

SOUL without SHAME

A GUIDE TO
LIBERATING
YOURSELF
FROM THE
JUDGE WITHIN

BYRON BROWN

"*Soul Without Shame* is that rare book that blends intellectual depth, genuine originality, and practical usefulness. As Byron Brown envisions the 'inner critic,' (the superego) it is a force that most of us accept as a necessary moral compass in our lives, but which in fact attacks us relentlessly and insidiously. Gracefully and persuasively, Brown makes the case that we literally become our own worst enemies, undermining even our most determined efforts to grow and prosper. This book offers rich and fresh insights into an aspect of inner work that is far too often neglected, and also sets out systematic ways to break free of the prison of judgment—both of ourselves and of others." —TONY SCHWARTZ, author of *What Really Matters*

"In very clear and available language, this book details how to recognize the inner critic and how to deal effectively with it. Byron Brown's presentation is useful for any individual who wishes to be free from the inner suffering and coercion of this ancient foe of our humanity, but it is specifically directed to those interested and engaged in the inner journey toward realization and enlightenment." —A. H. ALMAAS

Do you have a chronic case of "the judge"—also known as the inner critic or superego? Here is a practical, accessible handbook that will show you where your inner critic came from, how it operates, and how accessing strength, joy, truth, and compassion can counteract its powerful forces. *Soul without Shame* explores what it means to liberate yourself from your inner judge as a step toward experiencing the freedom and vitality of the human soul. It contains exercises, practices, and entertaining examples from everyday life to guide you in your work with this exhilarating process.

Byron Brown is a senior student of A. H. Almaas, who developed the Diamond Approach, a path of self-understanding. As a Diamond Approach teacher, he has a special interest in guiding students through the basics of working with their superegos.

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CONTENTS



<i>Foreword</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
<i>Preface</i>	xv
<i>Introduction</i>	xvii
<i>Note to the Reader</i>	xxiii
1. The Soul Perspective	3
2. What Is the Judge?	13
3. True Nature and Reality	29
4. Recognizing Judgment	41
5. Awareness	65
6. What Is Judged?	73
7. Acceptance	89
8. Engaging the Judge	99
9. Personal Will	117
10. Being the Judge	127
11. Strength	143
12. Why Judge?	153
13. Joy and Curiosity	171
14. Looking Deeper	179
15. Compassion	189
16. Disidentifying	197

17. Spaciousness	209
18. Stopping Self-Betrayal	217
19. Value	229
20. Defending Against Judgment	239
21. Peace	257
22. After the Judgment Is Gone	263
23. Truth	275
24. Recapping the Journey	283
25. Presence	295

<i>Final Thoughts</i>	301
<i>List of Practices and Exercises</i>	303
<i>Further Resources</i>	305
<i>Index</i>	306

FOREWORD



WE ALL WANT TO be free and happy. Many of us believe that we can attain these qualities through external success, and so we tend to see our obstacles as out there in the world, in people and situations. When we recognize that the promise of fulfillment and what stands in its way are both within us, we begin the inner journey. It is a journey into our own consciousness and experience, a path of discovery and realization of the inner riches of human potentiality. Even though it is a thrilling adventure, the inner journey, as with any real adventure, is not an easy one, for it is full of challenges and difficulties, obstacles and barriers.

The inner obstacles have been known and discussed for thousands of years by many of the wisdom teachings and teachers. However, some of these primary obstacles could not be understood in a precise and detailed manner until the development of modern depth psychology. Now with this understanding the inner journey is assisted in ways not possible in previous times. One of these obstacles to inner work and spiritual realization is the painful and difficult one of the inner critic, the coercive agency within us that criticizes, judges, compares, condemns, blames, and attacks us and others mercilessly and constantly.

