



Self-Love Journey

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Step 22: Stop Self-Condemnation

This chapter and the two that follow explore how self-love helps us deal with excessive self-criticism.

One of the most complex, fascinating, and painful aspects of modern human life is our considerable capacity to live in a mindset that works against ourselves. On its face this sounds paradoxical, strange, puzzling, even absurd. What interest could a person possibly have in acting against themselves? Why would someone condemn themselves, over-criticize themselves, relate to themselves with needless judgment, and at times even belittle themselves, their abilities, and their possibilities to cope, succeed, change, and grow?

Most people we meet declare that they wish for themselves the most comfortable, healthy, enjoyable, and fulfilling life possible within existing limits. It is hard to assume that a person would wish themselves a gloomy, painful, tormenting, or chaotic future. And yet, why do almost all people harbor excessive self-criticism that can reach very high levels of self-condemnation, self-flagellation, self-blame, self-disappointment, and self-pity? How does it happen that a person becomes hostile toward themselves and behaves in their inner dialogue like a harsh, arbitrary officer who struggles to encourage, to adapt, or to feel compassion for themselves?

How does it happen that in many cases we are furious with ourselves for having erred, failed, forgotten, missed, or fallen short, without accounting for our being human with pressures and with emotional and other limits? Why is it so hard to forgive ourselves, while it is relatively easy to scold and reprimand ourselves because something in us did not go, supposedly, as it should?

All of these descriptions may sound strange and unclear. How was an efficient, active, and consistent mechanism built within a person that narrows their steps, weakens them, harms their self-image, and limits their freedom of action? How did it come to be that the most intelligent, talented, and developed creature on the planet must routinely face inner parts that cause them to feel that something in them is almost always not quite right?

From a theoretical psychological perspective, several models could be developed to explain this odd phenomenon in which, on the one hand, a person declares the intention to live as meaningful and successful a life as possible, and on the other hand an inner mechanism operates that blocks almost every dream or wish for change, improvement, progress, or development. One might compare the phenomenon to the “superego” as Freud described, and from there continue investigating the ways people tend to over-criticize themselves.

This, however, is not the right or relevant place for complex theoretical models that would sidetrack us from the central discussion and from this important path, the path of self-love. Here we need to examine the main connection between self-love and excessive self-criticism with its unreasonable tendency toward self-condemnation. Here we need to focus on the emotional process that must be undertaken in order to improve our lives and reposition them in a new place where the inner relationship is composed more of expressions of love, compassion, consideration, and understanding, and less of negative expressions that contain a strong element of self-harm.

Before we deepen the link between the level of inner love and the level of inner criticism, it is worth clarifying what is not obvious. In many cases of self-condemnation, excessive self-criticism, self-judgment, or self-flagellation, there is very little essential connection to truth. Exaggerated disappointment in ourselves combined with a demand that next time we will not err is not based on the reasonable reality in which human beings tend to make mistakes and to act while under load, fatigue, and stress. Failing to acknowledge the real and imperfect context in which we live, and being intolerant of the predictable messy outcomes, is a clear deviation from truth and from what is actually happening.

There is almost no situation in which a person truly undergoes deep, beneficial change as a result of self-condemnation. Self-condemnation does not help us improve or correct ourselves, it mainly weakens us and amplifies guilt. Therefore we cannot truly advance and make our conduct more efficient, and the opposite will occur. Excessive self-condemnation creates an atmosphere that is overly hesitant, impotent, frightened, and apologetic. We do not need many reprimands when something goes awry. We need something else that genuinely helps. We need, more than anything, self-love.

A lack of understanding about what actually helps a person move forward, grow, and focus better, together with the outdated and rigid worldview that mistakenly asserts that only a deterrent and painful response prevents future failures, are central to the shift a person can make toward a life in which self-love is a large and influential part.

A person injured by themselves and by their surroundings cannot take the better action, the more precise action, the more creative action, or the higher action. A hurt person is a suffering person, a fearful person, enslaved to impossible standards, limited in flexibility and in the capacity to change, to be changed, and to develop. Such a person will meet the same problems and will repeat more or less the same mistakes despite countless self-condemnations and self-reproaches that supposedly call them to strict order.

To the question, “Why are we capable of condemning ourselves so much?” we can answer: because we do not love ourselves enough.

A shortage of self-love, from which most people suffer, creates in the soul an empty space that should be filled with content that is encouraging, supportive, and holding. In place of these, self-hostility, self-suspicion, self-distrust, and a tendency to respond rigidly and inflexibly arise whenever things do not proceed, supposedly or actually, as they should.

This point is important and highlights what appears in the title of this book, Self-Love, The Highest Commitment. It is not for nothing that we attribute such great importance to self-love and to the commitment of anyone who wishes for a better life to amplify it, to develop it, to nurture it, and to make it the core of inner communication.

Here is how it works. When we do not infuse our consciousness and daily inner discourse with love, and together with it support, compassion, empathy, holding, self-forgiveness, self-encouragement, self-appreciation, and self-protection, the opposing pole grows stronger. A hostile, non-encouraging, non-nurturing, intolerant, and even non-understanding stance takes hold. There is no empty vacuum. When the good is absent, the not good grows in its place. When we do not invest resources in strengthening self-love, and when we neglect the emotional space and take no initiative to improve our relationship with ourselves, we will find within us a hostile, intolerant, overly critical, condemning reality.

Self-love is a role and a weighty responsibility, because neglecting this commitment costs us dearly. Instead of coldly and logically wondering why we fell into an unkind inner dialogue, and instead of trying unsuccessfully to appease excessive self-criticism, it is better that we rouse ourselves to turn on the light and infuse components of self-love within. If we do not do this, we will be forced to live in an inner space not very different from a drumhead court where we are accused again and again without being given a genuine chance to defend ourselves and perhaps be found innocent. This is what happens when self-love is too weak. To change it, the more we internalize and implement the highest commitment, the more we must practice, apply, and breathe self-love. Here and now.

Practice Questions (Answer in handwriting or share in a practice group):

1. How do you feel when you **fall into a state of self condemnation**?
2. Have you experienced a situation in which you were able to **stop self condemnation by increasing self love**?
3. Can you now see the connection between moments of **forgetting self love** and an **inner attack of self intolerance and lack of self acceptance**?
4. What do you currently do, both **physically and mentally**, when you find yourself in a state of **self judgment**?
5. Can you now say with satisfaction that your level of **self condemnation has decreased in recent months or years**?
6. Any other thoughts, feelings, insights or questions you would like to share about this step in the journey?

