

SELF-ESTEEM

Greetings, my dearest friends. Blessings for every one of you here. May your heart be open, may your attention be focused, so that you can absorb as much as possible in this hour.

I should like to discuss a problem of great importance, especially for all those whose pathwork has brought them awareness of previously undetected reactions in the self. These reactions indicate struggle and confusion regarding their self-esteem, which is of fundamental importance. Self-esteem, self-liking, or self-value -- whatever you call it -- is sorely lacking in every human being who experiences feelings of uncertainty, fear, insecurity, guilt, weakness, doubt, negativity, inadequacy, and inferiority. To the degree these feelings are present, self-esteem is inevitably lacking, only this is not directly recognized. Such ignorance is all the more damaging, for you are then less capable of tackling the problem directly. Only considerable insight into the self, as a result of hard work, brings the direct awareness of "I do not like and respect myself."

People are constantly confronted with an inner, and rarely conscious, conflict about this recognition. The conflict arises out of the dualistic perception characteristic of humanity. I have often shown how a misconception splits the truth into two opposing halves that confuse you and make it impossible for you to make satisfying choices. You are then torn in inner dissension and painful confusion. In this case the dilemma is: How can you accept and like yourself without falling into the danger of self-indulgence and self-justification for the destructive traits that exist in all human beings, no matter how concealed they may be? Or, on the other side, how can you confront, accept, and admit those negative, destructive traits, weaknesses, little selfishnesses, cruelties, and vanities that often make you vindictive and unloving and nevertheless maintain your self-respect? How can you avoid falling into the danger of destructive guilt, self-rejection, and self-contempt?

This is a deep-rooted conflict, and most human beings, whether or not they know it, battle with it. It is a typical dualistic confusion that apparently makes admitting an unpleasant truth and self-acceptance into mutually exclusive opposites.

But before I will discuss this in greater detail and offer you a key that will make it possible to unify this split, let me discuss the conflict itself a little more. Those of you who have recently found this raging battle within yourselves will know exactly what I am talking about. Others, who have not yet recognized their self-rejection, will have to come to this awareness gradually. Perhaps the only way you can now recognize your self-dislike and your undervaluation of yourself will be an indirect one. You can certainly sense shyness, uncertainty, insecurity, apprehension about being rejected or criticized, as well as feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. Perhaps you may perceive here or there a peculiar guilt feeling that makes no sense to you. Although this guilt usually hides behind other attitudes, it is rarely so remote that it cannot be clearly perceived at times, once you set out to detect such things. Perhaps you are aware that you are not open to the untold possibilities of blissful

fulfillment in life; that you make do with much less than you could experience. Perhaps you can discern that you stand back in life and feel vaguely undeserving and perceive your own possibilities negatively. Perhaps this perception exists only in certain areas of your life, but it still indicates self-rejection.

All these manifestations indicate self-rejection, self-dislike. It should not be too difficult to bridge the gap in consciousness between any of these manifestations with the more profound root, namely that you do not think much of yourself. You may dislike yourself for some traits and attitudes, but this specificity may be even more hidden from your awareness. It is quite possible that you can first ascertain only the vague general feelings of self-disdain, without being able to pinpoint the specific traits you dislike in yourself.

Once you feel, however vaguely, that you do not respect yourself and lack esteem and appreciation for yourself as a human being, the next step must be to make this attitude more specific. If you really want to find it, you will do so, although the recognition of exactly what this attitude is may come quite indirectly. This is the way the path often works.

On the other hand, you may see something quite clearly in yourself that is truly regrettable and undesirable. Then you may fall into the erroneous attitude of defiance and self-justification, because you believe that admitting your undesirable traits means that you must dislike and reject your entire self. You fail to differentiate between rejecting a trait and rejecting the person, whether yourself or others. Therefore you fall into the error of justifying, denying, falsifying, and rationalizing -- and often even beautifying -- a very undesirable and destructive trait. Here you have the full-fledged confusion!

