

THE IDEALIZED SELF-IMAGE

Greetings. God bless all of you, my dearest friends. Welcome are all my old and new friends gathered here.

Let us continue within the series of lectures to help you gain further insight into yourself and therefore into life. The two preceding lectures dealt with the great duality, the struggle between life and death, the illusion that it is a question of either/or. The more one is involved in duality, the more one sees life in terms of extremes, such as happiness versus unhappiness, with happiness standing for life and unhappiness for death.

While still struggling in this duality, it is impossible to accept life as necessarily containing both. Intellectually you may accept and believe this, but emotionally you do not. What you feel is that if you are unhappy now, you will continue to be unhappy forever. Then the tragic, unnecessary, and destructive struggle against death or unhappiness begins.

Birth is a painful experience for the infant. Other painful experiences are bound to follow, although pleasurable experiences occur as well. But since the knowledge of unpleasurable experiences, or their possibility, is always present, the fear of them creates a basic problem.

The most significant countermeasure to which people resort in the false belief that it will circumvent unhappiness, unpleasure, and death, is the creation of the idealized self-image as a universal pseudo-protection. They never realize that this very countermeasure not only does not avoid, but rather brings on the very thing that they dread most and fight. However, if you do not fully understand your struggle with duality, about which I spoke in the two preceding lectures, you cannot fully understand the creation and the function of the idealized self-image.

I have occasionally used the term mask self in the past. The mask self and the idealized self-image are really one and the same. The idealized self masks the real self.

It pretends to be something you are not. The idealized self-image is supposed to be a means of avoiding unhappiness. Since unhappiness automatically robs the child of security, its self-confidence is diminished in proportion to its unhappiness, though this unhappiness cannot be measured objectively. What one personality type may be able to cope with quite well and does not experience as drastic unhappiness, another temperament and character feels to be dismal woe.

At any rate, unhappiness and lack of belief in oneself are interconnected. The creation of the idealized self-image serves to supply the missing self-confidence and to thereby gain pleasure supreme. At least this is the unconscious reasoning process, and it is not altogether different from the truth.

In truth and reality, healthy and genuine self-confidence is peace of mind. It is security and healthy independence and allows one to achieve a maximum of happiness through developing one's inherent talents, leading a constructive life, and entering into fruitful human relationships with healthy interdependence. But since the self-confidence established through the idealized self is artificial, the result cannot possibly be what was expected. Actually, the consequence is quite the contrary and frustrating because cause and effect are not obvious to you. It may take a great deal of life experience and inner will to find the truth. Then, and then only, will you slowly discover the links between your unhappiness and your idealized self-image.

You need to grasp the significance, the effects, the damages that follow in the wake of the idealized self-image and to fully recognize its existence, in the particular way it manifests in your individual case. This requires a great deal of work for which all the preceding work was necessary. The dissolution of the idealized self is the only possible way to find your true self, to find serenity and self-respect, and to live your life fully.

There is much to be said about this topic, but now I will discuss only the barest fundamentals. As time goes on, I shall be more specific and go into further details, but the results and findings of your personal work in this respect are more important.

As a child, regardless of what your particular circumstances were, you were indoctrinated with admonitions on the importance of being good, holy, perfect. When you were not, you were often punished in one way or another. Perhaps the worst punishment was that your parents withdrew their affection from you; they were angry, and you had the impression you were no longer loved. No wonder "badness" associated itself with punishment and unhappiness, "goodness" with reward and happiness. Hence to be "good" and "perfect" became an absolute must; it became a question of life or death for you. Still you knew perfectly well that you were not as good and as perfect as the world seemed to expect you to be. This truth had to be hidden; it became a guilty secret, and you started to build a false self. This, you thought, was your protection and your means of attaining what you desperately wanted -- life, happiness, security, self-confidence. The awareness of this false front began to vanish, but you were and are permanently permeated with the guilt of pretending to be something you are not. You strain harder and harder to become this false self, this idealized self. You were, and unconsciously still are, convinced that if you strain hard enough, one day you will be that self. But this artificial squeezing-into-something-you-are-not process can never attain genuine self-improvement, self-purification and growth, because you started building an unreal self on a false foundation and leave your real self out. In fact, you are desperately hiding it.

