



The
Self-Critic
Reduction
Journey

Dr. Pinkie Feinstein

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The Psycho-Creative World

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Dear friend

Transformational journeys can be taken on your own.
You can go through this journey with yourself, at your own pace, in your own way.
And if you truly walk it, it can lead to deep and meaningful change.

This journey, even by itself, may open a completely new space in your life.

And yet... There is something powerful that happens when a journey is shared.

When you connect with others who are also walking their own paths of transformation,
something begins to move differently.
There is support. There is inspiration.
And there is a quiet sense that you are not alone in this.

You begin to feel that there are others like you, people who are willing to explore, to feel,
to create, and to change.

You are warmly invited to join such a space.

Moments of True Joy is an open, free community where people share their journeys,
their feelings, and their practices and experiences from psycho-creative processes.
A space where inspiration flows in both directions, given and received, and where
personal transformation becomes something we grow into, together.

You are welcome to join, whenever it feels right for you.

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Introduction

This book deals with a subject that accompanies many people throughout their lives: excessive self-criticism. Over the years, self-criticism has often been perceived as something natural, and even necessary. It is commonly associated with responsibility, improvement, and self-development. However, when we begin to examine it more closely, it becomes clear that in many cases, it exceeds its useful function and becomes a limiting and even harmful force.

Excessive self-criticism is not always experienced as something extreme or unusual. On the contrary, it is often embedded in everyday thinking, in internal dialogue, and in the way we interpret situations, actions, and outcomes. Because of this, it can influence a wide range of areas in our lives, including decision-making, emotional experience, creativity, relationships, and our overall sense of capability.

The purpose of this book is not to eliminate self-criticism completely, but rather to reduce its excessive forms. This distinction is important. The approach presented here is based on the understanding that while some level of critical evaluation may be useful, excessive self-criticism tends to distort reality, reduce flexibility, and create unnecessary pressure.

The process described in this book begins with awareness. Developing the ability to recognize excessive self-criticism as it appears, in its different forms and expressions, is a central part of the work. As awareness increases, it becomes possible to observe its patterns, understand its impact, and gradually change the way we relate to it.

As the chapters progress, the book moves from observation toward more active engagement. This includes learning to respond differently, to question automatic assumptions, and to create new internal responses that reduce the influence of excessive self-criticism over time. This is not a one-time action, but an ongoing process that develops through repetition and practice.

In addition to its more visible expressions, excessive self-criticism is also connected to deeper psychological dynamics. These include fear, the need for control, internalized voices from the past, feelings of guilt and shame, and patterns of self-judgment that have developed over time. Several chapters in this book address these aspects, not as separate issues, but as different expressions of the same underlying mechanism.

Alongside this process, another movement begins to take shape. As the influence of excessive self-criticism is reduced, there is often a gradual increase in freedom of action, willingness to initiate, and openness to creative and authentic expression. These changes do not occur all at once, but they become more noticeable as the process continues.

This book presents a structured path that combines awareness, understanding, and practical work. It is intended to be approached gradually, with patience and consistency. The process it describes is not limited to the time spent reading, but is meant to continue in everyday life, where the actual change takes place.

Chapter 1: Broad Awareness

Reducing excessive self-criticism is a subject I have been engaged with for close to thirty years. From the moment I became aware of its importance, both for myself and for the people who went through processes of change and healing with me, it was clear to me that this is a vast field. A field with immense possibilities. Truly immense. It begins with awareness, but from there it opens into worlds of change, improvement, empowerment, and even transformation across a very wide range of areas.

From relationships with others, through the relationship with ourselves, to creative expression, self-fulfillment, problem solving, flexibility in life, greater joy, and greater satisfaction. All of these are directly connected to the level of excessive self-criticism that we allow to exist in our lives. Allow, because there is consent here. There is an unconscious choice. And we will speak about this a great deal.

The very fact that a person knows they have excessive self-criticism, and understands that it is an important task to reduce it, already says something very significant about them. A person who understands that their excessive self-criticism is a problem, a limitation, an unnecessary difficulty, is a person who can make a meaningful journey here. And if you have arrived here, you are likely that kind of person. And that is a good thing, because this is exactly what we are going to do here.

We are setting out on a journey, and its first part includes three chapters devoted to one thing: getting as close as possible to an intimate familiarity with excessive self-criticism. To get to know it, to understand what we are dealing with. Because the more we know what we are facing, even if it is something we have created within ourselves, we can begin to develop strategies, to reduce it, to bypass it, to outsmart it, to manipulate it, and most importantly, to free ourselves from it more and more.

Therefore, broad awareness of excessive self-criticism is essential for changing it. Essential. We live on a daily basis, almost moment by moment, under the presence and influence of excessive self-criticism, exaggerated, unnecessary, and redundant. And in most cases, we are not aware that it is so. We surrender to its internal logic, a logic that sometimes sounds very convincing, but in practice limits us, weighs us down, and instills within us concepts of incapability.

It generates excuses, explanations, stories of why it is not possible. Why it is not possible to do things that we actually very much want to do. It creates an internal language that diminishes us, that constricts us, that narrows our vision regarding our own potential. It introduces into our awareness messages of “it’s not possible,” “it’s not okay,” “why did you do that,” “you failed.” This is an inner voice that operates constantly within us, sometimes quietly and sometimes more openly, and our role now is to begin increasing our awareness of its presence.

One of the things I did at the beginning of my journey was to carry a small notebook with me. That was before the era of smartphones, but even today it is still relevant. Simply to

write. To catch the critical thoughts as they appear and write them down. Suddenly something concrete appears before the eyes. A list of thoughts: I'm not okay, I won't succeed, why did I do that, I shouldn't have chosen that. And when it is written, something changes. It is no longer just a vague internal voice, but something that can be seen and observed.

Excessive self-criticism is present at many different points. It appears before action, preventing us from even trying, creating hesitation, fear, and excessive doubt. It appears during action, following us, not allowing mistakes, limiting creativity and flexibility, and creating an ongoing internal threat. And it appears after action, sometimes as self-beating, with recurring questions: why did I do that, why not differently, why did I choose that, why did someone else do it better than me.

At times this becomes an internal obsession of a negative relationship toward oneself. It is unnecessary. It can be reduced. But in order to get there, we must first acknowledge that it exists. That this mechanism exists. That this inner "monster" exists.

And it did not appear by chance. It is cultivated within families, within educational systems, within workplaces. We learn it, we absorb it, we internalize it. The messages around us, both explicit and implicit, teach us to be dissatisfied with ourselves, to doubt our abilities, to take failures too seriously, and not to see them as a natural part of the process. Sometimes it is even wrapped in humor, when a person says about themselves that they are not talented or not capable, and it sounds like a joke, but that joke continues to fuel excessive self-criticism.

In this way, without noticing, we give it reinforcement. And therefore, we want to get to know it. Not to agree with it. To be able to observe it and see how it hurts us, how it limits us, and how it confuses us with messages that sound logical, yet in practice diminish us and place weights on our feet.

We want to begin identifying it in real time. To say to ourselves: here it is, this is my excessive self-criticism. Here it has appeared. Here it is speaking. Here it is inventing reasons why not. Why to be afraid, why not to act, why not to try, why not to take risks, why not to initiate. It is there, sometimes openly and sometimes in a subtle, elusive way.

And we want to improve our ability to identify it, with a lot of self-compassion, with patience, and even with humor. Because it is a product of fears. Our fears, our parents' fears, the fears of our environment. It is a product of a lack of love and of an upbringing that did not encourage free, creative, authentic expression. And it is so common that many people do not even consider the possibility that it is possible to live with less excessive self-criticism.

But it is possible.

And it begins with a journey. A journey that begins now and will continue far beyond these chapters. A journey of listening, of practice, of increasing awareness. Each time a negative thought arises, not to accept it automatically as truth, but to pause and say: this is a product of excessive self-criticism trying to convince me that I am smaller than I truly am.

I want to learn to recognize it. It can begin simply, with a notebook, with a few days of documentation, and seeing what is happening inside. Awareness expands, and the more we recognize, the more we can begin to move, to reduce, and to free ourselves.

And gradually to discover all the treasures that exist in a place where we are less controlled by excessive self-criticism.

We have set out on the journey. It is going to be interesting.

Questions for Self-Reflection (it is recommended to answer in writing):

1. What are the first feelings that arise in you when you encounter the expression “excessive self-criticism”?
2. Are you aware of the extent to which your excessive self-criticism limits you?
3. In which area of your life do you currently feel the presence of excessive self-criticism most strongly?
4. How do you imagine your life would look if you were free from significant parts of the excessive self-criticism that currently exists in your life?
5. If you could convey a message right now to your excessive self-criticism, what would it be?
6. Anything else you would like to share? Feelings, thoughts or questions about this step?

Chapter 2: The Many Faces of Excessive Self-Criticism

Chapter Two is the second chapter in the first part, which focuses on getting as close as possible to an intimate familiarity with our excessive self-criticism. This is not a one-time familiarity, but a life-long task. Excessive self-criticism will always be there, to some extent. It is a cultural matter, a planetary matter, an energy that circulates among people and exists within us as part of the structure of human consciousness. It is an ongoing challenge.

Therefore, our goal is not to completely dismantle it. At least not according to what currently seems possible based on our understanding of the human psyche. But it is possible to do very meaningful work. To make very significant progress in reducing it. And each time we succeed in reducing excessive self-criticism, we open within ourselves gateways to freedom, gateways to creativity, gateways to self-fulfillment, and many other possibilities.

This happens in parallel. Everything we want to do, every change, every process of growth, development, expansion, problem solving, will always include the element of breaking down excessive self-criticism around that specific matter. It will always be there. And therefore, one of our central tasks in this part of the process is familiarity. Deep familiarity.

Although it is part of us, we can also step aside and observe it. To observe from a place of awareness, of compassion, of recognition, of tracking. Like becoming a kind of inner Sherlock Holmes, waiting for the moment to say: I caught you. I caught you. This is a very significant moment.

Because a large part of the power of excessive self-criticism lies in the fact that we do not notice it operating. And when we do not notice it, we believe it. And when we believe it, we begin to see reality through its language. When it tells us that something will not succeed, we feel that it will not succeed. When it tells us that we are not okay, we feel that we are not okay. We are wrapped in it.

But if we are able, even for brief moments, to step aside and say: this is only excessive self-criticism. This is not real. This does not truly represent who I am. This is too sharp, too absolute, too general, too distorted. I am not interested in this. This is excessive for me.

In such a moment, distance begins to form. An inner dialogue begins. The possibility of negotiation begins. And from there, a path opens toward setting boundaries and reducing its influence. That is why it is so important to recognize it, to track it, to look for it, and to identify it the moment it appears. To say: here it is, excessive self-criticism has just appeared. I saw you. I am aware of you. Because the moment we are aware of it, it already has less power over us.

Chapter Two deals with the many faces of excessive self-criticism. One of its central tools is its multiplicity of forms. It has many forms of expression. Many. And no matter how many examples we give, there will always be more. It bypasses our mind. It appears unexpectedly, in many different ways, but ultimately it always delivers the same message.

A limiting message. A message that reduces hope. A message that reduces enthusiasm. A message that reduces passion. A message that reduces self-trust. A message that reduces playfulness, spontaneity, and boldness.

It can appear as a wave of pessimism. It can appear as a depressive mood. It can appear as excessive anxiety. It can appear as a distorted interpretation of something that did not work, accompanied by exaggerated feelings of guilt. And this is not real. It is not truly so. It is excessive. It colors reality.

Because in reality, there are always possibilities. There are always paths. There are always opportunities. There is always a way to look again. Very often, when we are dealing with a problem, the problem itself becomes much more difficult because of the excessive self-criticism surrounding it. We are not only dealing with the problem; we are also being attacked from within for having the problem. And we are not aware of this.

We are not aware that if we manage to reduce the excessive self-criticism surrounding the problem, it will be much easier for us to deal with it.

The same thing happens with dreams, with desires, with things we want to realize. Suddenly an inner statement appears, sometimes even in the voice of someone familiar from the past. But it is no longer that person. It is us, through that figure.

We can view excessive self-criticism as a kind of chameleon. It constantly changes shape. And it is responsible for almost every situation in which we do not meet ourselves from a place of freedom, ease, flow, joy, and spontaneity. If those qualities are not present, it is very likely that excessive self-criticism is there, behind the scenes, through statements that sound very logical.

And this is one of its main disguises: logic.

It explains to us that no one has succeeded. That it has already been tried and did not work. That it is too risky, too big, too far away, a waste of time, a waste of money. Many different forms. And therefore, it is important to understand that it has many faces.

In a certain sense, it represents our fears. Fears of growth, fears of freedom, fears of truth, fears of encountering pain. One could even say that all of our fears converge into one place and are translated into excessive self-criticism, which attempts to distance us from direct engagement with what we need to face.

The main thing to take from this chapter is that excessive self-criticism is highly present. It creates heaviness. It creates conflicts. It creates exaggerated hurt. It creates a distorted perception of reality rooted in self-pity. It sometimes creates obsessive thinking that repeats the same unnecessary and exaggerated messages again and again.

And ultimately, this is a negative relationship toward oneself.

It stems from many sources. Culture, education, childhood, parents. That is not the main point right now. The main point is to understand that it is there. That it is present. That it is a kind of inner adversary.

And we want to learn how to meet it. Not with brute force, but with sophisticated, emotional, creative, and intuitive approaches. There are ways. And we are here to learn them.

But if we do not recognize what we are dealing with, and if it continues to influence us before we identify it, and if we continue to be convinced that it is right, we will not be able to create change.

And so now, in the coming days, in the coming weeks, we are looking for it. We are looking for it, and we are catching it. And we say to it: I caught you. I saw you. Here you weighed me down. Here you gave me exaggerated messages. Here you made me doubt myself. Here you blocked me when I tried to create something.

I saw you before action. I saw you during action. I saw you after action.

I saw you.

And we begin to learn. Because it can be found.

And if we had only learned this from a young age, we would become very skilled at it. Not because we would eliminate it completely, but because we would place it in its proper proportions. And we would live with much more freedom, more self-expression, more ability to deal with problems, and more fulfillment.

Therefore, it is important to remember: it has many faces. It sounds very logical. Very convincing. But in most cases, it is excessive. It is distorted.

And from now on, we are after it.

We are looking for it.

We begin, in a certain sense, to move from being pursued to becoming the ones who pursue.

With a smile.

Questions for Self-Reflection (it is recommended to answer in writing):

1. In which situations and forms does your excessive self-criticism prevent you from initiating, taking action, or daring to try?
2. What feelings does your excessive self-criticism evoke in you when it “speaks” to you while you are trying to do something new or different?
3. How far can you go into feelings of guilt or self-anger if you tried or did something and later realized that you made a mistake, missed something, overlooked something, or did not notice something?
4. Are you aware that procrastination and hesitation can stem from excessive self-criticism? Do you have examples from your own life?
5. Can you identify your excessive self-criticism when you are anxious, in a low mood, or simply in a place that does not feel good to you?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about regarding what you have read in this chapter? Experiences? Insights? Questions? Feelings?

Chapter 3: Restricting Authentic Creative Expression

Chapter Three is the third chapter of the first part, which focuses on getting as close as possible to an intimate familiarity with excessive self-criticism. This does not mean that later on we will deal with it any less. On the contrary. But it was important to begin the process with a clear declaration, with a strong presence of a very central aspect of excessive self-criticism, one that requires us to open our eyes wide.

The lies of excessive self-criticism.

Through excessive self-criticism, we tell ourselves lies and believe them with all our heart. Emotional, internal lies. And therefore, before we point a finger at others who lie to us, whether on a personal, familial, or public level, it is important to understand that we lie to ourselves on a daily basis.

This is a kind of lie that we must recognize as a lie. And it is important to use this word. A sharp, unequivocal word: lie. Excessive self-criticism lies to us. In fact, we lie to ourselves through it. We tell ourselves a story that is not true about who we are, about our abilities, about our possibilities.

It is not always important to understand why this happens. And even when we do understand, it does not necessarily change the situation. At this stage, what is more important is to allow ourselves to see the possibility that a large portion of the messages of excessive self-criticism are biased, distorted, and misleading information.

This information affects everything. How we see ourselves, the decisions we make, what we do or avoid doing, our emotional state, our worldview, our interactions with others, our relationships. It is there, everywhere.

And therefore, we want to begin to be somewhat more skeptical toward its absolute messages. To open openings for release from it. And this begins with awareness.

And this brings us to the heart of this chapter.

Excessive self-criticism has a role. And its role is to reduce us, to limit us, and to prevent authentic creative expression. That is its role.

This is a cultural role, a familial role, and ultimately also a personal role. And it stems from fear. Fear of freedom. Fear of our natural power. Fear of our inner truth. Fear of our creativity. Fear of self-realization. Fear of success. Fear of release.

We are far more afraid of these things than we are willing to admit. And there is even a kind of self-deception here. We tell ourselves that we want to succeed, want to grow, want to develop, want to be free. It is easy to hold on to these headlines. It is also easy to be drawn to promises that lead in that direction.

But at the same time, we are also afraid of it.

And when these fears are active, they generate obstacles. And these obstacles often take the form of excessive self-criticism. Stories. Explanations. Why it is not possible. Why it is dangerous. Why this is not the right time. Why it will not work.

And so a situation is created in which things that could be relatively simple and accessible appear complicated, distant, and difficult to achieve. Not because they truly are, but because we are afraid of them.

Excessive self-criticism is one of the central tools that generate this fear and sustain it. It blurs our vision. It limits our ability to see our paths of expression. And it does so in a wide variety of ways. It is very skillful.

It also appears in interpersonal dynamics. We fuel each other's criticism. We fuel the lack of trust in our ability to create, to initiate, to change, to free ourselves.

It has a purpose. It has an agenda.

We can also refer here to a familiar psychological distinction. Alongside instinctual, free, and spontaneous parts within us, there has developed a mechanism that restrains. A kind of inner guard, an internal police force, that does not allow certain impulses to be freely expressed.

Originally, there is some logic in this. But within that same inner space lies the blueprint for our creative expression. There lies access to our deeper self. And so it happens that not only problematic impulses are restrained, but also creativity, freedom, expression, and desire. We restrain ourselves.

And therefore, very often the reason that things we want to happen do not happen is not because they are too big, too complex, or too far away, but because there are layers of fear around them. And layers of stories created by excessive self-criticism.

- Stories of why it is not possible.
- Stories of why not now.
- Stories of why it is dangerous.

These are barriers. That is their role.

And at this stage, we want to begin to question their absoluteness. To see that they are not truth. That they are lies. That they are fiction. That they are manipulation.

The human being is a complex, sophisticated, and creative being. And we can also be very sophisticated in the ways in which we limit ourselves.

And therefore, our task here is to recognize this structure. A sophisticated structure whose purpose is to hide from us what we are capable of being. To hide from us the paths of joy, the paths of fulfillment, the paths of our truth.

And at this point, it does not really matter why this happens. This is what it does. And it does it very effectively.

One of its central tools is criticism. Criticism is a form of internal punishment. Statements such as “oh no,” “you must not,” “not okay,” “how did you fail,” “why did you do that.” And when we hear these voices, we also feel them.

This is manipulation. This is a way of bringing us into an emotional state of shame, contraction, and self-beating. And an internal drama is created: accuser and accused, critic and criticized, judge and judged.

This is a drama. A staged drama. And a drama whose purpose is to reduce us. We will want to learn how to step out of it. Not to take on either role. Because this entire drama is designed to limit us. And deep down, we are afraid of expansion and of freedom.

At this stage, we are not yet approaching these fears directly. That is another stage. Right now, we are learning to recognize the mechanism. To recognize that this is not only personal. It happens to many people. It is part of culture. It comes together with the beautiful aspects of humanity, but also with its costs.

- And it harms.
- And it limits.
- And it takes us to places we later regret.

But it is possible to be free from it. There are tools. And this is part of our inner leadership.

And so we begin with awareness. Awareness that it exists. Awareness that it can be changed. Awareness that it has many faces.

And awareness that it has one clear purpose: to reduce us, to limit us, and to prevent authentic creative expression.

And it succeeds in doing so.

It succeeds within us, and it succeeds around us, in educational systems, between people, to the point that sometimes we are surprised to see someone who has taken a step forward, who has realized something. Because there is always some moment, some crack, some opening through which they managed to pass beyond the wall of their excessive self-criticism.

And we can as well.

It is possible.

But first, we must recognize what we are dealing with.

And that is what we have done in these first three chapters.

Questions for Self-Reflection (preferably answered in writing):

1. Which of your creative abilities do you feel are not sufficiently expressed?
2. Which wishes and passions do you feel you suppress more than necessary?
3. Are you aware that the previous two questions are related to the excessive influence of your self-criticism, and what do you think about this at this moment?
4. Do you see the possibility that part of your personality is continuously engaged in preventing you from growing, expanding, and changing?
5. How do you feel about the idea that part of your mental energy is being used in a negative way to limit your possibilities for expansion and spontaneity?
6. Are there additional things you would like to share or express in writing regarding what you have read in this chapter? Experiences, insights, questions, or feelings?

Chapter 4: Aggressive Force

Lesson Four opens Part Two. It brings forward the very thing for which this course exists, and it is something that needs to be said again and again. On the interpersonal level, in everyday conversation, and above all within the relationship a person has with themselves.

Excessive self-criticism can be significantly reduced. It truly can be significantly reduced.

This is already embedded within the words. I did not choose the term excessive self-criticism by chance. When I say excessive, I am already saying that there is something here that can be reduced. But the problem is that this is not present in awareness. People are not aware of the potential and actual damage of excessive self-criticism, which operates continuously in almost every person within the culture we know.

The lack of awareness that it exists and has an impact, together with our habituation to its messages and its modes of operation, creates cooperation with it. We believe it. We believe its false messages. And this, of course, does not allow us to reduce it.

And so we begin from a clear recognition. To recognize that it is excessive. That it is problematic. That it is harmful. That it limits us. Not to let this slip away. Not to give it legitimacy through statements such as “that’s just the way it is,” “everyone is like that,” “we need to be hard on ourselves.”

This is not true.

It is not a balanced and healthy part that helps us improve. It is not a constructive corrective mechanism. It is a part that beats us down. A part that frightens us. A part that causes us to hide from ourselves. A part that uses anger, reproach, and guilt.

And it is a part that distances us from ourselves. From our source. From our creativity. From our abundance. From our joy. From our love.

