

Pathwork Guide Lecture No. 31
1996 Edition
June 6, 1958

SHAME

Greetings in the Name of the Lord. I bring you blessings, my friends, to each one of you and to all your dear ones.

When we spirits observe human beings, we can see how badly you need spiritual nourishment. Your body is nourished, as is your intellect and even your emotional nature -- though the latter not always with the best possible food. But when it comes to spiritual nourishment, most human beings starve themselves. There is a great confusion about what spiritual nourishment really means. It does not merely mean to read, hear, or learn about spiritual truth or law, about God and His creation. It does not even mean prayer and meditation which, of course, if done in the right way, is also a very important part of spiritual nourishment. However, the most important substance of spiritual food is self-development. Your innermost self, your divine spark, is constantly crying out for this food, but your conscious being refuses to hear the cry. When you are sad or depressed, when you are dissatisfied with your life whether for actual and rational reasons or not, it is always because your spirit is starved. Only that person can be truly happy and fulfilled who partakes of this most important food: spiritual development. For there is no human being alive who has not the opportunity to become happy. It is in your hands, my friends. But you so often turn the wrong way; you seek happiness in the wrong direction; you blame others for your misfortunes; you blame fate, you blame God; you blame the alleged injustice of the world. But you do not take the one and only step that leads you to fulfillment through a deep sense of having lived your life the way your Creator had it in mind for you in this particular incarnation. It varies, of course, with each individual, for not everyone has to fulfill an incarnation in the same way. The same work or effort is not expected of everyone. But the one thing you should keep in mind, my friends, is that if you are not quite happy in spite of occasional outer difficulties, you have denied your spirit some of the nourishment it craves -- most probably in the right way of self-development and self-recognition. Anyone hearing or reading these words has sufficient means to acquire this food.

In my previous lectures I have mentioned several attitudes in the human soul which are what you might call God-eclipsing. Last time I explained that pride, self-will, and fear underlie all faults and are responsible for all unhappiness and all untruth that exists in the human soul. To continue this series of lectures on self-development, I will discuss tonight a new subject: shame.

There is a right kind and a wrong kind of shame. The right kind of shame is true repentance. Without this kind of shame, there could never be an incentive for self-development. Without it, no one would ever undergo the noble fight, my friends, against one's lower self; no one would take the path of purification if this shame did not exist within. True repentance is therefore constructive and very positive. But there is also shame of the wrong kind. Human beings so often confuse the two kinds of shame that now I want to devote some of our time together to this subject.

What is the wrong kind of shame? We might call it a guilt-complex which, of course, is entirely destructive and negative. What do your emotions actually say -- even though you certainly do not consciously think so -- when you have the wrong kind of shame? They say: "I am hopelessly bad, and there is nothing that can be done about it." With this attitude you not only wallow in self-pity, but express a sluggishness that prohibits your working actively on the elimination of that which is wrong within you. Furthermore, this attitude becomes more and more unreasonable and unjust, for you demand and expect respect and love from others although you do not respect and love yourself. Mind you, this is not because of your shortcomings. In the deepest regions of your being you cannot respect yourself because of the wrong attitude, the wrong kind of shame that makes you passive where you should be active.

Thus, you find yourself in a vicious circle: the more you deny to yourself the experience of the constructive shame that would make you lift yourself up and work on yourself with realistic self-recognition -- the foundation of self-development -- the more you despise yourself. The more you do that, the more you need to demand love and respect from others to make up for the lack of self-respect. The blind, unconscious, and immature side of you believes that if you receive sufficient appreciation from others, it will make up for the lack of self-respect you can never truly possess unless you fulfill the basic spiritual laws within your own soul and unless you do the maximum of what can be expected of you in self-development according to your overall spiritual development.

I know, my friends, that no one thinks these thoughts consciously, but if you would test your emotions, examine their demands as to what they actually mean and express, this is what you would find. Remember -- and this is very important -- your lack of self-respect is not due to your faults, weaknesses, shortcomings, and sins -- no matter what they may be -- but it is due to your wrong kind of shame. The moment you exchange the wrong shame for the right, I can promise you that in the measure this change takes place, you must develop true and justified self-respect long before the faults in you have disappeared. You do not have to be perfect in order to respect yourself. All you have to do is to adopt a realistic and constructive attitude toward your imperfections. The more your self-respect is established, the less you will crave for the respect of others, for you are then resting secure within yourself. And this will so change your inner attitude and your emanations that you will have a different effect on others; this will make it so much easier for the people around you to actually give you the love and respect you desired in the first place.

