



Reducing Excessive Self-Criticism Journey

Dr. Pinkie Feinstein

Step 5: The Beginning of Practical Work

Chapter Five is the second chapter of Part Two, and it brings with it a piece of good news. This is something that needs to be said again and again. To remind ourselves of it. To return to it. And also to allow it to awaken something within us. To awaken those natural forces that we are not always aware of.

The message is simple and clear: excessive self-criticism can be significantly reduced.

And not only that. Excessive self-criticism is something that we created within ourselves. One could also say that, to some extent, we became addicted to it. We got used to it. We gave it space. We gave it power. We believed it. We cultivated it.

And if we created it, and if we cultivated it, and if we understand that it is excessive, then the very same force that created it is also the force that can reduce it.

It is the same force. The same force that built it, the same force that believed it, the same force that gave it too much space in consciousness, is also the force that can begin to reduce it.

The moment we truly understand that excessive self-criticism is unnecessary, that it is indeed excessive, that it distorts reality, that it harms us, that it limits us, and that we have the possibility of doing something about it, from that point on, choice enters the picture.

From that point on, it becomes our initiative. Our decision. And our action. What we do when it appears.

And that is exactly where Chapter Five enters. It begins to offer a practical focus. The beginning of a path. The beginning of a process that creates change.

As we have already said, this is an ongoing path. A continuous one. There is no perfect finishing point here. We do not arrive at a state in which there is no excessive self-criticism at all, no discomfort at all, no disappointment or anger toward ourselves at all.

No.

But through an ongoing process, we can reduce it. And that is our task.

So what do we do in practice?

To identify. To recognize. To feel. And then to firmly refuse. And to repeat the action. That is the sequence. To identify, to recognize, to feel, to refuse.

And to repeat.

Not a one-time action. Not a momentary fire extinguishing and that is it. But ongoing work. Creating new precedents within the psyche. And not becoming disappointed when it returns. It will return.

It is part of us. It is part of the culture. But we can improve at this. And that is our task. So let us begin with the first stage: to **identify**.

Identification is an art. It is truly an art that improves over time. To become more and more finely attentive, almost like using a magnifying glass, toward the unpleasant experiences that from time to time enter consciousness. And to identify who stands behind them. Excessive self-criticism.

To identify the exaggeration. To identify the overly absolute messages. The “I’m not okay,” the “why did I do that,” the “why did I make that mistake,” the “I probably won’t succeed,” the “this won’t work.”

To identify the excessive rigidity. To identify that there is no flexibility there. To identify that there is no real possibility of coping there. They block.

After identification comes the stage of **recognition**. I begin to recognize it. I begin to identify the pattern. I begin to notice the small nuances. I already see it when it begins.

This is work. And over time, we improve at it.

The next stage is to **feel**. We do not only think excessive self-criticism, we feel it. In the body. In the psyche. In contraction. In heaviness. In pressure. In worry. In disappointment. It is an experience.

And we learn to feel it.

After we have identified it, recognized it, and felt it, we already know: right now I am under its influence. Right now I am under attack. Yes, attack.

And then comes the next stage. To **refuse**.

And this is where the real work begins. To refuse. To set a boundary. To create a new response.

Excessive self-criticism often operates because it has no answer. It enters with absolute, weakening messages, and there is no one there to stop it. As though it is allowed. As though this inner bully is allowed to run wild without interruption.

And that is what we got used to. But this is where change begins. We identify, recognize, feel, and then we say: no.

We say: stop. I do not agree. Like this. Directly. This is disturbing me. This is not acceptable to me.

This is a new dialogue. And when someone attacks you, the first thing is defense. First of all, defense. After that, one can examine, understand, perhaps speak. But first of all, to prevent harm.

And so we develop a reflex. A reflex of refusal. A clear and unequivocal refusal toward excessive self-criticism. Even if we are not one hundred percent sure that it is wrong. Because we are still used to believing it.

Doubt will arise. Maybe it is right after all. Maybe I truly am not capable. Maybe I truly am not okay. That will arise. But even then, we set a boundary.

No. Not like this. First of all, we stop.

This is not the full solution. It is far from it. This is the beginning of beginnings.

But it is a beginning. It will return. And we will set a boundary. It will return. And we will set a boundary. Again. And again.

“You are trying to hurt me. I am stopping you.”

First of all, within myself. That part which I cultivated within myself, which I allowed to act against me, which I gave legitimacy to, now I begin to change that.

From this moment on, I am looking for it. I am tracking it. I am learning to identify its changing forms. And when it arrives, I say:

No.

Without arguments. Without trying to convince.

First of all, No.

No matter what the content is. No matter what it says. This is hurting me. This is not acceptable to me.

If I tried something and did not succeed, I am not supposed to receive this kind of criticism. On the contrary. I am supposed to receive reinforcement. It may be that I need to fail ten times. Twenty times. That is my process. And excessive self-criticism will not give me that. It will stop me.

So I say to it: I am trying again. I do not agree to this kind of treatment. I do not agree to this style.

And I return to action. To identify. To recognize. To feel. To refuse. And to improve at it. And when it comes, to stop. To set a boundary.

Because excessive self-criticism is an attacking force. And we are beginning to place before it another force. A force that will keep growing stronger. A force that will be assertive. A force that will be unequivocal.

And this is the beginning of the journey toward reducing excessive self-criticism.

And this is only the beginning.

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

1. How do you currently assess, in general, your ability to refuse, to set boundaries, and to say “this is enough!” when needed?
2. Are you willing, starting from this moment, to practice more decisive assertiveness in relation to your excessive self-criticism?
3. What kind of firm statements would you like to say to your excessive self-criticism when it bothers you? Give a few examples.
4. Why do you think it is often difficult for us, as human beings, to refuse and set boundaries even when it is important and necessary for us?
5. What will happen when your relationship with your excessive self-criticism shifts into one that includes more assertive responses from you toward it?
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?