

Reality and Illusion

Study Guide for Online Meetings on PL 71 Part 2 of 2

PL 71 explores how we attempt to escape reality by clinging to illusions. In The Four Fold Way, Angeles Arrien divides the personality into 4 different abilities: Warrior (being present), Healer (heart), Visionary (truth), and Teacher (non-attachment). The four Ways reflect a pervasive belief that life will be simple if we practice four basic principles:

Show up or choose to be present,
Pay attention to what has heart and meaning
Tell the truth without blame or judgment
Be open, rather than attached to, the outcome

Week 1: Telling the truth without blame or judgment

Week 2: Illusions and dualistic thinking

Week 3: Staying open to the outcome, not attached to it

Week 4: Concentration Exercises

Week 1: Telling the truth without blame or judgment

In order to tell the truth to others, we must first be able to tell the truth to ourselves. The next phase is to see through the illusion of duality. It can be useful to break this step up into 2 parts. First, learning to sense what the truth might actually be. After we have become comfortable with being able to access our inner truth, we may be able to examine how we hid behind blame and judgment. Jan

Blind Spots: Excerpt 1 of 3

It is likely that most of us overestimate our ethicality at some point or another. In effect, we are unaware of the gap between how ethical we think we are, and how ethical we truly are.

The notion that we experience gaps between who we believe ourselves to be and who we actually are is related to the problem of *bounded awareness*. Bounded awareness refers to the common tendency to exclude important and relevant information from our decisions so that our perceptions and decision making are constrained in ways we don't realize that favors our own self-interest at the expense of the interest of others.

To improve our ethical judgment, we need to understand and accept the limitations of the human mind. The ordinary thought processes humans use to categorize, perceive, and judge information can lead to systemic feelings and beliefs that can be labeled as prejudiced and stereotypical.

Explore your implicit preferences and receive feedback about the potential ways in which these might discriminate against others without your awareness, using the [Implicit Association Test](#), a free computer-based task.

Blind Spots: Why we fail to do what's right, and what to do about it

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Telling the truth:

The moment an individual is more bent on the truth than on proving his right, he contacts the divine principle of transcendent, unified truth. If the desire to be in truth is genuine, the inspiration must come forth. PL 143

This simple act of wanting the truth requires several factors, the most important of which is the willingness to relinquish what one holds on to -- whether this be a belief, a conviction, a fear, a cherished way of being. When I say relinquish, I merely mean questioning it and being willing to see that there is something else beyond this outlook and that conviction. PL 71

One origin of blame or judgment:

The greater the urgency to be loved, approved of, etc., due to your fear of loving, the more rigidly and tensely do you go about constructing illusory forms, so to speak, in the hope that this desire can be fulfilled. This can take place in a very subtle way and happens in many different forms.

For instance, if you desire very much to be loved by a specific person or if, very ardently, you just wish to impress a particular person, you will think up situations in which you see this wish gratified. Every favorable sign will be taken not in its reality value, but will be put into an illusory construction. Even if you actually obtain what you wish in love or admiration, you do not perceive it as it is really forthcoming in the particular personal flavor and atmosphere of the person involved. You cannot be satisfied with it in the long run because it does not live up to your idea of it.

Finally, what actually comes forth has to crumble as illusion. Unconsciously, you struggle against this as long as possible and strain even harder to maintain an illusion where none would be necessary. You constantly suspect that what actually is does not correspond to your idea of it, and therefore you feel yourself endangered. Every little indication of reality, clashing with your illusion, brings you a disappointment which in turn creates a hostility in you of which you are no more aware than of this entire process which I describe.

This hostility is bound to affect the other person so that he will react in such a way that your illusion cannot be maintained any longer. This will cause an all-black and subjective view in you. Hence, it is your urgency that causes the illusory construction, whereas in many cases no such construction would be necessary. Actually, it is never necessary because even if, for his own reason, the other person cannot respond to your desire, you would be better off to see it and let go.

But often you could obtain your wish, but only if you are in freedom, without urgency, and therefore without any unreal, preconceived constructions of situations, relationships, and reactions on the part of the other person. You would be able to adapt flexibly to the particular ways of the other person and would not find it necessary to mold him and the situation to your ideas.