Depth psychology has demonstrated that we always develop a part of our selves to take the role of inner conscience, traditionally referred to as the superego. But this ego structure of conscience is built mostly through identification with the judging, critical, blaming, and punishing attitudes in the environment we grow up in. It becomes a harsh judge and a cruel source of punishment, instead of being the light of true conscience. It tends to develop into a rigid

part of our mind that embodies inflexible rules and commandments, impermeable to understanding and deaf to reality. The superego becomes one of the main sources of inner suffering, through low self-esteem, guilt, shame, devaluation, and self-recrimination. It acts whenever it recognizes in our experience of ourselves, or in the perception of others, something of which it does not approve. Besides the pervasive suffering it causes in our experience, the rigidity and judgment of the inner critic make it difficult for us to go deeply into ourselves. This is because we are attacked by it every time we uncover something of which it disapproves. So in the inner journey, we either unnecessarily suffer, or to avoid this suffering we veer away from parts of our own experience. In both cases, our inner work becomes difficult and limited, and frequently comes to a halt.

Because of the greater understanding of the genesis and structure of the inner critic available in modern depth psychology, we can now deal with it more effectively than ever before. We can recognize it for what it is, address it in ways that liberate us from its cruel inner attacks, and henceforth journey inwards with greater freedom and more enjoyment of the thrill of discovery.

This book is unique in providing the reader with the understanding and methodology to do just that. In very clear and available language, it details how to recognize the inner critic and how to effectively deal with it. Byron Brown's presentation is useful for any individual who wishes to be free from the inner suffering and coercion of this ancient foe of our humanity, but it is specifically directed to those individuals interested and engaged in the inner journey toward realization and enlightenment.

Byron has been a student of mine for many years, and a teacher with considerable experience in the Diamond Approach to the inner journey. He has expressed his own understanding of how to work with the judge, culled from many years of his own inner work, and his work with students and groups, in a way that reveals its roots in the actual essential states of inner realization. As a result, this book is not only a study of the inner critic and how to deal with it, but a clear presentation of how this work can be done in a way that actually helps reveal our true and spiritual nature. In other words, it demonstrates how the work on the inner critic can become a path

toward realizing true conscience—the essential conscience of which the inner critic is merely a limited imitation. Byron has also succeeded in demonstrating how the work with the inner critic and the arising of inner spiritual states are related, and how they contribute to and support each other. His extensive understanding of the subject matter derives not only from his own inner work and work with students in the Ridhwan School, but also from the many classes he developed and taught, devoted specifically to working with the inner critic.

I believe the reader will find this book a unique opportunity to deal with an age-old problem, with intelligence and efficiency. The application of its knowledge will contribute significantly to one's inner development.

A. H. Almaas
Berkeley, California
February 1998

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



I WOULD LIKE TO express special thanks to Hameed Ali (A. H. Almaas), with whom I have studied and trained as a teacher during the last sixteen years. He is the founder of the Diamond Approach, a modern spiritual path based on self-understanding. Through the work of his Ridhwan School, I have learned this approach to the judge, or superego. I am completely indebted to Hameed for the profound teaching of Essence and its aspects, and for illuminating the ways in which the superego hinders us from knowing our true nature. Learning to disengage from the attacks of the superego is a fundamental step in early stages of the Diamond Approach. I hope this book may be of some assistance in supporting students involved in the Ridhwan School, as well as interested people everywhere. My heartfelt appreciation also goes to Karen Johnson, Hameed's colleague and my individual teacher, who has so patiently guided me through the maze of my own psychic reality for many years.

I am grateful to Michael Torresan, former teacher in the Ridhwan School, for first organizing this material and presenting it as a body of teaching in workshop format. He was an inspiring and provocative model for assisting others in confronting their judges. I have found his work an important starting point for much of what I have developed in this book.

Throughout my years of teaching the Diamond Approach, and this material in particular, I have worked with many students. I am grateful to each one for what he or she has taught me. Many of them appear directly and indirectly in the pages of this book.

Much of the writing of this book was made possible by the solitude and quiet of the Vedanta Retreat in Marin, California, and I am

appreciative of the welcome offered me to have quiet time and to write. I would also like to thank Deborah Meyer for her belief in the profound value of this work for her psychotherapy clients as well as her encouragement and feedback in an initial reading of the manuscript. Special thanks to my father, Quentin, for a patient and detailed editing of my rough grammar and questioning of my unfamiliar concepts. He has always supported me in my pursuit of writing and has set a high standard for an appreciative use of the English language. And thanks to Alia Johnson and Sara Hurley, who have given me feedback and cheered me on during the four years it has taken to complete this book. Many people encouraged me as they read through the initial drafts, including Loie Rosenkrantz, Ward Stoneman, Sherry Anderson, Robert Birnbaum, Barry Rothman, Pam Weiss, Jessica Britt, Karen Johnson, and Hameed Ali.

