

SHADOW + LIGHT



WEEK 2



JOURNEY TO SELF-MASTERY

MELISSA CARROLL, ERYT500
& ASHLEY SWEET, LMHC

WWW.THEYOGAWRITER.COM
WWW.ASHLEYDSWEET.COM

the trap of shoulds + shouldn'ts

This week we're diving into your "shoulds & shouldn'ts": the core beliefs that create deep grooves in your unconscious and ultimately direct your life.

We're asking you to explore the messages you were told growing up, and the consequences of those messages. How do they show up in your life now?

Remember, when we think about the Shadow we think about the qualities that are out of balance. We don't want to judge traits as purely good or bad. We're looking at these traits in the **context of being helpful or not helpful in our lives**.

No quality is inherently positive or negative (as we'll explore in the upcoming weeks), but it's when a quality swings out of balance that it can cause suffering in our lives.

Take productivity:

When in balance, I do what I need to do and I get my needs met.

When I'm not productive enough I may fall behind and get in trouble at work.

When I'm too productive it can lead to burn out, which can cause anxiety and depression.

Some "shoulds" you may have heard growing up:

You should be a good kid.

You should get good grades in school.

You should be ashamed of yourself!

You should be polite.

You should be nice.

Ashley works with many women who don't behave assertively because they've internalized the notion that they need to be nice and can't ruffle feathers.

In particular, **the messages we absorb about our bodies and our appearance create powerful inner narratives that affect our relationships with our very selves, with food, with our body image, with social dynamics...**

"*You should be thinner/prettier/sexier*"... (thank you, so-called women's magazines!)

"*Beauty is pain.*"

"*If you look good, you feel good.*"

"*Maybe she's born with it, maybe it's Maybelline.*"

There's a trillion dollar marketing engine based around us feeling shitty about ourselves.

They're profiting off our insecurities.

We're often told narratives about being attractive from a young age, which teaches us how the body "should" look... according to whom, though?

According to a Western view through a lens of late capitalism, from marketing agencies mainly populated by white men?

Beauty is not **one** thing.

And it's certainly not defined so simply by the (unrealistic) standards set forth in the west in the 21st century. Various cultures across geography and across time reveal that beauty can be defined in a multitude of ways: as thick hips, as soft features, as long necks, as small feet...none of these standards are particularly correct (and all have involved women mutating their bodies throughout history to conform to these societal standards).



Luckily, you can take your power back by recognizing these ingrained beliefs and rewriting your narratives.

belonging to the tribe

We internalize these narratives from the time we're young. **Often these narratives start with the best intentions.** Our parents want us to grow up and be successful, and they framed what success means based on what their parents taught them. When we think about how our history shapes these internal narratives, it's helpful to think about some of the basic ways we're influenced:

What community did you grow up in?

What kind of school environment did you grow up in?

What music did you listen to as a child, what books did you read, what did you watch on television?

In what region of the world did you grow up?

All of these different messages helped to frame the "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts" — and their consequences — in your life.

On the one hand, these messages help prepare us to be successful, or safe, or — most profoundly — to be accepted in society. On the other hand, these messages can ingrain rigid core beliefs that can cause us suffering when we do not behave in ways that obey them. **Most of us just want to be affirmed, seen, and accepted as human beings, so we play by the rules that are laid out for us by our families, communities, and peers.**

The innate desire to belong is perfectly normal. In other words, have compassion for yourself throughout this process. We won't tell you that you "should" show yourself oodles of compassion, but we do recommend it from experience ;).

And so we constantly, unconsciously try to comply with these messages: *I just want to be good because I want to be liked. I want friends, I want to be understood, I want to belong.*

These messages become ingrained in us with the "should" or "shouldn't" behavior attached:

I want to be liked, so I should always be friendly = I shouldn't speak my mind honestly.

I want to belong to the cool crowd at school = I shouldn't raise my hand in class because I'll look like a nerd.

I want to be attractive = I must be thin no matter the health consequences.

A special note about Money:

Many of us have very specific, and often contradictory core beliefs about money, and the "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts" around it.

