

Pathwork™ Steps

Perfectionism

Study Guide for Online Meetings on PRS 9 and PL 97

Week 1: How Perfectionism originates

Week 2: Manipulation of feelings -> Pseudosolutions

Week 3: No Current -> Yes Current = JOY

Week 4: Finding a dynamic balance

Week 1: How Perfectionism originates

“I do not trust people who don’t love themselves and yet tell me, ‘I love you.’ There is an African saying which is: Be careful when a naked person offers you a shirt.” —Maya Angelou

PRS 9: Perfectionism is a rigid, static, unrealistic picture of life, of others, of self. The stronger perfectionism, the harder the brunt of self-condemnation.

Perfectionism denies the temporary reality of imperfection and limitation in a most unhealthy way. It wants the pleasant results of perfection without paying the price for achieving it. The price is: facing the unpleasant, often unflattering, fact of imperfection and slowly working at the elimination of it. Perfectionism does not want development, it demands the magic of eliminating the necessary steps to attain the goal. When this proves impossible, it becomes impatient, angry, destructively guilt ridden, it punishes the self and completely rejects it, seeing no redeeming features. It completely misunderstands the nature of imperfection, its specific origins, and thus ignores the way out of it. It flatly judges, without vision or wisdom.

If one is (consciously or unconsciously) filled with the idea that one should already be perfect, discovery of imperfection is not only difficult, but unnecessarily painful. The person will be tempted to color the truth, not to face certain facts and unwelcome factors. Moreover, the inevitable discovery of imperfection is bound to destroy a sense of one's own values. Since perfectionism is rigidly and unrealistically one-sided, the individual falls from one extreme to the other, being incapable of proportionate self-evaluation. From an unrealistic height, the person plunges into an equally unrealistic depth.

The stronger perfectionism, the harder the brunt of self-condemnation. The "way out," chosen by an unconscious attempt to lighten this burden, is projection onto others. This, in turn, brings problems with the outer world, so that the personality fluctuates between two equally damaging alternatives: condemnation of the self, in an unrealistic, exaggerated way, or condemnation of others, in rigid, blind intolerance.

Perfectionism is a residue of childhood impressions the soul received and retained, not

having assimilated certain influences and impressions according to reality values. Many children grow up in an atmosphere in which **the expectation of perfection is implicit**. Some children are not even rewarded for being good -- it is taken as a matter of course, while being punished, or at least made to feel inadequate, when being naughty, imperfect. Their imperfection threatens to cost them the much needed parental love and security. This childhood climate is preserved in the inner world of feeling, and it is automatically expected to reign in the adult world as well. Of course, this is not thought, but it may be strongly felt, even by persons who are most reasonable in their intellectual understanding. We are not discussing views and thoughts, but automatic reflexes in emotional reactions. An individual may feel deep shame about the slightest weakness, fault, limitation, failure -- in short, about any kind of human imperfection. This can lead to unjustified guilt, to pretense, to inferiority feelings, to intolerance with and hostility for others (projection), and any number of other destructive emotions. PRS 9

Perfectionism and the Idealized Self Image

Meeting the Pain of Destructive Patterns PL 100

To begin with, the child suffers from certain imperfections of the parents' love and affection. It also suffers out of not being fully accepted in its own individuality. From this, you suffer although you may never be aware of it in these terms or in exact thoughts. This may leave as much of a scar as the lack of love or of attention. It causes as many frustrations as does the lack of love, or even cruelty.

This general climate in which you grow up affects you like a constant minor shock that often leaves more of a mark than one traumatic shocking experience. You take this climate as a matter of course. You take it for granted. You believe that it has to be so. Nevertheless, you suffer from it. And the combination of suffering from it and believing it to be 'unalterable fact' conditions you to develop destructive defenses.

All of these pseudo-solutions, in addition to various other aspects, are incorporated into your idealized self-image. Since the nature of the idealized self-image is self-aggrandizement, it separates you from others. Since its nature is separateness, it isolates you and makes you and those you deal with lonely. Since its nature is falsity and pretense, it alienates you from yourself, from life, and from others. All of that is bound to bring you pain, hurt, frustration, unfulfillment. You chose a way out of pain and frustration, but this way has proven not only inadequate, but it actually brings you much more of that which you wished to forego. However, to clearly recognize this fact and to put the links together requires the active work of sincere self-search.