The idealized self-image may assume many forms. It does not always dictate standards of recognized perfection. Oh yes, much of the idealized self-image dictates highly moral standards, making it all the more difficult to question its validity. "But isn't it right to want to be always decent, loving, understanding, never angry, and to have no faults, but try to attain perfection? Isn't this what we are supposed to do?" Such considerations will make it difficult for you to discover the compulsive attitude that denies present imperfection, the pride and lack of humility that prevents you from accepting yourself as you are now, and above all, the pretense with its resulting shame, fear of exposure, secretiveness, tension, strain, guilt, anxiety. It will take some progress in this work before you begin to experience the difference in feeling between the genuine desire to gradually work toward growth, and the unguenuine pretense imposed upon you by the dictates of your

idealized self. You will discover the deeply hidden fear that says your world will come to an end if you do not live up to its standards. You will sense and know many other aspects and differences between the genuine and the ungentle self. And you will also discover what your particular idealized self demands.

There are also facets of the idealized self, depending on personality, life conditions and early influences, which are not and cannot be considered good, ethical, or moral. Aggressive, hostile, proud, overambitious trends are glorified, or idealized. It is true that these negative tendencies exist behind all idealized self-images. But they are hidden, and since they crassly contradict the morally high standards of the particular idealized self, they cause additional anxiety, in that the idealized self will be exposed for the fraud it is. The person who glorifies such negative tendencies, believing them to prove strength and independence, superiority and aloofness, would be deeply ashamed of the "goodness" another person's idealized self insists on and would consider it as weakness, vulnerability, and dependency in an unhealthy sense. Such a person entirely overlooks the fact that nothing makes a person as vulnerable as pride; nothing causes so much fear.

In most cases these two tendencies are combined: overexacting moral standards impossible to live up to and pride in being invulnerable, aloof, and superior. The co-existence of these mutually exclusive ways presents a particular hardship for the psyche. Needless to say, the conscious awareness of this contradiction is missing until this particular work is well in progress.

There are many more facets, possibilities, individual pseudo-solutions combining all sorts of mutually exclusive trends. All this has to be found individually.

Let us now consider some of the general effects of the existence of the idealized self and some of the implications. Since the standards and dictates of the idealized self are impossible to realize, and yet you never give up the attempt to uphold them, you cultivate within yourself an inner tyranny of the worst order. You do not realize the impossibility of being as perfect as your idealized self demands, and never give up whipping yourself, castigating yourself, and feeling a complete failure whenever it is proven that you cannot live up to its demands. A sense of abject worthlessness comes over you whenever you fall short of these fantastic demands and engulfs you in misery. This misery may at times be conscious but most of the time it is not. Even if it is, you do not realize the entire significance, the impossibility of what you expect from yourself. When you try to hide your reactions to your own "failure," you use special means to avoid seeing it. One of the most common devices is to project the blame for "failure" into the outer world, onto others, onto life.

The more you try to identify with your idealized self-image, the harder the disillusionment whenever life brings you into a position where this masquerade can no longer be maintained. Many a personal crisis is based on this dilemma, rather than on outer difficulties. These difficulties then become an added menace beyond their objective hardship. The existence of the difficulties is a proof to you that you are not your idealized self, and this robs you of the false self-confidence you falsely tried to establish with the creation of the idealized self. There are other personality types who know perfectly well that they cannot identify with their idealized self. But they do not know this in a healthy way. They despair. They believe they ought to be able to live up to it. Their whole life is permeated with a sense of failure, while the former type experiences it only on more conscious levels when outer and inner conditions culminate in showing up the phantom of the idealized self for what it really is -- an illusion, a pretense, a dishonesty. It amounts to saying: "I know I am imperfect, but

I make believe I am not." Not to recognize this dishonesty is comparatively easy when rationalized by conscientiousness, honorable standards and goals, and a desire to be good.

The genuine desire to better oneself leads one to accept the personality as it is now. If this basic premise is the main governing force of your motivation for perfection, any discovery of where you fall short of your ideals will not throw you into depression, anxiety, and guilt, but will rather strengthen you. You will not need to exaggerate the "badness" of the trait in question, nor will you defend yourself against it with the excuse that it is the fault of others, of life, of fate. You will gain an objective view of yourself in this respect, and this view will liberate you. You will fully assume responsibility for the faulty attitude, being willing to take the consequences upon yourself. When you act out your idealized self, you dread nothing more than that, for taking the responsibility of your shortcomings upon yourself is tantamount to saying, "I am not my idealized self."

A sense of failure, frustration, and compulsion, as well as guilt and shame, are the most outstanding indications that your idealized self is at work. These are the consciously felt emotions out of all those that lie hidden underneath.

