

POSITIVE THINKING: THE RIGHT AND THE WRONG KIND

In the name of the Lord, I greet you, my friends, and I bring you His blessings. There are many people who, when they come in contact with God, with absolute truth, with the spirit world, believe that the certainty of this experience comes to them by some staggering "proof" which they expect to receive personally. But, my friends, it cannot happen that way. You desire this kind of proof because you think that it can eliminate your doubts. Doubts are, in themselves, understandable enough. However, your doubts can never disappear by the sort of proof for which you hope.

Doubt is the opposite of faith; and faith, my friends, is in reality nothing other than the certainty of all that you may doubt now: it is the inner experience. Inner experience cannot come into existence through outer events. So we are dealing here with two entirely different levels of consciousness. To accomplish something within you, you have to prepare the inner conditions as well as the outer, by finding and conquering your inner blocks and hurdles, in short, everything that stands in your way to faith in its true meaning.

Let us suppose you were to receive the proof you hope for, but without first removing your inner obstacles. At the moment you would certainly be impressed. You might say: "Indeed, this is strange; this is wonderful; it is astounding." Yet, after the first effect has worn off, the doubts in you would surface again. You would say to yourselves: "Perhaps the medium knew about it," or "All this was coincidence." So you see, when outer occurrences are not substantiated within, the greatest outer effect must fade after a while because these two levels of perception can never replace one another; they can only be integrated by steady inner development. The experience of absolute truth is like a living organism; it has to be nursed, cared for, and developed. It cannot come to you by a miraculous outer happening.

Physical growth happens slowly but surely, step by step; you hardly notice the growing while it goes on, until all of a sudden you discover how the preceding development has gradually proceeded and attained a new stage. All physical growth happens gradually, and the process is not a bit different with spiritual or emotional growth. Shortcuts never have any lasting effect and are therefore always a farce. Shortcuts and other sudden measures supposed to eliminate the effort of slow growth are in accordance with the laws of the powers of darkness. They are very effective, very quick, but never lasting. Slow growth and development, however, are in accordance with divine law and must eventually be crowned by success.

It would benefit all my friends to remember that you cannot come to the kind of faith we are talking about here by a single experience, no matter how astounding. Rather, you will obtain faith by working spiritually, by walking on this path of perfection, by getting to know yourselves as you really are, by understanding your inner conflicts and finding out in what way you have, be it only by

an emotional reaction, broken spiritual laws. Step by step, as you proceed to free yourselves of your inner chains, the doubts will come less and less often. They will not disappear suddenly, but will recur more and more seldom with less and less strength, until they disappear altogether. This is the only way, my friends.

As I said, this is the law for all divine processes. Anything substantial and permanent grows slowly with a maximum of personal effort, little by little. As the process unfolds, you may not even be aware of the extent to which you and your faith, your experience of the absolute, and your sense of it, grows.

It is not only people at the beginning of this path or those on its threshold who need to know about these facts. Even those already in the process of their proper inner development find themselves occasionally, though less often and with less impact, assailed by their original doubts. For these inevitable times of doubt I wish to give you, my friends, some simple advice, in order that you may know how to go about meeting the doubts.

Most of you know that there are two forces within the human soul. The higher self or the divine spark is the part of you that strives upward; it is the part of you that wishes perfection for the whole human being, complete integration of all separated parts. The higher self knows the greater truth your conscious being doubts and wants to convey this knowledge to your consciousness. The other part is the lower self, which comprises not only your faults and weaknesses but also your ignorance and all the attitudes by which you consciously or unconsciously break divine law. This part fears the certainty of the spiritual world. For knowledge also means responsibility, and you in your lower nature prefer to remain ignorant because you are thus freed from the obligation to conquer your lower self, which is indeed not easy to accomplish. Yet there is also a yearning in you for the truth of spiritual reality which you still doubt because, difficult as it may be to attain, truth means eternal happiness and bliss. But your lower self with its fear, and for its own reasons, tries to make you doubt the part desiring truth in order to avoid disappointment.

