

**Shrink Rap Radio #377**  
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**“Dispelling the Ghosts Who Run Our Lives”**

**Dr. David Van Nuys Ph.D., aka ‘Dr. Dave’ interviews James Hollis PhD**  
(Transcribed from <http://www.shrinkrapradio.com> by Gloria Oelman)

**Introduction:**

On today’s show I will be speaking with return guest James Hollis about his new book, *Hauntings: Dispelling The Ghosts Who Run Our Lives*.

James Hollis PhD is a Zurich-trained Jungian analyst in private practice in Houston, Texas where he is also the Director of the Jungian Studies doctoral program of Saybrook University of San Francisco. He is the author of fourteen books, including *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life* and *What Matters Most: Living a More Considered Life*, which I interviewed him about on Shrink Rap Radio #244. His latest book, *Hauntings: Dispelling The Ghosts Who Run Our Lives* came out in 2013. Dr. Hollis is also Executive Director of the Jung Educational Center of Houston. He is also Senior Training Analyst for the Inter-Regional Society of Jungian Analysts, was the first Director of Training of the Philadelphia Jung Institute and is vice-president of the Philemon Foundation, which is dedicated to the publication of the complete works of Jung. He also heads up the Saybrook University Jungian Studies Program and is an adjunct professor at both Saybrook University and Pacifica Graduate Institute.

Now here’s the interview:

**Dr. Dave:** Dr. James Hollis, welcome back to Shrink Rap Radio.

**James Hollis:** Thank you very much, it’s a pleasure to be with you again.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, last time we spoke, it was about your book on midlife, *The Middle Passage* and it’s really great to have you back about your latest book, which is called *Hauntings*. As I started to read that book, you know I had forgotten that you’d spent twenty six years as a Professor of Humanities before becoming a Jungian analyst and as soon as I started to read your latest book it came back to me, I said ‘oh, my goodness.’ I had to go back and check and sure enough, yes, that was your history because in this latest book you reference William Faulkner, James Joyce and W.B. Yeats and other literary and historical figures, so of course, this background of yours enriches your writing and the reader’s experience so much.

**James Hollis:** Well thank you. I found actually that the artist is exploring the same territory and returns to the surface with the work of art as a kind of memento of that kind of exploration work that people try to do in depth therapy anyhow.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, you know I was an inveterate reader of novels in college instead of reading much of the assigned work that I was supposed to be reading and at some level I felt it was important. I really felt that it was important but I could not have fully articulated why I felt so justified in doing that but I think the kind of thing that I

read in your work helps to substantiate that.

**James Hollis:** Well, I think I could actually say categorically and this is a deliberate over statement but I think the study of literature and religion and philosophy was actually more instructive to me than the study of psychology as an academic discipline because in all of those other disciplines the tensions and the dilemmas and the choices of the human condition were dramatized in such profound immediate ways. Sort of like Jung said, if you really want to know anything about the psyche leave the classroom and walk out into the world. He said that you need to attend the union meetings, the stock market and the pubs and bars and brothels and the prisons and he said you'll walk away with a deeper understanding of the psyche than books will ever tell you. I think even though novels are part of our book culture, to some degree there's the exploration of the essential elements of the human condition there. We can read about the abstract but in many ways they're brought to life through the flesh and blood concretisation of the artist's imagination.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, yes and that really helps me to understand that what I was going through was really wanting to explore life and seeing life through many different eyes as a result of reading these sort of classic great novels of people like Steinbeck and Faulkner and so on and lots of others because I missed that sort of education in high school. So I was doing some real catch up work and it occurs to me now that maybe for me those served the functions... you know I know that Jungians are great on myths and mythology and studying the older tales but I realise now that those novels were serving that function for me.

**James Hollis:** Sure, sure and the reason for that so called Jungian interest is not the sort of interest in antiquity but the point is that there are elements of the human condition that really don't change, that are timeless. Jung said once, to know what's going on in the unconscious, which is of course difficult because it's unconscious, he said we have to examine the artifacts of culture and the artifacts of artistic and religious production and he said myths tell us what's happening inside of a person whether he or she is present to it or not. A perfect example of that is Joseph Campbell's comment that the myth was the dream of the tribe and the dream was the myth of the person, of the individual.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, I've always liked that quote. Well I have to ask you, is it synchronicity that your book *Hauntings* comes out right around Halloween, or was that planned?

