

# Overcoming Shame: Forgive Yourself and Let Go



By Jennifer Chrisman | [Tiny Buddha](#)

**“Stop beating yourself up. You are a work in progress; which means you get there a little at a time, not all at once.”  
~Unknown**

I haven't always been the woman I am today.

I used to be scared. Of everything. And everyone. Painfully shy and insecure, I saw myself as a victim of my circumstances and was always waiting, on guard, for the next rejection. I masked my insecurity in a blanket of [perfectionism](#) and worked hard to put forth the image that I had everything together and had it all figured out.

I did a good job looking the part. On the outside, most people just saw an attractive, intelligent, successful woman, and had very little awareness or understanding of the pain and fear

that was living inside.

To further protect myself, I oftentimes took advantage of knowing that others believed my facade.

**I believed myself to be unworthy of love or loving, and there were times when the only way I knew to feel good about myself was to treat others harshly, often by knowing I could intimidate them just by being my “perfect” self.**

I had split the world into people that I was either better than or [less than](#).

It's been said that someone once asked the Buddha whether it was possible to be critical and judgmental of other people and not treat oneself the same way.

He said that if one is critical and judgmental of others, it is impossible not to treat oneself the same. And that while at times it appears that people can [be judgmental toward others](#), but seem completely satisfied themselves, this is just not possible.

**How we treat others is how we treat ourselves, and vice versa.**

I've spent the last four years working on [finding compassion for myself](#) and those who I blamed for my pain, embracing the concept of self-love so that I could find a sense of peace within. I'm proud of myself for how far I've come and the life that I lead today.

However, it was recently brought to my attention that, despite the hard work I've done and the large shifts I've made, there are still some people who have a negative perception of me, and some hurtful words were used to describe my qualities and attributes.

When this was shared with me, I immediately felt the stinging pain of rejection and my automatic response was to go to shame. I felt really bad about myself.

Aside from the fact that I don't think it ever feels good to hear that someone doesn't like you, I've spent a long time working to heal these very wounded parts of myself, and in a moment they were all brought back to the surface in a very painful way.

**When memories arise of behaviors and situations we're not proud of, it can be easy to turn to shame. However, shame has very little usefulness, as it oftentimes serves to shut us down, isolate, and close ourselves off from others and our own healing.**

Seeing this reaction in myself was an indication that there was work I needed to do, something within that I needed to address.

This situation showed me that I have spent years turning my back on this [former image of myself](#), striving to be better, but what was still lacking was compassion and forgiveness.

Pema Chodron describes emotional upheaval, feelings of distress, embarrassment, or anger that we assume is a spiritual faux pas, as actually being the place where the warrior learns compassion.

**When we learn to stop struggling with ourselves and dwell in the places that scare us, we are able to see and accept ourselves and others exactly as we are, complete with imperfections.**

We all act unconsciously and without consideration for others at times. When we allow ourselves to be honest about these behaviors, without the judgment or shame, we are left with remorse, which is a quality we are actually quite fortunate exists.

Remorse can help us refine our actions and to live a more authentic life. It does not mean that we are useless and unworthy or that we made some horrible mistake beyond repair.

It simply means that we are human, and that like all humans, we are in a learning process.

Remorse can be a sign that we are becoming more aware and that what was previously unconscious is coming into consciousness.

**However, if we move into shame and beating ourselves up, we stop ourselves in our tracks, get stuck and likely remain in the mistake, and deprive ourselves of a lesson learned and opportunity to do things differently moving forward.**

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