SAA of New York City

Workshop Handout

Garment District
Sunday July 19th - 3 pm

From Shame To Grace -

A recovering addict Journey

By VJ

NOTE: SAA in NYC does not endorse, finance or oppose any of the above non-SAA material. The views reflected on this document are the ones of the SAA member who presented the workshop. The SAA member who presented the workshop does not speak for SAA.

What is Grace?

Divine grace is a theological term present in many religions. It has been defined as the divine influence which operates in humans to regenerate and sanctify, to inspire virtuous impulses, and to impart strength to endure trial and resist temptation and as an individual virtue or excellence of divine/spiritual origin.

"Grace is favor, the free and undeserved help that higher power gives us to respond to his/her call to become children of higher power and partakers of the spiritual nature

I found while searching what is grace someone wrote beautifully, “There is nothing I can do to make higher power love me more. There is nothing I can do to make higher power love me less. Grace”. I tell myself this every day. When I mess up, when I feel down, when I’m full of myself, when things are good.

Grace is God's love, wrapped around me like a blanket swaddled around a rescued flood victim. No scolding, no "I told you so," no judgement, no name calling or snide remarks. Just warm, solid, unshakeable, immovable love.

When I began to realize this as truth, to own it and make it a part of me, there was a tectonic shift in my soul. No, life didn't turn around immediately. I still struggle with old thinking. I still find myself jumping on the never-ending rat race/fight with the addicted self. I have to jump off and go back to the foundation stone using the program principal

What is Shame?

Shame is an unpleasant self-conscious emotion typically associated with a negative evaluation of the self; withdrawal motivations; and feelings of distress, exposure, mistrust, powerlessness, and worthlessness.

When it comes to sex addiction, shame plays a significant role. Shame is a primary drive and trigger in sex addiction, from having shame and guilt for the sexual acting out, as well as carrying shame from the past whether its previous mistakes made or childhood trauma. As the individual continues in his/her sexual behaviors, the feelings of shame continue to pile and build. Individuals who are actively acting out sexually are often unaware that what their feeling and trying to numb is shame. They have no idea the power shame holds, and they have no idea the power they have given shame. Shame can push the addiction further; it can prevent individuals from asking and accepting the help that they need; it is also reason for relapse.

Shame tends to be overlooked as a powerful emotion and it is often confused with guilt. Guilt serves as a moral compass. We feel guilty when we feel responsible for our actions. For example, I made a mistake, that behavior did not fit with my values, I hurt a loved one's feelings in the process, I should not do that again in the future.

However, shame says, "I am the mistake I made." "If I did something that was bad, I am bad." For example, sex addicts feel shame for who they are, vs. guilt when we feel guilty for something we did.

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The origin of shame Depending on the level of shame, the origin likely stems from less than nurturing experiences in childhood. Sexual behaviors can serve as a way to numb the painful experiences, receive that desired validation or attention. Some individuals may have developed shame once active in their sexual addiction.

Guilt and shame are some of the biggest obstacles in addiction recovery. Learning to cope with these feelings is an integral part of the healing process. Guilt is based on a failure of doing. It's contingent on our values, morals, and standards. When we violate these standards, guilt can drive us to change. It can also hold back change. Many addicts start feeling more and more guilty as they reach the late stages of recovery. As mental clarity returns, the reality of the mistakes you've made become clear. Knowing all the struggles your family and friends went through to get you into treatment can cause addicts to feel a lot of shame. They don't want you to feel
shame; they want to feel better. The following are some tips for avoiding crippling shame during recovery.

Shame as coping:

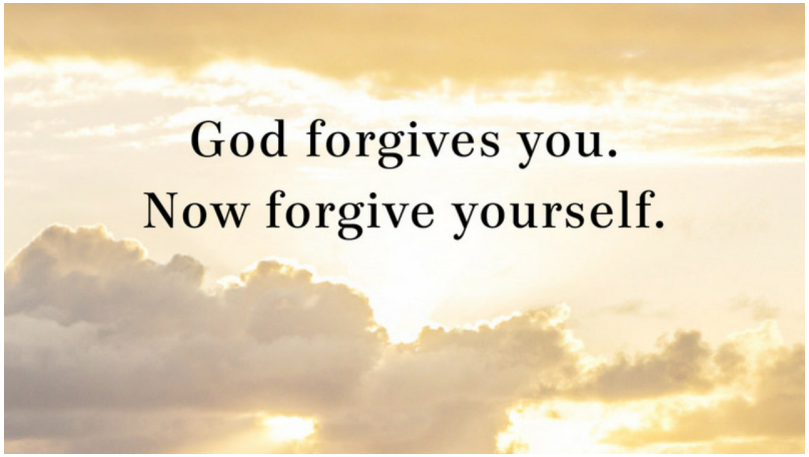
As mentioned before, most individuals engage in sexual acting act out as a way to cope with their loss of self. As a way to cope with this and the shame of the behaviors that they struggle to stop, they cope with the difficulty and the consequences of the addiction in the only way they know how, by further acting out. In the very short term, the acting out serves as a way to self-soothe and to preoccupy their mind. However, the level of the addiction and the level of shame gets to a point where the individual may be living two different lives in order to keep their behaviors and their "other life" a secret. The shame becomes layers upon layers of pain and negative self-thinking as they continue their behaviors. The fear of being caught, the embarrassment and remorse they carry for the behaviors they engage in, the guilt for the consequences their behavior brings, it is all wrapped up into a big ball of shame.

