OMUK Precepts Group: Interlude 2

Prison Face: Working with the Zen Precepts

Interlude 2: Recognition and Shame

This piece isn't the way I wanted it. Putting the weekly talks together has been too demanding, too fun, and too distracting. So there's not the structural arc I'd like there to have been. Nevertheless, there's a lot here, maybe too much! Most of it we've touched on already in the talks, and hopefully it will clarify some of the things said there. Importantly, it assumes you remember reading the discussion of shame in relation to gender in prison from the last section we looked at, and the whole idea of 'binary inequalities' (of which gender is a key example) from the Second Precept commentary. This is supposed to build! Anyway, apologies! Our aim is just to have enough to prime a good discussion…

Maybe I could be the U for U, and U could be the U for Me too…

(Arrested Development: 'U')

How do I know I'm 'me'? And how do I know what a 'me' is? From our earliest years we learn what it is to be a 'self', *this* self, through relationship. Through growing awareness of 'you' (in this beginning my 'mother' or other close caregiver) as a centre of intention and of action and reaction, I come to be reciprocally aware that 'I' am like 'you', and that we engage, interact, relate, and by doing so come to *recognise* each other. I experience your pleasure in me, your pleasure in my pleasure, and my pleasure in yours. I learn too that you can be hurt, as can I, and that we are alike in this sense too. We are *different*, but *alike*, and we *matter* to ourselves because we each show the other that they *matter* to us. There is joy and delight in our relating, and sadness, anger and perhaps despair when as it must this recognition falters and, temporarily, fails. I become aware of *other* people too, and that in this world of others there is a 'way things are', and a way things *should* be: that there are things we *do* and things we *don't* do. This mutual recognition, this shared *mattering* is in a sense always provisional, always found and lost and (hopefully) found again. And when recognition does falter and is lost, how do I *experience* this, whether as an infant or an adult? As a recoverable interruption, as a demand on me for action as apology or other repair? Or as a *global* judgement of my *not* mattering, a not mattering I interpret as my worthlessness, unloveableness or badness? To experience this last, global, judgement is to feel the sting of *shame*.

Shame is at once the most intimately experienced of our emotions, and the most social. Experiencing myself as now going unrecognised, as lacking that recognition by others that grounds my sense of my own real existence, cuts into my most intimate sense of self: it

invalidates me exactly like a refused credit card. This recognition, this *mattering* was no abstract or theoretical affair, but had grown out of the joy and delight of my most dependent and intimate first relationships now extended to my 'having a place' in the world. To lose this place, this self, is emotionally catastrophic. So shame is the emotion which shows to us most directly our own 'selfing' — the experiencing of ourselves as separate from the world — *and* that this selfing is in reality simply a part of that very world from which we imagine ourselves to be separated. Shame is, in Barry Magid's words, 'the shadow of recognition', because in one sense or another shame is always the experience of the limiting, the absence, or the active denial of recognition. So we'll first explore more fully what is involved and what is at stake in recognition, before moving on to look at how it helps us better understand what it is to shame and be shamed, and the experience of shame itself.

Recognition is not a single or simple *event*, but a permanent and evolving process *between* us that embodies the deep paradox of what it is to be a 'self': that a self alone is inconceivable, that self is *always* relationship. The understanding of mutual recognition outlined here draws primarily on the work of Jessica Benjamin, who although firstly a psychoanalyst, has long been a major presence within feminism, critical theory and the 'philosophy of the subject'. Her work on recognition as *intersubjectivity* or *mutual subjectivity* focuses on the fundamental paradox that I *require* there to be a 'you' to experience that I am 'me'. To be a 'subject' in this sense is to experience myself as *sharing* a world with *others* able to *interact* with me as we each intentionally affect the world outside, and each experience our vulnerability in that world. Only thus can 'I' ever come to see the world as *actually existing outside* my fantasies, wishes and imagination. Your *otherness* to me actually depends on me realising that we are fundamentally *alike*: sentient beings with both agency and vulnerability. This is the basis of our mutual recognition, a recognition that is constantly reinforced or challenged. If I feel like I'm only an *object* to you, a mere 'thing', then I can't be 'me', I will experience my subjectivity as challenged or denied (or in an extreme case as non-existent). If I feel that *you* are only an object to *me*, a thing to be used or ignored at my whim, then there is *no* actual 'you' to confirm me as 'me'. You see the problem? Only if we can recognise *each other* as true *subjects* can we ever be sure of our *own* subjectivity. That requires that I understand both that we *share* a sense of agency, and hence that we can *affect* each other, and that we acknowledge that we share too the experience of our own *vulnerability*. This mutual recognition is about connection, and the delight, the pleasure, the fun, the joy of connection, of *meeting an other* who is *like*, but *different* from me. This isn't just some technical process or concept: this is what we *are*, this is why we are here.

