

## **SHAME AS A TEACHER: 'LOWLY WISDOM' AT THE MILLENNIUM©**

### **Introduction**

Can lust for knowledge sometimes be a moral transgression? Are there natural limits to experience? These are ancient questions which should never be ignored. In the contemporary world, the media constantly displays an abundance of shadow and evil, with a steady résumé of crime, abuse, ethnic conflicts, and ecological disasters. Technology, with all its benefits, creates an alienating quality of speed and abstraction. The forces of globalization whip the process onward. Under this onslaught, the moral structure of individuals and communities steadily weakens. Is there a basic human wisdom which can provide moral orientation and tell us our limits?

Shame is the emotion of limits, and is the price of self-knowledge. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the Archangel Rafael advises Adam to be 'lowly wise.' The Angel has been telling Adam a great deal about the meaning and purpose of things, and counsels patience. Knowledge will come in time. However, Adam's imagination and curiosity are too much. He eats the apple so that he will know what God knows now! As a result, Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden, and know shame for the first time. Shame came into the world to teach us about our relationship to the Self, and about our finitude.

Shame can be an everyday guide to a humble wisdom. Especially in hazardous times of personal and cultural liminality, such wisdom can be an anchor. When crossing thresholds of new awareness, we always run the risk of becoming inflated and dangerous. Shame can provide a gradient, so that we do not undertake too much for our own good.

Usually, we think of shame as a symptom to be eliminated rather than being useful or wise. During the modern era the attitude toward shame, and toward emotions in general, shifted radically. Certainty and perfection became the ideal. After Descartes, embodied emotion was relegated to — and perhaps became — the unconscious of Western culture. One result of this disownment was the loss of the natural moral bearings of individuals and communities. The Age of Reason has created its dark opposite. Our post-Enlightenment world is pervaded by violence, worship of power, and a shame-haunted narcissism.

In contrast, the Parzival Legend shows that shame functioned well as a guide within an intact, pre-Enlightenment, world-view. From a very different perspective, recent scientific discoveries about the brain's workings are also helping us reconnect with the innate primacy of shame. These neurobiological findings have begun to show the crucial role of shame in the formation of the emotional self.

Placing these findings in the context of Jung's view of emotion and feeling, I will develop the view that the fundamental core of self is indeed emotion and feeling. In this connection, shame can be seen as the archetype, or generic modulator of emotion and feeling. It shapes our character, our ongoing sense of self.

These varying perspectives all have the common theme that shame can indeed be a guide to a humble wisdom. As we create a pathway into the future at the millennium, we badly need such a point of orientation.

### **Shame, Guilt and Culture**

Shame is the emotion which most frequently teaches humility and limits. When boundaries are overstepped, we feel shame. The parameters at issue may range from the person and society, to the individual and the cosmos.

Practically speaking, we tend to see this emotion as a painful symptom, something to be done away with as soon as possible. The fact is, we are an unconsciously shame-ridden culture. Many theories of narcissistic and borderline disorders are based on it. Street talk is full of considerations of being 'dised' (i.e., disrespected). In the larger picture, wars and revolutions, ethnic conflicts, and genocide, seem substantially based in shame dynamics (Hinton, A.L., 1998; Scheff, 1997; Wurmser, 1978).

We tend to speak more of guilt than shame. Guilt is usually about some specific wrong which can be righted, a hurtful thought or action, generally involving a certain person or situation (Jacoby, p.1-4; Williams, pp. 219-223). In guilt, we usually fear some retribution. One can be guilty without doubting one's self-worth. It generally involves only a part of the self. With guilt, there is a specific wrong, perhaps an illegal act, but it can be remedied through some form of penance or penalty.

Shame can be social and somewhat superficial, or it can bring into doubt the very basis and value of one's own being. In shame, the self may be seen as flawed and inferior (Morrison, p. 48). One may feel

"mortified," and want to disappear. Its word origins refer to "keeping under cover" (Schneider, pp. 29-30). This emotion is not readily resolved.

Due to "reasonable doubt," an individual might be formally acquitted of a crime or misdemeanor. Often, the finding of "not guilty" would not resolve the issue for a morally sensitive person. Shame would continue, resulting in a period of self-examination. Such a person might ask, "How could I have been involved in such a thing? What does this say about my character?" For some people, spiritual questions would arise. A shame-provoked sense of finitude can have profound dimensions.