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Blind Spots: Excerpt 2 of 3

In the midst of disagreements, we often fail to see eye to eye. Why? Because different people pay attention to different data. Specifically, we tend to first determine our preference for a certain outcome on the basis of self-interest, and then justify this preference on the basis of fairness, by altering the importance of the attributes that affect what is fair.

Before you accuse someone of being selfish, first try to consider the matter from their perspective. Our behavior is driven by details, not abstract principles.

Visceral responses can also be counterproductive. At the time of the decision, visceral responses lead to an inward focus dominated by short-term gains. Ethical considerations fade away. It is only later that we engage in moral reasoning.

When we remember details, we focus on times when we told the truth or stood up for our principles; meanwhile, we forget the lies we told or the times when we bowed under pressure [note: these may surface as ‘background thoughts’ ref PL 68].

[Watch [this video](#) and try to accurately count the passes among players wearing the white shirts before reading the article. <http://people.hbs.edu/mbazerman/blindspots-ethics/neisser.html>]

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Daily Review PL 28

Exercise: Keep a record of incidents that disturb you. Focusing upon subtleties may help us from becoming distracted by exaggerating or over-dramatizing a situation. Notice feelings of discomfort, where your suspect you may be uninformed, ignorant, unprepared, or unaware.

Every day, see if you can consciously practice sensing moments when you have the opportunity to:

Tell the truth (without blame or judgment when possible)

Stay open to the outcome, not attached to it

It is helpful to notice any physical sensations that accompany such moments. The body never lies, although the mind may have overlaid its own interpretations so often that it can be hard to differentiate the original energetic signals.

All you need is a ½ page of lined paper per day. Create 4 columns. At some point during each day, jot down brief notes about each incident (limit:10 per day). Eventually, this can become a thought process. The Guide refers to Daily Review as ‘spiritual hygiene’.

1. Two to three words to identify each incident (no details)
2. What feelings or emotional reactions came up
3. The judgments or conclusions you came to at the time

At the end of each week, read through your entries and complete the last column:

4. What do you notice today that you did not notice at the time? Are there patterns?
5. Using your preferred form of meditation (sitting, walking, or while doing 'mindless' chores) reflect upon your early childhood experiences.

What happened when you told ‘inconvenient truths’ about your experience of life and others?

Are the sensations you have identified now similar to sensations you felt when you were younger?

Week 2: Illusions and dualistic thinking

Lack of awareness and understanding breed duality. Duality causes opposites. Opposites bring suffering, pain, problems, conflict, confusion. The original confusion of ignoring the one-ness between God and man had to create further confusion. It can hardly create clarity, truth, peace.

Duality is experienced in many aspects. It embraces the large issues of life, as well as seemingly lesser ones. The great opposites are: life and death; good and bad; right and wrong; happiness and unhappiness; love and selfishness; light and darkness; truth and falsehood; pleasure and pain; peace and fear. Out of these essential aspects of living, which are split into opposites, man has fashioned the concept of God and the Devil. Two opposing people, or forces, are experienced, each symbolizing one half of the duality.

In mankind's immaturity, it has attempted to solve, or rather avoid, this struggle by dogma. Depth of understanding, attained through truthful self-confrontation and discrimination, eliminates the split of a truth. It comprehends that two opposites can both be right and desirable, each in its own circumstances. It avoids rigid judgment and the exclusiveness of either this, or that, both being incomplete and dissatisfactory. Man is confronted by this difficulty and frustration, by the puzzle of a seemingly insoluble struggle as long as he is tempted by laziness and dependency on others. These reasons induce him to learn right conduct by heart, like a book of rules one memorizes.

The better he is able to assume self-responsibility, the more concern he will have for and receive from others. The more he gives up the little self-will, putting it aside for the more superior will of his real self to manifest, the more independence and strength he must have. He has thus transcended the duality, finding that hitherto contradictory principles not only cease to contradict one another, but complement and strengthen one another.

PRS25

As you learn to understand your emotions, you will evaluate the outer happenings in a different way. These outer happenings are real in their occurrence, but, up to now, the importance you attached to them (at least, emotionally) was unreal. Think of the example I cited before. So is it with everything else.

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Blind Sports: Except 3 of 3

The video from Week 1 / Excerpt 2 ([watching basketball players](#)) demonstrates how, when we are focusing closely on one task – in this case, counting passes – people miss very obvious information in their visual world.