The higher self and the lower self are therefore at war with one another. Whenever there is an inner disharmony, it means that your two natures are fighting. Whenever doubt reappears, it is your lower self speaking. When the doubt is gone, the higher self is speaking. Then you know that God, His wonderful creation, His spirit world is the ultimate truth where everything is possible, where no unhappiness may exist. But when the lower self is stronger, you believe that doubt, despair, hopelessness may after all be true. Now there is just one question for you to settle, and that is, which side is right; which side is actually the truth? All you should do while you are in doubt is to retire into quietness. Formulate this argument in clear-cut, concise thought and ask God the simple question: Which is true? And then keep yourselves open for the answer. Do not expect that the answer can always be given to you immediately. In the days to follow, just stay aware of the question. In one way or another you will eventually receive the answer.

Actually, the answer is already settled within you, although you may not know it yet. It is evident by the mere fact that when you are in doubt you are depressed, and when you are experiencing truth, you feel happy. Truth must always make you happy -- even unpleasant truth. All my friends on the path have experienced how they must occasionally encounter unflattering or unpleasant aspects within themselves. But when desire for the truth within becomes greater than all else, this unpleasant truth will always strengthen and bring happiness. By the same token, if you

observe your feelings closely, you will find that untruth, pleasant as it may seem at the moment, never gives you real peace, for deep down your higher self always has the correct answer and you must feel it. Thus truth will never depress you, my dear friends. And there you find the answer to the question you have not yet settled when you are in doubt. But should you not be satisfied with your own inner voice that tells you the truth, and should you wish additional answers, formulate your feelings and ask God again: "Which is true? I am ready to receive Thy answer." I promise you the answer will come, provided you will not put the question completely out of your mind. Rather, stay patiently aware of it in a relaxed and serene way and go about your business. The truth will be shown to you, and you will know which of the two battling sides within you has the right answer.

When you have overcome the hurdles within you and are mature enough to remain in a state of truth, the proofs that you had desired will come to you also from without, not once, but a hundred times. But the purpose of such proofs will not be to make you see reality as it actually is, to convince you and to overcome your doubts; rather, the proofs will be more wonderful than you ever dreamed possible. They will come simply as a natural byproduct of your inner victory in walking the path to God. When you do not need proofs anymore, you will receive them abundantly. These incidents will just be an additional confirmation for you and will surely make you happy, though they will not be a condition without which you cannot believe and accept truth. This again is profound wisdom and divine law.

Now I wish to talk about a much disputed subject among my friends: positive thinking. Positive thinking is, indeed, essential for the person who wants to grow spiritually. Unfortunately, it is often misunderstood and wrongly applied. To build clean and proper thoughts according to divine law is, of course, one of the fundamentals of a spiritual path. Since your thoughts are reality, they have form and substance. Unclean thoughts build disharmonious forms, which must eventually affect your lives and destinies. Not only conscious thoughts have this effect but also emotional reactions and subconscious thoughts. In any case, the great temptation of the spiritually and emotionally immature person is to push everything uncomfortable into the subconscious, where it does infinitely more harm than any conscious thought, even the worst one.

Everything can be dealt with and met when it is conscious, whereas it smolders like a time bomb when it is enclosed in the subconscious mind. There disharmonious forms build themselves every bit as destructively as from conscious thought. Diligent students of positive thinking are therefore often encouraged to do just what is worst for them. They are so concerned about not harboring any negative thoughts that they are inclined to push all negative thoughts into their subconscious and thus disregard the discrepancy between what they want to think and what they actually still think or feel.

It should be stressed that thoughts can be controlled by your conscious direction of will, just as your actions can; however, you cannot directly control your feelings. You may know very well that it is sinful to hate, but when hatred is still in you, you cannot change this inner current merely because you try to force yourself. Similarly, if you do not love a person you cannot force yourself to do so, as much as you may want to. The change can be brought about only indirectly, by remote control, so to speak. With every upward step you take on the path, your feelings will change automatically, naturally, and gradually.

One way to bring this about is to make your subconscious known to your consciousness. But the system of positive thinking works the other way; it tries too hard to induce you to convince yourself about something that exists merely on the surface and has no root in you. Thus you live a lie, well meant as it may be. And this is the most harmful of all things! Therefore, it is imperative to meet squarely what actually still exists in you and face it. When you are so concerned with positive thinking, right as it is in the proper way, you may partly fall into danger by your own good will and partly by that side in you which hates to recognize unpleasant currents within yourself. You then disregard what actually exists in you, locking it up where it will ferment and work harder against you than negative thoughts that remain conscious. This is one important consideration that you all should remember.