Here is how to find the key that will enable you to squarely confront the undesirable attitudes, without in the least losing respect for yourself or losing the sense that you are a valuable human being. First, you have to perceive and experience life in a new way. Your life -- and you are life because you are alive -- represents all life, all nature. One of the earmarks of life is its untold potentiality for change and expansion. To be more specific: Once you perceive life as it is, you will sense that even the lowliest of all destructive creatures has every possibility for change and for goodness, for greatness and for growth. At any moment, the thinking may change and create new attitudes and behavior, new feelings, new ways of being. And if these do not happen now, that alters nothing, for one day things are bound to change and then your true nature must finally emerge. The knowledge of one's true nature having to emerge sooner or later changes everything: it changes your despair about yourself. It opens the door to knowing your potential for goodness, regardless of how malicious you now may be; for generosity, regardless of how mean you may now be; for loving, regardless of how selfish you now may be; for strength and integrity, regardless of how weak you may now be and how tempted to betray your best self; for greatness, regardless of how petty you may now be.

Look at nature, at any manifestation of life, and it is forever changing; it is forever dying and being reborn; it is forever expanding and contracting and pulsating. It is always moving and branching out. This applies particularly to life that is conscious, and even more so to life that is self-conscious. The power of thought, of will, of emotions is infinitely greater than any inanimate power. And yet, the inanimate power of, say, electricity, and even more of atomic energy, is so great

that you have barely begun to gain an inkling of its possibilities both for good and constructive, as well as for destructive, ends. Wherever there is life and consciousness, both these possibilities exist.

Now, if in the smallest atom -- so small that it cannot even be perceived with the naked eye -- a power exists to release untold energies for building or destroying, how infinitely more is this the case with the power of the mind: the power of thinking, feeling, and willing. Just dwell on this significant fact, my friends, and it will open new vistas to you. Why do you blindly assume that the power of inanimate things is greater than the power of the mind?

The powers to think, will, feel, express, act, and decide are the earmarks of consciousness. They are vastly underrated by humanity. Living consciousness therefore deserves a respect that can hardly be put into words. It does not matter how it manifests; no matter how undesirable and destructive the present manifestation may be, the life that issues from the momentary destructiveness holds all the potential for turning into constructive channels, for life's source is truly inexhaustible.

Since the very essence of life is movement, and therefore change, this is what justifiably and realistically gives hope, no matter how hopeless a situation or a state of mind may appear. People in deep depression and hopelessness must be in error, for they negate the very essence of life. And those who despair about themselves because they feel they are so bad, so unacceptable, so destructive, so negative, find themselves in the error of perceiving and experiencing life in a fixed way, as though what is now must always be. This is the error of deadness: "This is so, and that is all there is to it." Such thinking ignores and negates the flux of true life. Since you are alive, this fluidity is yours; in reality you are fluid.

The only thing that keeps you from being fluid, and therefore changing into a state of realistic hopefulness and light, into the essence of life itself, is your own enclosure, your ignorance of this truth -- your momentary state of consciousness. This state of consciousness is now fixed in the conviction that life and your personality traits are static and must remain that way. Your state of consciousness remains fixed in this dark imprisonment as long as you know nothing else.

By merely being here and hearing these words you have the possibility of applying them to your personal situation. Where are you hopeless? Why are you hopeless? Do you feel hopeless because of life itself? Because you believe the possibilities for expansion and happiness are too limited to give you sufficient scope? Are you hopeless because you feel you do not deserve and cannot have a more meaningful, fulfilled experience of life? The latter thought may smolder secretly beneath your perception of life's limitations.

If you can bring these fleeting impressions into more concise awareness, you can ask yourself: "Am I hopeless about deserving happiness because I, possibly quite justifiably, dislike certain traits in me?" But don't you then also believe that these traits mark and define your person? That is the great struggle, my friends: you erroneously believe that what is most obnoxious to you is you. This, at the same time, is the cause for the great resistance, inherent in all human beings, against changing. For, since you do not believe that you can essentially be anything else but that which you dislike, you have to hold on to it nevertheless, because you do not wish to cease existing. That is the crux of this dualistic confusion. This is why you so inexplicably hold on to destructive traits. Many of my friends have reached the awareness where they can see this, and actually see themselves holding on

to aspects in themselves they thoroughly dislike. They seem unable to help it and thus despair even more. They cannot even understand what power propels them to hold on, almost deliberately, to what they hate in themselves.