The perfectionism that is so deeply ingrained in you and in your idealized self-image makes it impossible for you to accept yourself and others, to accept life in its reality; and you are therefore incapable of coping with it and resolving its problems and your own problems as well. It causes you to forego the experience of living in the true sense. PL 100

Week 2: Manipulation of feelings -> Pseudosolutions

PL97

The urgency of unrecognized needs causes you to build up your emotions out of all proportion to their actual intensity. Unconsciously, you thus say, as it were, "If my emotions are strong enough, I will be gratified."

Or if you happen to be a more fearful and pessimistic character, you will not admit their existence at all, let alone their urgency, and thus you will squeeze these emotions out of existence -- that is, out of your awareness.

In both instances, you do not afford yourself the luxury of letting the emotions flow, observing them, learning from them, and recognizing the true state of affairs within yourself. Making your emotions stronger or weaker than they actually are is a forceful tampering, crippling their functioning. Your intuitive, creative, and spontaneous capacities cannot unfold. You substitute other faculties for the emotional ones, and thus a discrepancy and disharmony come into existence. The richness of feeling is prohibited, and thus you impoverish yourself. You live on the periphery, which is the shallow living I discussed earlier.

So observe this, my friends. All of you have both of these ways of manipulating your emotions. The overdramatization is connected with the pseudosolution of power. The repression of feelings is connected with pseudosolution of withdrawal, false serenity, escape from living and experiencing. Both alternatives lead to shallowness, which is not real experience.

Offhand, you may say that the one who overdramatizes into stronger feelings than he may actually have, does in fact experience very acutely. And I say, my friends, everything that is not really genuine is conducive to and a result of self-alienation and therefore of shallowness. Even if you seem to thrive on emotionalism, this is not the real experience of your soul. You put on this overemotionalism perhaps because, quite unconsciously, you thus wish to bend life and others according to your needs. It is, in the true sense, a manipulation. PL 97

"There is an old Chinese tale about a woman whose only son died. She went to the holy man in her village and said, "What prayers, what magical incantations do you have to bring my son back to life?" Instead of sending her away or reasoning with her, he said to her, "Fetch me a mustard seed from a home that has never known sorrow. We will use it to drive the sorrow out of your life." Of course there is no such magic mustard seed. Every home has known sorrow, in every land and every age, throughout history and in our own day. There is some comfort in knowing that we are not alone in our sorrow."

Rabbi Ellen Weinberg Dreyfus

On losing track of real feelings from Self-Confidence, It's True Origin and What Prohibits It PL 77:

Still another way [to damage self-confidence] is to cripple your real feelings... not allowing your feelings to function freely or naturally.

Either you whip them artificially into a more dramatic state than they would naturally be in, you exaggerate them, over-dramatize them... Or else...you artificially cramp, prohibit, and squash your natural feelings. The negative result of this is that you prohibit growth of something that is alive, a living organism, for feelings are that.

Any living organism not left alone, but constantly manipulated, pulled, extended, or squashed in its growth, will suffer a very crippling effect. This is what you do with your real feelings.

You do so when you exaggerate and dramatize a positive feeling about a person. And you do so when you artificially talk yourself into resentment and contempt for a person because you believe that this is protection against the seeming tragedy of being rejected.

So finally, it is not surprising if you no longer know what you really feel and want; and who you really are. Your feelings are the expression of your being. Now, if you constantly prohibit your real feelings from functioning, and substitute them with artificial ones, you cannot know your real self. PL77

Moralizing. Disproportionate Reactions. – Needs

Notes on PL 90 by Susan Thesenga for the Pathwork Teachers Helper

In addition to negative feelings, we need to look at 3 negative conditions in the soul:

1) Moralizing - excessive demands and expectations of self and others

- rigid standards - perfectionism - arrogance and intolerance
- "good" behavior based on stringent self-moralizing is not genuine; it does not come naturally, but is based in fear of self.
- too insecure to delve into your own soul; caught in duality of living by rigid rules or acting out destructive impulses;
- creates need for idealized self image - not just to get approval from others but also to hide from yourself
- trust in rules rather than in yourself, a very shaky security
- need to trust self, even with imperfections
- need to accept flaws and also accept your "not knowing"

2) Disproportionate reactions - exaggerations

- May not be obvious over-dramatizing (such as emotion type might do) but still have inner reaction that is excessive
- Such reactions always based on all good/all bad thinking – cannot tolerate the negative or painful - make it all bad; similarly, a small "good" such as a compliment - can make you feel all good.

- Self-confidence is too shaky - reacts too much to outer events.

Both 1) moralizing and 2) disproportionate reactions based on non-acceptance of own humanity - stringent perfectionism; either/or thinking--emotional immaturity.

