

Chapter 6: The Practice of Self-Awareness

The Challenge of Self-Deception

Our shadow is unconscious – at least in part, and at least at first. So if we can't see it, how do we work with it? It's a great question. And the answer is that **honest self-awareness is the primary antidote to our repression and self-deception**. And the fastest route to honest self-awareness is by **learning how to lovingly take 100% Personal Responsibility for our upset**.

Our shadow isn't bad, it's just scared. Our shadow was primarily created out of the aspects of our life we judged as too scary to deal with at the time, and as we stored away those aspects, we also stored away our self-judgments and fears of them. Our shadow often includes some of our darkest self-judgments, our deepest fears, and our most painful wounds. However, it also holds our unacknowledged greatness, and it also contains the path to reconnecting with a Love Beyond Belief.

Our shadow is like a child who broke a precious vase while playing, and is hiding in a closet because it's scared of what its parents will do when they find out. What our shadow most craves is to be told that it's okay and that it can come out now. What it most craves is the warm and forgiving embrace of love. The practices of acceptance and loving self-discipline provide the foundational tools for working with our shadow. Then the next step is to become more consciously aware of it – which means working through our incredible capacity for self-deception.

When I say “incredible,” I mean it literally. If you think about it, the gift of repression is an amazing thing. Somehow, without even being aware that we're doing so, it allows us to play hide and

seek inside our heads. It allows us to take experiences that are too painful or scary to deal with at the time, store them away – and then erase all awareness we’ve done so! Without any conscious decision, and with all the best intentions, each time we repress something, we engage in a profound act of self-deception. We take something that was conscious and make it unconscious – and in doing so, we deceive ourselves into believing that things are different than they are.

In polite company, and with those we care about, we often create “white lies” in order to avoid hurting other people’s feelings. For example, we may be angry at someone because they keep showing up late, but in order to avoid conflict, we “play nice” and tell them that everything’s okay. In order to be nice, and on an almost daily basis, we deceive others about what’s really going on inside us, or inside the relationship. And this can be a great gift. At the same time, if taken to extreme, it can seriously erode the trust and connection we have in our relationships. For true intimacy is based as much on honesty and authenticity as it is on acceptance and care.

Similarly, and with similarly positive intentions, we unconsciously create our shadow by making “white lies” to our self. For many years, and for very good reasons, I deceived myself about the pain that my mother’s death caused me. Similarly, I spent many years deceiving myself about my anger at the Mormon Church, and about how the Question of Blame was fueling my need to prove their beliefs wrong. On an almost daily basis, I now notice ways that I’ve been pulling the wool over my own eyes.

“And the day came when the risk (it took) to remain tight in the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.”
– Anaïs Nin

And this is not wrong. In every case I’ve explored, I’ve found that when I performed this magic trick called repression, I was doing the very best I knew how, in order to cope with the challenges in

front of me. At the same time, it does hurt. Repression is a truly remarkable gift, particularly when we’re younger. For example, without the illusion of our parents as perfect protectors, as children we might have crawled under the bed and never come out. But as we get older, our shadow-making capacity for self-deception usually becomes one of our greatest challenges.

The Challenge of Distortion

Repression is particularly challenging because it creates invisible patterns of **distortion, denial and projection.**

Our shadow distorts both the way we see ourselves, and the way we see our world. It acts as grease that warps the lenses of our perceptions. For example, Anne was a 5’4”, 95 pound anorexic. Yet no matter how thin she became, when she looked in the mirror, she still saw herself as fat. Similarly, Jose was raised in a family where nothing he did was ever good enough. He went on to become a successful stockbroker, husband and father, but could never take a compliment, and became obsessed with fixing all the things he thought were wrong with him and his life.

We think we’re clearly seeing Reality, when actually our view is passing through glasses that warp, smear, color and cloud our perceptions of what Is. Our shadow distorts not just our ideas, but the very sensations and paradigms by which we evaluate everything else. For **the problem with lying is that one lie begets another.** In order to cover up our little white lies, we find ourselves having to create bigger ones. “Honey, its no big deal if you’re late,” may then lead to “Angry? I’m not angry!” or to saying “There’s nothing wrong with our relationship” as we start looking for the door. Similarly, in order to cover up our little self-deceptions, we start creating ever larger lies, until we end up believing some absolute whoppers. The larger our shadow is, the more unconscious distortion we experience – and the more we tend to deny that our shadow even exists.

The Challenge of Denial

In order to pull off this magic trick called repression, our mind first makes the threatening aspect unconscious – and then covers its tracks by denying that anything just happened. Like a guilty looking child with crumbs on his shirt, it says “*Cookie Jar? What are you talking about? I didn’t touch no cookie jar!*” Again, in doing so, our mind is protecting us the best way it knows how – yet in doing so, it creates quite the challenge for us to unravel.

