

## THE MANY FACES AND VOICES OF SHAME

Shame is the primary by-product of emotional neglect, poor communication, family dysfunction and loss of self-importance. Its life begins with an absence of positive mirroring (responses), positive affirmations and intimacy and is fed further and nurtured by a range of mixed messages, which pollutes the child's sense of worth. This in turn confuses the child and sets up a state of internal conflict. It is in the midst of this conflict that shame carves away at our 'core self' and our authenticity. We all come into this world with amazing beauty and potential but if we are not affirmed and helped to feel good about ourselves, we never make real contact with our inner essence, our real purpose and nature. This leads us to believe that what does lie inside of us is inadequate and not good enough. In fact, one's 'realness' is then gradually substituted by various false selves. These false selves are created by the child's inability to make sense of the double messages that it is being fed, by those who are central characters in its life. There are many overt and covert demands, expectations and conditions imposed on the child, these are often tied to the child getting its emotional needs met, so the child learns to act in accordance with both the spoken and unspoken conditions and expectations to get what it needs. Exposure to this conditional environment perpetuates an internal culture of confusion and falsehood.

Once these false selves (sub-personalities) have been conceived, the whole process of loss of self, and with it, loss of one's intrinsic value, begins. We then become entangled in the web of denial and falsehood created by these sub-personalities and dance to their tune as we have become convinced that our true self is something to be ashamed of. So, the many faces and voices of shame begin their diverse and varied career with vigilance and dedication. Each face and voice ensuring that who we really are is never found out or discovered... not even by ourselves.

Guilt is - I have made a mistake. Shame is - I am a mistake. Guilt gives us hope that we might be able to make amends and put things right. Shame denies us this possibility and keeps us trapped within the feelings of inadequacy and low self-importance. Much of the negative dialogue that has been set in motion inside of us resonates in our minds and is propelled by the feeling of shame. It tells us with unhealthy frequency that "we are flawed", "something is wrong with us", "we will be found out", "we could never achieve that goal", and so it goes on churning out negative self-talk, which becomes integrated into our belief system and self-perception.

These voices (the negative self talk), create many sides and various shades to our personalities, which, in fact, make us very different people in a range of situations. These voices help to emerge the faces of jealousy, irritability, stubbornness, prejudice, hypocrisy, as well as a network of denials and sophisticated defence mechanisms - all of these having been created and then sustained by our continuing to dance hypnotically to the out-dated rhythms of our sub-personalities.

Understanding the internal creation of shame offers us some of the solutions to our mental divisions and the continuing disintegration of ourselves. It allows us to begin to make the distinction between the acquired self and the authentic self and create a programme of divorce from that which we have become (the acquired) and marriage to that which we really are (the authentic). The time to be me has arrived, let me remove the masks of falsehood and silence the voices of shame, with understanding and compassion.