

Constructive Attitudes in Self-Confrontation

Chapter 5 of The Path to the Real Self by Eva Pierrakos

Boldface and Section Headings added by Jan Rigsby

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Self-Awareness

Asking yourself - and answering to the best of your ability - the questions raised in the last lecture will stir up your emotions, some of which have been repressed so far and whose existence you may only have vaguely sensed in isolated moments. The discovery of destructive emotions, of faults one has ignored, is naturally upsetting. Hate, hostility, vindictiveness, envy, jealousy, cruel desires, fear -- these, and more, may exist in the best of human beings. Their effect is made worse by the belief that no one who is decent could possibly have such feelings, therefore they must remain a guilty secret one must expose under no circumstances. As time goes on, they become so secret that even the conscious self knows nothing about them -- they are "forgotten." And this is not good. It does not further health, well being and fulfillment.

Of course it is desirable to free oneself of undesirable trends, emotions, attitudes or thoughts. But keeping them hidden does not mean liberation from their tyranny. Knowing of their presence does not force you to act destructively, but not knowing makes you blind to the way you are governed by them. Their effect is indirect, the link between cause and effect obscure.

Feeling and perceiving emotions, as well acknowledging their existence, are not the same as acting them out. Awareness of negative trends in no way forces you to act accordingly. I stress this factor so emphatically because this is one of the most powerful reasons for resisting to face what is in the psyche -- the misconception that, the moment one becomes aware of destructive tendencies, one is no longer master over them. One may even feel that acting out is "honest," otherwise one would be a hypocrite. The exact opposite is true, of course. Repression of childish, destructive feelings never eliminates them, nor their effect. Awareness does. It is essential to deeply impress yourself with this truth, in order to counter-act such possible misconceptions, residing in your unconscious mind.

It is never, never an outer event, as such, responsible for happiness or unhappiness, no matter how much it may appear to be. In the last analysis, it is always the attitude to the event that determines its effect on you. An objectively favorable, and even desired event may, by dint of your inner attitude and due to certain unrecognized concepts, be frightening and unwelcome. The confusion this creates is so disturbing that repression and rationalization seem the only "way out." The same holds true for the opposite alternative. An objectively unfavorable event may be emotionally welcome and appear as a solution to a problem. Observation of this fact is very important.

Attitude

It cannot be stressed enough that your attitude to yourself is what counts. It will make this work easier and more successful in a shorter time if you learn to take yourself less seriously; with a sense of humor; with a grain of salt, as to your explanations and answers why you feel this or why you act that way; if you realize that hidden factors are not non-existent; if you keep

common sense handy and refrain from exaggerating your faults; if you keep in mind that recognition of a negative trend is not identical with acting it out. If you can manage to adopt these attitudes, undesirable material you confront in yourself will not only not throw you into fits of depression and disappointment about yourself, but will afford you relief and release. Even simple acknowledgement of its existence, and the stated desire to understand and change, will give you release from tension long before a change has taken place. It will free hitherto paralyzed energies and give you more self-respect as a consequence to your honesty with yourself. He who has the courage to look himself squarely in the face, without flinching, but also without dramatizing his "badness," is bound to like himself much better. This increases self-confidence and the "inner permission to be happy."

The same applies to passing negative feelings about events, situations, relationships and your reactions in connection with them. It is so easy to overlook a slight disturbance, a heavy mood, but so much material is contained in them, so much to learn from them about the self and its problems. Training oneself to scrupulously prevent such hiding will prove of immeasurable benefit.

The more constructive, realistic and reasonable your attitude to your negative emotions is, the less damage they will do. This proves that it is not so much these emotions themselves that are damaging, but your fearful, guilty, untruthful, exaggerating attitude about them! They have to be let out of your system. Covering them up is emotional toxic poison and ruins your psychic blood stream. This can only be done by taking stock and finding their origins.

Resistance

To follow through, it is very helpful to make up your mind , every day anew, impressing yourself with this constructive attitude. Be prepared that there is resistance to face unpleasantness, determine to get the better of it, to become aware of it -- and it will not prevent you from following through.

