

ASCA News • August 2001

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From the Desk of George Bilotta

I hope this August edition of our **ASCA News** contains some challenges and growth opportunities for each of you. My *Reflective Moment* article discusses some of the parameters surrounding the issue of **respect**. The *Step Elaboration* piece focuses on Step 6, particularly the notion of **shame**. In our *Ongoing Education Moment*, I review our *Partial Listing of Feeling* printed in our *Welcome to ASCA* handout. A possible *Rotation C Topic* for one of your August meetings might concentrate on the topic of **respect**. In addition, James Daniels continues to provide us with another of his poetry pieces entitled: *Blocks*.

During the past month a couple of volunteers have stepped forward offering to assist with the production of **ASCA News**. Ramona Mastin who has been the primary architect of our web page will assume some editing duties. She will also format the **ASCA News** for web publication. Laurie Herscher will also join the **ASCA News** team by taking on the ongoing duties of editing the *Step Elaboration* article. James Daniels will become poetry editor insuring a poetry piece for our monthly editions.

We would like to introduce survivor art to the **ASCA News**. If you have a web page with survivor art, send us your web page address. We will publish your site address. If you do not have a web address, you can forward your art piece in gif or jpeg format. Please limit the size of your image to 100KB or, preferably, below. You are welcomed, as well, to include a brief description about your art and it's meaning to you as a survivor of abuse. We will try to incorporate the piece and description into one of our upcoming newsletters.

We continue to look for additional editors and writers. If you would like to write an occasional piece for the **ASCA News**, we have many ideas for possible articles that may interest you. You may also have an idea for an article that you would like to write. Also, we are looking for a person with expertise to promote our web page within the Internet. If interested in any of the above positions, please contact me.



A Reflective Moment for August *Respect: To Look Again*

by George Bilotta

Through my *Reflective Moment* piece for August, I want to explore with you some ideas concerning the notion of **respect**. What does respect mean? How can living respectfully enrich our recovery process and everyday lives? Many people would probably say something like: "Well, I know what respect is all about. I'm a

respectful person." But I wonder ...

When I look around, it seems to me that our world and daily lives are overshadowed by disrespect and thoughtlessness. I see people disrespecting themselves and others, as well as animals and the environment. Looking back on my day, sometimes I am embarrassed by my lack of respect. **Step 6** notes that *I shall respect my shame and anger*. So what does it mean to respect?

Respect - To Look Again

The term **respect** derives from the Latin *respicere*, meaning *to look again*. To respect, to be respectful, to behave respectfully and to value the virtue of respect involves a particular style of living, a deliberate stance towards life. This respectful way of living reminds and encourages us *to look again and again*. *To look again* suggests the opposite of scanning, staying on the surface or taking a quick look. By *looking again*, we challenge the attitudes and behaviors of our perpetrators. They viewed us as throwaway things that were undeserving of respect. Respectfulness reawakens a healthy way *to look again* and understand self and others with new eyes and clearer vision.

Respect - Looking Again for the Precious Heart

Within the specific behavior of *looking again*, what are we looking for? I think what we are looking for is the **precious heart** of self and the **precious heart** of every person with whom we interact. The precious heart contains the core of self. The precious heart embodies our unique, wonderful and special qualities as well as our potential and value as human beings.

In this way, to be respectful, to interact respectfully and to value the virtue of respect consists of *looking again*, and *looking again and looking again* some more until we uncover and disclose the precious heart of self and others. The visual for this process consists of gazing through the outer shell of the body, looking directly into a person's heart, and looking into our own heart as well. *Looking again* seeking the precious heart in self and others describes a unique way to live out our day. It is an intentional way of living.

Upon finding and seeing the precious heart to interact respectfully continues to deepen and mature in the form of appreciative dwelling. Appreciative dwelling permits us to linger with, to soak in and to develop a fondness for the precious heart whether it be one's own heart or another's heart. Respect that includes appreciative dwelling adds dignity to life. Dwelling appreciatively with the precious heart of self or others counters the disrespect, thoughtlessness, mean-spiritedness and perversity of our abusers. It supports us in viewing self and others in a balanced, fuller and dignified light.