The idealized self has been called into existence in order to attain self-confidence and therefore, finally, happiness, pleasure supreme. The stronger its presence, the more genuine self-confidence fades away. Since you cannot live up to its standards, you think even less of yourself than you originally did. It is therefore obvious that genuine self-confidence can be established only when you remove the superstructure which is this merciless tyrant, your idealized self.

Yes, you could have self-confidence if the idealized self were really you; and if you could live up to these standards. Since this is impossible and since, deep down, you know perfectly well you are not anything like what you think you are supposed to be, with this "super self" you build up additional insecurity, and further vicious circles come into existence. The original insecurity which was supposedly whisked away by the establishment of the idealized self, steadily increases. It snowballs, and becomes worse and worse. The more insecure you feel, the more stringent the demands of the superstructure or idealized self, the less you are able to live up to it, and the more insecure you feel. It is very important to see how this vicious circle works. But this cannot be done until and unless you become fully aware of the devious, subtle, unconscious ways in which this idealized self-image exists in your particular case. Ask yourself in what particular areas it manifests. What causes and effects are connected with it?

A further and drastic result of this problem is the constantly increasing estrangement from the real self. The idealized self is a falsity. It is a rigid, artificially constructed imitation of a live human being. You may invest it with many aspects of your real being; nevertheless, it remains an artificial construction. The more you invest your energies, your personality, your thought processes, concepts, ideas, and ideals into it, the more strength you take from the center of your being, which alone is amenable to growth. This center of your being is the only part of you, the real you, that can live, grow, and be. It is the only part that can properly guide you. It alone functions with all your capacities. It is flexible and intuitive. Its feelings alone are true and valid even if, for the moment, they are not yet fully in truth and reality, in perfection and purity. But the feelings of the real self function in perfection relative to what you are now, not being able to be more, in any given situation of your life. The more you take out of that live center in order to invest into the robot you have

created, the more estranged you become from the real self and the more you weaken and impoverish it.

In the course of this work, you have sometimes come upon the puzzling and often frightening question: "Who am I really?" This is the result of the discrepancy and struggle between the real and the false self. Only upon solving this most vital and profound question will your live center respond and function to its full capacity, will your intuition begin to function to its full capacity, will you become spontaneous, free of all compulsions, will you trust in your feelings because they will have an opportunity to mature and grow. Feelings will become every bit as reliable to you as your reasoning power and your intellect.

All this is the final finding of self. Before this can be done, a great many hurdles have to be overcome. It seems to you that this is a life or death struggle. You still believe you need the idealized self in order to live and be happy. Once you understand that this is not so, you will be able to give up the pseudo-defense that makes the maintenance and cultivation of the idealized self seem necessary. Once you understand that the idealized self was supposed to solve the particular problems in your life above and beyond your need for happiness, pleasure, and security, you will come to see the wrong conclusion of this theory. Once you go a step still further and recognize the damage the idealized self has brought into your life, you will shed it as the burden it is. No conviction, theory, or words you hear will make you give it up, but the recognition of what specifically it was supposed to solve and what damage it has done and is continuing to do will enable you to dissolve this image of all images.

Needless to say, you also have to recognize most particularly and in detail what your specific demands and standards are, and, further, you have to see their unreasonableness, their impossibility. When you have a feeling of acute anxiety and depression, consider the fact that your idealized self may feel questioned and threatened, either by your own limitations, by others, or by life. Recognize the self-contempt that underlies the anxiety or depression. When you are compulsively angry at others, consider the possibility that this is but an externalization of your anger at yourself for not living up to the standards of your false self. Do not let it get away with using the excuse of outer problems to account for acute depression or fear. Look into the question from this new angle. Your private and personal work will help you in this direction, but it is almost impossible to do it alone. Only after you have made some substantial progress will you recognize that so many of these outer problems are directly or indirectly the result of the discrepancy between your capacities and the standards of your idealized self and how you deal with this conflict.

So, as you proceed in this particular phase of the work, you will come to understand the exact nature of your idealized self: its demands, its requirements of self and others in order to maintain the illusion. Once you fully see that what you regarded as commendable is really pride and pretense, you will have gained a most substantial insight that enables you to weaken the impact of the idealized self. Then, and then only, will you realize the tremendous self-punishment you inflict upon yourself. For whenever you fall short, as you are bound to, you feel so impatient, so irritated, that your feelings can snowball into fury and wrath at yourself. This fury and wrath is often projected on others because it is too unbearable to be aware of self-hate, unless one unrolls this whole process and sees it entire, in the light. Nevertheless, even if this hate is unloaded upon others, the effect on the self is still there and it can cause disease, accident, loss, and outer failure in many ways.

