

The Shape Shifter

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Shape shifting is a common theme in mythology, folklore, literature, cinema, science fiction and fantasy. It is a motif of transformation from one form or energy system to another. It is a quantum phenomenon, where matter can become energy and be transformed into another form of matter or energy. For instance, in digital space, sound may be depicted as images of different colors and vice versa. In neurofeedback, brain's electrical current is depicted as colored mandala images on the computer screen, which may be consciously modified. In turn, these new images create a new mental state which has tremendous potential to treat numerous medical and psychiatric disorders like ADHD, Depression, Anxiety, Stress disorders etc.

Popular shape shifting creatures in folklore are werewolves and vampires, the gods, goddesses, and demons of numerous mythologies, such as the Norse Loki or the Greek Proteus. It was also common for deities to transform mortals into animals and plants.

Examples of shape shifting in classical literature include many examples in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Circe's transforming of Odysseus' men to pigs in Homer's *The Odyssey*, and Apuleius's Lucius becoming a donkey in *The Golden Ass*.

In Homer's *Odyssey*, the goddess Athena transforms her appearance on multiple occasions throughout: She appears to Odysseus' son Telemachus as Mentor (Mentes). She transforms Odysseus into a beggar so that no one in his household, including the suitors, would recognize him.

In Greek mythology, the young Tiresias was walking through a forest when he found two snakes in the act of love. He prodded them with a stick and was instantly changed into a woman. He lived in this female form for many years, and even married and had children. Years later, Tiresias came across the same snakes doing the same thing. Again she poked them with a stick, and Tiresias turned back into a man. Later in his life, he was asked by Zeus which of the two sexes enjoys sex more. Tiresias, speaking from experience, replied that it is woman, and Hera blinded him for telling her husband of the greatest secret of women.

Zeus, unable to undo what his wife had done, gave the now blind Tiresias the gift of foresight. Other versions say that it was Zeus who was angered by Tiresias for saying that men did not get the most out of sex and that it was Hera who gave Tiresias the gift of foresight to comfort him.

In my experience as a psychiatrist and a Jungian psychoanalyst, I have found the concept of shape shifter or Trickster archetype extremely helpful in understanding the working of our psyche and the unconscious in creation of medical and psychiatric symptoms and relationship and personality problems.

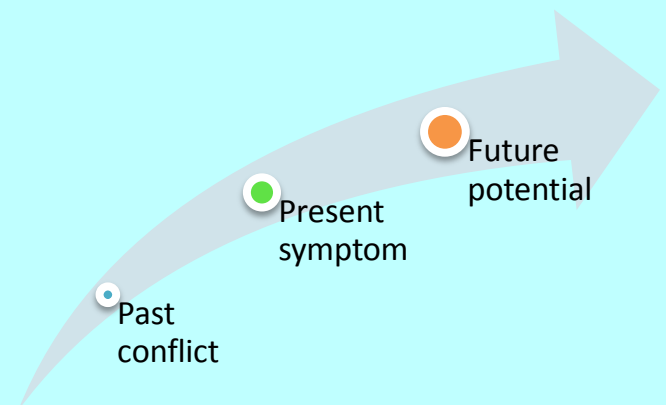
The most common manifestation of this phenomenon is in treatment of addictions. Often, when we treat alcohol or drug addiction, it morphs into an eating disorder, a sexual or gambling addiction. The addiction continues to shift shape until the underlying psychological conflict is resolved and the teleological or future propelling thrust of the psyche is attended to and lived out.

A physician in treatment for drug addiction later became addicted to pornography. Initially he had to resolve his conflict with his controlling father complex. His father had pushed him into medicine. Eventually he was able to recognize that his thirst for drug or sex was really a wish for not the spirit in the drug or sex but the Spirit in his own soul, his creative drive. He took up his deep interest in sculpting and is a very

proficient sculptor. Now he was able to return to surgery as a profession and attend to his creative spirit in his avocational pursuit as an artist.

There are numerous such examples of the shape shifting tendencies of our psyche. When we ignore our feeling function, they manifest as depression. Men often marginalize their attachment drive in service of empire building. This unlived attachment morphs into a serious cardiac problem. When women cannot assert their voice, it may morph into a thyroid disorder.

Therapists must connect the dots between the past conflict, the present symptom and the future potential of a medical or a psychiatric symptom for true healing to manifest.



This system attends to the symptom not only as an opportunity to retire the past conflict, but to claim the future potential of a symptom or a problem. This is the Janus approach to illness. Janus is the Greek God that with two faces, one looking to the past, the other to the future. Hence the upcoming month of January, that bids farewell to the year past and welcomes the year to come.

Every medical and psychiatric problem and a personality or relationship conflict has such a Janus potential. A control freak can become the best organizer, a wishy washy person can become a good politician and be a skillful negotiator, a sadist may be transformed into a life saving surgeon.

The Universe always gifts us a problem that we need to retire our past karma and claim our future potential or Dharma. We must see it as an opportunity for personal transformation and spiritual engagement.

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Dr Bedi is a Diplomat Jungian psychoanalyst and a board certified psychiatrist. He is a member of the Royal College of psychiatrists of Great Britain, a diplomat in Psychological Medicine at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of England, a Distinguished Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association. He is a Clinical Professor in Psychiatry at the Medical College of Wisconsin in Milwaukee and the President Elect, a Training Analyst and a faculty member at the Analyst Training Program at the Carl G. Jung Institute of Chicago. He is Honorary Psychiatrist at the Aurora Psychiatric Hospital and the Aurora Health Care Network. He has been a psychiatric consultant to several agencies in Metro Milwaukee. Presently he is the consultant for the Sexual Assault treatment center at the Aurora Sinai Samaritan Hospital, Dewey Center at the Aurora Psychiatric Hospital for treatment of Addictions and the Pastoral Counseling Service of Greater Milwaukee.

Trained in India, Great Britain and the US, he is interested in the emerging frontiers of Spirituality and Healing and the synapses of the Mind, Body, Soul and Spirit. He is author of the book, Path to the Soul, Weiser Books, 2000, Awaken the Slumbering Goddess: The Latent Code of the Hindu Goddess Archetypes, Booksurge Publishers, 2007 and the coauthor of Retire Your Family Karma, Nicholas-Hays, Inc. 2003, These and

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Ashok Bedi has been in practice in Milwaukee for over twenty- five years and specializes in Adult Psychotherapy and Jungian Psychoanalysis. He regularly presents lectures and seminars in India, Great Britain, Ireland and USA on the topic of the Spiritual and analytic dimensions of treatment, healing and personal growth. Over the last several years, he has been the International Association of Analytical Psychologists liaison person for developing Jungian training programs in India and travels annually to India to teach, train the consult with the Jungian Developing groups at several centers in India including Ahmedabad &, Bangalore. He leads the annual “In the Footsteps of Carl Jung in India” study group to several centers in India under the auspices of the New York Jung Foundation.