Difference Between Respect and Politeness

While *looking again* directly into the heart and dwelling appreciatively with the precious heart of self and others, characterizes the difference between being respectful and being polite. Being polite is a socially acceptable behavior, a tactful and often refined way to interact. Many people however mistake politeness for respect.

On the other hand being respectful involves the heart. It *looks again and again* for the precious heart, that which is special and full of potential. Respect embraces a

value system flowing from the heart that senses, draws out and acknowledges the giftedness, the specialness and the best that the self and others innately possess. Being polite is important socially. Living one's life from a respectful stance however, adds depth and dignity to our lives and the lives of others.

Cultivating Respect

How do we cultivate a life full of respect toward self, others and the things of the world? **First**, I think we begin by desiring and wanting the virtue of respect to be an essential part of our being. We understand and appreciate that living in a respectful manner will profoundly influence our recovery process and daily lives. Consequently, we end up valuing and desiring to incorporate the virtue of respect into all areas of our day.

It is like valuing ongoing education. We understand and appreciate how education can influence and improve our lives, likewise with respect. Living respectfully, looking again directly into the precious heart adds quality to life. It enhances life. In this way we individually contribute to making the world a better place.

Second, in some manner we need to move toward making the virtue of respect a priority. It is like waking every morning and consciously deciding to focus on cultivating the dynamics of respect throughout our day. With this type of intentional focusing and trying, we maintain a reflective mindfulness about *looking again and looking again* some more. Throughout our day, we deliberately seek the precious heart contained within self and others. We learn to gently hold, caress and honor the precious heart.

It is like deciding to carry around a butterfly net as a reminder to always be looking for special butterflies. To nurture respect requires constant effort and concentration. It is an ongoing learning activity of *looking again and looking again* some more for the precious heart. The more we focus on this reflective activity of *looking again*, the greater our capacity grows to respectfully embrace, honor and dignify self, others and things of the world.

Third, I think that trying to cultivate the virtue of respect is challenging. Many survivors were taught to disrespect themselves. They learned through their abusers to disrespect and take for granted others and the world around them. In a sense, we grew up with a steady diet of disrespect and disrespect's various cousins like rudeness, flippancy, inappropriate boundaries, disapproval, criticism, ungratefulness, disregard, insensitivity, indifference, withholding, mean-spiritedness, etc. To counter an attitude of disrespect, I think it is helpful to develop cues as constant reminders *to look again*, to always try to glimpse and dwell with the contents of the precious heart.

Fourth, I think innately, we value and want to live in a respectful manner both toward self and other people as well as the things of the world. But we tend to forget. Our lives are busy and often rushed. We forget to constantly take a second and third look, *to look again and again* for the precious heart. Any kind of cue or token to gently remind ourselves to seek the precious heart by looking again and again will help foster a respectful way of being. In this way, we replace the blurry eyeglasses that our abusers placed on us which distort how we look at self and others.

The Value of Respect

What value does living a respectful life offer to our recovery process and daily lives? First, just as childhood abuse negatively affected every dimension of self, respectful living will steadily reverse much of this negativity. Second, respectful living promotes softness and gentleness. It transforms the harshness and intensity that accompany life's daily activities. It reduces hecticness and confusion replacing these with reflectivity and thoughtfulness.

Third, trying constantly to live a life full of respect, *looking again* at the precious heart of self and others increases our capacity to appreciate, to stand still in awe at the wonderfulness of self and others. It thus increases our self-esteem and builds our sense of self-worth (Step 16). In this way, we counter our belittled self-image deformed through childhood abuse. By *looking again and looking again* some more, we slow down, stop, pause and wonder. In this mode, we constantly rediscover and reshape our new self (Step 21).

Fourth, living respectfully adds a dimension of graciousness to our lives. When we mindfully try to interact respectfully, our bodies feel less stressed. We relax, let go and surrender to life's realities. Our minds invite alternatives. Our stance toward life and others is more welcoming and less rigid. Relationships seem less troublesome, more connected and fulfilling. Our emotions seem fuller and more accessible. The heart seems more generous and grateful. Life possesses increased meaning and fulfillment. Life feels worth living.

