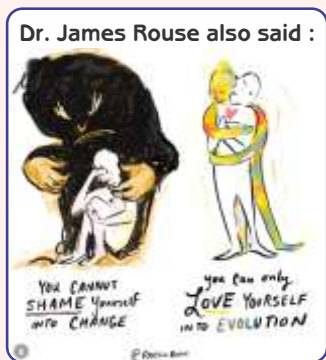


Think Positive: Communicating with Love Instead of Shame

~ Saheli Sheth (Peoria, USA)

Dressed in purple and green, Thakorji looked absolutely stunning across from me in the mandir. While gazing at Him, a thought suddenly echoed in my mind: **"You can't shame someone into changing."** Curious, I googled this phrase and found that this isn't a new concept at all.

Author Brené Brown stated, "You cannot shame or belittle people into changing." For example, she explains, we can't use self-hate to lose weight, nor can we shame ourselves into becoming better parents.



Think about something your child does that irritates you. When frustration bubbles up inside, what do we often feel compelled to say? Here are some examples of how we might unintentionally use **shame** to try to change our child's behavior:

"If you spent less time on your phone, your grades would improve."

"You don't do anything around the house. At your age, I knew how to cook."

"You are wasting your potential by not studying harder. Look how much effort I put into your education."

"What will people say if they find out? Think about our family and how you'll make us look bad." (This often prioritizes societal opinions above our child's wishes, especially in big life decisions.)

"You're lazy, leaving your things around everywhere."

"You spend all your time watching TV. You should talk to people more!"

While each parent's concerns may be 100% valid, **how they are said** is more important than **what is said**. It may not be easy to change how we communicate, but recognizing how our words impact our kids is a first step.

The difference between guilt and shame is often discussed in self-help circles. Guilt can actually be a healthy response when we lovingly correct a child's *behavior*, whereas shame creates a negative internal spiral by labeling them as a *person*. In other words, guilt signals **"I did a bad**

thing" and encourages learning from the behavior. In contrast, shame tells us, **"I am bad."** Shame can lead to feelings of helplessness, where we freeze or feel unable to take action. **If the goal is to motivate change, shame does the exact opposite.**

We can also fall into the trap of shaming or criticizing *ourselves* as parents:

"Look at those kids; they are so successful. What did I do wrong?"

"If my child doesn't succeed, it's a reflection of my parenting."

"I should have been more patient; I lose my temper too easily."

"It's my fault they're struggling."

"I feel that I should have spent more time with them instead of focusing on my own career."

Consider how you respond when you feel shamed. Does it motivate you to change your behavior? Often, shame doesn't inspire change; **what it does instead is activate a self-protective response**, making us want to disappear or shut down.

So, what can we do instead?

1. **Delete the word "should" from your dictionary.** Replace thoughts like "I should be better" or "My kid should be this way" with loving self-talk: "I'm doing the best that I can." This shift can help us feel less like we've failed.
2. **Communicate in a firm, loving, and strengths-based way.** Sadguru Sant Pujya Manojdasji asked a group of youth, "Does negativity lead people to be happy? Raise your hand if you know even one person who says, 'I am happy because I was negative.'" Not a single hand went up! He emphasized that if negativity really worked, we'd be hosting conventions for people to criticize each other to inspire change. But we all know that negativity and criticism don't lead to change or happiness.

May we treat ourselves and others with positivity and love. By doing so, we can live a life aligned with our values and inspire those around us to do the same. After all, this is Guruhari Sahebada's life motto: "Think positive, and the rest will follow." ◆