

SHAME

What is the difference between shame and guilt?

Shame is described as a painful sense of having done something wrong. The expression, "You should be ashamed" was sometimes applied in chiding someone for doing wrong – to invoke a sense of wrongdoing or what's called contrition. Guilt is defined as a responsibility for wrongdoing. Shame is an internal matter perhaps resulting from our conscience that tells us, "you did something wrong, or that was wrong". The well-known author and counselor, John Bradshaw addresses both positive and negative aspects of shame in his book, "Healing the Shame that Binds You":

Our **healthy shame** is essential as the ground of our spirituality. By signaling us of our essential limitations, our healthy shame lets us know that we are not God. Our healthy shame points us in the direction of some larger meaning. It lets us know that there is something or someone greater than ourselves. Our healthy shame is the psychological ground of our humility."

Toxic shame is no longer an emotion that signals our limits, it is a state of being, a core identity. Toxic shame gives you a sense of worthlessness, a sense of failing and falling short as a human being. Toxic shame is a rupture of the self with the self – it is described further by the self-analysis: If I am flawed, defective and a mistake, then there is nothing that can be done about me.

"Any human emotion can become internalized. When **internalized**, an emotion stops functioning in the manner of an emotion and becomes a part of our character. You probably know of someone who could be labeled 'an angry person', or someone you'd call a 'sad sack'. In both cases the emotion has become the core of the person's character, her identity. The person doesn't have anger or melancholy, she is angry and melancholy. Shame is internalized when one is abandoned. **Abandonment** is the precise term to describe how one loses one's authentic self and ceases to exist psychologically. Children cannot know who they are without reflective mirrors. Parents or caretakers who are shut down emotionally (all shame based parents) cannot mirror and affirm their child's emotions.

"The shame binding of feelings, needs and natural instinctual drives, is a key factor in changing healthy shame into toxic shame. **Shame-bound** means that any feeling, and need or any drive, prompts shame...you are shamed to the core."

Healthy shame begins at birth and through the Holy Spirit that indwells us with discernment and understanding of sin, disobedience, conviction, forgiveness, healing and restoration. Toxic shame is characterized by a *sense of worthlessness, a sense of failing and falling short as a human being.*

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