And therefore, we want to see it as it is. As something excessive. As something that accompanies us. And as something that can be significantly reduced.

To such an extent that Chapter Four carries a clear title: there is an aggressive force within us, and we are engaging in a struggle with it.

There is a struggle here. An inner struggle. A subtle struggle, not always conscious, but very present.

On one side, there is the critical part, dissatisfied, fearful, and intimidating. A part that limits. And on the other side, there is another part, open, creative, naïve in the healthy sense of the word, childlike, intuitive, emotional, spiritual.

This part does not seek wars. It wants to express itself. To create. To develop. To grow. To heal. To try. To experiment. To connect. To open the heart. It has no interest in fighting.

But the critical part does. And it is busy diminishing it, restricting it, silencing it. This is a problematic inner relationship.

And beyond these two parts, there is also the “self.” The inner captain. The one who observes. The one who sees everything that is happening. The one whose role is to properly manage the inner space.

This is the place where we can choose. This is the place where we can reorganize our inner boundaries.

This is the place where, after a process of awareness like the one we have gone through in the first three chapters, we can see that there is excessive self-criticism. That it has costs. And that it is not only legitimate to deal with it.

Sometimes it is necessary. To struggle. Later on, we will see that there are also indirect, creative ways, alternative paths. But there are moments when we confront excessive self-criticism directly.

Why? Because it is a kind of bully. An inner bully. A bully that misleads, that pressures, that generates anxiety, that creates an unpleasant inner atmosphere. And when there is a bully, sometimes you need to tell it: stop. To say: enough. This is not acceptable to me.

I will expand on this later, on the strategies and the methods. But first, it is important to recognize that there is a force within us that carries energy. Life energy. And this energy is being misused.

Instead of using it creatively to deal with life’s challenges, it is directed inward. It uses our own resources against us. We use our own resources to harm ourselves.

This is difficult to grasp. But it is happening. And ultimately, many of the things we want to happen do not happen. Not because they are too big. Not because we lack ability. Not because we lack luck or the right environment. But because of excessive self-criticism. Which is like weights on our legs.

And we must recognize this. Excessive self-criticism does not come to dialogue. It does not sit with us for a balanced conversation. It does not listen. It is not truly interested in what is good for us.

It attacks.

And it attacks quickly.

And it attacks strongly.

It is an inner bully.

And we developed it. We learned to develop it. In order to please certain figures. In order to meet expectations. Out of fear that if we did not meet them, something terrible would happen. And so we learned to beat ourselves down.

And when there is an attack, the first step is defense.

Later, we will also speak about more creative approaches. About strengthening the healthy parts, about creativity, spontaneity, freedom. That is the deeper solution. But when these parts are not yet strong enough, and the bully attacks, we first defend.

We create clear lines of defense. We bring forward an inner force that understands that this is excessive. That understands that this is false. That understands that this is inner speech that comes from fear and limitation. That understands the damage.

And then, if there is a force within me that is an inner bully attacking, my role is to reduce it. To reduce the damage it causes.

I take a stand. I, the inner captain, take a stand. I stand alongside the creative, emotional, childlike, spontaneous part. And I say: enough.

Now there is a struggle.

I will not allow excessive self-criticism to move freely and generate so much noise and so many unnecessary remarks. And later, just as I would not allow people from the outside to speak to me in a diminishing way, I will not allow it to happen from within.

But first, it is important to put this on the table. There is an inner struggle. And we must choose to enter it.

For the sake of our healthy parts, those that need protection. Because they do not protect themselves. They are busy creating, growing, developing. And we need to provide them with that protection.

To allow them to deepen their roots. To extend branches. To grow. To strengthen. To come into expression. Until the point where excessive self-criticism will barely be able to harm them.

And even then, we will need to remain aware. Because this part is naturally exposed. And it needs to remain open in order to be alive. And so we protect it, but we do not close it.

This is possible. It happens. And it improves over time. But first, we must be aware. And we must make an inner decision.

That we stand with this part. And that we protect it.

And from here, the rules of the game begin to change.

Questions for Self-Reflection (preferably answered in writing):

1. Are you aware of the natural aggressive aspects within you?
2. What is your relationship with these aspects? Do you resist their existence? Do you feel anger toward them? Do you find yourself unsure of what to do with them?
3. Are you open to the possibility that part of your being is engaged, almost routinely and on a daily basis, in attacking yourself through excessive self-criticism?
4. Do you find it difficult to accept the idea that there is self-directed aggression within you expressed through excessive self-criticism? Does this way of describing it feel exaggerated to you?
5. What might happen if you were able to channel your natural aggression into expressions of release, initiative, and new action?
6. Are there additional things you would like to share or express in writing regarding what you have read in this chapter? Experiences, insights, questions, or feelings?

Chapter 5: The Beginning of Practical Work

Chapter Five is the second chapter of Part Two, and it brings with it a piece of good news. This is something that needs to be said again and again. To remind ourselves of it. To return to it. And also to allow it to awaken something within us. To awaken those natural forces that we are not always aware of.

The message is simple and clear: excessive self-criticism can be significantly reduced.

And not only that. Excessive self-criticism is something that we created within ourselves. One could also say that, to some extent, we became addicted to it. We got used to it. We gave it space. We gave it power. We believed it. We cultivated it.

And if we created it, and if we cultivated it, and if we understand that it is excessive, then the very same force that created it is also the force that can reduce it.

It is the same force. The same force that built it, the same force that believed it, the same force that gave it too much space in consciousness, is also the force that can begin to reduce it.

The moment we truly understand that excessive self-criticism is unnecessary, that it is indeed excessive, that it distorts reality, that it harms us, that it limits us, and that we have the possibility of doing something about it, from that point on, choice enters the picture.

From that point on, it becomes our initiative. Our decision. And our action. What we do when it appears.

And that is exactly where Chapter Five enters. It begins to offer a practical focus. The beginning of a path. The beginning of a process that creates change.

As we have already said, this is an ongoing path. A continuous one. There is no perfect finishing point here. We do not arrive at a state in which there is no excessive self-criticism at all, no discomfort at all, no disappointment or anger toward ourselves at all.

No.

But through an ongoing process, we can reduce it. And that is our task.

So what do we do in practice?

To identify. To recognize. To feel. And then to firmly refuse. And to repeat the action. That is the sequence. To identify, to recognize, to feel, to refuse.

And to repeat.

Not a one-time action. Not a momentary fire extinguishing and that is it. But ongoing work. Creating new precedents within the psyche. And not becoming disappointed when it returns. It will return.

It is part of us. It is part of the culture. But we can improve at this. And that is our task. So let us begin with the first stage: to **identify**.

Identification is an art. It is truly an art that improves over time. To become more and more finely attentive, almost like using a magnifying glass, toward the unpleasant experiences that from time to time enter consciousness. And to identify who stands behind them. Excessive self-criticism.

To identify the exaggeration. To identify the overly absolute messages. The “I’m not okay,” the “why did I do that,” the “why did I make that mistake,” the “I probably won’t succeed,” the “this won’t work.”

To identify the excessive rigidity. To identify that there is no flexibility there. To identify that there is no real possibility of coping there. They block.

After identification comes the stage of **recognition**. I begin to recognize it. I begin to identify the pattern. I begin to notice the small nuances. I already see it when it begins.

This is work. And over time, we improve at it.

The next stage is to **feel**. We do not only think excessive self-criticism, we feel it. In the body. In the psyche. In contraction. In heaviness. In pressure. In worry. In disappointment. It is an experience.

And we learn to feel it.

After we have identified it, recognized it, and felt it, we already know: right now I am under its influence. Right now I am under attack. Yes, attack.

And then comes the next stage. To **refuse**.

And this is where the real work begins. To refuse. To set a boundary. To create a new response.

Excessive self-criticism often operates because it has no answer. It enters with absolute, weakening messages, and there is no one there to stop it. As though it is allowed. As though this inner bully is allowed to run wild without interruption.

And that is what we got used to. But this is where change begins. We identify, recognize, feel, and then we say: no.

We say: stop. I do not agree. Like this. Directly. This is disturbing me. This is not acceptable to me.

This is a new dialogue. And when someone attacks you, the first thing is defense. First of all, defense. After that, one can examine, understand, perhaps speak. But first of all, to prevent harm.

And so we develop a reflex. A reflex of refusal. A clear and unequivocal refusal toward excessive self-criticism. Even if we are not one hundred percent sure that it is wrong. Because we are still used to believing it.

Doubt will arise. Maybe it is right after all. Maybe I truly am not capable. Maybe I truly am not okay. That will arise. But even then, we set a boundary.

No. Not like this. First of all, we stop.

This is not the full solution. It is far from it. This is the beginning of beginnings.

But it is a beginning. It will return. And we will set a boundary. It will return. And we will set a boundary. Again. And again.

“You are trying to hurt me. I am stopping you.”

First of all, within myself. That part which I cultivated within myself, which I allowed to act against me, which I gave legitimacy to, now I begin to change that.

From this moment on, I am looking for it. I am tracking it. I am learning to identify its changing forms. And when it arrives, I say:

No.

Without arguments. Without trying to convince.

First of all, No.

No matter what the content is. No matter what it says. This is hurting me. This is not acceptable to me.

If I tried something and did not succeed, I am not supposed to receive this kind of criticism. On the contrary. I am supposed to receive reinforcement. It may be that I need to fail ten times. Twenty times. That is my process. And excessive self-criticism will not give me that. It will stop me.

So I say to it: I am trying again. I do not agree to this kind of treatment. I do not agree to this style.

And I return to action. To identify. To recognize. To feel. To refuse. And to improve at it. And when it comes, to stop. To set a boundary.

Because excessive self-criticism is an attacking force. And we are beginning to place before it another force. A force that will keep growing stronger. A force that will be assertive. A force that will be unequivocal.

And this is the beginning of the journey toward reducing excessive self-criticism.

And this is only the beginning.

Questions for Self-Reflection (it is recommended to answer in writing):

1. How do you currently assess, in general, your ability to refuse, to set boundaries, and to say “this is enough!” when needed?
2. Are you willing, starting from this moment, to practice more decisive assertiveness in relation to your excessive self-criticism?
3. What kind of firm statements would you like to say to your excessive self-criticism when it bothers you? Give a few examples.
4. Why do you think it is often difficult for us, as human beings, to refuse and set boundaries even when it is important and necessary for us?
5. What will happen when your relationship with your excessive self-criticism shifts into one that includes more assertive responses from you toward it?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about regarding what you have read in this chapter? Experiences? Insights? Questions? Feelings?

Chapter 6: It is Not a Fate

Chapter Six is the third chapter of Part Two, and it brings with it perhaps one of the most important messages in this process. Excessive self-criticism is not fate. It is not a finished fact. It is not something fixed that we will have to deal with forever at the same intensity.

It is something that can be changed. A significant change. A very significant one.

It is in our hands. It is within our potential. We have the ability to reduce this burden. Perhaps a small part will remain, but it will be far less disturbing, far less limiting. And when it is barely there, our creative possibilities will expand, our flexibility will increase, and we will not always even realize how much this is connected to the fact that there is far less excessive self-criticism within us.

It is possible. That is why we are here. Because it is possible.

And I repeat this again and again, because excessive self-criticism has a tendency to create the opposite impression. It creates the feeling that it cannot be reduced, that it cannot be negotiated with, that it cannot be overcome, that it cannot be calmed, that it cannot be regulated.

This is the impression it creates. And it does so through its language. A binary language. An absolute language. A language of black or white.

A language that generates anxiety, that generates guilt, that speaks with drama, with decisiveness, as if it were an unquestionable truth. “Never,” “this is terrible,” “how did you not see,” “how did you do that,” “how did you miss it.” An atmosphere that is very difficult to argue with.

But this is not the truth. And this is exactly what we are learning here. We can reduce excessive self-criticism. I can. You can. We can.

And it begins with awareness. I am aware of it. I am attentive to it. I identify it when it appears and when it generates an unpleasant inner experience within me. And מתוך this awareness, I begin to update myself, again and again, that I can, over time, reduce its presence.

This is the central message of Part Two. It is possible. This is a key phrase.

Because this is exactly what excessive self-criticism does not want us to see. It wants to place us with our backs against the wall, in a state of no choice, of finality, of “this is how it is, and that’s it.”

But the healthy, healing, transformative message is different. It is possible. I can. You can. We can reduce excessive self-criticism.

Because we have the tools within us. Because there is an inner space within us that knows how to function in a much healthier, much more abundant, much more creative way when there is less excessive self-criticism.

It is possible. And we are also ready for it. And what remains is to move toward it, to do the work, to use the tools, to begin to reduce.

And here Chapter Six adds another important emphasis. We are in a struggle. This is truly a struggle. Excessive self-criticism is a kind of attack on our inner child, on our spontaneous creativity, on our freedom, on our spirituality, on our ideas.

It is an attack. And it is important to use these words. Because when we understand that this is an attack, we also understand that we need to defend ourselves against it, that this is our responsibility toward ourselves, that this is our commitment to ourselves.

To be there. To be present in this struggle. For the sake of that soft, creative, even brilliant part within us.

And in order to do this, we need information, we need tools, and we also need to keep reminding ourselves, again and again, of what Chapter Six emphasizes: these are lies. And a distortion of reality.

Look for a moment at another person. A friend, a colleague, someone you know and perhaps even appreciate. Someone you are impressed by. Their actions, their personality, their initiative.

And then you hear them speak about themselves. And suddenly, excessive self-criticism emerges. A lack of tolerance toward themselves. A lack of compassion. Exaggerated disappointment.

And you are surprised. How can this person, whom you see as having so many abilities, so much value, speak about themselves this way? You may not even understand how much this limits them, how much more they could be if they reduced their excessive self-criticism.

And then a point becomes clear. This is not reality. It is a kind of lie. This person stands before themselves, speaks in a convincing, confident, absolute way, and lies to themselves.

This is deception. Self-deception. And we do this to ourselves as well. It is important to use these words. Because excessive self-criticism creates emotional manipulation. It causes us to believe things that do not exist. It creates doubt where there is no need for doubt. It creates negative evaluation where it is not appropriate.

And it also focuses us on what did not work, and does not allow us to see what did work.

This is a lie. A lie with an agenda. An agenda whose purpose is to reduce us. To cause our free and creative part to become contracted, ashamed, hesitant, afraid. And this agenda exists within us. It is part of us. And it is based on lies and on a distortion of reality.

The word lie is a strong word. A difficult word. But here it is accurate. Because when a person tells themselves that they cannot, when in reality they can, this is not just inaccuracy. It is a lie.

And this lie has consequences. It creates depression. It creates anxiety. It can harm relationships. It can stop entire lives.

And therefore, we begin to stand in front of excessive self-criticism and say to it: you are lying. Not only are you exaggerating. You are lying. This is not true. This is the opposite of reality.

I can. I am creative. I am worthy of appreciation. I also see what I have done. And I continue to try, even if I failed. And perhaps it is good that I failed, because failure is part of the path. One of the most important learning materials. Those who succeed are those who do not surround their failures with excessive self-criticism, but continue.

But if we allow excessive self-criticism to take over, it will stop us after one or two attempts, and it will tell us a false story: I cannot, this is not for me.

And therefore, we raise the intensity. From a certain point, we do not only stop it. We also attack it back. We say: this is a lie.

And we do not say "I am lying to myself," but we turn to it. We momentarily make it an object. And we say to it: you are lying. And when we do this, we begin to dismantle its legitimacy.

Because we do not believe a liar. And this is much stronger than saying that it is only exaggerating or afraid. It is giving incorrect information. There is no reason to believe it. And the more we repeat this, the more we begin to believe a new version.

That excessive self-criticism does not speak the truth. That it is distorted. And that there is no reason to believe it.

This is an emotional drama. And we will not always succeed in doing this in real time.

But the more we practice this, especially in calmer moments, we will begin to recognize that the negative, heavy, convincing messages are not truth. They are lies. And if they are not expressed in a gentle, balanced, constructive way, they are incorrect information.

And incorrect information, we reject. We do not adopt it. And this is already the beginning of a very deep change.

Questions for Self-Reflection (it is recommended to answer in writing):

1. What immediate emotional reactions arise in you in response to the word “lie”? How do you feel about the atmosphere of this word?
2. Are you willing to consider the possibility that you are, in fact, lying to yourself through excessive self-criticism, quite often?
3. If excessive self-criticism is, for the most part, false, what is the truth that is not being said in its place?
4. How do you feel when you discover that someone is lying to you? And how does this connect to the fact that you also do this to yourself, without noticing?
5. Are you willing to forgive yourself, even a little, for allowing your excessive self-criticism to lie and even convince you with its lies?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about regarding what you have read in this chapter? Experiences? Insights? Questions? Feelings?

Chapter 7: Transform the Obsession

Chapter 7 opens part Three. Part Three enriches our tools for dealing with excessive self-criticism. The first part focused mainly on awareness. This is a large area, and we have a long way to go in learning to identify the nuances, the aspects, the forms, and the expressions of excessive self-criticism. This is an art in itself.

The second part also deals with awareness, but it already serves as preparation for action. It brings the message, or the declaration, that strengthens awareness: not only does excessive self-criticism exist, is exaggerated, limiting, and constricting, but it can also be reduced. These two things must come together. The recognition of the problem and the recognition of the ability to deal with it and reduce it.

Part Three begins to provide us with tools. To enrich us with tools, because there is much to do. A great deal to do. And there is also a great deal of enjoyment and satisfaction in this, along with a strengthening of self-confidence in the knowledge that I can do something about it, and that there are results, and that there are changes.

Chapter Seven asks a question: are we obsessive about what is familiar and routine in our lives?

It opens Part Three, which brings tools related to stepping out of routine, to change, and to initiative, as a way to challenge excessive self-criticism. Excessive self-criticism keeps us in the same place. Sometimes this is good. Routine has value. It strengthens, it stabilizes, it provides a framework.

But when routine becomes too closed, when it becomes too rigid, it begins to harm us.

Because part of human nature, healthy nature, and also the nature around us, is to change. It is part of what exists. It is part of what is. It is part of the natural flow of life.

And when we hold too tightly to what exists, preserving it out of fear of change, fear of uncertainty, fear of mistakes, fear of things we do not know, we begin to harm ourselves. And this only intensifies over time.

And so the central question here is: to what extent are we obsessive about what is familiar and routine in our lives?

Every person occasionally experiences obsessive periods. Thoughts that run again and again, with pressure and anxiety around a certain issue. And within this, there is always a great deal of excessive self-criticism, which intensifies the pressure, increases it, and does not allow us to see things in proportion.

And so we want to ask ourselves:

- To what extent are we obsessive, and to what extent are we critical, within what is familiar and routine in our lives?

- To what extent do we insist on maintaining routine, maintaining habits, maintaining certain patterns of behavior within the family, within work, within ourselves?
- To what extent do we invest excessive energy in preserving what exists, in protecting what is familiar and routine?

And if we expand this even further, it is also related to what we perceive as “normal.” On a social level, we want to belong to the “normal herd.” And so we are constantly, often unconsciously, asking ourselves: what do I need to do in order to remain within that herd?

It is important to clarify: maintaining routine is not necessarily something wrong. Routine can be a good thing. Being familiar, being normal, these are things that have significant value in the right context. But when we become obsessive about them, when they become too important, it is already a sign of fear.

We are afraid of ourselves. We are afraid of our natural creative impulse, which wants to break through existing boundaries, which wants to remind us that we are constantly creating for ourselves a kind of cell, a kind of prison, without noticing.

We tell ourselves stories that we like our lives, that we have freedom, that everything is fine. But within us there is an impulse that says: no. This is not enough for me. I want to break through. I want to change. I want to see other things. I want to taste. I want to challenge the places where I am stuck. I want something different.

- It is an impulse.
- It is a healthy impulse.
- It is a creative impulse.
- It is an impulse of life.

And sometimes we do not have the strength for it. It can be annoying, because it creates restlessness, it creates discomfort. And if we interpret it incorrectly, it can even generate excessive self-criticism about the fact that we are not changing, about the fact that we are stuck. In other words, even there, we can activate criticism.

And at the same time, we continue to preserve what exists, and even complain about the fact that we are not changing.

There is a way out of this situation. We will go deeper into this in the following chapters, but already here it is important to say: stepping out of routine, change, and initiative undermine excessive self-criticism.

It will not help to give excuses for why this is not the time to change. It will not help to complain about the fact that we are not changing. All of these excuses, all of these complaints, all of this overthinking, ultimately strengthen excessive self-criticism. They fuel the obsession with what is familiar and routine.

And not only within us. We also want others to remain familiar and predictable. We are even anxious about the possibility that they might change. And all of this only strengthens excessive self-criticism and gives it more power.

Because that is its purpose. To reduce the expression of our creative impulses. To reduce the expression of our authentic part. And the authentic part is creative. It changes. It updates. It surprises. It is spontaneous. This is how authenticity functions. Each person in their own unique way.

And so we want to ask ourselves, and to find answers: to what extent am I obsessive, to what extent am I investing excessive energy in what is familiar and routine?

And again, this is not a bad thing. We need stability. We need familiar and routine elements. They are foundations. We rely on them. They give us structure, meaning, a sense of ground.

We do not want to be in constant change. It is not healthy. It is not sustainable. We want to be in the right measure of openness and willingness for change, when our inner impulse guides us toward it.

And this impulse is wise. And when we listen to it, and dare to follow it, something interesting happens: excessive self-criticism begins to diminish, almost like magic.

But when we do not listen to it, when we do not allow ourselves to move, it grows stronger. And then we find ourselves investing more and more thoughts and doubts: why did I not do it, why will I do it, maybe I am like this and maybe I am like that, I must maintain this, why am I maintaining this. All of this mental activity only fuels excessive self-criticism.

So at a certain point, we need to step out of routine. We need to initiate changes, even small ones. We need to take our natural ability to initiate and move, and use it to deal with excessive self-criticism. This is how it happens.

And so, the first step is to identify: to identify to what extent we are obsessive about what is familiar and routine. Obsession is energy. It is energy dedicated to preservation, to protection, to non-movement.

But here there is something very beautiful: that same energy can be used to step out of routine, for change, for initiative, for self-healing. The same energy. And this is something remarkable.

And so it is possible to help obsessive people. There is no need to eliminate their energy. One only needs to shift its direction. From the obsessive, preserving, closed place, to a creative, open, initiating, changing place. And when that happens, suddenly there is no room for obsession. There is no room for excessive criticism.

