

ESSENTIAL HEALING NEWSLETTER

Strategies to help ourselves move forward and support our animal companions

HEALING THE SPLIT: FROM SELF-ATTACK TO SELF-LOVE

By Judy Aizuss, M.S.

I have developed a kind of evangelical passion when it comes to confronting the self-hatred, or self-abuse, that I often see running unchecked in many of my clients. Self-abuse is very common, often subtle, but extremely destructive and debilitating to every aspect of our lives.

What is Self-Abuse?

Self-abuse takes many guises. Workaholics and perfectionists are two examples of self-abusers. They behave like cruel taskmasters. These are often people who would be horrified at the thought of whipping a tired horse, or overburdening a mule with too heavy a load. Yet, when their bodies cry out for a break, they ignore the signs and simply drive themselves harder. Sometimes they will resort to drugs to keep going - a solution that throws the body into even greater imbalances. At the root of this behavior, we often find self-hatred. Workaholics often believe that who they are is never good enough. The irony here is that *because* they don't nurture themselves, they never *can* perform as well as they are capable.

Another example of self-hatred is seen in people who find ways to deflect nurturance from outside sources. If someone offers such a person a compliment, there will always be a "yes, but..." or an out and out rejection of the support offered. The logic is "How can they love me? I'm too fat, thin, poor, untogether, selfish, flawed" - you-name-it. The result is that the self-abuser is forever starving for love, and may then feel even more unloveable.

No matter what outward form it takes, an integral part of self-hatred is an unrelenting barrage of judgement, criticisms, disparaging and discouraging remarks directed at one's self. In other words, one's core Self is under constant attack, like a defenseless city under siege by heavily-armed snipers.

Where Does Self-Abuse Come From?

Self-abuse, or self-hatred usually stems from how we were treated as children. Any negative dynamics that were present between ourselves and our parents tends to live on within ourselves - long after actual parental influence has ceased. For example, if, as a child, we were criticized a lot instead of encouraged, we may develop the voice inside us of a harsh, critical judge, undermining our every move or new idea.

Results of Self-Abuse

Holding these kinds of thoughts on a daily basis over the years can be devastating. One effect can be that the inner, core Self becomes paralyzed. This can be experienced as an inability to generate new ideas, or as an inability to act upon new ideas. Trying new things, taking risks, and moving ahead with life becomes impossible. This is because the Self is on the defensive. It is saying, in effect, "Why should I try anything anymore, if all you're going to do is attack me?" The inner Self may also feel a sense of helplessness and despair, along with profound alienation, loneliness, and feelings of abandonment. At other times, one may experience periods of anger and rage. This is the rage of a Self whose needs have been abandoned.

Self-hatred can also result in physical symptoms and illnesses. Energetically, the second chakra - located above the pubic bone and below the belly button - is the bodily location of one's sense of Self. Thus, attacks on the Self over time can result in problems with the large intestine and sex organs.

A Personal Story

I used to be a perfectionist. I thought that the impossible standards I set for myself were right and good. I thought that my failure to meet these standards, as well as the mistakes I made, were proof of my inadequacy. I would viciously berate myself, and then sink into feelings of hopelessness and despair.

Sometimes, people would point out to me that I was being too hard on myself. I would refute these kindnesses by saying, "I'm not hard on myself - I'm just being realistic", while thinking "They don't know just how bad (selfish, flawed, inferior, etc.) I really am. The problem is, I'm not hard *enough* on myself!" And then I would sink into a full-scale depression, from which no loving soul could dig me out.

Waking up to the destructiveness of my process and learning how to heal it has been a long process for me. I hope that by sharing the following vignette from my journal of a few years ago, I can help shorten the process for those of you who still suffer from self-abuse.

I began the morning as I had for the past week and a half - working with my now 11-week-old puppy, Falcor. Progress has been uneven, and every time something has gone wrong, I have questioned my ability to train him adequately. I am periodically flooded with worries and visions of an out-of-control, destructive adult German Shepherd - the result of my inadequacy and failure to make the "right" decisions now. All of the fretting leaves me feeling depleted, burned-out, and fantasizing sending the puppy back to where he came from. But on this particular morning, I decided to do something different. Rather than pursue this line of thinking, I took a walk in the forested area behind our house.

Following a familiar trail, I came to the creek, where I wanted to cross. I was hoping that the few days of dry weather had exposed enough large rocks to make crossing

the creek possible. So I surveyed the scene carefully. Could I cross without getting my feet soaked? It looked like there were enough rocks to put my feet on, and they were close enough to each other - but were they all stable? And would I be able to maintain my balance and footing? I wasn't sure, but I said to myself, "I *think* I can do this" Then I planned my strategy - which foot I would plant where. I then considered the risks, the "what if's": what if I fell? I decided that the worst that could happen would be wet feet, and that would be unpleasant, but liveable. *I did not conclude that falling would mean that I'm clumsy or otherwise inept.*

In other words, falling would not mean that there is something wrong with *me*. What it would mean is that I need a different strategy next time, or perhaps more practice: maybe I need to improve my concentration, or work on my balance; maybe I need to step on different rocks; maybe I need to try a different route, or perhaps I need to wait until the creek level recedes a bit more. I may need to *do* something differently, *but who I am is fine.*

In considering a possible negative outcome to crossing the creek, I also refrained from concluding that a fall would imply that the attempted task was impossible, or that I had failed at my one and only chance. Again, I realized that the failure would only mean that one specific strategy had not worked. I could try again, a different way, and succeed.

Finally, I saw that this little vignette applies to my current concerns about training Falcor. I have been so worried, when something doesn't seem to be working, that I have "ruined" my puppy. I have chastised myself for being an inadequate trainer, or for blowing my only chance. But now I see that I just need to keep thinking and trying different strategies. I need to analyze, without judgement, why what I did failed to work, and then do something different.

As it happened, I did cross the creek successfully, and when I did, I said to myself: "Good girl! That was a good job!" And the praise for risking and trying felt real good. I was ready to go back and meet the puppy challenge.

It has been three years since I wrote the above journal entry, and much has changed. For one thing, I've become very good at identifying the sometimes subtle and insidious signs of self-attack. In addition, I have developed a variety of effective ways to challenge the destructive patterns when they occur, and how to replace them with genuine support and self-caring. For example, I have taught myself how to disconnect from the judgmental, false self, and to become a loving "parent" to my core Self. Finally, I have found many marvelous flower and vibrational essences - essences to heal self-condemnation, promote self love and compassion, essences for self-forgiveness, for lack of self-worth and self-neglect, as well as powerful essences for healing old abandonment issues and current self-abandonment. As a result, I have watched myself take risks, move ahead in my life and succeed in ways I never could before, and I love helping others do the same.

Through the use of spiritually-oriented counseling and essences (I now choose from about 600) I work in partnership with my clients to help them clear negative mental and emotional blocks, get through their stuck places, and on to where they want to go. Included are many down-to-earth, practical techniques for transforming self-destructive patterns to self-supportive ways of being. If you feel that you, or someone you know, could use further assistance in this area, I'd be delighted to help.

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