

Pathwork™ Steps

The Spiritual Significance of Human Relationship

Study Guide for Online Meetings on PL 180

“Greetings, my dearest, dearest friends here. Blessings for every one of you, blessed be your very life, your every breath you take, your thoughts, and your feelings. Many of my friends are indeed progressing. Sometimes this progress manifests, at least temporarily, as crisis. Now you know this as a principle, but it is easy to forget this rule or spiritual law, as it were, when you are submerged in it. And it is all the more important to remember that there is a deep significance in the crisis you experience. Your attempt to understand it at its depth will bring you liberation and joyous living all the quicker, all the sooner, all the more real and permanent. Tonight's topic deals with relationships between human beings and its tremendous significance from the spiritual point of view -- from the point of view of individual growth and unification.” PL180

“Crisis can be avoided by looking at the inner truth when the first inklings of disturbance and negativity manifest on the surface. But it requires a tremendous amount of honesty to challenge one's tightly cherished convictions.” PL183 The Spiritual Meaning of Crisis

Week 1: Start from a POSITIVE perspective

1. Every relationship is designed to support our life plan. Once we gain some awareness around our plan and the wondrous nature of our real self, we will be able to understand why life's twists and turns have actually been serving us:

“In your present state, a part of your innermost being is developed and governs your thinking, feeling, willing, and acting. There are other parts still in a lower state of development, which also govern and influence your thinking, feeling, will, and acting. Thus you find yourself divided, and this always creates tension, pain, anxiety, and inner and outer difficulties. Some aspects of your personality are in truth, others in error and distortion. The resulting confusion causes grave disturbance. What man usually does is to push one side out of the way, identifying with the other. Yet this superficial denial of part of what exists cannot bring unification. Quite on the contrary, it widens the split. What must be done is to bring out the deviating, conflicting side and face it -- face the entire ambivalence. Only then do you find the ultimate reality of your undivided, unified self. As you know, unification and peace emerge to the degree you recognize, accept, and understand the nature of the inner conflict and split.

It is exactly the same law and principle when it comes to the unity or, respectively, to the dissension between outwardly separated and totally different entities. They, too, are but one level behind the level of appearance. The dissension is not caused by actual different units of consciousness but, just as in the inner dissensions of one person, by different aspects of development of the manifesting universal consciousness. The principle of unification is exactly the same.” PL180

2. Disharmonious relationships are only effects: the underlying cause is our own inner split.

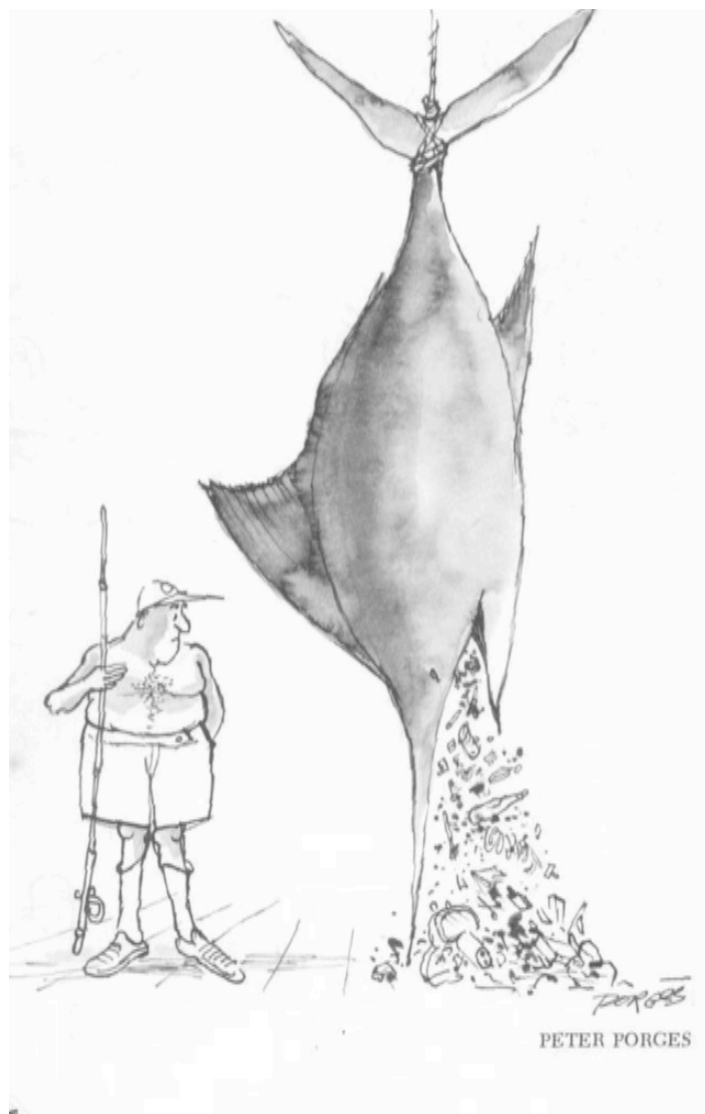
That is what is revealed within and through relationship with any and all living beings; family, friends, co-workers – even pets and inanimate objects can trigger our internal civil war.

