



### On Loving Ourselves

One day during my analysis a particularly disturbing thought came to mind. My analyst was an older woman who was highly respected as a teacher and analyst. Part of the reason I chose her was in some ways she reminded me of my Grandmother whom I had felt very supported by as a child. This made entering analysis seem more safe and possible. My analyst was a short woman who had scoliosis since childhood. She walked slightly stoop and usually used a cane. She also had heavy facial features. While impeccably groomed and attractively dressed she was otherwise average in her appearance. One day in analysis I was laying on the couch and the thought pops to mind she is “an ugly little troll!” Instead of saying the thought I reported I was thinking something I could not say because it was not what I really thought and was not a reasonable thing to say. She reminded me of the fundamental rule (see below)...! I could not bring myself to say what the thought was. Over the next week or two I came up with all sorts of reasons why I could not say that particular thought. She encouraged me to abide by the fundamental rule and even attempted to reassure me she could very likely help me with the thought if only I could share it.

During psychoanalytic treatment the fundamental rule of psychoanalysis is for the patient to say without editing everything that comes to mind or more briefly, “Say whatever comes to mind.” Using this tool, called free association, the psychoanalyst will discover aspects about the patient’s conscious, pre-conscious and unconscious mind (see On Reality) the patient has not been consciously aware of. The psychoanalyst will then share insights or new ways of understanding the thoughts that are often helpful to the patient. During my own psychoanalysis I too was subject to this fundamental rule. All psychoanalysts who are members of the school of thought I am must also undergo personal psychoanalysis in order to become psychoanalysts. Thus my analyst was also psychoanalyzed.

After what seemed like several weeks in retrospect, with my courage in hand, and feeling the thought was now a long, long time ago and far, far away I shared the thought with her and winced having the fantasy she might actually hit me with her cane! This paradoxically grandiose thought, that I could somehow dramatically control or change her feelings or behavior, reveals the source of my fantasy about the ‘ugly little troll.’ Her response was there must be a part of

myself that thought that way about me too. This had not occurred to me and stirred up a series of feelings so powerful that I started to cry which surprised me! Of course, she was absolutely correct. There is a part of me, a part of all of us, that does believe we are all 'ugly little trolls.' At that time in my life this critical part too often had the power to make me miserable. It also made it difficult for some people around me to feel safe and loved by me.

The tears were the result of a combination of feelings: of relief she had not hit or rejected me, a sudden much deeper understand about myself that was much more loving than before, and the feeling a great burden was being lifted from me. I had been more or less trapped in the paradox of knowing the negative thoughts I had were incorrect and this just made me feel all the worse about having them since if I knew they were wrong why couldn't I just get rid of them myself? This hopefully last vestige of my grandiosity was I can fix everything myself including myself! It was not until I was able to openly share these thoughts and feelings with someone else who empathically understood them that they were relieved. It was not until I could let go of my grandiosity as a significant power in my life that I was able to feel love. I was unable to tame my critic without the help of others around me. Indeed grandiosity's claim that I must be 'perfect' to be loved was a lie. And even believing I was in some way 'perfectly' terrible at times is paradoxically grandiose since the judgment was being made only by a part of me with no consideration of what other people might think.

When we are born we are unaware of the difference between our selves and the world. We and the world are one. Babies delight at peek-a-boo because something is appearing and disappearing that they come to realize they have no direct control over. By opening and closing his or her eyes the infant experiences the world created and destroyed! As an infant it seems it is the real world we are thus controlling rather than our experience of the real world. Peek-a-boo is one of the activities that helps us to learn there is a difference between what we see and what exists in the real world. We learn the world outside of ourselves exists without us doing anything to make it so. This is so obvious to us as adults that an infants response to peek-a-boo surprises us. What's so funny? As adults we still often close our eyes in response to perceived information we wish were not true as if closing our eyes to it could make it untrue.

Along with the infantile feeling that we and the world are one is a grandiose feeling we can easily control everything too. As infants, with little effort on our parts, we find all of our needs met. This grandiose perspective is in for trouble. Within a very short period of time we discover we exist in a world of other people and we are only one self in a world of many selves. We discover other selves come and go beyond the reaches of our ability to control them. Our favorite mothering parents are not always available and indeed at times the best we can do to find a mothering parent is to conjure up the image of one from inside. Our favorite blanket or stuffed animal or other object, that is usually present with us when our mother is with us, is at least still with us and comforts us with the feeling perhaps things, mothers, don't just disappear forever.

