

Pathwork Guide Lecture No. 57
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THE MASS IMAGE OF SELF-IMPORTANCE

Greetings, my friends. God bless all of you, God bless this hour.

We have often discussed inferiority feelings and their true origins. This is an important trend in human nature and therefore needs further understanding in your work of self-finding. I think you understand clearly by now that the real reasons for inferiority feelings are hidden. Subconsciously you do register your imperfections and inadequacies, and while you do not want to face them and come to terms with them, your knowledge of them persists. You cannot eradicate that. So you seek relief from it and mistakenly believe that this can be accomplished by receiving attention, admiration, and approval. We have already established -- and many of you have found out by now -- that no matter how much approval you receive, the relief is at best only a very temporary one. This is a short recapitulation of what has been said on this subject thus far.

In this connection, I would like to discuss a mass image about the self. This mass image exists at all times regardless of civilization, geography, period, and environment. There are mass images bound to certain times and civilizations. There are others which are universal and encompass all mankind. They are a product of a particular blend of human imperfection and humankind's desire to reach perfection, often in a twisted, misunderstood manner.

Such a universal mass image is the following: "If I receive attention or approval or admiration, all my worth is established not only in the eyes of the world but in my own eyes. If I cannot get it, then I am inferior." Needless to say, this is a wrong conclusion. And needless to say, this is not a conscious thought but an unconscious emotional attitude. None of you will fail to verify this emotion within yourself.

Since this is an image, it is illusory. The purpose of this work is to free you of the illusory. For no illusion exists that can bring you harmony, peace, and freedom. All that is illusory is bound to create problems for you. The particular illusion of this image has many repercussions and a chain reaction of harmful results for yourself as well as for others around you.

At this point, I might emphasize once again (so as to avoid all possible misunderstanding) that the remedy is not in defiance and rebellion against your dependence on others' opinions of you. Unconsciously, this is done just as frequently as the inner pleading for admiration and approval. Both exist simultaneously in many a soul. Both are equally harmful and are the result of the same unhealthy and erroneous basic misconception.

Let us get back to this particular mass image. We, in our world, can hear your souls shrieking for attention. The earth sphere produces this loud noise for us. When we approach your plane, all souls send forth this loud calling and clamoring, inaudible to your ears. But you can imagine how

noisy it is for us. The voice of the soul is a loud one. All emotions produce sounds, but the loud voice claiming self-importance does not produce a very harmonious sound.

The outer manifestation of this mass image varies according to temperament and characteristics; according to other trends, healthy or sick, which determine the strength and manner of manifestation; and according to environment and education. All this together determines just how noticeable, how strong, how obvious the cry for approval is and in what particular direction the need of self-importance exists. If the demand for approval is to an extent obvious to other human beings, it does not necessarily mean that such a person is spiritually less developed than another person with whom the same trend is more hidden and more subtle. This is rather a question of degree of suppression.

By working on this particular trend, all of you will come sooner or later to that part in you that demands to be elevated to first place. You will become aware of a part of your personality that desires to be unique. It is not sufficient to say "pride." You will have to go further than that. Why do you feel a need for this pride? -- because of the image I have just explained; because of the wrong conclusion, leading you to believe that when you are extraspecial in the eyes of the world, your inferiority feeling will vanish; and because of the false contention that when others agree with what you do, believe, and think, you gain in worth in your own eyes. Of course, you do not think all this in conscious thought. But if you analyze the meaning of your emotions, this is what they amount to, this is their meaning.

Thus you use pride as a defensive measure, as a means to an end, not for the sake of pride itself. This is why the realization that pride exists in you never really helps to eliminate this pride. You may not have been aware of pride in the beginning. After a certain effort on this path, you discover, perhaps with a shock, that you too possess pride. But no matter how often you then tell yourself, "This is pride, I must not be proud," it does not help. You have to go to the next stage of self-understanding by realizing why. You will have to understand fully that you unconsciously believe this pride serves to gain something for you or to save you from some imagined disaster. When you discover the error of this assumption, you can then get rid of the pride, of the vanity, of the self-importance -- when you comprehend that there is no need for it.

In order to grasp all this, it is essential that you become fully aware that the part of your personality wherein you harbor this wrong conclusion indeed exists. You have to get so far that you actually hear the inner voice shrieking for and demanding approval. You have to observe the occasions when this voice speaks up louder than usual. You have to question emotions that you have never questioned before as to their meaning and desire. Then and then only will you be aware of this voice in you, of this mass image in you.

