

Pathwork™ in Texas

Constructive Attitudes in Self-Confrontation

Excerpts from Path to the Real Self, Chapter #5

The discovery of destructive emotions, of faults one has ignored, is naturally upsetting. Hate, hostility, vindictiveness, envy, jealousy, cruel desires, fear -- these, and more, may exist in the best of human beings. Their effect is made worse by the belief that no one who is decent could possibly have such feelings, therefore they must remain a guilty secret one must expose under no circumstances. As time goes on, they become 'forgotten'. And this is not good. It does not further health, well being, and fulfillment.

Of course it is desirable to free oneself of undesirable trends, emotions, attitudes or thoughts. But keeping them hidden does not mean liberation from their tyranny. Knowing of their presence does not force you to act destructively, but not knowing makes you blind to the way you are governed by them. Their effect is indirect, the link between cause and effect obscure.

Feeling and perceiving emotions, as well acknowledging their existence, are not the same as acting them out. Awareness of negative trends in no way forces you to act accordingly. I stress this factor so emphatically because this is one of the most powerful reasons for resisting to face what is in the psyche -- the misconception that, the moment one becomes aware of destructive tendencies, one is no longer master over them. One may even feel that acting out is 'honest', otherwise one would be a hypocrite. The exact opposite is true, of course. Repression of childish, destructive feelings never eliminates them, not their effect. Awareness does. It is essential to deeply impress yourself with this truth, in order to counteract such possible misconceptions residing in your unconscious mind.

It is never, never an outer event, as such, responsible for happiness or unhappiness, no matter how much it may appear to be. In the last analysis, it is always the attitude to the event that determines its effect on you. An objectively favorable and even desired event may, by dint of your inner attitude and due to certain unrecognized concepts, be frightening and unwelcome. ... The same holds true for the opposite alternative. An objectively favorable event may be emotionally welcome and appear as a solution to a problem. Observation of this fact is very important.

Resistance

It cannot be stressed enough that your attitude to yourself is what counts. It will make this work easier and more successful in a shorter time if you learn to take yourself less seriously; with a sense of humor... He who has the courage to look himself squarely in the face, without flinching, but also without dramatizing his 'badness' is bound to like himself much better. This increases self-confidence and the 'inner permission to be happy'.

The same applies to ... negative feelings ... and your reactions in connection with them. ... The more constructive, realistic and reasonable your attitude to your negative emotions is, the less damage they will do. This proves that it is not so much these emotions themselves that are damaging, but your fearful, guilty, untruthful, exaggerating attitude about them! They have to be let out of your system. covering them up is emotional toxic poison and ruins your psychic blood stream. this can only be done by taking stock and finding their origins...

One may also resist to see something undesirable in others -- people one needs, loves, feels close to and whom one wants to respect. This blindness can easily be rationalized by claiming it is the strength of one's love. But true love is not, and does not need to be, blind. Perhaps it is fear of not being able to love and respect an imperfect creature. Or perhaps, there is fear of having to act, make changes, or confront the other person with one's perception about him. Repression of such perceptions creates disunity, unrest, feeling uncomfortable and ill at ease. Calmly facing what one perceives and, in the clear light of consciousness, confronting the issue, can never hurt others, the self or a relationship.

Resistance to facing an unpleasant truth -- for whatever reason -- means 'I act as though it does not exist, that will make it do away'. This childish magic does not work and has often the gravest consequences. The personality pays a heavy price for this self-deception, a price that could so easily be avoided.

Overcoming resistance is one of the most important aspects on this path, and one of the most rewarding. Without it, there can be no recognitions, no insight into yourself. ... With each new block before every new insight, resistance comes up and has to be recognized. ...It is important to remember that the stronger the resistance, the more vital the finding, and the greater the subsequent relief and enlightenment.

How can resistance be recognized? By a feeling of anxiety when certain questions or points are raised; by impatience, boredom, lack of concentration; the consistent desire to do something else, often less important; by tiredness the moment the work is approached, by consistently forgetting.

When the intent is uttered into the deep recesses of the self, when the creative forces within and around the self are instructed to help explore what ought to be recognized at this time, if it is truly meant that one wished to face oneself in utter truthfulness, the path must be a dynamic and most rewarding experience.

The lower self contains an unreasonable child, ignorant of what the rest of the personality, which has grown up, knows. It is important to allow this child to grow up. ... The child within always wants something for nothing. It wishes the advantages of adulthood, with all its freedom and, simultaneously, it wants the advantages of childhood -- freedom from self-responsibility. Naturally, these unjustified demands are hidden. ... But does this child want to grow up? Most certainly not. It somehow hopes against hope that its utopia is possible. Changing and fulfilling what seems like difficult demands life makes is unwelcome. Hence, resistance.

Resistance also exists because a cluster of destructive attitudes is thought to be a protection and is held on to for that reason. If change is enforced, anxiety becomes very great. ... Beware of the idea that you cannot possibly harbor such tendencies, merely because you are now unaware of them.

Daily Review

[The Daily Review is one of the most important tools for this work. ... It enlists the creative intelligence within yourself to help in affecting a harmonious growing process and the dissolution of blockages and resistances.]