On the level of the soul, relationship is about growth and transformation. Its purpose is to provoke our distortions, manifest our negative intentionality, expose our weaknesses to those who know us best. That's the 'stick'; the 'carrot' is the opportunity to experience bliss through connection and love (emotion types), a deeper inner awareness of divine order and wisdom (reason types), and eliminating the boundaries between heaven and

the earth plane by manifesting as our real selves (will types).

“When necessary change is not accepted willingly, you put yourself automatically into a state of crisis. The intensity of the crisis indicates the intensity of the opposition as well as the urgency of the need for change. The greater the need for change and the greater the obstruction to change, the more painful the crisis is going to be.” PL183

“The most challenging, beautiful, spiritually important, and growth-producing kind of relationship is the one between man and woman. The power that brings two people together in love and attraction and the pleasure involved in it are a small aspect of the state of being in cosmic reality. It is as though each created entity knew unconsciously about the bliss of this state and sought to realize it in the most potent way open to humanity. That way is in love and sexuality between man and woman. The power that draws them together is the purest spiritual energy, leading to an inkling of the purest spiritual state.” PL180



“I recommend the assertion, "Here I am in stress and pain. I am in a situation that gives me anxiety that I wish would not exist. What is the meaning in it for me?" Open up anew. Do not use the knowledge you have already gained about yourself as the answer. It may even be correct, but previous recognition can subtly serve as a barrier. You will truly have to be willing, deep, deep inside, to let go -- to see and to let it be.” PL183

3. Consider the airline in-flight safety warning: ‘Put your mask on *first* before you help anyone else.’

(What they don’t tell you is that if the air-pressure in the cabin suddenly de-compresses, you will have less than 15 seconds to do anything before you go unconscious. Helping yourself first is the only way to remain conscious and therefore be available to assist others!)

“Yet this principle cannot be executed with another human being unless it has first been applied to one's inner self. If the divergent parts of a self are not approached according to this truth and ambivalence not faced, accepted, and understood within a self, the process of unification cannot be put into practice with another person. This is a very important fact which explains the great emphasis of this pathwork on the primary approach to oneself. Only then can relationship be cultivated in a meaningful and effective way. “ PL180

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Explore your understanding of the concepts:

Films where main characters represent elements of PL180

Adjustment Bureau (2011) A congressman (Matt Damon) who's a rising star on the political scene finds himself entranced by a beautiful ballerina (Emily Blunt), but mysterious circumstances ensure that their love affair is predestined to be a non-starter. Romantic adaptation of Philip K. Dick's classic sci-fi short story "Adjustment Team." Director George Nolfi Ending: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RqmsnG8nE3c>
Negative view of free will: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-Ur1IDzLB0>

As Good As It Gets (1997) A New York waitress (Helen Hunt), a gay painter (Greg Kinnear), and a dog help a misanthropic author (Jack Nicholson) reach a self-awakening.

Cast Away (2000) A plane crash strands an airfreight exec on a deserted isle in the Pacific for more than four years Tom Hanks, Helen Hunt. Director Robert Zemeckis
Keep breathing: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaA_fSYfmTQ

Click (2006) Workaholic Michael Newman (Adam Sandler) an experimental gadget from an inventor (Christopher Walken) guaranteed to change his life; a perfect remote control with some startling functions - it can somehow mute the barking of the family dog and even fast forward through an annoying quarrel with his wife (Kate Beckindale). Michael quickly becomes addicted to this new rush of power. Director: Frank Coraci Comedy 110 mins 11 parts <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skjtNoM6vYk>

