



# THE ASTROLOGY OF SHAME

## WHEN YOU'RE NOT GOOD ENOUGH

by Andrea Conlon

Shame is possibly the most difficult and misunderstood emotion we experience. It is insidious and crippling, and more common than one might think. I propose that, to one degree or another, we all deal with it in our lives.

*Mindful Self-Compassion* is a growing movement in psychotherapy that addresses shame. As counseling astrologers, we can trust that we have a powerful tool that offers self-compassion quite naturally. This article focuses on the psychology of shame, how it appears in astrology, and astrology's inherent capacity to mitigate shame.

### Dynamics of Shame

At its core, shame is the fear that I am flawed in a way that renders me unlovable. It is an emotion whose roots lie in the innocent wish to be loved, which never goes away, from birth onward. This is our deepest longing. "All of us have loved someone fiercely who could not love us back."<sup>1</sup>

Shame may also be essentially tied into our ancient limbic survival neurology; where we are shamed, we may be cast out from the necessary support system of the tribe and will die. Hence, the grip it has and the importance of dealing with it.

Internally, shame is a self-attack and involves negative self-evaluation, such as

*I am bad/inadequate/flawed/a failure.* In this way, it is like an autoimmune disease, eating away at us inside. There is also a social or external component, a real or imagined fear that others see me as bad and flawed and are contemptuous of me. But even more debilitating is that shame breeds isolation and concealment. Shame is hidden; people often don't even know it's there.

Shame is now studied and worked with through the doorway of self-compassion; it is the first step in the process of healing shame. It seems paradoxical that we practice self-compassion not to get rid of unwanted feeling states, but *because* we are suffering. It's a subtle shift of motivation away from the fantasy of being able to evacuate a painful feeling, to allow it to shift organically by softening into it with warmth and kindness. We are deserving of this kindness simply *because* we are suffering humans.

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Research shows that we are more capable of giving compassion to others than to ourselves. It takes courage to move past our shame toward the realization of our goodness, despite our flaws. Learning to practice self-compassion can free us from a compulsive seeking of mirroring from the outside. In fact, self-compassion promotes emotion regulation and self-soothing, which are key therapeutic actions. We can be comforted in our *common humanity*, a core healing component of self-compassion practice, in that shame is shared by all.

However, this path is not a quick fix. Just as practicing meditation doesn't guarantee enlightenment, working with shame can be a life's work.

### Astrology as Cosmic Mother

Astrology's mythopoetic lens can be fundamentally compassionate, like a nurturing Great Mother. The highest guidance from our astrological chart communicates a deep level of permission for us to be wholly ourselves. People come to us to be nourished by a cosmological model that says, 'I see you; you are not flawed; ...you belong and are meant to be exactly as you are'. Our spiritual DNA is a microcosm of the solar system which means we are good, just as the cosmos is good.

When we work with a client, we are always confronted with various questions and problems. But beneath it all, our client's unconscious question may ultimately be, 'am I still loveable even though I am also a flawed human?' We can meet this essential question with astrology, that when used as a therapeutic tool, amplifies our energies. It encourages us not to skip over difficulties but to bring compassionate awareness to them. Therapeutic astrologers need to engage with the issue of shame because it can so block the flowering of our potential. Even if we don't use the word explicitly in

the client setting, we can be aware that we are helping to heal underlying shame.

### Astrology as Cosmic Mirror

As one young and troubled client implored, “*tell me who I’m supposed to be!*” To see oneself in astrology’s cosmic mirror can help orient our lives. Mirroring is a *relational nutrient* that is foundational to our selfhood, and if our mirror is contaminated by harshness, criticism, or abuse, shame will grow. Seeing oneself in astrology’s cosmic mirror softens the bite of shame. When we can label the dynamic of shame for our clients, we bring it out of the darkness where it festers.

Astrologers who practice non-judgmental witnessing can be accurate teachers of self-compassion with our laser view into the psychic structure. “*All psychotherapeutic approaches, in the end, depend upon an individual making peace with what he or she is in order for any healing to take place.*”<sup>2</sup> As counseling astrologers, we aspire to give people a feeling of being found but not overly exposed.

The illuminating nature of astrology is beautifully articulated by Dane Rudhyar, who wrote:

“*What astrology can help us do is to discover consciously what our thwarted instincts are no longer able to reveal...to our confused ego.*”<sup>3</sup> We can bring restoration to the self.

### The Usual (Planetary) Suspects

While there are many ways that shame could appear in the chart, I’ll focus on the key planets of **Saturn**, **Pluto**, and **Chiron** because they are most strongly associated with shame.

Our natal **Saturn** placement may harbor shame because it is often where we’ve experienced insecurities, failures, and deprivation. Whenever we are tasked by Saturn, there is always the possibility of falling short. Where Saturn lies, we may feel like we’ve gone through the school of unrelenting hard knocks. It can help people to know that we’ve all got this thorny place we’re working on throughout life. When a person recognizes the universal humanity of Saturnian lessons, it can be easier to heal the wounds of shame with self-compassion. With experience, wisdom, and consciousness, Saturn becomes the foundation of our Great Work.