One may also resist to see something undesirable in others -- people one needs, loves, feels close to and whom one wants to respect. This blindness can easily be rationalized by claiming it is the strength of one's love. But true love is not, and does not need to be, blind. Perhaps it is fear of not being able to love and respect an imperfect creature. Or, perhaps, there is fear of having to act, make changes, confront the other person with one's perception about him. Repression of such perceptions creates disunity, unrest, feeling uncomfortable and ill at ease. Calmly facing what one perceives and, in the clear light of consciousness, confronting the issue, can never hurt others, the self or a relationship. Such conduct will make it clear how to behave, it will guide as far as the proper timing is concerned. In short, it enables you to cope with a difficulty in a productive way. Denying what you perceive makes this impossible. Another reason for resistance is being unwilling to face a hurt one has endured. One rather makes believe that it does not exist. But the self cannot be cheated. It knows all and has its own ways of reacting. When this happens without your conscious understanding of what is going on, reason cannot enter into the transaction.

Resistance to facing an unpleasant truth -- for whatever reason -- means: "I act as though it does not exist, that will make it go away." This childish magic does not work and has often the gravest consequences. The personality pays a heavy price for this self-deception, a price that could so easily be avoided. The tragic fact is also that, so very often, an individual merely believes the feared truth is unbearable, devastating, unflattering. Many a times, after having

mustered all your courage to face what appears to be unpleasant, turns out to be a factor that is not in the least what you had feared. But the fact that you believe it is bad creates the exact conditions as though it were really bad. The resistance was not only for nothing in the sense that even the worst truth is so much easier to bear (and can always be eliminated) when faced, but also in that there was no fearful, unpleasant truth to begin with.

Being prepared for resistance -- for whatever misconception -- is half the battle. Determining to overcome it with one's will, and deliberately enlisting help from your innermost real self, means victory over it. It will then be seen that the half-conscious agony was unjustified; that fear was grossly exaggerated. Overcoming resistance is one of the most important aspects on this path, and one of the most rewarding. Without it, there can be no recognitions, no insight into yourself. Overcoming resistance is not only necessary at the beginning. It must not be assumed that once it has been done, it is accomplished for ever. Each new block, before every new insight, resistance comes up and has to be recognized. Only, it becomes easier to do so with each experience in recognizing and overcoming it, provided no false idea exists that this is a one-time act. It is important to remember that the stronger the resistance, the more vital the finding, and the greater the subsequent relief and enlightenment.

How can resistance be recognized?

By a feeling of anxiety when certain questions or points are raised; by impatience, boredom, lack of concentration; the consistent desire to do something else, often less important; by tiredness the moment the work is approached, by consistently forgetting.

Any of these reactions may not be important if they occur once in a while. Close discernment is, as always, essential. When resistance has been overcome, when the self faced to the fullest (in accordance with the inner guidance which knows what is to be tackled at any given phase of the pathwork), one has a tingly feeling of aliveness, of joy and confidence. One feels at home in, and at one with, the world. This is a very good gauge. When the intent is uttered into the deep recesses of the self, when the creative forces within and around the self are instructed to help explore what ought to be recognized at this time, if it is truly meant that one wished to face oneself in utter truthfulness, the path must be a dynamic and most rewarding experience.

Lower Self / Child Consciousness

The lower self contains an unreasonable child, ignorant of what the rest of the personality, which has grown up, knows. It is important to allow this child to grow up. But this cannot happen underground, just as a seed cannot grow out of the earth if the earth is covered with heavy material. Hence, this inner child has to be fully recognized, acknowledged, its presence accepted for the moment. It makes one-sided, unjustified, often quite unfair demands. Then, the outer self goes overboard in order to make up for them. Both these levels of manifestation -- the covered, silent, but no less stringent demands, as well as unfairly treating the self -- are exaggerated, disproportionate and would be unhealthy even without the counter-pull of the opposite extreme.

The child within always wants something for nothing. It wishes the advantages of adulthood, with all its freedom and, simultaneously, it wants the advantages of childhood -- freedom from self-responsibility. Naturally, these unjustified demands are hidden. Emotional reactions have to be tested and thoroughly questioned in order to determine that such demands

exist. Only then can mature reasoning help this child to grow up and be in harmony with other aspects of the personality.

