

*R<sub>X</sub>*

# *The Guilt Cure*

*Nancy Carter Pennington  
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Also by  
Lawrence H. Staples

*Guilt with a Twist: The Promethean Way*  
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*To  
Eliza and Molly Fisher  
Christopher Lentz  
Beverly Lynch  
Ronald Staples*

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## PREFACE

As our work on *Guilt with a Twist* unfolded, we began to notice that the importance of guilt extended far beyond its moral purposes and functions, and realized we had hit upon some ground breaking ideas that advanced a new theory of guilt. Near the end of *Guilt with a Twist*, we touched on these broader and more important aspects of guilt but their place in the book was subordinate and ran the risk of being lost or overlooked in the swarm of other themes and materials. The fear of losing these new ideas among less important material prompted us to write *The Guilt Cure*.

In *Guilt with a Twist*, we focused on the necessity to incur guilt in order to live fully. We explored in depth the ways guilt, in its conventional role of maintaining the legal and moral order, could interfere with psychological development. In *The Guilt Cure*, we focus on the necessity to incur guilt ***if we are to live at all***.

In our more than 25 years of practice, we have accumulated an abundance of material that is relevant to dealing with guilt in a clinical setting. Guilt has a profound effect on our mental health and wellbeing and we are glad that this very important and interesting material has now been published in *The Guilt Cure* and made available to a global community of clinicians.



## INTRODUCTION

Late in his life, Carl Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist, had a stunning insight about the nature of guilt. His insight reaches deep into humanity's collective psychic experience, and reveals a mystery that challenges our conventional views. In Jung's last book, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, which he finished seven years before his death in 1961, he wrote, "that the opposites are the ineradicable and indispensable precondition of all psychic life, so much so that life itself is guilt."<sup>1</sup>

The relationship he perceived between the opposites, guilt, and life is far from obvious. Although he left us no direct explanation for his unusual and somewhat mysterious assertion, we can, if we think deeply about it as he did, see that his insight is profound, and that life and guilt are connected to each other in the cosmic evolution of humans. They are connected by an unfolding chain of psychic development whose path leads from guilt through the opposites on to life itself. In this developmental path, guilt is the precipitating factor. First, it creates the opposites. Then, the opposites produce consciousness. Consciousness in turn gives birth to life.

Until consciousness is created, there is no life as humans know it. For humans, life is a psychic phenomenon; it exists only if we are conscious of it. Our bodies and the world around us may be alive, but we don't know it, if we are unconscious. Thus, guilt is the price we must pay for the privilege of experiencing life as a human.

The idea that guilt's most important role is in the formation and maintenance of consciousness and human life, flies in the face of the widely held conventional belief that guilt's primary function is in the maintenance of the moral and legal order. While guilt does play an important role in the maintenance of these orders, this is not its only role. Nor is it even its most important role. Guilt is far more morally neutral than many would suspect. While guilt is conventionally thought to be a result of sin or legal infractions, most guilt, in fact, stems from thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that violate no religious, divine or legal prohibitions. The psychological experience of feeling guilt is much broader than the religious definition of sin or legal considerations

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1 Jung C.G.(1954), *Collected Works (CW)*, Edited by Gerhard Adler et. Al. Bollingen Series XX. Princeton University Press, Volume 14, par. 206.  
**Note:** CW refers throughout to *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*.

would account for. Unfortunately, the feeling of guilt for religious/legal infractions is identical to the feeling incurred for more run of the mill transgressions like eating too much or too little or working too much or too little. Psychologically, we often punish ourselves as severely for overeating as we would for stealing food. Therefore, becoming conscious of the source of the guilt, and interpreting its meaning more realistically is important to the treatment of guilt.

Guilt appears to be a necessity. It is as essential to the life of our psyches as food and water are to our bodies. As in the case of most of our greatest necessities, however, guilt is a two-edged sword. Guilt, like sunshine, water or electricity can be dangerous. It can enliven us or kill us. The sun that warms us can also fry us; the water that quenches our thirst can also drown us; the electricity that helps us prepare our food can also electrocute us. While guilt gives us life, it can also give us suicidal impulses to take it away.