Perhaps it has not occurred to you that the wrong kind of shame comes from your pride and furthers your pride even more. This may sound paradoxical at first. Let me explain it this way: Your lower self with all its shortcomings is a factor to reckon with if you do not want to escape your present reality. The more you try to escape the facts of your life, the sicker your soul must become. By having the wrong kind of shame, you do escape reality, for what your emotions express is that you will not accept yourself as you really are. The moment you hopelessly despair about the lower side of your nature, you have not accepted yourself as you are. It means you are lacking the humility of courageously facing everything about yourself -- and that is pride.

Let me stress once again: Intellectually you know that you are imperfect, but emotionally you don't. Often there is a wide chasm between what you know and think consciously and what your emotions claim and desire. It is not at all difficult to make the emotions conscious if only you are willing to take the trouble to translate them into concise thoughts, but it needs a little effort. Your

emotions claim perfection before this perfection can be yours. You place yourself higher than the efforts you have so far taken would warrant. At the same time, you do know, or at least feel, that you are not there yet. Instead of consciously recognizing this fact and slowly working up to the point where you want to be, you become angry at the world and at yourself for being what you are and refuse to make the inner effort to become what you want to be. So the wrong kind of shame means pride, laziness, injustice, and escape from your present reality. This is what makes you feel guilty, my friends, and not the actual faults you may possess. These would never make you feel guilty, provided you adopted the right kind of shame in which you accepted yourself in humility as you are at present, not fleeing from your reality, and thus building up from there -- slowly, step by step. It is the only realistic and constructive way to change and develop.

The wrong attitude brings further hazards, however. Because of your pride and your need for respect and love from others, you begin to withdraw from what you really think and feel about yourself and hide it behind a wall, so to speak. You dare not stand up for who you really are because your emotions say that if you were yourself, you would be despised. As I said before, the more you lack self-respect, the more important the respect of others becomes to you. So you create a mask self. In some subtle way, you become a fake. And that, in turn, makes you even more despondent and you despise yourself even more. The vicious circle continues in full force and carries you into deeper emotional conflicts until you develop the courage and humility to break it. Please do not confuse standing up for who you really are which includes your lower self, with giving in to the impulses of your lower self in your deeds. There is a vast difference between that and a simple recognition and acceptance of what you are, without building up a different personality for the outside world to appear better. One often establishes a fake "real self" for the very reasons explained here.

As long as you feel sad, bitter, defiant, or disharmonious in any way when you encounter your faults, you have not yet accepted yourself as you are. Again you have to strive for the middle path. Accepting does not mean wanting to stay in a state of imperfection. It means that you first have to learn to accept your state of imperfection. You should also find out whether you desire to be cherished for your shortcomings as a compensation for your imagined inability to change and thus come to cherish yourself. When you have made such and other unreasonable emotions conscious, it will be easy to direct them into proper channels.

When you are capable of really and truly accepting yourself as you are, not desiring to appear better than you are, you have fulfilled the basic requirement to be on this path, my friends. Before that, you are not on it as yet, but merely in a state of preparation for entering the gate leading to it. In other words, as long as there is the wrong kind of shame in you, you cannot advance on this path; you have to exchange it for the right kind of shame.

The wrong kind of shame will create a state of mind that is not only extremely unhealthy, as I outlined just now, but will also make you feel more and more alone. Whenever you feel lonely and not understood, please realize that, at least to some degree, the condition I have described must be responsible for it and not other people's lack of love and understanding. No matter how incapable of love the people around you may be, you would never feel lonely if this wrong attitude were not somehow prevailing within you. So do not seek a remedy from without, but turn around within and look at yourself from this point of view.