If our mutual recognition is a source of shared joy and delight, then any faltering in this relationship will be a source of pain. But precisely because this recognition itself depends on our being *separate* centres of intention and desire, of being alike in being *other*, breakdown is in reality a necessary part of the process of recognition itself. Within this frame rupture — the breakdown of relationship — is inevitable and necessary for relationship to survive and evolve. And the restoration of relationship, the repair of recognition, is itself the source of pleasure, of joy. We rely on and need the affirmation of

each other as independent centres of feeling, thinking, and intention. But *being* interdependent but relatively independent subjects, we will inevitably to some degree misunderstand, disagree, contradict, frustrate, annoy, enrage each other. Being embodied, mortal, finite, will aggravate this mightily…and yet all this *too* is what we share, the very basis of our recognition of each other. We have to find, construct, a space we can share, a space of shared understanding and acting, but also inevitably of shared misunderstanding, breakdown, rupture and repair. A space in which we can trust each other to fail and then to recover our mutual trust. Benjamin has shown how this occurs in the relationship between mother* and child (*other caregivers are available…*). From the early months evolving *play* between mother and child involving rhythm and reaction form the basis of the child coming to understand herself *as* a self that intends and acts towards her mother, who is herself a self who intends and acts towards her in turn. In making faces, performing nursery rhymes, playing 'peepo', each shows they can affect the other, and be affected by the other, and beyond this there is the *delight* of sharing this mutual confirmation. This is the space Benjamin calls the Third: the shared rhythm, the invented game, *mutuality* itself. As suggested above, this is also the space of rupture and repair: the child is too tired, the mother has an actual life of her own beyond the child…relationship stumbles. But re-finding the space of the Third the relationship renews as stronger and more resilient than before. Each knows they *matter* to the other. Each knows the other to be a being fundamentally *like*, but also *different* from themselves. How do we move towards effective repair? Adding the ethical dimension Benjamin talks of the *Moral* Third: a space of '*lawfulness*', not in the sense of an abstract 'justice' and punishment, but rather the possibility of admission of hurt, the acknowledgement of harming and having been harmed, which then offers the possibility of reparation. So we do not only know and share the rules of the game, but we have a way of continuing mutual engagement even when the rules seem to have broken down.

But complicating this process, and becoming increasingly important as the child grows to adulthood and goes out into the world, is a second and more problematic sense of recognition. This is what I'll call 'recognition as', which is recognition in the sense of identity and identification. (When I was looking for images to reference recognition, besides those overwhelmingly for awards for 'recognition' of a job well done at work, were images of facial recognition for the purposes of individual identification…) From our beginning, when the preverbal child 'knows' literally nothing, the mother (father… grandparent…) is a fully social being with or without a partner, with or without a job, capital, friends; she was raised in a family, or in social care, and had and has desires, aspirations, fantasies, responsibilities. The mother has to *identify* the child as child, as *her* child, *her* responsibility. Has to try to understand, and perhaps will panic over and be perplexed by what this tiny being needs, wants, enjoys. How to achieve the (nearly) impossible and integrate caring for this infant into her life, a life that is so much more than this one role of 'mother'. All the emotions, understandings, myths about what a child of *this* age can or might or should or should not be are present, helping, hindering, as they recognise and misrecognise each other moment by moment. Present too and helping or hindering are all the emotions, understandings, myths about what the self she identifies with as a '*mother*' can or might or should or should not be…