The mature person can take criticism or compliments w/ equanimity because his self-esteem does not depend on outer approval and is not so shaky as to go up or down depending on what people say to him

Antidote is to accept all emotions, including negative ones - then true self-esteem can be established, based in reality, Need to observe own immaturity in the form of "emotional reactions."

3) Condition of unfulfilled needs - real needs and false needs

- false needs always have a compulsive and excessive force – cannot tolerate the frustration of their not being met.
- False needs always cover some real need – if you explore the condition of the false need, can discover the real one
 - e.g. excessive need for approval from others covers real need to give that approval to yourself; . excessive need to receive
 - love covers real need to give love
- false needs are always indications of immature emotions which need to be felt so personality can mature.
- False needs (like moralizing and disproportionate reactions) based on either/or - either I get my way or I will die...frustration needs to be felt and tolerated

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Daily Review

Exercise: Keep a daily review (PL28) for one week focusing upon moments when you *feel, sense, or think that you, someone, or something 'should' be perfect*. All you need is a ½ page of lined paper per day. Create 4 columns. At some point, jot down each day these brief notes about each incident (limit:10 per day).

1. Two to three words to identify each incident (no details)
2. What feelings or emotional reactions came up
3. The judgments or conclusions you came to *at the time*

At the end of the week, read through your entries and complete the last column:

4. *What do I notice today -- was what happened or felt truly wrong, bad, or even unnecessary? Why was it so important to me to change things at that time?* Notice any patterns.

5. Spend some time in meditation about how you feel about 'being wrong' or 'flawed'. Are you afraid that people will judge you? That you will judge yourself? That something has been revealed that 'must' stay hidden? How could you become more comfortable with **what is?**

Week 3: No Current -> Yes Current = JOY

Transition from the No Current to the Yes Current PL125:

The yes-current is the expression of the supreme intelligence and creative universal force. It is the life force, whose aspects were also discussed in a separate lecture in the past. It is all that strives toward union, wholeness, harmony, fulfillment, fruition. It is truth and love in its substance and manifestation. It is life embracing and accepting. Its movements are smooth and harmonious -- to bring in still another of our past topics. Anything or anyone adapting himself to the yes-current must be in equal smooth harmony, must reach perfection and fulfillment on forever higher levels of being, must extend the range and experience of unbroken consciousness, unbroken by untruthful concepts and contradictory currents.

The no-current works and affects in the opposite manner, but not in the sense that, in itself as an equal factor, it is evil, manifest in the scheme of creation. It consists rather of ignorance, blindness, distortion, lack of awareness of relevant factors -- relevant to the no-current in whatever way manifested. Ignoring truth, it must be in fear and spread fear. Hence, it is the opposite of love, of everything that leads toward union, fulfillment, fruition. It is discord and spreads disharmony, isolation. Those who are enmeshed in it in any specific manifestation of their lives follow a harsh, disharmonious, rocky, shrinking, or rejecting soul movement that leads into greater blindness, error, and half-truth; into putting the focus and emphasis on aspects of self and others which, even though perhaps correct in themselves, do not lead out of the no-current. PL 125

How the No Current Manifests PRS 9

There are several ways, apart from projection, in which perfectionism may manifest. For instance: rigid moralizing, prejudice, dogmatic rules, cover the secret knowledge that the individual is not what he "ought" to be. Thus, he erects a rigid structure of rules against which he measures and evaluates human behavior. Such evaluation, based on fear, cannot lead to real standards. It must cause distress and a feeling of inadequacy.

When about to discover a deep-rooted problem, perfectionism is a real obstruction. The moment a "forbidden" feeling rises to the surface, the person may feel "I should not feel that way, I must feel so and so," and the matter is pushed out of awareness, never being properly examined. It is important to note and remember that, so as to discover this tendency. It exists in everyone.

Self-justification and self-indulgence are both manifestations of perfectionism. The fear of imperfection often induces man to minimize his faults, to deny them, to push the burden onto others. Rationalization is part of this, it belongs in the same category and is a derivative of self-justification. In both instances, pretexts and false reasons are used in order not to face and admit the real issue.

Perfectionism causes man to have a stronger fear of a finding than many actually warrant

it. If he lacks the courage to take the chance and look behind the dividing curtain between the conscious and unconscious mind, he can never experience the relief of finding an aspect that is so much better, so much less devastating, than he had suspected.