And so the invitation here is to examine ourselves. To examine our obsession with what is familiar and routine. And to ask small questions.

Am I willing to move something there? To move it a little? To surprise myself? To step out of the familiar, repetitive direction? To play with what exists in a new way?

It is part of our role, from time to time, to challenge what exists. To show ourselves that routine and familiarity are important to us, but not to that extent. Because there are other things that are important in our lives. And I am willing to begin to give them energy.

And when the energy of obsession begins to find new “obsessive” channels of activity, channels whose purpose is change, renewal, challenging the existing, play, and exploring different paths than the usual ones, then excessive self-criticism retreats, and in its place arises a new excitement that can provide energy for continuing the journey of reducing excessive self-criticism.

Questions for Self-Reflection (it is recommended to answer in writing):

1. What are the things that are most important to you in your routine?
2. Which things could you be more flexible about in terms of the need to maintain them within your routine?
3. What happens to you when your routine is disrupted by something unexpected?
4. In what way can you slightly challenge your routine and introduce more adventure and surprise into it?
5. Can you recall a situation in which your routine was significantly disrupted and it ultimately turned out for the better?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about regarding what you have read in this chapter? Experiences? Insights? Questions? Feelings?

Chapter 8: Change

Chapter Eight continues Part Three, which focuses on tools for reducing excessive self-criticism. And there is a very interesting point here. At times, when things are done correctly, this process can be experienced as a kind of miracle, as a kind of wonder.

It is not supposed to be a miracle or a wonder if we understand in advance that this is how things work. And yet, the experience is sometimes that of a miracle. And Chapter Eight deals with this.

It deals with the way in which we actually generate this “miracle,” and perhaps also with the fact that we are not always aware that we have the ability to generate such miracles. Because very often, the miracle begins exactly at the point where we reduce excessive self-criticism.

In a certain sense, excessive self-criticism hides from us our ability to create realities, to create meaningful changes. And ultimately, these are the things we experience as miracles.

When a person is free, even partially, from excessive self-criticism, their creative forces, their flexibility, their spontaneity, their originality, their boldness, all of these take a leap.

And what is this leap, really? It is not a leap to a new place. It is a return home, a return to our natural ability, an ability that is not blocked, an ability that is free to act.

But because we have become accustomed to living with blockage, when it opens, it feels like a miracle.

Chapter Eight brings with it a central understanding: change is a way of life. A way of life that does not allow excessive self-criticism much room to operate.

Many times, we are happy when change comes our way, when an opportunity for change arises. Sometimes we are even excited by it. But at the same time, not infrequently, we are also afraid of it. It can be stressful; it can be confusing.

We long for change, but we do not always take the actions required to create it. And this is where our task comes in.

When the goal is to reduce excessive self-criticism, change becomes a central tool. And it connects to other aspects of inner leadership. The less we are in excessive self-criticism, the more we are in contact with our intuition, the more we can develop compassion toward ourselves.

Because there is a very close connection between excessive self-criticism and judgment in general. And the more we reduce criticism, the more compassion expands.

And change does not have to be complex. We can see excessive self-criticism as a pressing force, like invisible clamps that keep directing us along the same path, the same route, without even considering the possibility of change.

And sometimes we even criticize others for not changing, without noticing how difficult it is for us as well to be flexible, to surprise ourselves, and to offer ourselves new ways.

And here we have a task: to reduce excessive self-criticism through change. And from there, things begin to unfold, toward creativity, toward emotional transformation, toward the ability to deal with complex situations. All of these depend, to a large extent, on reducing excessive self-criticism.

And it can be reduced, almost like a miracle, if we allow ourselves to generate more change, to turn change into a routine. Two things that seem not to speak to each other: change and routine. And yet, here we can choose.

To choose to initiate change as a conscious person, as a responsible person, as a person who wants to grow. We declare this, we go to courses, to workshops, we watch content, we invest. We want to heal, to grow, to change.

So here is a simple message: whoever wants to change must practice changing. And sometimes this is one of the simplest and most enjoyable things there is.

The amount of change a person can create in any given moment is far greater than they can grasp. The number of options available to a person at any given moment is vast. At every moment, a person is at a crossroads, they simply do not always notice it.

Because they are enslaved to routine, and the routine is enslaved to excessive self-criticism. But in reality, a person moves from one crossroads to another, and at each crossroads, there are options.

Some of the options are more courageous, connected to passion, capable of changing a life. And others are not really options, but simply the automatic continuation of the same path, without change, without awareness, without boldness.

And this is exactly where a person can choose. To choose to practice, to practice increasing the moments of change in their life. And this can take countless forms, small changes, small choices, slightly different actions.

And why is this so significant?

Because if excessive self-criticism is like a force that holds us in a straight line, and we cooperate with it without noticing, then the moment we step out of that line, the moment we change, excessive self-criticism cannot operate in the same way.

And the more we add change, and more change, and more spontaneity, it becomes tired. And then we receive moments of freedom, moments of natural creativity, moments of connection, moments of clarity, moments of inspiration.

And all of this begins with something simple: agreeing to play with reality, doing things a little differently. It does not have to be a big change, it does not have to be dramatic, it is simply practice, to choose differently, to change direction, to train this muscle, to turn toward paths we usually avoid. The possibilities here are endless.

But it is important to understand something deeper: excessive self-criticism pulls us to walk in a straight line, reducing excessive self-criticism allows us to walk in curves, even without knowing exactly where we will arrive, or when we will arrive, or what will happen.

And this is exactly where the process begins. Because it is easy to say that the result is less important than the process, but here we truly enter the process. And what is the process? A continuous sequence of changes.

And within that sequence, the person begins to free themselves from their excessive self-criticism. And within the changes, it matters less what the outcome will be, because within the process itself, they begin to receive what they were truly seeking: freedom, freedom from criticism, inner connection, boldness, creativity, passion.

This is the true result.

And therefore, in order to reach it, we need to reduce excessive self-criticism. And in order to reduce excessive self-criticism, we practice change.

And we hold on to a simple principle: change is a way of life that does not allow excessive self-criticism much room to operate. Every time I add change, I move it, I distance it.

And when this becomes a way of life, reducing excessive self-criticism also becomes a way of life. We get used to it.

There are people who practice this in different ways. For example, free writing in the morning, without knowing what they will write, simply allowing something new to emerge. There are people who change small habits: relationships, daily actions, ways of thinking. The possibilities are endless, because at every moment we are at a crossroads.

But if we do not use that crossroads, if we do not listen to our passion, if we do not allow ourselves to choose differently, excessive self-criticism will continue to manage our lives.

And so, from this moment on, we practice. Change and more change, even for the sake of play, even for the sake of the experience, even just to train the muscle. Because the moment there is change, something shifts.

And the criticism becomes confused, becomes tired, and gives us breathing space.

And from that breathing space, we continue, another change and another change, until we connect to a quiet, confident, creative inner voice, a voice that was always there, but was hidden, hidden by the noise, the noise of excessive self-criticism.

And now, as the noise decreases, we begin to hear.

And it can be very pleasant, at a certain moment, to hear less inner criticism and instead to hear passion, enthusiasm, curiosity, pleasure, and many other experiential gifts that come with the reduction of excessive self-criticism.

It is worth it, is it not?

Questions for Self-Reflection (it is recommended to answer in writing):

1. What are the things you like to change in your life frequently?
2. What are the things you like to change in your life only rarely?
3. What change do you wish for yourself but currently feel unable to bring about?
4. What change would make you truly realize that your control over your life is less than you thought?
5. If you had the means and the conditions, what unusual and unconventional change would you initiate right now?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about regarding what you have read in this chapter? Experiences? Insights? Questions? Feelings?

Chapter 9: Initiative Undermines Excessive Self-Criticism

Chapter Nine is the third of the three chapters of Part Three. Part Three deals with stepping out of routine, with change, and with initiative, as a way to undermine excessive self-criticism. This is our goal. This is our goal: to undermine excessive self-criticism, to undermine its leadership, to destabilize it, to disrupt the balance it holds, to weaken the control it has within us.

It is useful to use such expressions when we engage with our excessive self-criticism, and even more exaggerated expressions, because usually we do not sufficiently grasp, on an experiential level, the meaning, the place, and the cost of excessive self-criticism.

And so Chapter Nine brings with it a central idea: initiative, even when it does not succeed, strengthens the ability to reduce excessive self-criticism. I will say this again: initiative, even when it does not succeed, and perhaps especially when it does not succeed, when it is repeated, strengthens our ability to reduce excessive self-criticism.

I would like to begin with an energetic image. Excessive self-criticism is like a heavy sack, like a kind of covering that wraps itself around our body. It weighs us down, it constricts us, it almost does not allow us to move. And even when we do move, every movement becomes complicated, complex, filled with thoughts.

We begin to think too much. If we plan more, maybe it will be more successful. If we think more, maybe it will turn out better. And we enter into more and more mental involvement around the question of whether to act, how to act, when to act, how exactly to act, whether it will turn out well. All of this stems from the limitation that this covering creates around us.

And here a very important point comes in. When we practice “initiating for the sake of initiating,” initiating in order to get used to the act itself, initiating in order to train ourselves to be people who initiate, something begins to change.

This has nothing to do with whether we are employees, self-employed, or entrepreneurs. It is not about a role. It is an attitude. A spirit. A position that every person can and should adopt.

I initiate. I take the first step. I decide. I set out on the path even before I understand all the details. I am the initiator. I am in charge. This is mine. And within this approach, I am also prepared in advance for the fact that some of my initiatives will not succeed.

Later, we will speak about the importance of mistakes. But even before I allow myself to make mistakes, very often I do not initiate, because I am afraid of making a mistake.

And what happens then? Out of fear of making mistakes, I do not make mistakes. And because I do not make mistakes, I do not act. And I remain frustrated, with dreams, with desires, with things I would like to do. So what, in fact, is the “mistake” here?

And then I begin to tell myself stories. I do not have time. I do not have money. I do not have the right conditions. I do not have ideas. I do not have support. But the truth is different.

The truth is that I have become accustomed to being afraid to move. I have become accustomed to thinking that I should act only if I know that it will succeed. And in this way, I have dramatically reduced my creativity. And within this space, I have enough intellectual ability to invent excuses for myself, to give myself explanations that sound logical, instead of telling myself the real thing: that I have become accustomed not to initiate. And who is the quiet force behind this habit? My excessive self-criticism.

And here we arrive at the central point of the chapter. Since our main goal here is to reduce excessive self-criticism, I invite you to practice initiative. To practice initiative for the sole purpose of reducing excessive self-criticism. To practice initiative in order to free yourself from the limitations that have been built over years by excessive self-criticism that is too active and too influential.

Of course, along the way, many additional benefits will come from practicing initiative. But this is the goal: to disrupt the ability of excessive self-criticism to block movement, change, initiative, and renewed action.

There are so many things that are prevented from a person simply because they are “stingy with initiative.” And it is possible to initiate very small things, very simple things. It is almost always much simpler than it appears when we are under the confusing messages of excessive self-criticism.

What does excessive self-criticism actually do? It turns us into victims by causing us to wait for others to act. Maybe someone else will take the risk. Maybe someone else will make the mistake. Maybe someone else will lead. How many times do we wait for some kind of “hero,” some kind of “leader,” to do what we are afraid to initiate?

And this is how it works: the less we initiate, the more our energetic state contracts. And the more it contracts, the less we initiate. And when we initiate less, we become more exposed to the influence of excessive self-criticism.

And so it is important to stop and examine: even if I perceive myself as a person who does not initiate much, is that really the case? Where and how can I, right now, initiate? Where have I exaggerated my sense of inability to influence a certain situation through some initiative?

We want, therefore, to begin counting initiatives. Throughout the day. Throughout the week. Also small initiatives. Also those that supposedly did not succeed. Initiatives, as I

mentioned earlier, are actually a healing tool when it comes to reducing excessive self-criticism.

And in our language at this stage, the initiative itself is the success. We collect initiatives. We collect precedents. Because the psyche learns itself through precedents. The more I experience, act, and do again and again, the psyche reaches a conclusion: this is who I am.

If I train in initiating, very quickly something within me begins to feel: I am a person who initiates. And then I initiate more. And when I initiate, when I connect the inner world to the outer world, simply get up and act, excessive self-criticism cannot stop me. I do not give it space.

This is a mental muscle. A muscle that, when active, reduces excessive self-criticism. This is a rule of thumb: if we want to live with less excessive self-criticism, we need to initiate more. To get up faster and do something. To reduce waiting time. To reduce procrastination.

And all of this only for the sake of practicing initiative. Only for the sake of reducing excessive self-criticism. Not in order to “become an entrepreneur.” Not in order to “win.” Not in order to “get ahead of others.” But only for one thing: to gain more freedom from our excessive self-criticism. Only for that.

And this can become a kind of game. An exciting, liberating, expanding game. A person begins to discover how much energy they receive from each initiative. How accustomed they were to waiting for others to take the step.

So now we change roles. We stop waiting. We develop inner leadership. I determine my life. And in order to determine my life, I must also demonstrate it in action, not only internally.

And when I prove to myself through action that I initiate, the power of excessive self-criticism begins to shrink. It cannot stand in front of a person who says: I initiate. I do not have time to hesitate. I do not have time to deliberate. I do not have to know that it will succeed.

And again I emphasize: very often, the initiative itself is the success.

And so I invite you: each one of us can improve our ability to initiate. Especially in the more stuck areas. To initiate more. To make more mistakes. To initiate again and again.

And at a certain point, it begins to flow. Even if sometimes it turns out to be a “mistake.” That is fine. It is part of the process of change. The “mistakes” themselves also become, over time, tools that we learn to use in order to reduce excessive self-criticism.

We will return to the subject of mistakes later. For now, we will focus on changing one central and chronic mistake: the mistake of lack of initiative in areas where we tend to get stuck, in places where we have become accustomed to giving too much power to others or to circumstances.

Questions for Self-Reflection (it is recommended to answer in writing):

1. How do you currently assess the level of activity of your “initiative muscle” in your life?
2. Give an example of something you initiated in the past, even though others were not particularly enthusiastic or encouraging about it.
3. What emotional changes do you experience when you are at a higher level of initiative than usual?
4. Are you willing to take a risk and initiate something connected to your passion, even if it may not succeed this time? How will you help yourself cope with the lack of success?
5. What initiative do you fantasize about doing sometime in the future? And perhaps you can bring that future a little closer to you, in some way?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about regarding what you have read in this chapter? Experiences? Insights? Questions? Feelings?

Chapter 10: The Big Mistake of "No Mistakes"

Chapter 10 opens Part Four. This is one of my favorite parts, and it touches on one of the weaknesses and at the same time one of the opportunities of what we might call modern humanity. It is a place where we are weak as a culture, as supposedly enlightened people, and at that very same place lies the opportunity to rise above ourselves and become a much more successful version of who we are.

This is also where the great importance of mistakes comes into focus.

The message of this chapter is clear and direct: those who do not make enough mistakes live their lives in quite a big mistake. This is a fundamental statement. There is a fundamental misunderstanding here, one that does not even align with basic logic.

In other words, it is not difficult to demonstrate, even in a very logical way, that if a person is overly cautious about mistakes, they very quickly reach a state in which they make many more mistakes. Even during performance, when a person is too preoccupied with avoiding mistakes, their performance suffers and becomes much less effective. And also in situations where a person must make a decision, must create change, and if they do not make the decision or take the step, life will do it for them, and not in a pleasant way. That is a mistake.

And this is a mistake we want less of. And rightly so. We want more of the other kinds of mistakes, the mistakes that are not necessarily mistakes. Mistakes that, in the immediate moment, may appear to be errors, but in the long term turn out to have led to opportunity, to the opening of doors that were not possible before.

We want more of the mistakes that come from a person initiating more, creating more, trying more, responding more, improvising more, moving more, flowing more, participating more, laughing more, daring more. And within this entire repertoire, from time to time, things will not happen exactly as I wanted, and then I will think that this is a "mistake." But if I have already made progress in reducing excessive self-criticism, I may remind myself of the phrase "good mistakes," and that I should accumulate good mistakes.

A person who engages in creative activity knows that there are things that, if you do not do them several times, and each time make a few errors, you will not reach a good level of performance. You will not get there. It is not possible. Without mistakes, we remain small. We do not grow.

And here it is worth looking at the relationship we have cultivated with mistakes. What were we taught from a young age? That we must give the correct answer, that we must receive the correct grade, that we must repeat what the teacher says, that we must be "okay," be "normal," do things correctly, do things like everyone else, do what is expected, and not make mistakes.

Within a framework that sanctifies logical thinking, and alongside technological developments that are supposedly very precise, we can see many professions that rely on reducing intuition, reducing creativity, reducing spirituality, and even reducing human reflex, supposedly in order to reduce mistakes.

And what is the price of this? A much greater mistake. The breakdown of humanity. The breakdown of human wisdom, which ultimately leads to far more severe mistakes.

Because when an atmosphere of fear is created, along with excessive checking of what I do or do not do, whether I made a mistake or not, together with processes of “learning from mistakes” that go too far, with the constant creation of more and more rules to prevent mistakes, gradually human spontaneity is reduced.

Sometimes we will conduct analysis and reflection and not realize that part of the reason something failed is that we conducted too much analysis. We reach a point where, in a certain field of activity, we are afraid to make mistakes. We no longer listen to our inner wisdom. It is not present. It is not considered.

This can be a major mistake. A heavy price.

Of course, there are different kinds of mistakes. There are mistakes we truly do not want, and there are mistakes that are beyond our control. But here I am speaking about an approach. An orientation. An orientation that exaggerates the fear of mistakes to such an extent that the person paralyzes themselves. To the point where they are afraid to give answers, afraid to make assessments, afraid to raise hypotheses, afraid to try, afraid to initiate, afraid to take important steps in their life.

Because they sanctify the fear of mistakes. It becomes a kind of temple. A temple of fear, maintained consistently and systematically by excessive self-criticism.

A person who is governed by fear of mistakes is a person who suffers, and at times also a person who is dangerous to themselves and to others. They live according to a code of fear. And where a person lives according to a code of fear, the fear manages them. They struggle to connect to compassion, to hope, to optimism, to creativity, to spontaneity, to initiative, to the ability to improvise in response to what life presents to them.

When we are less afraid of mistakes, we listen to our intuition. And then we become more precise. We become more aligned with what our psyche needs. We spend fewer resources on defense. We move forward, we initiate, we act, we learn as we go, we adjust through experience, and we understand our path more clearly.

But when we exaggerate the importance of mistakes, we do not adjust as we go. We simply stop everything and try to do everything possible to avoid mistakes.

And then we forget what the right hemisphere of the brain knows: that an important part of doing, of development, of growth, of correction, and of healing, passes through paths

that at first seem unsuitable. It cannot happen otherwise. From time to time, we must step out of the familiar path in order to discover a more accurate, broader, and more suitable path for us, because the path is constantly changing, evolving, and developing along with us.

If we go on a long journey and carefully map out in advance every path and every turn, what will that journey truly look like? And if we deviate from the plan, does that mean we have ruined the journey? Or perhaps it is *קוֹרָא* through deviation that we encounter something no one else has seen, something we were not supposed to see, something that is important to us but we did not know it existed, and we discovered it only because we deviated, only because we were open to making a “mistake.”

And here we must be careful. Excessive self-criticism creates a narrative of logic that explains why it is so important not to make mistakes, because otherwise “terrible things” will happen. And this narrative accumulates, and accumulates, and accumulates, until we find ourselves living inside a film of fear, with few mistakes but also very little freedom, very little joy, very little pleasure, and very little fulfillment.

Excessive self-criticism leads to the creation of too much hesitation, to the creation of barriers that are too strong against our inner voice, against our intuition, against our creativity, against the beautiful things in life, against love, against passion, against pleasure. Everything gets lost there, often without us even noticing.

So I return again to the sentence with which we opened: those who do not make enough mistakes live their lives in a big mistake.

And as I become more tolerant, lighter, and even more humorous toward my small mistakes along the way, I begin to learn their value. I even begin to look for them. I initiate more. I am already prepared for the fact that something will not happen exactly as I planned.

And then I ask: what do I “gain” from this mistake?

And the answer is: when this is my approach, I gain a reduction of excessive self-criticism. I gain access to my creativity. I gain a connection to the taste and meaning of life. To all those good things that are lost when I sanctify the fear of mistakes.

And this, as I said, is one of the places where the modern world is weak: excessive self-criticism that is also excessive in its fear of mistakes.

But in that very place where we identify this ingrained habit, to fear mistakes in an exaggerated way, there also lies an opportunity. An opportunity for freedom. An opportunity for release. In the place where we create for ourselves a more flexible relationship and orientation toward this concept that we have constructed in a distorted way and called “mistake.”

Questions for Self-Reflection (it is recommended to answer in writing):

1. Give an example of a “mistake” that changed your life for the better. How does it feel to revisit that “mistake”?
2. In which areas of your life are you too cautious about making mistakes, and therefore avoid acting more freely?
3. What “good mistakes” do you wish for yourself to make in the coming months?
4. Are you able to forgive yourself when you make a mistake? Do you have a specific example?
5. Now that you are here, is there a “mistake” you are willing to take a risk on and experiment with, one that in the past you were less willing to approach?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about regarding what you have read in this chapter? Experiences? Insights? Questions? Feelings?

Chapter 11: Permission to Make Mistakes

Chapter 11 is a particularly interesting chapter. Not because the other chapters are less interesting or less meaningful, but because of a certain energetic feeling that arises here. I work in such a way that I write the structure in advance, the chapter headings, the six parts, three chapters in each part, and then I let it rest. When I come to create the chapter, I look at the title, feel it, and from there begin in an open and intuitive way. And from that, messages emerge that are sometimes very essential to this process.

There is something here that is important to remind again and again. Not only to you, but also to myself. And the act of reminding lies at the very heart of this chapter.

We are in Part Four, the great importance of mistakes. There is much work to be done around this subject, around our relationship with the fear of doing something wrong. This fear accompanies us throughout most of the day, whether consciously or unconsciously. It sits there like a heavy weight, even when we are not aware of it.

We are here to increase awareness of it and to deal with it. But with the understanding that it does not disappear completely. It is there, in the air, in the atmosphere. And we can improve, we can free ourselves, we can move forward, but it is still part of the space in which we operate.