But does this child want to grow up? Most certainly not. It somehow hopes against hope that its utopia is possible. Changing and fulfilling what seems like difficult demands life makes is unwelcome. Hence, resistance. This child has to be humored. The resisting, unwilling part of the unconscious must never be forced. It is not amenable to force. If the psyche is under the impression that insight and understanding mean a forced change, the resistance to recognize whatever needs to be faced will be much greater.

Consequently, it is a good policy to impress yourself, your unconscious, that you are not forced to change; that you have a perfect right to stay the way you are; your right of choice can only be extended by knowing what goes on in you, never diminished; knowing what takes place "on the floor below" your consciousness, makes the consequences not one iota worse than when you do not know; nor is there any punishment. The only one who punishes and makes unfair demands of you is yourself, due to all the confusion and misunderstanding arising out of being governed by impulses whose origins you do not understand. A thorough understanding of these facts, through cultivating and pursuing the relevant thoughts, such as mentioned here, will diminish resistance considerably and make the path work infinitely easier. Your own unconscious mind will respond more readily to your concisely stated intents that you wish, above all else, to face and know the truth about yourself. You will convince yourself more and more that the truth can never hurt, it makes you free.

Resistance also exists because a cluster of destructive attitudes is thought to be a protection and is held on to for that reason. If change is enforced, anxiety becomes very great. This is why it is necessary that the reasons for such attitudes be fully understood, their motivations, their wrong conclusions, the possibility of their being a defense.

When the child inside is allowed to maintain its "protection" as long as it chooses, provided the entire process takes place in the open, this child is bound to discover that the imagined protection is the very opposite; that it is responsible for pain and deprivation. When this is fully comprehended, when cause and effect, in this respect, are put together, resistance will vanish. We shall discuss all this in more detail. For the moment, it is very helpful to know about them and be prepared. Beware of the idea that you cannot possibly harbor such tendencies, merely because you are now unaware of them.

Investing Time

Let us now discuss the necessary time element for executing this path work. Much depends on your ability to concentrate. And this ability, in turn, is largely determined by presence or absence of resistance. If this ability is good, a fifteen minute period of meditation and attention may be more fruitful than several hours during which the mind wanders and the time is not spent on that which is most vital, but squandered on issues which are not of immediate importance. For instance: to think of the world situation may, in itself, be important, but it may be an evasion from facing, say, a feeling of envy or hostility towards a loved person.

It is obvious, then, that the quality of time invested counts, not quantity. However, a certain amount of quantitative time is necessary, so we might say, as an average, and at the beginning of this path work, about **twenty minutes to half an hour a day should be excellent**. No one need be too rigid about it. If, occasionally, there are times when only a few minutes are devoted, you will find that you might spend an hour or more on other occasions. But, as a rule, it is important to have a certain discipline. Without it, it is very easy to fall off altogether.

The usual rejoinder "I have no further time to spend, I am too busy as it is" is a most unreasonable reaction. If life is not satisfactory, something must be done to change it. It cannot be done unless there is a willingness to invest something into it. If this willingness is missing, one better reconcile himself to the status quo. Those who never have time are usually those who squander most of it. If their outer and inner activities were investigated, it would be easy to discard a large part as useless and even damaging, leaving sufficient time for that which can truly change one's life in a most wonderful way. If nothing but the time spent on wishful thinking or day dream fantasies were utilized for this pathwork, the best results could be expected. Or, if the time it takes to brood over alleged injustices were used for this purpose, it often would be quite sufficient to make good progress.

Time for this path work is not limited to certain allotted periods, but can also be done during mechanical work which does not preoccupy your thinking, or while walking or riding in public conveyances. Also before falling asleep, for those who take a while to do so.

The topic of concentration varies, of course, according to the phase of the pathwork. When reading and studying these lectures, a deeper assimilation can be affected by instructing the unconscious to retain and utilize what is most helpful and needed at the moment. Enlist the creative intelligence within yourself to help in affecting a harmonious growing process and the dissolution of blockage. This entire material will be better understood and absorbed with the help that inevitably comes forth when activated through deliberate will. We shall discuss prayer and meditation separately, in the next lecture. For the moment, understanding and thinking about this material, compiling the lists of questions and answers, and preparing for recognizing destructive attitudes, so that constructive ones can be assumed, will be the task.