Shame is therefore much more than merely social. Indeed, deep shame is often experienced completely alone. With guilt, some restitution for the act of wrongdoing is usually possible. In contrast, shame creates a profound sense of "wrongness" and self-doubt which, when full-blown, is too pervasive to offer the possibility of easy remedy.

### **An Example of Shame Experience**

I found an excellent example of a shame experience in the *Atlantic Monthly* (Kane, 1992):

"A mathematics professor in his fifties, who likes to think of himself as dynamic and rakish but who is at the moment 'between lovers,' stands on the subway platform eyeing an undergraduate. He sees that his gaze is making her uncomfortable. He feels a twinge of shame over this intrusion, but not enough to stop. He files his behavior under 'manly aggression' and keeps staring. Then a searing thought enters and exits his mind so fast that later he won't remember having had it. The idea seems almost to have been waiting there like a hot coal, and after stumbling upon it and getting singed, he flees in panic. Feeling inexplicably crestfallen, he looks away from the young woman, buries his head in his paper, and seeks out a separate car when the train comes in. For the rest of the morning he feels listless and down. He doesn't want people near him, and growls if they press. He works methodically, waiting for the unnamable discomfort to pass. The idea that scorched him was an image of himself, all too believable, as a hungry, unhappy loner, a man who had wasted his youth and was incapable of lasting attachments, staring forlornly at a woman who could not possibly be interested in him. The shame that that image evoked was too hot to handle."

## **Shame as an 'Inferior' Emotion**

In modern intellectual history, shame has generally been regarded as a "lesser" emotion (Schneiderman, p.50). Shame-based cultures — generally non-Western — were seen as manifestations of a "primitive," or a "collective" ethos. Such cultures and communities were portrayed as dominated by a group-consciousness, an "irrational" preoccupation with "face" which constrained individual development. Guilt was propounded as a manifestation of a more advanced type of moral reasoning. The "rational" individual of Western, supposedly guilt-oriented societies, was praised as being at the forefront of cultural evolution (Shore, p. 8).

This view of the superiority of guilt was based on the European Enlightenment model of rational perfection as the ideal. From the guilt perspective, right and wrong behavior could be analyzed into neat models, which were followed by "civilized" Western people.

However, logical propositions about right and wrong look sensible only when seen in isolation in the textbooks of moral philosophers. In real human interactions, people do not behave like logical propositions. On the contrary, De Tocqueville commented on the prevalence of shame in the nineteenth century America he admired. In ancient Greece, the idealized land of our ancestral spirits, guilt was only a subdivision of shame (Williams, B., pp. 92-95). Anthropologists have shown the great complexity of so-called "primitive" cultures. And the most refined Western cultures have shown themselves to be as capable of "barbarous" behavior as any other.

At this point in Western history, it is the lack of shame that we tend to bemoan as a sign of the decline in communal values. The O. J. Simpson trial was a dramatic, public instance of the difference between guilt and shame. Guilt is formal and legalistic. Shame is personal and cannot be readily excised by formal verdicts, or even specific penalties or their lack. When shame is missing, we feel the wrong has not been set right, whatever the formal verdict of "guilty" or "not guilty."

Clinically, focus on guilt often leads to superficial discussions with a rational bent. We often say "guilt" when we really mean "shame." In actual experience, the two are frequently mixed.

## **Descartes and Historical Perspectives on Emotion**

How did shame lose its conscious value in Western culture, and then reappear as a tormenting force in the contemporary psyche? We find important historical clues by examining the origins of the Enlightenment. Steven Toulmin has researched those times, and brought new perspective to the subject (Toulmin, 1990).

The "Age of Reason" did not start with a group of brilliant intellectuals sitting in their armchairs and seeking a new model of truth. Like all thought, it originated amidst specific social and historical currents. The early seventeenth century was, in general, full of catastrophes. Cromwell wreaked havoc in England. There was a little ice age in Europe. Famine resulted in the countryside, and starving people thronged the cities. Apocalyptic pronouncements of the coming end of the world filled the air. Such was the atmosphere surrounding the birth of the "Enlightenment."

