

Session Three:
Unlearning for Change Agents
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Session 3.1 The Struggle to Be Good

Everybody's trying so hard to be a good person. It's quite touching. I don't know if trying hard to be a good person really results in being a better person. Except as a kind of prayer that attracts the necessary experiences that change you into a different person. I would not even necessarily say better or worse, but maybe as a person who acts more consistently from love, from empathy, from compassion, from service. These are things that we tend to aspire to but the aspiration often comes from an assumption that this is something that we can do to ourselves and for ourselves, that we can achieve it through an effort of will. Inherent in that is a kind of conceit, a kind of elitism, because if you do try really hard and you finally become more generous, more kind, more compassionate than somebody else, well, why is that? It's because you tried harder than they did; shame on them. So there's... it can result in this kind of arrogance, or sometimes this patronizing indulgence of, yeah, you know, "You're not as far along, you're not as conscious, you don't get it." But I think that, if you look at the motivation, where does the desire to be a better person come from? Maybe there's part of it that comes from the desire to like yourself, the desire to approve of yourself, which in turn comes from deeply ingrained self-rejection, which comes from multiple sources, but one would be the almost universal parenting practices of our culture, that are based on conditional approval and rejection. And also based on... also another influence would be the religious and scientific stories that say your fundamental nature is bad, your fundamental nature is to maximize self-interest, your fundamental nature is sinful. Whether you grew up in a religious school or a scientific school the same implication is there, so there is all kinds of fuel for the fire of self-rejection that leads to the desire to be good, or at least to look good to yourself. To the extent that that motivation is there, what you will achieve looking good to yourself, but not actually being "good." That might not be something that you can achieve, especially when it's being driven by that motivation. But there is also another drive behind it, which is a kind of heart-break. It's... just to encounter something in the world that is so painful, and so wrong, and so sad that it pierces the shell. And you think, "I will do anything in my power to serve the healing of this. I will do anything in my power to bring justice to this place, to bring healing to this place." That impulse can

also... yeah, it can then get hijacked by the desire to look to oneself as if one is a good person. But it also drives an earnest quest for liberation, for liberation from the playpen and the prison cell of separation that we've been cast into. That quest is something that is impossible to achieve through your own power. At least, this is how I have experienced it. It maybe that I'm not qualified to make such universal pronouncements that sound like wisdom, but in my personal experience, I end up just giving up on trying to be a better person, after the humiliation of realizing that I was just playing a game, that I was deluding myself, putting on a show. And it's been when I have given up on that that initiations have come to me that gave me what I said I wanted—and partially what I did want. But be careful what you ask for because there is a price to pay to actually being a person who acts more from love and compassion. You have to give something up. Obviously! Because if it's a place where you are not right now then who you are will have to change. The generosity of the universe is such that the changes will be brought to you if your asking is persistent enough. And the sacrifice will be asked. But it'll feel like the right time.

Session 3.2 Despair is a Story

I mean, I hope you're not under the impression that it's all beaches and roses and that I've somehow moved past ever feeling despair or depression. But one thing that helps me and that I would tell my younger self when I was in the midst of dark phases is that the despair comes from the same place that the problems come from. That if you conceive the world as this force-based machine, then there is no hope. Because the powers that be, the military, industrial, pharmaceutical, agricultural, NGO-educational-prison-complex have a lot more force at their disposal than those of us who believe in the kind of changes that I want to see. Or even at another level, like I am just one person, what can I do that's going to make a difference? So despair is kind of built into that worldview, but that worldview that sees the Earth as this thing devoid of purpose and devoid of an evolutionary impulse towards something beautiful, that is the worldview that is responsible for so many of the crises that we see. So, I would like to say then to my younger self that the despair is a story, and what are the threads of that story, what are you assuming about the world by being in despair? And then underneath that, like that story... I mean that story isn't just some random idea that you thought was more logical than some other idea. It seems logical because it coincides with a state of being and it is a traumatized state of being. It is perhaps coming from being dominated and controlled by parents and by the culture, by being suppressed. So, yeah, of course a worldview that clothes that experience in logic, that says it is hopeless.. like that, kind of... it fits the experience of the child being confined and being suppressed. And it was hopeless! And your power was not enough! So that might be the psychological origin of that story. So, yeah, I think that my younger self would have benefitted from just having that illuminated. Not that it offers any solution. But just to see it in that light makes it less

compelling. I mean, to get that moment where, “Oh, that’s a story!” It might not shake the story off you, but it definitely loosens its hold.

