

A photograph of a man in profile, smiling, looking out at the ocean at sunset. The man is balding with some grey hair, and his face is lit by the warm light of the setting sun. The background shows the ocean waves under a soft, orange and yellow sky.

# Freedom from Self-judgment

Basic Notes on the Inner Judge.

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## The inner conflict

You wake up, and as your day starts, so too do your first sensations and thoughts. Next come your plans – things to do, intentions for the day. But something else comes too: a pressure you know only too well. It may come as a voice inside or a sensation in the solar plexus, or a pressure in your forehead or a familiar heaviness on your shoulders. Behind each of these responses, lies the question: 'Will I make it?' The pressure arises not only because of the number of things you need to do or from the feeling that there never seems to be enough time to do all of it, but mostly, from a vague, even unconscious feeling that to do it all will take effort. How have stress and pressure become such constant companions in life? When did you start running, having no time for yourself, feeling distant from people and preoccupied? When did that happen? Is this what life is all about? You might feel uncertain, afraid of failure and, more than that, you expect and in fact take for granted a level of stress in merely getting through your day.

The pressure is instant and, without realizing it, you are 'in the dock' and have started to assess and judge yourself. You are measuring your worth – as man, woman, husband or wife, father or mother, son or daughter, worker, or boss... Pay enough attention to your inner voices and you'll notice that from the moment you wake up there is no respite from this feeling. There may be temporary relief when you have accomplished a task... but soon, the pressure returns.

## What is the inner judge?

A psychosomatic software that operates from your unconscious.

When you were a child Mum and Dad were the authorities and dictated the rules, admonished, and eventually punished. As you grew up you internalized them and their commands, adding some more from other authority figures. Now they all, jelled together, exist as a controlling agency: the Inner Judge.

The basic functions of the inner judge are:

- Protecting the status quo of the personality by enforcing what it considers acceptable and repressing what is unacceptable.
- Measuring and defining your value as a human being.
- Constantly evaluating every thought, feeling and action through an inner dialogue between opposite "parts" of Self.
- Punishing with guilt, shame, belittlement, and self-sabotage: Its message is

that something is fundamentally wrong with you.

- Rewarding through protection and sense of self-importance: Its message is that you are special and have to prove it all the time.
- Reinforcing and nurturing your self-image
- Giving a sense of identity.

Here a short description of some of these functions.

From the moment the inner judge is structured and functions 'efficiently', we are endowed (and stuck) with an inner mechanism that is continuously interpreting and evaluating – us, others, and the events of our daily life.

The inner judge (also called superego) works by reinforcing the values of the parents and, indeed, all authority figures who had, and perhaps still have, a strong influence on our life.

At the same time the judge, which is 'born' in answer to the need to keep our unacceptable behaviors in the unconscious, becomes the tyrant who controls our actions, emotions and thoughts.

Sometimes we see, with extreme clarity, that we are confined in a prison made of actions, thoughts and behaviors. Sometimes we experience it through a latent sense of impatience and anxiety. And this keeps repeating; we experience a sense of once again being in an unpleasant or painful situation. We may also recognize a feeling of powerlessness and constraint that makes us angry, discontented, resentful and depressed.

## Maintaining the status quo

These sensations are related to the first and fundamental function of the judge. Like 'border police', the superego controls the unconscious material – those drives, thoughts, and so on that we suppressed during childhood in order to adapt to the family status quo.

The superego maintains that status quo (now internalized) through a clear division between what is acceptable and what is not. The impulses are so suppressed that they don't reach our consciousness anymore when activated by the events of daily life. Yet the repressed material generally evokes a vague, indefinable sense of anxiety.

This feeling of anxiety is related to behaviors that were considered unacceptable and therefore repressed and are deeply bound to painful states in which we were denied our parents' love.

## Establishing a self-image

A second role of the superego is to give us a sense of identity based on self-image. Our identity is based on a constant and repetitive 'inner dialogue' which has us enumerating our values, opinions and points of view, alongside a web of tensions at a physical level and our particular emotional state.

