

# Four Stages of Relationship with Guilt

Based on T-5.V.5-7

by Robert Perry

**5** It has been said that the real difference between neurotic and healthy guilt feelings is that neurotic guilt feelings do not help anyone. <sup>2</sup>This distinction is very wise, though incomplete. <sup>3</sup>Let us make the distinction a little sharper now.

<sup>4</sup>Neurotic guilt feelings are a device of the ego for “atoning” without sharing, and for asking for pardon without changing. <sup>5</sup>The ego never calls for real Atonement and cannot tolerate real forgiveness, which *is* change.

**6** The concept of healthy guilt feelings has great merit, but without the concept of Atonement it lacks the healing potential it could hold. <sup>2</sup>The distinction between neurotic and healthy guilt feelings has been made in terms of feelings which lead to a decision not to *repeat* the error, which is only part of healing.

<sup>3</sup>This concept therefore lacks the idea of *undoing* the error. <sup>4</sup>What is really being advocated, then, is adopting a policy of sharing without a real *foundation*.

**7** I have come to give you the foundation, so that your own thoughts can make you really free. <sup>2</sup>You have carried the burden of the ideas you did not share, and which were therefore too weak to increase. <sup>3</sup>But you did not recognize how to undo their existence, because you had made them. <sup>4</sup>You cannot cancel out your past errors alone. <sup>5</sup>They will not disappear from your mind without remedy. <sup>6</sup>The remedy is not of your making, any more than you are.

## The Source of Guilt



## Four Stages of Relationship with Guilt

Stage	Defining characteristic	Result
<p><b>1. No guilt feelings</b></p> <p>“He may deny he <i>is</i> a murderer, and justify his savagery with smiles as he attacks. Yet he will suffer, and will look on his intent in nightmares, where the smiles are gone and where the purpose rises to meet his horrified awareness and to pursue him still. For no one thinks of murder and escapes the guilt the thought entails” (T-23.IV.2:1-3)</p>	<p><b>I have nothing to feel guilty for.</b></p> <p>I haven’t done anything wrong. You can tell by the fact that I had a friendly smile on when I did it.</p>	<p><b>The guilt is there and catches up with me.</b></p> <p>I don’t know why I have nightmares where my murderous intent rises to meet my horrified awareness and fill me with guilt.</p>
<p><b>2. Neurotic guilt feelings</b></p> <p>“Neurotic guilt feelings do not help anyone” (5:1).</p> <p>“Neurotic guilt feelings are a device of the ego for ‘atoning’ without sharing, and for asking for pardon without changing” (5:4)</p>	<p><b>If I just punish myself with guilt, I should be pardoned.</b></p> <p>If I punish myself with enough guilt, then I have “atoned” and should be pardoned.</p>	<p><b>I haven’t changed, so others aren’t helped and neither am I.</b></p> <p>I ask for pardon even though I have not changed one bit, even though I have not replaced my attack with sharing.</p>
<p><b>3. “Healthy” guilt feelings</b></p> <p>“The concept of healthy guilt feelings has great merit, but...lacks the healing potential it could hold” (6:1).</p> <p>“feelings which lead to a decision not to <i>repeat</i> the error” (6:2)</p> <p>“a policy of sharing without a real <i>foundation</i>” (6:4)</p>	<p><b>I feel so bad that I will never do that again.</b></p> <p>I use guilt as a motivator to never do the thing I feel guilty for again. I firmly intend to replace my earlier attack with sharing.</p>	<p><b>I have no real foundation for my better behavior.</b></p> <p>Unfortunately, the egocentric idea in me that caused my behavior is still there. Thus, I’m trying to share, but without a real foundation on which that new behavior can stand.</p>
<p><b>4. Guilt feelings as the motivator to accept Atonement</b></p> <p>“<i>undoing</i> the error” (6:3)</p> <p>“I have come to give you the foundation, so that your own thoughts can make you really free” (7:1)</p> <p>“You cannot cancel out your past errors alone. They will not disappear from your mind without remedy” (7:4-5)</p>	<p><b>I invite in the real remedy to undo my inner error.</b></p> <p>I invite the Atonement into my mind to undo the inner error behind the act that caused my guilt. Now my error disappears from my mind.</p>	<p><b>I have a real foundation for loving behavior.</b></p> <p>Now I have a real foundation from which to engage in genuine sharing.</p>