Certainly, you should practice positive thinking. Observe your thoughts, but observe them quietly, with detachment and in a relaxed way, without guilt feelings, so that you can perceive whenever your emotions are not always parallel to your thoughts or to the way you want your thoughts and feelings to be. You have to learn to view your lower self, accepting its present temporary existence -- how temporary depends entirely on you. Your lower self is still a reality on the plane where you now live, and you cannot close your eyes to any reality on whatever plane it may be.

Another misunderstanding, misuse, or abuse that often arises out of the principle of positive thinking is the following: Everybody wants to be happy. This is a most natural wish, which comes from the higher self as well as from the lower self, but only the higher self knows that there is a price to be paid for happiness. The price is all the effort one has to make on the path: self-knowledge, overcoming one's faults, learning the spiritual laws generally and applying them particularly and personally, and so on. The lower self, on the other hand, wants to attain happiness by outer means and without the price of conquering itself. And the basis for conquering the lower nature is self-knowledge, honesty toward oneself, and self-analysis. The lower self, in its pride, wants to be perfect without doing the necessary and often tiresome work to accomplish this. Thus it is that both the higher and the lower self want happiness, but each in a different way. Your higher self knows that only by perfection within can you achieve perfection without, and that is happiness. Your lower self is not prepared to pay any price; it wants to have its cake and eat it too.

If you have difficulties in your lives, you all know that they come from your lower nature and are the result of your breaking the divine law in some respect, and often in many respects. Mature people have to be prepared to accept the workings of the law as a way of honoring God. They will not try to get out of paying the price. Misapplied or misunderstood positive thinking wants to have outer perfection often too quickly, merely by learning thought control. This is not enough. Your lower nature borrows this principle because it fits very well with what it wants. The first step to true positive thinking is to take the consequences of what you have done in the past, whether they concern a previous incarnation or this very same life, and say: "I have gone against the law and the effects have to be worked out. This means among other things, that I have to accept the consequences in this life."

We often observe people who try very hard to practice positive thinking. One reason they try so hard is that, unbeknownst to themselves, their thoughts are not clearly formulated; when their desire for happiness comes from the lower self, they are inclined to quarrel with God and destiny whenever they encounter difficulties and hardships. You may accept intellectually the truth that

God did not want you to have difficulties in the first place and that you yourself are responsible for them. But emotionally you have not learned this truth as long as you are unwilling to pay. Paying means accepting your difficulties, knowing that they are only temporary, for God is love and wants all His children to be happy. But happiness can be achieved only by consciously accepting the laws of cause and effect and not trying to escape the effect by mere thought control.

Happiness cannot come to you as long as you love yourself so dearly that a little pain becomes too terrible for you to bear. Only by accepting this pain can you become detached enough from your ego until pain will no longer be necessary for your development. This does not mean that you should resign yourself and become hopeless, wallowing in your little pains and tribulations. It means that you should be perfectly aware that every difficulty in your life is self-inflicted and therefore you have to go through it, bear it, accept it, and most important of all, find its cause within you, so as to eliminate it once and for all. The cause can be found only on a path of self-knowledge. Find the fault in you that is responsible for your outer hardship and eliminate the fault, knowing that the outer manifestation of the root cause cannot disappear immediately but has to be dissolved by the process of slow, organic growth. As long as this process lasts, honor God by accepting His laws; do not love yourself so much that you shirk a little pain, but shoulder it courageously and humbly, not making your own little comfort so important. This is the true and best way to practice positive thinking.

With this attitude you will be penetrated by the profound conviction that God's world is a happy world in which you have nothing to fear, in which you have so much to look forward to. Your sense of time will also gradually change, becoming not only an intellectual concept, but a deep intuition that tells you how short the span of your little pain is when viewed from the spiritual and only real perspective. You all have heard often, from me or others, that your difficulties are not as important as the manner in which you take them. And I have shown you how you should meet your difficulties.