Because of denial, self-deception is much easier to see in others than in ourselves, particularly in the cases where someone’s shadow has gotten seriously out of hand. As Dale Carnegie pointed out in How to Win Friends and Influence People, even Al Capone, one of the most notorious mobsters of all time, to the end could only see himself as a public benefactor. “*I have spent the best years of my life giving people the lighter pleasures, helping them have a good time, and all I get is abuse, the existence of a hunted man.*”¹

Similarly, part of why fanatical suicide bombers make front page news is our shock at how profound their denial and self-deception must be, in order for them to kill themselves and innocent civilians in the name of a Loving God.

When we deal with an addict’s denial over their problem, or a fallen leader’s inability to own their mistakes, we’re being given the chance to see our own patterns of self-deception in action. The larger our shadow is, the more important it is for us to work with it – and the more we tend to go in to denial about our issues.

It’s common wisdom that the easiest loans tend to go to the people who need them least. Similarly, the times when we’re most in need of having our shadow pointed out to us by others are usually the times when we have the hardest time hearing constructive feedback.

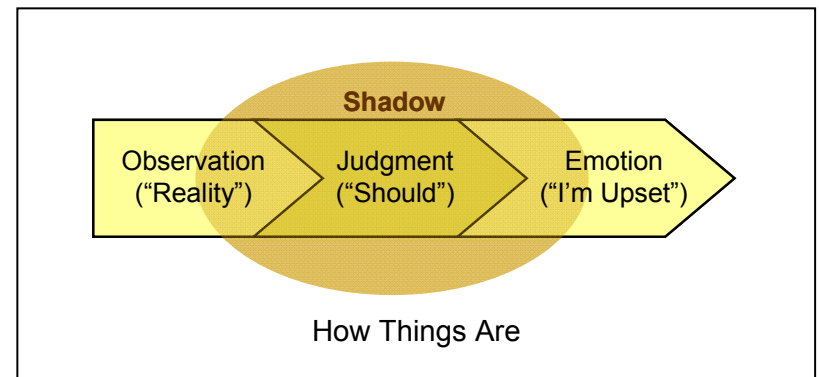
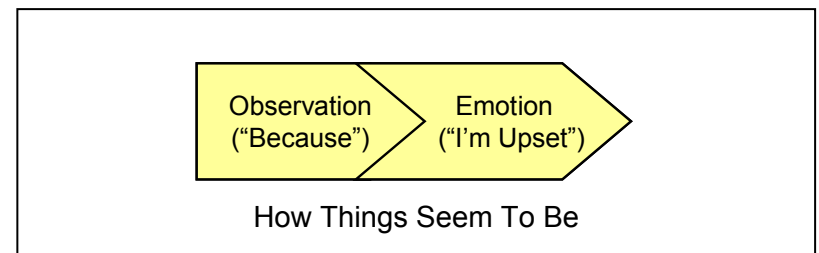
A big piece of working through our denial is realizing that if others are doing it, we probably are too. Instead of claiming that we’re different, and denying our denial, our opportunity is to use our awareness of others to help us discover the hidden source of our upset.

The Hidden Source of Our Upset

When it comes to our emotional upset, our shadow tends to be particularly good at denying the true source of our pain. Instead of seeing our pain as “in here” it causes us to see it as “out there.” It causes us deny that our shadow has anything to do with our pain.

However, Reality doesn’t create our upset. Our judgments **about** reality create our upset.

One of the most astonishing tenets of spiritual psychology is that **our judgments are the primary source of our emotional pain**. We assume that our judgmental thoughts are **diagnosing** our pain, when all too often they are **causing** our pain. This is one of



our root self-deceptions, and one of our core opportunities for honest self-awareness.

This is shown in the pictures **How Things Seem To Be** and **How Things Are**. We tend to notice that we’re upset, and then look around for the “because.” We assume that we’re objectively

observing Reality, and that these observations are telling us the source of our emotional upset (the “because”).

However this misses an essential step – our process of judging that something “should” or “should not” have happened. It isn’t Reality that’s causing our emotional pain, it’s our interpretations of what it all **means**, and our judgments of how this compares with our how things **should** be. Let’s look at a few examples of this.

Jeremy is sitting in his office when his boss comes in. She tells him that she thinks he can do even better on a project, and makes a few suggestions on how to do so. Jeremy could hear this in different ways. He could hear this as criticism and feel defensive or insecure (“*I’m upset because she’s thinks I’m lousy, and nothing I do is ever good enough.*”) Or Jeremy might hear this as encouragement, and feel inspired (“*I’m happy because my boss believes in me and cares enough to give me guidance.*”)

Sherrie is standing in the kitchen when her husband walks up to her, and asks her what she wants as an anniversary present. She could get mad (“*I’m upset because he doesn’t care about romance. If he really cared about me, he’d know what I want and surprise me with it.*”) Or she might squeal with delight (“*I’m happy that he remembered our anniversary, and wants to get me something nice.*”)

When we’re upset emotionally, somewhere, someplace in our consciousness, there’s an expectation that’s been violated. We have some “should” or “should not” that’s been triggered. But because of our repression and denial, we don’t tend to see this – at least at first.

In the example of Jeremy getting upset, his judgments might have included “*I should be perfect*” or “*she shouldn’t criticize me.*” In the example of Sherrie’s upset, her judgments may have included “*he should know what I want without my telling him.*”

If this is so, then why don’t we notice this more often?

