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SHAME: A SOUL EATING EMOTION

Although this is not specifically an essay about Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, Dr. Ben Carson or Carly Fiorina, they do figure into its construction, for this is a piece about that which Carl Jung [that's him in the photo] called *a soul-eating emotion*: shame. In the Jungian world view, shame feeds on itself; it survives in



the darkest recesses of one's insecure, self-loathing and self-doubting mind. Shame needs fear and negativity to survive. To my way of thinking, those who live their lives without the ability to feel - let alone acknowledge - shame, are definitely narcissists and likely what I choose to call "moral albinos." In the Jungian

world view, "shame" often strides alongside "guilt." But they are different. "Shame" comes from a word which means to cover. As such, it represents the hidden affect; the parts of ourselves we try to hide from both ourselves and others. "Guilt," on the other hand, is a feeling which, generally speaking, stems from violating a rule or standard, committing an offense, a trespass. To feel guilty requires a conscience. To feel shame requires a mixture of humility and self-awareness. Frequently, those beset by shame are depressed; on a toxic downward spiral which can lead to emotional oblivion. An *inability* to feel shame can be just as toxic and dangerous; especially when the afflicted are public

figures. Then too, the public itself bears a share of the blame. We'll return to the matter of guilt and shame later on . . .

Which brings us to Trump and Cruz, Carson and Fiorina. All four are masters of innuendo who are wont to make claims which are patently, demonstrably untrue. All four are seemingly immune to feeling shame.

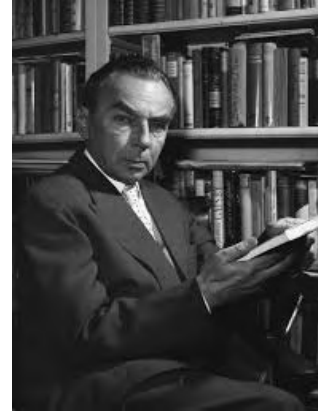
Of the four, Donald Trump is the most impervious to that most soul eating of emotions. The billionaire real estate tycoon originally came to political notice by staking his claim as the mouthiest birther and misogynistic bigot on the block. He has labeled Mexicans drug-dealing rapists, called women "fat slobs, dogs, and disgusting animals," and once told a woman on national television, "It must be a pretty picture. You dropping to your knees." When called on these and other slurs, Trump either denied having said them or, more often responded "I don't frankly have time for total political correctness, and to be honest with you, this country doesn't either." His supporters love him for his shameful directness. Just the other day, within hours of the massacre in San Bernardino, Trump revived the anti-Obama birther *mishegoss*, suggesting to his cheering supporters that that President Obama is behaving defensively regarding Islamic terrorism, that *"There is something wrong with him that we don't know about."* Shame on Donald Trump.

Senator Ted Cruz's latest foray into shamelessness came the other day when he knowingly misrepresented [an academic study](#), claiming that the "overwhelming majority of violent criminals are Democrats." When shown the utter unreliability of his claim, Cruz chose to stand firm and cast aspersions on the "liberal journalists" attempting to engage him in meaningful conversation. Likewise, Dr. Carson has apparently lost little sleep over his overwhelmingly discredited biographic tidbits -- all the more glaring because they were published in several best-selling books. And then there's Carly Fiorina who, despite national surveys showing that most Americans support continued federal funding for Planned Parenthood's health services, falsely claims "the vast majority of Americans" support defunding the group. When challenged on this assertion, Fiorina - like Cruz - instead of rising to the challenge of defending her claim, chose to attack "the liberal media" for asking questions in the first place.

(To be "fair and balanced," former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently released [a post](#) on her campaign website under the headline **"Ted Cruz says no one's trying to ban contraception. Here are 5 times Ted Cruz tried to ban contraception."** Turns out, though there was an element of truth to the charge, Clinton's claim was less than totally honest. The researchers at [Politifact](#), going over Secretary Clinton's statement, noted that it ". . . contains some element of truth

but ignores critical facts that would give a different impression, so we rate it Mostly False.")

This collective inability to feel Jung's "soul eating emotion" brings to mind the opening verse of one of late German satirist Erich Kästner's most popular poems: "*In the place where others have a soul, she had a hole.*" (In this poem, the "she" to which Kästner - the author of *Emil and the Detectives* - was referring, was late 1920s Berlin. That's Kästner [1899-1974] on the right.)



Slick innuendo, mendacious half-truths and outright lies are absolutely endemic in modern high-stakes politics; they are the fuel that fires a million screaming headlines and lights up the lowest common denominator. And because this is the United States of America, even the biggest, nastiest whoppers fall under the protection of the First Amendment. Now to be certain, there *are* some generally accepted prohibitions on free speech, such as:

- Yelling "FIRE" in a crowded theatre;
- Sedition (advocating force as a way to change government);
- Hate speech;
- Defamation (slander and/or libel);
- False or misleading advertising;
- Profanity on public airwaves, and
- Gag orders or publication bans in contracts, court cases and legal settlements.

Nowadays in the world of politics, it would seem that the telling of virtually any fiction, fable, falsehood or fabrication is acceptable; if you can create it, you can proclaim it. For every lie that is told there are ears that will hear and mouths that will repeat. It seems that today, because the rewards of victory are so immense that no prevarication is punished. And because there is so much lying and misrepresentation coming across the airwaves, in print and via electronic media, we have come to a point where nobody is believed . . . except the politicians *you* like.

Historically, humanity possessed two censors for keeping mendacity to a public minimum: morality and that soul eating emotion, shame. For the person of even moderate faith, lying and bearing false witness have always been understood as immoral acts; just check the Biblical books of Exodus (20:13), Leviticus (19:11) and Deuteronomy (5:17). For much of recorded history, people's words and deeds were, in large measure, shaped by a desire to live moral lives -- to be moral

beings. As such, spreading deliberate lies about others was understood to be both immoral and intolerable. I for one find it terribly ironic that in the modern political arena, we hear as many protestations of faith and morality coming from the campaign stump as parishioners might in a church, a synagogue or a mosque. Sadly, many of those flaunting their moral *bona fides* -- those who seek to blend religion and politics and to turn campaigns into crusades - are guilty of the sin of lying . . . over and over and over again. Apparently, morality is no longer such an efficacious censor.

But what about that second censor . . . shame? According to [Paul Ekman](#), author of [Telling Lies](#) and one of the most brilliant psychologists of the past 50 years:

Shame is closely related to guilt, but there is a key qualitative difference. No audience is needed for feelings of guilt; no one else need know, for the guilty person is his own judge. Not so for shame. The humiliation of shame requires disapproval or ridicule by others. If no one ever learns of a misdeed there will be no shame, but there still might be guilt. Of course, there may be both. The distinction between shame and guilt is very important, since these two emotions may tear a person in opposite directions. The wish to relieve guilt may motivate a confession, but the wish to avoid the humiliation of shame may prevent it.

In other words, we -- the great unwashed public -- are just as much to blame as the politicians, commentators and bloggers for all the untruths, misrepresentations and outright lies. Why? Because we have lost our ability to scream "SHAME!" at those who lie, to those whose deed is at odds with his or her creed -- in short, to those who talk the moral talk, but walk the mendacious walk. We demand honesty from our leaders but countenance dishonesty from their challengers -- and vice versa.

According to Dr. Ekman, unless and until we the people reconnect with that other great censor -- shame -- those seeking our trust and our votes will continue feeding us a steady diet of defamation, deception and dishonesty -- without feeling a moment's guilt or shame.

In the words of the 17th century French philosopher/physicist/mathematician Blaise Pascal, "*The only shame is to have none.*"

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