Here, my friends, is the answer: You hold on to it because you genuinely believe this is you; you are in a fixed state, you are a fixed unit, and any change is impossible because you do not realize that all possibilities exist in you. You are already what you think you would have to produce artificially, laboriously, and through forcibly contorting your very nature. But since you will not believe this, you cannot give up holding on to the very facets you do dislike, for they seem to represent your essence.

This is indeed a vicious circle, for true self-esteem can, of course, come only by your sensing your capacity to love, to give of yourself. Yet this capacity cannot be known when you take it for granted that it simply does not exist; when you believe that any state other than the one you express now is alien to you -- intrinsically alien, and your real, final, fixed self is what you dislike. As long as that is the case, you remain trapped in a vicious circle.

In order to come out of this circle, life must be understood in its essence. No matter how fixed your life may appear, it is only one tiny part of the whole story, my friends. Underneath all these personality traits you believe are fixed, final things, the fluid life exists like a winter stream under the snow. It is constant; feelings branch out of it in all directions, spontaneously and wondrously forever self-renewing. Its life pulsates vibrantly; it is movement itself. Above all, it is a life in which you are free at any moment to think new and different thoughts that create a new and different life expression and personality.

You see, as long as you ignore the true state of life, hence your own true state, you cannot give yourself the fundamental respect that you deserve as a human creature. As long as you confuse life with death, with inanimate matter, you will despair. And even inanimate matter, as you now know from present-day science, has an intrinsic life and incredible movement, once this life is released. Think about this, my friends. Even an apparently dead object is not dead; it contains life, movement, and utter change. Think of the movement, life, and change in every atom of the dearest-seeming matter.

So, nothing in the universe actually exists that is lifeless. How much less so with consciousness! Your thinking is a constant movement. The only trouble is that you have conditioned yourself to let it ruminate in habitual negativity, self-rejection, and needless limitation. But once you decide to use your thinking in a new way, you will experience the truth of life's hopeful changeability, its endless possibilities to move in new directions. You can constantly expand your thinking, take in new ideas, embrace new realizations, and therefore bring to yourself new will-directions, new expansions, new aims, new energies, new feelings. All of this is personality change. Without your being quite aware of it, these new ways of thinking and feeling change those attitudes you now dislike so much.

When I talk about new ways of being, I want to make it quite clear that this does not mean they have not existed in you as a dormant essence. They are only new as far as your awareness is concerned, for they are all there, constantly ready to be used for the asking. But as long as you enclose yourself within the narrow framework of your limited perceptions of yourself and of life,

you cannot use what is already there. Perceive yourself as fertile soil before the seeds are planted. Fertile soil contains incredible power to bring about new expressions of life. The potentials seethe in it, whether or not the seeds are actually put in. Your entire consciousness and aliveness is the most fertile soil imaginable. The fertile soil is constantly there with incredible power to bring forth new expressions of life in your thinking, your feeling, your willing, your energies, your possibilities of action and reaction.

Each situation you are in contains new possibilities for reaction. You have choices all the time. You can be in a new situation and automatically fall into the old conditioned reflexes, your negative approach, without paying attention to what you are doing. Perhaps you moan about the misery of life because this or that has happened to you that you do not like, and you never see the connection between your discontent and failures on the one hand, and your one-sided, negative automatic reactions, on the other. As long as you assume that this habitual approach is the only one possible, you will not grasp the possibilities and powers in your life.

Thus, when you feel unhappy or hopeless, question yourself: "Do I not have another way to react to this situation that seems to befall me out of nowhere and to which I choose to react negatively, destructively, making myself hopeless, complaining and feeling angry about it?" This choice is yours. Your anger and complaints against the world are wasted, for all that energy could do so much to build new life for you if it were used properly. You cannot change others, but you can certainly change your own attitudes and your thinking. Then life offers its limitless possibilities to you.