A further facet of perfectionism is exaggeration and over-dramatization. Upon becoming aware of previously unconscious aspects, it will often be ascertained that evaluation of them is so out of proportion that one's entire self-evaluation become unrealistic. A simple human fault induces a feeling of dire misery, commensurate with a crime. The discovery of an asset, of receiving a compliment, induces equally disproportionate elation. Such over-reaction indicates not only a lack of self-awareness and strong feelings of insecurity, but, concomitantly, perfectionism. The hidden nagging voice of it makes it impossible to believe in the truth of a compliment and, therefore needs to produce an elation in order to convince the self. Exaggeration of a liability is self-evident in connection with perfectionism.

Perfectionism is also, in part, responsible for a particularly harmful device the human psyche sometimes resorts to in ignorance. And that is the manipulation of emotions. In order to avoid the truth, emotions are squeezed, bent, molded, disciplined, forced, pushed, pulled, repressed, denied, shifted onto other people or onto other issues or aspects within the self, until the natural, organic flow of feelings can no longer express and respond spontaneously and freely. Feelings are constantly being put in a straight jacket, which cripples and kills them. This alienates man from his real self, which can function only if all aspects of the human personality flow and grow freely. Perfectionism thus prohibits the natural growth of man's emotional nature, in the misunderstanding that giving free reign to emotions, the individual is undisciplined and gives in to destructive actions. How can self-confidence and security exist if man cannot put trust into his feelings nor derive the benefit from his intuitions? PRS 9

To the degree that emotions are manipulated, intuition cannot function. When the hard shackles of perfectionistic standards fall off, the self can truly begin to breathe, and thus grow, unfold, reach out for expansion of more dynamic life.

You believed that trying to live up to, and pretending to fulfill these impossible and unrealizable expectations would make you into a more lovable and acceptable person. You can see now that the very opposite is true. The relief when you will know that you can afford to be your imperfect self will create an entirely new inner climate of well being and, eventually, new outer circumstances. PRS 9

You cannot give joy if you are not a joyful person. PRS 97

Offhand, it seems a paradox to be capable of joy only if you accept imperfection, to be capable of growth only if you accept your own imperfection. But if you really think about it, you will see that this is so.

I venture to say, my friends, that none of you, no matter how much progress you have made, is quite aware to what an extent your need for perfectionism contradicts this outer knowledge and, at the same time, **prohibits a joyful life** -- not 100 percent joy, no! -- but

a life in which you live fully and derive the joy of experience, of growth, of feeling, to a much greater extent than heretofore.

Again it as a question of truth. The reality, or truth, of your world is imperfection. And the reality, or truth, of your personal state of soul and emotions **is your complaint** against imperfection. Only by facing the truth and coming to terms with it, facing the reality of both factors, will you have a sound foundation from which you can go on.

If you attempt growth rather than perfection, you will live in the now. You will dispense with superimposed values and find your own. You will dispense with subtle pretenses and superimpositions with the subtle, hidden, but nevertheless present attitude that you do what you do for appearance's sake rather than for being true to yourself. This leads to selfhood. This leads away from self-alienation. All this will bring you to a state of identifying with yourself, being anchored in yourself rather than on peripheral layers. PL97

Acceptance vs. Resignation PRS 9

Strange as this may seem, **the more you accept imperfection, the more joy you will give and receive.** Your capacity for happiness depends on your capacity to accept imperfection -- not in words or theories you pronounce, but in your emotional experience. As you well know, these are two very different matters. It takes a great deal of self-search, of systematic work, and the utter will to be candid with yourself in order to uncover this discrepancy and to even accept this for the moment.

Only in accepting, let us say an imperfect relationship -- and this does by no means imply the unhealthy submissiveness that is born out of fear of loss or disapproval -- will you derive and give joy in this relationship. Only in accepting your own imperfection can you begin to grow and experience the joy from your own individuality. PRS 9

All un-genuine, artificially manipulated feelings induce inner disharmony, gnawing bitterness, anxiety, guilt, a sense of being ill at ease with oneself. Genuine feelings never impair self-respect, security in oneself, emotional comfort, integrity.

You will feel great relief upon discovering such artificial feelings. It will be as though a burden has fallen off your shoulders, your entire inner system will settle back into the comfort of being natural. This affords an occasional glimpse of the real self, long before all inner problems have been resolved. To make this possible, **you have to dare to feel** what you really feel, rather than trying to feel what you believe you should feel. Sometimes what you actually feel may be less perfect than the ideal you have pretended and forced yourself into. But there will also be times when you discover what you actually feel is much healthier and better than what you think you ought to feel.