**James Hollis:** Well, no it actually was published in July, so the fact that you're getting to it now is, I think, coincidental but ironically several people did mention that. As is the cover because the cover is a painting by my wife and she'd done that quite independently and had no knowledge of really what I was writing on. I don't talk to her about it when I'm doing it and so the painting seemed to be an appropriate subject matter for the cover and you know it's an open window, with a candle that's mysteriously gutted out and there's obviously some kind of invisible presence that has entered that space and there's an element of mystery about it, so that was sort of two parallel lines that, despite what we learned in geometry, in fact converged.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, yeah and the fact that I got the book around Halloween, it's also a

very Halloweeny kind of image in a way, with that sort of mystery breeze blowing through the window. Now to start to get into the book, I loved the dream that you share about General Grant in the preface and what you made of it. Would you mind sharing that with us here?

**James Hollis:** Well, sure. In brief I had... I'm seventy three now and a time when most people, if not deceased, are slowing down and my work schedule has increased if anything and I found myself very resistant to wanting to write another book because the only time I could ever do it is to come home at the end of a long work day and sequester an hour here and an hour and a half there and enough of those put together produced the book. But it was with a lot of personal ambivalence, so I was putting it off and putting it off and I started to have dream fragments, or I'd wake up at three in the morning and there was a paragraph or two erupting from the psyche and so I had this dream of being in a house somewhere and mysteriously I was charged with maintaining a kind of observation and caretaking of a body that was in the other room. And I went in there and of all things it turned out to be the body of General Grant and I'd had no personal associations with him as such obviously and every time I... I didn't question the solemnity and the inescapability of that assignment and so every time I walked by the body it seemed to have moved a little bit and I thought well maybe there's some air blowing through here, or something that's moving the blanket that was covering him. After a while I realised that there was a grimace on his face and I thought 'oh, my goodness' and I leaned down right in his face and I said 'are you alive?' and he growls at me 'yes.' He's clearly irritated and all of a sudden I have both a sense of high anxiety and also excitement and I run into the other room and I get on the phone and I'm saying 'General Grant, he's alive, he's alive.' For some reason I am trying to reach somebody, like a hospital or somebody to take care of him and the phone instead goes to a pharmacy. I'm trying to explain this to the pharmacist and it's a very comic dream in many ways and the pharmacist won't listen to me and he keeps shifting me to the pens department – p-e-n-s – of the pharmacy and I keep saying 'but you have to understand the real point here is the General's alive.' I'm shifted off again to the pens department and that's how the dream ends and I wind up extremely irritated and frustrated about that and yet I woke with a dream and I know enough to know that our dreams are not arbitrary and just the detritus of yesterday's business and bad digestion or something. I puzzled over that, I did have certain associations coming from the same part of the country as General Grant and I knew that he was a person who, in the face of enormous hardship, had persisted and won through, including his writing a book when he was dying of cancer because he left the Presidency of the United States being penniless essentially. Then he learnt he was dying and to help his family he literally wrote up to the day before he died and that book became a best seller and so forth. At any rate there were a lot of associations and then I was left with a kind of conundrum; why does the dream work here keep shifting me to the pens department, what on earth would you do with a pen? Well, the answer's obvious, 'sit down, you fool and write' and it was one of many such promptings – I didn't have time to go into all of them – that said 'you know, get back in the saddle because it's not about whether you're comfortable, or whether you'd rather sit and watch a ball game, it's about what wants to enter the world through you' and that's really about service and I reflected a great deal on that issue in the second half of life, just to touch on our previous subject matter. The subject about the first half of life is about ego development; 'I have to develop a sense of who I am and I'm able to deal with my parents and ultimately have enough strength and capacity to

leave them and enter the world and deal with the tasks that work and relationships and citizenship and parenting bring to us and so forth. One could say 'alright having done that, I've achieved who I am or what I'm about and there's a point in one's life typically and it's often in mid life where a person begins to question, to say, 'well who am I apart from my roles?' which might be good roles or bad roles. Or 'Who am I apart from my history, or what is this life about?' Especially since it's framed with our mortality. It's at that point that one often begins to shift one's sense of locus from the ego-world axis, to the possibility of the ego-soul axis where one begins to say 'Well what is my life about? In service to what and how am I meant to spend it?' And many times we'll bring the plans and expectations of the first half into the second half and may be overly identified with career, or with our children or something like that but sooner or later other questions, I think, force themselves into one's sensibility and as a therapist I'm dealing with people in that kind of transition and second half of life issues all the time. So I think one of the issues of the second half of life is really not so much 'how do I build the ego?' That's the task of the first half. It's more 'to what value, or task, should this ego now be in service?' Or putting it another way 'what really is my service to life or what wants to enter the world through me?' And I don't think that's a question that people think about very much consciously but I think it's being addressed in the unconscious and it certainly was in my case saying 'get off your duff and get back to, being a servant frankly, of something that wants to come into the world through you, which is this book. It's sort of like already pregnant and not really particularly wanting to be a parent again but on the other hand, I have this thing there that wishes to enter the world through me and I really need to honour that.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, so your unconscious was in a way dragging you kicking and screaming back to the pens and I really identify with what you're saying because you and I are age mates and for me this podcast series is kind of my service to the world, so I can really relate to what you're saying. Now in the preface, you write; 'The task before us, then, is to consider more fully how we're all governed by the presence of these invisible forms which move through us, and through history and to understand them psychologically without 'psychologizing' them.' Now, we'll get into later what those forms are that you're referring to but tell us what you mean by understanding psychologically, without psychologizing?