Fifth, respectful living adds to our perspective concerning the interconnectedness of all life. In turn we seek to constantly rebalance our way of living and restore harmony to our lives, since daily living has a way of knocking us off balance. Respectful living is like an insurance policy guaranteeing rebalancing and harmony. In a sense our abuser(s) threw our entire being off kilter. Respectful living counters this lopsidedness.

Finally, respectful living adds dignity to one's life. Through respectful living, little by little, we increase our sense of self-worth. We nurture our self-confidence. We contribute to our self-respect. We mature and grow in stature and value in our mind's eye. Respectful living, *looking again and looking again* some more, pulls back and reveals the covered over mystery and wonder concerning who we truly are, i.e., our giftedness and grandeur as well as our incompleteness and frailty. Respectful living helps us to pause and wonder at the marvelous mystery of life and our place within the interconnectedness of our world.

Living respectfully will have healing incremental affects on our recovery process as well as our daily lives. Cultivating a style of respectful living requires desire, stick-to-itiveness and a daily plan. Respectful living, as a disciplined and wholesome way of living, follows the preeminence of Stage One Remembering, i.e., telling our story over and over again. From my perspective, recovery from childhood abuse continues to progress in proportion to fostering a respectful way of life by *looking again and looking again* some more for the precious heart within self and others.

You can offer feedback concerning the preceding and following articles by sending an e-mail either to THE MORRIS CENTER's Board at tmc_asca@dnai.com or directly to George at georgebilotta@cs.com. Mailing addresses are included either in the beginning masthead or in the contact information at the conclusion of the newsletter. Your comments will be gratefully received.



Poetry

BLOCKS

by James Daniel, Copyright 2001

Feedback to poet: ribturtle@aol.com

Red and white blocks
On a lawn of green plastic
Nothing to hurt me here
This is fantastic.

I build four walls
With nothing inside
Strong and secure
A good place to hide

I'll let them do
What they will to my body
Go ahead, hit me
Go ahead, flog me.

They cannot hurt
That which they cannot see
I'll keep myself safe
The part really me.

Locked up inside my head
These plastic walls
Don't need any roof
'Cause the walls are so tall.

Blocks interlocked
To block out the pain
My safe box inside
My skull keeping me sane.

Pulling these blocks apart
When there's no threat
Years from now they'll get
To pay off their debt.

I'd rather do more

But for now I'm too small
For now I'll just make sure
These walls do not fall.



Rotation C Topic:

Respect: How Are We Growing in Respect toward Self and Others?

For this month's Rotation C Topic, your meeting might take up the topic of **respect**. As mentioned in the Reflection article, part of respect is to look again and look again at the precious heart of self, others and things of the world.

Questions:

1. What do you think would be the repercussions within your daily life if you purposefully tried to increase your capacity to respect, *to look again* at your precious heart?
 2. What do you think would be the obstacles that you would face in trying to increase your capacity to respect?
 3. What do you think would happen to your sense of self-worth, self-confidence and self-esteem by intentionally focusing on increasing your capacity for respect?
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ASCA Meeting Ongoing Education Moment: Our Partial List of Feelings

The *Welcome to ASCA* handout contains a diverse listing of feelings. Its placement within the handout and at the end of the **Survivor to Thriver** manual is meant as a tool to assist us in identifying and articulating our feelings. We often have difficulty naming the various feelings, especially uncomfortable feelings that we experience during an ASCA meeting, while working the material in the **Survivor to Thriver** manual or just in general throughout our day. We can sense the stirring within us but may not be able to associate a label or a word to what may be happening emotionally.

Since our feelings contribute to motivating and guiding our behaviors, increasing our capacity to locate and articulate our feelings can be most helpful. By slowly reviewing the words in our *Partial List of Feelings* and matching what you experience with each word you can practice identifying the various feelings that come up. Using and adding to this listing of feelings as an ongoing exercise can strengthen your feeling vocabulary, give voice to your feelings and increase your comfort level with your feelings. Our feelings represent an aspect of who we are at any given moment. The more we can identify and voice our feelings the more healthy control we have over our lives.



Step Elaboration

We continue the monthly Step series by George J. Bilotta, Ph.D.