**Pluto** relates to shame in a very different way. Where Pluto lies, we can be twisted by shame. It can indicate where we have experienced injury or violation. For example, several of my clients have strong Sun/Pluto contacts, and the therapy has centered on healing injuries to the sense of self. A Sun/Pluto contact likely

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resonates with a lifetime of buried need to be valued and validated. It might even be inherited. Unconscious feelings, passed from generation to generation, can feel like a family curse! A Sun/Pluto contact can be a curse-breaking aspect.<sup>4</sup> Our Pluto placement is not empowered until we’ve done work to cleanse the shame or trauma concealed there.

### Shame as a Multigenerational Legacy

A recent emergence in the contemporary conversation around healing is the realization that we carry the unresolved wounds/trauma of our ancestors, both on the collective and the individual level. The past is present in our genes and in our ner-

vous systems. Pluto issues point us back to our family ancestors — to elements in the family psyche that have begun to poison us<sup>5</sup>. It says —now it’s our turn to clean something out from the ancestral line. Strong Pluto aspects to the Sun or Moon suggest the need for this transformative process.

It is helpful to broaden the context of a painful dynamic within us. We can realize the wound is something we carry, but we don’t have to over-identify with it. It’s a burden that affects only a part of us. This, too, is *common humanity*. It’s not a problem; it’s part of the human experience.

With **Chiron**, we come to a more idiosyncratic wounding. Just like in the Greek myth, our Chiron wound is accidental. To be wounded so makes us feel like we’ll never get over it. Where Chiron is, we can feel misshapen like Quasimodo in The Hunchback of Notre Dame. Yet, paradoxically, there’s freedom and authority in that. Working with the wounding expands our horizons, even as it makes us work with our limitations. We can work with Chiron by becoming more objective and accepting the flawed nature of the human condition<sup>6</sup>. We might become wise healers and teachers, like Chiron in myth.

We serve our clients well when we empathize with their Chironic wounds — ones that can so easily result in shame. For instance, if we see a Chiron/Moon interaction, it can indicate shame from not being loved or nurtured as was needed to thrive.



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We can set a workable frame for healing this by understanding that *feeling* there is something wrong with you is not the same as there *actually being* something wrong with you. We can also reflect that the beautiful potential in a Chiron/Moon interaction is a deeply empathic nature, with a capacity to profoundly relate to and understand other people's pain.

### Shame-Prone Signs

While shame can correlate with many signs, I'll focus on two that are particularly problematic in our superficial culture — Virgo and Scorpio.

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Virgo is an essential and integral part of our life, with its drive for excellence through clear perception. However, it is also a sign that is prone to self-criticism and self-judgement —the core hallmarks of shame. Virgo's laser beam of analysis can be mercilessly directed inward at the self. Of Virgo, Steven Forrest has stated, "*you are learning to love yourself, but in the most difficult possible psychological environment — a n honest mind.*"<sup>7</sup>

Scorpio, too, may be shame-prone, because it lives in emotional depths which are often pathologized in our superficial culture. Likewise, the sacred quality of our Scorpionic sexuality has been a particular target of shame through the ages. It's important to remember, however, that shame is a universal emotion and is present in people with little to no Virgo or Scorpio planets.

Astrology allows us to identify and work with a dynamic instead of being blindsided by unacknowledged and unwanted feeling states. The symbols of astrology bring guidance and meaning so we can work symbolically with challenging emotional states.

### Chart 1

Here is a chart (below) of someone in the middle of Solar Arc Pluto conjunct a

Sun/South Node conjunction in Scorpio, and in square to the Moon in Leo. Notably, this is one of the most intense Pluto events of a lifetime! This progression is directing her into her psyche to clean out a deep soul wound.

She has described herself as shame-prone, and in childhood, even thought of herself as a 'bad seed'. Sadness can overwhelm her. She finds herself revisiting a depression she often experienced in her youth. There is grief for what might have been, yet hope as Pluto's relentless process of death/rebirth breaks down an old self, and a new self struggles to be born. Although we can doubt ourselves and judge this kind of process, our sacred art helps us see that important inner work is going on. Rather than resist the process, she is learning to practice self-compassion to honor this work and soothe herself.

