

Pathwork™ Steps

Facing the Lower Self

Quotes from Chapter 6 of The Undefended Self by Susan Thesenga

Facing the Lower Self

We all have secret places of shame, childish beliefs in our ‘badness’. We all have real adult guilt for our sins of omission or commission. We are tempted to disown or justify our negativity.

The moment at which we acknowledge our own Lower Self is a sacred moment that marks a turning point in our spiritual healing. Our pride yields, our heart opens. When we consciously embrace the evil that lives within us, our truthful acknowledgement heals our unhappiness at its source: our spiritual alienation from God.

What is the Lower Self?

The Lower Self is the creative center of our negative attitudes and feelings towards self and others, arising out of our egocentric separateness from the totality of life. It is our defense against pain, our numbness to feeling, our disconnection from ourselves and from other people. And it is the negativity we act out as a result of this numbness.

What is Evil?

We normally reserve the word ‘evil’ for negativity that is extreme and ‘or consciously chosen. Yet when we repress our awareness of our own capacity for evil, we remain split within ourselves. The Lower Self is the dark side of the life force, whether manifesting as a Hitler or as a minor act of thoughtlessness in an otherwise evolved personality.

Denial of the Lower Self

The denial of the Lower Self in human beings is at least as powerful a force as the denial of death; sometimes it is even stronger. People have chosen suicide rather than face some truthful but negative revelations about themselves that have become public, threatening their reputations and self-esteem.

The need to work with the Lower Self does not disappear as we become more identified with the Higher Self. In fact, the stronger our experience of the Higher Self, the more important the purification of the Lower Self becomes.

Three Aspects of the Lower Self: Pride, Self-Will, and Fear

Pride, self-will and fear are the crux of the lower self. Each of these attitudes is a different form of denial and therefore even more dangerous to the soul than more overt forms of evil.

Pride says we are better than others so we have a right to our self-importance and specialness. “He who feels the humiliation of another person less than his own still have too much pride.” pgl 30 The antidotes to pride are honest self-confrontation and humble self-acceptance out of which real self-esteem comes.

Self-will says we must get what we want when we want it, thereby justifying our egotism: ‘I want what I want when I want it’. Self-will is distinct from free will, which is simply the capacity of the entity to choose, to direct, to activate. Self-will occurs when free will is used in the service of the little self, the limited ego consciousness, in an attempt to control others and life.

Fear says we must protect ourselves so anything we feel we need to do for our own defense is justified. The attitude of fear says ‘I will not trust’, and often also ‘if I am not special, or do not get my way, then something terrible will happen’. Fear both supports and results from the attitudes of pride and self-will. Fear keeps us restricted within the narrow boundaries of the little ego-self. The attitude of fear often makes us justify negative thoughts and acts which we never face directly because we are lost in the disorientation caused by fear. We need to bring the attitude of fear to the surface and understand the refusal to trust.

What the Lower Self is NOT

Anger is a natural human emotion. It is an alarm bell in our psyche that signals that something is wrong in ourselves or in our environment. Anger helps us act, move, change,. Without it we would lack the willingness to stand up for ourselves and for others who are being treated badly.

It is always healthier to feel our anger than to repress it. Repressed anger will always be acted out in some indirect and inevitably more negative way. Anger becomes an expression of the lower self only when it is used to hurt or destroy.

Lower Self Anger

Anger is an expression of the Lower Self only when its intent turns from simple self-assertion to a desire to hurt, punish, or destroy. Anger that is expressed violently or allowed to fester into hatred or revenge is always an expression of the Lower Self.

Uncovering the Lower Self

The Lower Self is a dangerous, exciting, and scary terrain for most of us. It is both repellent and attractive. While we find violence repugnant, it nonetheless fascinates us.

The Lower Self operates in our lives through our images that distort reality and justify our negativity. The defenses of Pride, Self-Will and Fear keep us trapped within a narrowly egotistic self-definition that further rationalizes our disconnection from others.

If we are not aware of how the Lower Self operates in our outer lives, our dream life and our fantasies may reveal our shadow side.

