

Pathwork Steps

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Meeting Notes March 9th 2013

13 people attended the March 9th. None of the March meetings will be recorded.

During the first 4 minutes, as people were coming on line, the first 6 paragraphs of PL 132 were read. The intent was to bring the energy of the lecture into the group meeting, and also avoid the awkward pauses waiting for people to enter the conference.

At 7:04, participants were invited to introduce themselves and indicate where they were calling from. Those who wish to audit (= not take part in sharing) may introduce themselves or not, as they choose. Pseudonyms may be used, as names are only used to indicate who speaks next.

As we began the round, I muted everyone in order to minimize background noise and phone line echoes. Each person then pressed *6 when their name was called.

Round1. *Can you offer an example from your own life where you are / were able to distinguish between your ego (becoming) and your real self (being)?*

The intent of this question was to give us real-life examples of how different group members currently discern the Ego. Everyone expressed some awareness, along with a desire for becoming more aware.

Referencing the lecture, this can be where the ego judges our present development too harshly, and the result can be that we are too embarrassed to continue working. This leads us not to explore the real self, and the dynamic can become a vicious circle (PL 50) and preventing ego-development.

An underdeveloped ego does not seek change or growth. It just wants to hide and be left alone. It defends being lazy by telling scary stories and projecting its fears onto others. The real self seeks positive change because it is on a spiritual mission to grow and learn. It is not afraid of hard work, 'making mistakes', or the judgements of others.

Discerning the difference is not difficult, yet it takes practice. And the humility to see that we have allowed ourselves to be deceived. The part of us that starts the process of discerning the difference IS the healthy ego, hidden within the underdeveloped one.

Round 2: *You are invited to share examples in your life where your ego may be weak or overactive.*

Rather than being completely weak or overblown (an example of dualistic thinking, where things are black OR white), the lecture suggests that issues around the ego (where it does not work harmoniously) are the result of imbalance: weakness in some areas compensated by overdevelopment in others. It can be useful to notice where / how / when our egos are weak and where / how / when they are overblown. This can help us to uncover patterns of behavior. When we successfully address patterns of behavior, we gain far more benefit (= create more pleasure in our lives) than by addressing single,

occasional incidents. Daily review is a useful tool for uncovering patterns.

Again in this round, it was evident that participants can activate a healthy ego that self-recognizes its own distortions.

Several people left early, which you are always welcome to do.

Round 3: *See if you can track one of your fears, step by step, along the consequences it hints at.*

“If I do 1), 2) will happen” is usually not the end of the story (unless you are deciding to jump off a steep cliff and you cannot reasonably expect to survive the jump). 3) happens next, and it reflects the real-life consequences and realizations of having made 1) and 2) a reality. 3) does not happen in a vacuum.

What may happen is that our ego sees the possibility of 3) it as a threat to its feelings of control and importance. The ego throws a tantrum, and exaggerates the consequences and our capacity to manage / cope with them. It claims that the worst possible outcome is the most probable, and that we will be irreparably damaged if we permit this to happen.

Walking through the consequences honestly can allow us to see where we might be disappointed or have to make extra efforts, rather than a doomsday scenario. One example was, ‘if I speak my mind, I won’t fit in, I’ll be ostracized and never invited back’. It can be useful to inject an objective perspective, even some humor! Do we really want to be part of a group that will throw us out if we ever speak what we think or feel? By using our time and energy to remain in such a group, we miss opportunities to discover groups where we would be welcomed and applauded for who we are and what we offer.

Jan offered to facilitate this section, as we may become habituated to our own ego’s unreasonable, ego-centric demands and unable to realize how we might be deceiving ourselves. Facilitation will only be offered during the last round, and participation is always voluntary.

We closed at 9:05 with a quote from the lecture: “When you reach into the ego world with your ego faculties, you limit yourself. The reaching out into the universe must be done upon a decision of the ego, but not with ego limitations. You must reach into another realm. This is where the ego must be abandoned. This was the essence of this lecture. This giving up of the ego can happen only when you fully possess it.” PL132.

