

A Guide to Letting Go of Shame & Fear

Many of us are so often in a state of shame or fear that we often don't realize they're even there.

Shame and fear pervade most of our lives to an extent rarely understood, so that our days revolve around them.

Some examples of shame and fear that are fairly common:

- We are unhappy with ourselves or our bodies, and feel a sense of shame around how we look or how we are
- We procrastinate or get lost in distraction, and feel shame around that laziness or lack of focus
- We don't exercise, meditate, write, journal, read or eat as well as we'd like, and feel shame around these failures
- We don't call our loved ones as much as we'd like, and feel shame around that
- We fear the unknown, and so we stress out about the uncertainty in our lives
- We feel shaky if we have to give a presentation or speech, and so we do worse (and feel shame about it) or enjoy it less than we could
- We don't speak the truth or have difficult conversations for fear of the fallout of such directness
- We shrink away from difficult tasks or projects because of fear of discomfort or being overwhelmed
- We stress out about upcoming trips, meetings, parties, projects because of fear of how it'll go

So we allow fear to cause us to shrink from taking the action we want, or to make those actions less enjoyable. We allow shame to make us feel bad about ourselves and our lives, degrading our happiness and relationships.

What would it be like if you were free of shame?

How would you act if you were free of fear?

Those aren't just idle questions: take a moment to reflect on them. They allow us to envision who we could be without shame and fear.

Imagine that you didn't feel fear (I'm not saying that's possible, but imagine it) ... how would you act differently? For me, I might take bolder chances with my business, push into areas that usually scare the crap out of me. I might give public talks with a greater sense of

ease and confidence. I'd openly and lovingly have difficult conversations instead of putting them off. I'd stress out about the future less, trusting more.

Imagine what your life would be like without shame. You could just be present with what's happening right now, rather than feeling bad about what you've already done. You could be happy with who you are, instead of feeling shame about yourself or your body. You could talk to strangers more easily, rather than worrying about what they might think of you. You could miss a couple of workout sessions (or meditation, healthy eating, journaling, etc.) and just start again, without beating yourself up for messing up.

Life without shame and fear would be more easeful, more peaceful, more confident and trusting.

Now, I'm not saying you can live a life completely free of shame and fear — they will come up whether you like it or not. What I'm proposing is that we can *let go of them* when they come up, or at least not let them control us.

The Process of Letting Go

So fear and shame will arise, no matter how much meditation we do, no matter how much we work on ourselves. Emotions come up without our control ... but what we do once they come up is, at least to some extent, up to us.

So fear comes up — that in and of itself isn't a problem. It's the *holding on to the fear* that becomes the problem. It's the letting the fear hold us back from doing what we would otherwise do, or hurt our happiness, that becomes the real difficulty. The same is true of shame.

Step 1: When shame or fear comes up, we can notice. Then we can see them as “no big deal.” They're not a problem, just a sensation in our body. So the first step is just noticing the sensation caused by fear or shame, without judgment, just observing. Just being mindful of sensation, not getting caught up in them. You'll notice that neither shame nor fear is that bad, nothing to hate, they're just sensations.

Step 2: From this place of noticing, we can become curious. What does this feel like? Where is it coming from? For example, we can feel shame and then be curious about how it feels in our body. Then notice that it's coming from a sense of not liking something about ourselves. Why do we not like this thing about ourselves? Is there an ideal or expectation we've created that causes this dislike? Maybe I think I should be perfect at work or exercise, and I'm not living up to that. For fear ... it often comes from a lack of trust, and a sense of uncertainty. Maybe we also have an ideal that there will be no uncertainty, only stability and control, and so fear comes up when this ideal isn't met.

Step 3: Once we notice the ideal causing the shame or fear ... we can begin to loosen our attachment to it. Is the ideal something that's helpful? Is it harming us? Where did it come from? Who would we be without that ideal and the fear/shame that it causes? Imagine yourself without the ideal, and try it on like you would a new outfit. Imagine yourself completely trusting in an uncertain future, free of fear. Imagine yourself completely happy with yourself, free of any ideal of what you *should* be.

Step 4: With this new outfit — a lack of the ideal causing your shame/fear — see what it's like to move around in the world without it. Who are you without the fear? Can you move around with a sense of trust in yourself and in the world? Can you move around with a sense of confidence, a sense of happiness in yourself, a sense of love for yourself? Try this on, and see what changes. See what actions you would take without the shame or fear. See how you show up differently.

This isn't a simple or straightforward process, of course. It's not as simple as snapping your fingers. But you can try it, and practice. Slowly, you might be able to let go of what ails you, and start to see the beauty in this moment that exists when we let go of what's getting in the way.

Some Training with Me

If you'd like to retrain these patterns (and others), I've launched the Fearless Training Program on Patreon and would love for you to join me.

We'll be working on:

- Pushing into our meaningful work with devotion, despite uncertainty
- Working mindfully with the emotions and habitual patterns that come up
- Courageously staying and working with fear and other difficulties, with an open heart
- Training in new patterns of openness, courage, gratitude and joy, in the midst of uncertainty
- Finding focus in the middle of all of that

It'll be amazing. Let's work on this together.

Join my Fearless Training Program on Patreon today.