We wake up in the morning and we recognize ourselves by the inner dynamics with the judge, our troubles, our desires, our emotional make-up, our opinions and our tensions.

## Setting limits

The third function assumed by the superego is related to boundaries and limits.

The judge, through its judgments, creates a condition of constant duality, where everything is divided into good and bad, into what is acceptable and what is to be condemned, what is moral and what isn't...

In each duality, the superego will identify the outer limit, a boundary beyond which it is not permissible to go. Inevitably, this boundary becomes a battle zone, sometimes conscious, but in most cases on an unconscious level.

Each time we go near the boundary line, we feel anxious, and this anxiety triggers the inner judge to intervene. The superego will do all it can to bring us back to the known territory, to behavior that is considered acceptable.

These boundaries are very real energetic structures which express themselves in our body and influence our senses.

The net of boundaries and limits works effectively, and we begin to read all our reality through conditioned perceptions – as if wearing a pair of glasses with lenses of a certain color. In particular, these boundaries give us a specific perception of the space inside us and around us.

## A safety net or a constraint?

You might have noticed that in moments of relaxation, when the process of judging is absent or minimal, your perception of space expands and you have, at the same time, a sensation of being able to breathe easier. You feel as if you have 'more space'.

This is not merely a mental impression or a fantasy, but rather a real experience that has to do with the temporary dissolving of the rigid limits imposed by the superego and of the self-image that is formed by the structuring of those borders in space and in the body.

## Knowing who we are

We recognize ourselves because we are one way and not another. We recognize ourselves, therefore, through a dividing line. For example, we say, 'I'm strong and not weak', 'I'm extroverted and not introverted', 'I'm capable of finishing my projects and I don't leave things half done', and so on.

Each time life presents us with a situation that challenges our identity and boundaries (for example, situations in which we feel weak or where we don't want to communicate but rather want to close ourselves off and lick our wounds), we will unconsciously reject that situation. Of course, we can't accept this 'label' of weak, nor can we show it, so each time we are in this kind of situation a battle starts inside us – the superego works in order for our image of a strong, extroverted and capable person to remain in place.

## Integration is possible

If we are able (through self-inquiry and our ability to be in the here/now), to resist the superego's pressure to reinforce our image, and we allow ourselves the chance to explore and feel other possibilities – to be weak or introverted or incompetent – the boundaries will tend to fade, becoming less defined and rigid. When our self-image becomes more flexible, less solid and dense, we develop a more fluid personality structure that is more able to respond to situations rather than reacting in predetermined ways.

We begin then to integrate parts of ourselves that we have for a long time denied or rejected and start to let them grow.

## Rewarding and punishing

The last of the superego's functions has to do with rewarding and punishing. From a very young age we experienced some behaviors as acceptable, and they were supported and rewarded. Others, on the other hand, were refused, condemned, and punished.

The internalization of our parents and other authority figures leads to the formation of the superego, the inner authority. And through the various forms of 'You must' or 'You must not' the superego rules all aspects of our behavior and of our inner life.

We have in our psyche an effective mechanism that rewards or punishes us according to how we relate to its commands. If we obey, we are rewarded; if we rebel, we are punished.

What is the reward? It is a sense of easiness and the temporary disappearance of anxiety (that has usually been activated by the arising of 'forbidden' behaviors and desires) as we drive them back into the unconscious, together with the manifesting of the superego's approval for that act of self-repression.

It is a pat on the shoulder, a puffing up of our ego...

The punishment? It will be feelings of guilt, shame, rejection, neglect, disgust, humiliation... for re-experiencing sensations and emotions associated with those prohibited behaviors and desires felt as a child.

We can then say that the presence of guilt, shame and rejection of ourselves are symptoms of the presence of an inner conflict between ego and superego.

We can also say that anxiety – the alarm bell activated by the unconscious 'stuff' that pushes toward the surface – is our main door for reconnecting with that material suppressed in childhood.

## Ring the alarm bell

One way to proceed, in order to find out and to understand the way the superego works inside us, is to use the anxiety as the entrance door.