Toulmin's researches have brought out new facts about the life of Descartes himself, who best symbolizes the birth of this world-view. He discovered that Descartes was heavily influenced by the turmoil of his times. He had close, emotional knowledge of the violent assassination of King Henry IV of France, and was directly present as an observer during the cruel progress of the Thirty Years' War. Descartes was heavily immersed in the most destructive events of his time, and these experiences surely influenced his reactive embracing of a geometric model of truth. "Cogito ergo sum" was a retreat from the bloody contingencies of body and emotion.

Descartes was similar in this to the older Plato, who had been disillusioned with the defeat of Athens and the death of Socrates. Such reactive idealism gave hope in difficult times.

Descartes' life experience is conveyed by the epitaph he chose for his tombstone: "He who hid well, lived well" (Damasio, p. 249).

### **Some Effects of the Enlightenment Model of Truth**

Because of a general humility about the limitations of human knowledge, it was unusual to have severe penalties for theological deviations during the Middle Ages (Toulmin, pp. 77-8). Later, Francis Bacon and others warned of the dangers of "proud learning." Voltaire wrote on the idea of *portée*, or living

within one's grasp or range (Shattuck, p. 34). As the Enlightenment ideal took hold, this cautious, humble approach to knowledge was forgotten.

The absolute model of truth lent itself to even more severe forms of religious intolerance. The "parsimony" of science, as applied to religious dogma, translated into absolutism. When the model is geometric perfection, there is not much room for messy compromises of theological differences.

The effect of the geometric model of knowledge finally resulted in the decline of religious belief. Myth was debunked as flawed and irrational, and the individual was left more and more without moral anchors or guidelines. The Cartesian model, springing from a reactive horror against the events of the seventeenth century, took its revenge upon religion itself.

Idealistic plans for perfecting society slowly replaced religion. An obsession with organization and quantification began to dominate such disparate areas as forestry and city planning. Descartes himself had expressed a strong prejudice in favor of "well-ordered" towns. *L'esprit géométrique* became the driving force behind the building of roads, mapping, and the reorganization of communities. These undertakings generally over-rode any local concerns. An identifiable and quantifiable population is an administrative necessity for the utopian and authoritarian state, for purposes such as taxation, conscription, and the distribution of allotted benefits (Scott, 1998).

The French Revolution incarnated this Enlightenment ideal of progress and perfection. Many long-standing customs were to be scrapped, including the months and the days of the week. A new, scientific model — seen as the victory of reason over custom — was to predominate. It was said, for instance, that France would be better off if it lost a third of its population so that resources could be more equitably distributed! It is not far from such an idea to more recent models of revolution, progress, and perfection such as Stalinism, the so-called Cultural Revolution in China, and the genocides in Nazi Germany and Cambodia (Hinton, A., 1998).

In our post-Holocaust, post-modern times, we are again raising the questions of the limits of geometric models of truth. Post-modern critiques sometimes reach a level of nihilistic absurdity, but at best teach us that there are always limits to truth. This can lead us back to the tradition of a more tolerant, humble view of knowledge.

## **Narcissism as the Modern Condition**

When the God-image is no longer mediated by religious and cultural forms, that energy does not merely disappear. It falls back into a psyche that already suffers from a lack of structural coherence. As a consequence, the energy of the Self pervades the psyche in raw form. That is the modern condition, both individually and collectively.

Narcissistic and borderline syndromes result when the psyche is overwhelmed with such unmediated energies of the Self (Edinger, 1972, pp. 66-7; Satinover, p. 100). Buffeted by the raw energies of the Self, the narcissistic person fluctuates between extremes of grandiosity and inferiority. The longing for the ideal becomes so intense as to be overwhelming. It is impossible to be God. Some have called this the "malady of the ideal." (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1985). Such a failure, such an impossible task, leads to terrible and haunting feelings of failure and inferiority. Inner structures and boundaries are overwhelmed. There is anxiety over the deficiency, and potential fragmentation, of the self. Shame being the emotion of boundaries, the acute and chronic threats to inner boundaries result in profound shame.

"Borderline" individuals represent the extremes of this modern condition. Such people are, for various reasons, susceptible to carrying our cultural projective identifications: the stuff we don't want. "Borderline" individuals are torn by the shame and turmoil, the boiling, unassimilated energies of the Self, the shadows of the modern world. They carry too much for their own good, and, to our discomfort, mirror it back to us.

