

# Saying Sorry, Healing Shame

Heart Thought 8, 19/2/08

by Nicholas de Castella

Last Tuesday the Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd, issued an apology to indigenous Australians for harm that has been done to them: "We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians. ...we say sorry". This is a healing for all Australians and for our country.

It is also timely reminder to all of us to stop and consider our own shame. And what we are doing about it.

It is so easy (in the short term) to stay in denial and justify our behaviour when we have caused hurt, but this prevents healing from occurring and our hearts from opening. We would rather stay stuck and powerless by thinking of ourselves as victims (rather than perpetrators), but whilst we are human we are going to make mistakes and hurt people. It is unavoidable.

Shame is a natural emotion that tells us that we have made a mistake. It is a social emotion that helps us to live with respect. (You can read more about Shame on my website in the article: The Anatomy of Shame).

The natural tendency when we are in shame is to put our head down, avoid eye contact and hide - none of which is good prelude to success, happiness or loving relationships.

The experience of extreme shame is numbness, fear and the feeling of nothingness or emptiness.

Common thoughts (stories!) that go with shame are 'I am a bad, wrong or inadequate', "I am not good enough", "I am a failure" or "I am inadequate".

The fear that we are shameful stops us from healing shame. We believe these stories and fear that they will be more true if we acknowledge our limitations - but the opposite is true.

Healing shame sets us free to be happy, successful, healthy and alive.

To Heal Shame when we make a mistake

1. Acknowledge: what we have done, or what has happened
2. Ownership: Accept responsibility for our part in it
3. Say 'Sorry': Comes from the word Sorrow (not I am wrong)
4. Make amends: do a make up: buy a gift, do an act of service...
5. Drop the stories: 'I am a bad, wrong or inadequate'
6. Drop punishment: especially of ourselves - it does not help
7. Be compassionate, kind, understanding and gentle
8. Feel the feelings: often fear, remorse, sadness until peaceful
9. Forgiveness: It is human to err and divine to forgive
10. Let it go: Move forward using our mistakes to make us more humble, compassionate and available to love.

Who could you say sorry to?

What's stopping you?

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Give it a go and see what happens.

Let me know how you get on

Thank you,

Nicholas

**February 12, 2008**

**Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's apology motion has been tabled in Parliament:**

Today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history.

We reflect on their past mistreatment.

We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were Stolen Generations – this blemished chapter in our nation's history.

The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future.

We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians.

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.

To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.

And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.

We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.

For the future we take heart; resolving that this new page in the history of our great continent can now be written.

We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians.

A future where this Parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again.

A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity.

A future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed.

A future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility.

A future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country, Australia.