Defending Your Life (1991) An intelligent comedy directed and written by Albert Brooks and generally regarded as Brooks' best film., this delightfully offbeat romantic comedy shows it's never too late to change your life - even if you're already dead. Brooks plays an advertising executive who dies in a car accident and finds himself in Judgment City, where he must defend the cowardly, self-involved life he led on Earth. Co-starring Meryl Streep, Rip Torn, Lee Grant and Buck Henry. 112 minutes. Several segments on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GNjHFUz6yk>

It's a Wonderful Life (1946) George Bailey (Jimmy Stewart) spends his entire life giving up his big dreams for the good of his town, Bedford Falls. But in the present, on Christmas Eve, he is broken and suicidal. His guardian angel, Clarence, shows him how his town, family and friends would have turned out if he had never been born. Director: Frank Capra Uncut version 2:10: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frXkIECPkD0>
One life touches many/Cemetery scene 2:21: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4PIYcT6DmJY>

The Sixth Sense (1999) Dr Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis) is a successful child psychologist who is shaken by the sudden reappearance and suicide of a former patient. Months later Crowe encounters Cole Sear (Haley Joel Osment), a troubled young boy who bears a similarity to his earlier patient. Dr Crowe must try to save Cole, not only for the boy's sake but for his own redemption. Thriller 135 mins
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MN13toLMHpE&feature=related>

La Strada 1956 Director Federico Fellini. Gelsomina (Guilietta Masina, Ms. Fellini) is sold by her mother into the employ of Zampanò (Anthony Quinn), a brutal strongman in a traveling circus. When Zampanò encounters an old rival in highwire artist the Fool (Richard Basehart), his fury is provoked to its breaking point. Academy Award® Best Foreign Film 1956. Complete movie <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VQ63giVbY> in Italian with English subtitles. The 'parable of the pebble' in English: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3S9Rs4N6jkg>

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Week 2: Identifying resistance to growth and self-transformation

These selections from the lecture were cut and pasted together to illustrate different ways we resist opening our hearts (and justify doing so).

We retard our own growth and self-transformation. Rejecting or deliberately misinterpreting the messages our Real Self constantly sends to us is only possible if we shut down our heart and close our eyes and ears on all levels.

To the outside world, we telegraph our stage of development to others as clearly as if we put a sign on our door saying ‘Only negative relationships may apply within’. We collude with others who are also in resistance, creating the very kinds of dead-end relationships -- social, professional, or intimate -- that we say we fear.

Some level of awareness is required before understanding can begin. Understanding is required before knowing can become a conscious process.

“Pain makes man think, thought makes man wise, and wisdom makes life endurable.”
Teahouse of the August Moon, play by John Patrick from the novel by Vern Schlieder

Please watch these short clips from the attached film list via links to YouTube:

The Adjustment Bureau

Negative view of free will: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-Ur11DzLB0>

Ending: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RqmsnG8nE3c>

It’s a Wonderful Life

One life touches many/Cemetery scene 2:21: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4PIYcT6DmJY>

La Strada

The ‘parable of the pebble’ in English: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3S9Rs4N6jkg>

How the ‘little ego’ tries to avoid awareness, and why the bigger Ego permits this to happen.

“In this lecture I shall try to outline some elements of dissension and unification between human beings and show how these parallel the individual process. Before doing so, I should like to say that relationship represents the greatest challenge for the individual. For it is only in relationship with others that unresolved problems, the difficulties, and conflicts that still exist within the individual psyche are affected and activated. It is because of this that many individuals withdraw from contact with others, from interaction with others. The illusion can sometimes be maintained that the problems arise from the other person when one feels disturbance only in their presence and not when by oneself.”

Dependency: paying the price

“The tendency to make oneself emotionally dependent on others -- the awareness of which is such an important aspect of the growth process -- is largely due to wanting to absolve oneself from either blame or difficulty when establishing, maintaining, and sustaining a relationship. It seems so much easier to shift the bulk of this burden to others. But what a price to pay! Doing this renders one indeed helpless and brings about precisely such a state between two equally undesirable alternatives as I just mentioned before: isolation or unending pain and friction with others. It is only when one begins to truly assume self-responsibility by looking at one's own problem in the contact and by willingness to change, that freedom is established and relationships become fruitful and joyous.

A contact between individuals in which the destructiveness of the lower developed one makes growth, harmony, thriving of good feelings impossible, or in which the contact is overwhelmingly negative, should be severed.”