**James Hollis:** Yes, you know the task of religion historically, the task of depth psychology today, the task of all of us in some way, is to read the texture of our life and say 'What's this really about and what's going on here and what are the forces at work within me, that often maybe impede me and block me from where something else wants to go and something else wants to develop? Or, 'What are the forces that support me?' and so forth. That kind of internal self-examination, I think, is essential to a person if he or she is going to live with any thoughtfulness in life. Too easily these things become formulae of some kind, or commodified, or commercialised, or rationalised, or something like that, when in a fact it's a kind of, I think, an obligation to the depth and dignity of the human soul that one has to be called to accountability and to be humbled before this because as Woody Allen said once, ninety per cent of life is showing up. Well, that's true but showing up in service to what? That's the real question. So I think that it's something that has to be converted from theory and from sort of the talk of the brain into those deeper systems inside of us; the feeling function, the energy systems that we're not ultimately in control of, they have an autonomy, you know our dream life and to those elements within us that, in a sense,

are wiser than consciousness ever has been and will be serving as promptings. In other words, to put it in a very simple minded way, if we do what's right for us, it will be right for us, if we do what's wrong for us, it will be wrong for us. Now the trick is in knowing the difference and being conscious enough to sort through the contradictory traffic that always exists at the same time and to discern that and then one feels, even in the presence of struggle and conflict, the rightness of one's life, that one feels the reciprocity of life. In other words, as you invest in it, something comes back to you in a way that is experienced as meaningful, or purposeful. And as much as we will things, if it's not in some way consonant with our inner reality, then it will not bear good fruit. It may be acceptable in the world and it may have commercial value or something but it doesn't provide that sustaining sense of satisfaction and purpose that comes from lining up the choices of the ego with the intentionality of the soul.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay, well your book is so poetically written and I'd love to have the audience get a feel for your writing. I've actually pulled out a whole bunch of quotes but I'd like to read the first paragraph of the first chapter, just to help the audience to better understand just how wonderful this is. So you write:

*To ordinary consciousness, we seem to be corporeal bodies, mostly, fixed by gravity and stitched by pain and mortality to this gravid earth. But we are, rather, systems, energies, exchanges, projections, programs, force fields, and continuous enactments of tenebrous scripts both conscious and unconscious. What animates this assemblage of matter that we inhabit when we are born? What blows spiritus into the lungs of the bawling infant? That spiritus – esprit – re-spiration, in-spiration is energy, a force field blowing, blowing through eternity into time-bound bodies whose curving trajectory brings them inexorably back to earth. Even as plummet-bound bodies, decaying, dying as we lurch through life, we remain nonetheless force fields of energy, dancing on the grave of history and aflame with eternal fires.*

**Dr. Dave:** Wow! (laughs)

**James Hollis:** Kind of high calorie isn't it?

**Dr. Dave:** You packed so much into that one paragraph and it really – as you talk about force fields and systems and energies and so on – it really begins to get at what you're referring to as the ghosts that are running our lives. There's one word I meant to look up and I forgot to. You've got some good words in here – what is tenebrous? I don't know even know if I'm pronouncing that right.

**James Hollis:** Having depth, disappearing into the darkness.

**Dr. Dave:** What a great word.

**James Hollis:** Leading us into mystery. Because in a sense we are matter that is in some way ensouled matter, animated matter and 'anima's' Latin for soul. It's matter that longs, that suffers, that grieves, that yearns and can be intentional and

contradictory and violent and loving and so forth and all of that is a profound mystery and when we forget it, we somehow settle in to being just creatures of stimulus-response in our environment, which governs much of our lives.

