



The Abyss of Illusion Freedom and Self-Responsibility

Pathwork Guide Lecture No. 60

1996 Edition

March 4, 1960

Greetings, my dearest friends. Blessed be this evening, blessings for all of you.

You all know, my friends, that thoughts, feelings, attitudes and convictions create forms -- forms that are just as real as your earth matter. The deeper and stronger a conviction is, the more lasting and substantial are these forms. They exist in your soul and they exist at the same time in the world of the spirit. If you harbor truthful attitudes, opinions, convictions and emotions, these forms will exist in a world of light and they will, in your own soul, create and bring you happiness, harmony, and what you may call luck. Soul forms of truth are made of a substance that lasts permanently. They will never dissolve, nor can they ever be destroyed.

Convictions and emotions of untruth or unreality have the opposite character. They may last a while, but their durability is limited to the length of time that these attitudes in the personality prevail. The stronger these convictions and attitudes, thoughts, and emotions are, the greater is their impact, the more substantial their form.

At times I have described the path you are taking by depicting landscapes as you know them on earth. There are shrubs and thickets, narrow ledges and cliffs. At times the going is rough and tedious, the way steep and stony. At other times you find yourselves on a meadow of rest and light until you are ready to tackle the next hurdle. All this is not merely symbolic. These forms truly exist. They are the product of your inner attitudes and convictions, thoughts and emotions. Many of these create obstacles through which you have to grope your way.

The more unconscious such attitudes, convictions, and erroneous conclusions are, the more powerful they are. This is logical, for anything that is out in the light of conscious awareness, if wrong, is open for correction. It is laid open for consideration and thereby made flexible and amenable to change. In your daily life you may experience happenings that may change a conscious conviction. However, if you are unaware of a conclusion or attitude, it is not exposed and cannot be reconsidered and changed: it is rigid; and the more rigid a form, the stronger is its substance. If this is so with a form created from untruth, you will easily see that it must become a tremendous obstacle in your life.

If you could but understand that all thoughts and emotions are actual forms, objects, and things, you would better understand why it is so important for you to uncover your unconscious and look at what it contains. These forms vary in substance, strength, and shape according to what they represent, how strong the convictions are, and what is linked with them. This, in turn, depends on the character and temperament of the person.

Now I should like to discuss one common soul form which, to some degree, exists in every human being. I will call this the "abyss of illusion." There is an abyss in each one of you. This abyss is utterly unreal, and yet it seems very real as long as you have not taken the necessary steps to discover its illusory character.

When you cannot let go of your self-will, which may not necessarily mean that you want something bad or harmful, or when you cannot accept the imperfection of this world, which means that you cannot have life and people be according to your very own way, even though yours may be the right way, it seems to you that you have fallen into an abyss. You may never have translated these feelings into such terms. But, if you analyze your feelings, you will see that this is so. There is a strong fear in you that whatever happens contrary to your will means danger. Needless to say, this does not apply to every situation, to your entire personality, or to every area of your life.

By working in this direction and examining your emotional reactions to certain incidents, you will become aware of the abyss of illusion in you. I ask you not to take my word for it. Experience the truth of it!

This abyss varies in depth and in width. Only by becoming aware of its existence and gradually discovering its unreality will this form dissolve, little by little. This can happen only if, at one time or another, you give yourself up to it. In other words, what seems so hard to yield to, what seems like a personal threat, is really no threat at all. If someone else does not accept you, or acts contrary to your expectation, this in itself is not a threat. Neither is it a disaster if you have to accept your own inadequacy. Yet you cannot find out that this is so unless you go right through the experience. Only after accepting your own or the other's inadequacy in the areas where heretofore you could hardly do so, only after giving up your own will where you hung onto it as though your life were at stake, will you be able to truly convince yourself that nothing adverse happens to you. As long as this abyss exists in your soul, it seems to you that you are gravely endangered if you yield or let go. You seem to fall down into the abyss. The abyss can only disappear if you let yourself drop into it. Then and then only will you learn that you do not crash and perish, but that you float beautifully. You will then see that what made you tense with fear and anxiety was as illusory as this abyss.

