

Pathwork Steps

The Defense

Quotes from Pathwork Guide Lecture #101

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Greetings, my dearest friends. God bless each one of you. Blessed is your path. Blessed are your efforts.

We have discussed your defense mechanisms repeatedly. We have worked on and gone into this subject considerably, and you have learned, to a degree, to recognize its presence. However, you do not as yet fully understand what happens to your entire system when you are on the defensive. ...this reaction of defending yourself is so imbedded in you, it has become so much second nature, that most of the time you are unaware when you are on the defensive.

When you are on the defensive, you are frightened, you feel threatened, endangered. There certainly are realistic dangers, and the human system is equipped to deal with them. If an actual attack is made on you, all your faculties will withdraw from their usual preoccupations and will be directed to and concentrated on this one danger. In order to deal with an urgent issue at the moment, you need all your faculties focused on that one point. ... In order to do that, your entire system goes through a change for the singular purpose of dealing with the emergency situation. When you are in real danger, this is good and important, for otherwise, with but your normal faculties and perceptiveness, you could not accomplish what is necessary to protect yourself. Thus you will develop more strength -- physical or mental -- than you normally have in order to defend yourself. Or you will quickly judge and decide whether defense by counterattack or flight is the better way to deal with the particular situation.

When, for psychological conflicts, for irrational, unrealistic reasons, you are on the defensive, your glandular system does not take this into consideration. It does not question the validity of the reason. The poisonous substance is released the moment you are frightened. ... All this comes about because your entire mental system is geared to ward off imaginary danger and to defend yourself from it. The same processes are operative as when you are in actual danger. ... There is no room for consideration of anything else. A very similar procedure occurs with your unrealistic defense mechanism. You have either chosen the pseudosolution of aggressiveness, and/or withdrawal from life, and/or appeasement that robs you of your integrity. ... In the emotional side of your nature, faced with actual danger, you hardly have time or room for feelings other than fright and anger. In the rare instances of real danger, it is good that this is so because these two emotions produce the necessary impetus and strength to defend oneself.

However, if you are constantly on the defensive, the predominant feelings are fright and anger. At this point, I need hardly discuss how damaging this is for yourself and for your surroundings. Whenever you are hurt, this hurt is erroneously believed to be an attack on you. Erroneously, it represents a danger to your safety. Thus you immediately repress the hurt -- your primary reaction -- and remain aware of anger and hostility as a substitute for the original reaction. You begin to let your defense mechanisms, whatever your private pseudosolutions are, go to work. Needless to say, you are no longer in truth, not only because the hurt you experienced, unpleasant as it may have been, is no danger and does not call for elaborate defenses which are infinitely more damaging than the original hurt could ever be, but also because you, yourself, are no longer aware of the original feeling -- the hurt -- but only of the secondary reaction -- the anger. This institutes a process of self-alienation, of psychological self-estrangement.

I think you all begin to see how predominant this defensiveness is. It may be subtle and not easy to detect, but once you are on the right track, you become more acutely aware of its permanent existence. You defend not only against hurt as a supposed mortal danger. You defend also against frustration of your will, against anything that does not go according to your wishes. All this represents, unconsciously, a threat to your safety, while in reality it is not so. It may be undesirable, but something undesirable is by no means necessarily dangerous. Yet, a defense mechanism, by its very nature, is a process of warding off danger.

As to the spiritual side of your nature, in the face of actual danger, it is again important and necessary at the moment that your capacity of feeling be limited to the issue at hand. In other words, in moments of danger, you withdraw into yourself, gathering your forces for counterattack or flight. You no longer reach out into the world; you no longer try to bridge the gap between yourself and others. You are not concerned with eliminating the separation between yourself and others, with communication and union. In moments of actual danger, such feelings would actually be a detriment. But when the danger is over, you go back to the state of feeling all these warm, good, outgoing, and outreaching feelings. It is the same with your creativity, which also is a side of your spiritual nature. No matter how creative a person may ordinarily be, in moments of acute danger, this creativity is temporarily stopped, only to return after the danger is over.

