



“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 aggression” and “manly keeps searing and staring. Then a thought enters mind so fast that later he won’t remember it having 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 unnameable 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 by Robert Karen, Atlantic Monthly, February, 1992



Shame can be a crippling experience. Where guilt is the belief or feeling that I have done something bad or wrong, shame is the belief or feeling that *who I am* is bad and wrong. It is the felt sense that I am irredeemably defective or unlovable at my core; that though I might not ever be able to name it, I am a carrier of some heinous, unshakeable sin. Shame is the self regarding the self with the withering and unforgiving eye of contempt.

To perceive myself this way foists untold social hardships and afflictions upon me. If who I really am is bad and wrong, then I must hide my "real self" from public view. I must invest in all manner and kind of personae, masks, roles and pretenses so as to gain some measure of interpersonal appeal and acceptability. Yet even if I am successful in passing myself off in these ways and gain a modicum of external validation and success, I don't feel that I really deserve it. I remain privately haunted by a chilling question that inevitably lurks behind my public face(s): *"Yeah... but if you really knew me, would you love me?"* The pitiless, inescapable verdict is always a resounding "No, you wouldn't!" To be ashamed is to expect rejection everywhere.

What Heals Shame?

From my clinical experience, shame is one tough nut to crack. Self-forgiveness is one of the hardest acts of all. Healing is not usually a quick, simple or easy process. The tentacles of self-contempt or self-hatred can become deeply rooted in our psyches and bodies.

Like so many other personal demons that we carry around with us, emotional healing begins with an admission to myself - that I do in fact feel ashamed of myself about certain things and that, on some level, my life has become unmanageable. This requires courage, a courage that is often coupled with the desperation of feeling overwhelmingly isolated and alienated from others or, in deeper pain still, overcome by addictions and self-defeating behaviors.

Indispensable to the healing of my shame is the need for another human being to bear witness to it. It cannot be healed alone. This is because in my inner world I cannot at once be both the convicted defendant and the prosecuting attorney, while at the same time be the one who grants a redemptive pardon.

The non-judgmental and supportive witness could be a chosen friend, partner, psychotherapist, sponsor or minister whose love and depth of compassion, while holding me accountable for my actions, can still see my soul, my goodness and the integrity and healing I am reaching for in my disclosures. It is through the expression, understanding and embrace of my humanity, reflected back to me by this loving presence, that shame can lose its tyrannical stranglehold over me.

It was with human beings that I plummeted into shame in the first place by experiencing my sense of being whole and loveable shattered. It will be with the help of a human being, as well as perhaps that of a Spiritual Consciousness greater than myself, that I will heal and feel worthy, whole and beautiful again.

UPCOMING SEMINARS

Seminar: Healing the Original Pain of Your Life: The Inner Child Seminar

Dates: Saturday / Sunday, October 27 / 28, 2012

Seminar: Relationships: The Work Of Love

Dates: Saturday / Sunday, December 8 / 9, 2012

Location: Pacific Mountain Centre, 3306 Dunbar St., Vancouver, BC

Contact: Reena at 604-689-4532 or reena@telus.net

"There are some things which cannot be learned quickly, and time, which is all we have, must be paid heavily for their acquiring."

Ernest Hemingway

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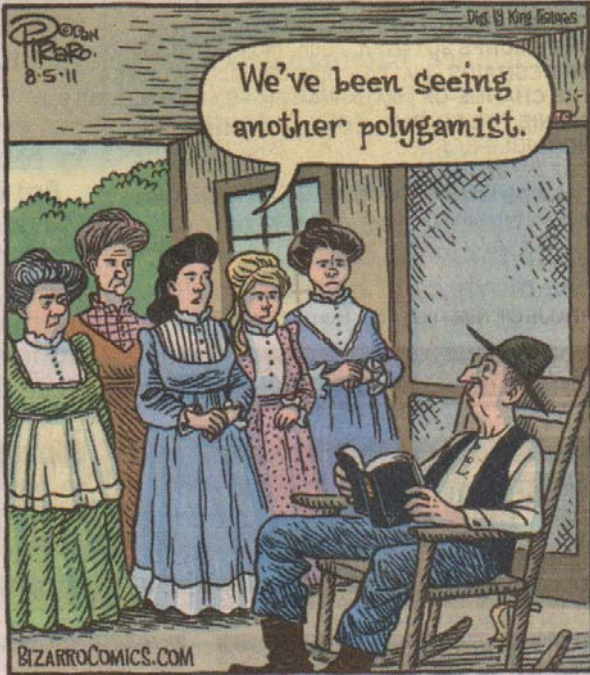
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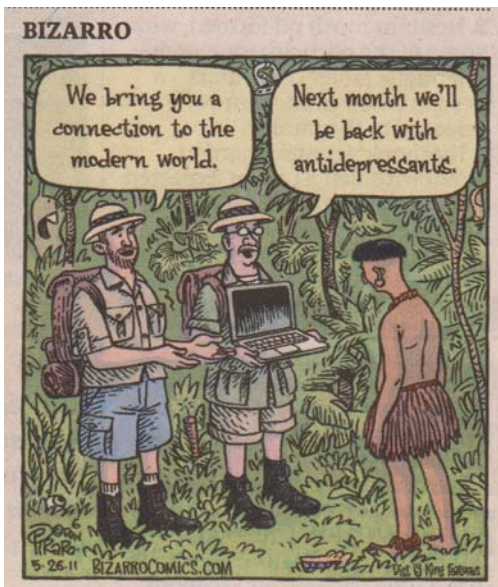
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