



Self-Love Journey

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Step 23: Love Dissolves Excessive Self-Criticism

One of the most confusing aspects of excessive self-criticism is the feeling that it is a reasonable and correct voice, that despite its harsh words it tells an unpleasant truth that we must hear in order to improve, to change, or to be freed from something. Many people get stuck in this trap of repeated encounters with their excessive self-criticism while feeling that they must absorb the remarks and judgments that arise from within, because they supposedly reflect mature, practical, and correct sides that direct them toward a path they have not yet managed to take, due to weakness or lack of understanding regarding choosing the good.

But as noted, this is only a deception, a confusion, a distraction, a diversion of attention, and a perfect misdirection. It is a kind of inner manipulation of the psyche that turns deep fear into words of criticism. Pessimism, skepticism, and cynicism are different expressions of excessive self-criticism that express fear, fear of feeling, fear of surrendering, fear of risking, fear of experiencing pain, fear of innocence, fear of disappointment, of rejection, and more.

We are not truly criticizing ourselves efficiently. There is hardly such a thing, and the proof is that most of the criticism we absorb from ourselves does not turn into productive action of change and learning lessons so that in the future there will be no need for that criticism. We will usually feel the criticism as pain, we will contract, we will feel that something in us is not okay, we will feel guilty and unworthy, and we will promise ourselves that in the future it will not happen again. But in vain. It will happen, and not once, many times.

This is what happens when we allow our fears to receive an exaggerated stage, a stage that exploits our reason in a harmful way and turns it into a condemning voice that always sounds right and leaves us with an uncomfortable, non-flowing feeling that does not allow us to get up and repair what broke or change what loosened. Fears are not an energy that leads to helpful action. Fears distance us from the path that will benefit us and cause us to remain in a kind of emotional fog regarding the tools available to us for self-healing, for self-understanding, and for better adaptation to what stands before us in the present.

It is not simple to forgive ourselves generously when we err or fail. It is not simple to be our own best friends when our project collapses or when our partner decides that the time has come to leave us. It is not easy to deal with childhood pains that surface within us with love and gentleness. It is not simple to be alone, to fail in business, to be rejected from the course of study we dreamed of, and to discover that even after years we still have the same overdraft at the bank. It is not easy in all these situations and in many others to be our own greatest supporters, our own loyal friends, our own loving and caring parents, our own stable and safe support on which we can always lean when things are hard.

And what seems simpler than this? What seems easier?

To be harsh and strict with ourselves in such moments and in other situations where things do not work out as we would like. This is the default that we have grown accustomed to, and we activate it far too easily and far too often when it seems to us that we failed or that we deserve a scolding for not being as wonderful as we thought we should be. It is easy for us to retreat into the contracted, fearful, pessimistic, despairing place, a place where we stop taking real and helpful responsibility for our lives. We get stuck there with the criticism, telling ourselves a story about how we are not good enough, and we do not pause for a moment to wonder whether we are doing what is truly right and necessary for us.

No one has not experienced this in one version or another. But what is often not clear enough and is not discussed enough is that this state is born of fear. When we apply excessive criticism to ourselves and allow it to stay and to speak loudly without refuting it, we surrender to our fears, we become addicted to them, and we convince ourselves that there is no choice but to remain inside this unpleasant experience with all the words of condemnation that accompany it.

In such moments we usually do not notice that the main thing we need, that is missing and has disappeared from our emotional landscape, is self-love. When we love ourselves we cannot be cruel to ourselves. That is how it works, quite simply.

When we experience love there is no room for fear. Love fills, fear empties. Love empowers, fear contracts. Love expands, fear narrows. How difficult it is for us, precisely when things go wrong, to be there for ourselves, to support and to encourage that it will be better soon. How easy it is for us, by contrast, to surrender to disappointment and to the voices that seem very reasonable and that try to convince us that something truly is not right in us.

Excessive self-criticism presents to the enlightened, modern person who wishes to heal and to empower their life two main signs from which they can learn important things about how they conduct their daily life.

The first sign is this, if at present there is excessive and nagging self-criticism that sounds very reasonable in its arguments, and in its messages it seasons the emotional experience with various forms of guilt, this is a sign that we have recently forgotten to invest love in ourselves. The current criticism tells less a concrete story about a specific matter that we did not handle well and that requires change, refreshing, or

correction, and more presents the real failure, the one we do not notice, the one that slips under the radar, the failure of self-love.

When there is no love, fear will come. There is no other option. The empty space left by a lack of self-love is filled and cannot remain without content. That empty space is always filled with something negative that is connected in one way or another to fear. This is the equation and this is how things work in the human psyche. If there is no investment in the positive, the negative will grow. If we forget to appreciate ourselves, to support ourselves, to hold ourselves, and to value ourselves, we will soon be forced to face waves of criticism and self-condemnation that are the products of fear that has grown in a space where there is not enough love. This is the first sign, we have not loved ourselves enough recently and this is the result.

The second sign is this, when excessive self-criticism appears in full splendor in the present, and against all the messages that are sounding inside now and against the persuasive voices that accuse us apologetically, logically, and eloquently that we are truly not right and not okay, precisely in those moments we must stop everything. Truly stop everything, step away from the situation, and renew the practice of self-love at that very moment. We must take an action that will confront the murky tornado that our fear is creating, a tornado that presents itself as necessary and important criticism intended to educate us and show us how not to do things. This is the second sign, we must now stop and grant ourselves self-love instead of believing the criticism and surrendering to it in a negative way.

This is real courage, and this is the place where a person begins to create deep change in their life. Not by responding in a way that appeases the criticism and the guilt, but by increasing awareness of the fact that what is managing the situation now is fear, and fear can be dealt with only by love that dissolves it, softens it, causes it to disappear, and renews a more optimistic perspective. The crushing response to excessive self-criticism is strange, paradoxical, and a bit amusing, a smile at the mirror. We are not so guilty, perhaps we simply missed something. In precisely such a situation, love is needed. When this is understood, life moves to a new place.

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

1. Have you experienced a situation in which **fear dissolved when you brought more love into your inner space?**
2. Which fears from your past **no longer influence you?**
3. Which fears have not yet reached a point where you can **smile at them with love and move through them?**
4. Do you now see that **excessive self criticism is actually a form of expression of fear?**
5. What happens when you **wrap your excessive self criticism with abundant and generous amounts of love?**
6. Any other thoughts, feelings, insights or questions you would like to share about this step in the journey?