Who do you blame for your troubles, however indirectly? The blame game:

“Difficulties and fear arise to the exact degree that he still projects his difficulties in relating on others and still renders others responsible for anything that goes against his liking. This can take many subtle forms. One may constantly concentrate on the faults of others even though, at first glance, such concentration appears justified. One may subtly overemphasize one side to the exclusion of other aspects. These and other distortions indicate projection and denial of self-responsibility for difficulties in relating -- hence dependency on perfection, consequently fear and hostility for feeling let down.

I do not speak of clear-cut anger that expresses itself guiltlessly and which does not leave a trace of inner confusion and pain. I mean the kind of disturbance that comes out of and breeds further conflict. The game of making others guilty is so overall that it constantly passes by unnoticed. It is so taken for granted. One human being blames the other, one country blames the other, one group blames the other.

Perhaps only a few of you can begin to see how you are doing this, and when you see it, you only stop it here or there. Begin to question it, and cease placing the guilt on others, which is always a hidden form of hostility and whitewashing of the self. One derives pleasure doing this although the pain that ensues and the insoluble conflicts that follow are infinitely disproportionate to the puny, momentary pleasure.”

Hiding behind the mask of victimhood:

“But how about the "victim?" How is he to cope with it? **His first plight is that he is not even aware of what is happening.** Now, obviously, the first necessity is concise, articulate awareness, for otherwise the "victim" will unconsciously respond in equally destructive, falsely self-defensive ways. No one involved then really knows of the intricate levels of action, reaction, and interaction until the threads become so enmeshed that it seems impossible to disentangle the complicated aspects of the relationship. Many a relationship has faltered due to this unaware interaction involving many mutual reactions to something one only vaguely feels.

The launching of blame and guilt spreads poison, fear, and at least as much guilt as one tries to project. Only conscious perception can prohibit this. Only then will you be able to refute a burden that is being placed on you. Only then can you articulate and pinpoint it.”

How, when, and where do you indulge yourself in victimhood?

“The only way you can avoid becoming a victim to blame and guilt-projection is that you avoid doing it yourself. To the degree you indulge yourself in this attitude (you may do it in a different way than the one who does it to you), to that degree you will be unaware of it being done to you and will therefore become

victimized by it. The mere awareness will make all the difference -- whether or not you verbally express your perception and confront the other. Only to the degree that you undefensively explore, face, and accept your own problematic reactions and distortions, negativities and destructiveness, can you refute someone else's guilt-projection. Only then will you not be drawn into a maze of falseness and confusion...

How can you assert your rights, reach into the universe for fulfillment and pleasure, how can you love without fear unless you approach relating to others in the way outlined above? Unless you learn to do this, thereby purifying yourself, there must always be a whip lurking in the dark when it comes to intimate closeness: the whip of loading guilt upon each other."

If I 'do' and they 'don't':

"However, when men and women stay together for a longer period of time in a more enduring and committed relationship, **the maintenance of bliss, and even increasing it, entirely depends on whether the two people involved relate to one another in the terms discussed before in this lecture.**

Are they aware of the direct relationship of enduring pleasure and inner growth? Do they use the inevitable difficulties in the relationship as yardsticks for their own inner difficulties? Do they communicate in the deepest, most truthful, self-revealing way, sharing their inner problems, helping each other rather than placing mutual guilt on each other and whitewashing themselves? The answers to these questions will determine whether the relationship falters, dissolves, stagnates -- or blossoms.

Difficulties that arise in a relationship are always a yardstick for something unattended to. It is as though a loud message were being spoken. The sooner it is heeded, the more spiritual energy will be released so that the state of bliss can be expanded and grow along with the inner being of both partners. Every day and every hour, one's inner state and feelings are a testimony to one's state of growth. To the degree this is heeded, the interaction, the feelings, the freedom of flow within and toward each other will blossom. The moment a relationship is experienced as irrelevant to inner growth, left on its own, as it were, it must falter. Sooner or later it must falter. And that is the fate of the majority of human relationships -- especially the intimate one between two mates. They are not recognized as a mirror to inner growth, so that the relationship gradually wears out. The first steam evaporates, and then nothing remains.

This must be done individually and mutually. When relationship is approached in that way, it will be built on a rock and not on sand. No fear will ever have room under such circumstances. Feelings will expand, and security about the self and each other will grow. Each day and each hour will be a mirror to the inner state of either or both partners and therefore to the relationship. Conversely, fear of intimacy implies rigidity and the denial of seeing one's own share in the difficulties in relating. This state also brings about fear of one's feelings. He is still at this primitive juncture where he shifts guilt on to others. Fear and uncertainty will make it impossible, under such conditions, to find bliss and closeness -- fearless closeness.