The title of the chapter is clear: permission to make mistakes weakens criticism and grants broad freedom of action.

Permission. I allow myself to make mistakes. I say to myself again and again: I allow you. It is okay. It is acceptable. You have permission to make mistakes. I love you, even when you make mistakes.

This is not obvious. It is not obvious that we have an ongoing task of weakening excessive self-criticism. And the central theme of this chapter is the recognition that nothing here is obvious.

In some way, we would like to fantasize about a state in which there is no excessive self-criticism at all. Why should it be there? Why is reality like this? Why are life conditions like this? Why do we make things harder for ourselves?

It is difficult to accept that this is how we are built. This is how we are. And we tend to escape from this fact. We do not always notice that our creativity is constantly being held back, hesitating, fearing doing something incorrectly. And this fear itself is anti-creative. And it is present.

The question is how willing we are to recognize this. To recognize that we are responsible for it. Even if we have received a very strong cultural influence, ultimately, as adults, it is already ours. It is our responsibility. We are the wardens of ourselves.

But this is not a place from which we want to develop guilt, regret, or pessimism. On the contrary. We want to learn the rules of the game. To understand that within these rules, we have room for action. We have room for action against the parts within us that are nourished by fear, that try to feed our reality with fear, and to block our free expression.

They are there. And sometimes we feel like not seeing them. To ignore them. To continue as usual. To say to ourselves: I am not “that extreme.”

And indeed, we are not that extreme. We are here, working with this book, out of initiative, out of inner leadership, out of self-awareness, out of desire, aspiration, and action toward change, growth, and healing.

But alongside this, there is also a part within us that denies, that escapes from this truth, from this dynamic, from the fact that there is a force within us that restrains us and is not truly necessary.

And our role is to weaken it. To weaken it through a kind of manipulation, but a manipulation that comes from love.

For example, not only to allow myself to make mistakes, but even to initiate mistakes. How much freedom can a person receive when mistakes become part of their strategy?

We can say that there are excellent mistakes, average mistakes, and unwanted mistakes. And the unwanted mistakes are a relatively small percentage. But we tend to relate to all mistakes as if most of them are undesirable.

And this is not correct.

There is a wide variety of excellent mistakes: mistakes of experimentation, of experience, of testing, of playing with life. At every moment, there is a range of mistakes we can allow ourselves, whether by chance or by initiative.

I am not speaking about mistakes that involve real danger. No. There is a vast range of potential mistakes whose cost is not high. Perhaps some discomfort, perhaps a delay, perhaps the need to correct.

But the gain is enormous.

The gain of freedom from excessive self-criticism is enormous. It contains within it almost all of a person's dreams. Because dreams know how to fulfill themselves. Imagination knows how to become reality. This is an energy that wants to manifest. It contains passion. It contains knowledge. It contains power. Almost everything we need to do is simply to allow. To allow through actions, through initiatives, through creation.

It is not complicated. It is a game. It is the simpler part of life. When the walls of criticism are removed, it happens.

And therefore, removing the walls of criticism becomes a central task. A primary task. Because everything we speak about, change, transformation, healing, self-realization, all of these are blocked by excessive self-criticism. If we dismantle this wall, things will begin to flow on their own.

And for that, we want to become masters of permission to make mistakes. To take “incorrect” paths and explore them. To say the wrong word sometimes and see what happens. Not with the intention to harm, and if needed, to apologize.

To choose a “wrong” color and paint with it. To write a wrong word and play with it. That is where the game is. That is where self-realization is.

Permission to make mistakes weakens criticism and grants broad freedom of action. It is a strategy. And sometimes it is so simple to choose it.

We do not have to go on big journeys. We can, here and now, ask:

- How many good mistakes did I make today?
- How many good mistakes do I intend to try tomorrow?
- How much am I able to forgive myself, and even laugh at my mistakes?

The freedom found there is immense. Infinite. And it continues to grow.

And this connects to what we said at the beginning of the chapter. We sometimes forget that we have a tendency to be the wardens of ourselves.

And why does this happen?

Because we are not active enough in playing, in allowing ourselves to make mistakes, in weakening criticism.

And weakening criticism is a role. It begins with recognition. With recognizing that within this way of living, excessive self-criticism is created.

It exists. Not to deny it.

And from here, to surrender. To surrender to every possible form of manipulation that weakens it.

And this is what we are learning here. To play with limitations. To move around them. To pass through them. To discover a new world.

And then, there as well, to encounter new limitations, new criticism, and again to do the work. More mistakes. More initiatives.

And after a period of time, to look back and discover how much growth has taken place.

Questions for Self-Reflection (it is recommended to answer in writing):

1. What kinds of “silly things” do you sometimes allow yourself to do?
2. Can you now give yourself an “official” permission to increase your daily mistakes by 10–20 percent?
3. What would happen if you had the flexibility to allow 10–20 percent more mistakes each day?
4. Do you know someone who made a mistake that initially seemed very unfortunate, but later became the source of an important change?
5. Can you see how tolerance toward your mistakes might reduce the influence of your excessive self-criticism? How might this affect your life in the future?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about regarding what you have read in this chapter? Experiences? Insights? Questions? Feelings?

Chapter 12: The Concept of “Mistake” Is Flawed

For quite a few people, the learning process involved in reducing excessive self-criticism can be difficult, and at times very challenging. One could even say that, to a certain extent, this subject is experienced as “negative,” because it deals with our problems with ourselves, with something we tend not to notice.

And it is understandable why.

Because it is not pleasant to encounter these parts within us.

We tend not to notice that there are problematic parts within us. We often prefer to deny it. This is almost built into the culture at present, at least until we learn to change it.

It is a deeply ingrained habit from an early age. There is a part within us that attacks us. There is a part within us that is excessive, that very often is not truly necessary, and whose activity is connected to the reduction of our freedom and the reduction of our familiarity with ourselves.

It can be a disturbance. It creates background noise. And it can be especially frustrating for a person who feels they have already progressed in self-awareness, found some inner peace, and now wants more tools in order to feel better, to deepen harmony, to expand and to heal.

And so it is less appealing to deal with this part, a part that contains expressions of attack, expressions of a kind of inner violence. We naturally prefer not to look at it.

And here, another kind of energy enters the space. A masculine energy entering a space that is primarily feminine, a space of inner leadership. This is one of the problems. When inner control or inner criticism is not properly balanced, when it is not properly regulated, it does not serve us. There is an entry of masculine energy in an unregulated intensity into a feminine space.

And this is also what sometimes creates resistance to even studying this subject, to opening it, to recognizing it.

It is important to say: self-criticism in itself is important. We cannot exist without it. But it is meant to be in the right dosage, in the right place, and with the right influence. And then it is beneficial.

If my self-criticism reminds me daily to take actions that support my well-being, reminds me of what matters to me, activates a kind of internal regulation in places where I tend to avoid or become lazy, then it serves me.

If it sets boundaries that help me not lose myself, not disconnect from myself, if it reminds me of goals and targets that I have grown tired of and started to abandon without real reason, then it is helpful.

When it does not become self-punishment, when it does not generate guilt but instead cultivates responsibility, when it creates inner order, supports routine, focuses intention, and helps guide action toward growth and healing, then it is a necessary form of self-criticism.

But this is not what we are speaking about here. We are speaking about criticism that comes from the roots of fear. Fear exists in the world. Darkness exists in the world. And also within us. And this is not easy.

It is not easy to enter these inner dark areas. And it will continue not to be easy. But we enter this space because it influences us, penetrates us, and significantly interferes with the way we lead our lives.

And part of choosing to cultivate a new and more effective form of inner leadership is to set boundaries. To protect ourselves within this sacred inner space from excessive self-criticism, which tends to enter, among other reasons, because we allowed it to, because we did not recognize it, because we avoided dealing with it.

And now, after this important introduction, we arrive at the heart of the chapter.

This chapter is the third in the topic of the great importance of mistakes. And it brings a deep idea: perhaps the concept of “mistake” is fundamentally flawed, and was created out of excessive self-criticism.

In other words, from the very beginning, we constructed within ourselves a flawed concept.

And therefore, very often, the right thing to do is to reconsider this concept. Even to turn it into something lighter, more humorous, more playful.

In order to develop creatively, I must do things that appear to me as mistakes. Otherwise, I do not discover new landscapes. Otherwise, I do not open doors. Otherwise, I do not reach the places I need to reach in order to expand. If everything appears to me as a mistake, and I avoid mistakes, I simply do not move.

And so we want to return to the beginning. To re-examine our standards. Our values. And to discover that under the influence of excessive self-criticism, personal, familial, social, systemic, and educational, a highly exaggerated and fundamentally flawed concept was formed, which we call “mistake.”

And this concept itself is, in many ways, a mistake.

Because if the higher values of human life are growth, development, expansion, healing, abundance, joy, fulfillment, harmony, relationships, and health, then the excessive use of the concept of “mistake” works against these values.

Simply so. It works against us.

And therefore, perhaps the first step is to redefine our priorities. To place inner leadership, love, compassion, creativity, and growth at the center.

If we look at the world around us, we see that this is not always clear. Large parts of the world still operate out of survival, out of fear, out of dependency, out of a lack of listening to the inner voice, out of a lack of inner leadership, out of excessive self-criticism and a lack of compassion.

This is a problem. A significant problem that reflects the current stage of human development. But we are here to place priorities differently. Love, relationships, compassion, creativity, development, self-realization, healing, fulfillment, harmony, learning, expansion.

All of these depend on not living in an excessive fear of mistakes.

Such excessive fear is a survival state, as if we are in a jungle, where every small movement might bring danger. But we are not meant to live in such a consciousness. We are not here merely to survive.

And therefore, in order to reduce excessive self-criticism, there are many things we can do. But here I propose one clear step:

To redesign our relationship with the concept of “mistake.”

To smile at it.

To observe how we relate to the mistakes of others. Of friends, of children, of parents.

What is our first reaction?

Is it to become angry? To punish? To cancel? To stop?

Or can we pause and say: wait. A mistake is part of life. Sometimes a blessed part. Sometimes a critical part. How many important things in the world happened because of mistakes? Discoveries? Breakthroughs? Massive changes?

We cannot allow creativity to flow through us without mistakes. Because mistakes release us from excessive rational control. And when we release this excess of control, the inner voice becomes clearer.

And therefore, yes, it is worthwhile to make quite a few mistakes.

Not dangerous mistakes. But to allow more experience and exploration within a wide range of “mistakes” that we simply fear, hesitate around, and delay.

And so we are here to reshape this concept. To understand that, in many ways, it was constructed incorrectly. That it does not align with the higher values of the human being. That it stems from excessive self-criticism.

And we are here to reshape it.

To make it less frightening.

And to discover that it is, very often, a tool.

And even an opportunity.

Questions for Self-Reflection (it is recommended to answer in writing):

1. Think about the central “mistakes” in your life, go far back into your past. What happens when you wrap them in deep compassion?
2. What alternative words or expressions can you offer instead of the word “mistake”?
3. If we reach the conclusion that there is not really such a thing as a “mistake,” what would that do to our lives?
4. What currently scares you most about your future mistakes?
5. Can you wrap your upcoming “mistakes” with love, and even gratitude, as they lead you to places you currently cannot imagine reaching?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about regarding what you have read in this chapter? Experiences? Insights? Questions?

Chapter 13: True Freedom

People love to talk about freedom. Throughout history, people have spoken about freedom, demanded freedom, protested when it was taken from them. Revolutions, slogans, cries of freedom, freedom, freedom.

But a basic question arises here: why does a person have to struggle again and again for their freedom? Why is it not natural? Why is it not simple? Why is it not self-evident?

Why is a person not free?

We tend to explain this by saying that there are external forces that limit us, that there are interests of others to control, to take freedom, to dominate. But if we look more deeply, something here does not make sense. It is not reasonable that a large number of people would give up their freedom for a small minority.

We cannot always blame others. Something is happening here within us as well.

Why does a person not wake up in the morning and choose to be more free? Why do they keep telling themselves that there are constraints, that there are reasons, that there are things they must do, and therefore they cannot be free?

- At any given moment, here and now, who is supposed to grant me my freedom?
- Is it really dependent on the state, on laws, on frameworks?
- Do I even know what freedom is?
- Am I ready for freedom?
- Do I know how to grant myself freedom?

And here the story begins. And this is also why it often does not work on the social level. As long as we do not understand that within ourselves we are reducing our own freedom, we are not able to truly taste freedom.

It is true that every person deserves rights. Freedom of movement, freedom of choice. Of course. But freedom begins from within. Within us there is a warden. A guard. Who places us inside a small, restricted cell. Telling us again and again: forbidden. Not okay. Not right. And this is how we live.

And it seems to us that this is “normal.” That it is acceptable to live this way. With excessive self-criticism, with excessive self-punishment, with excessive self-judgment, with little self-love, with little self-compassion, with fear of creative freedom, with fear of free expression.

No. We do not truly understand what freedom is. And yet we go out to fight over the fact that someone has taken something from us. And that is true. It does happen. But it is easy to take freedom from someone who does not know how to generate freedom within

themselves. From someone who does not find freedom within themselves. From someone who does not understand where they themselves take away their own freedom.

And so we are learning here to reduce excessive self-criticism. We are learning, first of all, to see how we limit our own freedom. To open our eyes. Because this is happening all the time.

Our fears are the heaviest weights that prevent us from being free. People can allow themselves much more freedom, but they do not do it. They are afraid of change. Afraid of initiative. Afraid of reactions. Afraid of failure. Afraid of mistakes. Afraid of letting go of what they have. And so there is no freedom.

And who manages all of this? Excessive self-criticism. It is the true authority. And as long as we are not aware of it, do not face it, do not reduce it, we do not truly expand our freedom.

There is no freedom when there is excessive self-criticism. True freedom is connected to listening to the inner voice and implementing its guidance. And whoever wishes can deepen this in other places as well.

But already here it is clear: freedom is not a simple matter. Freedom is not self-evident. It is not lying on a beach and doing “whatever we want.” Because at some point the vacation ends. We need to act, to create, to engage with reality, with people.

And then the truth is revealed. I am not truly free. The external image, the feeling that I am free, does not hold over time.

Because to be truly free is to be able to connect to the inner voice. And this is not simple. Because the inner voice is wrapped in many layers: criticism, fears, hesitations, limiting beliefs, lack of self-trust, doubt in our intuition.

This is a journey. It is a practice. To learn to listen through the body, through deep sensations, through instincts. To remember. To train. Because these capacities were taken from us within the culture in which we live. And we cooperate with it. We cooperate with this mechanism that takes away our freedom.

And when we speak about freedom, we can see that within the word itself there is a hint: search. Search for your inner voice. Do not take it for granted. There are confusions around it, fears, inner distortions, lack of trust.

And we want to learn to practice it. To search for our intuition. To trust it. To try it. To experiment. To listen to the inner voice and to implement its guidance.

And this is already a much bigger step. It is not only to feel. It is not only to recognize the impulse. It is also the courage to act. The courage to move toward the unknown. The courage to take an unclear step.

And how much excessive self-criticism will appear there. How many warnings. How many objections. How many external voices that will say: No! Not advisable. It is dangerous. Do not do it. Better stay where you are...

The challenging task that appears here, the true task of freedom, is to listen to the inner voice beyond all this noise. Because excessive self-criticism is located exactly there, in the zone of listening.

And therefore courage is required. The courage to believe in the inner voice. The courage to practice implementing its guidance. To follow it. To walk into uncertainty. To initiate one thing, just because something inside told me.

“I do not know how, but I begin.”

And then excessive self-criticism will appear. And it will say: not advisable. This is not right. How do you know? You do not have a plan.

And perhaps it will indeed not succeed. And then it will say: see, I told you. Stop. Quit. What are you doing?

And we continue. We do not stop. We want to create freedom. And this freedom is work. We continue to walk in the direction of the inner impulse, despite the criticism.

And we say to it: “I heard you. And still, I continue. I do not believe you. You are exaggerating. You are disturbing me. You are closing me in. I am not willing for you to interfere anymore. I continue to move. Even if it is not clear. Even if it is frightening. Even if it is confusing. I want to explore. I do not want to give up after one attempt. I want to learn as I go.”

And we continue: “I want to understand what the inner voice truly asked of me. And I do not want to continue telling myself stories that diminish me. That tell me: leave it. It is a waste of time. Stay where you are. No. I continue. I am capable. It is not that complicated.”

There, true freedom is revealed. True freedom passes through fear. Through criticism. Through the conscious choice to say to the criticism:

“I heard you. You tried to stop me. Thank you. But this is not relevant now. I listen to my inner voice. I learn to trust it. I learn to clear it. And I begin to act. Through trial and error. On the path to its realization.”

This is how excessive self-criticism is reduced. And this is how the sense of freedom expands, along with the deep pleasure of expressing it in physical reality.

Questions for Self-Reflection (it is recommended to answer in writing):

1. What is something your inner voice is suggesting you change or do, but your excessive self-criticism does not allow?
2. Which ideas, thoughts, or inner sensations that arise within you are difficult for you to believe in or accept as valid or “serious”?
3. What happens when you place the concept of “freedom” in front of your excessive self-criticism?
4. What is something you most want to release right now from your life or within your life?
5. What kind of deep, emotional, or spiritual freedom do you feel you have not yet fully experienced, or not in the way you truly wish?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about regarding what you have read in this chapter? Experiences? Questions? Feelings?

Chapter 14: Claim your Freedom

Chapter 14 is the second chapter in Part Five, which states that there is no freedom when there is excessive self-criticism. This is a far-reaching statement, one that is worth internalizing, so that we do not become confused, so that we hold accurate and precise knowledge, so that we know where to focus, where it is worthwhile to invest our resources in order to gain more freedom, and where it is less worthwhile. Which struggles can truly yield results, can liberate us and others, and which struggles leave us in place, within a prison that we are not even aware of.

A prison of excessive self-criticism. A prison that also turns people into strangers to one another, because each person is locked within their own fears. It is not really possible to communicate this way, it is not possible to come close, it is not possible to create partnership, it is not possible to understand, it is not possible to truly know one another. Each person is inside their own inner drama, with that same inner “police officer” that does not allow them to be who they are.

And so I say: a person who wants freedom, a community that wants freedom, must place the reduction of excessive self-criticism very high on the list of priorities. Because the moment a person is released from excessive self-criticism, the number of things they can do, the amount of initiative, the amount of creativity, the number of surprises, the number of changes, becomes almost infinite. This is freedom. This is freedom.

And as long as this is not present, a person may be active, may be trying, but is still very limited. They are very subject to their fears and their internal restraints. And in the worst case, they are not even aware of it. They are caught in inner loops, because they are unable to see a broader picture. Excessive self-criticism builds wall around them.

And we want to dismantle these walls. We can. This is what we are doing here. And this is what Chapter 14 says: freedom from excessive self-criticism is perhaps the greatest freedom a person can ask for.

A person walks down the street and does not know that they are wrapped in their fears. They do not know that they have healthy creative impulses in every moment. They do not know that they are constantly moving from one crossroads in their life to another, where there is an opportunity for change, an opportunity for growth, an opportunity for healing, an opportunity for love, an opportunity for celebration.

They do not know this. Because excessive self-criticism works overtime to hide it from them, keeping them in place, in a closed state, like inside a box, so that they do not change, so that they do not dare, so that they do not step outside the frame, so that they do not surprise, so that they are not surprised, so that they are not real, so that they are not authentic.

And the authentic, for those who have not yet seen this clearly enough, is a changing space. The authentic does not remain as it is. The healthy, inner, creative, almost divine

part within a person is alive and dynamic, and it carries a constant desire for change, a constant desire for development.

It is always asking: what is next? What is the next thing? What is the next change? What is the next challenge? What is my next stage of development? What is my next creation?

And excessive self-criticism cannot tolerate this. It cannot tolerate a space that contains movement, change, discovery, and the questioning of existing patterns.

And therefore, the more we succeed in freeing ourselves from it, and the great wonder is that we can, a large part of this begins with simple awareness. Simply knowing. Becoming aware of the limitations we create for ourselves. Becoming aware of the prison we create within ourselves through excessive self-criticism. This recognition alone already accomplishes a significant part of the work.

And then, as we are doing here, we begin to respond. We initiate initiatives. We practice change. We “challenge” reality. We play with what exists. We destabilize excessive self-criticism. We do not allow it to lead us.

We strive for a better connection with our intuition. We take steps to realize our inner voice. We are in practice. We are learning not to believe the dramatic, final, and absolute statements of excessive self-criticism.

We say to it: “Excuse me, no. I am not buying this. This is exaggerated. This does not suit me. All these theories of ‘it is impossible,’ of ‘too early,’ of ‘too late,’ of ‘why not,’ of ‘this cannot be done’, No. It is possible. I will continue to try. I will find my way.” This is how we deal with our excessive self-criticism.

And ultimately, without even noticing, through quiet inner work, we are doing perhaps the most important work we can do for our freedom. We are addressing the pain that built the criticism. Because what stands behind the criticism? Fear. And those fears stem from pain.

And what is dangerous about true freedom? True freedom is being who I am. Meeting my authentic self. And that also means meeting my pain, my wounds, the parts I have locked away so I would not have to see them, because it hurts too much.

And so we invest a great deal of effort to avoid full freedom. To prevent our emotional space from opening too much. So that we do not see what still hurts, what grief has not been processed, what insult remains, what humiliation never received an answer. It is too painful.

So what does excessive self-criticism do? It closes the channels of expression. And in this way, I preserve those pains, untreated but also hidden. And seemingly, it is more comfortable.

I am less distressed. But they are there. And they limit me. They prevent me from accessing many important areas of life. They prevent me from experiencing joy and happiness.

Because as long as I do not meet those painful areas, those inner dark zones, I remain within my limitation. I am constantly escaping from myself without noticing. I do many things in order not to encounter myself, because there are things there that I am uncomfortable seeing.

And therefore, when we learn how to reduce excessive self-criticism, we develop courage. Without even noticing, by opening the flow of our authentic expression, we develop the courage to face what emerges.

And things will emerge that are not pleasant. Perhaps embarrassing things, perhaps things we would prefer not to see. And we will want to avoid them. But we can.

This is the new statement: I can.

And all that is required with painful things is to look at them with compassion, with patience, perhaps even to create something with them, without judgment, without rushing to fix. Simply to look. Simply to stop running away.

And then it clears. It releases. A new space is created.