In the world beyond my caregivers (and as they recede in importance, or vanish as real beings) identification plays an increasingly major role. I can be recognised as… a man, a zen teacher, a sculptor, white…. I can be recognised as having certain qualities… being empathetic, annoying, short… By identifying me in any or all of these ways you inevitably 'frame' our possibilities of relationship, very useful in an instrumental sense: I am the plumber and you the person whose toilet has just flooded. But also in a very obvious way you misrecognise, betray and limit our possible relationship by so doing. I, 'Malcolm Martin' am many things, 'multitudes' to return to Whitman. And your notions of what my 'being' a man, a teacher, a sculptor, a White actually requires, includes or excludes, really only reflect *your* worldview. You begin (and of course I begin with my identifying you too…) by misrepresenting and hence *missing* me. Worse, if I try to conform to your identification (behaving as the person you want or imagine me to be) then I miss myself, *I* too misrecognise *myself*… So, recognition in this sense, although vital, is always also *misrecognition*. In this sense we remain *separate*, and in the deeper sense, mutually unknown and unknowable, perhaps even to ourselves. No wonder then, that this is the sense in which 'recognition' is normally understood within existentialism. It is this sense that Benjamin's theorising of recognition as intersubjectivity or mutual subjectivity provides the antidote for: we are mutually *necessary* to be ourselves. The *other* is not an intrusion into, or a distraction from, or a challenge to my own subjectivity. The *other* is the precondition to me being myself…

Our relationships, trivial or profound, will always share aspects of both senses of recognition. We still have to find a space of shared understanding, frame guidelines of how to be with each other, what to expect, what is allowed and what is not. Beyond our infancy I can never be purely an absolute 'other' to you, or you to me. Alongside the many identities we each assign ourselves and the other, our relationship has an identity too: we are 'lovers', 'coworkers', 'friends', substitute parent and/or child, victim and rescuer… these frame how we can indeed invent, develop, maintain, enjoy and delight in our relationship. Misunderstanding about the (inevitable) *misrecognition* this framing involves will add to our relationship stumbling, breaking down, and needing to find new ground on which to rebuild, reinvent, renew itself as stronger, deeper. This requires our ideas of identification — both of self and other — to be flexible, subject to permanent investigation and revision, even a source of *play*. 'We' are more than our ideas of self and each other, we are a possibility, an opening into new worlds. We may find new 'Thirds' in unlikely places: laughing at the same joke, a shared look of response that shows you and I are thinking, feeling *alike* about this situation, gratitude offered and accepted, even a freely given and received admission and apology. I *matter* to you, you *matter* to me. You show me *that* I am, and *what* I am. As I do you. For recognition to be maintained and reaffirmed, to be restored when, as it must, it breaks down, then no roles can be permanently defined and breakdown is accepted as part of relationship itself… It's *this* sense of recognition that the Sixth Zen Precept talks about in terms of meeting 'with openness and possibility', *this* time is not *last* time, or *next* time. I refuse to let my (mis)identifications of you or of myself determine what happens, however they may position us.

Going Global

Even within our first relationships there is always implicit behind '*I matter to you*' the global '*I matter to (all) the others in the world*'. I matter *in general*, *absolutely*, I have a place in the world, which our mutual recognition affirms. What begins in intimacy as true for 'you and me' assumes a *global* value. At this point, to lose the recognition of my caregivers is catastrophic, and experienced as a truly global loss. How may this happen? Being repeatedly told or shown by word, gesture or facial expression that I am bad, stupid, disgusting; being turned away from or ignored, or unable to gain their attention; simply being shown that I really don't count, *don't matter*. (Or: actually encountering *no* resistance to my actions, wants or whims, which undermines equally *your* reality to me, and so your acknowledgement of me no longer has value as recognition of me…) These are our first experiences of shame and being shamed: to *lose* recognition, worse, to be *denied* it, is life ending and world ending. Without recognition, I really don't know I exist. In a sense the story I tell to explain this ('I am bad, unworthy, unloveable, incapable…) is secondary: I am lost, utterly, until that recognition is restored. Shame (in the strong sense we'll be using it here) is always recognisable by its global nature: it's not a judgement of my actions so much as an erasure of my self-existence. I experience the withdrawal of your recognition that guarantees of our mutual existence as a loss of self.