So I repeat: the abyss cannot disappear by itself. It can only vanish from your soul and your life once you have made the plunge into it. The first time it may call for great effort on your part, but each time you try it anew it will be easier.

I hope I will not be misunderstood. I do not refer to giving up something needlessly, or merely because it is something that makes you happy. I do not even refer to giving up something you have or possess. Nor do I speak of realistic fears that you can face constructively. I refer only to the subtle little fears in your soul, to the frustration and anxiety you cannot quite understand and for which you often find such poor rationalizations. When a person near you does not agree with you or has certain faults, you may feel all tense and full of anxiety. If you analyze these feelings, you will discover that it amounts to feeling endangered because your world of Utopia is proven unreal. This is the phantom fear which makes you believe your life is at stake. Otherwise you would not be so fearful. This is the abyss into which you should plunge so as to find yourself floating instead of perishing.

Last time I discussed the function of Utopia in the human personality. I said that the infant in you desires everything the way it wants it, how it wants it, and when it wants it. But it goes further than that. This desire includes

wanting complete freedom without responsibility. You may not be aware that you desire just this. But I am sure that by investigating some of your reactions and asking yourself what they truly mean, when you come to the root, you will undoubtedly find that this childish part of your being desires just that. You want to have a benign authority above you who steers your life in all ways as you desire. You wish complete freedom in every way; you want to make independent decisions and choices. If these prove good, it is to your credit. However, you do not wish to be responsible for anything bad that happens. Then you refuse to see the connection between such a happening and your own actions and attitudes. You are so successful in covering up these connections that, after a time, it takes a great deal of effort indeed to bring the connection out into the open. This is so because you wish to make this authority responsible for the negative things only.

Many of my friends who are well advanced on this path will readily confirm that this part exists in them. In the final analysis this unconscious thought or attitude amounts to just that: you wish freedom without self-responsibility. Thus you wish for a pampering, indulgent god, like a parent who spoils his child. If this god cannot be found -- and of course he cannot -- he becomes a monster in your eyes and you turn away from God altogether.

The expectations you have of this god you also project onto human beings, either to a specific person or a group of human beings, or onto a philosophy, creed, or teacher. It does not matter who or what. At any rate, your understanding the unconscious God-image will not be complete unless you include this very basic element in it.

It is of great importance that you find in yourself the part where you desire freedom without self-responsibility. With the method of our work, it should not be too difficult to find the many areas where you desire just that. This desire can be extreme, although it is often hidden and can only be approached in an indirect way. I cannot show you now how it should be done because the approach varies with each individual. I shall be glad, however, to point out the way to each of you if you so desire. There cannot be a single exception. You all have just this hope and desire at least in some way: freedom without self-responsibility to the full extent. You may wish to assume self-responsibility in some areas of your life, often in superficial and outer actions. But in the last and deepest and most important attitude toward life as a whole you still refuse self-responsibility, yet you desire utter freedom.

If you think this through thoroughly, you will surely see that this is an impossibility. It is Utopia! You cannot be free and at the same time have no responsibility. To the extent you shift responsibility from yourself onto others you curtail your own freedom. You put yourself in slavery. It is as simple as that.

You will observe the same law at work even in the animal world. A pet has no freedom but it is not responsible for obtaining its own food and shelter. A wild animal is free, or freer, but it is responsible to look out for itself. This must apply much more to humanity. Wherever you look, you will see that it cannot be otherwise: the more freedom, the more responsibility. If you do not desire responsibility according to the degree of your capacity, you have to forfeit freedom. In a superficial way this applies to practically everything from your choice of profession to your choice of government. But the area where humanity has overlooked the basic truth, that freedom cannot exist without self-responsibility, is not outside but within the human soul, and in the human attitude toward life as such.