Guilt is complicated and paradoxical. It contributes much more to our existence than conventional explanations would suggest. Guilt serves the psyche, and life itself, in a number of ways. In this book, we will examine the many faces of guilt, and its effect on our lives and wellbeing. In addition to its role in the protection of legality and morality, we will look at its more important function in the creation and maintenance of consciousness, its place in the self-regulatory system of the psyche, its effects on our psychological development, and its impact on our mental health and wellbeing.

One of the great paradoxes of guilt is that despite its positive contributions to our lives, it is also potentially dangerous and deleterious, if untreated. Therefore, we will also address spiritual and psychological means to treat, expel and expiate it. However, if we were to rid ourselves completely of guilt we would also rid ourselves of life. That seems like a high price to pay just to rid ourselves of a sometimes painful and depressing burden. So, while in truth there is no cure for guilt, short of death, there are ways to ameliorate its harshest effects and bear its burdens without killing ourselves. Guilt is a major cause of depression and anxiety. If we had not found ways to assuage guilt, suicide would probably be a major cause of death in our society. While the chapter on treatment of guilt is addressed specifically to therapists, its clinical and other information should be of interest to a broad general audience.

The simple, yet profound, step of becoming conscious that guilt is a necessity and that its non-moral/legal purposes and functions are more important to human life and development than its moral/legal

functions, can significantly ameliorate the negative and painful feelings stemming from guilt. This altered consciousness frees us from interpreting guilt solely from a religious/legal perspective; it permits us to interpret guilt more often from a psychological perspective. Instead of reflexively interpreting our feelings of guilt to mean that we are bad or evil, we may now see much guilt as simply nudging us away from one psychological position and toward another. We can see the guilt as part of a psychic self-regulating system that is similar to our body's autonomic nervous system. And we need to pay as close attention to the nudges from our psychic self-regulatory system as we do to our physical ones.

The religious interpretation of the meaning of guilt feelings leads to anxiety and depression. Unless we are sociopaths, or unless we have a liberating insight like the one proposed here, we cannot feel guilt without feeling to one degree or another that we are bad and/or worthless. It would seem quite difficult for a human to feel bad or worthless without also feeling anxiety and depression. The psychological interpretation, on the other hand, reveals a helpful inner development that guilt feelings can produce in our psyche. These perspectives help liberate us from the futile effort to avoid guilt or rid ourselves of it entirely.

In Jungian terms, guilt is an almost perfect example of an archetype. Guilt is found ubiquitously in every epoch, in every country, in every culture and in every language. Like all archetypes, it contains both a light and a dark side.

Finally, because life is guilt, we must sin in order to live. This leads us inevitably to the logical conclusion that a one-sided pursuit of righteousness is absurd. Thus, our final chapter is entitled: The Absurdity of Righteousness.

## Part 1

## LIFE ITSELF IS GUILT



## CHAPTER 1

### Guilt and Consciousness

In order to understand guilt's role in the formation and maintenance of consciousness, we have first to understand guilt's role in the formation of the opposites. Consciousness depends on the existence of polar opposites.

Jung used a simple example to demonstrate the relationship between consciousness and the opposites. If we lower ourselves into a tub of hot water, we experience the heat of the water because it contrasts with the cooler temperature of the air. But after sitting in the tub for a while, it does not feel hot because there is no contrasting experience. In order for the water to feel hot again, and for us to know it, we must lift our bodies out of it and experience the cooler temperature of the air before lowering our bodies back into the water. Without a contrasting opposite, there is no conscious experience. Life would be a psychic flat line in which we live by instincts without any psychic awareness. As Jung wrote, "There is no consciousness without discrimination of opposites.... Nothing can exist without its opposite; the two were one in the beginning and will be one again in the end."<sup>2</sup>

Opposites are basic to the architecture and anatomy of the psyche. The flow of psychic energy is similar to the flow of electricity. It is based on the same principle. The flow is between polar opposites, negative and positive. If psychic energy does not flow, we are "brain dead." Our body may be alive but we do not know it. But, it is guilt that gives birth to the opposites. It creates our "evil" other. It causes us to divide our psychic world into pairs of opposites based upon their imputed values of relative goodness or badness.