In this mass image, there is you on one side and the rest of the world on the other side. There are many subtle emotions which, upon analysis, will reveal to you that this is exactly what goes on in you. This realization is of great importance. But again, it is only a beginning of further search and understanding, of making further connections and tie-ups. You will see how this factor brings you many conflicts and problems. As long as you do not know how harmful a condition is, you cannot have the necessary incentive to eliminate that condition. And as long as you are unaware of the condition, that it even exists, how can you see its effect? Thus first you have to become aware of this basic, universal condition in yourself; and then you have to connect the effects of this condition

with various conflicts. You will thereby come to see many of your problems in an entirely new light. You will realize that many difficulties need never exist if you are free of this particular misconception.

There are many forms and ways in which you express this mass image subconsciously. Therefore the outer manifestation varies too. In other words, admiration is sought in various ways. One person may believe that material wealth will gain him greater stature in the eyes of the world. With someone else, other values serve to gain that admiration and approval. I might say the majority of my friends fall into the latter category. With some people, the means might be a particular accomplishment or talent. With others again, it may be good character, decency, loyalty, intelligence. With most, the means is a mixture of many attributes, supposed to serve the same end of getting approval and admiration. There is even a category of persons who use misfortune as a means to gain sympathy -- and of course sympathy stands for approval too. But this goes into another subject; that is, other sick currents enter into this image and twist it into a particular direction.

In this image, without the approval of the world around you, you believe yourself lost. You believe you lose the firm ground you need to stand on. You believe, deep inside of you, that your whole world stands or falls by what the world thinks of you.

And again I ask you not to confuse the opposite manifestation with health in this respect. "I do not care what people say" is a rebellion. And where there is rebellion, there is still bondage. The rebellion tries to break loose of this bondage, but it is the wrong way to go about it. You believe you rebel against a world that tries to force you into behavior patterns. But this too is an error. You actually rebel against your dependence on the world's opinion. Therefore the remedy lies in your discovery why you are so bound, what misconception leads you to the bondage. Then and then only can you free yourself of this bondage and compulsion, and so you need no longer rebel. Nor do you have to make painful efforts in an attempt to gain something that is not your salvation. Also in such a dependency, you often become untrue to yourself, and this, more than anything else, causes inferiority feelings. Often you cannot both please the world and be true to your innermost self and your own inner life plan. Nor can you please all people. But since you are so dependent on their approval, whenever an issue comes your way that makes it impossible to be approved by all, your soul gets into a turmoil. These and many other conflicts arise out of this mass image.

You can easily see that this mass illusion existing in each human may at times compel you to sell your soul. This may happen in many subtle ways, and I venture to say that there is hardly a person who has not done so at times. I can assure you that there is no exception to the mass image among you here, or anywhere else for that matter. But you have to find, individually, that part in you which is bound by it. You will find at least some areas in you where the image exists -- no matter how subtly, how much hidden or covered up with worthy motives and plausible rationalizations. The subtler the form of manifestation, the more difficult will it be to find the affected part. But find it you will if you really want to.

If you observe your reactions in your everyday life and if you analyze them honestly, you will come to this very point I show you here: the mass image that you too are inflicted with. In that part of your being, you feel in exactly the way I described. And try to put your feelings into these words or similar words of your own choosing. That in itself will be a great measure of relief for your soul.

You can safely believe that you are not the only one with this image. You share it with all other human beings.

Find your bondage to public opinion, no matter how subtle. And then find, further, why you need this dependency and pride, or rather why you think you need it. Crystallize the wrong conclusion. Once you get that far, you will have begun to undo a major chain that has held you prisoner, a prisoner of the world of illusion. Then you can begin the process of emerging free. This can be done only by analyzing, by understanding your reactions. Always go behind the emotion you have just unearthed and clad into concise language. Ask yourself why, based on what reason, you hold this particular conviction you have just discovered. Right or wrong, find out why you are convinced of it. If there were no conviction, you would not have held on to it for so long. You know that your subconscious mind reasons too although its reasoning is often faulty. But you have to become consciously aware of such reasoning processes. When you formulate your emotional reaction into words, it does not matter whether you use words similar to the ones I use here or whether you use different wording. What is important is that you experience the truth of this image. That is what matters.

When you experience that truth, then the time is ripe for you to understand many of your conflicts that often seem to involve unjust and uncalled for actions and reactions of the world. I assure you, my friends, you can find this image behind every conflict, outer or inner. Sometimes the connection is indirect; other times, very obvious. Your personal images are always connected with this universal mass image of the self.