The infant in you does not see and does not want to see that connection. It wants one without the other, and what it wants does not exist; it is illusion or Utopia. The price for illusion is extremely high. The more you want to evade paying the natural and fair price -- in this case self-responsibility for freedom -- the heavier the toll becomes. This, too, is unalterable law. The more you understand about the human soul, the more clearly you will observe this. All diseases of the soul are based on just that: on evasion of the payment of the rightful price. There is a strong desire and insistence on having both ways, the easy way.

Ultimately, the price you pay for the evasion is so heavy, so steep, my friends. You are not aware of it yet, but you will be if you follow this particular road. A part of the price is the constant effort you waste in trying to force life into the mold of your illusion in this respect. If you could but see all the inner, emotional effort, you would shudder, because all this strength could be used quite differently. To let go of the illusion and to assume full self-responsibility seems so hard to you that fear of it becomes a good part of the abyss. You seem to think that you will fall right in if you really assume self-responsibility. Therefore, you constantly strain away from it, stemming against it, and this consumes strength.

You can see now that giving up the world of Utopia appears to you as the abyss. Giving up Utopia seems to you the greatest danger and you stem against it with all the might of your spiritual muscles. You lean away from the abyss, losing valuable strength for nothing. To give up your Utopia seems dire misery. The world becomes bleak and hopeless with no chance for happiness, because your concept of happiness in one part of your unconscious mind means utter perfection in all ways. But all this is not true. To give up Utopia does not make for a bleak world. You need not despair over letting go of a desire and venturing into what often seems fearsome to you. The only way you can discover the illusion of this fear, this abyss and its phantom quality, is first to visualize, feel, and experience its existence in you in the various manifestations and reactions of your daily life, and then to jump into it. Otherwise it cannot dissolve.

There is a very important general misconception about life. It constitutes the main result of the unreasonable desire for freedom without self-responsibility. It is the idea that you can come to harm through the arbitrariness of the god-of-your-image, of life, or fate, or through the cruelty, the ignorance, and the selfishness of others. This fear is as illusory as the abyss. This fear can exist only because you deny your self-responsibility. Therefore, others must be responsible. If you did not cling tenaciously to the Utopia of having freedom and refusing self-responsibility, you could easily perceive that you are indeed independent. You are the master of your life and fate; you -- and no one else -- create your own happiness and unhappiness. Observation of the manifold connections and chain reactions would automatically eliminate your fear of others, of becoming a victim. You could link up all unfavorable incidents with your own wrong attitudes, no matter how wrong the other people may be. But their wrongness cannot affect you. This would become clear to you and you would then lose your fear of being helpless. You are helpless because you make yourself that way by trying to shift responsibility away from yourself. So you see that fear is the heavy price you must pay for insisting on your Utopia.

In truth, you cannot possibly come to harm by any shortcomings or wrong actions of another person, no matter how much it may seem that way at first glance. Those who judge only on the surface will not find either truth or reality. Many of you are capable of judging profoundly in some ways, going to the roots of things. In other ways, however, you are conditioned to judge on the surface. In this particular respect many of you refuse to let go of judging on the surface because you still hope that the world of Utopia can actually exist. Therefore, you have to fear other people, their judgement, their wrongdoings. In this part of your being, you like to consider yourself a victim for the very reason I stated previously. This trend in itself is a sign of refusal to accept self-responsibility.

If you are truly willing and prepared to accept full self-responsibility, the vision of truth will prove to you that harm cannot come to you through others. I can foresee many questions coming up in this connection. But let me assure you my friends, that even a mass disaster, of which there have been many in the history of humanity, will miraculously spare some and not others. This cannot be explained away either by coincidence or by the act of a monstrous god-of-your-image who arbitrarily favors a few and punishes some less fortunate creatures. The other imagined god who rewards you for being a good child and spares you a difficult fate, while another person has to be tested and go through hardships is also a distortion, no less monstrous than the first.