Observe these manifestations of perfectionism in your daily review and your general self-observations. **The first indications may be fleeting and indirect.** Pursue these vague clues and bring them out clearly. This will pay many dividends in increased insight, self-respect, security and a sense of reality. PRS 9

Week 4: Finding dynamic balance

Quotes from PL 97

Full awareness of what you really feel and want must be the first aim in this respect. Sit back, so to speak, and allow your feelings to reach the surface of your consciousness. This does not always mean to follow through in certain actions, but when these feelings show themselves in their natural intensity -- or lack of intensity compared to what you thought you felt before -- without building them up or down, you will get a very precise inkling of what it means to be your real self. Also, it will give you a very different outlook on certain problems in your life and in yourself.

But the actual finding of how you genuinely feel, as opposed to the heretofore manipulated emotions, will come by relaxing by yourself and allowing your true feelings to come up. When you review how you reacted to certain incidents, you will then be able to ask yourself, "Do I really feel that strongly about it," or "Am I really that unconcerned with something that may hurt me, after all?" You will ask yourself if your fears, desires, or ingrained principles you think you have to adhere to are not responsible for overplaying or underplaying your emotions. PL 97

The Preface to Uh-Oh By Robert Fulghum

"Uh-oh" is not in any dictionary or thesaurus, and is seldom seen in written form. Yet most of us utter that sound every day. And have used it all our lives.

"Uh-oh" is one of the first expressions a baby learns.

"Uh-oh", or something like it, has been used as long as people have existed. And it may be the first thing Adam said to Eve after he bit into the apple.

She knew exactly what he meant, too.

Across the history of the human family, millions and millions of distinct sounds have come and gone as we continually reach for ways to communicate with one another. Often, the most expressive words we use are not words at all, just those shorthand sounds that represent complex thoughts -- grunts and moans and snorts and clicks and whistles compounded by facial expressions and physical gestures: "Uh-huh... oh-no... mmmmmm... huh... hey... oops... OK... yo... ah... ha... humpf... and an almost endless number of others whose meaning and spelling and cannot be conveyed with letters on paper.

"Uh-oh" is way up near the top of a list of small syllables with large meanings.

We say "uh-oh" to a small child who falls down or bumps his head or pinches his finger. It means that we know the child hurts, but we also know the hurt is temporary and that the child has the resources to handle the hurt and get up and go on about his business. As the

child learns, he will not need to turn to a parent to kiss-it-and-make-it-well each time he scrapes himself – he will know where to find the bandages on his own. “Uh-oh” is the first wedge in weaning a child away from us into independence.

The older we get, the more experience and knowledge we have, the more able we are to distinguish momentary difficulty from serious trouble. The more we know that something is “uh-oh”, not 911.

If I had a chest pain, I might go to an emergency room thinking ‘Oh my God, heart attack!’ If my doctor had the same symptoms, she might think “Uh-oh, gas pains, take an antacid” and go on with her work.

What to me is the last gasp of my old truck is a repairable electric problem to my mechanic. “Uh-oh, there’s a short in your ignition wire”.

One might even come to feel the same way about things that cannot be fixed. From the cradle, we know about “Rock-a-bye-baby” and what happens when the bough breaks. In kindergarten we are reminded about these conditions. All the king’s horses and all the king’s men could not put Humpty Dumpty together again. I’m familiar with death, having been around it often in hospitals and cemeteries. If I see my own death coming, my response may well be “uh-oh”.

It says to expect the unexpected, and also expect to be able to deal with it as it happens most of the time. “Uh-oh” people seem not only to expect surprise, but they count on it, as if surprise were a dimension of vitality.

“Uh-oh” embraces “Here we go again!” and “Now what?” and “You never can tell what’s going to happen next” and “So much for plan A” and “Hang on, we’re coming to a tunnel” and “No sweat” and “Tomorrow’s another day” and “You can’t unscramble an egg” and “A hundred years from now it won’t make any difference”.

“Uh-oh” is more than a momentary reaction to small problems. “Uh-oh” is an attitude – a perspective on the universe. It is part of an equation that summarizes my view of the conditions of existence:

“Uh-huh” + “Oh-wow” + “Uh-oh” + “Oh, God” = “Ah-hah!” **Robert Fulghum**

“Find in yourself where perfectionism is a substitute for demanding more than you are willing to give; where you dislike yourself -- for justified or unjustified reasons. Find the reason for the perfectionism itself -- then its manifestations will cease, even before the perfectionism itself has vanished. In other words, you will experience that you become deeply aware of perfectionistic expectations of yourself. You may not yet know why, but the moment you clearly and concisely ascertain these expectations, self-condemnations as well as self-justification will considerably lessen, and even disappear.” PRS 9

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