When you are inwardly ready to relate to another human being in such a fashion, you will find the appropriate partner with whom this manner of sharing is possible. You cannot ever feel helpless or victimized when the significant transition has taken place in your life, and you no longer render others responsible for what you experience or fail to experience. Thus growth and fulfilled, beautiful living become one and the same."

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Week 3:

1. Are your disharmonies the result of an imbalanced relationship? If you take an honest inventory, is the other party more developed than you or less developed?

When people who are of uneven spiritual development are involved with one another, it is always the higher developed person who has the responsibility for the relationship. The lower developed person is not capable of such a search. He is still involved with blaming the other and is dependent on the other's doing "right" in order to avoid unpleasantness or frustration. Also, the lower developed person is always caught up in the fundamental error of duality. He sees any friction in terms of either he is right or the other person. Conversely, if he detects a problem in the other, this seems to automatically whitewash him although in reality his own negative involvement may be infinitely more weighty than what he sees in the other person. It is only the spiritually more developed person who is capable of realistic, undualistic perception. A person of spiritual and emotional immaturity and crudeness will always put the bulk of blame on the other regardless of paying theoretical lip service to the above-mentioned process.

If the higher developed person refuses to adopt his innate duty to assume responsibility for the relationship and look for the core of dissension within himself, he will never really understand the mutual interaction -- how one problem affects the other. And the relationship must deteriorate and must leave both parties confused and less able to cope with the self and others. He will also make it possible for himself to soon find others with whom a truly mutual growth process is possible.

...difficulties of interaction in a relationship are usually not explored in depth by the individual whose spiritual development is still more primitive. He will render others responsible for his unhappiness and disharmony in a given interaction and is not able or willing to see the whole issue. Thus he is not in a position to eliminate the disharmony. Only he who assumes responsibility for finding the inner disturbance and mutual effect can do so. Hence the spiritually more primitive person always depends on the spiritually more evolved.

A contact between individuals in which the destructiveness of the lower developed one makes growth, harmony, thriving of good feelings impossible, or in which the contact is overwhelmingly negative, should be severed. As a rule, the higher developed person assumes the necessary initiative to do so. If he does not, there must be unrecognized weaknesses and fears which need to be faced. If a relationship is dissolved on the ground that it is more destructive and pain producing than constructive and harmonious, it should be done when the inner problems and mutual interactions are fully recognized by him who takes the initiative to dissolve an old tie. This will prevent him from forming a new relationship with similar underlying currents and interactions. It also means that the step of severance occurs as a result of growth rather than as a result of vindictive spite, fear, or escape.

When two equals relate, both carry the full responsibility for the relationship.

2. Periods of Solitude

Being alone elicits the inner call for contact, and the less contact is cultivated, the more acute the longing becomes. So, this is a different kind of pain -- the pain of loneliness and frustration. But contact makes it difficult to maintain the illusion for too long that the inner self is faultless and harmonious. It requires mental aberration to claim for too long that it is due only to all others and not to the self when problems arise in relationships with others. This is why relationships are at one and the same time a fulfillment, a challenge, and a gauge to one's inner state. The friction that arises out of relating with others is a sharp instrument of purification and self-recognition, if the self is so inclined.

By withdrawing from this challenge and sacrificing the fulfillment that intimate contact is, many aspects of inner problems are never called into play. The thus resulting illusion of inner peace and unity has even led to concepts that spiritual growth is being furthered by isolation. Nothing could be further from the truth. However, my statement must not be confused with the fact that intervals of seclusion are a necessity for inner concentration and self-confrontation. But these periods should always alternate with contact, and the more intimate such contact is, the more it bespeaks of spiritual maturity.

It is also possible to measure one's personal sense of fulfillment or frustration by the depth of relatedness and intimate contact, by the strength of one's feelings one permits oneself to experience, and by the openness and willingness to give and receive. The degree of frustration indicates an absence of contact, which in turn is a precise indicator that the self withdraws from the challenge that relationship is, thereby sacrificing personal fulfillment, pleasure, love, and joy.

3. Inner and outer hypocrisy:

When sharing is wanted on the basis of receiving only according to one's own terms while the self is really (although secretly) unwilling to do any sharing, longings must remain unfulfilled. People would be well advised to consider their unfulfilled longings from this point of view rather than indulging in the usual assumption that one is unlucky and unfairly put upon by life.