First, your thinking and your attitudes change; then the feelings follow suit; then your actions and reactions begin to respond to new spontaneous impulses. And these, in turn, bring forth new life experiences. The more you experience the chain reaction of this process, the more you also perceive that you are a living, moving, endlessly changing unit of life expression. And no trait merits evaluating and rejecting your whole self because of it. Once you perceive this, you can afford the wonderful, relieving luxury of calmly admitting any undesirable, ugly trait, without in the least disliking yourself for it; without in the least losing your sense of being a divine expression, no matter what the traits may be. Then, and only then, can you really transform these traits.

Paradoxical as this may seem, the total self-rejection, the destructive kind of guilt under discussion is incapable of overcoming anything. You will not understand why, my friends, unless you see that it is impossible to overcome anything when you believe you are a fixed, unchangeable blob. You know that according to your belief you must experience, because you cannot see beyond the form you have built according to your belief. Your actions then are determined by your beliefs and must thus provide proof of their veracity, no matter how mistaken those beliefs are and how many other alternatives exist in reality.

Thus, if you are convinced that you cannot change, you cannot even take a meaningful step in the direction of change. Therefore, you cannot experience change and must be convinced that change is impossible. The negative conviction makes it also impossible to summon the necessary effort for bringing change about. The energy, the discipline, the stamina, the initiative essential for effecting a change will be comparatively easy to muster when you know a change is possible; when you know that, change merely means bringing out your dormant qualities. When you know that, no matter how ugly the traits may be, you will not despair about being unlovable. You will make

available the powers in you to surge forward; you will be able to dip into the resources of your innermost being that enable you to overcome any ugly destructive trait.

The power that created the universe, with everything in it, including all that you are, possesses the strength to change anything. For even the things that should be changed were created by that same power and must, in essence, be something other than they appear now. This power is also you and is manifest once you contact it deliberately. This can be done only when you know of the source within you, which is forever changing, moving, and expanding with infinite possibilities.

You see, my friends, the life that is inherent in nature is also in you. Bare will and intellect is sterile, as you well know. Only the feeling of life, the natural life, can indeed bring you the fulfillment without which life is a sorry affair indeed. This is what we have been talking about and aiming for on this path. Now why has humanity lost touch with the source of its own life, the source of its feelings, the source of its instincts, the source of its own nature, deep inside the self? Only because you are so terrified of your destructiveness and do not know how to handle it. So civilization has for millennia denied the instinctual life in order to preserve itself from its dangers. But by doing so humanity has cut off its connection with the essence of life itself. It had not realized that there are other ways to eliminate the distorted, perverted, natural forces, ways that need not deny life itself. The instinctual life has always been wrongly equated with destructiveness. Only as humanity matures is it capable of learning that the instinctual life does not need to be denied in order to avoid evil. Indeed, it should not be denied, for doing so defeats life every bit as much as the feared evil itself. Only within the deep core of the instincts can God be found because only there can true aliveness be found. Thus humanity must find another means to handle its destructive instincts if it is not to annihilate itself by different but just as fatal ways as giving vent to those negative instincts.

This lecture will give you an additional tool to meet your destructive side. You will learn to value and nurture the deep instincts you have always so distrusted and to find the truth of the living creative spirit in and through them. You will then joyfully further your instinctual life, unfold and integrate it. You will believe and trust in it. Do not deny and fear it because you still have difficulties accepting and meeting your undesirable destructive traits. If you truly look at them in a dispassionate, objective way, you will always find that fear and denial really oppose the life of the instincts. The instincts are simple and innocent in themselves; your destructiveness is always a result of pride, selfwill, fear, vanity, greed, separateness, lovelessness, one-upmanship.

In this way, you will find it more and more possible to meet, acknowledge, admit, and accept anything in you, no matter how ugly, and never lose for one second the sense of your intrinsic beautiful aliveness, and of deserving your own esteem. This inner state will be the springboard from which change becomes possible. It will not only be a possibility in the abstract, but an effective way of living, day in and day out, a constantly growing movement.

