Day 9: Shame & Guilt

In Theory: Shame and guilt in psychodynamic theory are distinct emotional experiences that shape how the self relates to wrongdoing and exposure. The psychodynamic tradition notes that guilt relates to actions and allows for repair and restitution, while shame relates to the self as a whole and leads to withdrawal or concealment. Shame turns experience inward as a judgment on identity rather than behavior. It often produces a desire to disappear rather than to make amends. These experiences can become enduring ways of being that are not tied only to specific actions but can shape a person's baseline sense of self in the world. Guilt can move toward connection, while shame tends to interrupt it.

In Experience: Two people make the same mistake. One feels bad about what they did, apologizes, and moves on. The other cannot stop returning to what it reveals about who they are. Over time, this shapes how a person enters relationships and how they respond to closeness or feedback. The avoidance of situations where the same exposure might occur develops its own patterns.

In Thought: Shame and guilt can operate quietly in the background of strong opinions. What feels like conviction may sometimes carry an emotional history.

In Print: Lewis, M. *Shame: The Exposed Self* (1992)

In Attention: Notice whether self-criticism is about behavior or character.