Due to this grandiosity infants often feel they make happen whatever is happening. When adequate nurturing is not available it must be shamefully due to us. Our grandiosity holds us responsible for things we actually have no actual real control over as well as for things we can control. Knowing the difference requires decades of development for most of us. Before we grow up the connection to those around us, who we so desperately want and need, but are

currently absent we feel must be absent due to something we have done. Shame is the feeling we do not deserve to be with others due to something we must have done or something that is unacceptable about ourselves. Since we are all powerful or omnipotent and our life is not perfect it must be due to something we are doing wrong. We feel, 'I'm trying to find a way to meet my needs, to cry for it, to crawl to it, to put something in my mouth to sooth myself, to learn to talk to ask for it, to walk to find it.... There must be something I have not yet learned that will keep the awful feeling of abandonment, loneliness, starvation from happening that I have not yet discovered. There must be something wrong with me.' And thus the critic is realized in our frustrated infantile omnipotence. In psychoanalytic terms, as primary narcissism (I am the world and the world is me – there are no others – it is all me) transforms to secondary narcissism (I am me and others are actually other people a little like me too!), primary narcissism fights back by telling us we are all wrong – it is only about us. (And strangely there is a certain truth to this point of view (see On Reality)!)

We first become aware of our critic about the same time we become aware of ourselves as a person around 1 or 2 years of age. Then our critic is not usually a problem. The critic is there to help us grow and develop safely. However how our critic grows and develops is crucial to our adult happiness and our ability to love and to work.

Our experiences as a small child determine how our critic develops. Too often parents or teachers misuse the critic inside us to attempt to control us with the fear of loss of love or the shame of not being lovable. We may be told we are worthless, stupid, or self centered when grown ups are upset with something we have done. Our internal critic picks up on the external criticism and uses it to become stronger. As time goes by some of us start carrying on a constant battle in our heads with a side of us, the critic, that negatively and omnipotently judges everything we do. And we may start to judge others similarly. We replace our natural curiosity about life with criticism of life. This way we may become miserable and often make those around us who remain exposed to us miserable too.

The critic is self-referential. Being a part of our grandiose self the critic only refers to its own self for judgments. Although it is critical of us, and thus paradoxically of itself too, it grandiosely believes its judgments are ipso facto correct. Because it thinks it, it is so! It refers to itself as the highest moral authority on almost all issues. As a child we pay attention to the authority figures around us. We internalize the beliefs of these authority figures and they become our own beliefs. As an adult the source of authority regarding what we believe is right or wrong may remain our internal critic instead of becoming internalized ideas from those who parented us. The critic uses its own opinion as its source of truth about others and the world. The critic sees itself as the authority on everything it has an opinion about. The critic's opinion is not dependent on any external validation or other over riding principal and is only referring to its own thoughts as its source of truth just as the infant believes it creates and destroys the world by merely opening and closing its eyes. It refers only to itself for what the truth is. In historic terms this self-referential point of view is the essence of what is often called evil. The self-referential point of view is completely unrelated to external relationships as a source of correction or modification. It only agrees with those who agree with it. The critic judges without understanding and without all the facts. The critic has absolute certainty in its own point of view.

Ironically we do need our critic. As mentioned earlier the critic's goal is to keep us safe, have us do things that bring to us what we need, and promote our development. Its true goal is to help us find a way to meet a need that is being frustrated. So how is it things may go so terribly wrong that the critic may make us miserable or even cause some people to kill themselves? The answer is the critic must be kept inferior to the principal the goal of life is to love with good boundaries as best as we can (see On Love). The only valid source of authority is love. Love does not refer to itself as the ultimate authority. Love listens to others and searches for what truth exists in the other's viewpoint. Love believes whatever the other person is communicating has some truth within it even if it cannot determine at the moment what that truth may be. Love promotes cooperation and integration. If we keep our critic subordinate to the principle of love the critic switches from being a potentially evil master to become potentially a very helpful and creative friend.

I often tell patients to "Keep your critic on a short leash!" I tell my critic if it (the critic) cannot present its viewpoint in a loving way then I'm not listening. It then often returns to me with a rephrased statement. While it might start out by saying, "Jim your desk is a mess!! No self-respecting doctor would have a desk as messy as yours!! So clean up your desk!" I respond by saying, "If you can't tell me kindly how cleaning up my desk may promote loving relationships then I'm not listening! If I kept my desk neat all the time it would be at the expense of returning patient's phone calls and spending time with my family and friends but I understand being organized is also important." It might return and say, "You'd feel better, spend less time looking for things, feel less anxious about whether everything needing to be done is done or not, and thus be able to spend time with others if you kept your desk neater. Perhaps start by cleaning up one corner at a time or get through that old pile of journals first." This will motivate me to work at keeping my desk mostly neat and to set aside time periodically to actually clean it off.

No one can tame their critic alone. It is through others we love ourselves and it is through others we tame our critic. Ironically and tragically one of our critic's greatest lies is there is no one else we can trust. The critic tries to keep us convinced that hidden inside everyone's true self there is this mean critic waiting to get us too that no one else has tamed either. Thus some people remain trapped inside themselves fighting their critic, literally for dear life. Some die trying to fight this grandios hostile part of themselves, from illness precipitated by the conflict, or more directly by suicide. The old song truthfully says, "I can't live in a world without love." In order to feel loved we need to be loving. We love ourselves best *through* the people around us. Loving someone else first results in our self feeling loved too but not necessarily by the person or situation we are at first loving of. By loving others we remind ourselves there are also others who are loving us and it reawakens us to those people. However first we must love ourselves by holding all parts of ourselves subordinate to love.

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