The relationship between guilt and consciousness is embedded in the Biblical story of the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve, tempted by the serpent, eat of the tree of knowledge and become capable of distinguishing between good and evil. Consciousness is this capacity to distinguish. As such, eating the forbidden fruit is the mythical basis for

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2 Jung C.G. CW, Volume 9, Part 1, par. 178.

this consciousness. The eating of the forbidden fruit plunges us into the duality of conscious life. We lose our paradisiacal innocence when we become aware of the opposites.

Polar opposites are our cosmic parents and produce that small precarious flame of consciousness that actually creates who we are and the world we live in. Our developed self contains both of the opposites and yet is neither. We are the conflict between the opposites and we are their contradiction. Our conscious life and, therefore, our life is the tension produced between the opposites. Our reality when fully developed is an ambivalence that experiences the value of each of the opposites as relative rather than absolute.

The opposites complicate life and our understanding of it because of the contradictions and paradoxes that they present. They tend to make everything ambiguous and relative. Clarity is achieved only by diminishing or excluding one side of the pairs of opposites in what we think or say or do or create. Clarity is obtained at the cost of meaning.

Just as the tension between a bow and its bowstring pulled in opposite directions gives flight to an arrow, our life depends on the separating and coming together of opposites. For the arrow to take flight, neither the bow nor the string can be missing. Opposites repel and attract, and that is what creates the dance that enlivens us. Attraction and repulsion of positive and negative opposites underlies the chemical and physical reactions that create our world. We see it even in simple human reactions of mother and child. The child is both attracted to and repelled by his mother. When the mother is engulfing, the baby pulls away; when the baby is hungry it moves toward her.

It was Jung's recognition of guilt's causal role in the psychological sequence that produces the opposites and, in turn, consciousness that led him to the insight that life itself is guilt.

Because guilt, in this sequential chain of psychic development, gives us life, it is also a necessity, despite its negative aspects. It is as essential to the life of our psyches as food and water are to our bodies. While guilt, food and water are necessities, they are also dangerous, because their residuals, like urine and feces, become toxic if they are not adequately treated and discharged. Guilt that is not assimilated and discharged from the psyche becomes as toxic to the psyche as the left over waste of food and water become for the body.

We speculate that whoever or whatever created our amazing minds and bodies may have run into the problem all creators or inventors tend to run into. Whoever invented the internal combustion engine and de-

cided it needed gas to run it also had to figure out how to exhaust its toxic residual. When the creator figured out that we needed food and water to run on, it had to figure a way to discharge the toxic residual, the waste. When it figured out psychic life needed guilt to run on, it had to figure out a way to discharge its residual, its toxic waste. In all these cases, if we don't discharge the toxic waste, it becomes dangerous. It has a deleterious effect on the very hosts it initially serves positively. It makes no difference whether the food is good for us or bad for us. The toxic waste has to be discharged. It makes no difference whether the guilt is good or bad for us, its toxic waste has to be discharged or we get sick. The colon, the anus, and the urinary tract had to be created just as exhausts had to be created for engines.

In the case of guilt, in order to discharge its toxic residual, we had to devise psychic waste treatment processes analogous to those found in our body and automobiles and civic waste treatment plants. These analogous psychic waste treatment processes have spiritual and psychological origins. Baptism, that washes away guilt, is one example. Another is confession, which we call catharsis that cleans out the psyche and helps get rid of psychic shit just as bowel movements get rid of bodily shit. The need to treat guilt's toxic residual must have been an important stimulus to the beginnings of religion and eventually psychotherapy. In Part 3 the psychological and spiritual treatment of guilt is addressed.

## CHAPTER 2

### Guilt and Psychic Self-Regulation

There is a psychological explanation for guilt that has little to do with religion or morality. Guilt serves the psyche—and life itself—in a number of ways other than its support of morality. We realize this when we discover that guilt is for the most part morally neutral. Its neutrality becomes obvious when we notice that we can feel guilty about one thing, and, then, feel guilty about its polar opposite. For example, we feel guilty if we are too assertive or not assertive enough or when we are too aggressive or not aggressive enough. Women feel guilty when they have a career (so-called “mommy guilt”) or in the opposite case when they do not have one. We can see a powerful and tragic example of the impossibility of avoiding guilt in this life in a situation where one must choose between continuing life support for a loved one who is paralyzed and in a coma or letting them pass away. We must choose for them either death or a prolonged life languishing in a paralyzed and vegetative state in a nursing home. One would feel guilty saving them while consigning them to a life of grim and muted existence. We would also feel guilty letting them go.

