



Reducing Excessive Self-Criticism Journey

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Step 23: What Happens Within Me in Silence

The need to belong, and therefore also to be “okay” in the eyes of others, stands, as already mentioned, at the center of attention of excessive self-criticism within the human being. Excessive self-criticism follows our actions, emotions, desires, longings, and thoughts, and seeks to ensure that we are moving along what is perceived as the “normal” path, that we continue to be “okay” to a sufficient degree in order to keep belonging to some form of consensus to which we wish to belong, sometimes consciously and often unconsciously.

One of the things that consistently and continuously clashes with this “mission” of excessive self-criticism, the mission of “being okay,” is human authenticity. Later, we will continue to explore this conflict from different angles, between self-criticism and the true and unique story of the individual. Here, we focus on the fact that within the inner spaces of a person there exists a kind of freedom that is very difficult to limit. This is the freedom of the movement of the emotional world, the movement of thoughts, the movement of desire, impulses, and everything else that takes place within the person.

Within a person’s inner world, there are many contents that they prefer to keep “to themselves” and not expose outwardly. Various thoughts that they consider “strange,” desires that seem to them “inappropriate” or “unacceptable,” dreams they feel ashamed to share with others, feelings that even they themselves cannot fully understand in terms of their nature or direction. This inner freedom, the freedom of the mental energy within a person, is what excessive self-criticism seeks to reduce and restrict.

Just as excessive self-criticism itself is excessive, it seeks to create the opposite condition within the emotional and experiential world of the person. It seeks to make it limited, predictable, not spontaneous, not curious, not renewing, and not free.

Excessive self-criticism “fears” that the inner content world will also become excessive, that it will overflow outward and be revealed. In that moment, it “believes” that it will fail in its central role, to keep the person as part of the consensus, while the person might reveal to their environment just how different, unique, one of a kind, unpredictable, original, creative, and self-directed they truly are.

When a person becomes accustomed to the presence and authority of excessive self-criticism, they learn, through repeated encounters with it, to fear their own authentic and true story, even without knowing what that story actually is.

Worse than that, this ongoing inner dialogue with excessive self-criticism convinces the person that there are many things within them that it is better for no one to know about. Not because these things are truly “terrible,” as the person may believe, but because the continuous influence of excessive self-criticism has convinced them that significant parts of their authentic, original, and primary nature contain elements that are “problematic” or “not suitable” for the current social culture and way of life.

It is important to notice that this fear, the fear of exposing “what truly exists within me,” which exists in one form or another in every person, hides from us one of the sweetest and most connecting experiences between people. This is the experience of being completely open, of being transparent.

The human being, in the end, carries a constant desire to “confess,” to release all of their “secrets,” to free themselves from the burden of holding all those things that are supposedly “forbidden to tell” or “forbidden to reveal.”

It is true that we cannot, and it is not always appropriate, to expose all of our inner content to every person without boundaries. For this, all that is needed is a reasonable level of self-criticism, without the need for its excessive, painful, and frightening version, which leaves no room for judgment and choice regarding when, how much, and where it is appropriate to reveal or share.

In general, excessive self-criticism creates within a person, in an exaggerated and amplified way, a general experience across many areas of life of “I am not okay.” This begins within, in thoughts, impulses, drives, wishes, desires, and in places where the person perceives things in a unique way that differs from the majority.

The fear that someone will discover what happens within me in silence is a classic example of the damage caused by excessive self-criticism to a person’s ability to feel comfortable with themselves, and also to their ability to build relationships based on authenticity and direct, open emotional communication.

Excessive judgment regarding “what is allowed to be thought” or “what is legitimate to feel” creates “inner monsters” that would not have developed into monsters had excessive self-criticism not labeled them as such and exaggerated their negative significance and the potential consequences of revealing them outwardly.

When a person builds “monsters” within themselves, they also build an ongoing fear of themselves, of the validity of their path, of their creative ideas, of their originality, and ultimately of almost everything that makes their authentic inner world unique.

That same inner world, to which excessive self-criticism is given almost free access, becomes a place that is uncomfortable to exist within. Within this space, a need arises to create separate compartments of concealment, in which the person is unable even to observe certain aspects of themselves.

This same need to belong and to be “okay” gradually becomes, in the service of excessive self-criticism, a source of inner conflicts within the person. In these conflicts, what seeks to emerge naturally and uniquely encounters walls, “no entry” signs, and various forms of exclusion, arising from an accumulating, unregulated, and disproportionate fear of the possibility that “someone will discover what happens within me in silence.”

These conflicts prevent the person from bridging between who they truly are and their environment, and worse than that, between who they truly are and who they learn to believe they are “supposed to be.”

When a person learns, through various means, to dismantle the intensity of excessive self-criticism, which has become a kind of public norm, they begin to experience a gradual process of renewed approval of their inner world, and a softening of the fear of exposing broader parts of themselves to the outside world. This is especially true when it comes to people with whom it is safe to share, knowing that they will not respond with judgment or criticism, but rather with love and support for the courage and willingness to share.

This subject has very significant social implications. Those inner walls, and later external ones, that are built to ensure that “no one will know what is truly within me,” create tension and exaggerated separation between people. They make it very difficult to build processes of mutual understanding and connection, and ultimately may lead to situations that deteriorate into conflict or harm, due to accumulated tension resulting from the blocking of authentic expression between people. This flow is what enables trust, love, closeness, and shared creation.

For this reason, among others, there is great importance in learning how to reduce excessive self-criticism, and in improving the ability to identify how it functions and influences a person’s life, both internally and in relation to others. When we have less to hide, we have less need to hide, to lie, to pretend, and to manipulate. When we have less to hide, we can truly get to know one another, come closer to one another, and support one another.

When we learn to fear less the exposure of what exists within us, we can dismantle those “monsters” that we developed in the darkness, in spaces that were excessively hidden from the world.

In order to allow the light to enter and heal the basements of “prohibition” that we have cultivated within ourselves, we must recognize the mechanism that caused us to run away from our true story and to fear it. We must learn how to release ourselves from the habit

of living with this mechanism, and begin to discover new, more pleasant, and more creative ways of existing with ourselves and with our environment.

Questions for Self-Reflection (preferably in writing):

1. What do you think will happen when more people know who you truly are and what is taking place within your inner world?
2. What subjects that you usually keep to yourself would you be happy to share more openly with the right people and in the right setting?
3. What kind of "social adaptation" have you made in the past, or are you still making today, in places where you do not feel comfortable enough to be open and authentic?
4. Give an example of things that reflect your authenticity and your unique way of relating to yourself and to the world.
5. As you reduce excessive self-criticism and become freer from it, do you think there will be things you will be willing to express that you could not express in the past?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about regarding what you have read in this chapter? Experiences? Insights? Questions? Feelings?