When you are more or less permanently defensive due to the erroneous belief that any hurt or frustration, any criticism, any rejection is a danger you must guard against, you limit the range of your feelings, the potentials of your creativity, the ability to

reach out into life and communicate with others, to love and to understand, to feel and to express yourself. In short, your spiritual life is gravely impaired.

This is why we have to be concerned with the elimination of the unreal defense, the unreal danger. Such dangers apply also to hurt, rejection, frustration of your will, criticism. When you feel accused of something true, half true, or untrue, you feel in mortal danger. ... You erroneously believe that if your weaknesses, or at least certain weaknesses, are exposed, others would have a right to reject you, not to love you. And this you cannot bear. Therefore you use all your defense mechanisms, with all these processes, to ward off the tremendous, imaginary danger in order to preserve your status as a lovable human being. You believe if an unlovable trait is exposed, people will have a right to reject you. Hence, you use such heavy fighting equipment only to your detriment. The detriment is not only due to all the reasons I have given in this lecture, but also in a more direct way. For it is never true that people reject a person due to a fault or weakness per se. If you closely observe life around you, you will find without a doubt that rejection occurs because, in a subtle way, hiding of the truth causes the rejection. This is why a free admission of the worst fault or distortion will bring forth acceptance, while a defense against exposure brings forth contempt, dislike, rejection, fear, and is bound to make the other person defensive.

In defensiveness, you do not perceive, experience, and think thoughts of truth and reason. You do not feel feelings of warmth, affection, and understanding. Therefore you are not in reality, and you cannot communicate. Your system is focused on one small point, namely that of defending yourself against imaginary danger. In this way, so much else that is part of life, part of your reality, is left out of consideration.

The liberation you experience when you discover the illusion of the need to defend yourself, and therefore no longer do so, is impossible to convey. You simply have to live it to know this joy. Let go, and receive whatever comes to you. Look at it quietly with the dominant aim not to ward off, but to seek and see truth. In this attitude, your reactions will change. Your emanations will have a different quality. Your whole life will become different. ... If only you learn to observe, detect, and understand -- and therefore eventually eliminate -- your defensiveness, you will be freed of an illusion. There is no greater hardship, no greater prison than illusion. There is nothing more destructive on this earth than people unnecessarily defending themselves. There is nothing that creates more disharmony, more untruth, more hostility, more friction, in personal as well as in public life, than defensiveness.

QUESTION: You mean, we should just listen to someone if he criticizes?

ANSWER: Calmly listen and evaluate. Could there be some truth in the criticism? Observe your inner reactions of fright. You will soon discover that your fright is unjustified even if the criticism be wrong. Nothing can happen to you, you are not in danger.

QUESTION: But what if we get annoyed at being unjustly criticized?

ANSWER: The very feeling of annoyance is the proof and expression of your defensiveness. Without defense, you would not be annoyed. How could you be? You would evaluate and either find that in it there may be some truth, little truth, or none at all. What can this criticism do to you that causes annoyance? Have you ever analyzed it from this point of view? Justified or unjustified criticism cannot really harm you unless you think you cannot be loved and respected if something to be criticized is found.

QUESTION: What if it is a lie, if it is untrue?

ANSWER: I said that before. It cannot harm you by looking at it calmly. Your defense against it is the harm. The lie itself, or the erroneous judgment, could never harm you. And the less defensive you are, the more adequate will you be to straighten out an outright lie or misunderstanding.

QUESTION: If the accusation covers a betrayal, and you have a natural anger against it, your anger may cover self-defense. But it also is a natural reaction against someone who has made promises, and you have fulfilled your part, and then you find that you are betrayed, and the thing that you were promised and you have hoped for does not come true. Is not this a natural anger?

ANSWER: Before we deal with the term of what is "natural" and "unnatural," I would like to say again that I did not imply that people should take any injustice or betrayal without doing whatever is necessary, constructive, and productive. When it is healthy and when not, cannot be determined in a general rule. It is too subtle and can only be found in truthful self-examination. Now as to what is "natural," this can be so misleading. It is certainly "natural" to have immature, unproductive reactions because everyone else has them too. But that does not mean they are really natural or that it is not possible to grow out of them -- not forcefully, not by superimposition, not by feeling guilty that childish reactions still exist, but in the way that I always advocate.