We feel guilty when we work too hard or not hard enough. We feel guilty if we are very rich or very poor. We feel guilty when we neglect others; we also feel guilty when we neglect ourselves. We feel guilty when we eat too much or too little. Profound guilt accompanies both obesity and anorexia. Abusers feel guilty, unless they are sociopaths. Strangely, however, the victims of abuse also feel guilty, as in cases of rape or incest. We may feel guilty when we are not nurturing enough or if we are too nurturing. While it is clear we would feel guilty for killing, it is not so obvious that we might also feel guilty for failing to kill, in a situation where, for example, it might be necessary to save our children. Guilt clearly arises when instinct—appetites of all kinds—goes too far. We tend to feel guilty when we embrace either opposite at its extreme.

The psyche appears to be inherently just and anytime one of the opposites threatens to hijack the psyche and take it over, guilt occurs and



brings about a movement toward the excluded opposite. Guilt appears to be embedded in each of the opposites and shows counter tendencies whenever we move too far to one side or the other. As such, guilt serves the self-regulatory function of the psyche. It is like the critical factor in a gyroscope that causes it to move left when it is moving too far right. It appears to function somewhat like the sympathetic and parasympathetic operation of the physical body's autonomic nervous system that protects us with its opposite tendencies. In the physical body's system, one part may dilate the pupil and the other contract it. One part may inhibit the heartbeat while the other stimulates it. It compensates movements toward extremes in order to maintain health.

There is a psychic tendency toward both Diaspora and return. In every unity, there is a tendency toward fragmentation; in every fragment there is a tendency toward unity. There is a tendency toward the union of incoherent fragments, and there is a tendency toward the fragmentation of coherent unions. We see this in the marriage and dissolution of individual as well as political entities and other organizations.

We could generalize by saying that any self-regulatory system depends upon the existence of countertendencies. Our psychic self-regulatory system aims to maintain the proper tension between these counter-tendencies, or opposites, in order to protect consciousness and further personal development.

Like the body, however, the psyche can be assaulted by disorders that overwhelm its natural defenses and require intervention. In the case of guilt, the feeling, after it has been treated by our natural defenses, is buried in the unconscious. While the guilt may for long periods in our life not cause intolerable pain, it can fester, become toxic, and behave as a kind of saboteur. Then, later it may overwhelm the old defenses and storm back into conscious awareness. At that time, we face the pain again and have to assuage it with psychological and spiritual treatments.

## CHAPTER 3

## Guilt and Psychological Development

While guilt is an indispensable positive force in our lives, it also has a negative and sometimes destructive side. It can be an obstacle to and interfere with our growth and development. The truth is that we must sin and incur guilt if we are to grow and reach our full potential. This idea is inspired by and informed by the myth<sup>3</sup> of Prometheus. Myth tells us Prometheus stole fire from the gods and made it available for use by humans. He suffered for his sin. Zeus had him chained to a rock where an eagle pecked and tore daily at his liver. But human society would have suffered if he had not committed it. Thus, the life of Prometheus portrays a mythological model for guilt that is different from the conventional view. The Promethean model of guilt suggests the importance of sinning and incurring guilt in order to obtain needed—but forbidden things.

The conventional view of guilt is that it helps us remain “good.” Guilt keeps us within boundaries deemed acceptable. It helps us resist doing things that would disturb or harm our individual and collective interests. It can remind us of the apology we should make to help repair a harm we may have done. This conventional view of guilt has an important role in the maintenance of conventional life.

The conventional view, important as it is, can also create an enormous problem. It can deter us from being “bad” when that is exactly what is needed. While the conventional view is part of the truth, it is not the whole truth. The meaning of sin and guilt is far more complicated.