The power and significance of relationship represent often severe problems for those who are still in the throes of their own inner dividedness. The unfulfilled longing becomes unbearably painful when isolation is chosen due to the difficulty of contact.

It is also important to remember that **withdrawal can be very subtle** and may exist only on a level of feelings that is outwardly unnoticeable and manifests in concealed guardedness and false self-protection. Outer good fellowship does not necessarily imply a capacity and willingness for inner closeness. For many this is too taxing a problem. On the surface this seems to be due to a difficulty to cope with others, but actually the difficulty lies in the self, regardless of how disturbed others may also be.

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Week 4: Using disharmony as a yardstick / feedback mechanism:

“Difficulties that arise in a relationship are always a yardstick for something unattended to. It is as though a loud message were being spoken. The sooner it is heeded, the more spiritual energy will be released so that the state of bliss can be expanded and grow along with the inner being of both partners.

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(Finally! A promise – I will get what I want! ???...)

“When you are inwardly ready to relate to another human being in such a fashion, you will find the appropriate partner with whom this manner of sharing is possible. You cannot ever feel helpless or victimized when the significant transition has taken place in your life, and you no longer render others responsible for what you experience or fail to experience. Thus growth and fulfilled, beautiful living become one and the same.”

Daily Review:

To begin Daily Review, "let the whole day pass in front of your eyes and in your memory. Think of everything that has happened. Then especially focus on whatever incidents in the day have given you, in some way, a disharmonious feeling or reaction." PL17

"All you should do is review the day and think of all the instances that have caused you disharmony in any manner, shape or form. Even if you cannot at the beginning understand why you felt in disharmony, just put down the incident and what you have felt." PL28

Keep it simple:

1. Date: (so that you can track frequency / recency, and notice if you have skipped some days)
2. Situation: one to three words. 'Dog bit me', 'mom angry', 'parking ticket'.
3. Feelings: shame, guilt, anger, sadness, despair, loneliness... remember that this is a list of disharmonies, not a journal!
4. Thoughts/judgments/reactions: all three can reflect distortions. What is most important is not any particular incident, feeling or judgment, rather noticing patterns, obvious preferences (i.e. always anger, never sadness), and any focal points (all incidents triggered by men / women / topics around guilt).

"Penetrating the mask that depends on avoiding the "little" negativities and disturbances during the day allows the light to shine through as through a stained glass window. The disquiet of opening fully to God is only temporary." PL28

From 'Finding Your Faults' PL 26

1. Make a list:

You all know it is of imperative importance to gain self-knowledge. Now, how can this be done? The first step, of course, will be to think as objectively as you are capable about your own person -- all your good qualities and all your faults. Write down a list, as I have often advised, because this writing down helps to a compact condensation and concentration of what you have found out so far and will prevent you from losing your grip over this knowledge. It will, black on white, shed perhaps a new light of understanding, and already a tiny little bit of detachment in your consideration of yourself will result. And later on when you have gained further knowledge about yourself, about your subconscious trends, you will be able to combine certain factors of this first-found knowledge if it is clearly and concisely expressed.

2. Talk about it with someone else:

After you have done this conscientiously, the next step would be to ask someone else who knows you very well to tell you what he or she really and honestly thinks about you. I know that it takes a little courage to do that. Consider this your first effort to overcome a little of your pride.

For it is very important not to work quite alone, in many ways. In the first place, there is a spiritual law, my friends: to be able to open up, to really open your heart to another person brings a spiritual help that you could not receive by yourself. You see, it is the law of brotherhood.

Those of you who have not found as yet the proper coworker, as we might call it, pray for this guidance, and you will be helped. And then get together once a week and tell each other what you have accomplished so far, where you still have difficulties, what your inner reactions are, and perhaps plan together what pertinent questions you may ask in the next general session here. This will also mean a great deal of joy to you. And also begin by making your own "inventory." PL26

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If you think that you cannot affect a relationship because the other party is set in their ways, read the following article to see how people can change government-- peacefully from within, using the power of positive intent linked with consciousness and awareness.

The New York Times

The Other Arab Awakening By [THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN](#) November 30, 2013

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — AND so it turns out that there were actually two Arab awakenings.