Session 3.3: Listening to Your Inner Guidance

I am not even sure if I do a very good job of listening to that guidance. Sometimes I find myself by chance in just the right situation. Despite my efforts to avoid it. And sometimes I do feel like I am effectively listening to my guidance, listening to, like, “Yeah, which choice makes me feel alive?” Or, “What do I secretly want to do?” That’s a useful question to access the guidance. I think the guidance is... for me I access the it through questions like that. “What do I secretly want? What would I dare do if I weren’t afraid of this, this, and this. If I weren’t afraid of what people would think? If I weren’t afraid of what might happen?” So then, to bring that into awareness without the pressure of, “Okay so you’re going to do it even though you’re afraid that’s going to happen, but you have to do it!” No, no, no! It’s to trust that bringing the knowledge of what you are guided to do into awareness will change you into a person who will choose to follow that guidance. It’s not about forcing yourself, or bullying yourself, or bribing yourself into following the guidance. It’s to bring it into awareness, to bring, maybe, your readiness to take that risk or to make that choice into awareness. And to trust that that’s enough. Like, “I see that I am ready and I trust.” And from there, action unfolds. Or maybe I see that I am not ready. And I see that I am scared. And here is what I am scared of. Ok, good to know that. “Yup, here’s my guidance and I’m not listening to it.” It’s okay. You’re not going to get an ‘F.’

Session 3: Invitation

Ok everybody this session has been about ending what I call “The War Against the Self.” The campaign to convince yourself that you are justified, that you are right, that you are a good person. This campaign very often hijacks our best impulses, our altruism, and our desire to serve and unconsciously we become servants of our self-image rather than servants of some kind of healing we want to see in the world. So to drop that is a very powerful practice and that’s what the invitation... for a fast... will be for this session. It is to drop self-justification, to drop the attempt to narrate your actions to yourself in a way that makes you good and right for having done that. “Yeah, that decision was justified. Yeah, I did that because I deserved it, because, because because...” To make it okay in your story of yourself. To just let that go. And to allow yourself to have done what you’ve done because you you did it. Because you wanted to. Not because you were justified and ethical and right and good. That kind of... that’s a

kind of false-self-appreciation that doesn't actually convince the inner child. It has the same negative effects as praising children, over-praising children for who they are rather than, say, for how they tried. Which is really damaging, actually. I became aware of this a long time ago from a book, which I never even read, but I heard him speak, Alfie Kohn, "Punished By Rewards." It's a kind of a manipulation. And that manipulation echoes the dominating mindset that civilization has exercised upon nature, and upon its most vulnerable members. It gets applied to the self as well. And so we are going to release that as best we can. And when you catch yourself going over your day, reviewing your actions, make sure that you're not telling yourself why it was okay, but just let it be. Now, again, in parallel to the last fasting invitation, this doesn't mean that you ignore the impulses that you had and the causes of and the reasons why you did things, but that you again, that you don't internalize them, you don't make it about yourself as a being. It's not because you're a good person. It's not because you're a bad person. You are the same person as anyone else would be in the totality of those circumstances. So while the last session was an invitation to release judgment of other people, this is an invitation to release judgment of yourself, as good, as bad, as worthy, as justified, as moral, as ethical. And what freedom is there when you unlearn that structure of identity? Who are you free to become? When you're not beholden to measuring up to some image by which you can conditionally accept yourself. And I'll say one more thing about it. It is really impossible to... And this might be repeating myself, but it's worth repeating... It really is impossible to release judgment of other people while still holding yourself to a higher standard. Because if you are holding yourself to a higher standard you are implicitly saying other people may or may not measure up to that standard. If I am good because I did x, y, and z, and so-and-so didn't do x, y, and z, then, ergo, they must not be good. So, release of self-judgment and release of Other judgment go hand-in-hand. And, again, we are talking about unlearning a diagnostic lens that is incredibly damaging in the world. And unlearning one of the basic psychological templates of war: The Good People and The Bad People. You'll find unexpected changes will result from this fast. And, again, maybe it's not an all-or-nothing thing. Maybe you will, as you deepen your fast, you'll discover more and more and more layers of conditional self-approval and judgment of yourself and how you apply that to other people. So it's a deepening process. Just like when you fast from food you'll discover deeper and deeper layers of healing that can happen when your attention, when your body's physiological attention is turned away from digestion. When your psychic attention is turned away from judgment and turned away from maintaining this edifice of the world divided into good people and bad people and I'm one of the good people because, because, because... but... the secret suspicion that maybe I am not one of the good people. Like, I feel like I am lying in a way. When you let that go, so much healing becomes possible. So, yeah, maintain this strong intention to fast from self-judgment, self-justification, for the next week or so. And understand that it will persist even past this intentional time period. And, once again, thank you for contributing to the field of this practice.