

Shame and Guilt

A member shares: What drove me to seek such a shaming escape as Sex and Love Addiction? I was thunder-struck when *an SLAA member* shared with me a comparison of guilt and shame. He said **guilt came from making a mistake, and that harmful shame came from being a mistake.** That was me. I was a mistake, not one of the real people, a wrong person. I learned at a young age that I shouldn't be as I was and that my wrongfulness must be hidden from others or I would be exposed. **This was where my disease began. It was not that night when I first acted out with a stranger.** It was at the age of seven when I decided I was different from the others. It was a thousand experiences that led to that moment and followed it. I had been lost in this world, all the while knowing it was my own fault. I knew I should do things right to be a good person.

My approach to SLAA was in the same vein. I abused the program, making the Steps and service into tyrannical "shoulds" which I could not do well enough. I compared myself to others with painful results. I spent hours trying to figure out how I could be okay even though I was afraid to do the "right thing." I can fight this fight no more. My expectations about how I should be or how the world should be have to be surrendered. I cannot truly give up as long as things have to go my way. When my control is out of the way, I can follow my Higher Power's lead. **Acceptance removes the tension of my ego's demands.** My ego says, "You should be free of lust, or you should be willing to do this or that."

Acceptance and humility say, **"This is the way I am right now, Lord. I ask you to take my defects, but I offer myself to you just like this. I cannot give myself to you as I am not.** If I should be better or different than I am, I'm denying who I really am. **The false me I have to protect cannot be healed.** Oh, I want to change, Lord, and I will grow as you lead me, but I cannot let you in until the real me is free to come out in acceptance."

I know that I have a brother somewhere whose brokenness is like mine. I cannot say how much I want him to know that *he* belongs here, that *he* is okay in this moment even though his insides tell him he is unacceptable. **The peace is coming, my brother. Little by little, even I can see my God doing for me what I cannot do for myself.**

GUILT	VS	SHAME
1 Is about actions and our behaviors		Intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed 1
2 Guilt focuses on behaviors and values		Shame focuses on our self-worth and feelings of being unloveable 2
3 The natural and healthy response we feel when we do something that we should not have done		An unhealthy, personal response to feeling we did not do something right or in the way it should have been done 3
4 You can feel bad about the behaviors, but still respect yourself		You lose self-respect and allow shame to define who you are as a person 4

3 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT SHAME

- We all have it.** Shame is universal and one of the most primitive human emotions that we experience.
- We're afraid to talk about it.** Being vulnerable invites people closer in and allows a stronger connection.
- The less we talk about shame, the more control it has over our lives.**

SOURCES: Shame and Grace by Lewis B. Smedes (1992), Shame and Guilt by June Price Tangney and Ronda L. Dearing (2002), TEDTalk "The Power of Vulnerability," Dr. Brené Brown (2010)