I would now like to cite a very frequent occurrence, something that happens to practically everyone at least a few times in his life, in one form or another. This occurrence is hardly ever understood; the existence and influence of this mass image is rarely connected with it. And yet it is so vital, for only through such understanding can you find the solution. This example is not directed at anyone in particular. It applies to everyone at certain times in connection with certain events.

There are few people who have not experienced grief and disappointment because they felt betrayed. They have displayed the utmost loyalty and decency. In spite of this, the betrayal took place. And as it is bound to happen, the offender in turn claims betrayal to justify himself. Thereby the one betrayed is accused of having done the very thing he has so painfully experienced as a victim. Therefore, the hurt is double. The betrayal would not be half as difficult to bear if he were not, in addition, accused of having perpetrated a disloyalty or dishonesty of some sort. The pain of the accusation is the most gnawing of the two. He searches within but cannot find anything to blame himself for. Yet a deep uncertainty remains. Why?

You on this path, who have benefited from many a spiritual truth and teaching through this channel or others, know that no mishap can ever occur that you have not caused in some way yourself. You know intellectually that this is true. You may even have experienced this truth in many ways. But when certain events occur, you do not find this connection easily. The example cited may occasion one such instance where you are puzzled and seek the answer. You simply cannot find the point of connection to the way in which you might be responsible. You know you have experienced betrayal and disappointment, and you are also accused of having done something

that you did not do. In actual fact and deed, you did nothing that you could be blamed for. Your actions were correct, your intentions the best.

Now let me show you, my friends, how this particular mass image, strengthened and supported by various personal or individual images, may be responsible for such an occurrence -- all the more painful in that you do not see how you attracted it. Where this mass image exists in you, you strive and fight to be in the first place, in a special place, so that you can collect whatever your soul thinks it needs.

In order to reach that special place, your actions would be everything but decent, loyal, or idealistic. They would have to be ruthless, selfish, and would often have to betray the very thing or person you desire to be loyal to. To gain this special place of approval, of uniqueness in a certain sense, there is a temptation in your soul to do the very thing you abstain from doing in your deeds and words. But, the temptation is there.

Being a decent and honest individual, you do not give in to this temptation. You feel it vaguely, without real awareness of its significance and meaning. In fact, you are so afraid when you feel such a temptation and such emotions that you cover it up quickly. You do not want to acknowledge that it exists in you. Your conscience neither allows you to act in accordance with this temptation, nor does it allow you to become fully aware of it. In order to counterbalance the direction of this mass image of self-importance, you overcompensate by scrupulously proving the decent side in you, the side you wish to obey.

What is the result of this conflict? Due to the unconscious nature of the conflict, of the inner battle, the outer happening responds to the unconscious negative side in you, not to the positive side, even though the positive has won out in your outer actions. That is an unalterable law. I have often told you that. You have experienced it in some ways on your path of self-understanding and purification. But there are many areas left where you are as yet unable to apply this truth.

Whenever you have a battle within yourself, and even if the decent side wins out in your actions and good intentions, if the battle you are fighting is not consciously understood in its full significance, outer events will follow in such a way as if the selfish side had won out. The outer result must respond to that which is unconscious.

The more you advance on this path, the more you will see that you are not asked to accept anything I say as a dogmatic statement. You will experience the utter truth of these statements yourself. But you can do so only if you have the honesty to search for and verify and acknowledge this negative side you so bravely battle against. Yes, you do, I know that. But it exists nevertheless. And it will cause you trouble until you come face to face with it, acknowledge it, allow it to exist -- not by giving in to it or by not trying to change it after you have recognized its existence, but by seeing its reality at the point where you are. When you do that, you can take the next step by asking yourself why that negative tendency exists in you. Why does this temptation exist? You will invariably come up with the answer that you desire an elevated position in the eyes of the world in order to convince yourself that your inferiority feelings are unjustified. You believe, deep in your heart, that you need all this in order to survive -- not physically, but emotionally. And in order to get it, it seems necessary to betray others, to be ruthless, disloyal, or selfish. But as long as your good intentions prevent you from even recognizing this temptation, the outer occurrence will respond to

the negative side even though you have not given in to it. Therefore it seems like an injustice to you. And it is actually the injustice that hurts you more than the disappointment in a particular person.

Perhaps it still seems unjust to you. Perhaps you say, "As long as I have not given in to it in my actions, why does it have to be as though I had actually committed the wrong act? Isn't the most important thing that my actions are right?" No, my friends. Feelings are actions too although they do not manifest in the same way and with the same quick and consecutive results as outer actions do. Nevertheless, every thought and attitude, whether conscious or unconscious, is a definite act. But the more unconscious, the greater the consequence and therefore the more puzzling.