Step Elaboration augments the material provided within our **Survivor to Thriver** manual

Step 6

I can respect my shame and anger as a consequence of my abuse, but shall try not to turn it against myself or others.

Step 6 states that *I can respect my shame and anger as a consequence of my abuse, but shall try not to turn it against myself or others*. However, the section on Step 6 in our **Survivor to Thriver manual** does not address the topic of shame. The topic of shame is discussed later in Step 10, *I am facing my shame and developing self-compassion*. Yet, most of us have probably experienced the type of shame to which Step 6 alludes. Many survivors experience a profound sense of shame. Others experience varying intensities of shame that ebb and flow with life's daily variables, e.g., stress, heartache, loneliness, a fast paced work environment, an unreflective life style, the hassles of daily living, etc. Other survivors have significantly reduced their shame that originates from their childhood abuse.

Through this brief article, I want to explore with you some of my perspectives on shame and some ideas concerning how to go about rebalancing the shame in our lives. Shame is a burdensome experience. It squeezes the joy out of life. From my perspective, shame derives its hideous power through misapplying guilt. Retrospectively, guilt and shame may come about when we think back on our childhood. We may envision that we had more power and control over the abuse than reality attests. Thus we may think that we could have prevented the abuse or at least reduced it. Our situation is further exacerbated since it is difficult for us to recall and experience our childhood vulnerability.

We may also feel guilt and thus ashamed through association. Many of us feel full of shame because we come from abusive backgrounds and families. Alternatively, the phenomenon of shame might be more of a philosophical problem than a sinking emotional feeling. We may feel shame because we strive to be something other than who we are. In this striving, we may experience shame because we sense that our true self is not good enough. Later in this article, I will explore this philosophical approach along with some concrete suggestions on how to go about correcting and rebalancing our sense of shame.

What is Shame? What Is Our Experience of Shame?

Shame could be described as a painful, mortifying, deflating, and lonely kind of experience that resonates throughout one's being. The body feels stressed, tight and uncomfortable. Some people experience a kind of cringing and collapsing, as well as a desire to be invisible. There could be a closing up, a closing down of body, mind and soul. The mind might be overwhelmed with thoughts and feelings of regret and remorse. The expression, *full of shame* comes to mind.

Shame like depression seems to zap much of our enthusiasm for living. We feel exposed, transparent and vulnerable. Shame disrupts our process of fostering a positive self-image. It interferes with our movements to foster an emerging new self (Step 21). When we proceed with our daily lives from a shame-filled stance, looking out at life through shame-filled eyes, our heart's capacity seems to diminish. We seem to look down rather than up. We seem less open to life. We tend to withdraw. We may view ourselves as inadequate, not good enough, defective, limited, lacking in substance. Misapplied shame obstructs us from asserting ourselves, honoring who we are, and feeling self-confident.

Shame Activated by Guilt

Shame may be activated by guilt. We misunderstand our feelings of guilt. Misinterpreting that we have done some kind of horrific wrong, we think that we participated willingly and knowingly in destructive behavior. On some level we sense that we were responsible for our abuse. When we were children and later as teenagers however, we were not responsible for our abuse. The abuse was something done to us and against us by another person(s). We were used and manipulated both physically and emotionally by power, force and authority that was greater than us. When we feel guilty for doing something wrong, a healthy person naturally feels ashamed. Concerning our childhood abuse however, we did not do anything wrong.

Misapplying Shame

Since we did not do anything wrong and were not responsible in anyway whatsoever for our abuse, why do we sometimes feel guilty and ashamed? There seems to be a **misunderstanding**, a **misinterpreting**, and a **misapplying** that comes from a sense that one has done something wrong. In our struggle to maintain order and control, many survivors retroactively associate their present adult capacity for control and power with their childhood.

It is difficult to remember, to surrender to the reality that as children and even as teenagers that we had no control or power over those who abused us. We were dependent upon them. We trusted them. They were physically bigger and stronger than we were. They were opportunistic and cunning. They had more experience in the world and knew how to manipulate the situation.