And suddenly, things that once seemed very complex, very difficult, become something else. Suddenly, a door opens. All the excuses dissolve. It is possible. It is possible to achieve this. It is possible to get there. It is possible to choose this.

There were simply pains wrapped in excessive self-criticism, which protected us from reaching certain places within ourselves and outside ourselves.

And when we say to it: "Excuse me, you are in an exaggerated role. I can cope. I want to open things up. I have creative tools to deal with this. I am an adult. I am strong enough to see the truth," then we begin to truly taste what freedom is in its deeper essence.

As long as we do not do this, we carry our prison with us everywhere. Even if we tell ourselves that we are free, we are not.

The moment a person recognizes the option of excessive self-criticism and chooses the other option, the courageous, independent one that is willing to taste, to experiment, and to discover along the way, that is perhaps the greatest freedom a person can ask for.

When you feel it, you know it. It is a very meaningful experience. And when you feel it, you also receive unique gifts: joy, enthusiasm, optimism, a sense of capability, hope, and other good things that the psyche knows how to find within itself when it is freed from excessive self-criticism.

And all of this is within our reach. When we learn to reorganize our inner boundaries and significantly reduce the presence and influence of our excessive self-criticism.

It is possible. And that is exactly why we are here.

Questions for Self-Reflection (it is recommended to answer in writing):

1. Imagine a situation in which your excessive self-criticism is reduced by 40 percent. What would happen in your life?
2. And if it were reduced by 60 percent? What then?
3. Are you able to identify today situations and areas in which excessive self-criticism creates a kind of “prison” within you?
4. What is the “crazy initiative” or the “exaggerated change” that would really irritate your excessive self-criticism?
5. When do you intend to begin this action?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about regarding what you have read in this chapter? Experiences? Questions? Feelings?

Chapter 15: Every Day It Begins Again

Chapter 15 concludes Part Five, which deals with the understanding that there is no freedom when there is excessive self-criticism. And as unclear as this may be, and as much as we are used to searching outside ourselves for what we lack, it is important to understand why learning inner leadership is so essential. Because the main things we need in life exist within us. This is not just a statement, it is not a cliché, it is a fact. This is how it works.

And as confusing as this is, we are deeply conditioned to believe that what we need exists outside of us, and that if we have not received it, we are deprived, frustrated, that something was taken from us, that we are being mistreated. And in doing so, we make a very basic mistake: we give up the understanding that our true assets cannot be taken from us by anyone except ourselves.

We ourselves place walls between us and the abundance within us, between us and the love within us, between us and the creativity within us, between us and our intuition, between us and our natural ability to adapt to changing situations. Freedom is here.

And as long as we remain under the illusion of external control, and as long as we lack inner leadership, we are indeed subject to external control. And then we suffer more, we become more restricted, less joyful, less fulfilled. Our vision becomes narrow, our possibilities become limited, and our relationships become weaker.

It is inside. This is not a cliché. And even if it sounds like one, when nothing is done with it, it remains only words. Within the “inside” there is work. Within the “inside” there is excessive self-criticism, which we want to learn to reduce.

And this is the current chapter: every day it begins again.

The struggle for freedom, which in some ways has been taken from us within the structure of life, sometimes with our own participation, and sometimes through people around us who have limited us, taken our time, our possibilities, and collaborated with parts within us, with excessive self-criticism that created in us a readiness to believe that we are not entitled to freedom.

So what is freedom?

Freedom is a connection to the inner voice and the implementation of its guidance. That is freedom. I am free to be myself. And the more I am free to be myself, no one can take that away from me. And even if someone tries, the “self” within me will find other ways to manage.

But as long as I am not free to be myself, it is easy for others to tell me how, when, and where, to limit me, because I am not connected to that creative inner voice that shows me the right path for me.

This is what happens when there is excessive self-criticism, and when it is cultivated at the family, educational, and social levels. It is cultivated from a young age. That is why we are here. Because we were taught to create excessive self-criticism within ourselves. And those who taught us were also taught. They do not even know that this is what they are doing. They operate within a system, within a culture that nurtures excessive self-criticism.

How many creativity lessons are there in first grade? In second grade? In university? How much learning is there about freedom? About connecting to the inner voice? Zero, or close to zero. And when it is not cultivated, it closes.

And when we are taught to believe that someone who gets high grades is “successful,” that someone who is wealthy is “successful,” we gradually move away from our freedom. We move away from our inner voice. Because the inner voice defines success in a completely different way.

Within the success defined by the inner voice, there is true success: calmness, flowing and authentic creative expression, connection with the right people, personal inner abundance, ease, courage, adventure. These are successes. Love is success.

Who determines my success? External criteria? For that, we need inner leadership. And I, within myself, am a leader. I determine within myself. Not my excessive self-criticism, which aligns with external criticism that tries to define where I should be and whether I am good enough or not.

If I am not leading within myself, if I am not defining my own authentic criteria for success, then very quickly I will internalize shallow external standards and become convinced that I am not good enough, because others said so, directly or indirectly, and because my excessive self-criticism cooperates with this.

And therefore, every day we begin again.

Every day we look for the tools to reduce excessive self-criticism, to challenge ourselves, to challenge the next change, to practice creativity, to practice courage, to question what exists, to shake things a little, to take risks, to initiate, to play more, to laugh more, to participate more.

Every day it begins again.

And when we do not do this, it closes in on us. If we do not take actions that reduce criticism and increase freedom, creativity, and inner independence, excessive self-criticism grows automatically. This is how it works.

It is a kind of universal principle: when we do not cultivate the good, something else enters in its place, something that is like a negative mirror of it. There is no much of a

neutral state. If I do not actively allow my inner voice to flow outward, it closes. It does not sit there waiting. If I do not open the taps, they close and fill with rust.

And therefore, every day we begin again.

Maybe it is writing. Maybe it is dancing. Maybe it is an initiative. Maybe it is one more smile to myself in the mirror. Maybe it is nurturing something I have just begun.

And of course, again and again, it is about identifying the moments in which I am not kind to myself, and stopping.

Stop. Placing a stop sign. No. I do not agree with this excessive self-criticism. It is not reasonable. It is not necessary. It does not suit me. It harms me. It is inner bullying.

To see it. To refuse it. And then to notice how it also comes through external people. And there as well, without being a victim, without unnecessary drama, simply to say: no.

To say no to figures that generate self-doubt within me. To say no to figures that make me feel uncomfortable with myself. To say no to figures that reduce my courage, that diminish my sense of well-being within myself.

And to ask:

Who are the people in whose presence I feel more hope, more self-compassion, more courage, more adventure, more willingness to play with life, more ease?

And who are the people with whom I feel the opposite?

Those who strengthen my excessive self-criticism, who distance me from facing my pain.

Every day, there is work to be done with this.

As I said, this is the most important entry ticket to true human freedom. And therefore, it is worth investing in it. It is worth working on it.

It is worth finding, each person for themselves, their own techniques for another layer of release from criticism, another confrontation, another beginning.

Because every day we live in an environment that nurtures it. We receive its messages constantly. Almost at every moment. In almost every form of communication.

And therefore, we must work every day anew.

The struggle for freedom may have been partially taken from us within the structure of life, but we have inner powers capable of creating tools, methods, improvisations, and innovations to challenge the dominance of criticism. And we succeed in this.

And if we are here, in this chapter, and if we have already walked some path, it is clear that we have progressed.

And every time we answer a question, write an exercise, respond, initiate, act, every small action like this slightly weakens excessive self-criticism.

And we can already begin to feel it.

Freedom begins to build itself from within.

It is possible.

Questions for Self-Reflection (it is recommended to answer in writing):

1. Is this ongoing struggle with your excessive self-criticism difficult for you?
2. What happens if you do not stay alert and your excessive self-criticism attacks you without interruption?
3. Are you willing to develop a daily routine in which you stand before it with a smile and courage, and show it who is really in charge?
4. How far are you willing to go in the struggle for your true freedom?
5. What is the next action you intend to take to show yourself that you are serious about this?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about regarding what you have read in this chapter? Experiences? Questions? Feelings?

Chapter 16: External Excessive Criticism

Lessons 16, 17, and 18 deal with different forms of excessive self-criticism that are important to recognize. As I said at the beginning of the process, excessive self-criticism has many faces, many modes of operation, and many ways of appearing. Some of them we will be able to identify together here, and some each person will discover on their own, because it appears slightly differently in each individual.

But in the end, there is a clear common denominator: it creates a constricting effect. A limiting effect. An effect that wraps us in a negative and unpleasant experience, both in the way we interpret events and in the way we are able to deal with them.

It has many forms, but we can learn to recognize it. At first perhaps in hindsight, later in real time, and eventually perhaps even at the very moment it begins, and to stop it in time.

And therefore, Chapter 16 is a very important chapter. It touches on a conflict that every person encounters at some point, and it is not always easy to deal with.

The topic is excessive self-criticism that is projected back at us through other people. It is confusing. It is misleading. It is irritating. And it is not easy to handle.

We are speaking about unnecessary and excessive criticism that comes to us through other people. And here it is important to clarify: within close relationships, within friendships, acquaintanceships, or family, there is a place for criticism. Yes. Criticism can be important. It can be beneficial.

Sometimes the role of another person is to illuminate something for us, to awaken us, to show us that we are acting in a way that is not appropriate or not supportive of the relationship. This is a role, and it can be a positive role.

The question is how it is said, when it is said, whether it is said with clarity, with the intention to correct and release, with an invitation to dialogue, or whether it is said out of drama, out of blame, out of exaggeration, in a way that creates pain, doubt, and an unpleasant experience.

I emphasize again: criticism that is not excessive, criticism that is specific, relevant, and grounded within a relationship, can be helpful.

But there is another type of criticism between people. A criticism that is actually an expression of our own excessive self-criticism, which reaches us through other people.

People make comments about our initiatives, comments that do not truly help us, that we did not ask for, that make us feel bad, that do not lead to correction but only deepen doubt, create discomfort, and increase disappointment.

And I am not even speaking here about more extreme situations, of hostility, or criticism that makes us feel that we are not accepted. There are situations in which a person insists on correcting us, insists on directing us, even after we have clarified that it is not suitable for us. They continue to criticize our decisions, our choices, our thoughts, our spontaneity, our creativity, our dreams, our path.

We encounter this in many places. And in reality, there is no entry there for other people. We are not meant to allow it. But they are there, because we allowed them in.

Because in a certain sense, they are messengers of our excessive self-criticism, which has gone outward and found expression through others. And then we become angry at them, instead of understanding that this is also our story.

And therefore, when we encounter criticism that comes from another person, and it is not constructive, does not serve the relationship, does not set healthy boundaries, but rather diminishes us, disrespects us, casts doubt, and undermines our abilities, if it has reached us, it is a sign that we allowed it, even without noticing.

And if we allowed it, our role is to set a boundary. To say: excuse me, I am not interested in this criticism. To say it again, and again, and again.

Not to enter into the content, not to argue, not to try to explain, not to justify, not to defend.

Because excessive criticism that creates an unpleasant atmosphere and constricts us is, in fact, a form of bullying. Even if it is said in a polite, cultural, or “nice” way. The moment it is unpleasant, the moment it repeats itself, the moment it invades our space, the moment it diminishes, creates doubt, belittles, or becomes condescending, it is bullying, and to that we must say: stop.

There are, of course, other situations. There are situations where among friends there is humor, there is playfulness, there is mutual teasing, and it happens in proportion, with reciprocity, with an underlying sense of appreciation. That is fine.

But even there, sometimes a boundary is crossed. And the boundary is not always sharp, it is felt. The boundary is the moment it begins to feel unpleasant. And when it does not stop even after we ask, it becomes something else.

This happens sometimes with friends. It happens sometimes with parents. There are situations where the very act of conversation already carries criticism: “Why didn’t you do this, why didn’t you say that, why didn’t you go, why didn’t you call, and why aren’t you like others.”

We know this. And it is very unpleasant. It is an attack on our personality.

And why does this happen? Because our excessive self-criticism has found a messenger. A person who may be naturally critical, or less sensitive, or simply accustomed to speaking this way, and they become a convenient messenger. And our excessive self-criticism “fires” its arrows through them.

There is no point in hating the person, but there is also no point in ignoring it. Not to run away, but to stand, and to say: stop. I am not willing for this. I am willing to talk. I am willing to communicate. But not like this. To stop it, again and again.

And usually, after a few times, it begins to change. And if not, it is worth asking questions:

- Why do I continue to expose myself to this?
- Why do I remain in a situation where I am hurt again and again?
- Do I not respect myself enough to set a clear boundary?

Because this is bullying. And this is one of the important forms of excessive self-criticism. Because it is already connected to our relationship with the world, and our relationship with the world reflects our relationship with ourselves.

And other people attack us because, in a certain sense, we attack ourselves through them. They are doing their “job,” and we have our job.

To understand that this harms us, that it damages us, that it constricts us, that it harms our creativity, that it harms our relationship with ourselves, that it harms our relationship with our intuition, that it harms our ability to be compassionate.

This is bullying. And our role is to say: stop, both within ourselves and toward the other, with politeness, with respect, without drama, without victimhood.

Simply to say: no. This does not suit me. Perhaps I allowed it in the past, perhaps I did not notice, but now I set a boundary.

And each time it happens, to stop, to stop the conversation, to say: this is the limit.

And in most cases, after a few times, it is understood. And if not, we will need to decide what is right for us.

But the most important thing is to protect ourselves, to guard ourselves from excessive self-criticism, including that which comes from outside.

Because it is harm.

And it can, and should, be avoided if we wish to significantly reduce the excessive self-criticism within us. As long as these external “messengers” continue to deliver excessive

criticism, it is a sign that we have not yet set the right boundaries, not with them and not within ourselves.

So we will learn to stop it, and it will stop, both from the outside and from within.

Questions for Self-Reflection (it is recommended to answer in writing):

1. How do you feel when people speak to you with unnecessary and excessive criticism?
2. Are there family members, friends, or colleagues who tend to speak to you this way? Were there in the past? Try to describe.
3. How do you react when this happens? Do you shrink, get angry, feel hurt, think they are right, argue, or something else?
4. What will happen when you set a clear and consistent boundary against excessive external criticism?
5. Can you now see how external criticism is, in fact, a reflection of you, and to a large extent exists because of your own permission?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about regarding what you have read in this chapter? Experiences, questions, feelings?

Chapter 17: Disguises

Chapter 17 expands the recognition of excessive self-criticism into additional forms that are important to become familiar with. These forms accompany us, they walk with us, and at times they are also presented through other people. Ultimately, they are part of cultural norms that, at a deeper level, transform into excessive self-criticism and diminish our inner leadership.

Society, often unconsciously, does not particularly encourage inner leadership. There is a tendency to maintain people as relatively cooperative with the system, rather than for each individual to develop their own independent inner leadership. And therefore, it also preserves gestures, behaviors, and norms that keep us within excessive self-criticism.

And so we want to recognize these forms, to be aware of them, and to reduce them in our lives. We want to be more in negotiation with them, and to decide about them, instead of them deciding for us. Because our goal is to strengthen inner leadership. And within the inner space, in order for inner leadership to exist, we need freedom to listen to the inner voice, and also freedom to implement it. And this freedom is significantly disrupted by excessive self-criticism, which is why it is important that we become familiar with its variations.

So let us begin.

Pessimism, skepticism, cynicism, various addictions, judgment toward others, and even depression, these are only some of the forms. I am not going deeply into each of them here, but rather touching on them and inviting you to explore yourselves, to look inward. The ability to recognize that these are, in fact, expressions that serve excessive self-criticism is already a very meaningful step.

Pessimism, for example, sometimes appears logical. Negative things can happen, so why expect something good. It creates a space in which a person takes less risk and tells themselves that there is a chance it will not succeed, that they do not see the light at the end of the tunnel. This is a way to be “on the safe side,” and in many ways, being on the safe side is exactly what excessive self-criticism prefers. To preserve what exists, not to dare, not to step out. Pessimism provides justification, an intelligent explanation for why not to try, why not to move, why not to act. It sounds wise, experienced, grounded, and it is one of the more sophisticated disguises of excessive self-criticism.

Optimism, on the other hand, is a tool. One of the tools we have for dealing with excessive self-criticism. When we move toward the unknown and the criticism tells us that we do not know where we are going, optimism allows us to say: I believe this can work. Based on what? Based on the fact that I choose to believe. I do not need to prove it and I do not need to justify it. I act, I initiate, I mobilize optimism. In a certain sense, pessimism is the result of a lack of practicing optimism. When we do not practice light, darkness enters. When we neglect optimism, pessimism enters the service of excessive

self-criticism. And therefore, it is worth examining in which areas we are overly pessimistic.

Skepticism and cynicism are very close to pessimism, and are sometimes even perceived as part of an intelligent, sophisticated discourse, one that dismisses innocence, mocks attempts, and positions itself above others. But behind this there is fear. The cynical or skeptical person is a fearful person, who does not dare to take even a small step beyond their comfort zone. They hold themselves in a place that appears intelligent and refined, but in reality they look with a certain envy at people who dare, who create, who try, who fail and continue. They develop cynical humor, sometimes even toward themselves, and ultimately all of this serves their excessive self-criticism and the fear of daring, of making mistakes, of trying, of creating, of tasting, of fulfilling desire.

And so they rely on skepticism and cynicism, and sometimes this even receives social reinforcement. Then, the one who dares, who creates, who tries, becomes the exception. And they say to themselves: I will try anyway, maybe I will not succeed, I do not care, I want to try. And so it is important to notice: excessive self-criticism also appears in the disguise of pessimism, of skepticism, and of cynicism. And if someone speaks to you cynically and it does not feel good, there is a reason. You are sensing the excessive and unnecessary criticism.

Addictions are another form. We get stuck in things, invest time, energy, and attention into them. And within the addiction there is also excessive self-criticism: self-condemnation, dissatisfaction. And what is interesting is that this does not take us out of the addiction, but keeps us within it.

The criticism within the addiction strengthens it; it is part of the pain that feeds it. In this way, we invest many resources in something that does not move us forward, instead of realizing desires, creating, and moving. And therefore, this too is a disguise of excessive self-criticism. And sometimes, part of the process of recovering an addiction is through introducing more creativity, more adventure, more movement, and when there is life, there is less room for addiction.

Judgment toward others is another form. We tell ourselves that it is not okay, that we would never act that way, we create categories, compare, rank, and believe we are better, smarter, more understanding. But this too comes from fear. Fear of meeting the imperfect parts within ourselves. And so we disconnect, observe from the outside, and judge. In practice, we are projecting our excessive self-criticism onto others instead of connecting with them, or developing courageous compassion toward them, just as it is difficult for us to connect with the full range of parts within ourselves, toward which we are also judgmental and lacking compassion.

And finally: depression. This is a partial but meaningful list: pessimism, skepticism, cynicism, addictions, judgment, and even depression. We can get stuck in a low mood, and in that state we do not move, do not act, do not create, do not enjoy, do not change,

and do not go on adventures. And this may be part of a process of change, healing, or an inner need, that state of depression.

But many times, within this, excessive self-criticism celebrates. It becomes a significant part of the depression, the inner language becomes negative, and this deepens and complicates the state. We may not notice that excessive self-criticism has “raised its head” within a depressive mood, and we may find ourselves once again believing it and cooperating with it, until we decide, as has been recommended here many times, to raise a “Stop” sign.

Even when we are in legitimate periods of difficulty, it does not mean that we need to surrender to the stream of excessive criticism that increases pain and struggle. Even then, it is our role to block it, to limit it, and in doing so to help ourselves move through the difficult period in a healthier and more healing way.

And here as well, small actions that bypass the criticism, that challenge it, that limit it, can help. To restore movement, to restore life, to ease things. Of course, as long as we are not dealing with a deep clinical state, but rather with those familiar states of decline and discouragement that appear from time to time.

When there is a lot of excessive self-criticism present, and it tends to appear in such places, then it is completely unnecessary and interferes with the process we need to go through from time to time with ourselves, including in our lower states. In such periods there is more room for softness and self-understanding, and less room for intolerance, reprimand, and criticism.

And so, more than ever, we need protection from our excessive self-criticism, because we are in a state of vulnerability, and therefore our response to it needs to be more decisive, more immediate, and more assertive.

The faces of excessive self-criticism are varied. We are learning to encounter it, to sense it in the environment, to recognize it even in its early stages.

The moment we recognize it we already have power. And when we work with the tools for reducing excessive self-criticism, all of these forms, along with many other forms, begin to lose strength, to become less relevant, less necessary, and less appropriate.

A person who chooses to shape their life path with the central intention of reducing excessive self-criticism accumulates tools, accumulates knowledge, accumulates experience, and improves along the way. This is a very significant choice, and if you are here, it is likely that this choice is something that matters deeply to you.

And that is excellent.

Questions for Self-Reflection (it is recommended to answer in writing):

1. Are you familiar with the pessimistic and skeptical parts within you? What is your relationship with them?
2. Are you familiar with the cynical part within you? Do you recognize its connection to your excessive self-criticism? Are you perhaps even a bit cynical about this very question?
3. Do you recognize that you have addictions or unhealthy habits that are difficult for you to release? What is the role of excessive self-criticism within them?
4. Are you able to enter a low mood “in peace” without thinking that something is fundamentally wrong with you?
5. Do you recognize additional forms of your excessive self-criticism, and would you like to add them to the list?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about regarding what you have read in this chapter? Experiences, questions, feelings?

Chapter 18: Excuses of Self-Criticism

Let us begin with a reminder: excessive self-criticism attempts to force us to remain in place, not to rise beyond ordinary logic. Therefore, it also blocks expressions of inner leadership, creativity, freedom, spontaneity, intuition, and everything that carries elements of uncertainty, surprise, imagination, or change.

That is why it is so important to be aware of it, not to underestimate its power, not to diminish its significance, and not to think that we are done with it. Never.

We need to understand that it is there, and that it holds great power. It represents our fears, our inner darkness, the massive negative influences we absorb from all directions and internalize. It also represents the work of growth that we are meant to do, often directly facing it, sometimes more than anything else.

It is good to discover it. It is good to expose it. It is good to get to know it. It is good to speak with it. It is good to face it. It is good to stand מול it. It is also good, from time to time, to overcome it. It is good to live a life in which we maintain a relationship and awareness toward that self-criticism, and to tell ourselves that it is excessive, both internally and in front of others.