The Creative Power of the Lower Self

Evil is not a separate force in the universe. Evil is merely a distortion of the one great creative force of the universe. Meeting and embracing evil is the only way to redirect its 'energy current' back to its pure origin.

Transformation of the Lower Self is essentially the release of an ugly, congealed mass of soul substance back into its flowing essence.

Origins of the Lower Self

In any particular lifetime, the Lower Self is activated by negative experiences in childhood, especially with the parents. Both the Lower Self and the Mask are brought into existence by the soul's attempt to resist or escape painful experience, which is inherent in the duality of the human condition.

Neither the expression of grief or anger is accepted by our parents; hence, we learn to suppress our spontaneous feelings. And then we try to figure out a more acceptable way to act which will avoid future pain. Eventually, we become numb to our real feelings. And we vow – often without being aware that we have done so – to hurt others in revenge, often with our own misery as the weapon.

The Innate Lower Self of the Child

When the Child first begins to differentiate itself from parents and caregivers and to exercise separate power, the Lower Self shows itself in the form of unreasonable demands to be the constant center of attention, to have all needs met immediately, and to try to control other and the environment at all times.

The Pathwork Guide calls this the 'mass image of self-importance' which is a universal human expression of the Lower Self. Because most souls do not outgrow childish self-centeredness, the whole world can sound like an out-of-control preschool class to more evolved spirits.

Karma and the Lower Self

Each incarnation is only a fragment of the journey of the soul through many lifetimes. The Lower Self is then seen as a cumulative creation, resulting from every negative choice we have made in all the lifetimes we have lived on earth. Every time we have chosen fear or revenge or numbness over love and courage and connection, we have frozen a piece of our soul. This contracted life energy is the lower self of the soul.

The Origin of Evil

The Pathwork Guide sees human beings as part of the cosmic matter created when some of God chose to separate from the rest of God. Self-identification with its separateness led this part of God into duality and evil. We are on a journey of self-discovery toward conscious reunion with God, our true essence.

Religious myths and perspectives

The Guide generally uses the personalized myths and metaphors of Western Christianity to describe the universal process of separation and return. For each individual, the cosmology that best resonates with personal experience will offer the most useful model.

Original sin really means the imperfections inherent in our human nature as a result of the original choice to separate our consciousness from God consciousness. The awareness of original sin is simply awareness of our

alienation from the whole. Stories and myths are one way of trying to personify our original choice to leave unitive consciousness.

Some religions do not talk about evil, and see the human ego as part of that consciousness which has separated from the whole. They suggest that we have chosen to explore separation or evil simply because it exists as a possible choice.

The Pathwork Perspective

Human life is seen as a school of purification for the soul, as if journeys through lifetimes, creating and then freeing itself of Karma, the results of our negative, limited self-identifications, and learning to re-identify with our divine essence.

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Pathwork Steps

The Higher Self, The Lower Self, and The Mask

Worksheet for Lecture 14

Full text of this lecture available for download at www.pathwork.org

1. The Higher Self is sometimes known as the Spiritual level of a Human Being. The Higher Self holds a person's positive intention, the knowledge of their life task. Have you any sense of your Higher Self? Was there a particular occasion, or is there a particular area of your current life, where you feel that you have a sense of your Higher Self?

If you have not or do not now have such a sense, try this exercise: Find a comfortable position, slowly relax and allow the details of the day to drift away. Focus your attention upon your heart. Allow your heart to speak to you about a moment, a time, or an event when it felt expansive, full and safe. Stay in that feeling place for a while.

When you feel that you have fully re-experienced that moment, time or event, move your attention slightly to one side of your heart. This will activate your Observer Self, a useful tool for examining thoughts and feelings without fully disconnecting from them.

Allow your Observer Self to tell you what was going on during this experience. What prompted these warm, loving feelings? Are they familiar feelings or have you never observed them before? Can you relate these feelings to others in your life experiences?