The goal will be to end future meetings by 8:45. The next meeting will be March 16th EDT; times outside the US may shift forward by one hour.

As of April 1, invitations, study guides, and meeting notes will only be emailed to those who have attended at least 2 of the 6 February and March meetings..

Warm regards, Jan

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Meeting Notes March 16th 2013

There were 8 participants in the 2nd of 4 meetings on The Function of the Ego PL 132. We continued sharing and exploring how the Ego operates in our daily lives.

1. During the first round, we each focused upon one area where our Ego might be in duality. Dualistic thinking (PL 143) is indicated when we see things only in terms of right or wrong, good or bad. Underneath our rationalizations, one choice always represents death in some form; no love, no pleasure, no life worth living. We instinctively struggle to survive, settling for anything that seems represent life.

We shared what feels life-affirming to us: making decisions, getting things done, being valued and appreciated by others. We noticed judgments and fears about the apparent opposites of these goals: not knowing what to do, feeling stuck, being rejected, not getting the love we feel we deserve.

2. In the next round, we exaggerated our fears in order to bring feelings to the surface. When we see how we have defined 'good' as the life-affirming choice — and 'bad' as dangerous and deadly, our fears make more sense:

If people don't see me as worthy, I feel worthless.

If I don't achieve my goal or finish my project on time, 'someone' will know and I will be punished.

Things 'have' to be done, or I will become frustrated.

I restrict other people's input, and wind up feeling isolated.

Working for others gives me joy, but I find it difficult to justify working for myself; its not 'loving enough'.

When I am right, I feel full of life; when I feel wrong, I feel deflated, like a balloon that has been stabbed.

It's easier to do things for others because I can avoid self-responsibility.

The key to identifying a forcing current is to notice that it is actually a defense. Even though its goals appear positive, its real function is to avoid what frightens us, what we have decided is a form of death. Running towards something allows us to avoid dealing with what we are running away from. Avoidance keeps us inexperienced and ignorant.

By staying emotionally undeveloped and immature, we are vulnerable to exaggerated, imaginary fears. The Ego wants to do the right thing in order to be safe. Pathwork encourages us to develop our inner knowing and divine essence - our Real Self. The Real Self seeks growth and transformation.

3. In the third round, we attempted to face our fears by witnessing ourselves. We imagined standing next to ourselves, rather than being directly affected. Just as it is an act of the Higher Self to reveal the Lower Self, it is only the healthy Ego which can allow us to see the underdeveloped or overblown Ego. By visualizing ourselves standing or sitting

next to this little Ego, we were able to notice how the little Ego exaggerates its feelings and dramatizes consequences to justify avoidance. Yet feelings are only feelings, not weapons or judgments. By pausing and feeling into our inner life instead of out outer life, we were able to discern

How much energy we expend defending ourselves against judgments (both outer and from our inner 'critic')

How we do not honor and value ourselves (or our process).

The little me created a 'map' of good and evil in order to stay safe and receive love; the adult me can see where this map is no longer necessary.

If I am not 'something' I won't be loved. Yet when I just sit quietly without trying to do anything, it feels very relaxing and takes the stress out of living. It almost feels like freedom, from the slavery of my own doing.

I am afraid of being isolated, yet when I sit next to the feelings of isolation they are not actually that uncomfortable. And there is some pleasure in the isolation!

My family wouldn't make decisions, and I judged them as unable to progress. So I make decisions, and it's the 'only' way. I have developed a lifestyle based upon the reactions of a 5 year old.

If I sit on a bench with the extreme choices on either end (inflation vs deflation) both feel overblown. If I could stay more in the middle, deflation doesn't feel so bad and inflated doesn't feel so good. I can envision sliding back and forth easily, going with the flow if / when I am able. (Dynamic balance vs Static balance = to make the appropriate decision for the moment).

