

# Anger, Fear, Guilt, Shame

## The 4 painful primary emotions - how to live with and without them

By Arnina Kashtan

These emotions exist and operate from the ancient brain (the limbic part) and each one is driven by a deep existential need, which is designed to inspire us to defend ourselves at the existential, personal, social or spiritual level.

Naturally, these emotions, like emotions in general, are waves of energy of short duration that, if they were acting naturally (as they did in our infancy), would disappear at the end of their function without experiencing stuckness. But most of us know them as emotions that are present for a long time (years and generations ...) and that appear frequently.

This historical confusion is created by the intervention of the cortex (the thinking brain) in the process, as we've been indoctrinated to interpret them by patriarchy. The presence of the cortex generates stories and interpretations, nourished by opinions, values and beliefs based on the "right / wrong" paradigm. For this reason, we have lost the direct connection with the natural motivation of these feelings. As adults we almost do not recognize the appearance of these emotions as a direct response to an unfulfilled need and / or to any situation at the time it occurs. This creates a complication that entangles us in the effect of these feelings for much longer than would be their basic intention.

It is interesting to examine how fear is residing at the core of all.

Fear and anger are feelings related to personal existence. Guilt and shame are related to social existence.

We get stuck in these feelings because we believe in the stories that accompany the experience (although in reality, the experience was born *from* these stories). And this is how suffering is created: because we believe the stories, we see them as a description of reality, and we find ourselves trapped in them and in the resulting painful emotion. In this state, we are not present with what is really happening, and, therefore, we are unable to react from within ourselves (i.e., connected to our needs) or from reality.

The main work with these feelings is to separate them from the stories that are still attached to them so as to restore their natural function. In other words, the practice (i.e., untangling the stories or the history from the event itself) enables us to sense these feelings for shorter periods, and thus reduce the suffering that often accompanies them (stemming from the participation of thought in their functioning). When we are connected to reality and to the experience that occurs within us in response to our own needs in the moment, we are present and thus have a greater possibility of finding choices that arise from needs and from reality itself.

## Deepening our understanding of the 4 primal feelings

### The needs that these 4 emotions call us (or wake us up) to satisfy:

- Fear = survival (I survive, I live)
- Anger = existence and place (I exist, see me, I have a place in the world)
- Guilt = self-awareness for taking responsibility and belonging (I am aware, I see you)
- Shame = acceptance by others (belonging) and by ourselves (dignity - I am complete /worthy as I am)

### Fear

- Fear is directly connected to Self (survival)
- It is the basic emotion associated with my mere existence: it indicates when my life is in danger or threat and moves me to protect it
- It activates the three basic defense mechanisms: Fight, Flight, Freeze (the three F's)
- When the cortex enters the scene = thoughts in the future tense (what will be wrong)

### Anger

- Anger is related to the "other": the need for visibility (to be seen, to matter)
  - If they don't see me = I don't exist (When we are small, if they don't see us, our needs will not be met, and, therefore, the experience is that we cannot exist.)
- I am here, I exist; I have a place in the world
  - Anger is a means of expressing the needs of the Self, especially when there is an experience of impotence
  - It gives me the ability to defend myself through struggle
- Individuation (makes me an individual)
- The more the need is experienced as unfulfilled, the more anger there will be
- Anger is a movement towards self-expression
- Feelings underneath anger can be: fear, hurt, impotence, astonishment / bewilderment (when we don't understand)
- When the cortex enters the scene = thoughts about others, about life or about the situation in terms of "good / bad", "how it should have been / should be", "right / wrong", who or what deserves / does not deserve
- It is the release of stress resulting from fear

### Guilt

- Guilt is related to the "other" - awareness of their very existence
  - Guilt calls us to wake up to the need to take others into account = take responsibility for my actions (understanding the consequences and the effect on others)
  - I am aware of the interdependence between us
- In most cases, after expressing anger, I judge and blame myself for how I acted

- Feelings under guilt can be: sadness / remorse / pain / fear
- Although it is a primary emotion, it is often inactive when we are very young (because the ability to see the other is necessary to coexist in the tribe) and, therefore, appears later in our social development
- Realization of guilt restores the connection with myself (through self-acceptance), which opens the possibility of having contact with the other (compassion)
  - Self-connection (and especially self-acceptance) allows me to be more empathetic with others
- When the cortex enters the scene = thoughts arise in the past tense (what was wrong, what I did wrong)
- It gives me the ability to protect myself by fleeing (Flight) from the situation
- We need compassion (self-empathy) to avoid or get out of guilt
- Our objective in freeing ourselves from guilt: to feel "clean" sadness or pain, to repent without guilt
  - If guilt turns into repentance / remorse (clean), shame is not needed...

### Shame

- Shame is related to the connection between me and others (and my place amongst them): the need for inclusion / community / acceptance from others
- We want to assure or restore connection with others (and ourselves)
- I want to be seen and accepted for who I am
- Guilt is related to something I do; shame is related to something I am
- In this state we are disconnected from our highest values
- Shame pushes me to full self-acceptance
  - This part, which I want to hide, is part of who I am
- The "I" accepts itself
  - Or - You accept me and we belong
  - Or - I accept myself and I want to be accepted (belong)
  - Or - When I accept myself, I depend less on you receiving me
- It gives me the ability to protect myself through freezing (Freeze)
- The goal is to connect with ourselves before solving the problem
- When the cortex enters the scene = We think of ourselves in terms of right / wrong, good / bad. (What's wrong with me?)
- Feeling embarrassed is between guilt and shame, but closer to shame