After writing four drafts on my own, I made a New Year's resolution in 1997 to find an editor to work with me. I am deeply indebted to my father-in-law, Jim Friedman, and my father for helping to make this step possible. As a result, the book took a great leap forward into its final form through the invaluable attention of *The Writer's Midwife*, Elianne Obadia. We established a wonderful partnership as she helped me realize the energy and clarity needed to make the material speak most effectively. Thank you, Elianne, for your enthusiasm, appreciation, and critical consideration of my writing.

I offer many thanks to the staff of Shambhala Publications, particularly my editor, Emily Hilburn Sell, for believing in this book and helping birth it into the world.

Last, I am forever grateful to my wife, Ellen Friedman, for her ongoing support, interest, and energy, which have sustained me throughout the process of bringing this project to completion. My life with her has provided the ultimate laboratory and testing ground for the success of the principles described in this book.

PREFACE



DURING THE MANY YEARS I have been teaching people how to work with self-criticism, I have witnessed a great deal of suffering resulting directly from the negative ways people treat themselves. I have also seen their surprise and concern as they come to recognize how serious this situation is. Perhaps most important, I see their hunger for a sense of personal integrity based on compassion and understanding rather than a belief in deficiency based on self-blame.

There is nothing more poignant and heart-wrenching than to witness a friend treat himself badly out of a well-intentioned desire to do the best thing. It is painful to see his self-punishment, to recognize its inappropriateness, and to know you are helpless to stop it. You are helpless because the friend sees his actions as the logical and necessary outcome of who he is. Even when he recognizes the pain and struggle caused by the self-blame, he is not necessarily any closer to stopping it from happening. You might see that he believes he is responsible for something he is not and want him to recognize that. You may try to talk to this friend about it or give him books to read. But these things will have little lasting impact on his internal world unless they awaken his hunger to know himself beyond his hopes and fears.

To challenge your *own* patterns of self-judgment is an equally difficult task. Simply to recognize how harsh and intolerant you can be toward yourself is uncomfortable enough. But to expose and explore this part of yourself also means questioning basic assumptions about your upbringing and the society in which you live. This may mean setting personal priorities counter to those held by friends, family, and colleagues—something that is hard to do alone.

For this reason, you can benefit greatly from doing inner critic work with like-minded souls in workshops or ongoing groups. You see that you are not alone in your patterns of self-blame, and you receive external support for challenging these patterns. Working with others can counteract the isolation that you fear will come as you begin questioning the standards of those around you as well as your own expectations.

For those who do not have the opportunity to be in a group that supports this focus, working with the inner critic can be a lonely and often discouraging process. A book can give some background, suggest ways of working, and offer some guidelines, but it cannot replace the personal contact of other people or the feedback of a teacher or therapist. This book presents a perspective that frees you from the pervasive orientation of self-improvement, an approach that often reinforces rather than liberates you from the suffering of self-blame. I hope it will offer support for your own growth by validating the importance of challenging self-judgment on the path to self-understanding.

Byron Brown
Albany, California
November 1997

INTRODUCTION



THIS BOOK INTRODUCES YOU to the lifelong process of disengaging from self-judgment and, through and beyond that work, to knowing yourself as a living soul. Specifically, it will lead you on an experiential process of unraveling the judgment in your inner life. The abundant information here is not arranged as a theoretical treatise but as an interactive process and a practical guide to help free you from self-attack. Throughout the book, personal examples from individuals and from my work with students are included to illustrate the principles presented, as well as exercises and practices to encourage discovery of your own understanding of the material. The knowledge offered will have little impact unless you actively explore its relevance to your own experience.

Working with the judge and discovering the truth is a journey of liberation. As you come to recognize that you are in a prison guarded by the judge, you appreciate the soul's powerful longing for freedom. Every external form of bondage in human history reflects the psychic confinement of the soul resulting from ignorance and unquestioned beliefs. You are a slave to your own ideas of who you are and how you need to be.

