

## Shame, the 12<sup>th</sup> house and Chiron



Last year, I was invited to run a weekend on the concept of shame. This led me down many alleyways, as I discovered it is a complex and all-pervasive phenomenon.

From an intellectual point of view I discovered that shame has a hidden history. At the turn of the century, Freud was the first Western writer to propose the idea that shame and disgust were crucially important in human affairs, and the causal agent of the process of repression, whilst the social scientist Elias was the first to

explore the nature of shame as a mechanism for the evolution of civilisation in his works on civilising processes., showing how the Western societies changed their behaviour through various forms of self-restraint. He suggested that shame and disgust played a crucial role in the evolution of civilisation leading to the – social control of emotions. One of the other giants of social sciences Goffman pointed out that seeing oneself negatively in the eyes of the others was a major part in the presentation of self. Each of them implied that shame was the master emotion, rather than love, anger, fear, anxiety, grief or guilt.

Even so, whilst all three giants of the social sciences from different disciplines pointed to the crucial importance of this phenomena in shaping the individual and civilisation, there is surprisingly little follow-up in any of these disciplines. This phenomena itself can only be attributed to the hidden nature of shame maintained through silence, first by readers of the books, and then by the authors themselves. This taboo extends even into psychoanalysis and social psychology, disciplines in which emotion is a central concern.

From an experiential point of view, I discovered that it is far-reaching. Paradoxically, despite the taboo, it is perhaps the most pervasive of phenomena since it is born from the earliest of relationships beginning with the pre-nate in the womb, and throughout the various developmental processes, right up until death itself. It manifests not just at the individual level, but also at the collective: it marks a bridge between individual and family, family and society, and society and nation, nation and world, and world and universe. The healthy development of shame provides the foundation for an inner ethical compass, and by implication for expansion into the realms of boundlessness that is characteristic of self-realisation in many different traditions.

Shame can be thought of as a feeling (to feel ashamed) a mechanism to regulate a social mechanism for collective behaviour) or an action (to shame someone). Darwin noted that the phenomenon of ‘shame’ was the one thing that distinguished the human from animals. Bradshaw suggests that it is a regulating mechanism that ensures that a human being realises their limits as a human being and through this their sense of connectedness with the other.

Whilst in a healthy upbringing we all experience the affect of shame, if the child is not given adequate support in regulating the shame processes, then it becomes integrated within the developmental processes, and becomes what Bradshaw calls ‘toxic shame’. When the early relationships are threatened either by neglect, abuse, violence, loss, then the core self becomes buried under layers of defensive mechanisms to defend against the hell of disconnection – much of the real self has been banished and exiled. Shame inhabits the system and can arise as much from within as from external sources. In their own eyes, they imagine themselves to be the worst person possible in the eyes of another. The shame goes to ground and hides itself, and tends to become reinforced within a shaming spiral.

If this begins at a very early age and carries on over time, a baby cannot attach in a healthy way to the mother, then intolerable feelings of shame pervades the formation of personality and are carried forth into later life. The infant develops

a variety of psychic defensive mechanisms to avoid the intolerable feeling of shame which floods the body with anxiety. These defensive mechanisms surround the inner core of the infant such that his or her sense of self becomes hidden even from themselves. Over time, this mechanism becomes an unconscious patterning, which means that the personality is shaped by defensive mechanisms as opposed to positive patterning, and the story repeats itself.

There are many layers of these defensive mechanisms such as splitting part of the psyche off, projecting out the shame feelings, developing fantasies of how life is, or the development of a so-called 'grandiose' self, retreat into isolation or violence. Whichever these are, they prevent access to a realistic sense of identity, and push the infant into a terrifying exile.

Due to its very nature, and its defences, when I began studying the phenomenon, I did not recognise this within my own personal process. I could however relate to the sense of not having a fully developed sense of identity, and that there was always something more that needed to be discovered or found. This experience could be either confusing, but it was also what set me out on a spiritual path – in an endless seeking for something that could not be found, but which was longed for. This is the longed for connection with a significant other.