Each day contains certain events or incidents calling forth reactions in you. To become aware of, comprehend, and note these reactions is of utmost importance. Review the day and determine which incidence or occurrence has caused unpleasant feelings. Look at them, instead of pushing them away, hoping that the negative feelings will pass.

You will begin to notice little disturbances, hurts and disappointments, things you habitually disregarded.

For the moment, it is not even important that you analyze these instances as to their deeper significance. Just consistently register your reactions in a notebook -- every day, again and again. Note 'felt anxious at such and such an opportunity. Do not know why', or 'registered anger at so and so because I was not put in the first place'.

When you ponder over an accumulation of days, in which you took notice of your reactions, you will undoubtedly find a recurrent pattern. ... Mental, emotional and spiritual 'hygiene' liken the daily review to a cleansing process of all personality levels. This cleansing process is just as important for the psyche as for the body. ... It prevents self-deception, pretense, repression -- with their tension and anxiety, their confusion and impaired life experience. It heightens awareness of self, therefore, later, of others and of all that comes to pass.

Even confusions should be concisely formulated so that it can be exactly pinpointed what the confusion is. This is one of the major steps towards eliminating the confusion.

When you begin your daily review, it might be a good idea, occasionally, to ask yourself what worries you generally in life, what problems do you feel are difficult or even impossible to cope with. Observe the situation, and your reactions, from day to day.

The work proceeds, the nature of the daily review changes -- you now observe different aspects, become concerned with other facets of yourself and your life. No life process remains static and this path is a very dynamic real life process.

It is very important to understand that the path follows a spiral movement. Without experiencing this, you might easily misunderstand and be discouraged, believing that you are going around in circles. But when you return to the original phase with deeper and new understanding, you will know that you were not in an unproductive circle, bringing you around to the same point, without having gained something essential. The same sequence will follow again and again, in forever narrowing circles, the same lesson learned on deeper levels of the personality, until the various phases converge into One Point, in which all things meet -- and find solution.

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Techniques for Constructive Confrontation For Self-Led Groups

1. It is important for all members to be familiar with the concepts for Constructive Confrontation. These are found in Chapter 5 of the Path to the Real Self by Eva Pierrakos, and also within handouts from the Pathwork Teachers Helper. Copies may be obtained from students in the Pathwork Transformation Program or the the Pathwork in Australia office.
2. This technique needs to be real, not just a theoretical exercise, just like process work needs to be grounded in reality rather than ‘what if?’ statements and ideas. The starting point is for a group member to express that they feel they have been triggered by another group member. This could be a single reaction that feels important to resolve, or it could be a sense that there is a deeper issue that results in multiple small reactions which, in themselves, don’t seem to amount to much.
3. One group member needs to declare that they would like to engage in a Constructive Confrontation process. They will need to name the group member they would like to work with, and ask the other if they are willing to engage. If the other member does not feel able to engage, there may be others in the group who may also trigger reactions and feelings who might be willing to engage. It is important for everyone to feel safe, even if that means that the process must be delayed.
4. Once there are two people who are willing, if there are enough members in the group it is useful to change seating positions so that each member participating feels supported by another group member, who will attempt to assist if needed. Any additional group members may act as objective observers.
5. The person who brought the issue up speaks first. They declare the facts from their point of view. It is important at this stage not to work with feelings, but only with their reality.
6. The other person speaks their reality, their point of view.
7. If there are any disagreements at this point, they need to be resolved. All members may offer their observations – but not any interpretations. For instance, if Mary thought John walked out of the room abruptly and made an interpretation about why he did so and what he was feeling, the first thing to verify is the John did walk out of the room, and that there was some quality that could be identified as abrupt. This step will feel frustrating because what we really want to do is state our ‘case’ rather than find out what happened. That is the precise reason for doing this in stages – to harness the need to express our reactions and to find out the underlying realities. Sometimes, just taking this step will resolve the specific issue, and allow the group to work on underlying projections, transference, and displacement of feelings.
8. Once the facts have been agreed upon, the next step is to put forward any interpretations. The purpose of this step is not to relieve our tensions or show that we are right: it is to see if what made us angry or upset was actually contributed by the other party, or whether we are projecting something onto them. The first party speaks first, then the second, and then other group members may offer based upon their actual experience – their interpretations of the actual event, not their interpretations of how either party created their interpretations.
9. At any point, if feelings become strong, a time out or a pause might be needed. Avoid the urge to problem solve, discuss or relieve the tension. It takes a lot of courage to address an emotional situation, and only a few seconds to dissipate the energy.
10. For the third round we may finally allow each party to express their feelings. It is possible that at this point the issue may already have been resolved, and that underlying feelings – towards life, towards parents or authorities, or one’s own lack of confidence or insecurities – may be obvious. In effect, sometimes our reactions are actually about a specific person or incident, but most often they are not.

This technique is just an outline of one way of allowing a self-led group to work with emotional reactions and confrontations by containing the emotions and stepping through a process in order to find the truth of their own feelings.

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