

That Haunting Feeling That There's Something Wrong With You

by Bill Harris, Director

In this issue I'm going back to something very fundamental. This isn't about meditation, or high spiritual states, or controlling your internal state, It's much more basic, but if you don't deal with it, it can ruin your life, it make any spiritual work you do very unfulfilling. In some cases, it can make your life a living hell. This is a very sneaky issue, and because of its nature many people try very hard to cover it up.

I'm talking about shame.

I could get metaphysical about this and note that shame is a third chakra issue, and talk about how, if not healed, it can pollute further growth in many ways, and so on and so forth. I could also talk about where shame happens in the developmental spiral. But I don't want this to be metaphysical or scholarly. I want this information to be very real-world, practical, and accessible.

What is shame? Shame is, quite simply, the feeling that there is something wrong with you. In more extreme cases, it is the feeling that there is something **TERRIBLY, IRREVOCABLY, DEEPLY, FUNDAMENTALLY**, wrong with you. You feel broken, and there's nothing that can be done. Nothing works. Anyone who likes you or sees value in you just isn't looking closely enough to really see the "real" you.

And, the last thing you'd ever want would be for anyone to see past the facade and notice that you are broken, that there is something deeply wrong with you. So, you create all kinds of ways to hide, to cover up what you're afraid others will notice. You could use humor, or your intelligence, or your ability to perform in the world. You could hide behind being fat, or behind being a drug addict or an alcoholic. You could hide by creating a fantasy world where you act as if you're better than other people, or you try to control others. Perhaps you imagine that people don't like you (or do like you), when they may not be paying much attention to you either way. You could try to cope by being macho, or by being pitiful. There are scores of ways a person suffering from shame could attempt to cope. All the emotional dysfunctions we see in Centerpointe participants--anger, sadness, anxiety, substance abuse, fear, depression, powerlessness, relationship problems, and many others--can be shame-based.

A person suffering from shame may function well in the world, or their shame may keep them from being functional in many situations. Sometimes shame is layered beneath many defense mechanisms, and the outer appearance is one of "I'm fine. Nothing bothers me." Other times, it is so close to the surface the slightest thing can send the person into tears, anger, depression, or some other reaction. Sometimes the person knows they are ashamed, and something they have so successfully hidden the feeling they don't even know they have it. (I know this was true for me.)

If a person is suffering from shame, they may go from one personal growth approach to another, but nothing seems to work. This is because shame is very fundamental, and until it is handled, any growth built on top of it is like building a house on shifting sand.

A shame-based person spends a lot of time focusing on avoiding potential danger. As I've said many times, your brain will take what you focus on and find a way to make it happen in reality. To focus on avoiding danger you have to make internal representations of danger, and your brain then thinks it is supposed to create or attract danger--or cause you to interpret what isn't dangerous as if it is. For this reason, shame is a vicious circle, where avoiding danger leads to more danger, which leads to more attempts to avoid it, on and on.

Where does shame come from? It comes from abuse, from trauma suffered when you are too small to have any filters to tell you why it is happening and what it really means. If the people who are supposed to love you and care for you hurt you, neglect you, criticize you--or worse--the obvious conclusion, from a child's point of view, is that there must be something wrong with you. Otherwise, why would these big, powerful, God-like people who have every reason to care about you treat you with so much anger, contempt, or neglect?

Sometimes this trauma is inadvertent, coming from the death of a loved one, or situations the parents could not cope with themselves. Sometimes it comes from the fact that the parents were treated the same way when they were young, and it's all they know. But finding someone to blame isn't the point, and it isn't productive. If trauma happened, the resourceful thing to do is to deal with it now, get rid of it, and move on.

From this trauma, the child draws two conclusions. One is that the world is dangerous, and as a result they have to be on the alert for danger, as I've already described. Second, the child concludes that there must be something deeply wrong with them, at the very core, and that to survive, they must NEVER let anyone know that this defect exists. To accomplish this, elaborate armoring, physically, emotionally, and spiritually--an elaborate facade--is created.

A person living with shame generally exists in one of two ways: they create so much self-armoring that they don't feel much of anything, no one can get through to them on an emotional level, and life becomes a process of toughing it out. Or, they fail to create effective armoring, and go through life easily triggered by people and events around them (what I have called a low threshold) or emotionally collapsing whenever the going gets the slightest bit tough. Dealing with shame becomes the central point of such a person's life.

What makes it difficult to deal with shame is that the sufferer wants so much to hide it. It is nearly impossible to ask for help, since this means revealing to someone else that you are totally broken.