**Dr. Dave:** And I realise that that's what draws me to Jungian psychology, is mystery. That one word I think captures it, a sense of, and an appreciation for, the mystery and a recognition that there's more going on that meets the eye.

**James Hollis:** Yes.

**Dr. Dave:** Now one of the ghosts that you talk about is our complexes, so maybe you can say something about how our complexes run our lives.

**James Hollis:** Sure. And by the way I chose the phrase 'hauntings' because I realised that, as the novelist Faulkner said once, 'the past isn't dead, it's not even past.' And it's not that we are, from a standpoint of psychology or depth therapy, preoccupied with the past, the point is it's not past. It's constantly present in our gestures and our agendas and so to talk about history, is to say history is always in us, it's charged with energy and those charges are what are called complexes. The word complex itself is a neutral word, like apartment complex, airport complex, it's just a structure. It's a structure charged with energy so we have some of these energy systems that are very powerful and some are trivial and not important but at some level everything that has ever happened to us is still alive in a timeless way inside of us and given the right stimulus, or environmental setting, or situation can be triggered and come up and literally occupy or take over the ego state. Now popular culture's always recognised that, when people say 'count twenty before you say something,' which is a way of saying you might *be* in a complex and what comes out is something that you will, upon reflection and once you're out of that complex, that little cluster of energy, you might have another way of saying it. Or, write the letter but wait a couple of days before you mail it, you realise 'Well, I don't have the strength of feeling about that now that I did at the time.' And so a complex is a sense of the presence of our history showing up and activating its program. Now whenever a complex takes over the ego and it will from time to time, it's fair to say that at that moment, we're lifted out of a conscious relationship to this moment, that we're seeing the present situation, which actually is historically unique, it's never existed in this way before but we bring to it the lens of our history and tend to re-enact the old script. Because with every cluster of history there is a script, there's a message and there's a – Jung called it a splinter personality – and when that rises up, we become that dependent child or frightened, fugitive individual or angry aggressive person or whatever the case may be. And so the knowledge of complexes is really to say 'What are the engines or agencies that are generating the patterns in our lives?' And a way of putting this is when we rise in the morning, we don't say 'Well, today I'm going to do the same stupid things I've done for decades' but chances are we will enact patterned behaviour and the patterns are often inexplicable but there they are. We have to confess that we're the only person present in that long running drama that we call our lives so we're somehow accountable for those patterns and some of them are helpful and constructive by the way. It's a complex when you step out in the street and you just automatically look left and right and that's an example of a protective complex but there are other complexes that can show up and dismiss your powers as an adult and shut down your capacity for forward motion and put you into an avoidant situation.

So we could say ‘Where are the places in my life where I’m chronically avoidant and as a result consequences pile up?’ Or ‘Where are the places where I find myself accommodating other people’s wishes and over time do so at the expense of my own legitimate self interest and even integrity?’ And then ‘When are the times I get caught in power complexes and so forth?’ So those are examples of categories of complexes we all have because for example, one message we all got, which is true, as infants and children and that was ‘The world’s big and you’re not’ and ‘The world’s powerful and you’re not, now figure out how to manage that for the next few decades’ and we only have – you know we have unlimited variants of behaviours but there’re three basic choices – in the face of the powerful other, stay out of harms way. So we all develop patterns of avoidance and there are tons of those, ranging from procrastination to disassociation, patterns of the power complex getting evoked where we try to get in charge of the other and thirdly, patterns of accommodation, to give the environment, or the demanding other, what they wish in order to buy out of the conflict. So the key would be, if you stop and look at the patterns of your life, particularly the ones that you can see are not in your interests, or that have undermined your intentions, or represent values other than those you wish to consciously endorse, you could say they’re coming from these very deeply programmed places within us that were once protective and today may also still be protective but often at a cost, such as the cost of our integrity, or the cost of doing what’s really best for ourselves. So the complex is a way of talking about that which our ancestors might have described as ghosts because they too, historically and this goes back as far as recorded history, recognise the presence of what they might call spirits, or ghosts, or states of possession because they realise that people could be in a situation where they might do something, or fail to do something, that on another occasion they would be perfectly capable of sorting through. So they would attribute this to the evil people across that boundary, or to the presence of malevolent spirits and so forth. So, it’s not that the observation of the presence of the past in this moment is new it’s that our way of understanding and approaching it is different. And so today we would have to say from a psychological standpoint, rather than attribute this to the presence of evil spirits out there, or malevolent deities or whatever, we could say ‘This material’s coming from me. I’m the one enacting this and it’s material that’s heretofore been dissociated from the ego,’ meaning the ego is either not aware of it, or it has enough power to stay outside the ego’s sphere of management. And that which was once disassociated, our ancestors called ghosts for example, or spirits and today we would say ‘Are these clusters of history or hidden agendas?’ For example a person might not be happy consciously to be addressing his or her vanity, or his or her power complexes and aggression and so forth but as a human being those are parts of our personality, so then they’re going to show up as these transient states of possession, where we wind up doing something that we wouldn’t have consciously intended or endorsed but there it is. And that’s a part of our history, so the accounting for the various hauntings in our psychic life is one way of being accountable for our life and accountable for our choices and our history and in doing that we have a greater chance of making that more available to consciousness and therefore the potential of being less it’s prisoner.