As my experience of other people widens it becomes ever clearer to me that recognition is a fully social process: *all* others have the ability to affirm or deny me, and so potentially to shame me. On the one hand I experience the delight of mutual recognition, of the *alikeness* that I find in those I come to trust, on the other the permanent if usually unacknowledged fear of being shamed. Adding to this, as I move out into a world of increasingly distant others I also begin to experience recognition as both more complex and more qualified, as aways contextual and more according to the dictates of what I'm calling 'recognition as'. A*ny* 'other' can recognise me, or *fail* to, but the quality of their recognition is not simply absolute: it can be qualified, limited or devalued. This is equally so in my encounters with the individuals who make up my world *and* with the organisations and institutions through which my social existence is fabricated. We underestimate the scope and importance of this entire field of recognition at our peril. Every social interaction, however slight, involves the offer or withdrawal of recognition: passing someone on the street, being served a coffee. Do you and I *meet*, or do you or do I stonewall the other? Do we *recognise* each other not as identifiable categories or as specific individuals, but as subjects alike but different from each other? What implicit *judgement* is here, and if negative do you or I feel shamed by it? Do I feel *recognised* or merely *identified*? Normally the consequences of any individual encounter will be limited: a shared smile on the street or in a shop can lift our spirits, a dismissive response may discomfort us, but nothing too dramatic. Maybe they were just having a bad day, maybe there's something deeper and more enduring that's troubling them. But what if the response seems to demonstrate the kind of entitlement and implicit superiority we've examined in relation to structural inequality, in assumptions framed by our socially assigned identities? And how often, if I'm placed on the 'normal', 'positive' side of this divide, will I not even notice the colour of my response to the *other*? We will all find ourselves on different sides of these divides, switching perhaps many times a day. Almost all relationships and encounters contain elements of

unequalness, from the utter dependency of the infant on her caregivers, to the world of work, to the negotiated inequalities essential to friends, lovers and partners. True recognition — recognition of our mutual subjectivity — does and cannot depend in itself on true equality. Nevertheless, in *this* encounter, does one of us feel that their gender/race/education/wealth/sexuality/age/physical ability entitles them to a position of power or authority or superiority, consciously or otherwise, in relation to the other? Does this block entirely our ability to recognise each other as true *subjects*, fully human and vulnerable? If we *fail* to do this then we fail in our mutual humanity. So, what if your response to me is shaped by my being 'only' a woman, Black, disabled, neurodiverse, 'uneducated', 'lower' class, or being on the 'wrong' side of any other binary pair? And if in that encounter you are perhaps a police officer? And if you are armed?

Windrush

To understand the scope and significance of recognition more fully in relation to our sense of self — our sense of being an independent *subject* — we need to think about the experience of our contact with the both state and its related institutions. Rather than repeating a list of all the ways in which we all rely on the recognition of the state and on the institutions it regulates, we might think of the plight of those caught up in the Windrush scandal. The 'Windrush' generation are those who arrived in the UK from Caribbean countries between 1948 and 1973. Many took up jobs in the nascent NHS and other sectors affected by Britain's post-war labour shortage. The name 'Windrush' derives from the 'HMT Empire Windrush' ship which brought one of the first large groups of Caribbean people to the UK in 1948. As the Caribbean was, at the time, a part of the British commonwealth, those who arrived were automatically British subjects and free to permanently live and work in the UK. Commonwealth citizens were affected by the government's 'Hostile Environment' legislation — a policy announced in 2012 which tasked the NHS, landlords, banks, employers and many others with enforcing immigration controls. It aimed to make the UK unlivable for undocumented migrants and ultimately push them to leave.

Because many of the Windrush generation arrived as children on their parents' passports, and the Home Office destroyed thousands of landing cards and other records, many lacked the documentation to prove their right to remain in the UK. The Home Office also placed the burden of proof on individuals to prove their residency predated 1973. The Home Office demanded at least one official document from every year they had lived here. Attempting to find documents from decades ago created a huge, and in many cases, impossible burden on people who had done nothing wrong. Falsely deemed as 'illegal immigrants'/'undocumented migrants' they began to lose their access to housing, healthcare, bank accounts and driving licenses. Many were placed in immigration detention, prevented from travelling abroad and threatened with forcible removal, while others were deported to countries they hadn't seen since they were children.

Let's reflect on this not merely in terms of the obvious injustice, but in relation to the reciprocal nature of recognition. in a country and community in which I have lived as a citizen my whole adult life I am suddenly told that *now* I do not exist as a citizen of this