War, addiction, street crime, and the general decline of moral behavior, are to a substantial degree, desperate reactions to an overload of shame. If we can get "high" for a time, perhaps we can indeed be God, or at least have the temporary illusion of an intact self. If we can humiliate other persons, other communities, or even entire nations, we can pass the shame onto them. A community haunted by shame is more susceptible to authoritarian manipulation. Genocidal actions are the most extreme examples (Hinton, A. L., 1998).

We have despoiled our moral world, and this is reflected in our despoliation of nature. As Luigi Zoja has brilliantly pointed out, we unconsciously know our hubris in these things. We have offended

Themis, the powerful goddess of boundaries and limits. At the hidden core of our being we fear retribution from her counterpart, *Nemesis* (Zoja, pp. 49-56). That is where we stand at the millennium.

### **Parzival: Shame as a Guide on the Path**

Some old myths still have a numinous quality for the modern psyche, and make us aware of what we have lost. This seems particularly true for the Grail Legends. In these tales, we can see what it would be like to live in a coherent moral community, where shame is accepted as a teacher. In Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, shame repeatedly guides individuals toward the path of individuation and meaning. They welcome shame, because it helps them keep or regain their moral bearings.

One of the most unforgettable events of shaming in literature is Parzival's confrontation by Cundrie before the entire Arthurian court. Just as Parzival has been accepted in joy as a member of the Round Table, Cundrie publicly recounts all his failures to the court, and most especially his failure to ask the questions which would have released the Grail King from his suffering. Before King Arthur and all the court, she emotionally confronts him: "The reputation of the Table Round has been maimed by the presence of Lord Parzival...when the Sorrowful Angler [the Grail King] was sitting there, joyless and despondent, you failed to free him from his sighs!...In Heaven, before the seat of the Most High, you are assigned to Hell as you will be assigned here on earth [as well]..."(Eschenbach, pp. 164-5).

Parzival had failed in his deeper task because of the superficial shame of social propriety. When confronted by Cundrie, he suffers the deepest level of shame: a failure of integrity.

Eschenbach's description of Parzival's reaction to humiliation shows the perspective of those times. In the world of the high Middle Ages, shame was not seen as an inferior concern of conformists, but a guide to the knight who is serving the most sacred purposes. The author strongly doubts whether merely a brave heart and manly breeding can help a person after such mortification. Answering his own questions about Parzival's character, Eschenbach says: "Nevertheless, he has a further resource, a sense of shame that reigns supreme over all his ways...a sense of shame is rewarded in the end by esteem and, when all is said and done, is the soul's crowning glory and a virtue to be practiced above all others." (Eschenbach, p. 166)

In thinking of shame as a teacher, it is important to remember that Cundrie, who publicly mortified him, is also the first to indirectly inform Parzival about his lost, speckled "shadow" brother, the "infidel" knight Feirefiz. At the marvelous conclusion of the story, it is Cundrie who is revealed as a messenger of the Grail, as well as a sorceress. It is she who proclaims Parzival's destiny as the new Lord of the Grail (Ibid., p. 387).

It is Parzival's assumption of the mantle of shame which leads to his redemption and transformation. He is restored to accord with the heavens, with his true destiny as the Grail King. It is of interest to note that Emma Jung and Von Franz considered the Grail to represent the feeling function (Jung, E. and Von Franz, p. 388). Shame is a powerful teacher, and, in this singular work of Western literature and moral thought, it is clearly the vehicle which can lead to redemption and the deepest sense of integrity. It leads Parzival to the Grail of discriminated feeling, the truth of the heart.

### **The Psychobiological Immanence of Shame**

There is a strong biological basis for seeing shame as a teacher. For the first few months of life, the infant is largely dependent on mother's soothing behavior to regulate the ebb and flow of its emotions. When that fails, and the small infant is overwhelmed by emotions, one may see a "freezing-up" behavior. Mel Knight has speculated that this is an early experience of finitude or shame (Personal communication, 1998). The neurobiologist and psychoanalyst Allan Schore, in his pioneering work, *Affect Regulation and the Formation of the Self*, has described how an area of the brain specifically involved with shame, the orbito-frontal cortex, matures between 10 and 12 months of age.

