

Afraid of the Light? Let Yourself **Glow**

By Eve Menezes Cunningham

Lots of us struggle to express emotions like sadness and anger because we were not 'allowed' to feel certain things when we were children. We learned young that to be acceptable to our families – the people who held our very lives in their hands when we were small and could not fend for ourselves – we had to be a way these adults approved of.

Maybe we grew up attempting to be perfect or always aiming to please, ever the good girl or boy. When we were not (who is?) perfect or could not please, we would blame ourselves and try harder. When we had 'bad' thoughts, we would try and stuff them down.

When you think back, can you remember some examples from your childhood?

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Many of us know that this denial of certain feelings creates shadows in our psyche. No matter how hard we try to deny and suppress certain feelings, we will act them out unconsciously until we accept and heal them.

While Freud was very interested in the unhappiness caused by repressing our basic human drives, Jung felt we were just as afraid of our light side. Of shining. Assagioli felt that not accepting our higher nature, 'suppressing the sublime' was as big a cause of human misery as the things we more understandably did not like about ourselves.

When Marianne Williamson wrote about this fear of shining in *A Return to Love*, it was so eloquent that Nelson Mandela used her words in his inauguration speech.

They resonate with all of us and it turns out that while anger and sadness are obviously 'unacceptable' to many parents, natural feelings on the other side of the spectrum – joy, exuberance, delight and other 'happy' feelings may also have been discouraged.

Almost every parent (including yours) did the best they could do at the time. Maybe your parents were tired, had just got the baby to sleep or had one of a million

other reasons that had nothing to do with you. Sadly, your creative, enthusiastic, spontaneous shiny self was suppressed too.

Whatever the reason, as an adult, you can access and accept all your feelings and truly shine.

Let your mind wander as you think about the following questions.

When you think back to your earliest years, how do you remember feeling when you:

- a Sang? What were your favourite songs? Did you enjoy entertaining an audience or singing purely for yourself?
- b Danced? When did you move most freely?
- c Painted? What materials did you enjoy using? Who did you want to show first?
- d Wrote stories? Were there any recurring themes or characters?
- e Put on plays? Who did you most like pretending to be?
- f Created a baby business?
- g Did other creative things?

Do you remember your parents' reactions when you shared what you had been up to with them?

Did their reactions change? (Were they sometimes delighted by you and cross on other occasions?)

What about other important adults in your life (grandparents, neighbours, teachers, friends' parents, etc.)?

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Who encouraged you?

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Who shamed you?

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How can you best encourage and support that exuberant, creative part of yourself now?

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What can you do to honour her or him and encourage more risk taking?

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Who, in your life, right now, supports that part of you? Who sees your potential?

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How can you spend more time with these people?

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What are you doing when you feel at your most 'glowy'?

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How can you schedule these activities in more frequently?

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Who (maybe people you do not know personally but people you have seen in concert/on TV/in magazines/read about/heard about) epitomises this sense of shining to their fullest potential for you?

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How can you take inspiration from them on a daily basis?

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Again, while perhaps feeling self indulgent, the knock on effect this will have on the rest of your life will be worth it.

Now, let yourself imagine yourself moving ahead at your shiniest. If this part of you that you have been dimming were really free to shine, what would you be capable of?

How would it change the way you felt when you woke up?

How would it manifest at work?

How would you be relating to people if this part of you had its input? (Think

about everyone you relate to from your partner, family, colleagues, clients, friends, neighbours, strangers in the street or on the train.)

What dreams might you develop?

What would you be doing within your community?

How would it impact your health?

And your wealth?

Once it knows it is safe to come out and play, this creative, shiny part of yourself will help you in all sorts of ways – from coming up with a sparkly solution to the problem that's had you all flummoxed to helping you feel more yourself in every aspect of your life.

As the days get shorter, allow your inner light to shine through even the seemingly longest nights. You know you can do it. ■

If you have children of your own or spend time with children, how might you encourage their own shininess? List some simple ways you can support that part of them here:

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