“There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.”

– Shakespeare

Because of our shadow. As shown in **How Things Are**, our shadow stores our judgment and emotional upset, and in doing so, keeps most of it unconscious. When we get upset, things typically start with our unconscious thoughts and feelings. Some wound, fear, or judgment in our shadow gets “triggered,” and this starts our emotional “fight or flight” reaction. This upset then bubbles up from beneath the surface, and by the time we notice it, it’s already in full swing.

When a wife blows up at her husband because he didn’t put the toothpaste cap back on, or a teenager starts crying because a friend said something mean, it isn’t so much that these events **created** new pain. Rather, it’s that they **triggered** a pre-existing issue, and brought some stored pain to the surface. Our shadow can act like an emotional mine field, with our repressed issues lying in wait for something to trigger them. And because of the challenge of projection, the biggest explosions often occur with those we care for most.

The Challenge of Projection

Do you remember the childhood taunt, “*I’m rubber and you’re glue, whatever you say bounces off me and sticks to you?*” Out of the mouths of babes...

This saying is remarkably, obnoxiously, and sometimes even unbearably accurate. **Whatever upsets us in others is a projection of what we find upsetting inside ourselves** – but which because of our self-deception, we often aren’t yet able to see directly.

The key to understanding projection is remembering that our unconscious shadow provides a way of storing our pain and negativity, rather than a way of getting rid of it. When we repress our pain, fear, judgment and anger, it remains inside, like an untreated wound. And over time, it tends to fester and grow, creating ever louder cries for healing. However, particularly as children, we often find ourselves in situations where we have a lot of repressed negativity, but aren’t yet in a place where we’re able to give it the healing it needs. We find ourselves with all this painful,



negative, wounded energy inside – emotional energy that needs to get out, or else. Like a pressure cooker on a hot stove, we get to the place where we have to release some steam or burst.

The gift of projection allows us to “blow off steam” by directing it at others. Instead of facing our unconscious wounds directly (which can feel overwhelming if done too rapidly) we project them onto others. We feel angry inside, but because we’ve repressed our awareness of that anger, we assume the anger must be outside of us. Others must be angry at us! Or we repress our sexual drive, and then start preaching at others about how sinful their sexuality is. We may repress our self-judgments and self-blame, and blame others instead. And at least at first, our choice to do so is completely automatic and unconscious. When we decide that “*I’m upset because you didn’t call me when you said you would*” or that “*I’m upset because you told me I’m not doing a good enough job,*” we’re projecting our repressed upset onto others. Like a movie projector walking through a hall of mirrors, we take whatever we’ve stuffed in our shadow, and project it onto those around us.

For example, any time I find myself judging someone else as not good enough, I’ve now learned to immediately go looking for the place inside where I feel that I’m not good enough. And when I get upset at someone else’s lack of integrity, I’ve learned to look for the places where I’m not yet in full integrity.

This is not to say that others don’t get angry – it’s just that **our** upset has very little if anything to do with theirs. Saying “*I’m upset*” is accurate. Saying “*I’m upset because...*” isn’t. This is illustrated

in the figures **How We See the World**, and **Looking in The Mirror**. The picture on the left illustrates how we tend to see the world when we’re projecting. We may think that we’re happy and in control, and our life would be fine if we just weren’t surrounded by such angry, out of control people. We blame others for our problems and for any emotional upset we’re experiencing. Clearly, we’re right, and everyone else is wrong. This is the normal state of affairs for our world. However, when we learn to look in the mirror, we discover something shocking. **We** are feeling angry and out of control, and we’ve been repressing this!

“What we can tolerate the least in here is what we see the most out there.”
 – Anonymous

The Story of Tony and Samantha

Let’s look at how these patterns of judgment and projection played out with two colleagues, Tony and Samantha.

After years of trying to find her calling in life, Samantha had found a job she loved, working for a small but internationally renowned non-profit. She cared deeply about doing a good job, but quickly found herself getting upset with her new boss, Tony. Tony rarely praised her and tended to claim credit for her successes. He would drop out of touch for days or weeks at a time, and then come charging back in at the last moment, second guessing the decisions Samantha had made in his absence. One day he told Samantha that another executive, Janice, had told him that she didn’t trust how Samantha was handling a key project.

Scared for her job, Samantha charged over to Janice, and confronted her with the accusation. Janice was mortified, and denied she’d ever said anything like that. In fact, she praised Samantha, and told her how impressed everyone seemed to be with her work.

OK. What’s going on here? Does Tony have it in for Samantha, or is Janice lying through her teeth? Who should Samantha be angry at?

Or perhaps is there another option?