You, whoever you are, may feel ashamed of something. Whether it be big or small, grave or unimportant, is not the point. You cover it up; you hide it; you appear to be without that something of which you are ashamed. This is the wall that separates you from others. But in this way you can never be sure that you are really loved and appreciated. For this little voice in you keeps saying: "If they only knew how I really am and what I have done, they would not love me." That makes you feel alone, suffering, and cold. You think that all the affection given to you is destined for the person you appear to be and not for the person you really are. Of course you are insecure and lonely in that state. But only you can change it -- no one else.

It will be easy for you to see that the only remedy for this constant state of loneliness, of insecurity, and of growing self-despise is the one step that appears hardest to you, namely to break down the shame and stand up for what you really are. The more you try the other way, the way of subtle deception, the deeper your dilemma will be. You have seen that. So it is up to you to take the one courageous step of becoming yourself and gaining true security and the true appreciation of your friends. For they who are spiritually developed and capable of love will most certainly not love you less; quite the contrary. And they who are immature and therefore incapable of love will not be retracting their love for you since they never really gave it nor did you ever really own it. For such people find themselves in exactly the same spot as you are in now: craving for affection, respect, and love to assuage their own lack of self-respect, absent because they too do not have the courage to be themselves. Their kind of love was an illusion in the first place. So the only way to build a secure ground on which to stand is to stop the pretense you have laboriously cultivated all your life. This seems a hard step at first, my friends.

Again, I want to stress that you are not expected to tell your secrets to everyone you meet. Choose the right person to open up to; choose the person who can help you. Then choose the people with whom you are really close and those who know you as you really are. Otherwise, you can never be yourself. It is not a question of what you say, but rather of what you feel; a question of your inner attitude. In order to adjust your emotions from the wrong kind of shame to the right kind, all you have to do is delve into your emotions and, as I so often say, translate them into clear-cut concise thoughts. Then, when you see the unreasonableness of the immature side of your soul, you can readjust them. Only when you do that will you be able to take the next step. Only then will you have security and self-respect. For as long as you hide behind a wall of falsity, you must despise yourself -- much more than a brother or sister of yours who may have many more weaknesses but who has the courage to live without pretense and act according to the real self. It is not how good you are or how many weaknesses you still have that determines your self-respect. Self-respect -- and as a result of it also the respect of others -- can only be measured by how true you are to yourself, or how much you deceive and escape yourself, or how much you hide behind a wall of pretense. This wall of pretense is not something easily recognizable from the outside. It is something subtle within that only you yourself can find, by testing and probing your emotions and their meaning.

True repentance in the positive sense means to simply take stock of the self and to accept its weaknesses in their present state, with the deep desire to change. At the same time you need to acknowledge that the change can only come by again and again recognizing the deeply ingrained faults and comparing the faulty reactions to the ideal state. Thus you learn humility.

The moment you do not wish to appear better or more than you are, even in your own eyes, you will have taken yourself down from the high place in which you have put yourself. You can start rebuilding only after you have torn down the false edifice. If you have the courage to stumble a thousand times over the same faults and forever lift yourself up to try again, then you pay God the debt you owe Him; then you are worthy of His grace; then you are truly on the path. Then you rid yourself of pride and falsity long before you are perfect in all the details of your personality. Thus you approach perfection much faster than you think, in spite of some of your stubborn shortcomings that linger on. In that way you must win. But if every time after having stumbled again over the same fault you become so despondent that you despair of yourself, wishing to give up, and you consider self-acceptance to be senseless, then you have the destructive and weakening kind of shame, which will never get you anywhere. For as long as you despair so easily, there is too much pride in you, and then the healing, curative action of being able to observe your own weaknesses in the true light of what they are, neither exaggerating nor diminishing them, will not be able to affect your soul.

So, my friends, do not despair if you have no success for quite a while in overcoming your weaknesses. You may perhaps understand now that here you have a great curative agent for remedying something even more important than the actual weakness you are treating. You will learn the right kind of shame and self-acceptance, which brings humility, overcomes pride, and shows you how to live in your own reality. If you were soon very successful in overcoming your individual faults, it might make you even prouder, and pride is more harmful than many other faults. Apart from that, the faults you are battling against have been ingrained in you often for many incarnations, so you cannot expect to get rid of them within a few years. However, if you are capable of facing these weaknesses; if you meet them with open eyes and a healthy attitude and learn even while you are still stumbling over them; if you have the humility to face yourself knowing where you really belong -- not too low, nor too high -- then even though you are still imperfect, you are laying the foundation to a very healthy and normal inner attitude.