God is in you, and that godlike part of the divine in you regulates things in such a wonderful way that all your wrong attitudes will come to the fore, more strongly at some times, less strongly at other times of your life. The apparent faults and misdeeds of others will affect your own wrong attitudes and inner errors. You cannot be affected by any wrongdoing or action of other people if you do not have within yourself something that responds to it, as one note resonates to another.

Again, you certainly should not take my word for it. All who are on the path are bound to find out the truth if they really want to. Investigate sincerely the everyday occurrences, irritations, and annoyances in your life. Find out what in yourself responds, or corresponds either to a similar characteristic -- although perhaps on a quite different plane -- or to the exactly opposite extreme of the person who has provoked you. If you truly find the corresponding note in yourself, you will automatically cease to feel victimized. Although a part of you enjoys just that, it is a doubtful joy. It weakens you and is bound to make you fearful. It enchains you utterly. By seeing the connection between your inner wrong currents and attitudes and the outer unwelcome occurrence, you will come face to face with your inadequacy, but this encounter, instead of weakening you will make you strong and free. You are so conditioned to the habit of going through life concentrating on the apparent wrong of the other person that you feel victimized by it. You put blame on everybody left and right and never find the corresponding note in yourself. This explains how you could be adversely affected. Even those of my friends who have learned to investigate themselves with some degree of honesty often fail to do so in the most apparent everyday incidents. It takes training to condition yourself to follow this road all the way. When you discover your own contribution, no matter how subtle, as you go through an unwelcome experience, you will cease being afraid of the world.

If your fear of life and the inadequacy of others is not to some degree eliminated after such findings, you have not even scratched the surface. You may have found some contributing factor, but if it did not have the desired effect on you, you are still dealing with subterfuges. What you find must increase the knowledge in you that you cannot be truly affected by others, and that you are the master of your life. Therefore you need have no fear. In other words, your findings must make you see the truth and the importance of self-responsibility. In addition, self-responsibility will cease to be something to shy away from.

If this work is done in the right way, you will not feel guilty about it. In the right approach there is no room for guilt feelings. The very nature of a guilt feeling, which stifles your determined effort to find out more about yourself, seems to say, "I cannot help it. I have to feel guilty for something I cannot help." Therefore, a guilt feeling inevitably contains an element of self-pity. Without self-pity there could be no guilt feeling. The true and constructive way of searching within yourself must uncover many errors, many wrong conclusions, many faults and faulty attitudes. But you will encounter them without a trace of guilt. With the proper attitude, you accept your inadequacies and face up to them. In the world of Utopia you do not.

This is a good part of the reason why you reject selfresponsibility. By making independent decisions, you are bound to make mistakes. The child in you, clinging to Utopia, believes you must never make a mistake. Making a mistake means falling into the abyss. Here again you can test the validity of your fear by jumping in and finding yourself afloat. You then see that it is no tragedy to have made a mistake. The infant thinks you must perish if you do, and therefore thinks that independent decisions for which one is responsible must not be made. It should be noted that this belief may manifest only in a very hidden and subtle way.

Obviously, the illusion that you must never be inadequate leads to your rejection of self-responsibility, and the continued wish to be free. The world of Utopia as well as the fearsome abyss of illusion therefore depend upon whether or not you learn to accept your inadequacy, and whether or not you learn to free yourself of the phantom conclusion that you cannot err. The guilt and fear of making mistakes is so hard to bear that you set up all sorts of phantom thoughts and soul-forms that make your life miserable.

In your intellect you may know all I say here; you may readily admit to a variety of faults without the slightest guilt or fear. In this particular respect you have freed yourself of the abyss of illusion and the world of Utopia. But there doubtless are areas where you do not feel in accord with your knowledge. With these areas we do have to be concerned. It is quite possible that you have some faults which are infinitely graver than others, and yet you do not have this feeling of shame and guilt. You can admit them to yourself and even discuss them with others. Here you are free. Other faults, perhaps less severe and at times not even really faults, but mere attitudes, such as a certain shame, a kind of anxiety or a reaction, may give you an acute feeling of shame or guilt. You cannot face it, you look away, you struggle to avoid seeing it. This means that in this respect, for one reason or another, you live in your world of Utopia and therefore struggle against the abyss of illusion.

