

Toxic Shame



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Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, King James Version, Cambridge, 1769.

Isaiah 61:7 "For your shame ye shall have double; and for confusion they shall rejoice in their portion: therefore in their land they shall possess the double: everlasting joy shall be unto them."

Shame. It can be a normal, God-given reaction that prevents us from doing, or redoing, inappropriate actions. Healthy shame prevents us from saying rude, hurtful things, wearing revealing clothing and feeling guilt when we do wrong things.

But for many people, shame has been toxic in their lives. What is the difference? In simplest terms, healthy shame says, "I did a bad thing." Toxic shame says, "I am bad/wrong/evil because I did that." Healthy shame passes judgment on the **act**, while toxic shame passes judgment on **the person who committed the act**.

The roots of toxic shame are often found in childhood, with a judgmental parent, teacher or even other children. But, they can also be found in adulthood, such as with a judgmental spouse.

Shaming messages criticize you for having certain likes or dislikes, having feelings that do not agree with your critic, and can be as extreme as having needs or wants of which the shaming person does not approve.

The underlying message given is that you must not make mistakes, have your own feelings, thoughts, needs or interests because that makes you unacceptable, unlovable, or even intolerable.

Repeated exposure to toxic shame takes root deep inside, and over time, does a tremendous amount of damage. It destroys self-esteem, creates false beliefs (such as one is not entitled to have needs, wants or feelings), and also can create an overdeveloped sense of responsibility (such as one is responsible for the happiness of a parent or spouse).

What can be done to heal this toxic shame? Plenty, with the help of your Heavenly Father. Ask Him to speak His truth to you. For example, if you had a parent tell you that you were a mistake, ask God, "Is that true? Was my mother (or father) right? Am I a mistake?" Then, just listen. God will speak in that still, small voice to your heart, speaking healing words that will void the shaming ones.

Also, ask Him to help you overcome the toxic shame in your life. Isaiah 61:7 says that God will provide you with double for your former shame. This means double honor, double joy, double whatever you can imagine. Think about it- as much pain as that shame caused, you now can have double that amount of joy, peace and anything else!

Read your Bible and other good books, listen to music and preaching about who you are as a child of God, and the kind of life He wants you to have. There is tremendous power in His word- let it set you free. No one should suffer with the horrible effects of toxic shame. Know you can be free, starting today. It may take a little time working with God, but as someone who has been there, I can promise you it is well worth the effort.