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The Defense

Worksheet for Lecture 101

1. *In the emotional side of your nature, faced with actual danger, you hardly have time or room for feelings other than fright and anger. (101/p2)*

Consider a situation where you felt or knew you were in defense. Can you feel into the truth of this statement, even in part? Can you feel how you were not open to other solutions than 'fight or flight'? After such an incident passed, did you then become aware of other options, other factors, and perhaps wonder why you did not perceive them during the incident?

2. *You defend not only against hurt as a supposed mortal danger. You defend also against frustration of your will, against anything that does not go according to your wishes. All this represents, unconsciously, a threat to your safety, while in reality it is not so. It may be undesirable, but something undesirable is by no means necessarily dangerous. (101/p3)*

Take some time to recall an incident when you defended yourself strongly and there was not a truly necessary reason to do so.

We tend to remember those types of unwarranted responses one of three ways- by seeing the humor and making it into a joke, by continuing to defend by making it an ongoing 'sore point', or by being embarrassed and ashamed of the memory.

Allow yourself to notice where one of these residual feelings or attitudes exists. Allow yourself to open to the possibility that your behavior in the original situation may have been out of reality- that you may have been reliving another emotional incident and superimposing the past upon the present.

Would you be able to review these feelings out loud, with another person or a group? What feelings come up at the suggestion of doing so?

Be kind to yourself if you find that you still feel defensive. This process is not about whether you were or are 'right' or 'wrong'. It is about *feeling* and *appreciating* the areas in yourself which are not in congruency or integrity with your Higher Self. To be able to perceive an aspect of immaturity or weakness in yourself is a critical first step to your own healing.

3. *When you are more or less permanently defensive due to the erroneous belief that any hurt or frustration, any criticism, any rejection is a danger you must guard against, you limit the range of your feelings, the potentials of your creativity, the ability to reach out into life and communicate with others, to love and to understand, to feel and to express yourself. In short, your spiritual life is gravely impaired. (101/p3)*

Have you experienced a sense of freedom when you choose to restrain your defensiveness? If not, experiment with noticing and restraining immediate responses in some day to day interactions with others. Did your perceptions shift? Did the responses of others shift? How would you explain such shifts?

4. *As I said before, actual dangers in which you need all this defensive equipment happen in relatively very rare instance. You do not have to learn to use it. It is an automatic process that any human being comes to. Even a child will have automatic reactions in this regard without having been told about it. There is only one thing to say about the adequate defense mechanism regarding actual danger. The more you use these faculties for unreal danger, thus abusing them, the less will they work adequately and spontaneously when required for real protection. It is one of those imbalances you constantly encounter within. That is why a*

person whose inner system is constantly geared for defense against unreal dangers is often incapable of coping with real attack and threat. He is then paralyzed and helpless and actually becomes a prey just because he believes himself to be a prey when he actually is not. This condition can never be remedied by fortifying the defenses for real danger. It will not work. But it will automatically begin to work if and when one learns to stop defending when there is no need. (101/p4)

Lowering our defenses requires an act of faith at first.

What help might you need in order to feel safe in restraining your defensive reactions? Can your Helper, your friends or your group assist you here? What would prevent you from exposing your resistance to 'lowering your shields'?

Perhaps a first step might be found here, in your own resistance to exposing your defenses. finding the real fears behind your reactions is the true issue here - not the reaction itself.

5. When you feel accused of something true, half true, or untrue, you feel in mortal danger. If you translate your emotional reactions to such criticism, you will readily see that your feelings say, "I am in danger." Now let us examine the truth of the matter. Are you really endangered or threatened because of hurt, frustration, or criticism? I do not have to answer this. Only you, yourself, will have to verify that this is not so. Even unjustified criticism cannot endanger you, provided your attitude toward it is mature and realistic. Is it not often the case that the criticism against which you strenuously defend yourself threatens to expose something that you do not wish to face? You may not wish to face it because it is uncomfortable to change, or because you believe that if the truth comes out, you will not be loved and accepted as worthy of respect. (101/p4)

How does this possibility fit into the incidents or examples you may have brought forward in the previous questions?