"He who wants to win his life will lose it. He who is ready to give it up will win it." What does that mean, my friends? It means that if you are constantly so afraid of a little pain, if you hold on so tightly to your ego and to your little sensitivity or vanity, you do not give up your life; rather, you hold on to it too tightly and therefore must lose it. To lose, in the spiritual sense, means you cannot find peace, harmony, or happiness either from within or without. But those who do not take themselves so seriously, whose comfort and everything pertaining to the ego is not so terribly important, whose own little pains and hurt vanities do not matter so much, who do not think constantly, "If I show my affection or my true feelings, what will people think? I might be hurt or I might jeopardize something," they who truly give up their ego-selves, will receive life, again in the spiritual sense. They will find harmony within by going with the law, and will find the love and respect from others they could never have found by holding on to themselves so tightly.

It is therefore of utmost importance on the spiritual path to learn to give up one's life in the true sense, which entails also being able to accept pain. The misunderstood application of positive thinking leaves out this entire chapter of spiritual development.

The next time, my dear friends, I will talk about how we spirits see human beings, the whole unit of human personality, and how this affects the process of purification, or the path of perfection, or psychological therapy, whatever you want to call it. I want to give you the spiritual angle on this

subject. And I wish to inform you that my next lecture will also be in English, in order that more of you can profit by it. Then we shall see if we shall have a lecture in German again or not. But at any rate, the German lectures will take place less frequently.

Before I turn to your questions, I would like you, my friend Walter, to organize the questions from now on. It would be advisable if you would discuss beforehand with all the participants the questions they want to ask. I suggest that you then sift the questions and see to it that they are asked in order of their importance and their interest. If all the questions cannot be answered at that time, the rest will be carried over to the following session. It is more advisable to handle the questions this way because then there will be no pauses. As it is now, some friends who may want very much to ask questions often hesitate because they are shy. They think someone else may want to ask a question and they do not dare to speak up first. Then there is an unnecessary pause and this time could be utilized. Now that your circle is growing bigger and bigger, these things could work out better if they were organized properly. But before I turn to the planned questions, I will ask you if there is anything about the preceding lecture that you would like to ask first. Only afterwards will we turn to the planned questions.

And now, my dear ones, I am ready for your questions and will answer them to the best of my ability.

QUESTION: Why should an answer to our doubts come as an anticlimax?

ANSWER: I will tell you why. When a human being expects answers from God and from the spirit world, he or she somehow imagines that this must happen in a very dramatic, or perhaps even melodramatic way, that is, as some sort of a miracle. And yet this is not the way God works. God works through you or through other human beings, and the answers granted seem to happen in a way so natural that at the moment you may be uncertain as to whether there really was an answer. There is also a very good reason for this, in fact a number of reasons. One is that the highest state of happiness and grace -- the experience, the fact of the existence of the other world and its closeness to you -- must not be made too easy. You have to be tested and tested again and again to determine whether you are worthy of living in truth constantly. In short, you have to work for this; you have to keep your eyes open, your inner feelings and perception tuned to the spirit world. You must not take it for granted; you must train these inner senses by observation and awareness. Thus you work upward, using everything given to you from the spirit world, and this is the way it should be. If you meet it properly, the result will be infinitely better; you will not be sustained by some outer happenings or experiences, but by the strength and wisdom you have developed within, and you will find constant strength and happiness that is built on a rock and can never be pulled out from under your feet.

Thus the answers come in a "worldly" way, almost as though by chance -- naturally, not supernaturally. And that is why an answer may seem like an anticlimax. If you are not sure, take this uncertainty, voice your question clearly, and ask for truth. Ask whether this was an answer or not, and you will receive it again without a shadow of a doubt. Alas, this rarely occurs to people, even to those who are accustomed to praying and turning to God with all the little problems and uncertainties. You are prone to letting the uncertainties ferment in your feelings and create disorder in your soul. All unclarified conflicts, big or small, weaken you. Therefore, it would be very advisable to turn always to God with all things when you are uncertain. Ask for enlightenment; ask

for truth. Ask for His will when a decision is to be made. Thus you will reach the state for which you are longing far sooner.