Think and meditate about this, my friends. It is not sufficient to just hear or read my words once, for that will not be the kind of spiritual food that helps you to discover where your feelings still deviate from the ideal state. Find the echo within you to direct you in your daily strivings and in your daily spiritual work. When you do that, you will be giving yourself the food your spirit needs.

Perhaps you now begin to sense why it is so necessary to be able to talk openly about yourself to a qualified person and then to the people you are really close to. For as long as you keep things hidden within you, everything gets out of proportion. You may exaggerate one thing and underestimate another. But a person who is detached from your problems and your inner struggles may see things in the right light. As I have often said in private sessions, there is a spiritual law which applies equally to psychoanalysis and confession. It is the law of brotherhood. The moment you open up to another person, you risk an act of humility. At that moment with that person you do not want to appear more perfect than you are. That is one of the most harmful human tendencies, my friends. When you show yourself to one person as you are, you will instantly feel the relief your spirit has cried for, even if that person does not give you a single piece of advice.

Your spirit suffers when you act against its laws. And you feel better all of a sudden when you are able to humbly reveal yourself. The law of brotherhood is working. Something in you says, "At

this moment I do not want to appear better than I am. I want to show myself as I am; I do not strive for respect and love that I think is not really due me because of the things of which I am ashamed." Though you are wrong in that too, for love and respect are due every living creature. In the distorted view you suffer loneliness and you go on pretending in some subtle way. The wrong kind of shame also violates the law of brotherhood. Thus you may see once again how every inner feeling can be right when it comes from the godself. However, the same can be distorted by luciferic powers. It is so also with shame.

So I say to you, my friends, when you really and truly desire to develop along this path you will find guidance at a certain point. You will be almost pushed into a corner where you will open up for your own salvation. Of course, you always have your free will and this we spirits will respect at all times and never violate it, even if we do know what may seem so difficult for you to express. But you have to do the talking. We will not do it for you. You are always free, therefore, to refuse and retire deeper into your corner and resent that you are being pushed in this direction. However, you can also take the opportunity and step out of your hiding place, open your eyes, and see that herein lies your salvation. It is up to you.

When guidance appears in the form of an unpleasant test, you cannot fully understand what is happening. Yet it is there to help you do what is necessary. Such an opening up of your personality is healing. You think of these experiences as hardships. Once you understand, however, why they are necessary you will cease to see them in that way. You are like children; you do not know what is good for you. And God's helpers who are all around you constantly -- particularly with the person who is willing to take this path of purification -- manage to guide and inspire people to create situations which afford you the opportunity. But you have to decide with your free will whether or not you want to learn from them. You can either open your eyes to the significance of the situation, or you can shirk from the issue and refuse to recognize the call, for it is a call! Decide, my friends. Do you want to take your courage into your own hands, or do you think that you can advance on this path without summoning the courage to follow the call?

I can promise you one thing. After you have made the decision to take this path, you will already feel a foretaste of the spiritual rebirth that must come sooner or later when a certain phase is reached. The greater the effort and the apparent difficulty of recognizing the call and following it, the more relief, the more victory, the more happiness, the more self-respect, and the more inner joy and peace will you feel after the test is over and you have fully understood how to go on from there. This, my friends, I beg you to remember very well. Do not choose to forget these words, secretly thinking that if you manage to evade the issue the situation will cease to exist. Read my words every day, whenever you are faced with such a decision.

We deal not only with what you consciously know and hide. That is comparatively easy. Once you are able to reveal consciously hidden thoughts and feelings, you need, with our help, to try to find what unconscious currents lie behind them. That is then the work to be done. Of course, you cannot do so alone; and you cannot do so unless you have displayed the courage to bring into the open what you do know. Most people carry hidden unconscious factors equally active as the conscious ones. Those are a little more complicated to find. The first prerequisite is to be free and open enough to be able to talk about everything pertaining to your person. You can never reach the hidden motives, currents, and emotions without that.