There are the radical revolutions you've read about in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Yemen and Libya, none of which yet have built stable, inclusive democracies. But then there are the radical evolutions that you've not read about, playing out in Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf monarchies. The evolutions involve a subtle but real shift in relations between leaders and their people, and you can detect it from even a brief visit to Saudi Arabia, Dubai and Abu Dhabi. The Gulf leaders still have no time for one-man, one-vote democracy. But, in the wake of the Arab Spring, they're deeply concerned with their legitimacy, which they are discovering can no longer just be bought with more subsidies — or passed from father to son. So more and more leaders are inviting their people to judge them by how well they perform — how well they improve schools, create jobs and fix sewers — not just resist Israel or Iran or impose Islam. And, thanks in large part to the Internet, more people are doing just that. The role of the Internet was overrated in Egypt and Tunisia. But it is underrated in the Gulf, where, in these more closed societies, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are providing vast uncontrolled spaces for men and women to talk to each other — and back at their leaders. “I don't read any local newspapers anymore,” a young Saudi techie told me. “I get all my news from Twitter.” So much for government-controlled newspapers. Saudi Arabia alone produces almost half of all tweets in the Arab world and is among the most Twitter- and YouTube-active nations in the world. By far, those Saudis with the most Twitter and YouTube followers tend to be Wahhabi fundamentalist preachers, but gaining on them are satirists, comedians and commentators, who poke fun at all aspects of Saudi society, including — usually indirectly — the religious establishment, which is no longer off limits.

King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, who in Gulf Arab terms is a real progressive, remains widely popular, but his government bureaucracy is seen as unresponsive and too often corrupt. That's why Saudi Twitter users have recently created these Arabic hashtags: “#If I met the King, I would tell him”; “#From the people to the King: education is at risk” and “#What Would You Like to Say to the Minister of Health?” (after repeated hospital mishaps).

There were torrential rainstorms when I was in Saudi Arabia 10 days ago and the Saudi newspaper, Al-Sharq, published a cartoon with three men answering this question: Why did all the streets of Riyadh flood? The government official answers: “The streets didn't flood. That's just a vicious rumor.” The sheikh answers: “It's all because of the sins of the girls at Princess Nora University.” The citizen says: “It's because of corruption” — but then the cartoon shows an arm labeled “censorship” coming from off the page to snip off this comment. That is in a Saudi paper!

In the United Arab Emirates, a government official was recently embarrassed when he was captured on a cellphone video, after a traffic accident, beating the other driver, an Asian worker, with the rope from his headdress. The video went viral across the Gulf.

People are losing their fear — not to revolt, but to demand clean accountable governance. Last week, a Saudi friend shared with me a video that went viral there on What'sApp that was posted by a poor man whose roof leaked during the rainstorms, even into his baby's bassinet. He can be seen stalking around his rain-soaked house, saying: "I am Saudi. This is how I live. ... Where is the minister of housing? Where are the billions the king has given for housing? ... Where are my rights? ... I feel like being in my home and being in the street are the same."

I heard many of these stories during group conversations with young Saudis and Emiratis, who I found to be as impressive, connected and high-aspiring to reform their countries as any of their revolutionary cohorts in Egypt. But they want evolution not revolution. They've seen the footage from Cairo and Damascus. You can feel their energy — from the grass-roots movement to let women drive to the young Saudi who whispers that he's so fed up with the puritanical Islam that dominates his country he's become an atheist, and he is not alone. Saudi atheists? Who knew?

Talk about reform — in Dubai, the government has set a strategy for 2021, and each of the 46 ministries and regulatory agencies has three-year Key Performance Indicators, or K.P.I.'s, they have to fulfill to get there, ranging from improving the success of Dubai 15-year-olds in global science, math and reading exams to making it even easier to start a new business. All 3,600 K.P.I.'s are loaded on an iPad dashboard that the ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, follows each week. Maryam al-Hammadi, 48, the director of government performance, strikes fear in the heart of every minister in Dubai because each month she ranks them by who is making the most progress toward achieving their K.P.I.'s, and Sheikh Mohammed gets the list. You don't want to be at the bottom. Hammadi showed me the dashboard and explained that Sheikh Mohammed is demanding that "every government agency perform as well as the private sector in customer satisfaction and service." The public will get an annual report.

Again, this is not about democracy. It's about leaders feeling the need to earn their legitimacy. But when one leader does it, others feel the pressure to copy. And that leads to more transparency and more accountability. And that, and more Twitter, leads to who knows what.

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