

Week 17 - 4th Quadrant Practice - Bringing Creativity to Perfectionism

"Perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor, the enemy of the people. It will keep you cramped and insane your whole life, and it is the main obstacle between you and a shitty first draft. I think perfectionism is based on the obsessive belief that if you run carefully enough, hitting each stepping-stone just right, you won't have to die. The truth is that you will die anyway and that a lot of people who aren't even looking at their feet are going to do a whole lot better than you and have a lot more fun while they're doing it."

~ Anne Lamott, Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life

Perfectionism is behavior designed to cover up a sense of shame, inferiority, and belief about not being "good enough," no matter how hard one tries. It is the attempt to run from this shame in a continual striving towards activity and achievement, attaining goals often with no intrinsic meaning, perfect behavior according to the expectations of others, saying the "right" thing, being "politically correct" even if it means lying, conformity to expected norms of the person in front of you or the group in which you belong. This adaptation can change depending on who you are with. It can include being over-responsible and being "nice" in an attempt to belong, prove one's worth, gain approval, affection, attention, love, or to avoid being criticized or judged as not good enough. This triggers old shame that cannot yet be held in the creative space of love and acceptance. High status, high achievement and recognition is the secondary gain from attempting to be "good, right and perfect."

All of this is necessary and "good," rather than "bad," in the sense that the unbridled instincts of the creature we are, are tamed into socially acceptable behavior and achievement through fear and shame. This defines the moral codes of the 2nd quadrant. In unawareness, to get our needs met, we conform to the external demands of the culture that tame instinct and make us "civilized." The T.V. series "Dexter" is a wonderful portrayal of all of us moving through the earliest stage of instinct to moral conformity, and finally to awakening of affection and love that then determines choice, rather than unaware shame.

Dexter is a serial killer - his 2nd quadrant adult life is more extreme than most children develop because of the unaware re-enactment of violent trauma when, as a three-year old when he watched his mother being chain-sawed to death. He is adopted by a cop who sees that the impulse to kill must be channeled into a moral code. He is taught that he may only kill serial killers. He does this according to the strict inner moral guide that he is taught. He is meticulous in how he does it. He has rules, procedures and rituals around his killing. He does it really well - perfectly even. It is only when he starts having emotional and visual memory of what originally happened that he starts feeling any sense of inner connection and this connection then allows him the capacity and motive to **not kill**, because he feels some degree of affection. The compulsion to kill out of unaware terror and shame starts diminishing. Please all watch at least the first six episodes of Dexter. Watch for all levels in him including the outside persona of being a kind, thoughtful, socially connected person.

This show is compelling - because, of course, it outlines the evolution of every life to one degree or another.

We all have developed perfect behaviors that stifle the instincts, and so our very life force. When we can internally reconnect to the shame underlying the perfectionism, then the life skills of perfectionism can be used in a creative way - options and possibilities open up in a new way. Now the only time we would "kill" is when it is loving.

Consider for a moment all the ways in which you have become a serial killer through stifling your instincts in shame and learning to be morally correct, socially acceptable, conforming and chameleon-like depending on

the external environment to meet your deep inner needs. Do you kill with meanness, unkindness, gossiping, judgments, criticisms, rejection? How do you chop people up? How do you bleed them out? These are all socially acceptable within the moral code within which you live. You may not actually kill, but you can kill with hatred and damnation of others in a million small ways - you can kill by small cuts instead of taking a chainsaw to people.

The next step is to see this and to find the part of you that is wild, free and instinctual, and liberate that part from the shame that gave rise to the killing fields of your life. When that wild instinctual part is free and can express itself in love, rather than shame, then instead of death happening, abundant life grows in unexpected and creative ways. Your perfectionism can be used in service of this wild free, and now, loving rather than just instinctual part of yourself.

Some of the ways in which you can recognize your 2nd quadrant level of perfectionism is in recognizing the following behaviors:

- a focus on doing, rather than being in relationships - task and result oriented rather than process and person orientated
- anxiety and tension, as well as depression and aimlessness, when not working, achieving or doing - difficulty in just being
- life is seen and experienced as serious business with little time for play. Having fun is considered childish and wasting time. "Work comes before play," is the motto of this quadrant
- talk about being "busy, stressed and overwhelmed"
- very often being the first to offer to help and do for someone else
- achievement, status and intelligence considered the most important values to live by, and see this as proof of a person's worth and value
- achievement and success take precedence over the arts and creative expression
- feelings of anxiety, shame and guilt leading to compulsiveness, ruminating and obsessing
- brooding over mistakes, collapsing back into the original shame that resulted in the perfectionism
- language being full of "should's," "must's," "have to's" and "could have's." Lives by rules and standards to which others and self must and should conform -moralistic at a very primitive level with no introspection about motive.
- unrealistically compare to and compete with others
- uneasy when they do not see immediate results in what they are trying to achieve
- find it hard to stay in process, to persevere and discipline themselves - tend to give up if they do not get immediate successful results
- unable to engage in self-reflection without shame and judgment
- unable to set limits - overextend themselves
- inability to be honest with themselves or others - serve nice, good right and perfect rather than honesty, integrity and directness about feelings and needs
- rational and logical thinking only
- high defensiveness