Warm regards, Jan

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March 23, 2013 Minutes on The Function of the Ego PL 132

In the 3rd of 4 meetings on The Function of the Ego, we brought forward elements of PL 199, The Meaning of the Ego and Its Transcendence (nickname, 'Ego Tricks'). A chart of such 'tricks' is included in the study guide (download from www.pathworksteps.org/teleconferenceschedules)

1. Our first round focused upon personal examples based upon pride: where we created artificial conflict between ourselves and others (finding places where we were 'better than' or they were 'less than'), acted for the sake of appearances, or felt shame in exposing our real feelings or our spiritual selves. As always, my experience is that participants have a deep understanding and innate knowing of what is real:

- A relative asked for a favor, which was forgotten. This resulted in an exchange of blame, defense, and drama.

- A phone call to a home number regarding a business transaction was not returned. Insecurities created a 'script' based upon this being deliberate, and after acting out this script for a few days, even when the error was revealed and the issue resolved, it was hard to switch over to the 'new' reality, which was not a 'juicy drama'.

- The ego wants to win, to feel inflated. The images people hold of us become the goal, rather than who we really are.

- An incident 30 years ago where we were shamed for making a mistake (while feeling exuberant around completing a family task) comes back full force when we make a decision that prompts others to immediately criticize us harshly.

[Our early decision to accept the judgment of others that we are 'less than' they are was false, an artificial submission that children resort to because they feel — and often are— powerless when confronted by the anger of an authority figure. This false submission, like a splinter or a thorn, cannot be integrated and continues to fester.

Similar events activate it, and produce the same sensations as the original incident. The positive aspect (explored in the 3rd round) is that we have not become numb to injustice even though we may not have figured out what the truth of the situation might be / have been. jr]

- When someone says something insulting or offensive, we hold on to our anger towards them. Even when we realize later that they didn't mean to be offensive or to insult.

- We cannot resolve or release feelings round moments of failure or poor performance on our part.

Our goal is to "make the ego flexible, teach it, bend it, change it, make it receptive and vibrant by IDENTIFYING and ABANDONING the TRICKS. The searchlight must be ruthlessly turned onto the little self. Use the healthy part of the ego to she light on the unhealthy part. Then transcendence takes place in the safest possible way." PL 199

2. What is the positive aspect in these experiences? What do these experiences allow us to learn? How do experiences of the 'little self' allow us to transcend it?

- I didn't keep my promise, made excuses and felt bad.

Perhaps my life is busier than I realized, and sometimes I overextend myself.

- I feel weak and vulnerable when I have to deal with unexpected delays. I don't feel safe / lose my self-confidence / sense that I am doing the right thing.

By being aware of this vulnerability (being 'onto it' earlier / before it happens) I can manage the emotional impact of surprises.

- I am open about wanting to guard my privacy, in order to deflect prying / inappropriate questions. I manifest external rules and boundaries.

Inner boundaries, based upon my real needs as a mature adult, could be just as effective. Outer boundaries may be leftovers from another period of development.

- I create images about other people being cruel rather than seeing them as they are.

If I find the area in myself that feels underdeveloped and vulnerable and address it, I may not need to 'practice' defending myself so much.

- I create drama and argument, me against them.

[What does the argument accomplish? A sense of danger / heightened emotional conversation can become a substitute for intimacy. Yelling / being yelled at feels better than feeling isolated / having no contact. By identifying a negative substitute, we can focus upon developing more positive ways to get our needs met. jr]

- I cannot let go of the memory of an injustice done to me many years ago.

[How has this unpleasant memory made you more sensitive to injustice? How have you become more loving, more caring, more just because you have personally experienced the pain of injustice? Sometimes an experience is given to us so that we carry an ongoing awareness of the pain such actions can create. A positive result would be a commitment to never inflict such pain onto others, and to take action to prevent injustice when we can. jr]

- I can rationally understand a solution, but emotionally I still resist it. My emotional side rules.

