

Having explored trauma and related emotions, thoughts and sensations using different tools and media I can say that shame is definitely worth exploring. It may be one of the strongest boxes keeping us alienated from our authenticity or keeping us small. And because all well-being is connected to integration it may be worth liberating and integrating these aspects of our self that hold these experiences. It is not easy and it may feel like opening Pandora's Box. Memories, isolated events, intense bodily experience, emotions, symbols and images, narratives may all emerge.

Brené Brown suggests we explore the questions below:

I physically feel shame in/on my _____

It feels like _____

I know I'm in shame when I feel _____

If I could taste shame, it would taste like _____

If I could smell shame, it would smell like _____

If I could touch shame, it would feel like _____

In one of her videos she mentions that people come up with things like blood, thorny, slimy, sticky, black, red, purple, etc. Brené Brown describes the process of visiting shame like a visit to a swamp area. She says that we're not supposed to build our house and stay there forever, but put on our galoshes knowing that we will get mud on them. For me shame has sometimes elicited the colour brown. I actually remember years ago when an artist I knew had smeared his body with chocolate from top to bottom during an art performance and then had gone to the trouble of covering a real truck with chocolate, from top to bottom, which he exhibited in an art centre, I had immediately made the connection between his art endeavour and shame and humiliation. Of course, I cannot be certain of what had inspired him or what he was trying to get across to others. We often use metaphors to describe our feelings or bodily experience. Shame may feel like mud or some other slimy, thick, sticky, disgusting substance or it may feel dry, thorny, and painful. Shame may feel like heat or constriction and it can trigger fight-flight responses or nausea. Using meditating may allow for a more in depth exploration and mindfulness will help us contain it and observe it, stay with it. Interestingly, perfectionism also seems to be strongly linked with the shame box. Perfectionist notions and expectations can often be very effective in keeping us hand- cuffed.

Other questions we could ask our self:

If shame were a name (s) which would it be?

If shame were a place/ context which would it be?

If shame were a reason which would it be?

In order to understand the bigger picture Brené Brown suggests asking our self the following questions:

- What are the social-community expectations?
- Why do these expectations exist?

- How do these expectations work?
- How is our society influenced by these expectations?
- Who benefits from those expectations?

These questions allow us to both contextualize our experience, but also to additionally explore the negative effects of perfectionism and how it may keep us invisible.

We can be as creative as we want. One can also explore the above through creating art. For instance, we can depict what shame would look like if it were an image or draw the first image that comes to mind. We can depict how shame feels like in our body. We can experiment with different media. We can do a brainstorming exercise; for instance, we can write SHAME in the middle of a page and then write down all the things that come to our mind. Finally, as I mentioned above, we need to sit with shame mindfully, meditate and be with what is. This may trigger fight-flight responses and bring physical discomfort because it is deeply lodged in our body, but eventually also sighs of relief. It may bring chest constriction or nausea, but some release, an opening and an unclenching, as well. Combating shame through the body and using sensory motor therapy techniques would allow release to take place at a physical level. I provide the links to two short videos (below) by Janina Fisher where this is discussed.

Processing shame is definitely not a one time process, neither is processing trauma. Peeling away layers of experience is often required, but revisiting the material deepens and broadens our understanding and acceptance. As Dawa Tarchin Phillips suggests personal empowerment requires we choose which thoughts and emotions we want to cultivate and which we need to reframe, replace and release. Thoughts, beliefs and emotions related to shame definitely need to be released if we want to open our heart and tap into our well of strength. Most people avoid talking or even thinking about their shame because it causes discomfort and it requires courage, but unfortunately shame grows in secrecy and silence, processing and talking about it reduces its potency, can have a liberating effect and can prevent us from projecting it or dumping it on others. Just think for a moment what the world might be like if shame and anger and fear were openly discussed and healed. Imagine, what it might have been like if Hitler, to use an extreme example, had been able to heal his wounds and integrate the aspects of himself that held the shame, anger and fear? Imagine, what it might have been like if he had known how to or had been able to rescue the little boy who had been humiliated and abused?

2. You may like to listen to...

Janina Fisher two short films on a) **combating shame through the body** at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYR7BAQDq6U> and

b) About a sensory motor therapy technique, called **throwing de-resourcing thoughts like hot potatoes** at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxpUGOu_yjE

Listen to shame by Brené Brown on TED with Greek subtitles (υπάρχουν Ελληνικοί υπότιτλοι) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psN1DORYYV0>

And **The power of vulnerability**, with Greek subtitles (υπάρχουν Ελληνικοί υπότιτλοι) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCvmsMzlf7o>

You may also like to watch a short cartoon on **empathy** at brenebrown.com/about/

Or read a poem by Brené Brown: **MANIFESTO OF THE BRAVE AND BROKEN HEARTED**

*There is no greater threat to the critics
and cynics and fearmongers
Than those of us who are willing to fall
Because we have learned how to rise
With skinned knees and bruised hearts;
We choose owning our stories of struggle,
Over hiding, over hustling, over pretending
When we deny our stories, they define us.
When we run from struggle, we are never free.
So we turn toward truth and look it in the eye.
We will not be characters in our stories.
Not villains, not victims, not even heroes.
We are the authors of our lives.
We write our own daring endings.
We craft love from heartbreak,
Compassion from shame,
Grace from disappointment,
Courage from failure
Showing up is our power.
Story is our way home. Truth is our song.
We are the brave and broken hearted
We are rising strong*