### **The 12<sup>th</sup> house connection**

Part of this quest has been an on-going interest in astrology, using the chart as a blueprint for holding something that I could never quite pinpoint. One of the strongest elements in this chart is a conjunction of sun, moon and chiron in the 12<sup>th</sup> house, opposite Jupiter and Uranus, and all squared to Neptune – to add another level of confusion to the mix.

On working with shame, I suddenly realised that shame could be considered to be the archetypal characteristic of the 12<sup>th</sup> house. It comes with a lack of identity, a tendency to dissolution, secrets, fantasies – and I could see how its traditional association with prisons, hospitals and asylums represented all these areas where human beings become banished, hidden from society. Not to be spoken about, in the same way that shame itself is to be run away from. I could see how my own defensive patterns often lead me to create internal prisons that were then manifested in the outer world – in my case by battling with academic institutions that eventually bound me. I began to see how I would be in a polarised relationship with these institutions – often rebelling from within, but also carrying out revolutionary actions that threatened the institutions – resulting in further shaming in the form of dismissals or being excluded.

However, just as there is the pathological manifestation – the positive side of the 12<sup>th</sup> house is a sense of sacrifice, of working for the collective, and ultimately of the dissolution into the absolute that is represented in all spiritual traditions. As I researched I could see the connections of shame with the notion of original sin, and how this is also represented in other traditions such as 'ignorance' in Buddhism. At a simple level, breaking through the manifestation of shame is to develop one's own sense of what is ethical in the moment, rather than unconsciously passing on ancestral conditioning. With this ancestral

conditioning, patterns of behaviour are passed down through generations and not broken; recognising and being with the strong energies of the shaming process, provides a pathway for breakthrough. The boundary here is awareness in the moment – and not submission to a conscious or unconscious rule or regulation.

### **The Chiron connection and potential for self-realisation**

As I was thinking about this 12<sup>th</sup> house connection as it manifested in my own chart, I began to see how this was also linked to Chiron. Chiron, the wounded healer, not able to heal his own wounds, but sacrificing himself for the world. The placement here in the chart in the middle of the sun/moon conjunction has always implied for me a wounding in male/female relationships – here the father and mother. Chiron too, has a hidden side, and beyond a doubt, anywhere where he is found will have some connection with the phenomena of shame. The wound is always defended against, and until there is a surfacing and acknowledgement, and capacity to 'be' with the wound, then it remains hidden and thus not able to be healed. The wound itself will be covered over, and this would be the various defensive strategies not to feel the overwhelming affects of the wound – whether they be psychological, emotional or spiritual.

So researching into the notion of shame has unearthed much of the sense of travelling in the dark which is my personal experience of the 12<sup>th</sup> house enhanced in my chart by the placement of Chiron. It has enabled me not to fear that sense of falling off the edge of the planet, being banished to the far reaches of the universe, and to question deeply the nature of intimate and not-so-intimate relationships. Where and how does this hidden shame manifest? What am I doing that creates a veil between myself and the other? How can I find a form in which experiences of spaciousness and boundlessness can be articulated or communicated to the Other?

Unlike guilt, which can be repaired, it is a denial of life force, with the sufferer existing in some netherland that has lost or denied connection to others, and indeed to reality itself. It is the deepest form of wounding at soul level. The task of the spiritual practitioner or therapist is to facilitate reconnection with those parts of the psyche which have become banished. An understanding and acknowledgement of shame and shaming processes can bring clarity to the therapeutic encounter or spiritual path, recovering wholeness and authenticity.

So whilst shame tends to be dismissed or pushed away, , I can see it as potential for individuation and self-realisation – indeed perhaps it is always a necessary confrontation on a spiritual path for discovering a deeper sense of awareness as the old conditionings break down. Whilst indications of the nature of shame may well be characterised in other houses, and through other signs, I believe that the hidden aspect of the 12<sup>th</sup> house, and the hidden wounding of Chiron holds many clues to its resolution.

For further information and details on the nature of shame, and working with it in therapy or spiritual practice, go to

<http://www.incubatio.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Shame-and-Interpersonal-Rupture.pdf>