Daily Review

When this is, to a certain degree, accomplished, the next stage can begin. This includes one of the most important tools for this work, the Daily Review . This daily review can be conducted any time of the day, most suitable to you. Often, the best time is before retiring, because then the events of the day are still close enough before a night's sleep separates you from them. They can be reviewed consecutively. If you are too tired to go through the entire process in the evening, jot down some reminders and examine them the following day.

Each day contains certain events or incidents calling forth reactions in you. To become aware of, comprehend and note these reactions is of utmost importance. Review the day and determine which incidence or occurrence has caused unpleasant feelings. Look at them, instead of pushing them away, hoping that the negative feelings will pass. Of course it is true that they will do just that, but not what is behind them. No matter how flagrantly wrong another person may be, for example, your negative reaction -- bound to pass after a while -- is an indication that something in you is amiss. This may sound unbelievable at the beginning, but the more you understand your innermost self, the more you will come to see that this is true. If another person disappoints you, for instance, why have you been so blind, insensitive, unintuitive, that the disappointment is possible. If you would have been less deliberately blind, you might have seen a number of indications that would have made this sudden, perhaps shocking experience, impossible. Or, you may see the truth of another person's misbehavior, but not your own. If you were to see the whole truth, there would be not inner unrest, bitterness, anxiety. There are numerous possibilities of how you could be involved in a negative situation, in spite of flagrant wrong done to you. Usually it is not even so flagrant when seen in the full context. One thing is certain: you could not possibly register disturbance,

if there was not something you are blind about in yourself. It always presents an important stepping stone in your growing process. This something you are blind to may not necessarily be a moral fault, but it must be something immature, blind, erroneous. Otherwise negative experience is not possible. When negative experience is comprehended in this way and approached with this attitude, you learn to cope with any situation; you are constantly in a dynamic process of growing into fuller and richer selfhood, and you must become more secure in yourself with each incident you thus encounter.

In the daily review you learn to do just that. **You learn to become aware** of how you really react, long before it has a chance to accumulate unconsciously. You will begin to notice little disturbances, hurts and disappointments, things you habitually disregarded. There is, perhaps, a moment of anger or vindictiveness you do not like to face. Or you may register fear and worry you find inconvenient to acknowledge. Whatever it may be, if it is "caught" before it can sink into your unconscious, you not only prevent further repression and the thus resulting emotional imbalance and disturbance, but you also learn aspects of yourself you very much need to be aware of.

For the moment, it is not even important that you analyze these instances as to their deeper significance. **Just consistently register your reactions in a notebook** -- every day, again and again. Note "felt anxious at such and such an opportunity. Do not know why," or "registered anger at so and so because I was not put in the first place." Childish? Yes, but true. Some of these notations might strike you funny, others may, at first, be disquieting. However, the simple acknowledgement brings relief in most instances because you practice truthfulness with yourself and accepting yourself on the basis of what you happen to be now. Also, your psyche knows that this endeavor leads towards health and relief from error and disharmony. It relishes the acceptance of what is. You feel this inner reaction by more peace and energy.

When you ponder over an accumulation of days, in which you took notice of your reactions, **you will undoubtedly find a recurrent pattern.** Certain reactions reappear in connection with certain types of occurrences. Why is one person, for instance, consistently slighted by his surroundings? Or why does another person again and again encounter rejection? The discovery of such recurrent patterns gives a good clue to hidden problems and conflicts. Once you have found such a pattern, do not give up the daily review. As your personal path progresses you will see that your deep psyche brings specific items to your attention, at specific periods of your development. The daily review is the best opportunity to notice this. It is also, later, a very good yardstick to determine improvement and growth, as well as relapses. Mental, emotional and spiritual "hygiene" likens the daily review to a cleansing process of all personality levels. This cleansing process is just as important for the psyche as for the body. Civilization only recently learned the value of physical hygiene. Today, mankind has "time" for it -- at least a large part of mankind. In this century, hygiene on other personality levels will become as important. It prevents self-deception, pretense, repression -- with their tension and anxiety, their confusion and impaired life experience. It heightens awareness of self, therefore, later, of others and of all that comes to pass.