The ability to defend against the judge's attacks and disengage from its activity offers you the possibility of discovering who you are independent of ideas. Actively standing up for the truth of your experience breaks the habitual patterns of your familiar identity. Where expectations and standards ruled, there can be openness and allowing. Fear of retribution can give way to self-trust and curiosity. From hopelessness and defeat can arise acceptance and confidence. And confinement and tension can be transformed into spaciousness and ease.

A Journey of Truth

And truth guides the journey. In combination with the grounding and practicality of your personal will, truth acts as an objective conscience for action in the world. One of the original functions of the judge was to act as your conscience. The judge learned standards of right and wrong from parents and society. Then, by using guilt and shame, it helped you as a child to behave and act appropriately according to that moral code. Unfortunately, this process suppressed your spontaneity, aliveness, and instinctual power in order to make you socialized and acceptable. You needed the judge's firm support and direction as you developed your own ability to perceive, evaluate, and understand. However, the outcome of that development was not grounded in your true nature. As an adult, you have continued to rely on the judge's internalized standards of right and wrong. Only true maturation can replace the judge with a living conscience. This capacity of the soul depends on the recognition of your essential nature and the development of your ability to be authentically yourself.

Disengaging from the judge thus serves two functions: to free you from the confinement of old, limiting patterns and beliefs and, at the same time, to demand that you actively practice living in a way that eliminates the need for the judge. You cannot simply throw off a structure that has defined and supported you unless you have something more effective with which to replace it. You must learn to function, interact, and make choices freed from the standards of the judge, which means living in alignment with the truth and reality of your own life at the present time. This creates a living conscience that is not based on rules. Such a conscience allows the fullness of your living soul to express itself. This happens when you have transformed the self-centeredness of instinctual impulses, the self-destruction of compulsive patterns, and the rigidity of internalized authority. This is not a small task. It is the work of learning to be a responsible, mature human being. You cannot plan how to do it, you cannot only read about how to do it, you cannot simply follow someone else's instructions. You must learn how to live spontaneously by recognizing and following the guidance of what you know to be true.

A Journey of Recovery

Working with the judge is a journey of recovery. Disengaging helps free you from the harsh oppression of the judge and also accelerates your movement into experiencing the aliveness of the soul. This is the doorway to recovery of your soul nature. You have the opportunity to recover a fresh and dynamic aliveness at the heart of your life. And aliveness means the presence of passion and spontaneity, two qualities noticeably absent in the world of judgment. It also means the experience of yourself as a life source. Life flows from and through you, taking on both familiar and unfamiliar forms. The soul's aliveness is the sense of something conscious and unpredictable, awake and mysterious.

My desire is to support you to be directly in contact with your own lived experience without the judge as intermediary. The central practice in this process is to return to *your* experience of *yourself* in this moment. As you learn to know yourself each moment with curiosity and openness, you allow the process of self-discovery to open new doors. You find your own natural resources that have gone unrecognized because of the judge's controlling influence. When you actively disengage, you begin to recognize what is called *presence* as a ground of support for being who you are from moment to moment. You are offered tastes of being a soul that is alive, dynamic, and immediate—a soul that is open, changing, and responding, but also a soul that is rooted in the reality of the truth.

The various flavors of presence arise to enrich your experience: *Awareness* wakes you up to the ever-changing elements of each day, and *personal will* brings you back to your direct experience of what is true at the present time. *Acceptance* encourages vulnerability to the ups and downs of your inner world, and *strength* gives you the courage to expand your boundaries and go beyond what you think is possible. *Joy* and *curiosity* help you appreciate and celebrate the mystery of you and your world, while *compassion* tenderizes you as it allows contact with the fullness of your heart, including its pain, grief, and longing. *Spaciousness* transforms the anxiety about lack into the allowing of openness, and *value* offers sweetness and satisfaction to your soul as you learn to appreciate your true nature. *Peace*

stills the inner activity that undermines the quietness and simplicity of being yourself, allowing the *truth* of you and your life to be more apparent.

The soul's journey does not take you away from the physical, emotional, and social realities of your life. It is not about otherworldly experiences. Recovery of the soul enriches the life you have by bringing in the dimension of presence and its qualities, the invisible essence of what it means to be alive. Spirituality is the heart of human life, the subtle dimension of being a soul. It gives your experience fullness and immediacy so that you feel more in contact with each moment as you live each day.