Motivated Blindness

We are not only blind to our own unethical actions but also to the unethicality of those around us. The motivation to remain blind to the unethical behavior of others comes at us in many forms, including fear, incentives, organizational loyalty, and organizational culture. To behave more ethically, we need to remove our blinders and examine the effect of these forces on our judgment.

Our unethical behavior often occurs on a slippery slope. We excuse ourselves for committing one tiny infraction and then allow ourselves to commit increasingly unethical infractions as time passes.

Behavioral ethics research shows that people also commonly fail to notice the slippery slope of *others'* unethical behavior.

Interventions for improving ethical behavior

The answer lies in part in aligning the gap between your *'want'* and *'should'* selves. We tend to predict that we will behave as we think we *should* behave, but at the time of the decision, we behave how we *want* to behave.

To make matters worse, when we reflect back on the decision, we tend to believe that we acted as we thought we *should* have. Because we distort our recall of decisions to make us feel better about any unethical behavior we may have committed, our reflections aren't accurate. To make ethical decisions, you need to recognize your vulnerability to your own unconscious biases. If you don't you won't be aware of your own blind spots.

Learning to think before acting, in more reflective and analytical ways, would help us move toward the ideal image we hold of ourselves. Doing so entails being prepared for the hidden psychological forces that crop up before, during, and after we confront ethical dilemmas."

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Forcing Currents Part 1 of 3

The "favorable" signs, fitting into your constructions, are overvalued. They produce more joy than reality warrants, not because the other person dislikes you, but because his reaction is just different. You are in unreality because you can rejoice only if what happens fits into your construction.

On the other hand, when it cannot, your crushing disappointment is equally unrealistic. In order to realize all this, you would have to begin by becoming aware of the many little disappointments of which you do not allow yourself to be conscious.

Objectivity and subjectivity which we discussed last time is also one phase of reality versus unreality. It is necessary for you to understand that your subjectivity, and therefore unreality, is created by you through the strong and urgent need of having your illusion nourished.

This urgent need for illusion comes from the forcing current of the child in you that must have everything his own way. All this is so subtle, my friends, so do not be deceived by a superficial right reaction. Think of where your problems are in life; discover your emotions in connection with them; and then try to find this current or condition in you. You are bound to find it, for it must be in you also.

To the degree that you learn to give up this forcing current and become free of a great inner tension, to that degree will you be free to receive something.

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Week 3: Staying open to the outcome, not attached to it

Emotional pain is a function of the brain rather than an external reality, insisting that we change something. Since the message is not in English, we must interpret it.

“We can become hyper-vigilant to signals in our body that keep us trapped in a vicious cycle of pain” (David Kessler, [The Epidemic We Failed to Foresee](#)) when we focus exclusively upon alleviating pain.

Being present, paying attention, and learning to tell the truth must be practiced before staying open becomes a natural, relaxed state. Jr

As you progress in this particular direction on the path, you will also see that whenever you do not get what you want (and you will not get it all the time), it will not cause you half the distress and despair it caused you heretofore.

But, as I said, first you have to become aware that in not getting your way, be it in outer things or be it regarding other people's reactions towards you, you have felt disappointment. And you have to see what this unconscious disappointment made you do. Only then can you give up this forcing current, thereby giving up the contrived illusions, thereby being free to receive real value, or, if not receiving it, discovering that it is not half as tragic as the child in you thinks.

The difficulty here is that in your intellect you will readily agree with what I say. And because you can agree, you are likely to overlook the urgency of your very contradictory emotions as they manifest inwardly and not, necessarily always, outwardly. It is sufficient that they exist inwardly.

In this predicament, you have an unreal picture of other people since you are tempted to increase their value if they please you and to decrease their value if they do not. The picture you have of them is not unreal because what you emphasize in each specific mood is necessarily wrong. It is unreal because of your real motive in seeing the other person's good or bad side rather strongly. And it is unreal because, in each specific instance, the overall coloring in which you perceive the whole person is tainted and one-sided. When you see the good, due in part to subjective reasons, you will possibly see what is really good in him. On the other hand, when you see the bad, you will possibly see what is really bad in him. But in each case, either you will feel the other person good or feel him bad.