Here's a fact about shame few people understand, and which puts this problem in a completely different perspective. Almost every person I meet, whether in personal life or in my role as a teacher and helper, under their facade thinks there is something wrong with them. Each person has developed their own act designed, in part, to dance through

life without revealing this awful secret. They don't realize that the people they're trying to fake out are doing the same to them, too--and that the relationships they create seem so unfulfilling because they are relationships between two facades. At the same time, the real, hurting individual is trapped underneath, crying for intimacy and understanding.

At the beginning of Centerpointe retreats, we look at each other, a room full of strangers. The group looks like any group of people you might see on the street or in a mall. Most seem pretty together, a few seem shy and scared, a few seem obviously in difficulty. But overall, a pretty average, normal group.

What isn't "normal" about these people, though, is the fact that they want to do something to improve their lives, and they've taken a fairly daring step: to come to a retreat, sit down in the middle of a group of total strangers, and trust what I've told them about the improvements they'll experience.

We use some very strong Holosync at the retreats, and we ask people to participate in some processes designed to create a deeper awareness of certain aspects of yourself you may not have previously examined--or may think you have, but really haven't. But nothing at a Centerpointe retreat is confrontational, and everything is designed to create a feeling of deep safety and bonding to the rest of the group and an increased awareness of who you are and how you create your reality.

As people open up (and some do more than others), I notice that, almost without exception, each person has some amount of this internal feeling of shame--the idea that there is something wrong with them, and they must not allow others to see it. In the retreat environment, however, the feeling of trust in the staff and in the other participants sneaks up on you. Before you know it, you actually feel safe enough to allow others a peek inside at who you really are. Usually, one brave soul breaks the ice by sharing something about him or herself. Often this is something they really are ashamed about, often something they've been hiding for decades.

At one retreat, a man shared how he had been a wild teenager who said a lot of nasty things to his mother (which reminded me a lot of my own teenage years). Then, his mother died, and for forty years he has felt that there was something really, really unforgivable about a boy who did such a thing. Others instantly saw a fairly normal teenage boy who had loved his mother. Though they could understand his feeling of regret that his mother had died while he was going through his wild and uncouth years, they also saw that this did not make him a fundamentally bad person.

This man's sharing of such a deep and dark secret, only to find that the others not only did not reject him, but actually felt closer to him, not only was healing for him, it was healing for those who witnessed it. To one degree or another, many people began to see that perhaps the dark secret they've carried for so long might not mean what they thought it meant.

There is a lot more that happens at a retreat--I only offer this as an isolated incident that

relates to the topic of shame. But when people look at each other once again at the end of a retreat, they realize that these people who looked so ordinary in the beginning were each carrying a complex history of meanings, hurts, fears, and aspirations. They also realize that this applies to all the people they meet each day.

The person you're facing at the grocery store, or at work, or in your family, very likely has their own complex internal history and feelings. Just like the people at the retreat, they are doing the best they know how (which often isn't very functional, unfortunately) as they try to deal with internal feelings they think they can never let anyone see. Often they aren't even aware of these feelings on a conscious level.

Does knowing this allow you to feel more compassion for them? Does knowing it allow you to feel more compassion for yourself?

I hope that knowing that you're not the only one with the nagging feeling that there's something wrong with you helps you to begin to let go of that feeling.

Shame, as I said, is the feeling that something is wrong with you. But the reality is that something was DONE to you (on purpose or inadvertently--it doesn't matter). No matter what the appearance, it is NOT true that something is wrong with you. You may be acting in extremely dysfunctional ways as a result of past trauma, but that does not mean there is something wrong with you. It just means that as a result of some early significant negative emotional experiences you have developed a way of creating your reality that sometimes creates some lousy results.

You need to take your "creating" off auto-pilot and learn how to do it consciously and intentionally.

This is exactly why people use Holosync. Holosync increases your conscious awareness, so you can see what you're doing to yourself. It allows you to see that there really isn't anything wrong with you. At the same time, it dramatically increases your threshold for what you can handle before sliding into the dysfunctional feelings and behaviors you may use to cope with shame. The second tool we use is the support materials and personal support we provide, especially my online courses and Centerpointe retreats. This information shows you, step-by-step, how you are creating your current results, inside and out, and how you can learn to create the results you want.

The most important thing to remember is that you don't have to believe that feeling that something is wrong with you. Feelings, especially bad ones, don't mean that there is something wrong with you (they also don't mean there is something wrong with someone else, but that's another article). I suggest that you STOP believing such feelings. You do not have to live with shame and all its debilitating symptoms. Centerpointe programs are very powerful ways to end shame, and I encourage you to either get involved, or get more involved, and to stay involved. And, take advantage of our support.

No matter who you are, or what your past or current situation, you can be happy,

peaceful, and successful in the world, if you know how to do it. If I can do it, anyone can.

Be well.

Bill

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