**Dr. Dave:** Hmm, hm. You know I love the economy of that model that you spelled out ‘What do we do in the face of the powerful other?’ And then those three strategies, that’s a whole... There’s an awful lot implied in there so economically but a whole kind of theory of personality in a way.

**James Hollis:** Absolutely. And we all have to have them because that message that the world's big and powerful and you're not is an existential truth that we all experience. So when you think of, for example, patterns of avoidance, we have simple avoidance, procrastination – and who among us has not procrastinated? I procrastinated from writing the book after all. We can project it onto others, we can numb it, or anaesthetise it, we can live in a culture of distraction, as we do, we can suppress, which means push under consciously, so I think 'Well, I won't think about my dental appointment until next week because I don't want it to distress me now.' And repression, as Freud pointed out, it's an unconscious self-protection, where it's pushed into the underground and not that it goes away, it's down there bumping around and having an influence. We can disassociate even and simply just not pay attention to it and when Robert J Lipton was asked how physicians and others could work in the concentration camps, he said only by splitting and only by disassociation. And the splitting would say 'I'm a loyal family man and I take care of my family and I'm an honest, decent person. On the other hand I do this terrible work.' And you have to have a splitting in your ego consciousness to carry that off, or a complete disassociation where it remains operating autonomously. So most of the time, for example, our jealousies and vanities and so forth will show up in disassociated ways, so we will have it as projections on people, or we might not like them because in some way they're embodying aspects of ourselves that we would find unacceptable as a definition of who we were and so we see it in our neighbour.

**Dr. Dave:** You mention the Nazis and you write that the stories that we *don't* tell may have a sway over our lives and to illustrate that you draw upon the novel *The Reader*, which was also a movie. Perhaps you can take us through the highlights of that example.

**James Hollis:** Sure, sure. It's about a young man who falls in love with an older woman and she becomes his sort of mentor sexually and initiates him into a sensual life. He's smitten by her with all the intensity of young love and in return she asks him to read to her and to share the literature and other texts that he's learning at his school and he finds that peculiar but that's the trade off. Then she mysteriously disappears and time passes and we next find him when he's in law school, after college and he goes to a seminar on international law and the professor that day takes them to one of the trials of the war criminals that were going on in Germany at the time and he's utterly astonished to see his beloved, whom he hasn't seen in probably fifteen years, or at least ten years, there in the dock as one of the accused. She willingly accepts the guilt of a certain atrocity and even having signed the orders for it, where all of her compatriots also being accused, are proclaiming their innocence. And he's puzzling over that – her disappearance and her strange behaviour – and suddenly it hits him, as horrible as her involvement in that atrocity of history was, that she was nursing an even more shameful secret and that was she was totally illiterate. She had been a tram driver because she didn't have to read, she could memorise where the streets were and she was asking him to read to her so she could get some sense of the outside world. Well, she's found guilty and sentenced to something like twenty five years and then the novel cuts away and he's had an unsuccessful marriage in the meantime and at the end of her time, he goes and says basically he will continue to help her and support her but they will not be living together. Her last night in prison she hangs herself and leaves her small estate, such as it was, to a Jewish charity