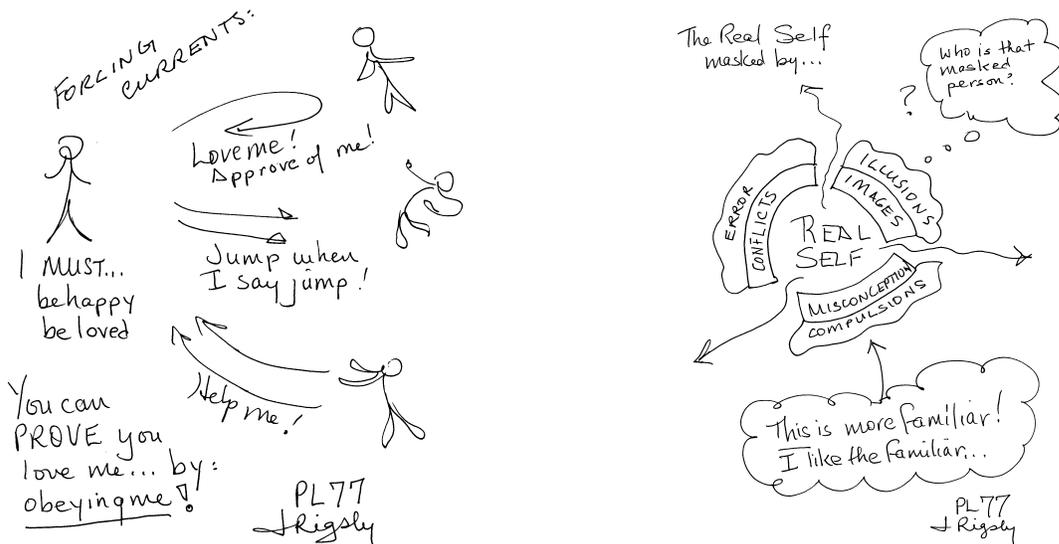
You also have an unreal idea of the importance that the reactions of others or incidents have on you. Again, intellectually you may know better, but emotionally, at this moment, this incident is of disproportionate importance to you.

Hence, you do not see reality with respect to the quality of people, nor, to the quality of occurrences and happenings. And last but not least, you are in unreality because your concept of time-quality is false when your childish emotions are involved without your awareness.

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Forcing Currents Part 2 of 3

From Self Confidence PL 77; the energy of Forcing Currents vs. that of the Real Self.



Self Confidence PL 77

Excerpt from 'Our Third Year' by Reverend Steven Greenebaum

I was rather startled, as a teenager, to be introduced to a rationale for judging others that had frankly never occurred to me. I spent a weekend with other teens participating in what was called a spiritual “encounter group.” It was a fascinating experience for many reasons. But the one that smacked me in the face and has vividly stayed with me over all these years came at one of our last sessions. A member of our group admitted to being prejudiced. He wasn’t happy about it. But he wasn’t ready to put it behind him either. In all honesty, I can no longer remember what group he was feeling “superior” to, but I do remember asking him, “Since you know it’s wrong, can’t you let go of it?”

He looked straight at me, and with no little anguish as well as passion said, “No! I have to feel that I’m better than *somebody*.”

You could have knocked me over with that proverbial feather. He felt so small. He felt so insignificant. I doubt I was familiar with the term “self-worth” in those days, but clearly, for a reason I couldn’t fathom, he felt all but worthless. Singling out a “them” who were by definition less than he, gave him a feeling of self-worth that he otherwise lacked. As I got older, and had more opportunities to study the world around me as well as history, I realized he was not alone. One important factor in our willingness to judge others is our own insecurity, our deep and relentless doubts about our own value as human beings. Judging others gives us power and a feeling of worthiness. It’s nothing to be laughed at, or sneered at. It’s real, it’s more prevalent than we may realize, and we need to understand it. I think it plays an important role in the, “I may be a failure, but God loves ME. ME and not you!”

Full text at <http://livinginterfaith.org/?p=452>

Forcing Currents Part 3 of 3

In connection with the negative side as far as the self-dramatization is concerned, I would say that you build up your situation to appear so bad and thereby try to force others to sympathize with you, to pay attention to you, to do your will or to side with you against those who do not. All this can be done ever so subtly, and, again, it needs utter self-honesty to recognize the emotions in this respect. Even if you manage not to show it, still the voice exists deep down in you that says, "Look at poor little me, how I suffer, how unfairly I am treated, how absolutely miserable everything is." Or conversely, "Look how bad I am. By recognizing my wickedness, I show you how honest I am so that you will give me the admiration I want." This dramatization can take many forms, but it is always a form of exaggeration in order to enhance self-importance, whether openly or hidden.