If you fulfill the necessary requirements, help will be given to you -- that you can be sure of. The help you need is the grace of God. Without it you cannot reach your unconscious and stubbornly hidden shames blocking the way. But if you wait for the grace of God in defiance and anger, saying to yourself, "Why can't I have it? Why someone else and not me? I have suffered so much. I am due for it now; I have tried so hard," then you push away the time for grace, because your attitude is not humble. You take it upon yourself to judge, and you cannot judge. You have no way of judging how much you have suffered, and when the grace is due, and how hard you have tried, especially in comparison with others. You lack comparison; you even lack complete self-recognition, for as long as you cannot delve into what your unconscious hides, you do not know yourself. And how can you dare to judge and compare if you don't even know yourself?

When you nurse a spirit of true humility and patience, then the grace, my dear ones, will be much nearer. If you have difficulties, try to concentrate on this. If you cannot advance, although you are working and doing your best -- and many do not advance because they are not working the way they could, so it is not the lack of grace -- and if there are blocks you cannot seem to penetrate, ask yourself, "How humble is my attitude?" Nurse these words instead of turning away from God the moment things become difficult for you. This is my advice for my dear, beloved friends.

I should like to discuss one more subject before we turn to your questions. I have already mentioned that you are ashamed of your faults. Most of them you wish you did not have. However, there is also another category, and it will be important to look at your faults from this new point of view, namely, that you have some faults which you are in love with. This explains why you do not get ahead in some particular respect of your development. You do not admit it, but you are actually quite proud of some of your faults. Of course, as long as this is true, you cannot possibly overcome them. Find out how this applies to you. Once you are aware that you are emotionally attached to some of your faults, pray that God may help you to recognize why this is so and what lies behind it. Pray that you may be able to see this attitude in an objective light, so as to develop the right kind of shame about it.

Check all your faults and your emotional reactions to them in all honesty. As you go through your list, you will see that there are some faults you really do not like and others you cherish in some way. Then, when you feel that attachment, ask yourself: "How would I react if another person were to display the same fault either in the same way or perhaps in a slightly different way?" You are actually often quite irritated when another human being displays the same fault you are somewhat proud of in yourself. Once you approach the fault from this point of view, you will lose the pride you take in it. As long as the pride persists, however, you cannot possibly overcome the fault.

I will be very happy to let you present to me any fault you choose for analysis. I will show you how every one of them is connected with pride, self-will, and fear. I will show you how to analyze the fault, how it leads to other faults, and what is connected with it -- and in this way help you to better self-understanding. I will show you how to meditate on it and proceed, in this particular way, with the spiritual work on your path. I will also show you how every single fault, weakness, or imperfection is a direct hindrance to love -- and therefore to God. I will also point out what the underlying good quality behind each fault is, for there is no fault that is not a distortion of

something good and pure. Try this as an exercise yourself; apply it to your faults, for your spiritual work is useless if it is abstract and impersonal. Where you are unable to do so, bring the faults here.

Now are there any questions in connection with this subject before we turn to your other questions?

QUESTION: You stressed the point that one should open up to a qualified person. Could you elaborate on the problem of a person who has the desire to open up and to be humble, but does so indiscriminately and therefore no good is coming from it -- only harm and repercussions?

ANSWER: Yes, you see that this is, of course, the opposite extreme, and you know that all extremes are wrong. Such a person has a deep need for which the spirit cries. The real need is not recognized and therefore the wrong satisfaction is sought. However, the case you mention is not as much of an extreme as you think. Often a human being opens up about many little things, and even exposes actual shortcomings, so as to keep the real issue hidden.

QUESTION: But what if that same person masks the true faults and invents artificial guilts to divulge?

ANSWER: That happens. You see, it will not do any good to tell such a person to choose to open up to the right people, because he will never know who the right people are. The intuition is lacking, as well as the sound intellectual judgment. Neither faculty can function well as long as one rationalizes and covers up the true reasons. Such a person has to be brought to first recognize this fact. That, of course, can only be done very slowly. And it cannot be done at all if the desire is not there. But the desire can grow.

Be blessed, all of you. Be in God.

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