Honest, warm, loving feelings are an indication that the Higher Self has been activated. It takes a bit of experience to learn to recognise the Higher Self, because it doesn't cry out for attention or create a fuss when it's around! If you have managed to touch into an experience of your Higher Self, observe in the next few days where and when it shows up - or even if it does not. The act of searching for our Higher Self is actually an act **of** the Higher Self. *The act of searching for the Lower Self is also an act of the Higher Self.*

The lower self does not only consist of the common faults, the individual weaknesses that vary with each person, but also of ignorance, laziness. It hates to change and to conquer itself; it has a very strong will (that may not always manifest outside) and wants its way without paying the price; it is very proud and selfish; it has always a great deal of personal vanity, the ego with all its manifestations. All these characteristics are generally part of the lower self regardless of other individual faults. (pgl 014p1)

2. Can you find examples or aspects of your life that may be influenced by your Lower Self? How do you feel about these? Have you become accustomed to them, just ignoring them and hoping for the best, or do you struggle against them?

The Lower Self can be tricky. It can encourage laziness and hopelessness in order not to be closely examined and identified. It can also encourage acrimony, argument, ill will and anger, which while active and energetic can also be futile, because the negativity of the attempted 'solutions' actually feeds the negative intention of the Lower Self.

When a person recognises that he may get in conflict with his surroundings by giving in to his lower self, he may nevertheless not be ready to take the consequences by paying the price in eliminating the lower self, which means, first of all, to face the lower self as it really is, with all its motives and drives. For you can only conquer something of which you are fully aware. This means taking the narrow path, the spiritual path. Many people do not want to think that far. They react emotionally without even thinking about it. And the so-called subconscious feels it is necessary to present a different picture of the self in order to avoid certain difficulties, unpleasantness, or disadvantages of all sorts. Thus they create this other layer of self that has nothing to do with reality, neither with the reality of the higher self, nor with the temporary reality of the lower self. It is what you might call "phoney"; it is false, it is unreal. (pgl 014p2)

3. Can you find areas of your life where you are phoney, unreal? consider a particular incident. What were your honest feelings? What different feelings did you present? Why?

4. Can you detect when others are 'in their Mask'? How do you feel when you interact with them?

To lie to oneself, it is often sufficient not to think about one's emotions and true motives at all, but merely to let the emotions react without thinking. (pgl 014p3)

5. Can you observe unconscious Mask actions in others using this description? Can you find any parts of yourself where you allow yourself to react with thinking?

Reactions are feelings that are stronger than the situation warrants; they are knee-jerk responses, a re-enactment to a past event where similar feelings were repressed and not resolved.

He who wants to become happy, healthy, and at peace with oneself, he who wants to fulfil his life truly, he who wants to be in harmony with God and thus with oneself has to realise once and for all -- what is the actual me? What is my higher self? What is my lower self? And where may there be a mask, a falsehood? (pgl 014p3)

It is important for all of you to try to train your inner eye to see yourselves and other human beings from that point of view. The more you become spiritually awake, the easier it will be for you to perceive yourselves and others from that point of view. You will feel when you come into contact with the higher self a very distinct difference with the mask self once your intuition has awakened also in this respect through your personal spiritual development. You will nauseatingly feel the manifestations of the mask self (first of all, your own, of course), pleasantly as it may present itself. (pgl 014p3)

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THE HIGHER SELF, THE LOWER SELF, AND THE MASK

Quotes from Pathwork Guide Lecture No. 14

Full text of this plus all other lectures may be downloaded at www.pathwork.org

You know that man's thoughts have definite spiritual forms, but not only thoughts create such forms, but also feelings. For a feeling is really nothing else but "unthought thought," thought that is not made conscious.

The aura of the physical body shows physical sickness, or health, or any and all states of the physical being, while emotional, intellectual, or spiritual reactions show in the aura of the respective subtle body.

The aim of spiritual development is to eliminate the lower self so that the higher self becomes free again of all layers it has acquired.

The lower self does not only consist of the common faults, the individual weaknesses that vary with each person, but also of ignorance, laziness. It hates to change and to conquer itself; it has a very strong will (that may not always manifest outside) and wants its way without paying the price; it is very proud and selfish; it has always a great deal of personal vanity, the ego with all its manifestations. All these characteristics are generally part of the lower self regardless of other individual faults. But there are many shades, many possibilities in which the lower self can display these general trends contained in it. And this depends on various other factors, for instance, on the personal faults which can take a different effect on these common traits of the lower self, also on the good qualities, as well as on various other circumstances, all of which together influence the outer manifestation, intensity, degree, and direction these general trends may take.