By facing this negative side, you evidence the bravest emotion there is: that of self-honesty. Therefore you do not have to be ashamed of this battle in you. It is to your credit. But the battle will be much more effective by allowing it to enter your conscious mind. You will therefore come to understand to a fuller degree all laws of the soul, the laws of human relationship, and the laws of the universe. Then you will no longer feel that an injustice has been done, and your hurt will be alleviated to a considerable degree. Also, there is a good chance that no further betrayal and accusation will occur because once the negative side of your battle has become conscious, it will lose power.

But let us suppose such outer event does recur, you will feel very different about it. You will then learn a lot from such an event and will be strengthened rather than weakened. You will feel something very constructive about it, and you may be able to turn events in course by the process of self-realization in this respect.

When you realize (a) the existence of this mass image in you -- not by intellectual realization, but by emotional experience -- and (b) the underlying erroneous concept that has thus far led you, you will have made a major step forward in the direction of real inner freedom.

The example I have cited is just one of many possibilities. But believe me, my friends, whenever you experience something that hurts and that you do not understand, whenever you feel there is an injustice because you cannot find any wrongdoing on your part, search in this direction. Bring out this mass image of self-importance. You can only do so by feeling this need to be special, realizing you feel so not out of malice, not because you wish to belittle others (who must automatically become smaller if you succeed in becoming bigger), and not out of pride for the sake of pride, but out of the mistaken idea that it means "survival" for you. When you recognize this trend, you will also free yourself from self-accusations in wrong and destructive ways. You will simply face the fact that you have harbored a wrong concept, that your emotional survival does not depend on other people's opinion of you, but only and solely on your own opinion of yourself! The more you cater to the opinion of others, the less you think of yourself, deep in your soul -- hence a vicious circle, always built on a false premise.

Again, I say all this cannot be understood on a purely intellectual level. It can be understood in its full meaning only if you really work on the path of self-finding. Yet, these words may leave certain valuable impressions in others too and may really come to fruition at a later period when the path is voluntarily taken. But the full benefit of these words can be realized, my friends, only by those of you who work particularly in the direction of the soul where this mass image lies deeply

imbedded, by those who develop the habit of questioning themselves regarding the significance of their various emotional reactions.

Before we turn to your questions, I would like to say a few words to some friends who have never found their way here and who have never had any personal contact with friends of this group, but who read these lectures with interest. Attention has been brought to us that some of those friends try on their own to reach the depth of their souls by themselves or with some of their friends. Their good intent is appreciated. But I should like to tell them that it is not really possible to succeed by oneself or even with someone else who has not had personal experience in this particular method. The method itself cannot be conveyed by the lectures. The lectures serve as general material, but they cannot give the method itself. You will do no harm in working by yourself, but you will not really get very far. I would therefore suggest to those friends, do not hesitate to get in touch with members of this group who are qualified to help. If they are really interested in using this method whether for others or for themselves, this will be necessary.

And now, my friends, let us turn to your questions. Do you have any questions with regard to this lecture?

QUESTION: I cannot understand which alternative to take with respect to being dependent on other people's opinion, as between leaning too much in the direction of catering for approval or going to the opposite extreme. I cannot see how to compromise.

ANSWER: It is not a compromise. You have difficulty in finding the right middle way perhaps? Let me try to show you how this comes about in a very natural way. You are not expected to decide where the right middle way is. You couldn't do that. The moment you would have to do that, there would already be something compulsive about it. There cannot be a choice for you, such as: "I go that far in this direction, and then I go this far in the other direction." This would be something forced and unnatural. The necessity for you to make a decision does not apply to weighing and measuring the right middle way. It applies rather to your facing yourself honestly and forgetting entirely, for the time being, the question: "What am I supposed to do?"

I might say that this "What am I supposed to do?" stands in the way of arriving at recognitions. It prevents you from finding the truth about yourself. It blocks you. First, do not think about that at all. The outer action may not change at first, even after you have made your recognition. But your inner motives will change. In some cases, your outer actions will change automatically, but this will be fruitful only if it is a natural result of your inner growth. The first thing you should be concerned with is understanding yourself: your emotions, your motives, your desires and fears. All this can be brought to light in every incident that bothers you.