place, and in fact have *never* been a citizen of this place. My previous life as an accepted and recognised citizen is now erased; it will even be considered to have been the result of an intentional deception on my part. My official 'home' is now several thousand miles away, and somewhere probably entirely *unknown* to me. I am forced to leave my job and not allowed to look for another, neither will I be entitled to normal benefits. I now have no right to the 'universal' healthcare that for the past 75 years has been a cornerstone of what we think of as the best of being 'British'. Even my driving licence is revoked: I may no longer legally get behind the wheel of my car. This is to be denied recognition at every level: I do not *matter*, I do not *count*, and when society *looks* at me it no longer sees me as an independent human subject with desires, needs and vulnerability, but solely as an identity, an object to be processed. My efforts to reclaim my subjectivity will involve a Kafkaesque series of slow-motion double-binds in pursuit of obligatory but non-existent documentation seemingly designed to reinforce my experience of being lacking, incapable, powerless. *Unrecognised*. I may, at the whim of the authorities, be handcuffed and placed on a flight to my 'original' home. At best I may allowed to remain in what are no longer my comfortable and familiar surroundings but is now an administrative limbo that disables me in almost every respect. Whether it ends in deportation or in the grudging admission of right to remain, the experience those caught up in the Windrush scandal embodies perfectly the way that recognition and its refusal operate symbolically and psychologically *and* through very concrete procedures with specific practical consequences. I have been reassigned from one side to the other of the binary inequality of citizen and non-citizen, an *absolute* and truly *global* judgement. I now suddenly find myself as the *other*, I have been cast out from my own identity, and from what I most firmly knew to be myself. How do I feel? How do I now manage to experience myself *as* myself?

Trying to understand and empathise with the dire and catastrophic consequences for those caught up in the Windrush scandal, we may get some momentary glimpse of the extent and depth of our dependency on the recognition of 'society', the *collective* other, and that we cannot separate out the social from the psychological and existential consequences of *either* our recognition or its refusal.

Rupture and Repair

When things fall apart, how do we put them back together? How to recover from this position? With our infant selves, it is clearly 'mother's' responsibility to make the repair, invite us back into the space of the Third created by our shared rhythms and play. As we grow older we move move firmly into the space of the *Moral Third*, founded on our shared sense of *lawfulness*, and a mutual willingness to accept the reality and inevitability of harm, and to acknowledge what has gone wrong. To offer apology and restitution, and to accept apology and restitution offered. This is often easier said than done. The collapse of recognition tends to create defensiveness within us: to feel unrecognised is to feel threatened, and so to become vulnerable to whatever triggers our shame.

So what needs to happen to restore some sense of lawfulness, of the Moral Third, and so to open again the space of mutual recognition? *Witnessing* on both sides as to what has happened, and where fault lies. Witnessing involves *listening*, honestly and without prejudgement and defensiveness, the key barriers to any kind of true recognition.

Witnessing involves *speaking our truth* in a way that does not shut down the possibility that this truth will be recognised by the other, it involves constructive speech, even if that will be hard to hear (no attempts to shame in turn, for instance). It involves the open acknowledgement of injury, of harm. An acknowledgement not hedged or flattened by 'if' or 'buts'. It involves *apology*, as the first step in whatever can be done to *repair* the harming, and rebuild *trust*. I could write another section detailing exactly how the UK government got this wrong time after time in the case of Windrush: endless denial, talking over the voices of those directly affected, an apology that was no apology, an attempt at restitution that was not carried through, yet more broken promises. The heart of this being that the 'hostile environment' intentionally created by the government, and which led directly and inevitably to the scandal, remains in place as a specific detail of recognition to all non-white individuals and communities in Britain. In terms of mutual recognition, it has been a disaster. These same processes apply at the level of my relationship with my partner, my children, parents, friends: how will we maintain and strengthen the mutual recognition that is so central to meaningful relationship? Difficult enough! But how do we effectively scale up these attempts in relation to different communities, organisations, governments? Our failure will, and does, generate more shame and more shaming, more violence, whether psychological or physical. The stakes are high…