This mask self is created in the following way. When a person recognizes that he may get in conflict with his surroundings by giving in to his lower self, he may nevertheless not be ready to take the consequences by paying the price in eliminating the lower self, which means, first of all, to face the lower self as it really is, with all its motives and drives. For you can only conquer something of which you are fully aware. This means taking the narrow path, the spiritual path. Many people do not want to think that far. They react emotionally without even thinking about it. And the so-called subconscious feels it is necessary to present a different picture of the self in order to avoid certain difficulties, unpleasantness, or disadvantages of all sorts. Thus they create this other layer of self that has nothing to do with reality, neither with the reality of the higher self, nor with the temporary reality of the lower self. It is what you might call "phoney"; it is false, it is unreal.

In other words, the right act is entirely unsupported because of unpurified feelings, and therefore the person is at war with himself. The proper act becomes an act of necessary compulsion instead of a freely chosen one. This is not paying the price in the real sense.

And after a while, the evil root will sink into the subconscious where it will ferment, create its forms that have their effect, and it cannot be eliminated when one is unaware of it consciously.

When people are emotionally sick, it is always in one way or another that a mask self has been created. They do not realize that they are living a lie.

Do not fool yourself if you still act according to "necessity" and not out of enlightened vision and inner conviction.

And in order to reach it, you must face first your lower self, your temporary reality, instead of covering it up, because that puts an even greater distance between you and absolute reality or your own higher self. And in order to face the lower self, you must at all costs tear down the mask self.

We even prefer the emanation and effects of the lower self, unpleasant as it may be for us. But at least it is honest.

You will feel when you come into contact with the higher self a very distinct difference with the mask self once your intuition has awakened also in this respect through your personal spiritual development.

This happens when the doctor has succeeded to tear down this mask self and the patient is in front of his lower self. The patient may be so shattered by this experience that he breaks down completely; he may give up the help; and it may even have more serious consequences. On the other hand, if this person would be told what I am telling you here and thus be prepared what to expect, so much hardship and often even tragedy could be avoided. If a patient knew that he has to face the lower self that exists in each human being but that this lower self, unpleasant as it may be, is not the ultimate I or true self, but that the higher self, which is perfection, is waiting to grow out of these layers of imperfection, then this shock would never occur. And therefore this knowledge is important for your psychologists and doctors of all kinds, as well as for all teachers, parents, etc. It would help a great deal.

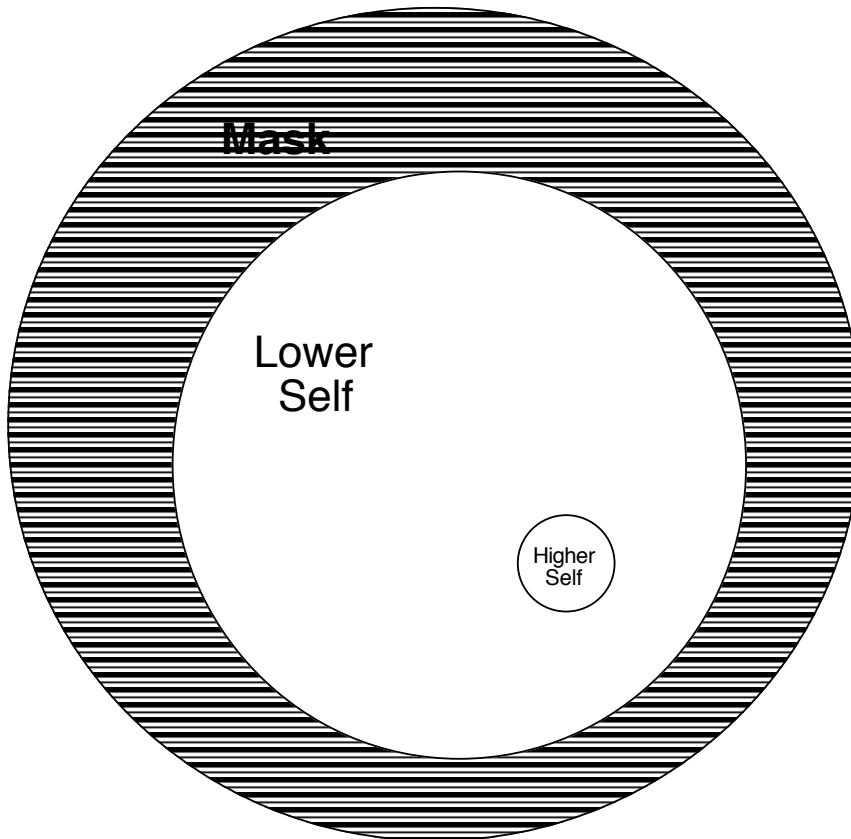
No, you should be aware that you act according to necessity and your own convenience, while your feelings are still unpurified and not always in accordance with your outer actions, provided you cannot or will not do the necessary work in order to purify yourself.