Once you have reached a certain point in self-recognition, you become aware of the false concepts you harbor unconsciously. Each time such a false concept is observed and therefore becomes more and more conscious, you will be less and less under bondage and compulsion. By understanding your wrong conclusion, you will become more aware of the right conclusion. If you go on that way, you will be increasingly able to observe your emotional reactions, and you will understand them better. Then a point will come where you realize that your wrong concept is useless and harmful. When it comes, discard it -- not outwardly, but truly within yourself -- and you will be free. False concepts are always held onto in the mistaken assumption that they are useful or

protective. Once you realize that this is not so, you will no longer hold on to them. You will then be able to say to yourself: "I no longer need approval so desperately that I sometimes violate myself, become untrue to myself, or else defy dependency by rebelling against it. I can now stand on my own feet. My inner life and value is not dependent on others. It depends on my own self-respect which I can further and live up to only by being fully aware of myself." Once you have gained this freedom, the right middle way will not be something you have to weigh in deliberation; it will develop naturally without your even thinking about it. The right way will just be there because you no longer have to prove anything to anyone else or to yourself.

If you have the tendency to depend too much on other people's opinion, it is because you have to prove something to them. And if you rebel against this bondage and turn into the opposite extreme with a defiant "I don't care" attitude, then you prove something to yourself. Both extremes are a result of proving something. When there is no longer a need in you to prove anything, the right middle way will be as natural as breathing. Do you think of having to breathe less or more in order to get the proper supply of oxygen into your lungs? No. You breathe automatically. It is a completely natural process. You have found the right middle way without deliberation and choice -- not too much and not too little. Just enough to give you what you need so as to maintain your health. The same applies to any soul process. Do you understand?

QUESTION: Well, to a certain extent. I wonder if all that applies intellectually as well as emotionally?

ANSWER: Very few people think in terms of this mass image intellectually, my dear. It is rarely on the surface since all images are of an unconscious nature. You may ask anyone at random whether he believes in his intellect that his life and his happiness depend on what other people think of him. Everyone prefers to be thought well of by others. That is natural. But the degree of dependence, its consequences, and the extent to which a person goes to meet the demands of the image is usually completely unconscious until the self-search is undertaken in this direction.

QUESTION: I feel consciously and very definitely that other people's opinions are very important.

ANSWER: I wonder whether you realize consciously to what degree this is important for you, and what this dependence causes you to do or to forsake. But the more conscious it is, the better for you in the sense of being able to think about it objectively.

QUESTION: I thought it is more difficult if a wrong conclusion goes so far that it is in the intellect as well as in the emotions?

ANSWER: On the contrary, your intellect is more accessible to reason. Once you have understood, once intelligence can work, a wrong concept can be corrected. But when one is consciously convinced of the right thing, it is often difficult to break through the separating wall between reason and emotion. The resistance to face the fact that one holds an opinion that does not correspond to one's conscious and reasonable thoughts is an obstacle you do not have to deal with if you agree with yourself about a wrong concept.

QUESTION: May I ask -- with the golden rule going through all religions -- how does this mass image affect the individual God image?

ANSWER: There are many forms of God images. But whatever it may be, the connection between the mass image of self-importance and the God image is this: it creates a further conflict in the psyche. The stronger the mass image of self-importance and the stronger the God image, the more the personality will be disturbed because two conflicting needs and compulsions work against one another and cause a short circuit. In cases that are less crass, in cases where one image is much stronger than the other, the conflict will exist, of course. It will create many disturbances, but each due to one particular wrong concept. But when both work against one another, a person cannot handle life any more.

The existence of these two images together causes a vicious circle. One current is: "I need to be in first place, I need this special consideration." And because of religious mass images, one feels all the more guilty and inferior. With guilt, you cannot remedy a situation. You can only do so by understanding the cause of it. The guiltier you feel, the less you dare to look into the cause, the stronger you are compelled to "wish a wrong attitude away" by looking away from it.

Thus the following vicious circle is created. The guiltier you feel, the more you need approval in the supposition that it will alleviate your feelings of guilt and inferiority. And the more you clamor for such approval, the guiltier you feel. This happens out of two different directions. One direction is the God image; the other direction is the real self in you which registers and observes everything and tries to convey to you that you are mistaken, that this is the wrong way. But this voice is misunderstood and used for the God image. Thus the contrary pull away from the mass image of self-importance comes from two sides -- the real side and the illusion side, if I may put it that way -- which again do not coincide, which are not at peace with one another. Do you understand?

Receive our blessings. Accept from us the strength to look for that part in you that causes you so much trouble, the part in you where you separate yourself from your fellow human beings out of wrong conclusions, because of imagined needs. Find it, and your entire outlook will change. You will become objective, you will be in reality! The mere awareness of this part of your being where you are caught in this mass image will change your life.

Receive our love and blessings, each one of you. Continue on this path, grow in it, rejoice in it. Be in peace, be in God!

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