Whatever the reasons, you run away from the truth. Thus if it is seen in its true light, your defense is often against truth even though this truth may come from outside, from people who are, in their own way, as imperfect as you are. The supposed mortal danger you have to ward off is often truth itself, my friends. And you defend against it by pointing out the truth in the other person which he does not want to see. Maybe one is stronger and the other weaker, but what difference does it make since everyone has his own rhythm and value system. No one can compare with another. Evaluation on that basis is never valid. Thus two sides point out truths about the other -- and each may be correct to a degree -- while not wanting to see the truth in himself. (101/p4)

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MEETING THE PAIN OF DESTRUCTIVE PATTERNS

Quotes from Pathwork Guide Lecture #100

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First, let us briefly recapitulate. To begin with, the child suffers from certain imperfections of the parents' love and affection. It also suffers out of not being fully accepted in its own individuality. By this, I mean the common practice of treating a child as a child rather than as a particular individual. From this, you suffer although you may never be aware of it in these terms or in exact thoughts. This may leave as much of a scar as the lack of love or of attention. It causes as many frustrations as does the lack of love, or even cruelty. ... This general climate in which you grow up affects you like a constant minor shock that often leaves more of a mark than one traumatic shocking experience. That is why the latter is so often easier to cure than the former. The constant climate of nonacceptance of your individuality, as well as the lack of love and understanding, cause that which is called a neurosis. You take this climate as a matter of course. You take it for granted. You believe that it has to be so. Nevertheless, you suffer from it. And the combination of suffering from it and believing it to be unalterable fact conditions you to develop destructive defenses.

The pseudosolutions are a way of battling the world, the pain, and all of that which you wish to avoid. ... When your pseudosolution is a withdrawal from feeling, from loving and from living, it is a defense against being hurt. ... When your pseudosolution is submissiveness, weakness, helplessness, dependency as a means toward having someone care for you -- not necessarily materially, but emotionally -- it is equally shortsighted and unsatisfactory as a solution. The constant dependency on others creates fear and helplessness. It further diminishes your already existing lack of belief in yourself. As the withdrawal solution makes you dead in feeling and robs you of the meaningfulness of life, so does the submissive solution rob you of independence and strength and creates no less isolation than the former although it does so through a different inner road. Originally you wished to avoid the pain by providing yourself with a strong person to care for you. Only you inflict upon yourself more pain because you can never find such a person. That person must be yourself. ... By making yourself deliberately weak, as it were, you exert the strongest tyranny over others. There is no stronger tyranny than that which a weak person exerts over the stronger or upon his entire environment. The self-indulgent, lazy, self-pity of the weak exerts stringent demands on their fellow creatures.

It is fallacious to think that the weak person is harmless and hurts others less than, let us say, the outright domineering and aggressive person. All pseudosolutions bring untold pain to the self as well as to others. By withdrawing, you reject others and withhold from them the love you want to give them and that they want to receive from you. By submitting, you do not love, but merely expect to be loved. You do not see that others, too, have their vulnerabilities and weaknesses and needs. You reject all that part of their human nature, and thus hurt them. By the aggressive solution, you push people from you and openly hurt them with false superiority. In all instances, you hurt others and thus inflict further hurt upon yourself because the hurt you inflict cannot help but bring consequences. Thus the pseudosolutions, intended to eliminate the original pain, only bring you more of it.

All of these pseudosolutions, in addition to various other aspects, are incorporated into your idealized self-image. Since the nature of the idealized self-image is self-aggrandizement, it separates you from others. Since its nature is separateness, it isolates you and makes you and those you deal with lonely. Since its nature is falsity and pretense, it alienates you from yourself, from life, and from others. All of that is bound to bring you pain, hurt, frustration, unfulfillment. You chose a way out of pain and frustration, but this way has proven not only inadequate, but it actually brings you much more of that which you wished to forego. However, to clearly recognize this fact and to put the links together requires the active work of sincere self-search.

The perfectionism that is so deeply ingrained in you and in your idealized self-image makes it impossible for you to accept yourself and others, to accept life in its reality; and you are therefore incapable of coping with it and resolving its problems and your own problems as well. It causes you to forego the experience of living in the true sense.