For Samantha, her key to resolving this situation lay in understanding the projections that were flying about. Samantha believed Janice's explanation, and in doing so, realized that Tony was projecting his judgments on her. The accusation "*Janice doesn't trust you*" was actually a projection of his self-judgment "*Janice doesn't trust me.*" And his lack of praise and need to claim credit were projections of the fears that came from his hidden self-judgments that "*I don't trust me.*"

When Samantha took a breath, she realized that Tony was widely considered to be half-genius and half-disaster. His challenges were widely known, including to the CEO. While Tony had been communicating the message "*you should be scared for your job*" what he really meant is "*I'm scared for my job.*" The challenge wasn't that Samantha wasn't doing her job well enough. It was that if anything, she was doing her job so well that it was "triggering" Tony's repressed self-judgments ("*I'm not doing a good enough job.*") He was then projecting his self-judgments onto others, including her ("*Samantha's not doing a good enough job.*")

Given this, it would be tempting to blame the situation all on Tony. However, Samantha's judgments and projections also played a part. She too was judging Tony ("*I'm upset because he's a poor manager*" and "*I'm upset because he lied to me.*") And as she looked in the mirror with acceptance and courage, she realized that she'd been carrying similar judgments against herself ("*I should be a better manager*" and "*I should be more honest with myself.*") Samantha wasn't upset because of what Tony did. She was upset because he'd triggered some of the deeper fears and self-judgments in her own shadow.

With this new understanding, Samantha was able to move from anger to acceptance, and she was able to start having compassion for the whole situation. She was able to focus on what she and Tony shared in common – their desire to do a great job for this company they treasured, and their hidden self-judgments that they weren't good enough to do so. In this process of honest self-awareness,

Samantha was able to move from seeing Tony as the enemy, to seeing him as someone who was showing her where her own opportunities for learning and growth were.

And while Samantha had been fearful of the **positional power** Tony had as her boss, she was able to focus instead on the **personal power** she could create by taking **100% Personal Responsibility** for her upset.

"[Relationships] do not cause pain and unhappiness. They bring out the pain and unhappiness that is already in you."

– Eckhart Tolle

We're going to take a look at the authentic power that comes when we meet our repression with love and 100% Personal Responsibility. But first, let's look at how we normally deal with it.

How We Typically Deal With Repression

Honest self-awareness has long been considered one of the great spiritual virtues. Along with charity and humility, Huston Smith lists veracity as one of the three primary virtues the great wisdom traditions share. In his words, "*As for veracity, it extends beyond the minimum truth-telling to sublime objectivity, the capacity to see things exactly as they are.*" Similarly, Socrates immortalized this virtue in his directive to "*Know Thyself.*"

Yet with all the best intentions, the most common response to our shadow is to avoid it. In our innocence and denial, we choose to "*let sleeping dogs lie.*" While it's easy to look at Al Capone's self-deception with judgment and scorn, we're all dealing with the same challenge. We may think we're being honest with ourselves, but the only true self-honesty lies is admitting that we still have levels of self-deception to explore. To a greater or lesser extent, we all deceive ourselves, because to a greater or lesser extent, we're all afraid.

However, after a certain point in our evolution, it just no longer works to try and avoid our shadow. We may think that our choice is between doing nothing and facing our deepest fears. However, this

isn't a real choice. For the longer we try to avoid our shadow, the more our suffering grows.

If we look at all of nature, everything is either growing or dying. As Robert Quinn illustrates in Deep Change, while our most common choice is to try and maintain the status quo, this isn't possible. For in each moment, we're faced with the choice between deep change and slow death.

"We live in a tumultuous time. Change is everywhere, and we are surrounded by circumstances that seem to demand more than we can deliver. We are all regularly lured into playing the role of the powerless victim or the passive observer. In such roles, we become detached, and our sense of meaning decays. We look at everything in a superficial way. We see little potential and have little reverence. To choose to play either of these roles is to choose meaninglessness or the slow death of the self. We have always been embedded in a dilemma. We have always had to agonize over the choice between making deep change or accepting slow death."

So if avoidance doesn't work, then what? The second most common response to our shadow is to fight against it. Although our shadow resists conscious awareness, its emotional energy cannot be repressed indefinitely, and it's constantly popping up in "interesting" ways. We may find ourselves getting angry for "no reason," struggling with an overwhelming temptation to have an affair, or locked in a battle to control our over-eating.

We may find ourselves "sinning" in ever greater ways, and then resolve to fight even harder to be good. However, what we resist, persists. When we choose to attack our shadow, while we may be able to hold it off for a while, we're engaging in a battle we can never win through violence.

Resistance comes from fear. Our hard-wired physical response to fear is to choose between "*fight or flight*." But this just means meeting fear with fear, and directing violence against our own heart.

In response to our shadow's fear, our two most common responses (avoidance or aggression, fight or flight) merely feed that fear, and cause it to grow even stronger. So then, what is our path to honest self-awareness?

Love, and taking 100% Personal Responsibility.

100% Personal Responsibility

The essential key to developing honest self-awareness is to practice taking 100% Personal Responsibility for our emotional reactions, from a place of simultaneous acceptance and loving self-discipline. When we're upset and we blame others, then we've given up our power to them. When we're in "*I'm upset because...*" we get to play the victim, we get to blame someone else for our pain, and we get to continue hiding from our shadow. However, if the source of our problem is "out there," then so is the source of our solution.