Why do we feel guilty and thus ashamed? It seems that in the bigger picture of our recovery story, we may not have gained sufficient perspective. That is, as adults it may be difficult for us to return and to reflect on our childhood vulnerability, i.e., not having control, not having any power over the person(s) who abused us. When we cannot re-experience our childhood vulnerability, we may **misunderstand** that as children we had no control and power. Any **interpretation** that implies that we had power and control as a child is an illusion.

This may lead to **misapplying** the idea that we could have changed the situation. This is often referred to as magical thinking. In other ways we may believe that we were at least partially responsible, that we had at least a little input into being abused. This might be a familiar situation for survivors who recall experiencing some physical pleasure while being abused, for example being sexually aroused, being touched, treated special, etc. On some level we may feel that we caused or contributed to the abuse in some way. We did not. We had no choice. We were manipulated and forced.

Guilt by Association

Our shame may also become activated through a sense of guilt by association. For example, we are associated with a particular family or group. Incest was perpetrated within this family. Physical beatings were regularly administered. Emotional abuse was continuously absorbed. This may describe your family. This is a group of people to which we belong and from which we came. One, two or more people within this family or group are responsible for the abuse overtly and covertly.

Being associated with and coming from such a family can raise a wide range of feelings. We might feel ashamed that we come from such an abusive family or from a father, mother, stepparent, etc., who were abusive. We might have been or continue to be fearful that others would discover that our family was so messed up, abusive, crazy, etc. We are or were ashamed of our families. We may be afraid that others will think less of us, reject us or think and feel differently about us because of the family from which we come.

Alternative Perspective on Shame

From a different point of view, shame could be discussed from a philosophical perspective. Philosophically, it could be proposed that the phenomenon of shame has more to do with our non-acceptance and our basic uneasiness with what it means to be a human being full of limits than from being an adult survivor of childhood abuse. Part of the human condition is to be imperfect, incomplete, fragmented, broken, flawed, etc. In general most people resist and fight this notion of having limits. They refuse to accept the fact that to be a human being is to always be imperfect and incomplete. So because they were abused and in a way broken, flawed, fragmented and think of themselves as incomplete, imperfect and limited they end up feeling ashamed.

We live in a world in which most people seem to value being number one, the best, on top, winning, and achievement oriented. Being average, regular and ordinary is not good enough for many people. In such scenarios, we seem to minimize and deny who we are. In turn we try to be more and different than whom we are. This does not mean that we should not try to improve our lot in life, to grow, to develop our gifts and talents. When we forget who we really are however, and try to reach for the stars, we usually get burnt. We promote a distorted sense of who we are.

Most people seem to want to be more than who they are. When we strive to be more than who we are, i.e., not accepting who we really are, being ashamed perhaps of who we are; we expend much of our time and energy trying to impress. In an effort to cover over our real self that we may be ashamed of, we try to project an impressive image. We do this through dress, expressing a certain attitude and stance toward people, the way we talk about our selves and others, the way we might put other people down, through competition, winning at all costs, etc.

This trying to impress is perhaps the difference between growing, developing and enhancing our selves and skills, and the difference from not accepting self. When we are ashamed of who we really are, we will try to impress others as well as ourselves. We might impress by showing what we can really do if we try hard enough, work long enough, if we double our efforts, etc. We promote a false and artificial self instead of an authentic and congenial self.

In reality we are survivors of childhood abuse. We have been abused emotionally, physically and sexually. Being a survivor of childhood abuse is part of who we are. It is not the total of which we are, but a part of who we are. It is part of our history and story of life. When we say, "well I am not proud of being a survivor or proud of coming from a family that perpetrated incest" then we set ourselves up for the fall. Because we come from these kinds of family constellations, it is a part of us. We do not like it. We may want to get away from them. But when we deny our past in anyway whatsoever, I think that we set ourselves up to experience guilt, shame and feeling ashamed.

Also from this philosophical perspective of shame, the experience of embarrassment seems to raise its ugly head. Shame becomes activated perhaps when we become concerned about what other people will think or feel about us. We feel embarrassed that we come from an abusive background or family. Again this type of embarrassment seems to stem from us not perceiving ourselves as good enough, not coming from the right kind of family, or the right side of the tracks. I think that there is a natural tendency for us to want to think and feel well of our selves, our families, and from where we came. But when we start to deny from where we come, embarrassment begins to root and form our shame.