When you make the very first steps toward giving up the idealized self, you will feel a sense of liberation as never before. Then you will be truly born again; your real self will emerge. Then you will rest within your real self, centered within. Then you will truly grow, not only on the outer fringes that may have been free of the idealized self's dictatorship, but wholly and fully free in every part of your being. This will change many things. First will come changes in your reactions to life, to incidents, to yourself and others. This changed reaction will be astounding enough, but little by little, outer things are also bound to change. Your different attitude will have new effects. Overcoming your idealized self means overcoming an important aspect of the duality between life and death.

At present you are not even aware of the pressure of your idealized self, of the shame, humiliation, exposure you fear and sometimes feel, of the tension, strain, and compulsion. If you have an occasional glimpse of such emotions, you do not as yet connect them with the fantastic demands of your idealized self. Only after fully seeing these fantastic expectations and their often contradictory imperatives will you relinquish them. The initial inner freedom gained in this way will allow you to deal with life and to stand in life. You will no longer have to hold on frantically to the idealized self. The mere inner activity of holding on so frantically generates a pervasive climate of holding on in general. This is sometimes lived out in external attitudes, but most often it is an inner quality or attitude. As you proceed in this new phase of your work, you will sense and feel this inner tightness and gradually you will recognize the basic damage it causes. It makes the letting go of many an attitude impossible. It makes it unduly difficult to go through any change that would allow life to bring forth joy and a spirit of vigor. You keep yourself contained within yourself and thereby you go against life in one of its most fundamental aspects.

The words are insufficient; you have to sense rather what I mean. You will know exactly when you have weakened your idealized self by fully understanding its function, its causes and effects. Then you will gain the great freedom of giving yourself to life because you no longer have to hide something from yourself and others. You will be able to squander yourself into life, not in an unhealthy, unreasonable way, but healthily as nature squanders herself. Then, and then only will you know the beauty of living.

You cannot approach this most important part of your inner work with a general concept. As usual, your most insignificant daily reactions, considered from this viewpoint, will yield the necessary results. So continue your self-search out of these new considerations and do not be impatient if it takes time and relaxed effort.

One more word: The difference between the real and the idealized self is often not a question of quantity, but rather of quality. That is, the original motivation is different in these two selves. This will not be easy to see, but as you recognize the demands, the contradictions, the cause-and-effect sequences, the difference in motivation will gradually become clear to you. Another important consideration is the time element. The idealized self wants to be perfect, according to its specific demands, right now. The real self knows this cannot be, it knows that it is imperfect and does not suffer from this fact.

The real self is a complex of everything you are at the moment. Of course you have your basic egocentricity, but if you own up to it, you can cope with it. You can learn to understand it and therefore diminish it with each new insight. Then you will truly experience the truth that the more

egocentric you are, the less self-confident you can be. The idealized self believes just the opposite. Its claims for perfection are motivated by purely egocentric reasons, and this very egocentricity makes self-confidence impossible.

The great freedom of coming home, my friends, is finding your way back to the real you. The expression "coming home" has often been used in spiritual literature and teachings, but it has been much misunderstood. It is often interpreted to mean the return into the spirit world after physical death. Much more is meant by coming home. You may die many deaths, one earth life after another, but if you have not found your real self, you cannot come home. You may be lost and remain lost until you do find the way into the center of your being. On the other hand, you can find your way home right here and right now while you are still in the body. When you muster the courage of becoming your real self, even though it would seem much less than the idealized self, you will find out that it is much more. Then you will have the peace of being at home within yourself. Then you will find security. Then you will function as a whole human being. Then you will have broken the iron whip of a taskmaster whom it is impossible to obey. Then you will know what peace and security really mean. You will cease once and for all to seek them by false means.

Are there any questions?

QUESTION: So the real self does not have two souls, no duality?

ANSWER: Of course not. The duality ceases to exist once you accept yourself as part good and part bad, as consisting partly of the higher and partly of the lower self. These two sides will be integrated and live in peace with each other once you accept yourself as having both. And only then can the lower side gradually develop and grow out of its blindness. But as long as you do not reconcile yourself to being both good and bad, as long as you battle against this "badness" and believe you cannot tolerate it, duality exists. By accepting your lower self you can gradually overcome it as well as the duality between the higher and the lower self. By nonacceptance you increase the duality. This is also the case with life and death. By accepting death, the duality between life and death is gradually decreased until it disappears altogether. By struggling against death, as you struggle against your lower self, the duality increases.

