



*Skyline, Summer - 2014*

## Earthlines©

By Diane Pendola

### *Shadow and Light*

*Some day, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity,  
We shall harness the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history  
Of the world, we will have discovered fire.*

~Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

When I am under the spell of a fog or wrapped in the grey of a leaden day I do not have the contrast of the sun against my body. It is when the sun breaks through that I see the shadow that accompanies me always. Similarly, it is with the light of awareness that my inner shadow is revealed allowing me to recognize my own darkness and to understand that I have wounds and capabilities hidden from my sight. In the forest it is the shadow play with light that creates the dance. Among the pillars of trees the dance moves, foliage gleams and sun streams in ribbons with vibrating life. Maybe it is when we lose touch with our shadow that we lose our balance, succumbing to the temptation that we are predominantly light and thus projecting our shadows on others, or conversely, believing we are predominantly darkness therefore forsaking the light that informs us.

Having now worked in the prison system for 25 years I am clear that prisons are a projection of our collective shadow. There are unknown capacities for cruelty, revenge and murder within our own psyches. When they remain hidden, without our awareness bringing them into the realm of our conscious choice, we are more easily able to scapegoat others and let them carry this disowned material for us. We abdicate responsibility for unearthing our own darkness and rage. On the flip side, we deny ourselves the possibility of revealing our own light and of what we could create together if we could bring all of ourselves to the dance.

It's as if the prison system lies under the spell of a leaden day. Its shadows are blanketed beneath a fog that seems to permeate our social conscience and obscure both light and dark in a dreary acquiescence of the status quo. In this acceptance of *the way things are* we deny ourselves the beauty of the dance and the capabilities of greatness we hold within our communal soul if only we would allow the light to inform our darkness.

What could these places we call *prisons* be if enough of us were to awaken sufficiently to our own shadow that we no longer ask the poorest and most broken among us to carry our social sin? The term scapegoat comes to us from the Hebrew *azazel* (Hebrew: עזאזל) translated as "the sender away (of sins)". In ancient times, on the day of atonement, a goat was brought into the sanctuary and the high priest would ceremonially lay the sins of the people upon the animal and then it was sent out into the desert to die. A similar

ritual was practiced by the Greeks called *pharmakos*, the ritualistic sacrifice or exile of a human victim selected from the ranks of the poor: beggars, criminals, or disabled to be cast out of the community as carriers of communal guilt. In each case the community feels relieved of the stress that may have been accumulating over the year. It's as though this scapegoating mechanism functions as a relief valve on a pressure cooker. The victim carries the disowned violence, fear or rage, thus allowing the rest of the community to come back into a sense of equilibrium.

In our time who are the scapegoats? In the financial crisis of 2009 wealthy wall street bankers absconded with billions, people lost homes, life savings and livelihoods, the world economy was driven to the brink of collapse and as far as I know not one of them was held accountable with prison time. Yet, here in the United States, one in ten black males will serve prison time in their life time, many for minor offenses that involve less than a thousand dollars. Who would you say is serving a scapegoat function in our society?

Beneath this example is *my own tendency* to want to scapegoat someone. I would like to scapegoat the wall street bankers; I would like to scapegoat those who hold positions of economic and/or political power. There must be someone I can ceremonially place blame on, exile into the desert and thus feel free of my burden of complicity.

René Girard,\* a cultural anthropologist and philosopher of social science, suggests that scapegoating is hardwired into the human psyche, that archaic religion arose to control human violence and rivalry through using the mechanism of the sacrificial victim, and that the largely unconscious drive to blame and lay guilt on an *other* still functions to this day.

This scapegoating tendency is so much a part of us that it is difficult to see it in ourselves. For that we need awareness, consciousness, empathy, and compassion. We need to see our own complicity and make contact with our own inner demons. By illuminating the violence within ourselves and within our social structures, by acknowledging our own driving desires which lead to rivalry, conflict, war and escalating violence our personal and collective shadows are revealed. With this violence unveiled we begin to see that the next great step for humanity is beyond violence. For that we need forgiveness of both ourselves and the other. For forgiveness we need grace. And for forgiveness and grace we need love.

Such a step will take us beyond prisons. It will take us beyond punishment and revenge to healing and forgiveness. It will take us beyond houses of hurt to communities of compassion. It will take us beyond scapegoating to a new humanity. As Teilhard de Chardin said: *Some day, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, we will have discovered fire.*

The time for love mastery is at hand. May our shadow selves come into the fire's light. May the ensuing dance unfold: exquisite, tender and true.

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\* [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/René\\_Girard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/René_Girard)

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