There's only person we truly have the ability to change – our self. And even if we do get someone else to change, we're only dealing with the symptom rather than the cause, and we'll shortly find ourselves back in our upset. As Brittany belatedly realized during her fourth marriage, "*The only common factor between all these men was me. So maybe I'm the problem – and maybe I'm also the solution. Maybe the key to the love I crave lies inside of me, instead of with them.*"

The road to freedom involves reclaiming our power by claiming responsibility for our inner state. It means embracing a Learning Orientation to Life, where we seek to use

"Look at the word responsibility – 'response-ability' – the ability to choose your response. Highly proactive people recognize that responsibility. They do not blame circumstances, conditions, or conditioning for their behavior."

– Stephen Covey

everything, including the things that most upset us, for our learning, upliftment and growth. It means taking ownership of our emotional reactions – all of them – rather than blaming them on others.

While our thoughts often go in to denial about the source of our upset, our emotions point to the truth behind the lie. *“I’m upset because...”* allows our shadow to keep projecting its stored negativity onto the world. But when we’re willing to get off our position, and drop into the simplicity of *“I’m upset,”* we’re well on our way to healing. For underneath anger is always fear, pain and judgment. And as we bring courage to our fear, loving to our pain, and self-forgiveness to our judgment, we heal. We grow. And we reconnect with the Love we most Are.

As the University of Santa Monica explains, our upset is the surest sign that our *“school is in session.”* And when we choose to take 100% Personal Responsibility for our reactions, the people who most upset us become some of our greatest teachers. While the Game of Life is about survival and success, the Game of Love is about growth and giving. It’s about learning from our challenges – and so our biggest challenges are also our biggest opportunities.

When we go into blame, our victim consciousness may feel good for a moment, but over time, it just adds to our shadow, and to our pain. In contrast, when we claim ownership for our experience, we’re also claiming the power to change that experience.

This is simple, but not always easy. There are times when we feel **so** justified, *“Truly, this time I’m the victim!”* This one time, they’re to blame for our pain, *“I mean look, I’m right and she’s wrong – everyone around me agrees!”* We are free to cling to that position – and with it, the painful consequences that come from victim consciousness.

When Viktor Frankl was locked up in a Nazi concentration camp, he discovered that those who gave in to victim consciousness quickly died. Whereas a few brave prisoners retained a sense of personal responsibility for their inner state, even though they had been stripped bare of every physical freedom. They retained *“the last of human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given circumstances, to choose one’s way.”*²

Taking 100% Personal Responsibility does not mean denying that abuse exists, condoning that abuse, or giving ourselves

permission to abuse others. Nor does it give us the right to judge others when we feel they aren’t taking 100% Personal Responsibility. We live in an absolutely just and merciful Reality – it’s just that we don’t come equipped with enough understanding to pass judgment on it; and when we pretend that we do, we suffer.

But what about the cases where we’re judging a murderer, or a rapist? Surely that must not be projection, right? The key is to track the energy, rather than just the form. What was it that caused them to commit those actions? How much anger, insecurity, and pain were they feeling? What self-judgments were they trying to escape from? And do we have any unconscious places where we still feel those same things? The things we judge or find objectionable in others are almost always a projection of at least one of the following five things:

- 1) *“Things we do to others, but are not aware of doing*
- 2) *Things we do to ourselves, but are not aware of doing*
- 3) *Reflections having to do with our relationship with God^{3-orange}*
- 4) *Things we don’t do inwardly or outwardly, but judge as wrong when others do them because we have yet to make peace with the fact that we are quite capable of doing them given certain conditions*
- 5) *Things we engage in mentally, with our mind”*⁴

Let’s look at an example of how this works. Do you remember the earlier example of how I got upset with Tom, my business partner? He was many months late in repaying me what he owed me, he hadn’t followed through on a lot of his small promises to me, and I couldn’t even get him to return my calls. At least to me, there was a lot of money at stake, and I started freaking out. Now, was I in violation of a major contract? Not that I knew of. Was I breaking my promises with him, or refusing to communicate with him? Not that I could think of. However, were there places in my life where I felt I was out of integrity? Lots of them – both with others, and with myself. Do I fully trust that I would never violate a major business

contract? Based on my experiences of how challenging business can get, absolutely not. Have I ever refused to “return God’s calls?” That’s been true for most of my life.

My upset was exactly that – my upset. And when I realized this, I was able to start moving from playing the emotional victim to taking ownership of my upset, and to start applying tools for healing, growth, and change.

Again, taking 100% Personal Responsibility does not mean rolling over and letting others take advantage of us. After “working my process” on my emotional upset, I was able to get to a much clearer and more powerful place from which to take action. I contacted a couple different attorneys in order to understand my legal options, and prepared a contingency plan that involved steadily escalating the disciplined force with which I could help hold him accountable to our agreements. I practiced getting to a place of acceptance of what he was doing, while also putting in place structures of loving discipline. And while we haven’t yet finished resolving the issue, I’ve found that I have much more power when I come from a “clean and clear place” than when I come from anger – and my life feels much better, as well.

The Power of Personal Responsibility

Personal responsibility creates personal power. Taking ownership of our emotional reactions moves us out of the helplessness of victim consciousness, and creates the power to grow and change.