This shame cortex, located in the orbito-frontal area, is connected with memory and inhibitory control, acting as a regulator for the cacophony of infantile affects. Such regulation — the basis of the emerging self — involves internalization of the interaction between self and other. These internal representations begin to act as modulators of affective states (Schore, pp. 177-8). The maturation of this cortex coincides with the growing motility of the child, as it moves toward becoming a more autonomous being. At this age, the child must learn to hear "no," and to inhibit its more dangerously exuberant impulses.

This function is largely right-brain (Ibid., pp. 66-7; p. 196). We know that the brain roughly doubles in size during the first two years of life due to myelinization. However, there is a death of 15-85 per cent of neurons between infancy and childhood (Ibid., pp. 19-20; pp. 258-9). There is a kind of "Darwinian" survival of areas and propensities in the brain. This is mediated by local hormonal influences in the brain itself, especially during "open periods" of development, like Lorenz's imprinting mechanism. The mother, and especially her gaze, directly stimulates or fails to stimulate growth or inhibitory hormones in the evolving brain (Ibid., pp. 71-7; 271; p. 333). This is obviously a highly social, interactive process. The attuned mother is "inside" the infant, "metabolizing" the infant's emotions, literally shaping its brain.

A secure parent, confident of meaning and perspective, gives clear, attuned messages about behavior and emotional management. That relationship is internalized as a stable, coherent structure of the self. It is reasonable to think that the fragmentation of cultural myth has, over time, created increasingly unsure and disconnected parents. That is, the parents have themselves become incrementally more narcissistic, with increasing problems in managing their own shame and self-esteem. This has had its effects on the emotional configuration of their children. Over these last centuries, we have increasingly actualized what John Donne described in the early seventeenth century, at the beginning of the modern age (*An Anatomy of the World*, 1611):

'Tis all in peeces, all cohaerence gone;  
All just supply and all Relation:  
Prince, Subject, Father, Sonne, are things forgot,  
For every man alone thinkes he hath got  
To be a Phoenix, and that there can be  
None of that kind, of which he is, but hee.

### **Jung and the Emotional Self**

Much of Jung's early research concerned emotions. The word association test, psychogalvanic skin responses, and his writings on complexes were substantially about emotions. He spoke of affectivity being the ground and basis of personality (CW 3, par. 78). In another place, Jung said, "...emotion is the chief

source of consciousness" (CW 9i, par. 179). He described the highly differentiated subjective sense that human beings have of the interpersonal affective field. We possess this sense like an "instinct," similar to animals (CW 8, par. 25).

The nuclear element of a complex is its feeling-tone, which Jung equates with its intensity of affect (Ibid., par. 19). It is through feeling that the individual sorts out the relative value of inner, symbolic-emotional experiences, and shapes the structure of the personal self. Jung indeed says that it is through feeling that the archetype exerts its influence on the "configurations" of our everyday, ongoing life (Ibid., par. 411). This strongly suggests that affects have an innate "shaping" tendency, as well as being the ground and source of consciousness. To quote William Willeford (1987, pp. 149-50), "The self has an evaluative aspect that has never been sufficiently stressed — and has never been made explicit enough — though Jung had it in mind when he regarded feeling and affectivity as essential qualities of the vital core."

In fact, Jung said contradictory things about the affective spectrum. Despite his above ideas about the affective basis of personality, he made a great deal of the separation between emotion and feeling. He was very eager to preserve feeling as something conscious and rational, and rather different than emotion (CW 18, par.. 45). In addition, he said that the dynamic, emotional pole of the archetype indeed provided the dynamism, but that the image provided the integrative element (CW 8, par. 414). That is, the archetypal image was the basic meaning-giving element, with a rather nobler role than affect. The wise animal sense of life, patterning through emotion and feeling, was usually not portrayed as the deciding factor in individuation.

In Jungian writings, the affectivity of complexes is most frequently depicted as nuisance rather than guide. It is something that "gets in the way." Emphasis on the image as an integrative guide for affects — the image originating from the "spiritual" or ultraviolet pole of the archetype — has fostered a tendency for Jungians and Jungian psychology to "go upwards," away from the earth, away from emotion, body, and the psychobiological self. Thus the Cartesian split of mind and body has generally continued in Jungian psychology.

