, and when I'm struggling with a heavy set and my brain starts producing a tidy list of reasons to put the bar down — I'm tired, I didn't sleep, I'm dehydrated — if I push through that anyway, images start surfacing: the teachers who hurt me, difficult moments from my journey. I think that's because there's energy trapped in the fascia, in the body itself, not just the emotional or energetic layers. I might have processed the emotional side of something and the energetic side, but there's a physical layer still being worked through — and weightlifting, oddly, is where I'm doing that work now.

What shadow work actually is

Notice, though — I'm still doing the work. Shadow work, along with “awakening,” has become one of those over-fancy phrases in spiritual circles that can leave people feeling excluded if their experience doesn't match the aesthetic, or baffled about what a “shadow” even is.

My take is much simpler: shadow work is learning to deal with being human. When we start working with spirit, we all want to escape our physical selves — it's much nicer floating above the clouds with your spirit team than dealing with the washing machine, the dog mess in the garden, or a bill you forgot to pay. But you, the human, are inescapable in your own mediumship. You're the vessel. It uses your soul, but the vessel is entirely human — mind, body, and spirit together, not spirit alone.

For me, shadow work happens by sitting in your own company with no distractions. It also happens by deliberately choosing to do things in your human life that you don't want to do — picking up the weights when you don't want to — to prove to yourself you can push through, and to actually meet whatever limiting thought is doing the talking.

The voice never goes away

I'm 25 months into the gym now, roughly six days a week, and I can tell you: the voice telling me I can't do it, that I should stop, has never once quietened. I've got episodes planned about how hard I still find doing readings — genuinely, still hard. We all love the idea of a finish line with shadow work, some point where it's “done.” I don't think that's true. I think real shadow work is accepting that the shadow is permanent. You're not Peter Pan — you can't detach it and leave it behind. It's the dark to your light, always there. The work is learning to function alongside it, rather than waiting for it to disappear as proof that you've arrived.

Sometimes shadow work is about trauma and its long shadow over your relationships and self-image. Sometimes it's simply that voice saying you can't do this — and whether that voice was born from a difficult childhood or just exists on its own, it still shows up in moments of vulnerability, and you still get to choose whether to listen to it. Shadow work, to me, is knowing yourself — accepting you're human rather than trying to manufacture something that isn't real.

The problem with claiming you've “ascended”

There's a strand in the spiritual community — I've been guilty of it myself in the past — that suggests once you reach a certain level with spirit, you're done, sorted, no more blocks. It's the same energy as someone in law of attraction circles insisting “I don't have money blocks” — when actually, isn't it far more honest to say, yes, I genuinely struggle with that, and have to keep working on my mindset? I don't believe anyone is without blocks, because to be blocked, in some sense, is simply to be human. Claiming otherwise — “I've done my shadow work, I've ascended” — is often just ego dressed up as enlightenment, because we're all in the depths of shadow work permanently. To carry a shadow is to be human, and being human is exactly what you are.

You might well have trauma stored physically, energy genuinely blocked somewhere — I'm not disputing that. But you might also simply be a person carrying a mixed bag of experiences, some of which land harder depending on the day. Spirit once taught me something I've probably mentioned before: someone can call you something unkind on a good day and it rolls off you completely — “is that the best you've got?” — but the exact same words on a vulnerable day can wound you deeply and take real time to heal. That's the journey. Some things you bounce back from; some you don't. Everyone is a collection of these small threads — some good, some bad, some genuinely damaging.

If you want my honest definition: shadow work is what happens when you wake at 3am and cringe at something embarrassing you said fifteen years ago. It's accepting your humanness rather than trying to transcend it — working with it, not against it, staying with it rather than moving away from it.

Blocks are rivers, not walls

I think everyone carries some form of energy blockage, but the word “block” itself can be misleading — it implies a dam holding something back completely. Really it's more like a river meeting a boulder: the water simply finds another way around. A block only stops you if you decide to believe it will. The rest of the time, it's just something you learn to work around.

Don't wait for your journey with spirit to make you perfect. I spent years assuming spirit would eventually shift me, improve me, make me “more spiritual.” The biggest thing I've actually learned is that it was never about changing me — it's about being me, and accepting that. Blocks aren't blocks unless you let them be. They don't stop you unless you let them. Nobody arrives at this work perfect, and anyone telling you they have is speaking from ego, not truth.

I'm fiery as hell, and I know it. That fire is necessary — it's what built this podcast, born out of frustration with misinformation and people gatekeeping their knowledge. But it's the same fire that loses patience in traffic, or with people blocking the aisle in a supermarket, or four abreast on a pavement leaving no room to pass. Same fire, different outlet. Accepting that part of myself — trying not to act on it unless it's actually useful, without expecting it to vanish, because it's also the thing that gets things done — that's the work.

Two practical things to do

So Erin, I hope this helps bring more of your light out. Practically, working with your shadow self comes down to two things: sitting with yourself, undistracted — even just a walk alone, fully present — and gently, deliberately putting yourself into situations that make you uncomfortable, so you can build resilience and notice what surfaces. Make friends with the voice that tells you that you can't do it. Accept it's along for the ride permanently, because that's simply the design of being human — and then don't let it stop you.

I hope this helps. Thank you for the question — if you've got one you'd like to submit, email podcast@hannahmedium.co.uk, and don't forget to review and follow. I'll see you all soon. Bye.