as a kind of compensation and the warden who's talking to him the next day, both of them shocked by what's happened, says to him 'Well, during this time she figured out...' Oh, by the way I didn't mention that he continued to send her cassettes of novels and other works of literature through the years, as a kindness to her and she realised one day she could put together the sound of his voice with the books that she could check out from the library and she literally in time taught herself to read. Then the warden said that when she learned to read she went from one subject to another and after a while she was devouring the literature of the Third Reich and the literature of the holocaust and through that obviously came to a some recognition of the magnitude of the catastrophe of which she had been a part and a willing component of it. Her suicide is not clarified for us, it's not evident in her final note but there's a chance that the very gift he gave her of literacy, was also something that provided the channel for her learning in an overwhelming way her role in history and so I had two examples in that particular chapter – *Stories Told and Stories Untold* – in that case the story when it's told is destructive, albeit ultimately liberating to the conscience of this woman. The other story was the untold family stories because you know families have secrets of various kinds and my good friend, the poet Stephen Dunn, had written about his family life and how there were certain secrets in the family of which he was intuitively aware but didn't know the secrets. In later life when he learned of them, it helped him liberate himself from some of the pathologies of that environment and to understand his mother and father in new ways and to be able to love them and see them for their value which had otherwise been blocked by the conflict and distress of the family environment that he'd otherwise had to swim in as a child.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, you know there are things I would like to ask my mother and she's gone, so I can't ask her.

**James Hollis:** Sure.

**Dr. Dave:** There are some mysteries there that I really wish I could have cleared up. You also write very beautifully about the archetypal, perhaps even genetic, narratives that drive our lives. For example you write 'Anyone who does not know that today's headline is simply a passing variation on an old, old story is simply not very well educated in the human narrative. The same passages, the same stupidities, the same delusions, the same inflations and deflations, and the same returns to earth play themselves out over and over. The past is not past.' So there again you quote William Faulkner there. Do you want to say anything else to maybe flesh that out a bit more?

**James Hollis:** Well, you know, the more we study the ancient... I mean the human condition hasn't changed. Social conditions have changed, social values have changed, our environment, of course, has changed but human nature is the same as it was thousands of years ago. Anyone who doubts that has not ever really studied the ancient scriptures, the ancient epics, the Greek tragedies and so forth because you see these things playing out over and over and over. When we were about to invade Iraq a number of years ago, I went back and read Thucydides and in Thucydides were the speeches of Pericles warning Athens of how it was shifting from a beacon of democracy to a garrison state and how it would make people fear them for sure but they would also lose respect for them. And I thought there were comments that were being offered by Pericles to speak to the tendencies of his time and place – that's what, twenty eight hundred years ago? – that were identical to what this country was

going through and what in fact happened in terms of world opinion about America and so forth. So there are many examples I could give you if we had time, that in a sense we continue to play out the same old dramas but on new stages and therefore... you remember the famous saying by, I guess it was Santayana or Whitehead 'Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it.'

**Dr. Dave:** Right.

**James Hollis:** And I think that's abundantly clear and it's in the nature of human nature somehow that we don't pay attention to the past and therefore wind up in the same old, same old.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, well, I didn't go back as far as you did but I was just tearing my hair out saying out 'don't people remember Vietnam?'

**James Hollis:** Yes, exactly.

**Dr. Dave:** This is a replay and you write powerfully about this when you say, of these archetypal narratives, you say 'We continue serving, running from, or trying to fix these narrative script scripts and we err to think that having once recognized them they will quietly retire from the scene. Their staying power, any older person knows, is immense and they resist our efforts to repress them, or finesse them, or distract them.' So that certainly sums up what you were just saying.

**James Hollis:** Yeah. Well and the truth is even when we recognize these complexes or tendencies inherent in each of us, they don't go away. Consciousness alone is not enough. It takes a continued dialogue with and a kind of resolve to address these things within ourselves or we will inevitably wind up with repetitions. Freud saw that and he called it the repetition compulsion – the inner compulsion to repeat our patterns even when they're harmful in their outcome. You think 'well, how could I do something so stupid and so counter productive?' And again that ignores the power of that history.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes, yeah. I was delighted to discover that your second chapter is on synchronicity and quantum physics and you start off by relating a series of five synchronistic events that occurred over a period of just a few days and I'm not going to ask you to run through those unless you want to but something I've noticed in my own life is that there've been periods where I experience a run of synchronistic events. Do you have any ideas about what such runs might signify?

**James Hollis:** I really don't. It's a mystery. I mean we in the West learn to, essentially, measure the external world, which was cause and effect and that leads to the development of our physics and chemistry and so forth. The Eastern traditions historically studied the field of internal cause of events. In other words, they were far more psychological and we were far more material in our forms and as such they thought about trying to figure out what's the tao of the moment. Not the Dow Jones but the t-a-o, which is the inner movement of something going on. So synchronicity means, essentially, the convergence of the events in the outer world that could, from a conscious standpoint, often be seen simply as coincidence or statistical probability. But one can always ask the question 'Is it conceivable that there is something else at

work here? Are there internal causations of things?’ And of course from the standpoint of psychology of course there are. You know, why do we do what we do? Well, we always do what we do in a logical way if we could understand the emotional premise from which it’s coming. And the premise could be flawed, and the premise could be wholly unconscious but what we’re doing is driven by that internal dimension, so synchronicity is talking about the possibility of internal causal factors that are not externally visible but are present in the invisible world that, again, courses through the forms of the visible world.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah and you make an interesting distinction between coincidence and synchronicity. What is that distinction that you made?