It will be of great value for all of you, my friends, who work on this path to find this particular aspect of your world of illusion -- where, how, and in what way you dramatize yourself and what is behind it. Then ask your emotions further: "What is the aim? Do I really believe it is as bad as all that, whatever it may have been?"

If you search diligently, you will always find a personal slight, something that has not gone according to your will, something that the child in you considers a disappointment.

How then does the absence of this forcing current bring you into reality and thereby into a more secure state of happiness and serenity? If this forcing current is absent, you are bound to experience -- provided you are certain of yourself -- that the disapproval, if it actually exists, is but an illusory hurt.

And you cannot be certain of yourself so long as there is the child in you with all its selfishness, egocentricity, one-sidedness, and unfair demands. Thus you are in a vicious circle. Disapproval strikes a chord in you because something knows deep down that, no matter how unfounded the criticism in this case, you yourself criticize your lack of courage to help mature the child in you.

With the forcing current removed, you will see all that. Therefore what used to be a hurt will cease to be one. What once in a while may actually be a disappointment will not be half as despairing as it used to be and still is. Thus you have gained true insight and therefore the freedom that only the approach to reality can bring.

Without the forcing current, you will not need to daydream fixed situations. Therefore you will be flexible and face up to what is and will not be disappointed if it were different from what your daydreams spun for you. Therefore you will not create hostility in yourself. And therefore the other person will feel your openness in this respect, and a spontaneous, free reality situation can slowly grow.

If you truly understand the deeper meaning of these words, you will perhaps understand and somewhat experience what the term reality actually means.

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Week 4: Concentration exercises PL 71

A valuable outer help as an addition to the inner requirements of analysis of your emotions in order to change those concepts which are not in accord with truth or reality. This additional step is a great help, provided it is not done instead of the inner work. This is another approach to living in the now.

1. Concentrate on a state of nonthinking (by various methods which can be used), but not nonthinking by letting your thoughts float away in a haze of vague background thoughts, or escape, but rather by being right there.
2. Nonthinking while being right there, in you rather than away from you, is a difficult thing to learn. The fact that it is so difficult shows you how little you live in the now, how much you are away from the reality of the moment.
3. To the degree that you live in reality, to that degree will you be able to stay with yourself, observing yourself as you do not think.

The discipline by itself will not eliminate the areas of obstruction. In these areas, confusion and unreality will persist and thus hinder their full experience of life, the full manifestation of their capacities and creativity. This is why both approaches are favorable. While the inner search and change is indispensable and can bring you to the goal without the outer help of such exercises, the latter will be a helpful addition.

If you persist and persevere, you will eventually succeed, be it only for a few moments. This will be a good beginning. The effects this will have on you are much more valuable than you can realize at the moment, provided you do it in conjunction with the other type of work that we do.

Further advice about these concentration exercises:

- Many people have to try various approaches until they find one that works.
- When you sit down for a few minutes of such practice, first observe your mood. See if you are impatient or hasty.
- Then ask yourself: "Where am I hurrying to? What do I think I miss by spending these few minutes on these exercises?" See the unreality of this haste.
- There is some feeling in you that this is a waste of time. Realize the preposterous illusion of that emotion. By observing this attitude and mood, gaining a little distance from it, a certain amount of peace and relaxation will take hold of you by the mere fact that you think about it intelligently.

The next thing you may do, as you are completely relaxed in body and mind, is to close your eyes and try to see yourself as you sit there.

4. Concentrate as though you were outside yourself or as though someone else saw you sitting there as you are now, what you wear, what your posture is, your facial expression.
5. As you do this, you will undoubtedly find yourself becoming more calm.
6. As you thus observe yourself, you may discover certain facial expressions you may otherwise not have noticed. You may feel, for instance, that your mouth pulls down or your shoulders sag or that you forcefully straighten them in an unrelaxed, artificial way.
7. Observe all that as you would closely observe another person. You do not have to do it for long. Then try either one of the exercises I mentioned previously.