It's a Shame…

So what do we mean by shame? Shame (and we've all felt it) is that deep sinking in the pit of your stomach, as aware of every creepy inch of your skin you feel super-exposed to everyone's view, and simply want to crawl away and hide…or worse… You can barely see, barely hear, the world disappears and all that remains is your own awfulness, your hopeless, ridiculous, awfulness. Shame is closely related to embarrassment — blushing, feeling hot, looking uncomfortable, avoiding eye contact — and to our feelings of guilt, regret and remorse, though there are really important differences here as well. The point is, that while this is an emotion we may feel with overpowering intensity— and one that we will go to almost any lengths to avoid — it's also the most *social* of our emotions. Shame is what I experience in response to a social judgement of my specific failure or general inadequacy. This is a judgement on myself that I am powerless to resist, a judgement that 'I' myself (*who*?) can and do make on myself (on *whom*?) on behalf of others. So we can talk of shame as being the negative experience of awareness of self in relation to others in our family, community and society. It can be argued that we actually only learn to become the social beings we are — that we diligently learn the rules of how 'behave' in the broadest possible sense — in response to the *fear* of being shamed, of repeating our actual awful experiencing of shame in the past. So our extreme 'shame-avoidance' motivates us to learn what is approved, what is permitted, and what is not. This is obviously partly a question of prevailing morality — of what our society thinks of as 'right and wrong' — but extends much more widely as we saw for example with our gender expression, where shame avoidance motivates us to walk, talk, sit, 'like a man' *or* 'like a woman', *or else* to face the censure of *being shamed*. Shame has a *normative* function: it is the stick that enforces a standard to which to conform within our community. I may be shamed — made to feel shame — by the judgement of a member of that community, including of course myself acting as judge on myself in accordance with our shared values. The carrot is the active

recognition of my belonging that I hope to experience when I do behave 'properly', when I keep to the words and actions of the socially sanctioned script.

To help make clear the distinction being drawn here between shame in its strong sense and the related emotional responses of embarrassment, guilt, remorse, and regret, I'll take a common ambiguity in the discussion of it with the Buddhist tradition. It's often said within Buddhist circles that shame is actually a *positive* emotion when we feel it in relation to having done something wrong, in that it calls us to reflect on what we have done and change our ways accordingly. It is said that the shame I feel at breaking precepts or training rules is to be welcomed, as my tendency to shame-avoidance will make me less likely to repeat the mistake. If (and only if) he shame is felt in relation to the clearly-established behavioural norms of my (implicitly monastic) community, then this is a good thing. So from this point of view the question is of restricting the sources from which I can experience shame: *whose* voice I listen to and heed, if only 'in my head'. If I attend only to the voice of the wise, as expressed in teachings, the precepts and other rules of conduct, then my shame is functional, positive. Why would I hear, listen to, much less feel shame at voices from outside my community? Correct orientation is all, and I willingly take on correction from my community.

Clear enough? Well, no actually. Let's begin by pointing out that this Buddhist response suggests that, in effect, I *choose* to allow myself to feel remorse or shame, that my responses are only and always entirely rational, and that for this not to be the case is itself a culpable failure, for which presumably I should feel further remorse or shame. This is not how any of the the shame-related emotions function. I experience all of these as *passions*, as judgments that *happen* to me, not that I voluntarily *choose*. If I judge myself, then it is because I am powerless escape the judgement I believe others have or would pass on me, and that I now make on their behalf. The Buddhist model also supposes a life which is simple both materially and emotionally: for the monastic there are relatively few real opportunities for being judged, and the covert eating of a biscuit after midday or failure to align the hem of one's robe correctly probably not too hard to confess. A little jealously or regret, and perhaps an immodest thought might be added without essential compromise. Those in authority over us are assumed to be always correct, and we ourselves have *agreed* to be bound by the rules of the community, in fact this is our deepest wish, our highest aspiration that we may fully embody these rules in the practice of our lives. Whether or not we think this corresponds to the reality of *monastic* life, it is definitely *not* the reality of the lives into which those of us outside the monastery have been born and which we now live. If the heart of our Ordinary Mind teaching is of the *impossibility* of leading a life which is pure, superior to and untouched by the suffering of others, then clearly our understanding of shame will need to be far more nuanced. Out in the 'real' world shame does not have a single script, certainly not one I have agreed to, and that is its power. It's function is normative: it proposes what I *should* think and feel, how I *should* act and want to act, and I experience my own resistance to this demand as shame, whether I assent to it or not. Hence shame becomes a weapon to control me by denying me recognition. But there is still more here that needs clarifying.

What is being talked about in our Buddhist example is exactly *not* shame in our sense, but the related emotions we call guilt, regret, remorse. This both is and isn't a translation issue: the relevant Pali terms, *hiri* and *ottappa* don't necessarily have close equivalents in modern English, ('embarrassment' probably gets closest) but even present day English speaking psychologists and philosophers use our words for this cluster of feelings in different and often rather muddled ways. So while the distinction needing to be drawn here is real, and of real importance, it may not be apparent in any particular writer's use.