If individuals could not sin, and then suffer the subsequent guilt, they could not fully develop themselves and their gifts. If individuals

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3 The Promethean myth provides a picture of an important aspect of humanity's experience of guilt. Prometheus stole fire from the Gods on Olympus and brought it back to earth for the benefit of mankind. Zeus had him bound to a rock where eagles pecked at his liver daily. Eventually, Zeus allowed Hercules to free him from his suffering. Also see *Guilt with a Twist: The Promethean Way* by Lawrence H. Staples.

could not develop fully, neither could society, as society is a sum of the individuals that comprise it. If, however, individuals could sin and not suffer painful guilt for their sins, they might well just be selfish beings that refuse to share their gifts with the community. They might keep the fire for themselves.

The contribution of Prometheus' sin to humanity led us to the idea of "Good Guilt." In common parlance, the words "good" and "guilt" don't belong together. Personal and clinical experience has repeatedly confirmed for us the useful role of sin and guilt. We began to notice that there are times in our lives when the experience of guilt actually was a signal of having done something good, even essential to nurture us. While the guilt probably did not feel like "Good Guilt" at the time of transgression, the "sin" that caused the guilt is sometimes viewed in retrospect as having brought something valuable to our life. Examples might include divorces, separations from partners and friends, giving up family-approved or family-dictated careers, or even marriages that are opposed by one's family on the grounds of race, religion, gender, or social status. It might also include the expression of qualities previously rejected as unacceptable, like anger and selfishness or the contra-sexual sides of ourselves. Later in life we may look at guilt thus incurred in a different light.

Promethean Guilt<sup>4</sup> and Good Guilt, therefore, are the guilt we incur for the sins we need to commit if we are to grow and fulfill ourselves. As the myth of Prometheus demonstrates, there can be an upside to the sins and the consequent guilt<sup>5</sup> we suffer when we violate conventional boundaries. Galileo, Copernicus, Socrates, Rosa Parks, and Susan

4 Jung talked about Promethean guilt in his *Collected Works* (CW 7, par. 243n). Here Jung was talking about the state of inflation that analysts often reach when they begin to experience an increase in consciousness as a result of insights that come from accessing the collective unconscious. Jung goes on to say in the note that "every step toward greater consciousness is a kind of Promethean guilt: through knowledge, the gods are as it were robbed of their fire, that is, something that was the property of the unconscious powers is torn out of its natural context and subordinated to the whims of the conscious mind. The man who has usurped the new knowledge suffers, however, a transformation or enlargement of consciousness, which no longer resembles that of his fellow men." This results in a loneliness, the pain of which "is the vengeance of the Gods."

5 We do not know if Prometheus actually *felt* guilt; the myth of Prometheus does not address that. But stealing from the gods is a sin, as society ordinarily defines sin. By that definition, any state of transgression against god or his commands is sin. Zeus's punishment of Prometheus must imply that he (Zeus) held Prometheus guilty of something. If Prometheus did not feel guilt, it suggests that he was a sociopath or that he was exempt from mortal rules

B. Anthony were guilty in this way. They gave much to society. But they suffered terribly for their “sins.” So did many lesser lights whose individual contributions to society were less dramatic but whose good may be quite extraordinary. Whether we are poets or cobblers, we will contribute the most to society if we commit the sins and bear the guilt necessary to develop ourselves as fully as we can. We can give society fire or we can give society our more developed selves as teachers, nurses, doctors, lawyers or writers.

Guilt is the only feeling that is palpably experienced by us as indisputable evidence that we have done something “bad,” that we have somehow “sinned.” Although some may define sin as breaking only those rules prescribed by religion, our subjective experience in life asserts that this is not so. Intellectually, we may make a distinction between ecclesiastical, secular, and parental rules, but viscerally and emotionally we experience them identically. For example, failure—in relationships, work, or art—makes us feel guilty and ashamed<sup>6</sup> emo-

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by virtue of being a demigod. But, Prometheus brought society something of great value and that act in itself seems incompatible with sociopathy.