Interestingly, a core management tenet is that **positional** power needs to be matched with an equal level of positional responsibility. Yet while the relationship of positional responsibility to positional power is well understood, we often overlook how this works with **personal** power.

Consider the case of a struggling technology company, where a man named Henry was brought in as the

“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”

– Eleanor Roosevelt

new chief executive. He was told to take change of the problems, and turn the company around. Furthermore, the board made it clear that while they were giving him great authority, this would be matched by an equal responsibility for the consequences of those decisions. As the saying goes, “*the buck stops here.*” Henry understood this, and set to work.

However, like many managers, Henry became focused on his positional power, and lost track of the importance of personal power.

While Henry had some brilliant ideas, he wasn’t very good at listening to others, or responding to criticism. He implemented layoffs that reduced costs, but failed to provide the authentic leadership his executives needed in order to “gel” together as a team. As infighting between the divisions escalated, he ordered 360 degree evaluations for everyone in management team – and didn’t participate.

Henry literally couldn’t see that he might be part of the problem, and so he spent his time trying to figure out which of his executives to blame. However, everyone below him could see how “*the emperor has no clothes,*” and took this as a sign that it was time to start looking for another job. Things rapidly got worse, and a year later Henry was fired.

Personal power is more important than positional power, and personal power is based on personal responsibility. Viktor Frankl had virtually no positional power, yet like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., his personal power changed the lives of thousands of people who’ve read his story. On the other hand, while Henry had lots of positional power, and all the best intentions, his inability to take 100% Personal Responsibility eroded his personal power, cost thousands of people their jobs, and accelerated the demise of a once proud company.

Personal responsibility creates personal power. Plus, there’s another bonus that comes with taking 100% Personal Responsibility – it allows us to claim our authentic greatness. Remember, not only does our shadow contain our disowned darkness, it also contains our disowned light. We can only see something in someone else that we

also have in ourselves. When we put our heroes up on pedestals, seeing them as larger than life, we're projecting our disowned greatness onto them. And while it may sometimes feel safer to play small, we're not small creatures. We are divine beings having a human experience, and our authentic greatness is beyond compare.

Two Pitfalls of Personal Responsibility

100% Personal Responsibility is an extremely powerful tool – and it comes with two very common pitfalls.

First, **knowing that our judgments cause our upset doesn't mean we're to blame for our pain.** In other words, responsibility does not mean punishment. There are many physical, cultural, biological, spiritual and psychological factors that contribute to the creation of our shadow. Plus, every piece of our shadow is a gift designed to support our physical and psychological survival. While blame causes pain, pain doesn't mean there's someone to blame.

However, we often forget this.

When we fall into this pattern, our opportunity is to further step in to **acceptance.** Our opportunity is to remember that **everyone is doing the best they know how.** Every aspect of ourselves, including each piece of our shadow, is trying to serve us the best way it knows how.

Similarly, when we realize that judgment causes pain, we often start judging our judgments. We may notice that we're running "*I'm upset because...*" and then go in to "*I'm upset because I'm upset because...*" But this just feeds judgment with more judgment, and compounds our pain. **Judgment isn't wrong.** Judgment is a stage-appropriate tool. We're not here to "be perfect," we're here to learn and grow. We can't use judgment to move beyond judgment. Instead, our opportunity is to love **all** of our selves – including our judgments.

The second pitfall is a mirror of the first. **100% Personal Responsibility doesn't mean we are to ignore, condone, or create abuse.** For while everyone is doing the best they know how, **pain is feedback that we have the opportunity to learn how to do better.**

As we'll talk about in chapter 9, while our choices don't affect our **worthiness** of Love, they do affect our **awareness** of Love. When we make choices that move us away from the Highest Good, they also move us away from our connection to Love. This does not change who we most Are. But it does hurt.

Our choices matter, and when we start thinking that "*it doesn't matter what I do since they're responsible for their experience,*" our opportunity is to step more fully into **loving self-discipline.**

Again, Love is about both/and rather than either/or. Love is both selfish **and** selfless. It's both physical **and** spiritual. It's both acceptance **and** discipline. Love is both being okay with how we're doing **and** committing ourselves to learning how to do better.

Loving our shadow isn't a process of rebelling against our notions of right and wrong. It's a process of embracing our notions of morality as crucially valuable tools, while also embracing the humility of realizing that we don't know enough to pass judgment.

When we realize that our judgmental thoughts are the source of our emotional suffering, and take 100% Personal Responsibility for our emotional reactions, then we're well on the way to reclaiming our authentic power. For the only person we truly can change is our self – and despite appearances, this is enough. In order to find the love, peace and joy we most want, we don't have to change the world – we only have to change ourselves. For beneath our buried pain, fear, anger, and judgments, beneath the thoughts that cause us pain, lies a Love Beyond Belief. And with each step we make towards the Light, we empower others to do the same. Remarkably, as we change ourselves, we change the world as well.

Again, simple, but not always easy. So here are five power tools for jump-starting your practice of honest self-awareness.

