

**April 24, 2008 Taos News Article  
Shame and Guilt: A Common Feeling in Grief**

***The Taos News has committed to implement a weekly column to help educate our community about emotional healing through grief. People may write questions to Golden Willow Retreat and TeamBuilders Counseling Services and they will be answered privately to you and possibly as a future article for others. Please list a first name that grants permission for printing.***

Dear Willow,

This year I have had many losses in my life. My job changed, my divorce was finalized, and I have had some health issues that have an impact on my day to day life, I have been feeling enormous amounts of guilt and shame for my situation and I feel heavy and stuck. Why am I being weighed down so heavily?  
Thanks, Bob

Dear Bob,

Wow, a lot has happened this past year in your life. I hope you have or find the support you need to help in your healing from loss. With loss, you may feel “weighed down” and this is natural and normal. Emotionally, your heart has been shattered and your life has had many transitions. You have had heavy losses and your internal system is probably exhausted. It is okay to ask for help when your load is too heavy to carry on your own. Support can come from loved ones, friends, professionals or others who are willing to listen and support as you rebuild your life. Grief and loss can lead to a place of shame and guilt. This often comes up while somebody is working with the bargaining phase of grief. This phase is when you are wishing your actions could have been different so that the outcome might be different. I call this the “should of – could of phase; if I had only said this, if he/she had only done that and so on. The brain is trying to invent a new outcome; an attempt to change the past and in that process, change the present situation. Your brain is trying to have losses make sense and one way to blame yourself. This is a dangerous time in the healing process because many people will choose to not do the work to get past this spot and will stay in a place of guilt, shame, and blame. The bargaining process needs room to be explored so that it can be brought to light and then released. Guilt is when there are actions that you regret from in your past. Shame is when you feel you are a bad person. There is a major difference between these two. With guilt, there are actions you may wish to take such as making amends, being healthy and conscious in the way you live your life today. With shame; you are stuck in a role with no behavior to change. Looking deeply and honestly into your actions and truths and beginning to feel healthy can be scary because you may not feel (consciously or unconsciously) deserving of a happy, wonderful, and productive life. It is important to work out of a place of shame so that growth and healing is able to happen. I believe all of us were meant to have happiness in our life.

Forgiveness may be the first step to finding out that you “are deserving”. You may also feel guilty for not handling grief the way you have heard it should be. Please remember that grief is an individualized process in which there is no set time or way for healing.

Looking at resistance to heal from loss may be the key that allows you to be able to move towards acceptance of your losses and your present situation and make conscious decisions that allow you a healing and happy future. The key in working with loss and bargaining is the ability to be truthful and gentle with yourself, realizing you were doing the best you could at the time and not judging it with the 20/20 hindsight of the present vantage point. By being willing to forgive yourself and move through resistance you have the ability to transform guilt and shame into passion, hope, and happiness.

As you look at your past there are probably actions you would have done differently with your present knowledge. Being able to realize that some of the wisdom of today is due to your actions of the past will help move you forward. Moving out of the victim role and choosing to “show up” with purity of intent and wise actions is all anybody can do. Making the decision to heal and then taking the action to follow through is the path of integrity. I hope you will be gentle to yourself as you honor your losses while honoring yourself with the hope of a life filled with joy, sorrow, and peace and the action to manifest happiness and health.

***Until next week, take care.***

***Golden Willow Retreat and TeamBuilders Counseling are nonprofit organizations focused on emotional healing. Please direct questions to Ted Wiard Founder of Golden Willow Retreat and Assistant Clinical Director of TeamBuilders Counseling Services at 505-776-2024, [GWR@newmex.com](mailto:GWR@newmex.com), or fax to 505-776-2824.***