6 Without some explanation and clarifying definition there could be some confusion in our use of the words shame and guilt. We suspect that some therapists would be troubled. Therefore, let us explain our use of shame and guilt. First, we need to comment about the distinction that some will draw between guilt and shame. At the intellectual level, there certainly are distinctions to be made, and the differences are significant. However, the differences at the visceral level are much harder to distinguish. At the gut level, we experience these two as identical.

Briefly, with guilt we are rejected for something we did or did not do; with shame we are rejected for who we are. *Guilt* can be explained as “experiencing myself as a bad person because I have done something bad or because I have fantasized about doing something bad.” *Shame* can be explained as meaning “I am bad intrinsically.” It is a sense of humiliation in which I am devalued as a person.

We feel guilt at transgressions of commandments and rules imposed on us by various authorities. On the other hand, we feel shame because we fall short of some ideal appearance: we are not tall enough, or slim enough, or we are not pretty enough, or we have a crooked nose.

Guilt feels as though it is a violation of something God said; shame feels as though it is related to something parents said. However, because parents are the child’s first images of God, to the child the two feelings seem to come from the same pool. They get hit with guilt and shame long before they are able to make these fine distinctions. For this reason, it seems to us that the visceral feelings we experience from guilt and shame are identical. We are sometimes suspicious that the fine parsing of the technical and intellectual differences between these two concepts can serve as a defense against experiencing the underlying feeling. There may be highly developed feeling individuals who

tionally, the same way we feel when we have sinned. We feel we are worthless or bad, even though we have violated no divine or moral laws. Almost any loss of control—whether of anger, appetites of various kinds, or of our bowels—causes us to feel guilty. Technically we have not sinned, but we might as well have because we suffer as if we had sinned. That is, our feeling of guilt from breaking a religious rule is identical to our feeling of guilt from breaking a secular or parental rule. We feel bad for violating either one. Thus, psychologically the guilt we experience from violating any authority triggers a feeling that is identical to the feeling we have when we have actually sinned in the conventional sense of the word. This identity of feeling happens to us psychologically because parents are our first image of God as well as our first authority figures. As infants, out of our conscious awareness, we have lumped these three entities (i.e., parental, secular, and divine authorities) together in a single identity. This identification remains unconscious all our lives, unless dreams or other sources of unconscious contents reveal it to us. Much of our moral compass is shaped by parental values that are inculcated in us from a very early age. As a result of this early conditioning (and our identification of them with God and authority), we experience guilt from transgression of any authority exactly as we do “sin,” which is technically defined as an infringement of divine law. By far, most transgressions that bring guilt are not violations of divine law. More often we feel guilty because we violated rules, values, attitudes and expectations of parents or other authorities. A lot of our guilt is for violation of highly subjective, and sometimes whimsical parental ordinances governing cleanliness, order, appearance, achievement, sex, health, and industry. We more often feel guilty for these garden variety types of transgressions than we do for murder or stealing or making graven images. Thus, the psychological experience of guilt is far broader than the religious definition of sin would suggest. While sin in religious terms is transgressing divine law, in psychological terms it is offending the ego ideals that are acceptable to parents and other authorities.

When “sin” and “guilt” are so defined, they cut a broad swath that envelops a widely varying catalogue of transgressions communicated directly and openly, by words, by disapproving gestures or, more subtly, by disapproving looks from authority figures (e.g., parents and grandparents). These actions of disapproval—words, looks, or gestures—define for us, particularly in childhood, those thoughts, feelings, and

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can make this fine differentiation in feeling for themselves, but we think they are pretty rare. For this reason, we lump guilt and shame together.

actions that are “bad,” and we interpret this to mean we are “bad” if we do any of these things. To be “bad” is to be “sinful.” These collectively shared and institutionally sanctioned beliefs of what is right and wrong, as well as widely varying individual and subjective beliefs of parents and other authority figures, present us with an enormous minefield that must be traversed if we are to develop and fulfill ourselves. It is a field that is fraught with the potential to wound us, sometimes grievously, at every step.

Therefore, when we look at sin<sup>7</sup> and guilt in this broader way, the way we actually experience them psychologically, we can see their powerful underlying influence embedded in our religious and cultural soil, and we can understand why they can be such powerful deterrents to human development. They can block our development—emotionally and intellectually—because a lot that is needed to live life fully is forbidden.