You likely didn't just one day believe that "**money doesn't grow on trees**", or that "**money is the root of all evil,**" or that "**money makes the world go 'round.**"

You learned these beliefs from someone, or from somewhere, and **these beliefs have consequences.**

These complicated feelings around money can lead you to have trouble believing in your worth, asking for a raise at work, or being open to receiving abundance.

By looking deeper we can explore what the consequences of these "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts" are on your life.



tracing the biography of beliefs

When you trace the biography of a belief to understand why you act the way you act, then you can choose to change your belief - which will change the way you act.

Stay with us here...

As you begin to understand where these "should" and "shouldn't" messages came from —and the consequences of these messages have in your life, **you can create the awareness and space to see which messages don't fit you anymore.**

For example: being always *liked* isn't always *helpful*.

When you realize this, then you can see the shadow side of trying to be liked all the time.

We would argue that it isn't *always* helpful to be *always* liked.

Channeling your Inner Bitch



Let's say you're walking down the street and you don't want to be cat-called.

Old belief: "I should always be liked."

Old behavior: Smile, despite feeling uncomfortable. Talk yourself into thinking it is a compliment, even when you feel uncomfortable. Feel unable to assert yourself, or tell someone to buzz off- because you might be seen as *unlikable*. Feel worried you might be seen by the cat-caller as a "bitch."

New belief: "It's okay to be unlikable sometimes."

New behavior: Avert your eyes, think something like "what a jerk," and possibly tell the person to leave you alone. Feel empowered to ignore the person's unwanted advances.

This disrupts a massive ingrained pattern for many women, because we live in a society in which women are conditioned to be kind and polite in order to... not to be a bitch.

The B-word! The most horrifying thing a woman could be! The dreaded bitch!

Sometimes it's useful to put your bitch hat on. Because bitches get stuff done! Bitches speak up for themselves. They're honest, powerful, and strong.

Note: Claiming or reclaiming bitchiness goes for men, women, everyone: these qualities aren't inherently gendered, though many women struggle with this word in particular.

the power to reframe and reclaim

When we observe a quality in others -- bitchiness, let's say -- we can discover that it holds a gift. You may discover that it implies that someone can be strong and assertive when they need to be... and can have value without always having to be nice – and potentially a doormat.

Examining this core belief that we "should" be nice all the time, helps us realize that being nice all the time is not effective in every scenario.

By examining and changing this core "should," you ultimately allow yourself to reframe and reclaim parts of yourself you've denied and locked away... you get closer to embracing the fullness of who you really are (yes, even that inner bitch!).

This is a journey to embrace all the parts of yourself, even if you've been taught you shouldn't be some of those parts.

Just because society tells you to be ashamed of certain parts of yourself doesn't mean they go away. Because they don't go away. In fact, they often take a whole new persona of their own.

So we hide these "unacceptable" parts ourselves, and they fester. They become our shadow parts (hidden from our light).

These shadow aspects are like children: if you ignore a child, they'll just get louder and louder until they throw a full-blown tantrum, usually at a very inopportune time.

Speaking of full-blown emotional tantrums...

Heeey Jealousy! Oh no, not me, I'm not jealous!



Have you examined your jealousy lately? No? Why? Because you ***shouldn't be jealous***, right?

Jealousy often doesn't boil up when we're in a peaceful state and can handle it with mindfulness and grace — **jealousy usually arises when we're already in the throes of another deeper, more volatile emotional state**. If unexamined, if denied its fair share of attention, it can grab the wheel of our life and drive us in an unhelpful direction at seemingly random times. Just because we think we "shouldn't" be something, doesn't mean we're not!

So what do we do with these shadow parts?

We have to bring these aspects into the light: to accept, embrace, to better understand, and to find empowerment through the many different pieces of ourselves – and also to shed old modalities and old beliefs that just don't fit us anymore.

If you want to live authentically, if you want to live your truth, then you have to get true about who you really are and what you really want...not just what you "should" want. Not just who you think you "should" be.

the power to be me

What if you allowed yourself to actually want what you deeply want — in the truth of your bones?

How would your life look different?

What would your life look and feel like if you actually pursued what you really want and not just what society, or the greater culture, or the media, or your parents instilled in you to want?

