

# Let go of shame and love yourself



by Liana Shannon

Embracing our so called flaws, standing in Spirit, having some practical responses when shame rears its head and doing the work to heal ourselves, not only

improves our lives, but it makes us available to help others as well according to many philosophers.

Although we're all a work in progress, one cannot fracture the self by rejecting the parts of ourselves that we deem to be imperfect or a source of struggle. According to psychologist Dr. Jane Bolton in her article, *Shame Release and Buddhism* (*Psychology Today*, 2010), one must learn to recognize the energy of shame and name it as such, thus undermining its power: "When you start to feel depleted, inferior, not good enough, defective, that's shame. Learn to recognize its energy. Merely naming it makes it less intense."

We are often at our most spiritual when we are wrestling with brokenness, rejection or shame and it is in that place of sadness that we learn connection to Source and to compassion. Our struggle into wholeness is often where our greatest beauty is manifested. According to Jean Vanier in *The Broken Body* (Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1988), a theologian and the founder of L'Arch (a community dedicated to bettering the lives of people with developmental challenges), our brokenness is the place where we are transformed into light. He believes that unless we have experienced the deepest place of our misery, we cannot fully experience the love of God. It is there in our brokenness that we can find the truth of our wholeness and in becoming unified with our whole self, we can become a source of love and unity for others.

Embracing our flaws and trusting that our higher power has a plan for our soul and lovingly created us just as we are can be a source of strength. Christian minister Joel Osteen recommends that each morning we put on: "the breastplate of God's approval." No matter what others say to us or even what our own internalized critic has to say, we are protected by the knowledge that the Creator loves us unconditionally as we are, not in spite



of certain parts of us, but in our whole self and in the potential of what we can be. He states that our higher power made us exactly as we are, flaws and all, and did not make a mistake.

Our flaws are often the place where our greatest transformation and beauty resides. Learning to develop our gifts and improve in our challenged areas even a little bit can lead to fantastic transformation and miracles in our lives and our perceived flaws, used for good, can be a source of great beauty.

Osteen tells the story of a woman gathering water with two pots, one whole and one cracked. The cracked pot leaked all the way back to the house each day for years

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and would be half full once she arrived home. One day the cracked pot asked her why she continued to use him when he was so broken. She explained to him that his leaking watered the path along the way home and because of this, flowers grew along the path. She regularly gathered these flowers and filled her home with them. It was the crack in his pot that brought so much beauty into her home.

We live in a culture that constantly tells us that we are not living up to expectations and that our lives are filled with lack. This seeps into our psyche and plays into millions of years of animal evolution that tells us to be alert for danger and that our very survival, genetic longevity and quality of life depend upon our place in the hierarchy of our social group. However, stepping outside this maelstrom of changeable, nebulous ego-based fear and shame in order to be grounded in Spirit, eternal truths, and connection to all life, frees us from this enslavement. We are eternal pieces of God (or life-force according to one's beliefs) and that ground of being within us is not dependant on the transitory winds of approval, but upon the eternal reality of love and grace.

In *How to Free Your Mind: Tara the Liberator* (Snow Lion Publications, 2005), Thubten Chodron explains the transitory and illusory nature of these false judgments: "It is difficult to accept others and to accept ourselves. 'I should be better. I should be something different. I should have more.' All of this is conception; it's all mental fabrication...When we stop believing them, it becomes much easier to accept what we are at any given moment, knowing we will change in the next moment. We'll be able to accept what others are in one moment, knowing that they will be different in the next moment."

Many psychologists recommend first doing work to heal issues that surround one's childhood in order to let go of shame and live a fuller life in the present. Perhaps the most famous book advocating the championing and healing of the 'inner child' is John Bradshaw's *Homecoming* (Bantam Books, 1990). In it he suggests exercises wherein one can learn to unconditionally love and parent the part of one's self that is still stuck in the wounds of childhood.

Again, from her article, *Shame Release and Buddhism*, Bolton suggests a few practical responses to when shame and fear creep into our daily lives and inner dialogue:

- Recognize the energy of shame and name it (as stated earlier.)
- Realize or remind yourself that you are not the feeling of shame.
- Take a nurturing stance toward yourself.
- Think of what you haven't done for yourself because of your shame and commit to doing it anyway.
- Work against the tendency to hide and isolate yourself.
- Practice in your imagination some alternative responses to shameful situations.

Bolton also suggests that letting go of shame allows us to be fully present for others. For many philosophers, letting go of shame and allowing in love and compassion for oneself, not only benefits oneself, but is necessary in order to help others.

The Dalai Lama was quoted in an article, *Lack of Self-Confidence* ([www.viewonbuddhism.org](http://www.viewonbuddhism.org)), saying: "Human potential is the same for all. Your feeling 'I am of no value' is wrong. Absolutely wrong. You are deceiving yourself... With the realization of one's own potential and self-confidence in one's ability, one can build a better world. According to my own experience, self-confidence is very important. That sort of confidence is not a blind one; it is an awareness of one's own potential. On that basis, human beings can transform themselves by increasing the good qualities and reducing the negative qualities."

Our flaws or mistakes are temporary, ever changeable and, when worked on, can be the source of the greatest beauty and miracles in our lives. Indeed, it is in our brokenness that we find connection with all living things, who also suffer at times. When we open the window of love to ourselves as we are and all that we can be, like the lengthening days of spring, we allow in the light that ever brings us renewed life.

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