Writing down certain affirmations and intentions may prove of help. The act of putting it down in writing somehow impresses the deep psyche and consolidates the material, preventing it to dissolve and dilute. It may therefore relieve you of anxiety because your thoughts become better organized, thus relieving you of the worry of forgetting what you wish to retain, and keeping some of this new material you feel is important, together, as it were. It is a good habit to cultivate, for later it will become increasingly helpful to "let yourself go" with

paper and pen, when the deeper regions of your unconscious are ready to manifest. Even confusions should be concisely formulated so that it can be exactly pinpointed what the confusion is. This is one of the major steps towards eliminating the confusion.

Get yourself a notebook, take one section of it for confusions, apparent or real contradictions, answers you seek -- generally and personally. After a while, you may be surprised to note that what you do not understand generally, reflects on your personal problems -- or vice versa.

Take another section of this notebook for the various lists of questions, as begun in the last lecture, as well as for further lists to be taken up later. Take still another section for the notes of your daily review, dated. And yet another section with admonitions, advice, constructive attitudes, you wish to remember, affirmations you wish to impress yourself with. This section may be looked at when starting to work each day.

When you begin your daily review, it might be a good idea, occasionally, to ask yourself
-- what worries you generally in life,
-- what problems do you feel are difficult or even impossible to cope with.

Observe the situation, and your reactions, from day to day. After you note the same reactions repeatedly and after having found the repetitive pattern, take the first two sets of questions, one after the other, and look at them in the light of what you have learned about yourself from the daily review.

Correlate the material of the daily review with both sets of questions. You may have to revise some answers, do not let this disturb you. Then try to connect the first and the second set of questions. Can you see a link? Is it possible for you to ascertain that a certain unfulfillment is a direct result of a certain cluster of immaturities? It is always several aspects, not just one. The compiled reactions of the daily review will make the second set of questions even more comprehensive and make it possible to fill in a number of answers you could not possibly know when you started out. The consistent daily review enables you to become more and more aware of your hidden failings, your real emotional reactions, not only those which are "permissible."

The work proceeds, **the nature of the daily review changes** -- you now observe different aspects, become concerned with other facets of yourself and your life. No life process remains static and this path is a very dynamic, real life process. After a while, you will become aware of a rhythm, especially suited to your individuality, you will learn to interpret its own organic language and messages. You become attuned to a new inner world which is vibrantly alive and real -- and not in the least opposed to the outer joy of life, quite on the contrary. The inner reality aims at bringing you fulfillment on all levels, but before this final reality can come into play, the other hidden reality of your undesirable reactions has to be fully met.

Suggestions for Moving Forward

It is very important to understand that the path follows a spiral movement. Without expecting this, you might easily misunderstand and be discouraged, believing that you are going around in circles. But when you return to the original phase with deeper and new understanding, you will know that you were not in an unproductive circle, bringing you back to the same point, without having gained something essential. The same sequence will follow again and again, in forever narrowing circles, the same lesson learned on deeper levels of the personality, until the various phases converge into One Point, in which all things meet -- and

find solution.

[Create] a list of what you think your assets and qualities are; a list of your faults and weaknesses -- those you believe you possess, and those others accuse you of, but you do not agree. **Ponder whether there is not a grain of truth** in such accusations, even if, perhaps, not quite in the way it is brought forth.

For the reader, who works by himself, without the assistance of a helper, it is particularly important to occasionally solicit the view of an outsider. If you can bring yourself to it, you will derive the greatest benefit from asking those who know you best how they see you. Are you able to listen with an open mind? Without getting defensive, hurt, humiliated, combative? **Your ability to calmly listen indicates your inner freedom.** Your reluctance to do so, your feeling of discomfort, indicates insecurity, your lack of belief in yourself. This is then not only helpful as far as the answers themselves are concerned, but it is also a good yardstick for where you stand in regard to inner security and true self-acceptance. *[see PL26 for further suggestions for working with others to find your own faults]*

If you think of how much you would respect a friend who came to you with the serious intent of understanding and seeing himself in truth, you could surely help him to this understanding by offering what you have noticed about him while respecting and liking him the better for asking you. If you make your aim and attitude clear, you can trust him to have similar reactions to you.