There's one amazing and quite immediate benefit we can receive when we begin to examine the 'shoulds' and 'shouldn'ts' imprinted within us throughout our lives:

it frees us of the pressure from these external forces, and frees us from the self-critical background noise that we are somehow wrong and flawed for being judgmental, or lying, or not being perfect and shiny all of the time — all of the things so many of us were taught to be on the outside.

Again, in theory these conditioned qualities are very nice: it's good to be good. But we can guarantee you're not going to be good *all of the time*.

Within all of us there's the capacity for every emotion, every expression of the human experience.

Every quality that exists is like a seed of potential within you—both for incredible compassion, grace, and wisdom as well as greed, hatred, and cruelty.



What you may discover is that our culture presents a very rigid and very polarized paradigm: things are either good or bad, black or white, right or wrong.

And yet, those of us who are showing up to life mindfully recognize that things are more fluid and colorful. We are **this AND that, not this OR that**. Even for us mindful folks, we are so inundated with these rigid this OR that messages that we absorb them and they become part of our core beliefs. This is essentially what guides us in our decision-making at the unconscious level.

As you start to pull apart the layers of what has been put on top of you, all of the layers that have been decouaged on top of your personality, as we strip those layers away we feel lighter, we feel more empowered, and we can remove our shame.

A Note on Empathy

One of the powerful benefits of examining your “shoulds and shouldnt’s” is that it invites empathy. We can look at the conditioning our own parents and peers were living with when they cultivated their beliefs and see the bigger picture. Like it or not, we are products of the greater societies and historical eras with which we are born into. This ultimately creates space for understanding, because most of the time people are only doing the best they can with what they have.

Again, it's essential to turn this empathy and compassion toward yourself: so many of your beliefs are simply products of your environment..and your environment and your context will change throughout your life (and it likely already has). These contexts will come into play in the coming weeks, as you integrate your shadow stories into the greater narrative of Who You Are and How You Show Up in the World (the Self with the capital S).

WEEK 2 ASSIGNMENTS:

Phase 1:

In your journal or on a piece of paper, write out the ways you “should be” and the ways you “shouldn’t be.”

It might be helpful to write out shoulds on one side of the page and your shouldnt’s on the other side, since they likely will correspond. For example:

I should be nice.

I shouldn't ruffle feathers, I shouldn't yell, I should't be honest.

Build on the list until it's exhaustive. We're constantly inundated with these unconscious messages (just scroll on your social media newsfeed for 5 minutes and you'll be inundated with information about how you should behave).

Phase 2:

Choose 5-10 “shoulds/shouldnt’s” that stick out to you, and dig deeper.

Where did these come from?

Where did you learn this?

How was this reinforced throughout your life?

Phase 3:

What are the consequences of those 5-10 core beliefs?

Make a web diagram for each of your core beliefs you're unpacking, which can reveal to you the ways in which these core beliefs may be unhelpful (changing the language from “this quality is always good or bad” to “this quality leads to these helpful or unhelpful consequences.” This map is a constellation that will trace a core belief in all its myriad effects, both deemed as “positive” and “negative.”

Check out our example here:



Vulnerability points for sharing your “Should Map” on the FB group!

You'll find a lot of these core beliefs are universal because they're spread through our cultural myths and ways of operating in Western civilization. Your unique background will bring forth certain beliefs, but you're also likely part of the greater fabric of human culture — which means you're not alone in your ways of thinking and being in the world. This clues you into the collective unconscious (to use Jung's term). You'll also discover that these core beliefs can't be true all the time. You can't realistically be nice all the time. And when you can't, all sorts of other scripts start running in the background, affecting your thoughts, your emotions, and your relationships.

We live in an incredibly stressed and anxious society where we're constantly in a state of trying to feel better. Collectively we feel bad about ourselves. This is a tool to start pulling away those layers and discover their origins. You're likely not naturally anxious all the time (while completely respecting predispositions to anxiety — which we both possess BTW — and trauma and one's unique biochemistry).

There are layers of anxious thoughts, avoidance patterns, and other unhelpful behaviors that we can examine now, in the light of compassion. Ask yourself if they're helpful. If the answer is no, can you become more flexible and lose the rigidity around it?