QUESTION: How far is desirelessness a necessary step toward the path of perfection? I refer especially to the differences in the teachings between East and West.

ANSWER: Desirelessness is also often misunderstood, not only by Westerners, but also by Easterners. Needless to say, some desire must remain in the human heart. And it is again the same old story: the how is important, the exact shade of it; the answer is neither a Yes or a No. In other words, in one way there must be desire; in another way, desire must gradually cease. The desire must remain to reach God, to experience Him, to serve Him, and, by serving Him, to serve our brothers and sisters. This wish must not only come from the intellect as a dutiful recognition of the right thing; this wish alone, or rather its fulfillment, will bring happiness. By spiritual growth, what one desires merely changes. However, desirelessness should set in as far as the ego is concerned. Again, this kind of detachment cannot come by forcing oneself; it is the natural result of spiritual growth; you can attain this state of being only indirectly. Here, too, it is important to be able to accept pain in a healthy way, as I have explained before. If you are so set against pain, if everything cringes in you at the thought of it, you very much desire not to have pain -- and therefore you are not detached. You have to train yourself that your pain, your vanity, and your comfort do not matter an iota more than that of the next fellow. When you feel increasingly that you do not matter to yourself any more than anyone else whom you may not even know personally, and do not consider yourself more important, then you are a step nearer to detachment -- and thus to happiness.

When personal success or failure does not grip you inside -- and both can do that: one pleasurable, the other unpleasurable -- you have attained some of this detachment, in which alone you will find real security. For otherwise the security you are seeking is always dependent on things outside your control. Everything has to go your way so that you can feel happy, satisfied, and secure. But when it does not, you are lost and in the grip of forces within you that you cannot control. In other words, you are controlled by them and you lose your serenity, or what you thought was serenity when things went well. However, being detached in the way I mean, you are independent; you do not need outside conditions to give you harmony and security. You are swimming right along with the stream and never push against it. Nothing can touch you then and throw you off.

I realize that this is difficult to understand for people who are not that far yet. I do not even like to talk too much about this state, for as development proceeds properly, it comes by itself and needs not be discussed too much. Hearing these words before you can feel their true flavor, you may even become afraid of being detached, because you will misunderstand me, my friends. You will think this kind of detachment means that you do not love any more or do not care, that you become resigned and indifferent. But this is not in the least true! Indifference means not being alive, not vibrating with vitality. And the higher you are on the path, the more alive you become. You do care and you do love, but differently, without the pangs of the ego, without the shadowy side that all good has on your plane of existence.

Your desires and the granting of them do not really make you happy; they may give you a moment's satisfaction, but never peace of mind, serenity, steady happiness that can never be lost and

that you often unconsciously fear, because you are afraid of emotions which you are not yet mature enough to sustain. So be not afraid, my friends. That state is something to look forward to, indeed. It will not happen suddenly, but you will grow into it. Like everything else, this too will develop gradually and organically if you proceed on the path, and you will not even be aware at the beginning that any transformation is taking place in you. You will just feel more and more at peace; things that go wrong will not affect you any more -- first less than previously, and finally not at all. You will not be gripped by anger, anxiety, or hostility. You will live more and more constantly in a state of joy. And do not think that little joys will then give you less pleasure. On the contrary, while now your capacity of enjoyment is hindered by your own disturbed soul, by all your desires and wishes, some of which are incapable of being fulfilled, in the new state you will really enjoy.

As long as you are in the grip of your ego with its fears and anxieties, you cannot live in the present. You sometimes live in the past -- and this is bad. And it is also true that you very often live in the future which, in its own way, is equally bad. This applies just as much to old people. When you believe it important to think of tomorrow or the next hour, you do not live this very moment. What does that mean? It means that there is some desire connected with the future. Anxiety comes from the wrong type of desire. If you fear something, you desire that this thing should not happen. So it is with most of you; you live almost all your life somehow in the future, and thus you let life slip by. You miss out on seeing and appreciating the most beautiful things right in front of your eyes; you do not see them because you are too busy with your desires. The now is lost for many of you because of your desires. If this kind of detachment is not reached, you constantly miss the happiness of the now. And I beg all of you, my friends, to whom the thought of desirelessness or detachment is still a little frightening, do not think about it. It will come as a byproduct, if and when you follow this path of happiness. This is what I have to say.