Power Tool #11: Write it Down

It can be remarkably difficult to use the mind to examine the mind. In my first self-awareness seminar, I remember walking outside on a break, in awe at the intricacy and complexity of the self-deceptions I was discovering. It was like my mind was playing

chess with itself, and for the first time I was noticing the strategies within strategies within strategies that it was using to keep me away from my shadow.

One of the most powerful ways to work with this challenge is to journal our thoughts and feelings. When we write down our inner experiences, it's like taking a snap-shot of our mind, which we can then go back and look at without it slipping and twisting away. Journaling helps us look **at** our thoughts and feelings, rather than being caught up **in** them.

Like with the processes of Free Form Writing and tracking our agreements, something magical happens when we get our thoughts “*out of head and on to paper.*” When we write down our experience, without judging what we're writing, we're honoring, accepting, and listening to our different voices. We're loving them. We're hearing them. And with journaling, we're also helping them see where in their innocence, they might have been making choices that cause us pain. Every aspect of ourselves is doing the best it knows how, and as we become conscious of a better choice, we naturally tend to embrace it.

This is one reason that “*simple awareness is often curative.*”

I recommend keeping a private “awareness journal” and setting it up in a way that you feel safe about its confidentiality. If you want to keep a journal for your posterity, do that separately. And if you find yourself venting negative emotions, I recommend that you switch over to a process of Free Form Writing on scratch paper, which you dispose of once you're done. Then you can come back to your journal and write down what you learned from the Free Form Writing.

Here are some things that are particularly useful to journal:

- ♥ **I'm Upset Because.** What emotions are you feeling? What was the situation that triggered the emotion? What thoughts are tied up with the emotion?
- ♥ **Victim Stories.** Where are you not taking 100% Personal Responsibility, and going into victim consciousness?

- ♥ **Self-Judgments.** What are the judgments you notice, either about yourself or someone else?
- ♥ **Who's Talking?** This is an advanced topic.⁵ As you start noticing differences between the different voices in your consciousness, you can start to name them. I've found at least a couple dozen different, very distinct sub-personalities, including my Inner Counselor, Little Brian, Wolfie, Rage, and my Inner Critic. Or you can practice distinguishing between the voices of Fear, Reason, and Love. Whatever works for you.
- ♥ **Learnings.** What have you learned?
- ♥ **Growth.** How have you grown? In particular, are there situations where you reacted with acceptance and equanimity, where it the past you would have reacted with upset? Are there places where you've moved from victim consciousness to personal responsibility?

Power Tool #12: The Mirror

Each time we get upset, we're being given a “golden thread” that we can track back in to our unconscious shadow. There are many ways to do this. We're going to concentrate on two: The Mirror and Track it Back.

Both of these work best when done as part of your journaling process. Start by journaling your upset, self-judgments, and any victim stories that are present. Then look in The Mirror and Track it Back.

“You may not yet be able to bring your unconscious mind activity into awareness as thoughts, but it will always be reflected in the body as an emotion, and of this you can become aware.”

– Eckhart Tolle

With The Mirror, we harness our projections, and use them as tools for honest self-awareness. It starts by practicing acceptance and loving self-discipline, and from there, stepping into 100%

Personal Responsibility for our upset. Not because we “should” let go of our victim stories, but because we’re ready to stop hurting.

Take a judgment you’ve written down about someone or something else. Then turn it around. How is this judgment a reflection of a judgment you are holding against yourself? If it isn’t immediately obvious, ask yourself the following.

As I check inside, is there some way this pattern is related to:

- ♥ **How I Treat Others?** Is this something I sometimes do to others?
- ♥ **How I Treat Myself?** Is this something I sometimes do to myself?
- ♥ **How I Treat God?** Is this a reflection in some way, on my relationship with God?
- ♥ **My Fears?** Is this something I don’t do, but judge as wrong because I’m scared that I might be capable of doing this in certain circumstances?
- ♥ **My Mind?** Is this something I do in my mind?

For example, if Tony had done this exercise, he might have come up with: “*Janice doesn’t trust me,*” “*I don’t trust me,*” and “*I’m not doing a good enough job.*” Similarly, Samantha might have come up with: “*I should be a better manager*” and “*I should be more honest with myself.*”

Please note that this process isn’t about finding all the things that are wrong with you! It’s about finding the places where, in your innocence, you’ve created **judgments** that there’s something wrong with you. While we all have opportunities to learn how to do better, our judgments aren’t true, because we’ve been doing the best we know how. Always. And that is enough. You are enough. You are worthy. For you are a spiritual being having a human experience. You are Love in the process of remembering itself.

After you’ve developed self-awareness of your self-judgments, we’ll then be learning how to take them in to a process of self-forgiveness (covered in chapter 10).

Power Tool #13: Track it Back

Once we’ve looked in the mirror, then the opportunity is to keep following the golden thread of upset back in to our shadow. For what we notice on the surface of our mind is usually rooted in something deeper. For example, the judgment that “*I’m upset because she didn’t put the toothpaste cap back on*” might be a cover for “*I’m upset because this means she doesn’t care about me.*”

One of the ways to get at these roots is by asking “*What would that mean?*” For example, let’s look at my judgments on Tom being out of integrity, and how this was a projection of the places where I judge that I’m out of integrity. Notice, I didn’t say the places where I **am** out of integrity – not only does humility mean giving up the “ego-juice” of feeling right, it also means giving up getting to feel right about being wrong. While our actions have real consequences, we don’t have the omniscience needed to pass judgment on those consequences. When we pass judgment, we’re playing God – and it doesn’t matter whether those judgments are directed against others, or against ourselves. At each moment, we were absolutely, 100%, perfectly doing the best we knew how. Period. Anything else is arguing with Reality.

