

Shame and Integrity

Reflections on Integrity in Depth by John Beebe

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"I want you to speak about your shame, and that instead of speaking great words..." Carl Jung, The Red Book (Scrutinies)

Beebe includes a fruitful subsection in his book *Integrity in Depth* titled "Dialogue with Shame" which provides a useful analysis of this elusive archetypal affect (as defined by Stewart), not just from the point of view of its impact of a psychoanalytic process, but with an eye toward the teleological implications of shame and its importance to integrity. Through his analysis he counters any tendency to want to rid a process of affects and instead opens our stance to an understanding of their value as symptoms of integrity.

"I think psychology would do well to become more interested in the attitude that enables us to "embrace shame" - and in the relief we experience when we do." (Beebe, *Integrity at Depth*, pg. 61) The challenge we all face is to first get shame into the room. Shame is elusive. Often it remains invisible. As Beebe points out, it has only recently appeared in the psychoanalytic literature. In fact, it is still common to find the dark affects to be spoken of as the triad of fear, rage and grief.

Beebe links the shame experience to the alchemical *mortificatio*, which is accurate. I'd add that the *putrificatio* is likewise a hallmark of the encounter with shame. With these as a backdrop, it's important as analysts that we keep an eye trained to see what by nature is trying to remain hidden in it's alienation, awkwardness, abandonment, inferiority and unworthiness. While it's common to encounter inferiority and abandonment in clients, the question to ask is does this

become a pathway to allow the darker aspects of shame to enter process.

Beebe finds the wonderful line in the hexagram Standstill of the I Ching: “they bear shame.” Another translation renders “they embrace shame.” It’s fascinating to me that this amplification mirrors many of the experiences of shame that have emerged in my process as well as in those of my clients. In stillness, often long stretches of quiet, shame will slowly enter. Perhaps because of it’s alienating nature, shame almost needs to be coaxed into the field. Embodied it is often nauseating. Counter-transferential somatic symptoms like nausea, an upset stomach and acid reflux I have learned can signal an attempt by shame to enter the process.

In what I find to be a sign of bravery, maturity, and his own integrity, Beebe discloses his unconscious collusion with his patients which occurred for more than a two decades. He reports “I began to realize that all along I had been unconsciously colluding with an attitude in them that shame was something to be ashamed of. It occurred to me that by doing so I was interfering with part of my patients’ opportunity to exercise integrity.” (Beebe, pg. 62) In many ways this disclosure provides clear example of what Jung meant when he said that an analyst cannot take patients further than they themselves have traveled. At this stage of unconscious collusion, Beebe was treating the presence of shame as a symptom to be healed or gotten rid of. as he worked on this in himself, his perspective changed, so he could begin to recognize that the shame has a purpose.

In his review of self psychology Beebe distills

“the clear implication is that shame is the letdown that comes when the ideal is unable to find an anchor in the parent, either because the parent fails to incarnate the ideal ways,

or because the child is made to feel unworthy of participating in the parent's ideal qualities. In the view of self psychology, then, shame is the crisis that emerges when the ideal aspirations of the self flounder." (Beebe, pg. 64)

Quoting Gabriele Taylor, Beebe adds "it is its relation to integrity which makes shame such a potentially devastating emotion...I shame the self is seen as less worthy than the agent thought, assumed, or hoped he was or might become; such thoughts, hopes or assumptions have turned out to be unfounded." (Beebe, pg. 64)

In the often devastating neglect we find with our clients regarding their parenting, and the resultant structures of the parental complexes, Beebe here gives us a glimpse as to the appropriateness of the presence of shame and how it is linked not just to the external factors in life but to the demands of the self. "To see the shadow as something more than a moral alien which we must stand guard, and to realize that we are dealing with an inner companion whose feelings and values might be approached psychologically, tests our capacity to empathize with a self that falls short. This capacity is developed through our experiences of shame." (Beebe, pg. 66)

Beebe outlines three stages of integrity advancing through the shadow. First there is denial of the shadow; then acceptance, which is followed by "a sense of restored wholeness once the "full disclosure" of the shadow has been integrated." (Beebe, pg 61) That shadow work advances through experiences of shame is a gem of an insight hidden within this 'dialogue.' Here we gain a glimpse of what can help heal the kind of shadow split portrayed with Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Beebe's defining shame as a symptom of integrity is an insight that will have a major impact on my own process. It's gives a sense of purpose to this difficult experience as well as signal a

perspective that opens up a teleological perspective. The vast “tar pits” of shame can be overwhelming. Shame shifts in a slow, practically imperceptible manner. Recognizing the integrity that shame has in many ways risen to protect, provides the much-needed opposite within an analytic frame mired in shame.