If we accept that everyone lives with a certain level of anxiety and that a certain amount is not in and of itself destructive, we need to discern when to use that anxiety as a trigger for change. In some situations, our anxiety levels rise quickly, and it would be this moment when it would be important to search and explore all possible causes and associations with this anxiety.

The hardest step is the first one: to be consciously aware of the anxiety that surfaces, and to be able to be present with it without denying, avoiding, repressing or escaping it in any way. A basic support is given by continuing to focus on our body and follow the thread of the experience while it's occurring and notice how our body's perception of tensions changes.

Consciousness is full of light, and love and it won't be difficult for you to feel that, simply by staying present in the experience, even as the more negative and oppressive emotions can be slowly released, often revealing unexpected significance and insight.

When doing inquiry, we can feel what kind of associations are in the body and what kind of tensions reveal themselves; we can feel the physical and energetic presence of defense mechanisms and their emotional content; we can become aware of specific attacks from the judge and of their content, specifically self-judgment, or judgment of others. We can note the appearance of images and memories from childhood and of family situations or situations at school where those judgments were shaped and consolidated, and so on.

# How do you recognize the presence of the Inner Judge?

A great indicator is the presence of what we call

## THE CRITICAL FRAME OF MIND

1. Conviction that things are not done the right way around you.
2. Certainty that others lack the capacity or motivation to do what needs to be done.
3. Distrust of others' motives; disappointment in their failings.
4. Intense need to hold your ground and defend your territory.
5. Stubborn focus on making a point and/or correcting details.
6. Belief that you will have to do it by yourself, without others' help.
7. Strong need to blame others for what is happening to you.

## Transforming your relationship with the Inner Judge.

As you start becoming more conscious of the presence of the inner judge you might start noticing that every time you are in a situation where you are challenging the normal boundaries - status quo - of your personality as you know it, the superego always comes in. The superego functions like the police, the national police on the borders - it is there to keep out anything that doesn't fit with a certain psychic structure and especially a certain image you have about yourself. But even more than keeping the other out, it keeps you in, inside these boundaries. Therefore, every time you go beyond your boundaries, you will have to challenge or respond to an attack from the superego.

As long as the Inner Judge controls your life in conscious or unconscious ways, you cannot experience true love, freedom and beauty.

And that's where the learning comes in.

The learning goes through very basic steps:

- The first one is to recognize when the inner judge is attacking, because most of the time we are not aware of it and we realize we are under attack only afterwards, usually when the blaming judge comes in and it is time to lick our wounds. So, the first thing is to recognize when there is an attack happening while it is happening. This is the most difficult step. We are so used to have

these voices inside constantly evaluating and judging and manipulating our experience, that it is quite difficult to recognize, " okay, now this is my energy, this is my experience, and this is what the inner judge is telling me." You start a conscious process of disidentification.

- The second step is that once we have recognized the presence of the attack, we need to identify with as much clarity as possible (which comes with practice) where it comes from, who is speaking - is it mother or father, or may be grandmother or the older brother? Have it very clear that the voice (or if it's not a voice could be a feeling, a sensation) it's not your voice, it is only the introjection of the voice that gave that specific input maybe 20 years or 40 years before, and you are still carrying that trauma in you. Once that voice is identified, then there are different ways to defend against an attack by the superego. With this step the distance/non-identification with the inner judge increases exponentially.
- And the third step is that we learn to defend 1. by non-engaging and 2. by using aggression against aggression.  
This is what we consciously do:
  1. We never engage in a discussion with the superego because the superego doesn't work on a rational level, it works on an irrational level and anyway it is only a program that repeats itself over and over. So, if we engage in a discussion we are already caught in the loop of the compulsive inner dialog!
  2. We learn to use (life giving) aggression against the (life cutting) aggression of the superego. We just say things like, " Stop!" or "Enough! I don't want to take this anymore" or " I don't care what you say" and revert our attention from the inner judge to the energy and the feelings that have been attacked.

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