Or try this one, which is a little more advanced, but which some may even find it easier than the others:

Watch yourself as you are not thinking. Be on guard for what thoughts may come. This is one of the best means of preventing background thoughts which take you away from the here and now. You can almost feel yourself standing poised on guard at a sort of threshold. If you succeed, be it only for half a minute, it will have a wonderful effect on you.

If after a few seconds, the chain is broken, never mind. Do not get impatient with yourself. Start again, observe again your state of not thinking. Observe the emptiness there. The more you succeed, the more you will see how you are in the present, aware of the moment, in this particular reality, not in a haze of vague floating thoughts often not at all pertinent, nor in a built-up dream world. When you float away into the unreality of your uncontrolled thought process, you are not in full awareness of self and of the moment, and therefore in unreality. The background thoughts you float away with are always away from you, as you surely will observe.

After you have succeeded in this exercise, be it only for a short time, it is a wonderful opportunity to make your prayer or meditation or to instruct your subconscious. For then you are fully open, receptive, and alive. You will be better able to formulate your thoughts, thinking of that which you need most at the present phase of your development.

Summary

Whenever you feel confused or uncertain in your life about something you have found recently, whenever you are not clear about something that bothers you, that is the best time to clearly state your question, your confusion, your lack of clarity. This is always the first step toward gaining the necessary clarification.

At such time, you may also express your utter will and intention to put aside all resistance towards facing yourself and changing where necessary. This is the time in which you can best observe the reaction of your subconscious when you utter such an instruction in its direction -- or ask God for His help. How much does it cooperate? It does, if you feel the unreserved desire to face anything that is within yourself.

If you feel uneasy and anxious, if you wish to limit such insight, you know that the child in you resists -- and you should know by now that this is damaging for you and against your best interest.

You can also utter such instructions or thoughts in clear-cut foreground thoughts every time you feel you cannot "stand on guard" anymore. Each time your thoughts aim to float away from you into this vague haze, then is the moment to catch yourself. It is easier then to think constructively with deliberate and valuable foreground thoughts rather than to start again with thinking nothing. This can be resumed with more ease after calling forth a few such constructive, deliberate, concise foreground thoughts.

As you proceed on this path in the particular direction I lead you onto now, from the two approaches shown you, you will come to a point when you will not only free yourself of tensions and fears, of many unnecessary burdens, but you will also become much more alive to each moment. Your reactions will be much more spontaneous, more healthy; your intuition more reliable.

The actual quality of your experience will change from repetitive, monotonous or strenuous life to pleasure, aliveness and vibrancy.

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Reality and Illusion – Concentration Exercises for PL 71

By Tom Hubbard for the Pathwork Teachers Helper Database (PTH)

<i>“Using observation and concentration to mature and create our lives full and whole”</i>	
Reality	Illusion
Foreground thought, consciously observed	Background thought, unconscious
Present moment	Reference to past/future
Authentic Self in truth	Story/ Mask calculated to make an impression (Idealized Self-Image – ISI)
Love, courage, honesty, compassion	Lower self/self will, pride and fear
Flow in Life	Forcing current
Higher self wisdom and curiosity in finding the hidden emotions	Child’s resistance
Love you are prepared to reciprocate	Fear of loving and demand for one-way love
Flowing with feelings in the moment	Harboring a case as a reason for depression
Freedom to receive, flexibility and spontaneity	Great inner tension and forcing current
Adaptability and flexibility to the particular ways of the other, no need to mould/control them	Distorted, exaggerated view of the other. Projections of demands and fantasies. (How can you love someone you cannot see clearly?)
Knowing that time does heal all wounds. Put experience and feelings into overall life context.	Feelings or conditions feel permanent and unbearable in the moment. Belief that things will not change
Respect yourself as you mature	Critical of our lack of courage to help mature the child in you
Trust your intuition and rely on what is deep within yourself	Experience life as tyrant of a child, it’s demands, it’s unfair requirements, and feel insecure
Detachment from circumstances creates security and inner peace	Dramatize life circumstances – for attention and control
Simply taking what is in the moment, seeing the absolute rightness of it.	Fantasies/daydreams so real you miss the goodness of what really is
Flexibility and spontaneity, meeting what is	Rigidity in expectations, demanding what should be
Knowing/seeing your fear of your own selfishness, your demand	Afraid of the most self part of another’s nature, think you have to give up yourself to this in order to love/be loved

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