If you cannot bring yourself to do so at this point, do not feel ashamed or angry at yourself. Above all, do not become discouraged. Treat yourself with the same kindness and tolerance as you would have others treat you and as you would treat someone whom you like and respect, even though he has his imperfections and weaknesses. Rather ascertain in concise formulation: "I am not free enough yet to listen to others, I am afraid of their disapproval, of feeling that they might despise me, of thinking that I have no value. I know that it is possible to criticize and see faults, and still like and respect someone for his values and qualities. But, emotionally, I am not yet prepared for it. I need more self-discovery before I have the strength and inner freedom to venture out in this way. At least, I now know where I stand, I have no illusion about this. I fully accept my fear of criticism. It is not an indication of being ridiculous and worthless, but having unresolved problems and immaturities which stand in my way as much towards desirable goals, as they do towards emotional comfort when others see me and express what they see."

When you finally bring yourself to ask, write down what you hear. Try to be as objective as possible, also to the relationship you have with this friend. Is it someone who might have specific resentments, on a certain score and therefore might over-emphasize and exaggerate one weakness, while not seeing another that may be at least as important, but which went unheeded because it did not personally affect him? Or is it someone who is inordinately afraid of hurting you and might not even dare to notice anything amiss? Is it someone who only notices what affects himself? Register your inner reactions of fear, hurt, anger, injustice, defensiveness, etc. Your ability to observe yourself and your reactions during and after such an interview is directly connected with your ability to evaluate what you heard objectively.

Repeat the venture a few months later -- with another person. And again, as you progress. Even if your friends cannot notice a change in you, at this point, (for it sometimes takes the environment longest to notice an inner change) you yourself will notice more inner freedom and relaxation, greater emotional comfort. You may have acted the same way before quite convincingly, so that, outwardly, nothing much seems changed. But the inner storm may

have considerably lessened at the second confrontation, with another person. And more so, as you repeat the venture, while, in the meantime, steadily growing and getting to understand yourself. The day will come when you can calmly face, not only a well meaning friend, but also someone who resents you. From him you may hear the bluntest truths. An enemy only perceives the most negative side, out of all proportion, and out of context with the rest of the personality. One day you may be strong enough to want to learn from such a situation. I do not mean that you have to go out and ask for this, but life brings everyone occasionally into such a situation. There are times of quarrel and discord -- the result of unresolved, invisible problems, hidden behind the obvious, outer manifestation. At such occasions you hear detrimental views unbidden. Can you learn from such an experience? Can you cope with it and retain inner comfort and relaxation?

Compile a list of people you resent, and have resented in the past -- and why; people who have hurt you. What was the hurt? What do you consider the greatest wrongs you have committed? Are the guilt feelings in any way connected with unnecessary limitations you set for yourself regarding your desires and goals? Could there be a more constructive way of atoning for past guilt than punishing yourself and prohibiting your fulfillment? We shall also discuss this topic more closely later.

Make a list of occasions you feel, and felt, ashamed; the type of event kindling shame in you. Do you feel more inclined to register shame over faults? Or, strange as this may seem, over actual qualities, such as generous warm feelings of love, tenderness, tolerance, compassion? Or over healthy sexual and erotic feelings? Shame of the higher self is as frequent as shame of the lower self. As a result of it, people often betray the best in themselves and pretend to be more selfish, hard boiled, critical, intolerant, judging, unkind, than they actually feel. They do not dare to live up to what they really are, out of fear to be laughed at, rejected, despised. Such self-betrayal causes the strongest guilt feelings and tendency of self-rejection. Connected with this trait is a fear of happiness, therefore an unconscious, subtle rejection of fulfillment and all desirable experience. It is of utmost importance to be aware of if you tend to lean toward a shame of the higher or the lower self. Incidentally, do not ever forget that one tendency (in this as in any other respect) does not exclude the presence of the other. It is possible that, in some areas one is predominant, while other facets of the personality tend to the other alternative.

Or do you feel most ashamed when you feel helpless, rejected? Does such helplessness or rejection appear humiliating? The answer to these questions will give a good indication of your specific defenses -- in what direction to look for them. After finishing these new lists, try again to correlate them with the first ones -- as well as with the results of the daily review.

The further you go, the more stimulating and interesting will such self-exploration become. You are bound to feel occasional joy and release from tension, even during the beginning stages. Do this work in a leisurely way, with gladness in your heart and eagerness to embark on a great adventure of exploration which will bring enlightenment and resolve many puzzles in your life.

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