In this way, we manage our lives rather than being managed by this massive trend, which includes guilt, irrelevant responsibility, irrelevant feelings of missing out, irrelevant feelings of loss of time, and many other unhelpful experiences that all converge into the same place we are addressing here.

This step focuses on a specific type of common excuses and helps us identify a very common phenomenon that represents the influence of excessive self-criticism:

Every excuse for avoiding initiative, renewal, creation, and change is in fact excessive self-criticism in disguise.

What does this actually mean?

It means that within our healthy nature, when we are connected to it at a reasonable level, there is a living, breathing, vibrant place within us that seeks to grow, create, change, influence, touch, connect, evolve, expand, and manifest. There is a creative core within us, connected to spirit and intuition, nourished by love and generating love. It is there. It is alive. Right now.

This healthy nature is the foundation of abundance, the foundation of joy, the foundation of love. It is the divine aspect within the human being, the part we arrived here with, the part we brought from the source. The purpose of this inner part, this healthy nature, is to express itself, to realize itself, to give of itself, to dance with the environment through its unique expression.

Our healthy nature is what we are constantly seeking, while at the same time often missing, largely due to the excessive influence of inner self-criticism.

This is part of the human drama. And it is okay. This is who we are. We do not want to apply excessive self-criticism to this phenomenon as well, or create additional guilt. There is no point in being critical of our tendency toward excessive criticism. There is value in recognizing the phenomenon, understanding it, becoming experts in identifying it, and learning tools to reduce its presence and influence.

We need to learn and internalize that the healthy part within us, the part that knows how to grow, expand, and create freely, exists. That it also has patience. That it is not pressured for immediate realization. That it is not disappointed when we forget it or move away from it. That it is always there for us. That it is part of us. That it is us. That it is not separate from us, and that we cannot be separate from it.

We may fail to notice its presence because of various difficulties we have placed upon ourselves, and mainly because of the excess self-criticism we have become accustomed to living alongside it, in its shadow and even in its light.

So when I come to summarize the process so far, I look at the bottom line and want to remind myself and you that within us there is a wonderful, divine, sophisticated, brilliant, creative inner engine that deeply understands what love is. It comes from a source of love, creation, renewal, and transformation. It is there.

And every time we construct within ourselves, in a rather sophisticated way, an excuse to avoid initiative, renewal, creation, and change, we are in fact following the path paved by our excessive self-criticism, while at the same time distancing ourselves from that healthy, magical, and highly capable nature full of passion.

Excessive self-criticism manages to make us think and tell ourselves a very convincing story: why it is not possible, why it is not the right time, why it is not working, why it will not work, why it is not good enough, why it does not function as it should. Various forms of negative feedback that we generate for ourselves.

And in the end, this causes us not to listen and not to act in cooperation with that unique inner engine within us. That engine speaks to us through pure passion, trying to tell us how important this is for us, for our health, for our relationships.

To reduce excessive self-criticism, we need to learn to listen more to this passion. To believe it. To take courageous initiatives in its service. To contain with love and understanding what we experience as “failures” in implementing it. To remain in continuous relationship with it, in dialogue, in listening, in trial and error.

This is the role of the personality, of who we are, with all our ego, our repressions, our denials, our wounds, our karma. This personality is built here, in this time, in this life.

And it can do the work to improve the connection with that inner engine, with those intuitive whispers of growth, expansion, courage, and change.

A developing and self-healing personality can and should choose this. And when it chooses this, it must recognize that every excuse, every inner statement that prevents initiative of renewal, creation, and change is in fact excessive self-criticism in disguise. It is a kind of lie. It is not real. It does not represent what truly exists.

This does not mean that a person must always be in constant renewal, creation, and action. There are also periods of rest, pause, waiting, and observation. This too is part of the process. But even then, we can be aware that we are resting, refueling, preparing for the next step.

What matters is to remain aware that sometimes we overload ourselves with a variety of excuses: there is no time, no resources, no knowledge, no talent, no friends, no suitable conditions, no suitable country. These are excuses that arise because we are afraid to take the step, to go on the adventure, to move into the unknown, to move toward the fulfillment of the pleasure of creation and initiative.

We are simply afraid. It is important to acknowledge this, because everything begins there. Excessive self-criticism emerges from this fear. And this fear can be dissolved not only through understanding, but through action. Through reducing criticism, setting boundaries, taking initiative, renewing, creating, changing, allowing surprises. Through allowing ourselves to make mistakes. To be foolish. To experiment. To change.

Excessive self-criticism will always be there as part of life, but it is the part that challenges our experience of life. It invites us to face it, to set boundaries, and sometimes even to bypass it.

And how pleasurable it is to make this transition, from a state of excessive self-criticism to a state of greater freedom, greater inner space, and a greater willingness to play with reality, with passion, and with ideas of expansion and change.

These transitions, these transformations, are always available as an option, and they occur more and more frequently in those who choose to dedicate a significant portion of their attention to reducing excessive self-criticism.

Questions for Self-Reflection (preferably in writing):

1. What is the most exciting, intriguing, and stimulating initiative for change that is still sitting in your “drawer” for one reason or another?
2. What are the main excuses you tell yourself for not realizing this initiative?
3. What is the “practical logic” that reinforces these excuses and makes you feel justified in delaying this realization?
4. Is the thought of finding a new way to bring this vision to life pleasant, frightening, or both? Please elaborate.

5. Is it possible to realize this dream in a slightly different way for now, or to take a small step toward it for now, so it does not remain entirely in the drawer?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about what you read in this step? Experiences, questions, feelings?

Chapter 19: The Fear of Losing Control

Life is, to a large extent, an unclear story. No matter how much we try to explain or define the journey of life through the tools of logic, there will always come a moment when we discover, perhaps to our disappointment, that we do not truly understand what is happening, why things unfold as they do, and where exactly we are moving now and in the future.

These moments, in which we recognize the high degree of uncertainty in our lives, accompanied by a considerable sense of lack of control, are moments that may evoke confusion, pain, anxiety, despair, anger, and other uncomfortable reactions.

In order to reduce our encounters with these aspects of life, which over time may not be as problematic as they seem, a continuous and universal human need has developed to increase the experience of control over what is happening, to reduce uncertainty and the element of surprise, to strengthen the sense of managing things, the ability to plan the path ahead, and the ability to be prepared for every possible scenario.

This is where excessive self-criticism enters, continuing, as it always has, to be excessive because of the impossible role that was assigned to it from the very beginning. In fact, excessive self-criticism is meant to fulfill a role that is destined to fail, to create an experience of control in a place where such control is not possible.

These are the laws of life, and there is no way or possibility to change them, certainly not through increasing self-criticism. Yet we struggle to understand this because this is what we have become accustomed to and even addicted to. We do not know how to approach the journey of life from a growing acceptance of uncertainty and lack of control, and from there to learn the way that is right for us to exist within such a space, a space in which what is hidden is always greater than what is revealed.

Precisely in those places where it is possible to increase our degree of control over what is happening, excessive self-criticism hides the possibilities from us.

These are places where, at first, reality feels more frightening due to the sense of lack of control, but once the fear subsides, we discover not only that our level of control is better than before, but also that we learn how to benefit from that experience of lack of control and the unavoidable uncertainty that accompanies the life story of every human being, everywhere.

And so it happens that through excessive self-criticism we do not reduce the fear of lack of control, but rather preserve it and even intensify it. Not only that, we sometimes influence people around us to behave in a similar way and to fear in a similar way what we call lack of control.

The reality is that we do not have, and will never have, complete control over what happens and what will happen. This is, in fact, a significant part of the beauty and

uniqueness of the human life journey. A large part of the true story of what is happening is not revealed to us, and no matter how much effort we make to uncover the deeper truth of this unpredictable path, it will remain significantly unpredictable. Uncertainty will always be part of the human experience, and without it, large parts of beauty and the possibilities for development and growth would not exist here or anywhere human life exists.

Relative control can exist only from a position that first recognizes the level of lack of control that cannot be changed, and the level of uncertainty and the wide range of surprises that are an inseparable part of the rules of the game. These cannot be changed, certainly not when approached only through logic or attempts to impose order and structure on this unpredictable journey of life.

Relative control is similar, for example, to the ability to navigate a rowing boat within a current whose strength and direction cannot be changed, yet through certain gestures and choices it is possible to move with the current toward new, changing, and even highly rewarding places.

When we recognize that uncertainty is not only a space defined by negation, a place where there is no certainty and therefore seemingly problematic, but also understand uncertainty as a space within human consciousness and within the story of life where anything can happen, including positive things, a shift occurs.

That same space of uncertainty, which strongly characterizes human existence in all its forms and expressions, also invites the human being to influence it in countless ways. It is a highly flexible space. Although outcomes cannot be predicted in advance and there is always room for surprises and changes, the human being has a significant ability to navigate the movement of existence in almost any direction they choose, through a creative, courageous, adventurous, playful, curious approach that is willing to change and to be changed.

There is no other way for a person to create for themselves even a partial experience of control other than this path. There is no other way to derive meaningful and even pleasurable benefit from the fact that uncertainty constitutes such a large part of their life story.

The experience of lack of control invites the person to learn, improve, grow, explore, and embark on journeys in which the logic guiding them is not only the familiar and conventional logic, but also an intuitive logic whose laws are different from what we usually perceive as the laws of reality.

This approach to the journey of life, which includes adventure, openness, creativity, courage, and a willingness for change and surprise, is the approach that places the human being in the highest level of synchronization with what truly exists.

Precisely in such a place, a person is less afraid of lack of control, because conventional concepts of control, which attempt to eliminate uncertainty and the natural lack of control inherent in existence, distance them from the better alternative to control, which is cooperation with the mysterious and possibility filled path of life.

Those moments of synchronization, in which a person reaches states of enjoyment from the game they are playing with the course of life, a course whose logic is always limited, those moments of connection through a creative approach that includes a willingness to make decisions without knowing exactly where they will lead, are the moments in which a person not only does not feel fear of lack of control, but experiences an increasing degree of freedom and the ability to exist within an unpredictable space and influence it in a way that grants increasing levels of satisfaction and fulfillment.

All of these meaningful and beautiful aspects are what excessive self-criticism seeks to prevent, keeping the person in an exaggerated position of fear toward the illogical characteristics of their life. Those moments of harsh and unpleasant inner reprimand from excessive self-criticism are moments in which we are, supposedly, trying to create a higher level of control in our lives so that we will not make mistakes and so that in the future we will make more correct and appropriate choices.

The very common fear of lack of control is in fact a fear of mystery, of surprises, of the understanding that part of the story will always remain hidden and unknown. It is a fear of existence itself, a fear of a close and fruitful encounter between the human being and the true framework within which they belong. It is, in fact, a denial of the course of life within which we exist. And therefore, it is also a denial of ourselves.

When we go deeply into this, it becomes clear that what occupies us is not a fear of control, but the opposite, a fear of true control in life. This is a form of control that recognizes uncertainty, that looks courageously at the reality of death, that connects to the mystery that is not fully understood, and that is willing to influence life in a creative way even when it is never clear where it will lead.

It is from this kind of control that we are truly afraid, and excessive self-criticism exists in order to distance us from it as much as possible.

Questions for Self-Reflection (preferably in writing):

1. Why do you think it is important to recognize excessive self-criticism in a person?
2. What is your relationship today with your self-criticism?
3. Is it now clear to you that it is excessive, or do you still have doubts about this idea?
4. Do you personally know people who are aware of their excessive self-criticism? Do you feel comfortable in their presence?
5. What might happen as your awareness of your excessive self-criticism expands beyond where it is today?

6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about what you read in this step? Experiences, questions, feelings?

Chapter 20: The Need Not to See

The role of a person who is growing and developing, who seeks for themselves a more meaningful and fulfilling life, is, among other things, to be engaged as much as possible in an ongoing process of personal expansion.

The healthy way to exist is connected, among other things, to a recurring question: how can I grow from my current point into new places of self-realization and a broader expression of what makes me unique?

A person who seeks growth and development is meant, as much as possible, to be on this path. There are always new horizons to move toward, always the next destinations, new wishes and new passions inviting the person to explore new spaces within themselves, outside themselves, and with other people.

This is similar to human curiosity, which reflects a healthy state of an ongoing desire to know more, discover more, uncover more, search more, and ask more questions. Many times, curious people encounter barriers that attempt to block their desire to expand their knowledge and understanding, and often they receive messages suggesting that their curiosity is unnecessary, disturbing, and perhaps even harmful.

This is exactly how excessive self-criticism operates when it is engaged in preventing a person from recognizing the fact that at any given moment there are many possibilities available to them for action, experimentation, and experience. Through its comments and reactions, it reduces the range of possibilities and creates around everything beyond them an atmosphere of fear and negative perception.

Excessive self-criticism serves, without our awareness, a need that arises from fear: the need not to see spaces that are too vast. The need not to see too far, not to see too broadly, not to feel things that move beyond what we believe we are capable of containing and managing within ourselves.

We are afraid of this ability within us, an ability that has no logic and no clear boundaries or order, an ability connected to the infinite freedom of imagination, to the vision some people have of creating a reality completely different from the existing one, and to our capacity to grasp, even if only for moments, how much more we are than just human beings who think in ordinary ways, act in ordinary ways, and understand as they are expected to understand.

Excessive self-criticism ensures that we remain within the boundaries of consensus. That we do not deviate, that we do not stray from the path, that we do not cross the lines defined for us by what is considered normal or acceptable. It ensures that we remain smaller than we truly can be, more afraid than necessary, and therefore also aspiring to goals and objectives that are far more limited than what we are capable of aspiring to and even realizing.

And so, when a person seeks to encounter their greatness, their uniqueness, their one and only story, their authenticity, and the path that reflects who they truly are, they must take into account that excessive self-criticism opposes this desire and will do everything in its power to prevent them from continuing to explore these places within themselves.

To a large extent, this is how a person's self-image is formed, regarding their abilities, the potentials available to them, their possibilities for growth and change, the forces that accompany them, and the horizons they can move toward through curiosity and adventure in order to discover themselves and their world.

Excessive self-criticism creates within us a kind of tunnel vision, or in another sense a kind of dimming, which causes us to think and feel that our lives and the world around us are far more limited than they truly are.

This can be illustrated through the example of a journey. Let us assume that we are moving along a certain path and wondering where we can continue next. Excessive self-criticism will attempt to inform us that there are only a limited number of possible directions forward, and nothing beyond that.

While presenting these limited options as correct or appropriate, it hides from us a wide abundance of other possibilities that we could choose, explore, and experience. These possibilities would reveal to us new horizons, not only in the external landscape of the journey, but also, and perhaps mainly, in our internal landscape.

How great are you? Are you able to recognize the unique and beautiful aspects of your personality, the places within you where there are elements of greatness, special abilities, and a wide range of possibilities to contribute unique gifts to the world through what you brought with you into life? Is there a voice within you that cancels this possibility, that suggests you should be modest and not exaggerate your self-evaluation?

This is excessive self-criticism, faithfully performing its role from morning to night, reminding us again and again that we are supposedly much smaller than we truly are. Our role now is at least to allow space in our awareness for the possibility that this mechanism, which limits our ability to see vast spaces within and around us, is not as reliable as it appears, and to learn to gradually reduce the degree of trust we place in it.

In contrast to excessive self-criticism, there are many inner voices that seek to hint that the reality within us and around us is far broader, richer, more abundant, and more open to change than it is presented through the filter of excessive self-criticism.

These voices are worth getting to know more deeply, nurturing, and bringing to the forefront of our attention with increasing frequency, while improving our ability to question the definitive and limiting messages of excessive self-criticism, which, as we remember, is excessive.

The irony here is that excessive self-criticism urges us not to exaggerate. It tries to convince us not to exaggerate in the way we look at life and at ourselves, not to exaggerate in our passion, not to exaggerate in our attempts to create change, not to exaggerate in our movement toward self-realization and the search for our authentic essence, not to exaggerate in our sense of adventure, love, and positivity.

Excessive self-criticism, in an exaggerated and even distorted way, seeks to reduce us to dimensions narrower than what we truly need and deserve. In a highly exaggerated manner, it attempts to prevent us from seeking new things, from exploring the unknown, from allowing ourselves to remain for extended periods in spaces of uncertainty, from crossing lines, from rebelling against existing rules, from asking for more, from dreaming, from leaping, and even from laughing too much.

Excessive self-criticism serves our fears of the greatness and abundance that exist within us from birth.

In order to free ourselves from its ongoing grip, it may be beneficial for us, from time to time, to do exactly what it tries to prevent: to exaggerate. To be more than what feels comfortable. To go beyond ourselves, to step out of the limited and familiar paths, and to allow ourselves to see larger spaces.

Often it works like this: when we allow ourselves to exaggerate in directions of passion, spontaneity, initiative, change, new choices, and decisions that come from intuition, the ability of self-criticism to exaggerate over us decreases accordingly.

At times, when we do this, we can feel the sweet taste of an inner and outer reality in which excessive self-criticism diminishes. And it is precisely for these moments that we are here.

Questions for Self-Reflection (preferably in writing):

1. In what situations and forms does your self-criticism prevent you from initiating, acting, or daring?
2. What feelings does excessive self-criticism create in you when it “speaks to you” while you are trying to do something new or different?
3. How far might you go into feelings of guilt or self-anger if you tried or did something and later realized you made a mistake, missed something, or were not attentive?
4. Are you aware that procrastination and hesitation can stem from excessive self-criticism? Do you have examples from your own life?
5. Can you identify your excessive self-criticism when you are in anxiety, low mood, or simply in a place that does not feel good to you?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about what you read in this step? Experiences, questions, feelings?

Chapter 21: Loss of Identity Within the Crowd

This step, and the two that follow it, deal with the human need to belong, a need that is profound and often underestimated, the need to be part of the consensus. This need exists in every person, even in those who see themselves, or present themselves, as original, individualistic, rebellious, anarchistic, solitary, or opposed to conventional ways of life.

Every person has a deep need to belong, to be accepted, to be perceived as “okay,” to receive recognition, to be part of the group, to be wanted, to be liked, to be “one of us.” Often there will be groups or circles that a person prefers not to belong to, and they may even define themselves as someone who is not connected to them at all.

Yet even then, in their own way, they will carry within them the need to feel that they are seen correctly, that they are accepted, that they are noticed, that they are wanted, that they are allowed to be “part of the tribe.”

This need is usually hidden from view. We do not notice how many of our actions, choices, and feelings are connected to the need to belong, to be accepted, to receive approval from our environment. At times, we do not realize that we are making decisions whose deeper motivation is the desire to feel part of a broader social story that includes many others besides ourselves.

Often we will also avoid situations in which we might feel alone, not because of the loneliness itself, but because of the feeling of not belonging, a state in which it seems to us that we do not fit in, that we are not “part of what is happening.”

Excessive self-criticism is especially active in this area, and in many ways it can be assumed that this is also where it was born. The child’s need to be protected and nourished is a basic survival need. A child cannot exist without the physical and emotional support of their parents and family, and their dependence on them is absolute. Therefore, they strive, with all their might, to be “worthy” and “deserving” of the good things that their environment provides.

For this purpose, they develop within themselves a system of self-criticism whose role is to monitor their actions and thoughts, and to direct them so that they align with what they perceive as appropriate or acceptable. In this way, they learn to continue belonging to the family structure and later also to the social structures of kindergarten, school, and the wider community.

In this space, excessive self-criticism operates around the question of our alignment with the consensus that we have adopted within ourselves as “right,” “moral,” or “appropriate.” Every time we feel that we have deviated from it, in thoughts, emotions, or actions, the criticism arises within us and activates strong, painful, and disturbing warning signals that do not allow us to move too far away from what we perceive as the “right and appropriate” consensus.

“What will the neighbors say?” “What will people say if I say or do this?” These expressions are rooted more deeply than we are aware. They represent the basic need to be “okay,” not to be pointed at, not to be perceived as “strange” or “different.” And at a deeper level, the real fear is the fear that others will see us as we truly are, with the full range of our authentic emotions and feelings.

And so, מתוך these fears, maintained continuously by excessive self-criticism and based on an early belief that we must belong at any cost, we tend to arrive at a state that can be called loss of identity within the crowd.

The need to be “like everyone else,” the fear of rejection or exclusion from the tribe, the fear of ridicule or unpleasant responses from others, all of these create within us an inner mechanism that constantly asks: “What should I do in order to continue belonging? How should I behave so that people will not think certain things about me? How can I hide what I do not want to be seen in me?”

This mechanism uses excessive self-criticism as a kind of inner police force that constantly examines us and asks whether we are walking on the “correct” path in a social, familial, or group sense, even when it seems to us that we are very independent and that “we do not care what others think about us.”

The truth is that we do care, even when it seems that we do not. There is no person who does not wish, consciously or unconsciously, that others will think good things about them. And even if we pretend that we do not care, we will still feel a certain relief when we know that not everything that truly happens within us has been exposed.

And so, a very wide range of freedom, enjoyment, spontaneity, self-discovery, pleasure, and adventure may move away from us simply because, in some internal way, they are perceived as contradicting the need to “continue belonging.”

A person who comes to paint after not painting for many years, if they are not equipped with an open approach or appropriate guidance, will ask themselves, consciously or unconsciously, “What should I do so that something beautiful will come out, something that can be called a painting?” They will move the brush and then feel pain, fear, and disappointment: “I do not know how to paint, I have no talent, what was I even thinking?”

What is hidden within this inner dialogue? The need to belong, to be “okay.” Behind the desire to create a “beautiful” painting lies another desire, to be approved, to be told that the painting is “worthy,” “good,” and “valuable.” That others will feel comfortable seeing it and perhaps even admire it. Deep inside, the thought is: “It will not be acceptable for me to create something that is not truly considered a painting. It will not be acceptable to simply decide that I can paint without receiving approval that I am capable of it.”

At this point, excessive self-criticism enters and stops the person. It convinces them to put down the brush, tells them that it is “not good,” that it is “not worth it,” and creates

unpleasant feelings of not belonging, as if someone who paints in this way is not part of the social consensus.

In the end, that same person, who internally longs to paint and needs it, but who grew up with internal assumptions that prevent them from doing so, loses their identity within the crowd, without the crowd having done anything. The entire drama takes place within them, a drama that began in childhood, within a social environment that limits the possibilities for different and authentic expression.

Such an environment exists thanks to the ongoing activity of excessive self-criticism. Yet when we learn to reduce it consistently, we can gain moments of the return of identity, a renewed permission to act, to experiment, to play, to discover. Permission to be who we truly are.