QUESTION: When you speak of positive thinking, you say that we should be aware of the hatred or resentment we feel. But how are we to relate the kind of thinking we should have to the feelings in us and not be in conflict?

ANSWER: When you meditate, listen within you. Just observe your inner feelings, reactions, and trends. Do not try to cover your true feelings for whatever motive. Say to God, "I want truth, including the temporary truth about me, about all my real feelings and thoughts." For you cannot reach absolute truth unless you discover first your own temporary truth, unpleasant as it may be. Ask God, therefore, for your own truth, and be ready to face it. Above all else, pray to have the will for it by meditating on these words. For instance, since you cannot reach your goal without finding your own truth, you can free yourself of all chains only by knowing, facing, and conquering yourself. Observe yourself clinically. Then just note your feelings; register them with detachment. Say to yourself: "This is the way I want to think and feel, but in this or that respect my true feelings, my inner thoughts, still deviate from what I understand intellectually. This understanding has not yet reached my emotions." Watch yourself continually, every day. Sometimes there will be a greater discrepancy, sometimes less; this depends on many things.

If you practice this process for a while, you learn several things at once. First, you learn to take yourself as you are, and learn the humility that so many of you lack because you all want to be perfect and to be on the top of the mountain, while in reality you have not even reached the first valley. And this is also a kind of pride, coupled with laziness. You want to be there without getting there. Again, your lower self does not want to pay the price. So learn humility; learn to take

yourself as you are; learn your true inner nature with its many facets and not only the facets you want to see.

This whole process is extremely healthy and it will give you infinitely more strength than any type of wishful thinking you might be tempted to use, prompted by a misunderstood theory of positive thinking. This is much more than positive thinking, for you learn to live in reality, the temporary reality you have created by your previous attitudes. If you do just this for some time and get accustomed to accepting objectively, almost coldly, the imperfection living in your lower nature without feeling too disturbed about it, after a while you will come to the next step. The next step is to meditate on the divine law which your inner trend has broken. Whoever follows this path, whoever sincerely wants to walk it, will definitely be guided to the very teacher, the one best for his or her particular personality and problems. This must happen and always will happen because you cannot take this path without teachings from the outside. You will thus learn what particular meditation is best to use for your problem. Hate or resentment may have different causes or motives in different people. The same things in different individuals may need different approaches, different types of meditations. But this will come later.

First, the clinical observation of the self, the lower self from the perspective of the higher self, has to be practiced and fully mastered before the second phase sets in. You have to learn first to take yourself as you are, to come down from the high place in which you have put yourself. Take yourself humbly and without feelings of guilt: "This is the way I am, but that is the way I want to be, and to bridge the discrepancy I shall have to have patience and the willpower to work unceasingly, for otherwise I cannot expect to arrive at the spiritual place I seek." After you have learned that, your particular second phase will be made known to you -- about that you can rest assured.

Edited by Judith and John Saly

For information to find and participate in Pathwork activities world wide, please write:

The Pathwork® Foundation
PO Box 6010
Charlottesville, VA 22906-6010, USA
Call: 1-800-PATHWORK, or
Visit: www.pathwork.org

The following notices are for your guidance in the use of the Pathwork® name and this lecture material.

Trademark/Service Mark

Pathwork® is a registered service mark owned by The Pathwork Foundation, and may not be used without the express written permission of the Foundation. The Foundation may, in its sole discretion, authorize use of the Pathwork® mark by other organizations or persons, such as affiliate organizations and chapters.

Copyright

The copyright of the Pathwork Guide material is the sole property of The Pathwork Foundation. This lecture may be reproduced, in compliance with the Foundation Trademark, Service Mark and Copyright Policy, but the text may not be altered or abbreviated in any way, nor may the copyright, trademark, service mark, or any other notices be removed. Recipients may be charged the cost of reproduction and distribution only.

Any person or organization using The Pathwork Foundation service mark or copyrighted material is deemed to have agreed to comply with the Foundation Trademark, Service Mark and Copyright Policy. To obtain information or a copy of this policy, please contact the Foundation.