So… first scenario: our hypothetical good Buddhist realises she has transgressed against the rules of the community she loves, perhaps unintentionally, perhaps on the spur of the moment, perhaps, even, with malice aforethought. But she accepts the responsibility, and does this whether or not it is actually drawn to her attention. She can feel upset about what she has done, and about any harm she's caused. She's genuinely sorry for anyone who's suffered injury, and sorry too that her actions have implicitly hurt the community. She can feel bad about what happened, *but not that this makes her bad in herself*. Her thoughts are directed outwards to the event and its consequences. She will make confession, and if possible, reparation.

This is guilt, regret, remorse.

Or, second scenario: she understands that she has literally exposed herself to the community, she imagines seeing herself through their eyes: their derision, their contempt, their laughter. In fact this is all she can see of the outside world, she feels the heat rise in her cheeks and her posture collapses in on itself, she can barely lift her eyes to look around. She realises that the problem is…she herself… her culpable carelessness, selfishness, and stupidity. She will never be a true Buddhist, she will never amount to anything, she will never *be* anybody. Far better to admit to this, and just walk away now and leave the community, and do so in secret so that she does not have to face her shame, and just pray that her shame doesn't follow after her.

This is a shame response — albeit rather exaggerated — but I hope the point is clear.

The first set of responses takes us back *towards* the world, the second *away* from it. The first engages with the ethics and practical issues of the situation, the second merely with my negative feelings about myself. The first set allows me my place in the world, it respects my intention and my vulnerability, it takes place in a world that *recognises* me. It may challenge my self-view, and so I may come to new insight: exactly how did this situation arise, exactly why did I respond in the way I did? The second set already knows the answer: my badness, end of story. In fact for shame this is the *whole* story, the world itself doesn't figure in it, except as a backdrop, as an imagined circle of eyes accusing me. I have no proper place in this world, and nowhere to go. I die.

So it is vital we come to understand and be able to distinguish this core difference between what we can call the *specific* feelings of regret and remorse, and the *global* feeling of shame, between the *acute* discomfort of the response to a specific event, and the *chronic* pain of the

continuous self-evidence of one's worthlessness. *Not-separate*, or *separate*? Or to return to the terms of our discussion of recognition as it bears on my existence *as* our mutual recognition, *not separate*, or *non-existent*? It is also important to understand how shame connects to the binary oppositions we've discussed: it is being on the disempowered side of any binary that will open us to shame, as being lesser, less powerful, less virtuous, less *in control*. But as we all in our actual lives cross the boundaries of these binaries, our shame may follow us. I'm a hugely successful professional…*and yet I feel…worthless*… Childhood trauma? Failure to conform to some ideal code of appearance? The possibilities are endless. As we have touched on, *to feel shame is itself shaming*, intensely so. The more 'power' I appear to others to have, the more keenly I may feel the shame of… whatever… Related to this, if I instead *lack* what I feel should be the *due*, the *entitlement* of being on the dominant side of a major inequality, for instance being white, or British, or male, or… then the shame may be amplified still further by this shamefulness of feeling shame: no man/ Briton/white should have to feel this way! The unbearable nature of this shame may well displace onto anger, and onto violence. Of course, *shaming itself is the outcome of the experience of shame*: as with so many forms of violence, my injury leads directly to my harming others.

Shame, Weaponised

Shaming itself is the outcome of the experience of shame. In terms of the binary inequalities, it is almost impossible to 'shame *up*': for someone on the dominant side to shame someone on the other, and almost inevitable that shame will be aimed *down,* unless of course it's to *challenge*: you're not a *real* man! If the shaming 'takes', or is not explicitly challenged, then dominance has been established or maintained, and this was its purpose. Resistance will itself be challenged: do call me a 'snowflake' for getting upset in response to a gender or racist slur, or even ask me 'can't you take a joke then?' It carries with it the same function of shaming: the use of shame as a relation of dominance by the withholding of recognition. The shame emotions do indeed tie me to society, to my group, and place me in relation all its members. In fact their primary *function* is to 'keep me in my place', through offering me or withholding recognition. Shame in this sense is always about hierarchy, about relationships of power. These may be very obvious or very subtle, and we begin to learn them from the point of our birth. So shame too surrounds us from the moment of our birth as we learn to be shamed, and learn to shame others (and of course ourselves) in our turn. As we touched on above, we are shamed by our parents, as they were shamed before us. We are shamed by our peers, and will shame them also. We will attempt to deny, displace or repress our own being shamed, or act it out as retaliation, as depression or violence. We may be overwhelmed by our own experience of perceived inadequacy, or even construct for ourselves and others the image of a supreme self-confidence unconcerned and even unaware of the real existence of other people: the shamed personality style we call 'narcissism'.