Intellectually you all know that this path is not a fairy tale in which you find your deviations and misconceptions and evasions, and after having done so, nothing but bliss follows. ... By now, you must understand how in many respects you have caused your own unhappiness by and through your own destructive, unrealistic evasions and defenses. **The primary result on this path is the understanding of your own cause and effect and of the sense of strength, independence, self-reliance, and justice that this gives to an individual.** How much time it takes to reach the first tentative beginnings of this new strength, and later the strengthening of it, depends on your efforts, your inner will, and your overcoming the ever present resistance which wears off only after you gain sufficient recognition of its devious ways.

In a previous lecture, we discussed the human needs. Before you uncover your various "protective layers," you cannot even be fully aware of your real needs. You may know some of your unreal, superimposed needs, but only after a fuller understanding of yourself do you gradually become aware of the basic, naked needs that you have held in check. When you experience the pain, before crossing the threshold into emotional maturity and productive patterns, you have the possibility, if you so choose, to become precisely aware of these needs. This is inevitable if you wish to come out of your present state of unproductive living. ... Through your destructive patterns, you pushed your painful need to receive into the unconscious. Due to this unawareness, as also to the defense mechanisms of various sorts, your ability to give could never grow within your psyche.

However, do not believe, my friends, that this pressure, this entire frustration did not exist before you became aware of it. It did exist, but it created other outlets, perhaps in physical sickness or in many other symptoms. As you become aware of the central core, the pressure and pain may feel more acute, but this must be the healing process. You thus draw your awareness to the central cause where the problem really lies. You focus your attention upon that which is the root. You shift your emphasis from the evasion to the reality. This reality pain has to be experienced in all its shades and variety. You have to become aware of what your needs are exactly: to give and to receive; the frustration of not finding an outlet; the accumulated pressure; the momentary helplessness of finding relief; the temptation to evade again as you have done in the past. As you battle through this phase, as you strengthen your will to no longer run away from yourself and from the apparent risk of living, opportunities will come your way. You will see them and make use of them. They will teach you to further your growth and strength until your needs can find partial fulfillment, and then little by little, there will be an increase in the measure that you grow and change your patterns.

QUESTION: You discussed in the last lecture that the effect of one person being in truth about himself is of greater cosmic importance than we can possibly realize. Can you explain this?

ANSWER: If you think for a moment of the effect of the negative, distorted soul parts of a human being in the sense again discussed tonight, you will also understand the opposite. Any pseudosolution, as I indicated tonight, is bound to reject another human being. ... Now reverse the process. Imagine the effect it must have on your surroundings when you are no longer defensive, fearful, withdrawn, falsely superior. You are then open to life, to the heart of another person. The courage to live and to love enables you to help another person weaken his own defenses and destructive patterns even if he is not yet developed far enough to choose such a path of self-finding. Everyone you come into contact with is therefore affected. And this effect extends over all those whom they in turn come into contact with. It draws rings upon rings of effect and intereffect. If you think about it in these terms, you are bound to visualize the truth.

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EVOLUTION'S FOUR STAGES: AUTOMATIC REFLEXES, AWARENESS, UNDERSTANDING, KNOWING

Quotes from Pathwork Guide Lecture No.127

The lowest phase of human consciousness is automation. Man responds according to automatic reflexes -- emotional reactions which are based on deeply imprinted wrong conclusions and generalizations. Blind automatism is always the result of material that man is unwilling to face. This applies to all people.

The next phase on this scale of evolution is awareness. When this takes place, he is aware of the automatism -- hence the automatism no longer exists. The transition from automatism to awareness is one of the most difficult that man passes through. The moment he knows he is driven by false ideas, man is no longer in blind automatism. This requires courage and the cultivation of the inner will.

After a certain degree of awareness has been gained and, proportionately, blind reflexes have ceased, the next stage is understanding.

The highest phase of this particular scale is knowing. When you deeply know the truthful concept, the particular truth behind the particular error that you begin to understand, something begins to happen within and around the sphere of your being. The only way that knowing divine principles can come about is through a highly personal experience of the untruth that blurred the way, so far, to that particular truth.

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