

THE HALL OF SHAME

Shame is the mother and father of all our negative, self-limiting emotions. Our fears, doubts, anxieties etc, are all fed, watered, and sustained by shame. It is shame that feeds our negative drives with misconceptions about who we are, these misconceptions are based on the various messages we received as children about our place in the world and our worth. Shame teaches us, from very early on, to conform and comply at all costs, otherwise there is the danger that the essential qualities of security and love may be withdrawn and how would we survive without security and love? Shame convinces us that whilst we perform in a way that makes others happy, even at our own expense, we will survive and so we learn to please, even when it would be better not to do so.

Shame is the fear of being found out, the fear of being exposed and the world discovering the ugly truth about who we really are. Shame is what keeps us pretending, denying, justifying, modifying the truth; it seeks to protect us from being diminished any further. Shame is that 'shudder' we feel when we have stood in the arena of humiliation, or under the bright lights of mocking and ridicule. Shame is that feeling that 'something is wrong with me', but whilst the world does not know maybe I will be OK. This is why we spend so much sub-conscious and at times conscious energy projecting a public persona of 'I'm OK', because we hope this will prevent the truth coming out about what really exists inside.

Many of us on hearing the word shame do not immediately identify with it, because we believe it has no bearing on our disablement and dysfunction, but this is nearly always because we do not understand the all-pervasive nature of shame. Shame is internalised so early on (in our pre-verbal stage) that it is one of the first unspoken messages we learn. We learn shame from those who have also been crippled by shame (usually to begin with our parents/guardians). They, largely unconsciously, teach us conditionality; attaching our worth, our value to performing and behaving in certain ways, and whilst we act in accordance with their mandate, some sense of security and safety is maintained. However, if we fall short of the expectations that have been laid down, then affection, attention and affirmation are often withheld, which tells us (particularly when we are children) that something is wrong with us. It is important to remember that as children we are not mature enough or sophisticated enough in our thinking to separate our behaviour from who we are. Therefore, if what we do leads to the withdrawal of affection or some statement of devaluation, then that message contributes to the way we perceive and define our value and importance, which in turn dictates our outlook, attitudes and the pattern of future behaviour.

The hall of shame is not about continuing the trend of heaping shame on top of shame, it is about freeing up the mind from the illusions perpetuated by shame. Shame has been woven into the fabric of the self to such an extent that if we do not start trying to disentangle ourselves from it we will never be the best we can be. The hall of shame requires us to look at what we have done to contribute to the shaming and undermining of others, as well as looking at how we have been devalued and shamed. Focusing on the most significant and debilitating acts of shame is crucial because they hold the key to the chains that bind us. To share those things that we least want to share, with a non-shaming person (someone who has taken a similar journey), disempowers shame. Shame lives in the dark corners and recesses of the mind, it lives in secret. It is only by bringing shame into the light, in a safe, secure and sensitive environment, that you can become free of its intimidating, enslaving influence. Walk down the hall of shame and discover for yourself that you are not a mistake that is best kept hidden, you are in fact a light that needs to shine.