It is this *social* dimension of shame that means it can and will be used as a weapon against ourselves and against others. We *all* share the experience of being both the victim of shaming. and of learning to shame others. We all live in the fear of being shamed. Shaming is never random (though it may often appear trivial to others), but follows the lines of

identities and inequalities: the rules and expectations of 'correct' behaviour differ by specific context but are always framed through distinctions of age, gender, class, race, ability and the other significant inequalities. Shaming always has the intention of establishing or maintaining hierarchy. The practice of shaming is one of the most significant ways that we try to exercise control over others, but the fear which demands that we also police ourselves to avoid being shamed in turn. Avoiding the experience of shame is an important motivation to shape myself, acquire skills, take on social roles. Shaming and its avoidance is one of the key mechanisms by which we place ourselves in and maintain an established social order, one of the key instruments by which I become 'me', and define myself in relation to others. It's an active *separation* that still *binds* me to those others, and does so whether the shame is held to be theirs or mine. So shaming is a form of symbolic violence we inflict on ourselves and others, towards ends which are at once individual and social. Our attempts to avoid or erase the symbolic violence of shame may themselves lead directly to further and more damaging acts of physical or psychological violence.

Turning Towards, Turning Away

Turning towards and turning away. Shame is perhaps our most instinctive turning away. From 'life as it is', from reality, and deep, deep into our fantasy of self. We could talk about Joko's use of the Core Belief in terms of shame, her description of the physicality of its experiencing, and of its global nature: *I* am unworthy, unlovable. I am unrecognised. This the script that underlies all shaming. From the perspective of shame, all that happens subsequently merely explains and confirms to me why this is so. Joko talks of the Core Belief in terms of the developmental psychology of her day: as arising in response to the frustration of the infant's and young child's developing assertion of ego: the child attempts to own her own inadequacy — the limitation of her powers, and to avoid the unliveable conclusion that she cannot *make* her world and her caregivers respond in the way she wants or feels she needs — and reverses this into her *own* badness. So in this account it's kind of a glitch we all have, a simple but unfortunate developmental error, nobody's fault, and is ultimately neutral in tone, only damaging to myself, with no wider social context. But however isolating, however reflexive, however much to do with *me* this *seems*, it is in fact vitally important to understand that shame is an absolutely *social* script, albeit one that seems most *private*. And this is how we usually talk about shame: *my* business, *my* shameful secret, because *shame is itself shaming*. In reality, shame goes to the heart of what it is to be human: a social animal, unimaginable without others, meaningless in isolation from our peers, needing the mutuality of recognition to know we exist.

What can address shame? Meaningful connection, the establishing of mutual recognition. On the cushion we can allow ourselves actually to experience this shame intimately, and resist the stories, the narratives we weave around it. Shame is an embodied physical experience like any other, it is not the end of the world, or the end of us, however much it may feel like it. But we do need first to be able to see it for what it is: we are all masters of evasion, displacement, substitution, *anything* rather than experience our shame as what it is. Are we 'A Big Enough Container' to hold our shame, without in turn shaming ourselves further, or shaming others? This is to begin to recognise *ourselves*. But then as I

discussed above, to recognise ourselves is to recognise the other, to recognise the other is to recognise myself. No *me* without *you:* 'you can't be yourself by yourself' as Barry says. So to recognise myself I need to work off the cushion as much as on it. To recapitulate what I said above about rupture and repair: *Witnessing* on both sides as to what has happened, and where fault lies. Witnessing involves *listening*, honestly and without prejudgement and defensiveness, the key barriers to any kind of true recognition. Witnessing involves *speaking our truth* in a way that does not shut down the possibility that this truth will be recognised by the other, it involves constructive speech, even if that will be hard to hear (no attempts to shame in turn, for instance). It involves the open acknowledgement of injury, of harm. An acknowledgement not hedged or flattened by 'if' or 'buts'. It involves *apology*, as the first step in whatever can be done to *repair* the harming, and rebuild *trust*.

Recognition, or shame? The stakes are high: individually, collectively, globally. We begin by recognising and being recognised by *this* person, in *this* place, right *now*…