**James Hollis:** Well, coincidence again, is things can happen and be paired and we can be overly imaginative and start seeing too much in them and I want to caution against that but again there’s a point where you could say ‘You know I have to also be mindful of whether there is something else at work here’ and that’s a useful question. Simply ask one’s self the question ‘Of what should I be mindful here?’ Doesn’t mean that it’s determinative, or it’s not like divination, or prophesy, it’s more like saying ‘Let me take that element, or that possibility into account and if I do, then of what should I be thinking this day?’ You know people have often, as a religious discipline, consulted a sacred text seemingly at random to say ‘Alright, let this verse, or this reading illuminate my day or make me mindful of certain things.’ And you know it’s not harmful by any means but it also can actually allow a person to look at things from a different angle and in so doing maybe arrive at a different understanding of it.

**Dr. Dave:** Sure. If I were sitting down to write a book about hauntings it would not have occurred to me to include synchronicity. In what way is synchronicity a haunting?

**James Hollis:** Well, it’s again the presence of invisible energies that are exercising an influence outside the sphere of consciousness and whether we will them to be there or not, they’re there. And again this is about coming to consciousness that they’re there and exercising an influence and included in that is, for example, the presence of our genetics; it’s continually at work. Our family history is at work within us, both the conscious parts and the unconscious parts. It’s leading us to do certain things and blocking us from doing other things. The presence of archetypal energies, such as our need to find meaning as opposed to sheer quantity in life and our movement towards our mortality and so on. All of these things are agencies if you will, energy systems, that are unfolding whether the ego pays attention to them or not. As we’re talking, who’s managing the growth of our toenails, who’s digesting the food of our breakfast, what’s attending to the death and rebirth of cells within our body? In other words, the ego isn’t, its not even paying attention, its directed to outer tasks. But there are agencies and intelligences, if you will, that are managing these systems wholly autonomously and so it would make sense, one would think, the more I reflect on that and the more I could align the choices of ego consciousness with the intentionality of that nature and the flow of those natural energies, the less divided a person I would be, the more arising out of natural directions and energies that I would be, too. And that’s one reason why this kind of mindfulness is not navel gazing, it’s really a form of trying to include more information and more perspectives and including the wisdom of nature because most of the time we’re driven by the artifices of culture.

You know the operative religions of the modern era are hedonism, narcissism and materialism and more people are driven by economics, in a conscious way, than any other single value despite whatever they pretend and more energy goes into anxiety management systems in the course of any day than people would ever comprehend. And all of this is going on whether we're paying attention or not and leading us in certain choices and creating a life with values, good bad and indifferent, to a world of consequences that just keep piling up.

**Dr. Dave:** 'Hedonism, narcissism and materialism,' I love the way these pearls just fall out of your mouth (laughs). That captures so much. Now you also write about parents and their impact and in this post Freudian world it's a truism that we're haunted by the ghost of our parents. I like the way that you put it when you say 'Each pattern is a derivative, fortuitous vision of self and world, driven mostly by the internalization of the parental engagement, an interaction that is ubiquitous, overwhelming, exclusive, and most often the only game in town. So who would contend, then, that the primary haunting of adult life is not the internalization of those parental presences that drive, deflect, repeat, and necessarily distort our voyage through this essentially unknowable universe?'