QUESTION: Could you tell us what Goethe meant by saying, "Two souls dwell in my breast"?

ANSWER: It can be interpreted to mean the higher and the lower self. And it can also be interpreted to mean the duality between the idealized and the real self. The lack of peace between the higher and the lower self brings the idealized self into existence. These two dualities are interdependent. You see, the more the idealized self is put between the real self and life, the less can life grow, the more it shrinks and is prohibited from functioning.

QUESTION: In modern psychology we frequently hear the word schizophrenia applied to people who are psychotic. According to your talk, tonight and previously, we are all fragmented and split. Is this duality only a matter of degree?

ANSWER: Yes, it is a matter of degree, of intensity, and of how many areas of the personality it includes. For the clinical psychotic, the areas where the self is not accepted are

overwhelming. For a more normal person who can function in life, the idealized self may pervade the whole personality, but there is still a certain sense of reality.

QUESTION: In the last lecture we learned that it is important for us to face death in order to live fully. There is, at present, great publicity given to the trial of Adolf Eichmann. My questions are, one, can we, and should we, try to face the death of these millions of unfortunates in order to learn something for ourselves individually? Two, is it healthy to revive an era of death and destruction? Three, can any positive lesson be learned by mankind through reviving this?

ANSWER: Answering first the question: Can any lesson be learned about life and death, or any other topic, for that matter? That depends entirely on you, the individual, whether or not you can or want to learn a lesson. But as to the lesson of death, I venture to say that every individual has to go through that personally, whether it be actual physical death, or the many little everyday dyings I discussed recently.

I think it would be very dangerous to assume that one person can learn through the tragedy of another in this particular sense. It would be dangerous because it would make for a smugness in that individual, which could possibly wind up in passive, or eventually even in active, cruelty. Such a person might condone cruelty in an insidious and subtle way. Certain things one can learn only by going through them oneself. There are other ways in which one could, at least theoretically, learn through other people's experiences, if one is open. However, experience shows that most individuals have to learn their own lessons through their own mistakes, not by the mistakes that others make, and not by the experiences others have. If in isolated cases this does occur, all the better. But there is no general law that can proclaim one particular happening as more conducive to learn from than another. Theoretically, one could learn from any occurrence in life. Mostly it is easier to learn a lesson from one's own tiny insignificant disappointments than from another person's tragedy.

As to the second question, my dear friends, I cannot answer that with a yes or a no. Again it depends on the individual. A positive lesson could be learned by individuals, as well as by humanity in general, if they recall this era of destruction and cruelty. And a negative lesson could also be learned through it. By the same token, a positive as well as a negative lesson could be learned by not reviving it. There is no yes or no. There is no pat answer to either of these two alternatives.

As long as people are governed mostly by vindictiveness, by hatred, and by revenge, and these emotions remain predominant, there will be no lesson. If, on the other hand, the main motivations are truly and genuinely more constructive than destructive -- not only proclaimed, but truly felt -- the lesson will be a positive one. On the other hand, not reviving it could also happen out of negative motives, such as cowardice, fear, indifference, opportunism, resignation. This would then be a negative lesson. Not reviving it could as well come out of a true wisdom that knows that the laws of the divine world take care of everything. But this certainly does not mean that criminals should not suffer the consequences. The approach of taking it upon oneself to punish another human being is a very different one from the approach of making further cruelty impossible, while healing criminals of their disease -- if they are at all willing to accept the necessary help.

QUESTION: To what extent should humans take it upon themselves to punish a criminal?

ANSWER: It is not up to human beings to punish. Your course of action should be, and one day will be, to also take upon yourself the responsibility that any crime can happen through wrong values, wrong systems, wrong education, wrong attitudes. With that recognition the weight will be shifted from punishment to healing. But the possibility of perpetrating further crimes by such people should be strictly avoided by curtailing their outer freedom, while helping them to gain their inner freedom through treatment. This would feel like punishment anyway for the criminal, for the infringement of personal freedom, as well as the painful process of healing the soul, may be every bit as difficult as death or life in prison, only it would be much more constructive. All this will come about one day.

May you all find truth and help and further enlightenment through the words I gave you tonight. However, you should understand and expect that a theoretical understanding, especially now, will avail you nothing. As long as these words remain theory you will not be helped by them. When you begin or continue to work in this direction and allow yourself to feel and observe your emotional reactions connected to your idealized self, then you will make substantial progress in your own liberation and self-finding in the truest sense of the word.

Now my dearest ones, each one of you, receive our love, our strength, and our blessings. Be in peace, be in God!

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