How do I go from Shame to Grace?

Very short simple, most effective and direct answer from my experience strength and hope is:

Take actions to work the SAA program with a sponsor to the best of my ability and practice program principles and character assets every day. A journey from Shame to Grace has been and will be a journey from character defects to character assets for me.

I am on a life-long recovery journey from the addiction. I have experienced both shame and grace in this journey. I know them/feel them and internalize them closely as they both are a part of myself and my emotional/spiritual landscape. Some days I go through only shame somedays only grace and most of the days some combination of shame and grace. My journey is not perfect but I know it is progressing from shame to Grace.



Other Effective Tools to help you on the journey from Shame to Grace:

Learn to forgive yourself

Do you judge yourself severely and berate the mistakes you've made? You might just be judging yourself too harshly. When you're addicted, you're not exactly yourself. You're better now; that's all that matters.

Examine the roots of your guilt

There's no good reason to feel guilty if the situation is out of your control. Are your reasons for feeling guilty rational and reasonable?

Face the guilt

Face your feelings of guilt head-on. Release them by talking about them, sharing them, confessing them, and being honest.

Change your actions

Again, guilt isn't always unreasonable. If your source of guilt is something truly unhealthy or unproductive—like drug use— or sexually compulsive behavior-then make some efforts to stop and work the program with a sponsor/help other to change too. Take Action and use the tools prescribed in the SAA program!

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Practice empathy

Lend a hand here and there.
Learn to empathize and forgive others,
and you'll learn to do the same for yourself.
Take charge in your community by involving yourself
with a group or organization that speaks to you.

Deconstruct your guilt

You can't forgive yourself for mistakes you've made if you can't clearly define them. Analyzing your mistakes *individually* is the key to feeling better. Saying hurtful things to people is never okay, but yelling at someone because you were feeling jealous, betrayed, rejected, or insulted–that's understandable.

Shame is an unfortunate partner for those who are working to overcome an addiction. The relationship between shame and addiction is complex – sometimes, it's solely about addiction, and sometimes, it has roots in the past.

People struggle to stop using or drinking on their own, and when they are unable to control it, they feel ashamed of their lack of control. Addiction isn't something people can control by their own will, so anxieties about shame and guilt in addiction recovery are something we want to head-off. Shame can lead to feelings of failure, inadequacy, and incompetence – all of which can be stumbling blocks on the path to healing. Negative thoughts such as "I'm a failure," and "I don't deserve happiness" are actually unhealthy, especially in recovery.

Understand the Connection Between Addiction and Self-Esteem

Addiction and self-esteem share a complicated relationship.
Often, low self-esteem precedes a substance addiction.
Shame and feelings of guilt accompany many who suffer trauma.
According to Dr. Suzanne Lachmann, writing for *Psychology Today*, childhood abuse – sexual, physical, or emotional – has a damaging effect on self-worth. Many victims feel like abuse is their fault, despite it being completely out of their control, and they feel guilty. Such displaced feelings of shame can set the stage for substance abuse.

Addiction itself can spawn feelings of low self-worth.
The effort to get clean can lead to a devastating cycle,
where shame and addiction feed on each other.
A user may not be able to get clean, leading him or her to feelings of inadequacy and shame.

Dealing with issues of shame and addiction is more than just a good practice for therapy. According to a University of British Columbia study, people recovering from alcoholism who were ashamed of earlier drinking episodes were more likely to relapse during recovery. Overcoming issues of shame and guilt in recovery will not only help someone better understand their addiction and what might have led them there, it will also increase their chances of making positive life changes through recovery.

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Change Your Perception of Addiction

The first step in overcoming shame is to change your perception of addiction and, by extension, the perception of yourself. The Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse once stated that what happens in the brain of an addicted person is like being deprived of something crucial – your brain can differentiate between a want and a need. She, along with many other addiction researchers and experts, believes addiction is a disease, not a choice. Understanding this may not eliminate all the guilt that accompanies addiction, but it can be the first step in self-forgiveness.

Make Amends With Those You've Wronged

Many people struggling with addiction harbor feelings of shame and guilt over events that happened during their struggle to overcome their dependency. The power of an addiction may leave friends and family confused and hurt. When you take steps to repair those relationships, it can help your feelings of guilt. Not everyone will be open to repairing relationships, but keep this in perspective – other people's emotions aren't always within your control. Try to make peace with people you've hurt in the past, and give them time and space for forgiveness.