Thus the lower self really has to be met and completely explored. Your aim must be purification and perfection for its own sake, for the love to God you have in you, and not for the sake of not having to bear a discomfort.

So, begin by meeting your lower self, in courage, in optimism, in humility, and in a spirit of warfare, if I may use this expression.

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C.O.R.E. = Center of right essence

Mask and Lower Self seek to protect the Higher Self from pain or harm and are not able to be present in the moment. They react from history.

The Mask identifies with the Idealized Self Image (ISI).

The Lower Self identifies with our own Negative Intentionality, Negative Specialists, and the Lower Selves of others.

The Higher Self identifies with the God Sphere and Divine Universality.

Chart by Jan Rigsby: 2003
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Personality Defenses

Interlocked Triads

<i>Lecture #</i>	<i>Origin</i>	<i>Reason Type:</i>	<i>Will Type:</i>	<i>Love Type:</i>
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
30	Evil Intent	Pride	Self-Will	Fear
43	Type	Reason	Will	Emotion
83	ISI	Serenity	Power	Love
84	Lower Self	Withdrawal	Aggression	Submission
43	Higher Self	Wisdom	Courage	Love
248	Negative Intentionality	Materialism	Separation	Half-Truths

Ways of searching for your primary personality type defense:

1. Complete the following questions over and over: Which one do you tend to identify most with? Which answers have more charge for you? Write down your answers and see what commonality they might have. No one is a pure type, and these terms are only tools if they are useful.

Pride says, "I'm better than..."
 Self-Will says, "I must have..."
 Fear says, "I'm afraid of..."

2. Make a list of your faults. The answers to question #1 may help you, also Lecture #26, "Finding Your Faults". Consider at least 2 different kinds of faults: the qualities that you judge as faults and the qualities that others judge as faults.

Looking at the chart above, what words match or resonate with each of the faults you have listed?

What personality type (or mixture) seems most dominant?

3. Try to find the evil intent, ISI or lower self distortion in each of your faults. Lecture #30, Pride Self-Will and Fear, can be useful here; and also Lecture #248, The Three Principles of Evil.

Look for the divine aspects in each fault, from the Higher Self. What are your positive qualities? Look to what you have manifested that is beautiful, harmonious, of value to others and to your community, or which you personally value even though there may not be any recognition of it by others?

Personality types shift during our lifetimes. Can you see a shift during yours? Were you more of a reason type at 17, a will type at 35, will emotion now? Since the goal is balance, how might the 'type' that you are now be counter-balancing the 'type' you were 20 years ago?

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THE CONCEPT OF EVIL

Quotes from Pathwork Guide Lecture No. 134

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Evil is, or results from, numbness and a confusion about the execution of control. Why is evil numbness? ... Numbness is also a protection against its own contradictory responses, impulses, and reactions. Under such circumstances, this might even be a salvation. But when such numbness has become second nature and is maintained long after the circumstances have changed, and when the personality is no longer a helpless child, in the smallest measure it is the beginning of evil, and this is how evil is born.

Numbness and insensitivity towards one's own pain in turn means equal numbness and insensitivity towards others. When examining one's reactions closely, one might often observe that the first spontaneous reaction to others is a feeling for and with them, a compassion or empathy, a participation of the soul. But the second reaction restricts this emotional flow. Something clicks inside and seems to say no. ... The numbness, instituted for oneself, must be continued towards others just as every attitude towards the self is bound to expand towards others.