How This Book Is Structured

This book addresses the human dilemma of the soul through answering two questions: what is this soul that you have lost touch with, and what prevents you from recognizing it? These two questions are basic to all spiritual work, and answering them can be approached in many ways. Here, we look at the barrier by working with self-judgment and how it blocks you from knowing yourself as soul. We explore the soul itself by focusing on some of its essential aspects that have largely been disowned or forgotten.

The following pages present a step-by-step method for confronting self-judgment. You will learn to recognize the presence of the judge, notice its effect on you, discover how it functions, explore how you support its activity, uncover its motivation, and most important, find ways to free yourself from its influence. This process is necessary for you to have the freedom to discover who you are beneath the myriad beliefs you have accumulated about yourself over the years. The information in the book is presented in an order most useful for working on your own: gradually developing the awareness and skills to support a true and effective defense against self-judgment. If you were working with the ongoing support of a teacher or group, the presentation of the material might have a different emphasis.

The first half of the book focuses on understanding judgment and how it affects you. The second half moves you into taking steps

to defend against the activity of self-judgment. Twelve chapters address the judge process, each one concluding with a summary of its significant points and one or more exercises for supporting you in pursuing the work on your own.

The second focus of this book is the reconnection with your soul, the forgotten potential of who you truly are. Complementary to the work on the judge is the process of rediscovering inherent qualities of your true nature that you lost touch with as you grew up, in particular those relevant to freeing you from self-judgment.

Traditional spiritual work tends to focus on aspects of your nature considered spiritual (meaning beyond worldly life), such as universal love, self-realization, transcendent unity, ultimate emptiness, or spiritual insight. These are important for knowing the deeper dimensions of human experience. However, you have other essential qualities, often overlooked, that are more relevant for life in the world.

Working with the judge is a particularly down-to-earth affair and needs the support of more basic, familiar soul qualities, freed from beliefs and personal history. In the soul chapters, you are invited to contact the clear simplicity of awareness, the energetic expansion of strength, the solid reliability of will, and the gentle warmth of compassion. These qualities and others provide a contrast to the experience of yourself supported by the inner critic and at the same time give you access to inner resources for challenging its power. Each quality presented has a particular relevance for an aspect of your work with the judge. The soul quality chapters alternate with the judge chapters, and each contains a practice to help you reconnect with that quality.

These two dimensions, dealing with the judge and contacting soul qualities, mutually support and reinforce each other. Seeing through the judge's attitudes and beliefs allows you to observe yourself and your experience with fresh eyes and begin to recognize your deeper soul nature. You make space to know yourself in a different way. At the same time, directly sensing an aspect of your true nature provides a vivid and definite alternative to the reactive nature of self-judgment.

In addition, a story that follows a young couple, Frank and Sue,

as they live through one Saturday together threads through the book. Their day is told in short episodes on the page facing the opening of each successive chapter. Every episode touches on the material in that chapter and helps place the subject matter of the book in the context of real life. When a judgment is arising in the characters' minds or in their own words, it is generally preceded by the symbol ☞ to help you learn to recognize the prevalence and variation of this element of both inner and outer activity. When Frank or Sue is engaged in inner dialogue, whether a judgment or not, the words are in italics. You may find it useful to reread an episode after you finish reading the chapter it precedes.

The Beginning of a Process

This is a lifelong journey of discovering the truth in your life as you liberate your soul. Recognizing, appreciating, and disengaging from your judge is a vital way of ensuring that it becomes *your* journey. This book is only a beginning, but it will provide a useful foundation for opening the prison door and stepping into the heart of life.

NOTE TO THE READER



THIS BOOK SPEAKS TO more than just your mind. It is addressed to your soul. At different times, the material will resonate in your body or your heart or in your very being. The chapters are packed with information, insights, and inquiries. It is not light reading. This is a book to work through slowly, allowing it to stimulate you, unsettle you, move you. Take it in small bites so you can absorb the tastes and textures. Go away and come back. Stop and reread.

As you read, you will find yourself responding to the ideas that are relevant to where you are in your own journey. You will draw from what is presented the nourishment you need at the moment for your own development. This means that much of what you read will pass into your mind and out again without any significant impact. This is natural. However, it also means that you can come back to any part of this book in one month, six months, or a year and you will resonate with material that was not important for you the first time.