Forgive Your Past Self

Give yourself permission to forgive yourself for prior actions, and begin restoring your self-esteem. Understand that your past actions and misdeeds do not define you. As a human, you are innately good – even if it doesn't feel like it at the moment. Tap into your better nature, move past your previous mistakes, and make a pointed effort to start making positive changes in how you act. Write a list of your negative behaviors and personality traits that you believe are "bad" or fueling your feelings of shame. Then, work on changing them one at a time.

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Change may not happen overnight, but it *will* happen.

Making a list of the sources of your low self-esteem takes brutal honesty, deep introspection, and a willingness to put the worst things about yourself on paper. Coming to terms with these truths is a critical step in accepting your past and leaving it behind. Shame will encourage you to hide the worst parts of yourself and to never let others see what your addiction has made you become. If you let shame win, you will feel trapped in this unhealthy way of thinking. You and your loved ones deserve better and rewiring your brain IS POSSIBLE!

In Closing….Your shame hides in many places-in anger, blame, denial, workaholism, perfectionism, drinking, drugs, sexual compulsion and anything else you compulsively engage in to make yourself feel better. But if you could just learn to be vulnerable for one second, and open up to the pain, you would
find there's no place left for your shame to hide.
Adam Appleton

Thank you for today and may you know freedom from what holds you back in living the highest and best version of yourself!!

Quotes to Refer to and Remember :

A moment of self-compassion can change your entire day. A string of such moments can change the course of your life.” ―Christopher K. Germer

“If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete.” —Jack Kornfield

“The most terrifying thing is to accept oneself completely.” ―Carl Jung

“Empathy’s the antidote to shame. The two most powerful words when we’re in struggle: *me too* .” —Brene Brown

“With everything that has happened to you, you can either feel sorry for yourself or treat what has happened as a gift. Everything is either an opportunity to grow or an obstacle to keep you from growing. You get to choose.” ―Wayne W. Dyer

“The past has no power over the present moment.” ―Eckhart Tolle

“Only if you’ve been in the deepest valley can you ever know how magnificent it is to be on the highest mountain.” —Richard Nixon

“One small crack does not mean that you are broken, it means that you were put to the test and you didn’t fall apart.” —Linda Poindexter

“Every saint has a past and every sinner has a future.”—Oscar Wilde

“Make the most of your regrets; never smother your sorrow, but tend and cherish it till it comes to have a separate and integral interest. To regret deeply is to live afresh.” —Henry David Thoreau

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“Mistakes are part of life. Everyone makes them. Everyone regrets them. But some learn from them and some end up making them again. It’s up to you to decide if you’ll
use your mistakes to your advantage.” —Meredith Sapp

“To keep on trying in spite of disappointment and failure is the only way to keep young and brave. Failures become victories if they make us wise-hearted.” —Helen Keller

“Time passes unhindered. When we make mistakes, we cannot turn the clock back and try again. All we can do is use the present well.” —the Dalai Lama

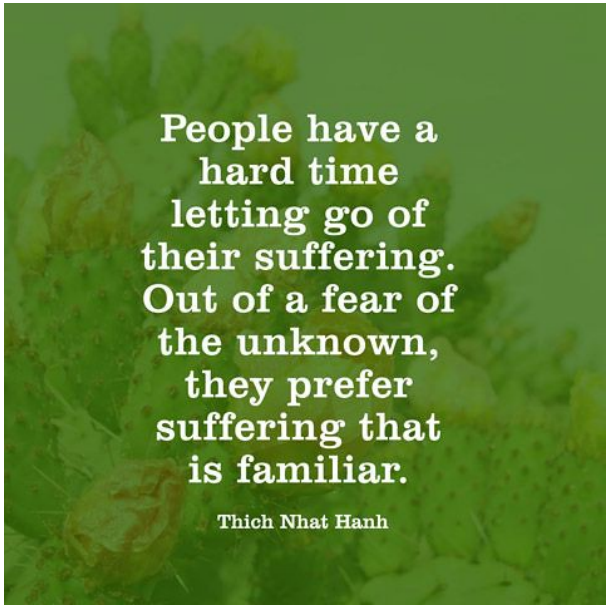
“People have a hard time letting go of their suffering. Out of a fear of the unknown, they prefer suffering that is familiar.” —Thich Nhat Hanh

“‘All conditioned things are impermanent’ — when one sees this with wisdom, one turns away from suffering.” —Buddha

“A man does not have to be an angel in order to be a saint.” —Albert Schweitzer

“Lack of forgiveness causes almost all of our self-sabotaging behavior.” —Mark Victor Hansen

“Forgiveness is giving up the hope that the past could be any different.” —Oprah Winfrey



Time for Shares !