Your whole life must change in many ways if you discover the truth of what I say here. It is not sufficient that you accept these words intellectually; you have to experience them in yourself. This can only be done by hard work in the proper direction and by your utter resolve to find this particular truth. On the other hand, you need not have completely dissolved the abyss in order to be liberated to a large degree. It is sufficient that you see and observe its existence, its effect on you, and that you have made some attempts in the right direction. It is sufficient to see the connection between your erroneous attitudes and outer happenings that heretofore seemed arbitrary. Once you realize how much you fear giving up Utopia in all its ramifications, you will have taken a tremendous step towards real freedom and true independence.

This will free you of your basic fear of life. It will release heretofore wasted forces for constructive purposes and it will bring forth in you a creativity you never dreamed possible. Once you realize what I say here, once it is your own and not superimposed knowledge, you will go through life with a completely new attitude: as a free being without fear. You will know with a deep conviction that no word and no teaching can ever give you anything better than your own realization that nothing can come your way that is not self-produced. You do not have to be ashamed of it. You can make the out-picturing of it and the unfortunate circumstances you may have to go through as a consequence a very constructive and productive medicine for yourself. This will serve to liberate you rather than to enslave you. You will realize that you have nothing to be afraid of. You are not the victim of others; you do not have to fight to make others perfect, because you now know that their imperfection cannot harm you.

Some of you may think it is strange indeed that this basic spiritual truth has been so obscured throughout the ages. But there is a good reason for that, my friends. Humanity in its development is required to reach a certain basic spiritual understanding before it can use this knowledge in the right way. For, misunderstood, such knowledge could indeed be very harmful. If a man's lower nature remains dominant, he might say, "I can kill and plunder and be as selfish as I want. My wrong actions cannot harm anyone else." And of course that is not true, not in the sense I mean. I realize, my friends, this seems like an utter contradiction. I say here on the one hand that the wrongdoings of another person cannot harm you. I say on the other hand that if you go ahead, following your lowest instincts, that is harmful to others. Both are true, my friends. But both can be untrue, if you understand them in the wrong sense. It is extremely difficult for me to explain how these apparent paradoxes still hold true. However, I will attempt at a future occasion to make this clear if you still need clarification. But I believe any of you who take this particular approach on your path and experience the truth of my words personally will know that both are true and that these two statements do not contradict each other at all.

There is just one thing I would like to add. First, it may appear that it has nothing to do with the apparent paradox; yet when you think more profoundly about it, you will clearly see that it has. I have often said, and many of you have experienced it, that your subconscious affects the subconscious of another person. This is so true and so apparent that all you have to do is open your eyes to have it constantly confirmed in your life. You know that the human personality consists of various levels or, expressed in a different way, of various subtle bodies. The level on

which you give out will affect that particular level of the other person. What comes out of your true being, your real self, will affect the real self of the other person. What comes out of any layer of your mask self will affect the similar or corresponding mask self layer or defense mechanism of the other person.

I will give you some random examples that I am sure many of you have experienced. When you are shy and reticent, it creates in the other person a similar effect, although he or she may express it in an entirely different manner. If you are not genuine or if you act out of a level of pride, the other person will respond automatically in kind. If you are spontaneous and genuine, you will find such immediate response in the other person. All you have to do is observe this. For that to happen you have to observe yourself, of course, in order to establish from what layer of your personality you have acted. Only then can you take the other person's behavior and mannerisms and compare them with what you gave out. You will soon stop being deceived by appearances. Your shyness may be open; the other person's shyness may be covered under a mask of brashness. However, you will recognize that they come from the same inner level. This is so important, my friends, and it has very much to do with the apparent paradox that you cannot be harmed by other people. Yet it would be harmful to go ahead on that assumption and indulge in the lowest instincts.

Now, my friends, if there are any questions, I shall be glad to answer them.

QUESTION: A few times you mentioned guilt and shame. Could one be ashamed of something without guilt feelings?