**James Hollis:** Well our initial experiences, lessons, invitations, traumas, whatever, are usually the infant child, the parent child and there are sort of elemental axes of value and consideration that are set in motion at that point. For example, 'Is the other safe or unsafe, is the other approachable, or do I need to keep my distance; is the other punitive and invasive, or abandoning or nurturant? Am I as I am of value, or do I have to twist and torque myself in some way to achieve the attention, even affection, of the other?' These kinds of primal sorts of orientations, adaptations and attitudes are going on from infancy on and form a kind of provisional sense of self and other and the traffic in between self and other. Again we have those patterns of avoidance, or accommodation, or control issues – whatever. And certainly there are tons of other experiences that come along in life to modify that and fortunately so, or we'd be creatures of fate alone but you'd have to say that however tall the skyscraper you still go through the bottom floors to get to the top on whatever elevator you ride. You'd have to say, so at the very least my elemental relationship between me and the other and this most of all shows up in the field of intimate relationship because that's where we're most vulnerable, least identified with a persona as one might be in other social settings and more is at stake and it's in that field particularly where the dynamics of parent-child relationships show up. In the face of such powerfully charged messages, i.e. complexes, again that for good or for ill, there are positive complexes certainly, do I serve it, repeat it, do I run from it, or am I trying in some way to fix it? Now for example if a person has a strong experience out of an intimate relationship in childhood with the parent, most commonly we'll serve it and that will lead to repetition and you see those repetitions going through the generations. This too was observed by the ancients, you know, in the Hebraic tradition the sins of the parents are visited upon the third generation we're told and in Greek tragedy the same thing and on the other hand we can be saying 'Anything but that.' So every time one says 'Well I'll be anything but like my mother' or 'I'll do anything to avoid my father's outcomes,' we're still being driven by that other. Or, thirdly, there are unconscious treatment plans such as anaesthetising behaviours, lines of distraction, or if you're really troubled and disturbed, you can become a therapist and work with other people with that problem you see, so it's never absent. In other words these primal

paradigms you might say, set ups, instructions, expectations are always present and we can override them with consciousness, of course but not if we're caught up in them and being carried by them and we also, as I said, have modifying experiences, so that they can be repositioned and we all grow up with a resilience and a capacity the child didn't have. We usually find in every room there's a hole in the wall called 'door' we can walk in or out of that door if we choose as adults, an option that wasn't available usually as a child. And so you could say 'Well it ought to be simple then' but in fact we find, as adults, many times our relationships with others and our relationship to life itself is governed by those ancient patterns. The more so as they're operating unconsciously because no patterns would be more powerful than those which we know not and even when we know they're there they exercise a powerful sort of tidal pull within us and it takes a lot of awareness and resilience to overcome them but it's possible. So it's like if I don't make them conscious, I don't struggle with them, particularly the ones that are regressive in character, then I remain their servant, whether I want to or not.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, I know that you've got another engagement at the top of the hour and I think that's a great place for us to wrap it up. So Dr. James Hollis, I want to thank you for being my guest again on Shrink Rap Radio.

**James Hollis:** My privilege David and it's always good to talk to you.

**Dr. Dave:** Wow! I have so much admiration for Dr. James Hollis. He's so erudite and also so wise. I think those who are lucky enough to be in therapy with him are very blessed indeed. I don't recall which of you listeners it was who alerted me to the fact that he had a new book out but if you're listening and I hope you are, thank you, thank you, thank you. I find his writing extraordinarily clear even though he's talking about challenging and complex topics. In places his writing flows like poetry. There is a sense in which it's easy to read however there is another sense in which it is not because it is so thought provoking and stimulates self-reflection. In fact I found it unsettling at times because he raises issues that are uncomfortable to confront. I had prepared a lot more questions for him than we had time to go into and I had a few more quotes from the book for him to comment on. Let me share those with you just to give you a bit more of a sampling of his writing. For example, he comments on the inordinate power of our complexes in the following terms:

*The central problem is the enormous energy from which core complexes draw their power. Whatever is first, or most archaic, in our history will often draw upon a vast reservoir of energy.*

Here's another quote of his that I was particularly struck by:

*To the child within each of us, the parent remains always a giant with gigantic powers to help or hurt. That deeply programmed imago is never left behind and carries with it a large charge of energy, a waiting script, and a predictable outcome.*

And similarly he writes:

*It is not easy for any of us to escape the confines of history or ever be*

*more than recovering children.*

I have to confess I was initially put off by the book's title, *Hauntings: Dispelling the Ghosts Who Run Our Lives*. Somehow it struck me as a bit hokey and perhaps even Halloweenish. Well, you know the old saying, 'Don't judge a book by its cover?' That certainly is apt in this instance because this book is chock full of depth and wisdom and is highly recommended by me to you all. Also I like the fact that there is a fair amount of self-disclosure in here, as well a sense of humility despite his extraordinary credentials. And he also throws in quite a few case examples from his therapeutic practice. This book would also make a wonderful holiday gift for anyone you knew who is at all psychologically minded. And as always you can use the [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) widget on our site, should you decide to order it.

Thanks once again to today's guest, Jungian analyst, Dr. James Hollis for his ever so insightful conversation.