Parents and society demand that we tread authorized paths, that we think, feel, and act in ways that are acceptable to them. Guilt, with its potential to inflict pain and suffering, is a sentry that guards the authorized paths and its boundaries.

Dreams can at times reveal to us an important part of the process by which individual parents shape our relationship to sin and guilt through their influence on our perceptions of what is right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable. We see this in the following dream of a well-adapted middle-aged man who felt trapped and imprisoned in a conventional and suffocating life.

I am at an amateur play watching the stage. There are two stark figures. The Queen/Mother is on the left on a simple throne. She has on a gown with plain and simple lines. The King/Son is on the right, also on a simple throne. The mother reads from a page and the son repeats it. The lines are poetic and nice but not original. They are both saying lines written by someone else.

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7 Edward Edinger in his book, *The Mystery of the Coniunctio*, talks about the broad definition of sin in a somewhat different way. He writes, “The devil is a personification of all those aspects of an individual’s psychology which contradict one’s conscious, ideal self-image and which therefore must be repressed. For a conventional Christian consciousness, the devil will be all that is unChrist like—sexuality, power, self-interest, and material desires as opposed to spiritual ones.” (Edinger, Edward F., *Melville’s Moby-Dick*, Inner City Books, Toronto, 1995, p. 115)

While we are wired with the capacity to feel guilt,<sup>8</sup> we are, as the dream above portrays, *taught* what to feel guilty about. Until such a dream appears, however, we are often quite unconscious of the degree to which parental and collective values are instilled in us from an early age, how scripted our lives really are, and how rigidly these scripts can circumscribe and limit our thoughts and our behavior. When we depart from the script and/or the path, we incur guilt.

We can also see how Judaeo/Christian creation myths shape our notions of what is acceptable and unacceptable. These myths tell us that in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. Soon thereafter, sin and guilt were born, as Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge, became conscious, and thereby acquired the capacity to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong.<sup>9</sup> Since creation, then, it appears that sin and guilt have been frequent and familiar guests in the psychic house of most of mankind. Original sin is a religious explanation for a psychological hard wiring that causes us to experience guilt from infancy until death.

It is as if a barbed-wire fence of guilt is laid around us for the purpose of restricting our thoughts, feelings, and actions to those that are

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8 If we believed, as the Creationists do, that we are created in the image of God, it would not take a huge leap to suspect that God himself contains guilt and the behaviors that go with it. Where else would guilt come from, if not from the source that created us? This dark side is evident not only in the cruelty and harshness often inflicted by nature upon humans and animals but also in the cruel behavior attributed to God in the Bible. We might, for example, ask those who were not allowed to board the Ark before the flood. Or we might gain some insight from God's treatment of Job. Any parent who treated his child the way God treated Job might get an uninvited visit from Social Services or be jailed. Even Jesus might have been justified in questioning God's behavior. One could, at least, imagine Jesus asking why, if the Father thinks sacrifice is such a wonderful thing, he did not sacrifice himself, instead of his son. A father dying in the place of his son could be perceived as a more worthy kind of offering. Sacrificing sons, instead of themselves, in order to preserve or redeem their kingdoms and their power, is what elders do now, for example, when they encourage young people to become suicide bombers. Sacrificing sons is what the patriarchal elders in charge of societies have always done when they decided to declare war. God of the Bible is a model for this patriarchal behavior. But maybe God and the elders do feel guilty, when they behave cruelly or unmercifully. Jung suspected that Yahweh's unjust treatment of Job led Yahweh to feel guilty and atone by creating Christ, a God with considerably more apparent compassion than Yahweh himself. The book of Revelation, however, might call into question this view of Christ as being only compassionate and loving.

9 Holy Bible (1969), The New Scofield Reference Bible, Authorized King James Version, New York, Oxford University Press, Genesis 1-3.

acceptable to parents and the collective society in which we live. An individual will be loved, admired, and accepted by the dominant authorities of the collective society only if one stays within the barbed-wire fence. Much of what we are taught to believe is unsavory or unacceptable is rejected and cast into the shadow. The shadow, in Jungian terms, represents all that lies outside the fence, everything we wish not to be. Unfortunately, we can reject and store in the shadow a lot of good stuff that we need either now or later, like creative gifts that are discouraged by parents because they are deemed impractical or distasteful. Whenever we venture outside the fence, we experience guilt.