How encouraging it is to know that it is possible to change this situation, to reduce self-criticism, and to reclaim our natural essence, while updating the excessive need to belong to the consensus, a need that in many cases actually distances us from ourselves.

Questions for Self-Reflection (preferably in writing):

1. Are you aware of the natural aggressive aspects within you?
2. What is your relationship with these parts? Do you resist their existence? Are you angry at them? Do you not understand what to do with them?
3. Are you open to the possibility that part of your being is to attack yourself almost routinely and daily through excessive self-criticism?
4. Do you have difficulty with the idea that you carry self-directed aggression through excessive self-criticism? Does this description feel exaggerated to you?
5. What might happen if you were able to channel your natural aggression into expression of release, initiative, and new action?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about what you read in this step? Experiences, insights, questions, feelings?

Chapter 22: Loneliness with the Truth

This step addresses a very significant illusion, one that is essential to recognize and give attention to, because it prevents a person from directions of development, growth, creation, and expression, without them always noticing it. This illusion competes with a person's ability to be loyal to themselves, to their path, to their essence, to their beauty, to their creativity, to their passions, and to everything that characterizes and makes them unique.

This illusion is well maintained by excessive self-criticism, which transmits messages to the person whose role is to keep them within an experience that does not reflect what can truly take place in their life. Because this experience instills a strong fear within them, sometimes even to the level of existential fear, it succeeds in preventing them from seeing the full picture, a picture that could serve their developmental needs in a meaningful way, while also reducing excessive self-criticism.

Every person has, to a large extent, a kind of truth that is a worldview unique to them and to them alone. It is a kind of mental fingerprint that reflects the uniqueness that distinguishes each person from all others. This uniqueness can be expressed in many ways that a person generates from within themselves, provided that they feel free and capable of expressing it, and do not feel that such expression is dangerous or may lead them to places they do not wish to be.

One of the reasons many people give up, entirely unconsciously, on the special and beautiful truth within them, which can even be described as the divine truth within the human being, is the illusion built around the strong need to belong and to be part of the group. When the need to belong is too strong, and the longing for inner truth and individuality is weak or weakened, a person may imagine that if they adhere to their unique truth, they will find themselves alone and isolated.

As a result, many people, who could have enjoyed and grown with the "divine diamonds" they brought with them into the world, choose, unconsciously, to give up access to them in favor of a level of belonging that is mediocre at best, compared to the belonging they truly need.

This is a form of belonging that forces a person, to a large extent, to give up themselves and parts of their uniqueness, simply in order to feel that they belong to some group. Sometimes this is an actual group, and sometimes it is a collection of social messages that the person has internalized as "codes of belonging" to the social space they wish, or at least hope, to belong to.

And this is the illusion: my truth might make me lonely. My unique truth, and therefore also my "strange" truth, the one that even I sometimes struggle to understand or express freely without absorbing inner criticism, might supposedly cause the people around me to look at me in an unfavorable way and even prefer not to be in my presence. This is, as stated, a complete illusion, even to the point of being harmful.

Because if a person prefers the company of people among whom they cannot express their truth and behave according to it, they sentence themselves to a much deeper loneliness, both social loneliness and inner loneliness.

This is a loneliness in which a person forces themselves to move away from who they are, to deny the unique aspects they came into the world with, and consequently also to deny their possible roles in serving others in a way that would also fulfill them.

As a result, many people learn, in a general sense, to distance themselves from and even avoid a wide range of topics related to the exploration of truth. Once they become accustomed to distancing themselves from their own truth, dismissing its existence, and blending into a social atmosphere in which they lose their unique fingerprint, they expand this pattern into other areas where there is a search for truth, a request for truth, or journeys toward truth. Such topics invite questions they may not be able or willing to answer.

Over this entire “orchestra,” which exists to some degree in every person, with differences in intensity and style, excessive self-criticism conducts. It will do everything in its power to keep the person within a low to moderate level of belonging, a belonging whose behavioral code includes self-cancellation of any truth that might contradict the consensus.

In fact, anyone who undergoes processes of transformation and significant change in their personality reports a renewed connection to their truth, through a process that is not simple, involving decisions and confronting old habits that forced them to lie to themselves and about themselves. Every person who undergoes a process of spiritual awakening discovers within themselves a new truth that had always been there, but was too hidden due to the excessive involvement of self-criticism, which had been internalized as representing the demands of a society that has little tolerance for difference and broad individuality.

The fear of loneliness with my truth, which is, as stated, nothing more than an illusion, is a very significant fear that tells a broad story about the society in which we live. People fear loneliness, fear being cast out, fear not having support, fear being completely alone on their path.

There is no place for judgment toward these people, each of us is also among them at different moments, because they are a product of a social system that pressures them, primarily through the internalization of excessive self-criticism, to feel this way and to make choices accordingly, often without awareness.

In contrast, when a person chooses a path of learning and practicing the reduction of excessive self-criticism, they discover how false it is and how much it distorts reality, and how it plants unnecessary, exaggerated, and irrelevant fears within them. Through its exaggerated messages, it attempts to manage their life for them.

When a person learns to recognize the exaggerations and distortions of excessive self-criticism, they can reexamine, slowly and gradually, their relationship with their truth, a truth they could not access due to years of self-criticism dominating their life.

For many people, this idea sounds surprising, the idea that truth leads to loneliness. It is surprising because many have never fully experienced the price paid by someone who does not give up their truth, despite threats of social rejection and lack of acceptance.

Moreover, it is surprising because of the denial surrounding this subject, a denial also maintained by excessive self-criticism, which forces a person to create around their truth an illusion of irrelevance, to the point that it no longer appears to be truth at all.

This is a very significant challenge within human society, a challenge that explains many phenomena, choices, and behaviors. A person who has grown into someone who does not give up their truth, at least to a sufficient degree that it awakens in them interest and a need to embark on journeys of exploration and change, is relatively rare. Such a person must pass through moments of feeling a lack of belonging and a lack of alignment with their immediate environment.

However, that same loneliness ultimately proves to be temporary and even valuable. During it, the person learns the importance of belonging to themselves, the pleasure in that, and the freedom that comes with no longer needing to pretend on a regular basis, which otherwise creates an even deeper loneliness.

Therefore, in the end, this is an illusion that must be passed through when one seeks to develop and discover inner beauty and a personal path of expression, growth, creation, and change. It is an illusion because the people we truly want around us are those who recognize our truth, resonate with it, support it, and feel comfortable with it. Usually, these are people for whom their own truth is also very important.

If we are surrounded by people among whom there is a silent agreement to hide the truth from one another, then we are indeed in deep loneliness, one that affects us to the point that we may want to distance ourselves from anyone who lives their truth, because they will remind us of our own loneliness and awaken within us a not simple pain.

And so, continuously, there exists a kind of struggle between excessive self-criticism and the simple and stable truth of the person. Excessive self-criticism will attempt to mark truth as the factor that leads to loneliness, while in reality, truth is the only path to finding the supportive and accurate environment for that person.

All that remains is to choose which side to stand on. The side that cooperates with excessive self-criticism and creates hidden loneliness under the illusion of belonging, or the side that resists it, willing to encounter moments of not belonging, but using them to clarify where one truly belongs and who the right people are to be close to.

Questions for Self-Reflection (preferably in writing):

1. How do you currently evaluate your ability to refuse, set boundaries, and say “this is enough” when necessary?
2. Are you willing, starting now, to practice more clear and decisive assertiveness toward your excessive self-criticism?
3. What firm statements would you like to say to your excessive self-criticism when it disturbs you? Give a few examples.
4. Why do you think it is often difficult for us, as human beings, to refuse and set boundaries when it is important and necessary for us?
5. What might happen if your relationship with your excessive self-criticism becomes one in which you respond to it more assertively?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about what you read in this step? Experiences, insights, questions, feelings?

Chapter 23: What Happens Within Me in Silence

The need to belong, and therefore also to be “okay” in the eyes of others, stands, as already mentioned, at the center of attention of excessive self-criticism within the human being. Excessive self-criticism follows our actions, emotions, desires, longings, and thoughts, and seeks to ensure that we are moving along what is perceived as the “normal” path, that we continue to be “okay” to a sufficient degree in order to keep belonging to some form of consensus to which we wish to belong, sometimes consciously and often unconsciously.

One of the things that consistently and continuously clashes with this “mission” of excessive self-criticism, the mission of “being okay,” is human authenticity. Later, we will continue to explore this conflict from different angles, between self-criticism and the true and unique story of the individual. Here, we focus on the fact that within the inner spaces of a person there exists a kind of freedom that is very difficult to limit. This is the freedom of the movement of the emotional world, the movement of thoughts, the movement of desire, impulses, and everything else that takes place within the person.

Within a person’s inner world, there are many contents that they prefer to keep “to themselves” and not expose outwardly. Various thoughts that they consider “strange,” desires that seem to them “inappropriate” or “unacceptable,” dreams they feel ashamed to share with others, feelings that even they themselves cannot fully understand in terms of their nature or direction. This inner freedom, the freedom of the mental energy within a person, is what excessive self-criticism seeks to reduce and restrict.

Just as excessive self-criticism itself is excessive, it seeks to create the opposite condition within the emotional and experiential world of the person. It seeks to make it limited, predictable, not spontaneous, not curious, not renewing, and not free.

Excessive self-criticism “fears” that the inner content world will also become excessive, that it will overflow outward and be revealed. In that moment, it “believes” that it will fail in its central role, to keep the person as part of the consensus, while the person might reveal to their environment just how different, unique, one of a kind, unpredictable, original, creative, and self-directed they truly are.

When a person becomes accustomed to the presence and authority of excessive self-criticism, they learn, through repeated encounters with it, to fear their own authentic and true story, even without knowing what that story actually is.

Worse than that, this ongoing inner dialogue with excessive self-criticism convinces the person that there are many things within them that it is better for no one to know about. Not because these things are truly “terrible,” as the person may believe, but because the continuous influence of excessive self-criticism has convinced them that significant parts of their authentic, original, and primary nature contain elements that are “problematic” or “not suitable” for the current social culture and way of life.

It is important to notice that this fear, the fear of exposing “what truly exists within me,” which exists in one form or another in every person, hides from us one of the sweetest and most connecting experiences between people. This is the experience of being completely open, of being transparent.

The human being, in the end, carries a constant desire to “confess,” to release all of their “secrets,” to free themselves from the burden of holding all those things that are supposedly “forbidden to tell” or “forbidden to reveal.”

It is true that we cannot, and it is not always appropriate, to expose all of our inner content to every person without boundaries. For this, all that is needed is a reasonable level of self-criticism, without the need for its excessive, painful, and frightening version, which leaves no room for judgment and choice regarding when, how much, and where it is appropriate to reveal or share.

In general, excessive self-criticism creates within a person, in an exaggerated and amplified way, a general experience across many areas of life of “I am not okay.” This begins within, in thoughts, impulses, drives, wishes, desires, and in places where the person perceives things in a unique way that differs from the majority.

The fear that someone will discover what happens within me in silence is a classic example of the damage caused by excessive self-criticism to a person’s ability to feel comfortable with themselves, and also to their ability to build relationships based on authenticity and direct, open emotional communication.

Excessive judgment regarding “what is allowed to be thought” or “what is legitimate to feel” creates “inner monsters” that would not have developed into monsters had excessive self-criticism not labeled them as such and exaggerated their negative significance and the potential consequences of revealing them outwardly.

When a person builds “monsters” within themselves, they also build an ongoing fear of themselves, of the validity of their path, of their creative ideas, of their originality, and ultimately of almost everything that makes their authentic inner world unique.

That same inner world, to which excessive self-criticism is given almost free access, becomes a place that is uncomfortable to exist within. Within this space, a need arises to create separate compartments of concealment, in which the person is unable even to observe certain aspects of themselves.

This same need to belong and to be “okay” gradually becomes, in the service of excessive self-criticism, a source of inner conflicts within the person. In these conflicts, what seeks to emerge naturally and uniquely encounters walls, “no entry” signs, and various forms of exclusion, arising from an accumulating, unregulated, and disproportionate fear of the possibility that “someone will discover what happens within me in silence.”

These conflicts prevent the person from bridging between who they truly are and their environment, and worse than that, between who they truly are and who they learn to believe they are “supposed to be.”

When a person learns, through various means, to dismantle the intensity of excessive self-criticism, which has become a kind of public norm, they begin to experience a gradual process of renewed approval of their inner world, and a softening of the fear of exposing broader parts of themselves to the outside world. This is especially true when it comes to people with whom it is safe to share, knowing that they will not respond with judgment or criticism, but rather with love and support for the courage and willingness to share.

This subject has very significant social implications. Those inner walls, and later external ones, that are built to ensure that “no one will know what is truly within me,” create tension and exaggerated separation between people. They make it very difficult to build processes of mutual understanding and connection, and ultimately may lead to situations that deteriorate into conflict or harm, due to accumulated tension resulting from the blocking of authentic expression between people. This flow is what enables trust, love, closeness, and shared creation.

For this reason, among others, there is great importance in learning how to reduce excessive self-criticism, and in improving the ability to identify how it functions and influences a person’s life, both internally and in relation to others. When we have less to hide, we have less need to hide, to lie, to pretend, and to manipulate. When we have less to hide, we can truly get to know one another, come closer to one another, and support one another.

When we learn to fear less the exposure of what exists within us, we can dismantle those “monsters” that we developed in the darkness, in spaces that were excessively hidden from the world.

In order to allow the light to enter and heal the basements of “prohibition” that we have cultivated within ourselves, we must recognize the mechanism that caused us to run away from our true story and to fear it. We must learn how to release ourselves from the habit of living with this mechanism, and begin to discover new, more pleasant, and more creative ways of existing with ourselves and with our environment.

Questions for Self-Reflection (preferably in writing):

1. What immediate emotional reactions might you have in response to the word “lie”? How do you feel about the atmosphere of this word?
2. Are you open to the possibility that you are, in fact, lying to yourself through excessive self-criticism more often than you realize?
3. If excessive self-criticism is, for the most part, false, what is the truth that is not being expressed in its place?

4. How do you feel when you discover that someone is lying to you? And how does that connect for you to the idea that you may be doing this to yourself without noticing?
5. Are you willing to forgive yourself, even slightly, for allowing your self-criticism to lie to you and even convince you of its lies?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about what you read in this step? Experiences, insights, questions, feelings?

Chapter 24: Self-Criticism and the Superego

This step, and the two that follow it, address one of the most significant and elusive aspects of excessive self-criticism. It is an aspect that, as will be explained here, is well known within common and widely accepted psychological theories: the fact that excessive self-criticism functions as a force that “punishes” us.

This aspect is not easy to identify for those who are not familiar with it or do not recognize it, because it describes a relatively dramatic and intense connection. However, without recognizing and understanding that this is indeed how excessive self-criticism operates, and that this is a central part of what makes it “excessive,” it is not truly possible to deal with it effectively or to create change in the complex relationship a person has with this part that they have developed within themselves without being aware of it.

The concept of the “superego” entered human culture through the work of Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalytic psychology and what is now commonly referred to as dynamic psychology. This is a form of psychology in which the therapeutic style is longer in duration and based on conversations aimed at reaching the depths of human conflicts and pain, in order to enable processes of change and healing at those levels.

The term “superego” is generally defined as an unconscious part of the human psyche. This part serves to “supervise” thoughts, sensations, and emotions, as well as choices and actions, so that the person does not cross boundaries that they are supposedly not allowed to cross, both on the level of thought and on the level of behavior.

To a large extent, the superego can be understood as having aspects of a “highly developed conscience,” or a sophisticated control system whose role is to prevent the instinctive and “wild” parts of the person from gaining excessive freedom that could supposedly endanger the person and their environment.

According to the conventional understanding, the superego attempts to neutralize such situations by creating a sharp experience of pain, through feelings of guilt, shame, and a sense of inner conflict. This occurs when the superego identifies that a person has thought or acted in ways that do not align with the rigid set of values that it holds as boundaries that must not be crossed.

It is commonly assumed that the superego develops in early childhood as a form of internalization of the accepted values of the family and environment. The child learns to become their own “educator” in an unconscious way, and thus learns to limit themselves and even to cause themselves pain when they act, or even think, in ways that are considered “unacceptable” or “improper.”

It is also commonly assumed that opposite this “superego” stands what is known as the “id,” which contains the instinctive, wild, animalistic, and boundaryless aspects of the

person. These parts are perceived as potentially acting in immoral or insufficiently regulated ways, especially in relation to sexuality and aggression.

This is the conventional theory: two unconscious parts exist within the person, engaged in a kind of “competition.” On one side stands the freer, more instinctive part, and on the other side stands the “cultural,” “mature,” and “responsible” part, which creates experiences of pain and punishment when the person “slips” into expressions that the superego considers socially or otherwise dangerous.

The Psycho-Creative approach expands this theory and also brings its foundations into conscious application, not only unconscious. Here we are referring to excessive self-criticism that is clearly noticeable and felt at the conscious level. Moreover, there is also a real capacity to moderate its level of influence and the nature of its involvement in daily life.

We also expand the scope of what excessive self-criticism is concerned with far beyond the limitation of sexual and aggressive impulses. We present excessive self-criticism as a force whose purpose is to broadly restrict the free spirit within the person.

It reduces initiative, creativity, imagination, originality, autonomy, and uniqueness. Excessive self-criticism seeks to influence the person to be as little different from others as possible, keeping them within a narrow space of what is considered “normal and acceptable” in the social environment in which they live.

At the same time, excessive self-criticism, as described here, operates in a way that is very similar to what is attributed to the superego, in that it also creates within the person a sense of “punishment” or an experience of “I deserve to be punished now.” It causes the person to feel that they are not good, that they do not deserve love, affection, belonging, respect, or appreciation. Under its influence, a person may feel small and insignificant, weak, and lacking the ability to positively influence their life.

Similar to the action of the superego, a person tends to believe excessive self-criticism more than is warranted. From this comes its great power to influence the person and generate those unpleasant feelings. When this component is unconscious, as traditional psychology often describes the superego, a person has less ability to deal with the negative reactions they experience when it becomes active.

In contrast, within the Psycho-Creative approach, a person learns how to become as familiar as possible with the way their self-criticism operates, to identify it in real time, and even to create a positive internal stance toward it, whose purpose is to counter the negative, harsh, and absolute messages of excessive self-criticism.

Within the Psycho-Creative approach, we turn excessive self-criticism into a kind of “inner entity” whose characteristics, modes of operation, and various forms of appearance can be described. With this “entity,” as we learn, there exists an ongoing and often highly conscious relationship. This is a relationship that we have much more ability

to influence and guide than we usually realize, directing it toward new, more pleasant, and more constructive directions.

Moreover, we even “use” the presence of excessive self-criticism to teach ourselves to rise above our habitual patterns, which are often tied to excessive criticism, and to cultivate greater courage to change, to develop, to create, and to connect with our passion and the realization of our dreams.

This is the major difference between the Psycho-Creative approach and what is described as the superego in modern psychology. We view excessive self-criticism as a significant challenge, as a representation of our quiet fears. This representation allows us to take ourselves into processes of transformation and change that we might not have been willing to pursue if not for the burden and repeated “punishment” created by excessive self-criticism.

The greatest transformation that can be described in relation to excessive self-criticism, and one that is usually not emphasized in discussions of the superego, is that the very existence of excessive self-criticism is itself a kind of message to the person. A message that tells them how far they are from their freedom, from their authentic expression, from their creativity, and from their self-love.

Thus, those “punishments” that come from excessive self-criticism, similar to those attributed to the superego, become, in this approach, a kind of catalyst for personal development. The results of this development can be measured, among other ways, over time, as a noticeable reduction in the influence of self-criticism. This reduction can be recognized at the conscious level, and it likely also creates, at a deeper level, a reduction in the activity of the superego itself.

Questions for Self-Reflection (preferably in writing):

1. What are the most important things in your daily routine?
2. Which elements of your routine could be approached with more flexibility?
3. What happens to you when your routine is disrupted by something unexpected?
4. In what ways can you gently challenge your routine and introduce more adventure and surprise into it?
5. Can you recall a situation in which your routine was significantly disrupted and it ultimately turned out for the better?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about what you read in this step? Experiences, insights, questions, feelings?

Chapter 25: The Shamed Child

To be a shamed child, scolded and “not okay.” This is one of the central experiences that excessive self-criticism creates within a person.

Is there a reason why you might find yourself falling into such experiences, in which you become a shamed child, scolded and “not okay”?

Is there any logic that can justify arriving at such experiences, with all the discomfort that accompanies them?

Excessive self-criticism is an internal creation of the human being. Although it exists within each individual, it carries a kind of universality. It can be said that excessive self-criticism has a certain “success” in creating a quiet form of control over large groups of people, through the cultivation of a punitive mechanism within them. This mechanism ensures a particular form of behavior, choices, and decisions, and also avoidance of various things that excessive self-criticism “demands” that a person stay away from.

Are you willing to acknowledge that there are moments, occurring very quickly, filled with pain and confusion, in which you are suddenly transported back to childhood, to moments in which you were small in the face of a world that was unclear, and at times rigid and arbitrary? These are moments in which you adopted, without knowing it, a narrative absorbed from the general atmosphere, a narrative that led you to feel ashamed and scolded.

Moreover, the great paradox of such moments, precisely because they are such an embedded part of the existing human social structure, is that although the experience of shame and of being “scolded and not okay” necessarily makes a person feel “unworthy,” and therefore to a large extent also “not belonging,” there is within them a component that actually creates a sense of belonging.

This is how it works: if the unpleasant experiences associated with excessive self-criticism are common and familiar, and if they ultimately occur in everyone, then part of belonging also takes place there, in the space where a person participates in what others are also experiencing. Every person is exposed, from time to time, to scolding and to the feeling of shame that accompanies self-criticism when it becomes excessive and is not itself regulated or balanced.

This is one of the quiet and difficult to understand reasons for the continued existence of excessive self-criticism among many people, and for its transformation into something perceived as “normal.” It is based on the widespread internalization of a form of “belonging” through the negative experiences it generates. Of course, this is a low quality form of belonging that does not serve the person well, but it is still a form of belonging. Often, a person will do almost anything to preserve what they perceive as a way to belong.

From another angle, a person finds it difficult to stand up to excessive self-criticism and prove to it that it is exaggerated, unnecessarily painful, and disproportionately punitive. This is partly due to a deep and unconscious fear of behaving differently from “the herd,” and thereby leaving oneself isolated and without belonging.