With that, let’s look at how to take our projected self-judgments, and Track it Back. In this example, my judgments on my friend being out of integrity were a projection of my self-judgments about my being out of integrity. He was mirroring back to me my learning edges and healing opportunities in this area.

So, if my self-judgments about being out of integrity were true, **what would that mean?** When I go inside and feel in to that question, the next layer of the onion I get to is my self-judgment that “*I’m dishonest.*” If that was true, what would it mean? What comes up next for me is “*I’m a bad boy.*” If I’m a bad boy, then what

would that mean? Continuing to track it back, I get the following chain of self-judgments.

I'm upset because...

He's out of integrity. (Look in The Mirror)

I'm out of integrity. (Track it back)

I'm dishonest. (Continue tracking it back)

I'm a bad boy.

I'm not good enough.

I don't deserve Love.

I'm separate from Love. (My bottom line)

Notice how the thread eventually terminates at a “bottom line” self-judgment. While we may not always get there, particularly at first, this bottom line usually involves our self-judgments about being unworthy of Love, not having enough acceptance, safety or control, or perceiving ourselves as separate from Love.

Power Tool #14: Tell the Microscopic Truth

The last three Power Tools integrate into a single, remarkably process for self-awareness. This then becomes even more powerful when we combine it with a practice of Telling the Microscopic Truth. This concept comes from Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks' book Conscious Loving.

“We learn early on that certain things, if said, cause us great inconvenience. We get censured, laughed at, or beaten up. We take a mental snapshot: Truth = Pain. Pretty soon it doesn't even consciously occur to us to tell the whole truth. If you escaped childhood with an easy ability to tell the truth, you are blessed and in the minority. Most of us carry into our adult relationships a reluctance to tell the whole truth.”

“How can you know what is true? Our definition: the truth is that which absolutely cannot be argued about. For example, take the statement ‘John is a jerk.’ It is

*clearly not true, because at least John would probably argue about it. In any case, it **could** be argued about and therefore is not true. If you say, ‘I'm angry at John,’ that is much more likely to be true. Even closer to the truth: ‘I'm scared of that part of me that John represents.’”⁶*

The microscopic truth is both detailed and unvarnished. Telling the microscopic truth is one of the most powerful tools for creating conscious, truly intimate relationships. It can be used to dramatically enhance the awareness we bring to our closest relationships – and in particular, to the self-awareness we have in our relationship with our Authentic Self.

When journaling, or when you get upset, ask yourself: **Am I telling the microscopic truth? Am I telling a story, or am I stating that which cannot be argued with?**

Power Tool #15: Meditation

Meditation is a particularly powerful tool for self-awareness. It's also very useful for developing our capacities for acceptance, loving self-discipline and non-attachment. The point of meditation is to practice raw, unvarnished awareness of everything that arises within our consciousness. It helps us release our identification with our thoughts, feelings, and sensations, and move more into identification with The Witness and our Authentic Self. It helps us move from seeing ourselves as human beings having a spiritual experience, to remembering the Truth of who we most Are.

Meditation involves both accepting every thought, feeling and sensation as it arises, while also practicing the loving self-discipline of bringing our focus back to either our breath, our raw awareness, or a “mantra.” A mantra is a phrase, sound, or visual pattern that serves as a constant point of focus. For example, one of the most common mantras is the sound “Om.”

In this way, meditation involves telling ourselves the microscopic truth, over and over and over again. As such, it is both a deeply loving practice, and a deeply honest practice.

Meditation is a mastery level skill – one we can continue practicing no matter how high we grow, or how deeply we heal. There are many wonderful resources and teachers of meditation, and I won't strive to duplicate their efforts here. Let me simply share two of the most important things I found that supported me in my early meditation practice.

- ♥ **Consistent Baby Steps.** Meditation is one of the deepest practices I know of. As such, its results are both extremely powerful, and at least at first, they can be very subtle. Developing your meditation practice is a great way to put your power-tools for loving self-discipline to use. Start small, with consistent baby steps, and then build from your successes. Keep your word to yourself, or else consciously renegotiate it. Develop habits that, over time, will take on a life of their own.
- ♥ **Binaural Beat Technologies.** When scientists attached advanced meditators to brain scanners, it was found that deep meditation tends to involve bringing conscious awareness into brain states normally only experienced during sleep. These Theta and Delta states can be induced through the use of a stereo audio technology called “binaural beats.” Studies have shown that using a binaural beat CD while meditating can dramatically accelerate your practice.

For more information and support resources on meditation, please see Jon Kabat-Zinn's [Wherever You Go There You Are](#), or visit the www.lovebeyondbelief.org web site.