I particularly recommend that as you read, you pay attention to your body and your energy. Notice how they are affected by your reading. If you become aware of having a hard time concentrating or feeling restless, stop and take a break. Perhaps something has struck home and stirred a physical or an emotional response. When one part of you is strongly affected, it can prevent you from taking in any more. The focus of this book on connecting with your experience in the moment makes it ideal for learning to track yourself in this way. Making space for your responses to the process of reading will create a greater impact and also allow the material to nourish and awaken more aspects of your soul.

Do not expect instantaneous change or development; be patient with yourself as you respect your soul's need to go at its own pace. Integrating into your life the various elements of this self-discovery process can take many years. The exercises and practices in this book are designed to expose you to different dimensions of inner experience in a gradual way. The resulting effect is cumulative: each facet of the work is reinforced by all the others.

SOUL
WITHOUT
SHAME

A DAY WITH FRANK AND SUE

Sue was awoken by Frank returning to bed from the bathroom. It took quite a while before she finally acknowledged that she couldn't go back to sleep. He, meanwhile, seemed to have fallen asleep right away. The clock radio was glowing 3:30 when Sue twisted her head to the left and opened her eyes. She remembered too late what she had heard on the radio from some sleep expert: you should never look at the time when you wake up in the middle of the night because that seems to make it harder to go back to sleep. This reminded her of how often recently she had been waking up in the middle of the night. Fortunately, this time it was Saturday and she didn't have to get up early, but she was frustrated with herself and dreaded lying awake for the rest of the night.

☞ *So what has been your problem lately anyway, Sue? You didn't used to have difficulty sleeping. Something's wrong here. You know you are eating too late, and you are getting into that bad habit of black tea after dinner.*

I think it must have something to do with either lack of exercise or being anxious about my work. I will have to get some of that melatonin at the vitamin store tomorrow . . .

As her mind continued working, Sue was getting more and more unsettled in her body. She could feel the heaviness of sleep still in her system, and her eyes were aching. A sense of low-grade agitation was developing in her limbs, as though a subtle current of energy had been turned on and she could no longer relax. She desperately longed to shut it off and drop back into sleep.

With some effort, Sue stopped her mental obsessing and focused her attention on her arms and legs and began controlled breathing to try to relax. At first, she felt more tension than relaxation from trying to concentrate. Then, as she continued, the outline of her body slowly transformed into a vivid presence charged with a slightly prickly energy. This shifted into a pulsing flow moving through her; it was both soothing and enlivening. And then for a moment, Sue experienced herself floating in the middle of a dark, spacious field with a vibrant perimeter. She was feeling herself in an immediate and unfamiliar way, when suddenly a familiar voice broke in: ☞ *But you're supposed to be going to sleep!*

The internal voice brought her back to being Sue lying in bed not sleeping. Where had she been? Not asleep but not anyplace familiar. She found herself yawning as she puzzled over what had just happened. Sue turned over, pulled up the covers, and was soon fast asleep.

1

THE SOUL PERSPECTIVE



YOU ARE A SOUL. And if you allow it, your life can become a journey of unfolding for your soul. The fact is, you do not recognize yourself as soul. You do not know the source of your own aliveness. You are not aware of the potential for freedom and responsiveness that is your true nature. In order to see your inner critic in a proper perspective, in relation to the totality of who you are, you must have some sense of being a soul. What does that mean?

What Is the Soul?

Whenever people say the word *I*, they generally are referring to a person who was born of certain parents, has a certain history, and acts and behaves in certain familiar ways. This is often referred to as the ego or personality. The soul, in fact, is the true “I.” It is the present-moment experience of yourself as the agent in your life, the sense of a livingness that is here now. Can you say what you are if you don’t refer to who you have been?

The soul is the you who experiences your life—the one who perceives, acts, learns, and changes. It is not the body that was born many years ago; it is not the self-image of a person who has particular skills and capacities; and it is not the mind that thinks and worries about everything that happens. The soul includes all of these, but as the experiencer, it is more fundamental and less defined than any of them. Who is it that experiences being an ego, being a body,

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