I may need to admit to myself that intellectual solutions (without any consideration for emotional issues) may not enable me to 'join the team' and fully support a decision. By identifying this need, I become able to address it and perhaps develop a greater understanding of myself.

3. Combining rounds 1 and 2, we looked at the ego tricks of confusion, numbness, and distraction.

- I am not always conscious of financials when dealing with clients. When they want to discuss financial matters, I am not prepared. Yet I need to address my own financial needs.

- When I am confused, I disconnect from my emotional reality and seek answers through technical details and asking lots of questions. This insulates me from my feelings. Acting confused has the same effect; it is a way to avoid my feelings.

- In a situation of conflict, I go numb because I don't know what to feel. So I detach and go off into my own world.

- When I have to think about getting more skills in order to get a better job, I make excuses about why I shouldn't have to do so. The older I get, the stronger those feelings get, and the stronger I push to try to achieve such goals.

['Better' is a judgment. A 'better' job may mean more money, but less free time. Or more prestige, with more risk of failure. Or more opportunities for

promotion in a field / environment with no possibilities for pleasure or any personal sense of accomplishment. Resistance may mean that your goals somehow conflict. Rather than trying to push through such resistance, it might be more useful to re-examine your goals, and realize that circumstances may have changed since you selected them. jr]

The task of the ego is to learn, remember, sort out, select, make up the mind, and move towards a certain direction (PL 158). The ego needs to be allowed to look realistically and objectively at the choices available to us, what the consequences of each decision might be, what the trade-offs are, and whether we are willing and able to support the decisions we make. If we fear making those decisions, in effect we instruct the ego not to make them. So the ego becomes confused, distracted, or numb. "You all have to accept your own imperfections, as well as this life's imperfections, before you can experience that absolute perfection is your destiny that you must ultimately realize." PL 132 'Closing one's eyes' by becoming confused, distracted or numb does not magically force reality to adjust to our desires.

Contribution from Jan:

At 12 years of age, I was riding my bicycle down a hill next to a ditch and wondered how blind people would do that. I closed my eyes. I opened them just as I hit a post and fell into the ditch. The answer to my question was, blind people probably don't ride bicycles down hills next to ditches. More accurately, those who abruptly pretend to be blind while engaging in a dangerous activity that depends upon visual feedback shouldn't expect to escape obvious consequences.

When an effect (falling into a ditch) is so obviously a result of the cause (closing ones eyes), ego tricks don't work. There is no one to blame, no confusion about what happened, no fantastical fears that it could happen again without our knowledge or permission. Riding a bike with eyes open can be scary because we may become aware of the risks and dangers around us. Riding with eyes closed creates the illusion that we are victims in an uncontrollable life plan.

Ego tricks depend upon the negative intent NOT to learn and grow. Identifying ego tricks is an act of the higher / real self. Our positive intent to grow and transform leads us to realize how such tricks inhibit our development and hinder our ability to find real pleasure in life.

This morning I noticed a link in the New York Times to a YouTube video, 'White Wine in the Sun' by Tim Minchin: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCNvZqpa-7Q> I am very sentimental about the 7 years I lived in Australia, when Christmas celebrations meant brekkie with champagne and an entire flat of ripe mangos and then tromping down to the beach for a swim. Very little fuss or bother, just friends around a picnic table in the summer sun.

Sometimes the Ego acts like an overburdened party planner, overly invested in the details and disconnected from the deeper spiritual and human significance of the event. Minchin sings of real-life distractions and of focusing upon what has heart and meaning.

Looking forward to #4 in our series on the Ego!

Warm regards, Jan

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The Function of the Ego

Minutes from March 30, 2013 Pathwork Studies meeting

Last of 4 meetings in March. 6 participants.

1. During the first round we shared our personal impressions of the Ego and how it manifests in our lives.

- Drives me forward towards what I want. Underdeveloped portion leads me to defend myself.

- I observe myself holding a strong position, avoiding dependence. Yet this leads to a sense of isolation.

- Now that I know about the tricks (PL 199) it feels like I use all of them!

