



# Reducing Excessive Self-Criticism Journey

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## Step 17: Disguises

Chapter 17 expands the recognition of excessive self-criticism into additional forms that are important to become familiar with. These forms accompany us, they walk with us, and at times they are also presented through other people. Ultimately, they are part of cultural norms that, at a deeper level, transform into excessive self-criticism and diminish our inner leadership.

Society, often unconsciously, does not particularly encourage inner leadership. There is a tendency to maintain people as relatively cooperative with the system, rather than for each individual to develop their own independent inner leadership. And therefore, it also preserves gestures, behaviors, and norms that keep us within excessive self-criticism.

And so we want to recognize these forms, to be aware of them, and to reduce them in our lives. We want to be more in negotiation with them, and to decide about them, instead of them deciding for us. Because our goal is to strengthen inner leadership. And within the inner space, in order for inner leadership to exist, we need freedom to listen to the inner voice, and also freedom to implement it. And this freedom is significantly disrupted by excessive self-criticism, which is why it is important that we become familiar with its variations.

So let us begin.

Pessimism, skepticism, cynicism, various addictions, judgment toward others, and even depression, these are only some of the forms. I am not going deeply into each of them here, but rather touching on them and inviting you to explore yourselves, to look inward. The ability to recognize that these are, in fact, expressions that serve excessive self-criticism is already a very meaningful step.

Pessimism, for example, sometimes appears logical. Negative things can happen, so why expect something good. It creates a space in which a person takes less risk and tells themselves that there is a chance it will not succeed, that they do not see the light at the end of the tunnel. This is a way to be “on the safe side,” and in many ways, being on the safe side is exactly what excessive self-criticism prefers. To preserve what exists, not to dare, not to step out. Pessimism provides justification, an intelligent explanation for why

not to try, why not to move, why not to act. It sounds wise, experienced, grounded, and it is one of the more sophisticated disguises of excessive self-criticism.

Optimism, on the other hand, is a tool. One of the tools we have for dealing with excessive self-criticism. When we move toward the unknown and the criticism tells us that we do not know where we are going, optimism allows us to say: I believe this can work. Based on what? Based on the fact that I choose to believe. I do not need to prove it and I do not need to justify it. I act, I initiate, I mobilize optimism. In a certain sense, pessimism is the result of a lack of practicing optimism. When we do not practice light, darkness enters. When we neglect optimism, pessimism enters the service of excessive self-criticism. And therefore, it is worth examining in which areas we are overly pessimistic.

Skepticism and cynicism are very close to pessimism, and are sometimes even perceived as part of an intelligent, sophisticated discourse, one that dismisses innocence, mocks attempts, and positions itself above others. But behind this there is fear. The cynical or skeptical person is a fearful person, who does not dare to take even a small step beyond their comfort zone. They hold themselves in a place that appears intelligent and refined, but in reality they look with a certain envy at people who dare, who create, who try, who fail and continue. They develop cynical humor, sometimes even toward themselves, and ultimately all of this serves their excessive self-criticism and the fear of daring, of making mistakes, of trying, of creating, of tasting, of fulfilling desire.

And so they rely on skepticism and cynicism, and sometimes this even receives social reinforcement. Then, the one who dares, who creates, who tries, becomes the exception. And they say to themselves: I will try anyway, maybe I will not succeed, I do not care, I want to try. And so it is important to notice: excessive self-criticism also appears in the disguise of pessimism, of skepticism, and of cynicism. And if someone speaks to you cynically and it does not feel good, there is a reason. You are sensing the excessive and unnecessary criticism.

Addictions are another form. We get stuck in things, invest time, energy, and attention into them. And within the addiction there is also excessive self-criticism: self-condemnation, dissatisfaction. And what is interesting is that this does not take us out of the addiction, but keeps us within it.

The criticism within the addiction strengthens it; it is part of the pain that feeds it. In this way, we invest many resources in something that does not move us forward, instead of realizing desires, creating, and moving. And therefore, this too is a disguise of excessive self-criticism. And sometimes, part of the process of recovering an addiction is through introducing more creativity, more adventure, more movement, and when there is life, there is less room for addiction.

Judgment toward others is another form. We tell ourselves that it is not okay, that we would never act that way, we create categories, compare, rank, and believe we are better, smarter, more understanding. But this too comes from fear. Fear of meeting the imperfect

parts within ourselves. And so we disconnect, observe from the outside, and judge. In practice, we are projecting our excessive self-criticism onto others instead of connecting with them, or developing courageous compassion toward them, just as it is difficult for us to connect with the full range of parts within ourselves, toward which we are also judgmental and lacking compassion.

And finally: depression. This is a partial but meaningful list: pessimism, skepticism, cynicism, addictions, judgment, and even depression. We can get stuck in a low mood, and in that state we do not move, do not act, do not create, do not enjoy, do not change, and do not go on adventures. And this may be part of a process of change, healing, or an inner need, that state of depression.

But many times, within this, excessive self-criticism celebrates. It becomes a significant part of the depression, the inner language becomes negative, and this deepens and complicates the state. We may not notice that excessive self-criticism has “raised its head” within a depressive mood, and we may find ourselves once again believing it and cooperating with it, until we decide, as has been recommended here many times, to raise a “Stop” sign.

Even when we are in legitimate periods of difficulty, it does not mean that we need to surrender to the stream of excessive criticism that increases pain and struggle. Even then, it is our role to block it, to limit it, and in doing so to help ourselves move through the difficult period in a healthier and more healing way.

And here as well, small actions that bypass the criticism, that challenge it, that limit it, can help. To restore movement, to restore life, to ease things. Of course, as long as we are not dealing with a deep clinical state, but rather with those familiar states of decline and discouragement that appear from time to time.

When there is a lot of excessive self-criticism present, and it tends to appear in such places, then it is completely unnecessary and interferes with the process we need to go through from time to time with ourselves, including in our lower states. In such periods there is more room for softness and self-understanding, and less room for intolerance, reprimand, and criticism.

And so, more than ever, we need protection from our excessive self-criticism, because we are in a state of vulnerability, and therefore our response to it needs to be more decisive, more immediate, and more assertive.

The faces of excessive self-criticism are varied. We are learning to encounter it, to sense it in the environment, to recognize it even in its early stages.

The moment we recognize it we already have power. And when we work with the tools for reducing excessive self-criticism, all of these forms, along with many other forms, begin to lose strength, to become less relevant, less necessary, and less appropriate.

A person who chooses to shape their life path with the central intention of reducing excessive self-criticism accumulates tools, accumulates knowledge, accumulates experience, and improves along the way. This is a very significant choice, and if you are here, it is likely that this choice is something that matters deeply to you.

And that is excellent.

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

1. Are you familiar with the pessimistic and skeptical parts within you? What is your relationship with them?
2. Are you familiar with the cynical part within you? Do you recognize its connection to your excessive self-criticism? Are you perhaps even a bit cynical about this very question?
3. Do you recognize that you have addictions or unhealthy habits that are difficult for you to release? What is the role of excessive self-criticism within them?
4. Are you able to enter a low mood “in peace” without thinking that something is fundamentally wrong with you?
5. Do you recognize additional forms of your excessive self-criticism, and would you like to add them to the list?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about regarding what you have read in this chapter? Experiences, questions, feelings?