When we can recognize these behaviors in ourselves, then we can bring our loving and creative Self into relationship with this function of being and use it very creatively and resourcefully. The bigger we can expand in our ability to embrace these functions of perfectionism, the less they will be driven by shame and the fear of feeling shame. The more risks we make in failing, the more we will find creativity lies in the very mistakes of life. Creativity is the very function of Spirit and so as we recognize this as our truest Self we will be able to bring it to the striving of our external lives. Creativity wells up from our deepest Self and finds positive

expression regardless of external pressure, criticism or regard for what others think. This includes the expression of love in relationship. Creativity is not limited to concrete expression, in for example, art and music.

We can recognize creativity of Being by responses within that reflect the ability to:

- be absorbed in a process and the present moment with calmness and interest for the sake of the process without undue anxiety about the outcome - for example, getting involved in the process of loving another without concern about the outcome.
- play - eg. build sand castles that will be washed away. Make mandalas about life for hours and then sweep the sand away
- express awe spontaneously and enthusiastically
- express joy with energy, sparkle, life and love in the eyes and spring in the step
- look like a fool, make a mistake, take risks, imagine, dream and see possibilities
- relate to others without the agony of shame or anxiety about what they think, or consideration about what their perceptions/judgements might be
- convey a sense of freedom of spirit
- think beyond conventional rules, norms, structures, doctrine, authority or the "way things are." Subscribe to a higher morality rooted in love, not shame
- see relationship as part of the creative process
- trust that their expression of caring for another will bear positive results, even if they never see them and even if people respond with anger and rejection, judgment and hatred
- convey joy, love, energy and a sense of hope to those with whom they interact
- limit setting and anger are conveyed from a creative and loving space within
- be at relative ease in the presence of another's pain and/or destructive behavior
- see the big picture without being overwhelmed by difficult situations, unpleasantness or pain
- see the potential for many options in any given situation
- maintain a sense of humor, amusement and objectivity in the face of difficulties
- learn from mistakes
- able to take risks
- be free from self-imposed limiting constraints rooted in unrealistic fear and fear of shame
- allow others to be free from the constraints of "should" when it is life defeating instead of life giving
- explore and expand their understanding of spirituality and ways of relating
- wonder and ask questions all the time
- allow others to be free to explore their spirituality and ways of relating

As an exercise start noting your behavior and seeing to what extent you live in a constricted state of perfectionism. Recognize too that you are also a creative being who can bring the perfectionism into the realm of creativity instead of collapsing into a small state of perfectionism. Remember all you learned is a resource in awareness to be harnessed and used by the Creative force that is YOU. Start working with these lists and adding to them - this is just to get you started on paying attention to the whether you are operating in a constricted place so you can bring some spaciousness to it.

"I do believe it is possible to create, even without ever writing a word or painting a picture, by simply molding one's inner life. And that too is a deed". ~Etty Hillesum

"Go into yourself. Find out the reason that commands you to write; see whether it has spread its roots into the

very depths of your heart; confess to yourself whether you would have to die if you were forbidden to write.

This most of all: ask yourself in the most silent hour of your night: must I write? Dig into yourself for a deep answer. And if this answer rings out in assent, if you meet this solemn question with a strong, simple "I must," then build your life in accordance with this necessity; your whole life, even into its humblest and most indifferent hour, must become a sign and witness to this impulse. Then come close to Nature. Then, as if no one had ever tried before, try to say what you see and feel and love and lose...

...Describe your sorrows and desires, the thoughts that pass through your mind and your belief in some kind of beauty - describe all these with heartfelt, silent, humble sincerity and, when you express yourself, use the Things around you, the images from your dreams, and the objects that you remember. If your everyday life seems poor, don't blame it; blame yourself; admit to yourself that you are not enough of a poet to call forth its riches; because for the creator there is not poverty and no poor, indifferent place. And even if you found yourself in some prison, whose walls let in none of the world's sounds – wouldn't you still have your childhood, that jewel beyond all price, that treasure house of memories? Turn your attentions to it. Try to raise up the sunken feelings of this enormous past; your personality will grow stronger, your solitude will expand and become a place where you can live in the twilight, where the noise of other people passes by, far in the distance. - And if out of this turning-within, out of this immersion in your own world, poems come, then you will not think of asking anyone whether they are good or not. Nor will you try to interest magazines in these works: for you will see them as your dear natural possession, a piece of your life, a voice from it. A work of art is good if it has arisen out of necessity. That is the only way one can judge it."

~ Rainer Maria Rilke