Again, I raise the question - what is this concern and worry over being an adult survivor of childhood abuse? Why do we feel embarrassed, ashamed, guilty that we were abused when children? I think in part it is the issue of wanting to be impressive, to impress self and others which comes out of a stance that one is not fundamentally okay with the core of who one is as a human being. Impressing is a projection of illusion. In a way we might be like birds and animals that tend to puff themselves up to look bigger than they really are, to be impressive as a defense or for mating, i.e., to be more desirable, for example like a peacock. For many people it is the looks, the trappings, the appearances, and the projections that seem to count. So many people tend to discount and minimize the internal hidden core, the heart of who they really are.

So perhaps from this philosophical perspective, it might help us to come to terms in a different way with our humanness. We are who we are, no excuses. We are survivors of childhood abuse, no apologies. We are human beings with many imperfections and flaws, no denying this. I wonder if we focused more on our human frailty, our childhood vulnerability, and our heart instead of our appearance, our trying to be impressive that we would experience less guilt and shame concerning being adult survivors of childhood abuse. Besides trying to impress usually just adds stress and confusion to our lives.

Other Correctives to Rebalancing Our Shame

Part of Step 6's task of *respecting our shame by not turning it against ourselves* involves correcting and rebalancing ourselves. This corrective balancing could involve some or all of the following:

1. assert and confront ourselves by telling our story over and over again, i.e., always remembering, never forgetting, never denying that we are adult survivors of childhood abuse.
2. to confront our abusers and conspirators when we deem that it will be helpful to our ongoing recovery process.
3. always hold the perpetrator(s) responsible for the abuse.

4. resist the illusion that as a child or teenager that we had anything whatsoever to do with causing or encouraging the abuse.
 5. embrace the core and heart of who we are as human being, i.e., a good and genuine human being with many wonderful aspects and also many flaws.
 6. in turn, be reflective about expending any time or energy trying to impress either one's self or others. It is truly a waste of resources. It only adds to our pile of denial that hinders more than helps our recovery process.
 7. there is a substantive difference between feeling ashamed, experiencing shame, and the reality upon which those feelings and experiences are based. Feelings are neither right nor wrong, neither morally good nor bad. However, feelings do flow out of how we perceive and interact with the people, events and things around us both yesterday and today. By rigorously challenging our assumptions we might be able to begin disassembling the perceptual base upon which our experiences of shame and feeling ashamed stand.
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Announcements

How to order the **Survivor to Thrive** manual? First, the manual can be downloaded from our web page for free. Second, to purchase a copy of the manual, send a check or money order payable to "**The Morris Center**" for \$24.00 (add \$5.00 for orders outside of US, i.e., \$29.00) and mail to **George Bilotta, Survivor to Thrive, 173 Malden Street, West Boylston, MA 01583-1020, U.S.A.** Manuals are sent priority mail usually within a few days.

If you have editing skills and want to volunteer to assist with preparing the **ASCA News** for publication, or if you enjoy writing and would like to write a story for the **ASCA News**, or if you have expertise and time to promote our web page within the Internet, please contact [George Bilotta](mailto:George.Bilotta) for details.

If there are changes in Co-Secretary assignments, please let us know so we can forward a hard copy or e-mail a file of the **ASCA News** to the correct person. Also if Co-Secretaries have a change in address, telephone number or e-mail, please send these changes to: e-mail: georgebilotta@cs.com, telephone: 508.835.6054, mailing address: 173 Malden Street, West Boylston, MA 01583-1020.

Remember that if you want to submit an article for the August issue of the **ASCA News**, our deadline is August 10th. If your meeting is not receiving the **ASCA News** contact George Bilotta.



Observations, Questions, Comments!

If you have any observations, questions and/or comments that you want to share concerning ASCA and THE MORRIS CENTER, consultant, George Bilotta, PhD, welcomes your inquiries, phone: Dr. Bilotta in Massachusetts at 508.835.6054 or e-mail him at: georgebilotta@cs.com. Never hesitate to call or e-mail. If you would like to contribute a poem, picture/art, article, etc. to our **ASCA News** please contact us.