This split has manifested as a kind of polarity. On the one hand, the urge for transcendence through the image. On the other hand: emotion, shadow, Nigredo. In much of Jungian psychology, one gets

the impression that transformation occurs through images of the transcendent, and that the meaningful patterning of life occurs through the "spiritual," or "ultraviolet," spectrum of experience. The image as the "leader" of experience is emphasized rather than the turbulent emotions that give it birth. At the extreme, this leads to a romantic, seductive promise of being healed by the special experience of an archetypal image (Williams, D., p. 14). This attitude often results in a kind of "symbolic excitement," rather than symbolic experience.

### **Idealized Image and Faustian Progress**

Romancing the symbolic image can lead to a Faustian intoxication with the ideal. For the sake of his fantastic projects, Faust rejected Care (Sorge) for the earth (Edinger, 1990, p. 83). All Western individuals have some of this seductive myth of Progress somewhere in their psyches. It has expressed itself in the ideology of endless change and revolution (Calasso, 1994). Actual revolution has subsided. Infatuation with the idealized image continues, creating a restless obsession with perfection at the expense of life. Technologies such as the Internet add to the endless possibility of knowing more, having more. We are alienated from Care: the immediate, emotional sense of earthy responsibility. The destruction of the environment continues. The search for a perfect happiness to which we are entitled, and the pursuit of change for the sake of change, race on.

For the sake of a progressive land development, Faust caused the murder of Baucis and Philemon, a gracious old couple who were close to the gods. He experienced no shame or guilt about his deeds. (Ibid., pp. 84-5).

Jung was plagued by his own Faustian heritage. Over the door at Bollingen, Jung carved: *Philemonis Sacrum — Fausti Poenitentia* (Shrine of Philemon — Repentance of Faust). He saw the Faustian moral problem as the key to the future of the modern world.

While at Byron's French commune, Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* as a counter to Faustian romantic excesses (Shattuck, pp. 98-9). Can shame cool such collective and individual excess? Are we Faust, or are we Frankenstein? Can shame help teach us "lowly wisdom," so that we welcome Care once more?

## **Emotion, Feeling and the Structure of the self**

Feelings are best seen on a continuum with affects, or as "cooled affects." Feeling presumes the internalized, functional memory of embodied emotional events (Damasio, p. 159; Willeford, p. 247). That is, feelings are based on memories of emotions. The basic "drive" of the emotions is retained in feelings, and gives them their continuing "charge."

These embodied emotions have ways of "knowing" and deciding which are more efficient than thinking. Often rather automatic and out of conscious awareness, they are usually quite orderly (Ibid. pp. 219-222). They are regular, functioning parts of our personal self-structures, shaping our ongoing internal and communal lives. This gives our lives a sense of cohesion, and is the basis of our continuing, background awareness of self as process.

The emotional self is the original core of self. Broucek describes this as a "prerepresentational self," which forms around our affective core. This is an enduring element of character that continues through developmental changes. The "affective core" has to do with early patterns of intersubjective relatedness, and is also "the foundation of our sense of ourselves as individuals" (Broucek, p. 45).

There is certainly not much syntactic communication in this early emergent self, when there seem to be only tones and vestiges of images. Shame becomes our teacher, so far as primary shaping of character and acculturation is concerned. Autonomous self control and self-direction are not possible before the shame cortex develops. From the classic psychoanalytic view, renouncing of childhood omnipotence, the great leap away from primary narcissism, takes place during this early period when the shame cortex matures (Schoore, p. 208; p. 213).

Without affects we would not be alive, since we would not connect with anything. We cannot think ourselves into having a self. Indeed, we would have no desire to do or think. Affects have direction and connection; they connect us to both self and others. In addition, the body-self's ongoing "background" feeling of aliveness is crucial to any vital sense of presence in the world (Damasio, pp. 150-1). Thought and image are not independent entities, but are intertwined with emotion from the start (Ibid., p. 160).

Indeed, most of the ongoing, sorting and shaping processes of life are based in emotional feedback loops from the body. For the most part, embodied emotions and emotional memories sort things out for us in a very efficient way, before we actually even think about our choices. Intellectually intact individuals who have suffered specific neurological damage cutting them off from embodied emotion, have profoundly flawed judgment (Ibid., pp. 212 ff.).

These findings contribute a clear limit and humbling perspective to the inflated pretensions of "pure" thought.