- I want to give the ego credit for trying to help me, because I was absent it had to 'keep me going'. Feel a sense of relief about [my higher self / real self] intervening, creating a new relationship with the ego. Should be good!

- My ego has succeeded in getting the attention it wants. Now I have gotten a promotion and have a new role of responsibility. I wonder if this was the right thing to do, it feels scary. [*Q - what if, for the rest of your life, there would never be any change or new developments to deal with?*] A - Yuch!

- I see with more discernment. I see that I have a strong need for validation, even if another part of me doesn't like having such a need. I am interested in developing the ego so that I don't fall back into old 'comfort zones'.

- My sense of the ego is that it imposes orders onto me. I understand that I might be able to bring it forward, as a friend, without allowing it to have full control of my life. I like the comment about giving the ego credit, and that by studying it we might create a new relationship with our own selves.

2. The chart on Ego Tricks (in the study guide) groups them into aspects of pride, fear and self-will. We have previously examined the tricks based upon distortions of pride and fear. The distorted aspect of self-will is to live in the duality of win/lose. Where in your life do you notice that you identify something desirable as 'winning' and anything undesirable as 'losing'? These identifications (made by the ego) are intended to coerce you into accepting any costs involved with winning, and rejecting any aspect of losing.

- I have noticed that I try to stay where I am and defend myself against new ideas.

When it is an idea that I wish to champion, I overreact when it is not easily absorbed into the team.

- When a problem develops that I had predicted, I am more attracted to the energy / place of 'I told you so' rather than staying focused on fixing the problem or helping / supporting the other person. I am attached to my 'precious' mindset, and that my suggestions were not followed.

- I have the feeling that the ego does not like the questions that are being asked!

Please repeat the question, I am not able to remember it!

- If I am not in control, that's losing. Winning is being always in control. That doesn't allow any room for the other person to participate. I demand control even if I am not qualified to exercise it!

- I notice that in the first round, I wanted attention and now complain about the responsibilities that come with being noticed. There is no winning!

- Having success in general, especially at work, is a way to win love. From my husband, for instance, but also from myself! Success satisfies my inner critic and makes me feel worthy.

- When I had a fight with my partner, I thought I had the answers to our problem(s) and I wanted him to listen so 'we' would win. By being stubborn, I made things worse. Yet in other areas of my life, I give way. *[Submission may not look like winning as much as taking control and having authority does. Yet it is a tactic that often works to give us some part of what we want. And we can define / redefine 'winning' to include partial victories]* Yes - I get peace, and can avoid conflict by submitting.

3. Because the group is smaller this evening, perhaps we can go around again on this topic. Also there may be questions or comments on the overall topic.

"make the ego flexible, teach it, bend it, change it, make it receptive and vibrant by identifying and abandoning the tricks. The searchlight must be ruthlessly turned onto the little self. Use the healthy part of the ego to shed light on the unhealthy part. Then transcendence takes place in the safest possible way." PL 199

- That I quit a job may have looked to others like I lost to someone else, Yet for me, the job had become rancid. Winning, for me, was to have more opportunity.

- Since I was a child I have felt unsupported. It helped me to be analytical, to see flaws, target them, erase them. I have a strong realization, seeing why I became who I am.

- I have been understanding the work on the ego this month, and notice that tonight I feel stupid and seem not to understand anything. Who / what part of me will develop this new relationship with the ego? What does this mean? *[While several terms are used, most people understand this in terms of feeling rather than definitions. The deepest aspect of ourselves that we have awareness of is what we are invited to bring forward. Whether this is our divine spark or center, the soul, the higher self or spirit, most people on a spiritual path have a sense that there is an opportunity for wise, loving, profound inner knowing when they can connect to this place. This is the source of inner authority, inner will, that the ego needs to hear from. The ego's task is to manifest our spiritual vision as best it can, within the limitations of life's imperfections — and our own. Giving in without giving up. Following the serenity prayer by Niebuhr used in 12-step programs:]*

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.