We might differentiate three stages of numbness. First is the numbness towards the self as protective mechanism. The second is the numbness towards others. In this stage, it is a passive attitude of indifference. ...Just because it is less crass, in the long run it is more harmful, for active cruelty induces quicker counterreactions. Passive indifference, however, born out of numbness of feelings, can look on for a long time and go by unnoticed because it can so easily be camouflaged. ... Indifference may not be as actively evil as committed cruelty, but it is as harmful in the long run.

The third stage is one of actively inflicting cruelty. This stage comes about due to fear of others who seem to expect such acts; or due to an inability to cope with pent-up rages; or due to a subtle process of strengthening the protective device of numbness. Offhand, this may appear incomprehensible. But when you think of it deeply, you will find that man may occasionally, almost consciously, stand on the brink of a decision: "Either I allow my feelings to reach out in participation with the other, or, in order to refuse this strong influx of warm feelings, I have to behave in the exact opposite way." The next moment, such reasoning is gone, the conscious decision forgotten, and what remains is a compelling force towards cruel acts.

In all these instances, it can be seen again and again how all harm, all destructiveness, all evil, results from the denial of the spontaneous real self, substituting secondary reactions which in one way or another are always connected with fear. The borderline between passive numbness and active infliction of cruelty is often a very thin and precarious one, very much dependent upon apparently outer circumstances.

When active cruelty is committed, it is an increased numbing process, prohibiting not only the influx of spontaneous positive feelings, but it also is supposed to ward off fear and guilt. The

active deed of inflicting pain on others simultaneously kills off one's own ability to feel. Hence, it is a stronger device to attain numbness.

There must always be a differentiation between the active deeds -- of either indifference or cruelty -- or the existence of these trends in the emotional reactions. Even the indifference or numbness may not actively be executed. ... Confusing the impulse with the deed and therefore denying both, results in extreme disturbance of the self, and therefore indirectly affecting others, with no hope of change so long as the process remains unconscious.

Seen in this light, it will be clear that numbness, to its extreme and followed to its logical end, becomes active cruelty. The difference between these two is only one of degree. It is exceedingly important for you, my friends, to understand this. For he who is most shocked, afraid of, and unable to cope with the existing cruelty in the world, he who suffers most by the mere knowledge that it exists, is inevitably the person who has in some way made himself numb and suffers from the guilt of its consequences.

The second facet of evil is the question of control. ... The imbalance this creates induces rigidity where flexibility should exist, and a helpless loss of self where resilient firmness should prevail. All suffering occurs by dint of helplessness. The greater the helplessness, the less the personality is able to avoid pain. The helplessness continues to exist in the adult where his psyche has remained childish or immature. The trouble spots in one's inner life are always marked by this feeling of utter helplessness, while in the healthy areas, this feeling is absent. On a broader scale, helplessness is one of the most problematic aspects of mankind. The significance of this is vastly overlooked.

Man does not have any more control over the faculties of his inner body and psychic processes than he has over his life, nor does he have less. To the extent that he has found the key to his inner processes, to that extent has he found the key to the apparently fateful occurrences governing his life.

... suggestion for meditation. Let us combine the aspects discussed tonight: control through the inner being and giving up the unconscious deliberate numbness. The way to approach the relationship between the outer ego faculties of mind and will, and the inner being for the purpose of eliminating numbness might be the following: "My outer direct will faculties cannot reach those areas in which I have numbed my faculties of perception, of experience, of feeling, and of sensitivity. Therefore I wish to contact my inner being of higher intelligence and greater power than my outer mind, to take the necessary steps to defreeze these faculties, to bring them to life so that I will become a fully functioning human being. Wherever there is fear and misconception involved in this respect, I wish to understand them so that I may eliminate what stands in the way. It is the useless prohibitions I do not yet quite know which cause me to be only partially alive. I want to be fully alive. In order to bring this about, I contact the inner self to help eliminate obstructions, to bring to my consciousness what I need to know so that I will reawaken and live in the state of fulfillment, selfhood, and beauty."

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