Anyone of you who can truly bring this important topic to bear upon whatever state you are at this moment will fulfill the next step on this path and overcome an important hurdle. Many of you may be stuck just in this painful inner confusion. Some of you may not know this consciously; others may feel it vaguely; still others may be quite aware of this struggle. Most human beings are totally oblivious of the fact that this very same battle rages in them; that this battle has created the instinctual restrictions and fear, the self-alienation, the aridness and impoverishment of the souls

who cannot thrive in a climate of self-rejection. People also ignore that all the religious commands to love cannot be fulfilled until this dualistic split is healed and unification found, so that self-liking is no longer confused with self-indulgence, and honest self-confrontation need not bring self-loathing. You can find peace only when you can truly accept the ugliest in you and never lose sight of your intrinsic beauty.

Now, are there any questions?

QUESTION: I feel a terrific battle going on right now in relation to my self-esteem. It feels like an atomic explosion. I realize I'm stuck in my own limitations. I realize that I can't stand pleasure. Coming from my habitual state of unpleasure, pleasure almost seems unnatural.

ANSWER: If you can conceive of yourself as the essence of life, with all its incredible powers, possibilities, and inherent potentials, you will indeed know that you are deserving of your own esteem and acceptance. You will be able to see the traits you hate and still not lose sight of who you essentially are.

I also suggest a specific exercise you might find quite helpful. Put down in writing everything that you dislike about yourself. Have it down in black and white. Look at those traits when they are written down. Then feel into yourself and ask: "Do I really believe that this is all there is to me? Do I really believe that I must be these traits all my life? Do I believe I have the possibility to love? Do I hold forces locked up in me that contain all the good imaginable?" By raising these questions seriously, you will get an answer on a deeply feeling level, a level where the answer is more than a theoretical concept. You will experience a new power in you that you do not need to fear, and a new gentleness and softness that does not need hostility or other defenses. Then you will know how much there is in you to love and respect.

You have recently come across, in your personal pathwork, a very specific misconception that makes loving impossible as long as you harbor it. Since loving is equated with the terrible danger of being totally impoverished, even robbed of your very life, how can you want to love? How can you let yourself love? According to this false idea, giving of yourself means losing what you give without ever being replenished. If this were true, love would indeed be impossible and giving a folly. Is it now conceivable for you to see that this is not so; that reality is different? And if you can see that love comes from the same inexhaustible well as wisdom, as all life does, can you further perceive that you will not need to deny your own natural instinct that wants to reach out, that wants the pleasure of feeling love, warmth, and giving of yourself? And can you still foresee the next natural, organic step in the chain, which is that if you can love, you will inevitably love yourself? This is the reason why you fear pleasure. For pleasure not only seems entirely undeserved, but love and pleasure are interchangeable. True pleasure is loving, and without loving pleasure just does not exist. This is not a reward from outside, or even from your own self; love is pleasure, and pleasure is love. The two are interchangeable. If you harbor love feelings your whole body is in a blissful vibration, with certainty, with security, with peace, with stimulation, with excitement in the most relaxed, pleasurable way. That cannot come through anything that is given to you when you are merely a recipient. It comes when you vibrate with this feeling. Nor does this mean that you do not also receive love. The giving and receiving become so interchangeable that it can often no longer be discerned which is which. Both become indistinguishable in one movement.

But if your nature is as yet incapable of allowing the feeling of love, you must fear bliss, since bliss and loving are the same thing. The misconception that giving is losing causes you to close up and contract in all situations that might bring forth your natural instincts. When you deny love and pleasure, you must inevitably also deny your self-esteem. Your key must lie in seeing that your inability to love is not an inborn aspect that you alone harbor forever. It is a temporary block to loving, based on some false premises, which exist on a deeper level of your emotional experience. You can change this misconception any moment you truly and fully look at it.

Be blessed, every one of you here. Be in peace. Be what you are, honestly and truly, so that God manifests more and more in you.

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.