



Reducing Excessive Self-Criticism Journey

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Step 16: External Excessive Criticism

Lessons 16, 17, and 18 deal with different forms of excessive self-criticism that are important to recognize. As I said at the beginning of the process, excessive self-criticism has many faces, many modes of operation, and many ways of appearing. Some of them we will be able to identify together here, and some each person will discover on their own, because it appears slightly differently in each individual.

But in the end, there is a clear common denominator: it creates a constricting effect. A limiting effect. An effect that wraps us in a negative and unpleasant experience, both in the way we interpret events and in the way we are able to deal with them.

It has many forms, but we can learn to recognize it. At first perhaps in hindsight, later in real time, and eventually perhaps even at the very moment it begins, and to stop it in time.

And therefore, Chapter 16 is a very important chapter. It touches on a conflict that every person encounters at some point, and it is not always easy to deal with.

The topic is excessive self-criticism that is projected back at us through other people. It is confusing. It is misleading. It is irritating. And it is not easy to handle.

We are speaking about unnecessary and excessive criticism that comes to us through other people. And here it is important to clarify: within close relationships, within friendships, acquaintanceships, or family, there is a place for criticism. Yes. Criticism can be important. It can be beneficial.

Sometimes the role of another person is to illuminate something for us, to awaken us, to show us that we are acting in a way that is not appropriate or not supportive of the relationship. This is a role, and it can be a positive role.

The question is how it is said, when it is said, whether it is said with clarity, with the intention to correct and release, with an invitation to dialogue, or whether it is said out of drama, out of blame, out of exaggeration, in a way that creates pain, doubt, and an unpleasant experience.

I emphasize again: criticism that is not excessive, criticism that is specific, relevant, and grounded within a relationship, can be helpful.

But there is another type of criticism between people. A criticism that is actually an expression of our own excessive self-criticism, which reaches us through other people.

People make comments about our initiatives, comments that do not truly help us, that we did not ask for, that make us feel bad, that do not lead to correction but only deepen doubt, create discomfort, and increase disappointment.

And I am not even speaking here about more extreme situations, of hostility, or criticism that makes us feel that we are not accepted. There are situations in which a person insists on correcting us, insists on directing us, even after we have clarified that it is not suitable for us. They continue to criticize our decisions, our choices, our thoughts, our spontaneity, our creativity, our dreams, our path.

We encounter this in many places. And in reality, there is no entry there for other people. We are not meant to allow it. But they are there, because we allowed them in.

Because in a certain sense, they are messengers of our excessive self-criticism, which has gone outward and found expression through others. And then we become angry at them, instead of understanding that this is also our story.

And therefore, when we encounter criticism that comes from another person, and it is not constructive, does not serve the relationship, does not set healthy boundaries, but rather diminishes us, disrespects us, casts doubt, and undermines our abilities, if it has reached us, it is a sign that we allowed it, even without noticing.

And if we allowed it, our role is to set a boundary. To say: excuse me, I am not interested in this criticism. To say it again, and again, and again.

Not to enter into the content, not to argue, not to try to explain, not to justify, not to defend.

Because excessive criticism that creates an unpleasant atmosphere and constricts us is, in fact, a form of bullying. Even if it is said in a polite, cultural, or “nice” way. The moment it is unpleasant, the moment it repeats itself, the moment it invades our space, the moment it diminishes, creates doubt, belittles, or becomes condescending, it is bullying, and to that we must say: stop.

There are, of course, other situations. There are situations where among friends there is humor, there is playfulness, there is mutual teasing, and it happens in proportion, with reciprocity, with an underlying sense of appreciation. That is fine.

But even there, sometimes a boundary is crossed. And the boundary is not always sharp, it is felt. The boundary is the moment it begins to feel unpleasant. And when it does not stop even after we ask, it becomes something else.

This happens sometimes with friends. It happens sometimes with parents. There are situations where the very act of conversation already carries criticism: “Why didn’t you do this, why didn’t you say that, why didn’t you go, why didn’t you call, and why aren’t you like others.”

We know this. And it is very unpleasant. It is an attack on our personality.

And why does this happen? Because our excessive self-criticism has found a messenger. A person who may be naturally critical, or less sensitive, or simply accustomed to speaking this way, and they become a convenient messenger. And our excessive self-criticism “fires” its arrows through them.

There is no point in hating the person, but there is also no point in ignoring it. Not to run away, but to stand, and to say: stop. I am not willing for this. I am willing to talk. I am willing to communicate. But not like this. To stop it, again and again.

And usually, after a few times, it begins to change. And if not, it is worth asking questions:

- Why do I continue to expose myself to this?
- Why do I remain in a situation where I am hurt again and again?
- Do I not respect myself enough to set a clear boundary?

Because this is bullying. And this is one of the important forms of excessive self-criticism. Because it is already connected to our relationship with the world, and our relationship with the world reflects our relationship with ourselves.

And other people attack us because, in a certain sense, we attack ourselves through them. They are doing their “job,” and we have our job.

To understand that this harms us, that it damages us, that it constricts us, that it harms our creativity, that it harms our relationship with ourselves, that it harms our relationship with our intuition, that it harms our ability to be compassionate.

This is bullying. And our role is to say: stop, both within ourselves and toward the other, with politeness, with respect, without drama, without victimhood.

Simply to say: no. This does not suit me. Perhaps I allowed it in the past, perhaps I did not notice, but now I set a boundary.

And each time it happens, to stop, to stop the conversation, to say: this is the limit.

And in most cases, after a few times, it is understood. And if not, we will need to decide what is right for us.

But the most important thing is to protect ourselves, to guard ourselves from excessive self-criticism, including that which comes from outside.

Because it is harm.

And it can, and should, be avoided if we wish to significantly reduce the excessive self-criticism within us. As long as these external “messengers” continue to deliver excessive criticism, it is a sign that we have not yet set the right boundaries, not with them and not within ourselves.

So we will learn to stop it, and it will stop, both from the outside and from within.

Questions for Self-Reflection (it is recommended to answer in writing):

1. How do you feel when people speak to you with unnecessary and excessive criticism?
2. Are there family members, friends, or colleagues who tend to speak to you this way? Were there in the past? Try to describe.
3. How do you react when this happens? Do you shrink, get angry, feel hurt, think they are right, argue, or something else?
4. What will happen when you set a clear and consistent boundary against excessive external criticism?
5. Can you now see how external criticism is, in fact, a reflection of you, and to a large extent exists because of your own permission?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about regarding what you have read in this chapter? Experiences, questions, feelings?