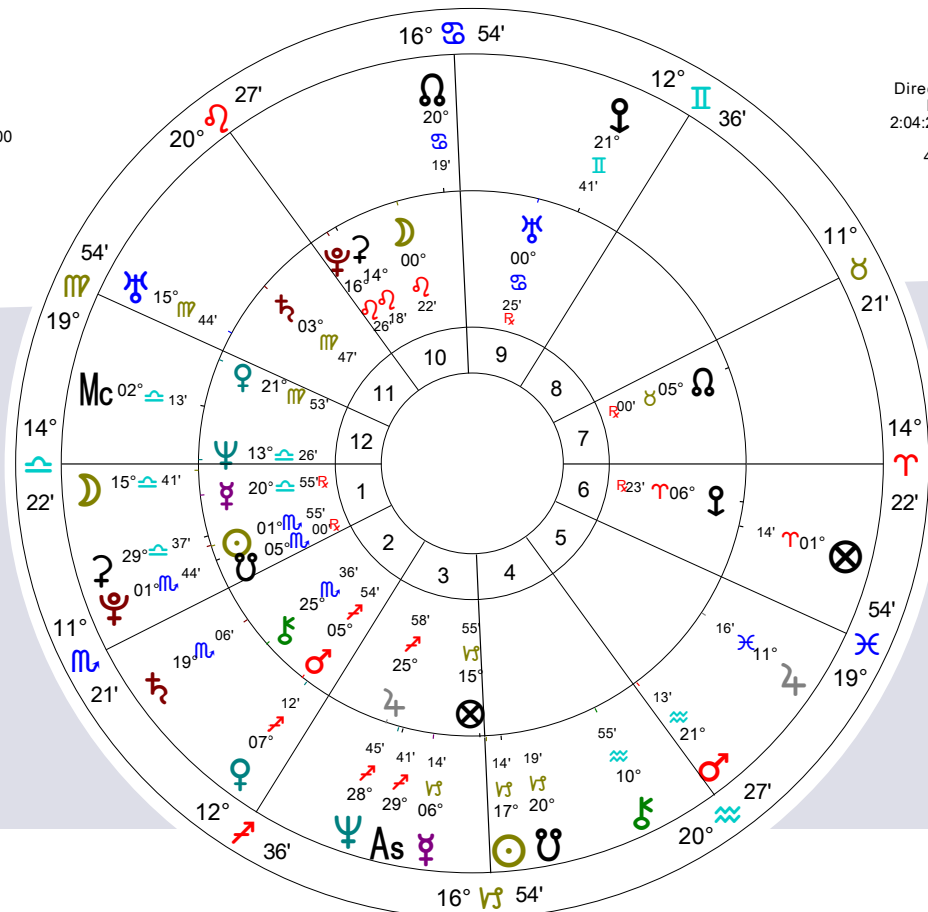
This chart carries both strong Scorpio and Virgo influences. With Saturn in Virgo in the 11th House, we see that Saturn's Great Work is to develop her skills and offer them to serve the larger community. Virgo's self-consciousness in a group setting can feel raw and provoke shame. But here is where her Scorpio depths and emotional honesty integrate well with her Virgo desire to be of service.

Inner Wheel

Natal Chart  
Oct 25 1948, Mon  
4:49 am CST +6:00  
Chicago, Illinois  
41°N51' 087°W39'  
Geocentric  
Tropical  
Placidus

Outer Wheel

Directed - Solar Arc  
Mar 21 2023, Tue  
2:04:23 pm CST +6:00  
Chicago, Illinois  
41°N51' 087°W39'  
Geocentric  
Tropical  
Placidus





## Grief and Shame

Shame often appears in our lives with other difficult emotions in tow. For example, our clients may be grieving major losses in life — a career, a relationship, or even their own impending death — with features that trigger shame. Deep emotional states are not honored in our culture, so sadness and suffering can elicit shame. How crazy-making, to suffer deeply and then to feel shame for our suffering! This happens in a culture with a wounded feeling function, such as ours, where we're taught to control strong feelings the culture deems shameful.

### Chart 2

Here is the chart (below) of a person who was in grief. As transiting Saturn crossed her Scorpio ascendant, her husband died in front of her in a hospital exam room. Death is often so messy! Here, a new extremely fraught cycle of self-identify was inaugurated where she instantly became a widow and single mother. Transiting Saturn brought a heavy burden of responsibility. Complicating things, the marriage had likely been headed for divorce. She felt both relieved that he was gone, and also, remorse for how she had treated him. Her

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### Conclusion

As Brian Swimme said, "all our disasters today are directly related to our having been raised in cultures that ignored the cosmos for an exclusive focus on the human."<sup>8</sup> This is true of our internal/mental disasters also. Astrology speaks the language of the soul and is an antidote and tool to help us love ourselves just as we are now, not when we're 'better.' As it has worked healing

magic in our own lives, so we seek to pass on the gift. We are cosmically informed empathic companions to our clients.

As astrologers, working with shame is some of the deepest work we do with our clients; it is a hero's journey. Although difficult, being part of that journey provides rich rewards. As Shakespeare might have said, the quality of this collaborative healing is *twice blessed; it blesseth him who gives and who receives.*

### REFERENCES

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- 2 Liz Greene, The Art of Stealing Fire, p.192
- 3 Dane Rudhyar, The Lunation Cycle, p.67
- 4 Liz Greene, Pluto seminar
- 5 Liz Greene, ibid.
- 6 Liz Greene, Chiron seminar
- 7 Steven Forrest, live lecture
- 8 Brian Swimme, quoted by Keiron Le Gris in Discovering Eris, p.45

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