### **Shame as the Archetype of Feeling**

If something like "cooled affects" decides value, as feelings, and this shapes the structure of the personal self, what cools the affects? Shame, itself an emotion, would seem to be the "cooler," inhibitor, or dampener of the other emotions (Nathanson, 1992, p. 134). Louis Stewart suggested that shame is the archetype of feeling. He also viewed shame, and feeling in general, as crucial to a stable and viable culture. Stewart speculated that shame evolved directly as a function of the social needs of the mammalian species (Stewart, pp. 284-5). Shame, as the generic modulator of emotion into feeling, enables us to be participating members of a moral community.

Shaping and maintaining a coherent self is an ongoing, valuing function. In establishing and maintaining a coherent self with integrity, shame is our teacher. Its role is discrimination: the "regulation" or "taming" of affects into the function of "feeling." One could see this on a graduated scale of intensity, ranging from powerful — sometimes chaotic — affective states to refined feeling, or even "dead" feeling.

In the early years of infancy and childhood, the attuned — or non-attuned — mother modulates and mediates this process. Her strongest influence seems to be on right-brain development and function. Most of our ongoing, automatic evaluating of situations and behaviors, the emotional "tone" of our lives, there before thought, is regulated by the right brain structures (Schore, pp. 30-31). That is where the shame cortex resides. Later, language and father become more important. The larger community takes on this "civilizing" function of cooling affects through shame.

Western culture has deified reason, and dismissed emotion and feeling. As a consequence, the modern, alienated individual has difficulty maintaining a personal sense of meaning. The moral compass, the capacity for evolved feeling, has been damaged. We need to seek and renew that Grail of lowly wisdom.

### **A Final Example: Shame as a Lifelong Teacher**

Recently, after reading something I had written on shame, an older colleague confided a personal story. She told me that, all her life, she had kept a photograph of herself as a tall, awkward twelve year old on her bedroom dresser. This picture was connected with a period of intense shame about body and self. However, the mysterious thing was that she had always found it paradoxically strengthening.

My friend had always wondered why she kept it there on her dresser for so many years. It was kept in a private place, like most shame-connected things, and yet its ritual presence was important. It had regularly helped solidify her sense of self through many decades.

Therapists must become attuned to the potential value of shame as an experience which may give deeper grounding to the self. "This initially sudden painful self-consciousness, if tolerated, may put self-identity into perspective, and consequently confirm, shape, and enlarge it...[shame commands] a more sustained look [which] reveals an underlying core of positive belief and self valuation." The self thereby becomes more defined and coherent (Ibid., p. 462; p. 490).

### **Conclusion: Shame and Humble Wisdom**

We have journeyed through history, culture, neurobiology and psychology. All these perspectives show that shame is a universal teacher that can keep us close to the core of self. It is our psychobiological heritage, bringing culture and ethics deeply into our brains and minds.

Shame is frequently connected with the alchemical Nigredo. If consciously suffered, shame can burn away artificialities of persona, and on another level, layers of the false self (Jacoby, p. 105). Faithful embracing of shame can, in time, bring new patterns of deeper feeling into awareness. Such grounded

feeling can reconnect us with the lineaments of order latent in the unconscious (Van Eenwyk, p. 166). In turn, this increases the deepest basis of self-esteem.

Shame reduces us to that little clod of earth that we are. If shame is consciously endured, a kind of *kenosis*, or emptying, results (Edinger, 1995, pp. 44-6). This "emptying" is a deeper openness without the ego's preconditions. The fullness of Being may then manifest itself in new ways.

At the millennium, a time of deepest liminality and archetypal passage, powerful energies are constellated. The perspective of "lowly wisdom" is of great importance, as we confront important decisions about our personal lives, our moral communities, and the limits of science and material progress. We must sniff the air, taste the inner and outer currents, and allow our sense of shame to have its voice. Shame can be trusted to keep us modest and low until, like Parzival, we can glean answers with integrity (Beebe, pp. 59-61).

To quote Wilamowitz (Toulmin, p. 19):

"To make the ancients speak, we must feed them with our own blood."

Humbly accepting shame as our teacher, being "lowly wise," is the required sacrifice of our blood, so that we can hear those voices as new meaning — rather than new insanity — during our millennial passage.

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