ANSWER: Yes, of course. This is always a question of terminology. There is a healthy kind of shame that is constructive and strengthening. You can also call it repentance. If you recognize that you have unwillingly hurt others by one of your wrong tendencies and you feel truly sorry about it and this gives you incentive to change, it is good. If shame does not weaken you, but if it strengthens you, it contains no guilt. If it is free of self-pity, of the flavor of "Poor me. I could not help it. I should be helped. People are unfair to me," and so on, then it is a healthy kind of repentance that has nothing whatever to do with guilt. So it is indeed possible that shame can exist without guilt. And it is also possible the other way around, namely that a person has an acute guilt feeling and is not necessarily ashamed.

QUESTION: Many times you stated that our psyche is in some way an electromagnetic field. Is it, from your point of view, in any way similar to the electromagnetic fields of modern physics? Or are they different in vibration rate?

ANSWER: The rate of vibration or frequency can be very different. It depends on what or who it is. The frequency rate of vibration varies between an animal and a plant, between two animals, between two human beings, let alone between all other things. Everything that has energy -- and you know that even your material objects are full of energy -- has or is an electromagnetic energy field. The nature of these fields varies also between one object and the other. This depends on the material of which they are constructed, and it even varies between two objects of the same material, because many, many other factors also play a role. But the basic principle is the same, of course. Energy fields exist in everything, from what is apparently a dead object to what is obviously a live organism. But their emanation, frequency, rate of vibration, color, tone, scent, and all other attributes vary according to a great number of factors that influence this magnetic field. Many of their manifestations I could not even describe, for you have not yet discovered them and therefore they are unnamed in the human language. Some you may never even discover on this earth plane. But in principle, all are energy fields and as such certainly the same.

QUESTION: Could this concept be applied to our tonal system, within and beyond the range of our auditory perception?

ANSWER: Yes, absolutely. I can foresee a time on your earth plane -- some of you may still see the beginnings of it -- when you will have machines with which to measure a person's frequency rate of vibration, in tone, in color, and in certain other manifestations -- also in energy emanation, if I may call it that.

QUESTION: Also in scent?

ANSWER: That may take longer; it would be much harder to establish technically. But it may come too, eventually. Such a machine will prove extremely useful.

QUESTION: Could it also be used for therapy?

ANSWER: Physical as well as mental therapy. It could be used for all sorts of other things, not to speak of the importance of proving the existence of human beings beyond the physical level. Since we have a question session next time, it would be very constructive if you presented some questions dealing with our subject tonight.

I retire with my blessings for each and every one of you, my friends. The strength and the light I am allowed to bring from my world is flowing now to each one of you. May it help you, wherever you are on your path, whatever your problems are. May you feel the love with which we come to you. Be blessed, be in God!

Edited by Judith and John Saly

For information to find and participate in Pathwork activities world wide, please write:

The Pathwork® Foundation
PO Box 6010
Charlottesville, VA 22906-6010, USA
Call: 1-800-PATHWORK, or
Visit: www.pathwork.org

The following notices are for your guidance in the use of the Pathwork® name and this lecture material.

Trademark/Service Mark

Pathwork® is a registered service mark owned by The Pathwork Foundation, and may not be used without the express written permission of the Foundation. The Foundation may, in its sole discretion, authorize use of the Pathwork® mark by other organizations or persons, such as affiliate organizations and chapters.

Copyright

The copyright of the Pathwork Guide material is the sole property of The Pathwork Foundation. This lecture may be reproduced, in compliance with the Foundation Trademark, Service Mark and Copyright Policy, but the text may not be altered or abbreviated in any way, nor may the copyright, trademark, service mark, or any other notices be removed. Recipients may be charged the cost of reproduction and distribution only.

Any person or organization using The Pathwork Foundation service mark or copyrighted material is deemed to have agreed to comply with the Foundation Trademark, Service Mark and Copyright Policy. To obtain information or a copy of this policy, please contact the Foundation.