So it's tricky to talk about guilt partly because of the enormously diverse childhood influences that shaped our experience of it. These influences could differ hugely depending upon the way sin was defined over the ages by parents, other authorities, cultures, religions, and epochs. There is no single touchstone of orthodoxy that we can all embrace. The meaning of sin 100 years ago is considerably different from the meaning of sin today. People today often claim to be more liberated, but it is likely that their liberation is illusory. While the specific items in the catalogue may be different in many ways, the catalogue is enormous.

The impediment that the psychological experience of guilt and sin poses to our growth becomes obvious, when we examine the many things we have been taught to feel guilty about. It is unnecessary to recite all of the potential causes and sources that like land mines dot the ground we daily tread. Nevertheless, this brief recitation is more than sufficient to convince us of guilt's threat to our development. As we graze through the modest catalogue of guilt that follows, we might ask what life would be like if we did avoid all of these mines. It is difficult to imagine any concept of psychological growth that could materialize in any authentic life without stepping on some, if not all, of these guilt-inducing mines.

Some of the mines are visible and well known to us; others are buried beneath the surface and out of conscious sight. Conscious causes of guilt are probably in the minority. A mine for one person may be harmless to another.

The catalogue of sinful, guilty actions extends into the far reaches of our thoughts and behaviors. Daily, in our practices, people recall long-forgotten infractions, and they suffer from revulsion at remembered behaviors like: "I told on a friend to a teacher," or "I drank too much



and made a fool of myself," or "I sucked my uncle's penis," or "I binged and broke my vow to diet," and on and on.

Or a woman is pregnant, she trips and falls, she loses her baby, and she feels guilty. She feels that she has done something wrong, that she was careless. Almost any apparent loss of control can lead to shame and guilt, whether it is overeating, drinking to excess, inappropriate behavior or remarks (e.g., belching), or wearing a dress that is "too short." Incontinence of bowels or emotions can lead to guilt. We feel guilty about our doubts and uncertainties, our lack of self-confidence. We feel guilty about being sick and missing work.

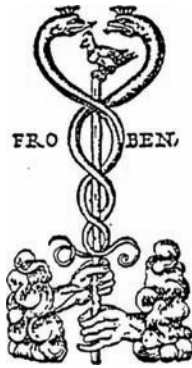
Even with the more relaxed attitudes found today, we can feel guilty about sex. We can feel guilty about impotence, infertility, or failure to perform in various ways. We can feel guilty about masturbation.

Then, we can feel guilty if we work too much or too little. The list goes on and on to include feelings of guilt about being late, underachieving, compromising, not having a career or having one, leaving our children with nannies or daycare, expressing anger or aggression, being assertive or not being assertive enough, being gay, being negative, expressing masculine traits when you are a woman or feminine qualities when you are a man, not making enough money or working mainly for money, changing jobs or careers or feeling stuck in them and afraid to move on, not having children, having children with birth defects, or children who are not smart enough or can't get into the right prep schools or colleges, having abortions or giving children up for adoption, not honoring and respecting parents no matter how awful or abusive they may be. The list also includes failure to live up to high ideals, even patently absurd ones for humans to achieve, like: "Be ye therefore perfect." As we know, the list just recited is only the tip of the guiltberg.

The truth is that in the course of our daily lives we tend to trespass far more often a garden variety of rules inspired by parents than those established by divine or religious ordinances. We incur guilt far more frequently for behaviors like being late, making poor grades or other forms of "inadequate" performance than we do for murder, or stealing or making graven images. Thus, much more human energy is expended tormenting over these lesser order of trespasses. It speaks to the ubiquity of guilt and the impossibility of avoiding it. Because we can feel guilty about so many thoughts, feelings and actions that we need in order to grow and develop, we have to find ways to live with, deal with and accept our guilt.

Part 2

GUILT & MENTAL HEALTH



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