We maintain excessive self-criticism, limiting and restrictive, partly because of the feeling that in this way we continue to belong to a community, to any social space that is important to us, consciously or unconsciously, to remain connected to.

This part of the story should not be taken lightly. It is a large part, perhaps even too large. It is difficult to grasp how far we are willing to go in order to maintain what we perceive as belonging. Sometimes to the point of being willing to hurt ourselves and harm ourselves if that is what is required to continue feeling part of the “tribal fire.”

To a large extent, this is a broad social and cultural question that ultimately reaches the individual. Is there any educational or developmental value in using tools such as shame, or in creating the experience of “I am not okay”? Have we paused even for a moment to examine the cost of this mechanism, and whether it truly serves a meaningful purpose in relation to the pain it creates?

This question is highly significant for the learning process here, regarding excessive self-criticism and the recognition of it as excessive. In places where there exists, to some degree, a perception that experiences such as “I am ashamed of myself” or “I am not okay” are an inseparable part of the social, familial, or community landscape, a distorted norm is created regarding the legitimacy of excessive self-criticism.

When we do not stop to ask about the very questionable value of creating shame or the experience of “I am not okay,” we effectively allow this element, which exists widely in the human environment, to continue operating and influencing. When such a phenomenon receives quiet legitimacy, it becomes difficult to recognize that it is an unreasonable and exaggerated response that should be reduced as much as possible, and that its widespread use carries a significant cost.

When a person feels, as a result of some unpleasant event, like a “shamed child,” they experience themselves as being punished. They experience themselves as unworthy and “not good enough.” These feelings have no ability to generate meaningful motivation for change or valuable learning. They diminish the person, their sense of self-worth, and their ability to understand themselves, their actions, and their thoughts. They focus the person within an atmosphere of fear and lack of value.

Such feelings compete with a person’s ability to take responsibility for mistakes and to correct them through change and learning. They distance the person from the ability to improve and develop, because improvement cannot take place in an atmosphere of fear, but only in an atmosphere of responsibility combined with empathy toward human weaknesses, which we all share.

We do not need ourselves, or others around us, to be ashamed. We need ourselves and others to stand with courage in front of their difficulties, pains, and mistakes, with the understanding that even then they are loved and worthy of respect and trust. A mechanism such as excessive self-criticism, in fact, comes to teach us to stop using this method within ourselves, and from there also in relation to others.

We all make mistakes from time to time. We all sometimes miss the right thing to say, and sometimes get carried away in a certain mood into actions we later regret. We all have missed and will continue to miss better paths under certain conditions. We all have missed opportunities and will miss more in the future. This is almost inevitable, and to a large extent even necessary, otherwise no learning process could take place.

This is the point at which it becomes important to recognize how continued cooperation with excessive self-criticism disrupts a person's possibilities for growth and development. Mistakes are not only events in which we "missed" or "were not attentive." Mistakes that we are aware of and feel the pain of are central learning events. In fact, they are not missed opportunities, but rather significant opportunities for change that could not have occurred otherwise.

Excessive self-criticism is what causes us to miss the great opportunities that come together with our mistakes.

In such moments, after a mistake or an experience of failure, there is a certain kind of pain, a pain that comes to signal things within the emotional space that require attention, now, after the "mistake" has occurred. That mistake holds special value in these moments because it draws attention, evokes emotional experience, and allows the person to observe something that could not have been observed otherwise.

In these moments, if the pain of the "error" deteriorates, through the intervention of excessive self-criticism, into an experience of exaggerated shame or into the feeling of "I am not okay," then, in effect, the lesson that could have been learned from that mistake is missed.

Instead of moving through the experience of pain with self-compassion, listening, and learning the emotional story that was revealed in those moments, the person is drawn into an unnecessary drama of shame and damage to self-worth. At that point, they can no longer recognize what the mistake was trying to tell them. Instead, they unconsciously choose a "real mistake," which is the prevention of the healing and transformation process that the original mistake was inviting.

If this happens, if we find ourselves being "punished" by excessive self-criticism, with strong feelings of shame or of "I am really not okay," we may come to understand that what is happening within us is a kind of childhood experience. A habit that was embedded within us years ago, through which we learned to belong to our environment, among other ways, through such experiences, just as others did. Now, here, it is time to

dismantle and dissolve this mechanism, which is no longer valid, no longer necessary, and no longer helpful.

If this occurs, it is worth pausing, breathing, observing, and for the first time recognizing that the shame is completely exaggerated and unnecessary. In its place, we can turn inward, as much as possible, with understanding, listening, empathy, and a genuine desire to learn, to grow, and to change. Not through punishment, but through healing the pain and wrapping it with love.

Questions for Self-Reflection (preferably in writing):

1. What are the things you enjoy changing in your life frequently?
2. What are the things you prefer to change only rarely?
3. What change do you long for but currently feel unable to bring about on your own?
4. What change would make you truly realize that your control over your life is less than you previously thought?
5. If you had the means and conditions, what unusual or unconventional change would you initiate right now?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about what you read in this step? Experiences, insights, questions, feelings?

Chapter 26: Why Do We Need Punishment?

This question is one of the most important and at the same time one of the most elusive questions in understanding the story of excessive self-criticism within the human being. It touches on a kind of masochistic habit that is considered part of what is perceived as “normal,” while at the same time there exists, most likely, a far-reaching denial regarding it. Without this denial, this habit of living within excessive self-criticism would not have been able to continue in such a widespread and significant way within human existence.

There is a reason, and perhaps we will discover that there is more than one reason, for why a person agrees to “absorb” emotional punishments within themselves on a regular basis, often daily. They are used to living this way, used to existing in this way. There is a kind of feeling that “this is how it is supposed to be, it cannot be otherwise. I will always encounter excessive self-criticism within myself and experience the pain it causes. This is not going to change.”

When we ask ourselves, and if we ask almost any person, “Why do we need punishment?” and perhaps more directly, “Why do we need punishment from ourselves on such a regular basis?”, it is likely that we will not receive a satisfying answer. The question itself may sound “strange” or “confusing.” “What punishments are you talking about? I do not understand what you mean. I have no tendency or agreement to experience punishment...”

As mentioned, without the sweeping denial of this phenomenon, it is possible that this subject would have received a more visible place in public discourse, and a book like this might have been written decades ago. But if we are here, and able to look directly at the phenomenon and recognize that it is a form of excessive, unnecessary, and harmful inner punishment, then all that remains is to ask this question, even if at first we do not find complete answers.

Sometimes, in order to understand more deeply, it is necessary first to dare to ask the right and not simple questions, even if for a while they remain “in the air” without a complete and satisfying answer.

The initial task in this context, therefore, is to allow the level of denial and avoidance of this question to begin to decrease, just as we seek to reduce the level of our excessive self-criticism. The more we reduce denial of the fact that excessive self-criticism is a form of inner punishment, and the more we recognize that this punishment occurs regularly, the more we can return to wondering, and perhaps even find ourselves surprised by this strange and essential question: why do we need punishment?

The answer to this question is simple and clear, yet not easy to admit. There is only one answer to the question “Why do I need punishment?” and it is: “Because I am not okay. I deserve punishment because I am not okay.” On the experiential level, there is no other answer to this question. It is an automatic and unusual answer that arises in response to a

question that is itself unusual and difficult to ask, yet important to ask: why do we need punishment?

Is a person willing to recognize that within them there exists an almost constant feeling, or a recurring feeling, of “I am not okay”? This is the first question, a meaningful question of self-awareness that is worth pausing on.

The more advanced question that should follow is: is there truly a reason for me to feel this way, and am I willing to continue agreeing to remain in this experience, or do I wish to begin dealing with its presence?

One of the major problems, on a social level, around this subject is the habit and consensus surrounding this quiet and insufficiently discussed experience, the experience that exists at the foundation of most people’s lives, if not all. This is the experience of “I am not okay,” which sometimes develops into an even more surprising experience: “I am not okay and I deserve punishment.”

This habit creates, on one hand, a sweeping denial and avoidance of these feelings, a denial that prevents change. On the other hand, this same denial and habit “normalize” the situation. A person feels, as mentioned earlier in the context of belonging, that there is nothing wrong with feeling “not okay” internally, and that in fact it is “completely okay” to feel that something is “not okay” about them.

This inner mechanism, which generates feelings of guilt, self-blame, self-doubt, a sense of incapability, pessimism, lack of hope, fear of initiative, self-condemnation over “errors” or “mistakes,” hesitation, procrastination, and lack of self-acceptance, is a mechanism that ultimately receives both personal and social approval to exist. It becomes, in one way or another, perceived as “normal.” From here also emerges the legitimacy for critical, judgmental, and sometimes even hostile attitudes toward others, as an external expression of what is internally perceived as legitimate.

At this stage, where we are now, I suggest leaving the question open, allowing it to undergo an internal process that over time will provide new and interesting answers. The question is: why do I need punishment right now? This is a question that should not be answered immediately or in a definitive way, but rather listened to. To listen to the question and to the quiet implications contained within it.

As long as we are unable to listen to this simple yet meaningful question, we will not be able to change the existing balance with excessive self-criticism, which often receives almost unlimited permission to punish as much as it can, through the creation of emotional pain and experiences of lack of belonging and lack of worth.

Do we need punishment in order to learn something that we could not learn otherwise? In the past, this was the accepted method of education, and perhaps it is not only in the past, but still exists today in a somewhat different form. To punish in order to teach. To punish

in order to “teach a lesson.” To punish in order to set a boundary, supposedly. To punish as part of dealing with a problem.

Are we aware that we use this tool of punishment unconsciously within ourselves? Are we able to notice that moment of shame, of inner disappointment, of exaggerated and diminishing inner scolding that does not allow us to go anywhere except “into the corner,” until the unpleasant experience passes?

Awareness that this is an act of punishment is highly significant, even before we seek to change it into something more gentle and beneficial. There is a process to go through until we reach a reasonable and continuous level of awareness, on the experiential level, that events of “punishment” occur far more frequently than we have ever estimated. They happen within us, and potentially can occur at any moment.

When excessive self-criticism has the opportunity to “punish” us, it ultimately creates a form of deterrence. This is the greatest problem arising from excessive self-criticism. We develop a style of thinking, acting, and decision making in which fear of punishment is already embedded.

We quickly reach a state of avoiding things that could nurture and expand our lives, simply because somewhere within us there is fear of an unpleasant reaction that will come from excessive self-criticism.

In order to begin changing the course of things, we will remain for some time with this question, and try not to provide it with a final answer. Instead, we will ask it again and again: why do I need punishment? We will ask it in a simple and open way, allowing ourselves to be receptive to a range of answers.

The more this question is asked, the more the quiet mechanisms of deterrence will be revealed, and the clearer the nature of the experience that occurs when excessive self-criticism is active will become. As these begin to move within us, we can continue advancing in learning the tools for reducing excessive self-criticism.

Questions for Self-Reflection (preferably in writing):

1. How do you currently assess the level of activity of your “initiative muscle” in your life?
2. Give an example of something you initiated in the past, even though others did not fully support or encourage you.
3. What emotional changes do you experience when you are at a higher level of initiative than usual?
4. Are you willing to take a risk and initiate something connected to your passion that might not succeed this time? How will you support yourself in dealing with possible failure?

5. What initiative do you fantasize about doing sometime in the future? And perhaps you can begin to bring that future closer to you, in some way?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about what you read in this step? Experiences, insights, questions, feelings?

Chapter 27: The Hostile Courtroom

One of the gifts a person can give themselves, a gift with deep and far-reaching impact on their life within the learning and awakening process around recognizing excessive self-criticism, is the understanding that this criticism creates within them an inner space similar to a “hostile courtroom.” This is a place to which a person is often “taken,” without having chosen it and without any real justification.

The term “judgmental” accurately describes this inner atmosphere, which contains many symbolic elements resembling an event taking place in a courtroom. Yet in this internal courtroom there is no real attempt to clarify what is just, nor is there any process of resolving a conflict.

It is a hostile space in which the person, cast into the role of the accused, stands before an internal figure acting as a prosecutor, while they themselves have no right to defense. There is no inner voice of defense that stands beside them, no internal figure that protects them, and no one who challenges the one-sided process that unfolds within them in those moments.

Within this inner courtroom, the person quickly moves from suspect to guilty, without any investigation, without presenting arguments, and without any form of proof. There is no proof because there never was any. This is an experience of self-judgment in which the person is both the judge and the prosecutor, and at the same time does not allow themselves to stand up to the judgmental atmosphere or to resist it. They are pulled into a scene that they themselves generate internally, again and again, usually without awareness.

This is a hostile courtroom that the person has built within themselves and continues to operate. It is no wonder that the fear of excessive self-criticism is so great, since violating one of its strict “rules” can instantly bring the person into this judicial space where they are declared guilty and even deserving of punishment.

Even if this description sounds metaphorical, it reflects very accurately the inner atmosphere familiar to many people, especially when something does not go according to expectations, or when patterns of difficulty, disappointment, and self-frustration reappear. In such moments, the emergence of excessive self-criticism pulls the person into this courtroom very quickly, and the internal drama unfolds almost without them noticing.

At this point, an important question arises: is it possible to resist this inner courtroom? Can a person decide not to participate any longer in a play in which they simultaneously serve as judge, prosecutor, and accused, without any real chance of being heard or understood? Why does a person continue to appear, again and again, before this courtroom that offers them no real space to breathe?

A person can stand against this courtroom only if, before anything else, they recognize its existence. This recognition becomes possible when they learn to identify their self-

criticism as excessive and disproportionate. They will be able to choose to leave this courtroom only when they clearly see that they are being drawn into it repeatedly, and that they themselves are fulfilling all its roles.

It is not simple to admit that we create within ourselves such a harsh inner atmosphere, and that we are the ones judging ourselves with excessive severity. It is not simple to recognize the quiet masochistic tendency we maintain within ourselves, sometimes on a daily basis, without naming it accurately.

We tend to judge ourselves not only harshly but also very frequently. We tend to be drawn into that inner courtroom where our entire perception narrows into a limited point of view that cancels all complexity, all understanding, and all compassion toward ourselves. This space reduces reality into a one-dimensional story that repeats itself again and again, without any real change taking place.

At this stage, it is worthwhile to pause and ask:

Why do I have a need for such an inner hostile courtroom?
Am I aware of the existence of such a space within me?
Am I willing to reexamine my conduct within the courtroom I have created for myself?
What will happen if I choose to be absent from it for a while, or even for longer periods?
What frightens me about a life with less self-judgment and less inner accusation regarding my thoughts, feelings, and choices?

These questions are not meant to produce one single answer. They are intended to open the inner space, to expand awareness of the pattern's existence, and to create a crack in the mechanism that continues to exist simply because we do not fully recognize it.

It is important to emphasize that this courtroom often convenes even after we have already decided to stop its activity. This is a sophisticated mechanism that begins in unconscious layers and operates long before we notice it. The path to improving early recognition and changing this pattern is not short, but it is possible. The clearer and quicker the recognition becomes, the more real change can take place.

We must cultivate compassion toward ourselves in our encounter with this inner courtroom. We must understand that it exists because there is an inner need that has not yet found its answer. It represents pains and fears that are still seeking a path toward healing, and therefore they appear again and again in the familiar drama of excessive self-criticism, dissatisfaction, a sense of failure, missed opportunities, and damage to self-worth.

At this stage, we aim primarily to improve recognition. We want to learn to identify the exact moment in which the courtroom convenes. In that moment, we can say to ourselves: here it is happening now, I am judging myself too harshly. The very act of recognition is already the beginning of change.

The more we learn to recognize that this drama does not reflect truth but rather creates a narrow and negative reality, the more we can gradually move toward choosing to end the courtroom session more quickly. Over time, we may even reach a place where the frequency of its convening decreases significantly, becoming rare and sometimes almost unnoticeable.

We are on our way there. And that is encouraging and uplifting.

And one last thing. The next time the courtroom convenes within you, at the moment you recognize it, you may pause and try to smile. The smile does not cancel the experience, but it exposes the mechanism. The smile reminds you that this is a manipulative process and nothing more. The more we are able to smile within this courtroom, the more it loses its power to judge us.

Questions for Self-Reflection (preferably in writing):

1. How do you feel about the expression “inner courtroom”?
2. How do you feel about the possibility that you are the one who convenes this courtroom and also fills all the roles within it?
3. If you were to surprise the “courtroom” and present yourself also as your own defender against the usual accusations that arise there, what would you want to say in your favor to reduce the atmosphere of blame?
4. How would you feel if you stood in this way to support yourself in the face of the tendency to accuse yourself or remain too long within feelings of guilt?
5. What do you think will happen when you smile at this courtroom? What might change for the better? Where could this lead if you add a smile that observes and understands this strange situation with a slightly more playful perspective?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about what you read in this step? Experiences, insights, questions, feelings?

Chapter 28: There Is No Way to Escape

One of the amusing, or frustrating, aspects of excessive self-criticism and its wide-ranging effects is the fact that a person has no real option to escape the consequences and reactions that arise when they once again encounter the unpleasant experience of harsh self-judgment. It is a meeting with a space in which there is no protection, no inner defense, and no real ability to resist or influence the “verdict” that always arrives in the same familiar way.

Only when we truly understand that there is no way to bypass the experience of “guilt” and the “verdict,” important metaphors here for illustration, and only when we honestly observe the hostile courtroom that a person has created within themselves over the years, can we begin to change the nature of this ritual.

Only then does the possibility of real change begin to open, a change in this heavy, limiting, and restrictive mechanism, one that seems to take us again and again, against our will, into an inner place where no one would choose to step.

In order to begin dissolving the “institutions” of this inner courtroom that emerges from excessive self-criticism, we must first acknowledge its existence. We must clearly recognize the moment we have entered it. We must agree to remain there for a moment with full presence, to look directly at this strange phenomenon, which many people are not aware of and may even find difficult to admit exists.

As long as we have not directly observed how we judge ourselves, how we arrive at overly extreme conclusions about ourselves, how we declare ourselves guilty and even punish ourselves, as long as we try to avoid this reflection and refuse to look at it, we will be taken again and again into that same inner space without any ability to change it.

But the moment we stop looking away, stop resisting this uncomfortable inner reality, and begin to recognize it, perhaps even with a slight smile and compassion, the real and deeper journey of reducing excessive self-criticism begins.

And perhaps we can indeed smile at this impressive performance, a performance we have been producing within ourselves for many years. Perhaps it is worth adopting a slightly more humorous, creative, and warm attitude toward the play we enter without noticing that we ourselves wrote its script, direct it, and perform all the roles within it.

This is a judicial space that we manage within ourselves, and this may be the most difficult part to grasp. But if we pause for a moment and look from the side, we may see that the figure who judges, the figure who accuses, and the figure who is accused are all us. This recognition already changes the nature of things.

Here an important principle comes into play. If I have chosen a certain path, even if I did so unconsciously, then I also have the ability to choose a different path. The ability to choose is always present, even if we are not using it. Just as I can choose to enter the

inner courtroom again and again, I am also capable of choosing not to enter it. A choice is a choice. And if I have the ability to choose something destructive, then I certainly have the ability to choose something new that I have not yet experienced.

And this is how it works. As long as a person does not learn to choose differently, they will continue choosing the same familiar path. They will do so automatically, out of habit. As long as they do not pause and smile, recognizing the inner manipulation taking place, as long as they do not expand their awareness of the nature of this performance, they will continue pulling themselves into that space where there is no possibility to escape the “guilt” and the “verdict,” because this is still their choice.

Again, it is important to emphasize something that is not easy to emphasize. In the experience of excessive self-criticism and the inner courtroom, all roles are played by us. This is our story, our unconscious choice, a creation built within us during childhood. Most of the time, we are not aware that this is only one story among many that we could create within ourselves. It is a story we still believe in and cooperate with, even though it is limiting, painful, and restrictive.

From here arise the most important questions that a person who seeks to reduce excessive self-criticism should ask themselves again and again:

How long and to what extent am I willing to continue being my own judge?
How long will I continue to produce a courtroom in which I am always guilty?
How long will I continue cooperating with a performance that I myself created?
Am I willing to take responsibility for the fact that this guilt is an internal invention that is not truly connected to the reality of my life?

Alongside these questions, it is essential to recognize the facts. This mechanism exists. It is active. It is present. It can arise at any moment. There is no real option to escape it as long as we are not willing to see it and recognize it. It is an old, ancient, and highly skilled mechanism that operates within us automatically because we have become accustomed to it. Recognizing its existence is a necessary step on the path to change.

From this place, where we stop denying the existence of this inner hostile courtroom, we can begin to change our relationship with excessive self-criticism. We can begin to see how absurd this performance is, how irrational it is, and how we are not required to continue participating in it.

Further along the path, we will be able to learn tools that will soften, reduce, and gradually dissolve the experience of “guilt” and inner verdict. Such tools can only operate after we are willing to recognize this part of our inner reality and accept that it is an old creation of ours, and to begin asking new questions about the possibility of choosing differently.

Even at this very moment, as you read these lines, excessive self-criticism is present. Perhaps it is quiet right now, perhaps it is occupied with other things, but it is there. It is

good to recognize this. It is good to know that the inner force that resists flow, change, spontaneity, and joy is still within us.

And yet, one day, at a moment when something does not go as we imagined, it will awaken. The courtroom will be called to convene. And you may once again feel the judgment and the discomfort. But what will change, over time, is awareness. Awareness will grow, recognition will deepen, and the ability to create a new, quieter, and more healing process will expand.

The more we become familiar with this pattern, especially in the moments when it occurs in real time, the more we will gradually be able to soften it, reduce it, and transform it.

Questions for Self-Reflection (preferably in writing):

1. Write a declaration in which you announce that you are resigning from the role of “judge of myself.” Allow yourself to release this unnecessary position.
2. What might life look like, in your view, without the presence of guilt? Can you imagine such a possibility in a positive way?
3. Complete the sentence: “I forgive myself now for...” regarding anything you wish to relate to, 12 times in a row.
4. How do you feel about the phrase “I forgive myself now”? Does it feel like something you could repeat many times?
5. Write one or two poems according to the following structure: 6 to 8 lines, each line 2 to 4 words, rhymes are not necessary. Title of the poem: No Longer Guilty. How does it feel to write this poem and to read it?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about what you read in this step? Experiences, insights, questions, feelings?

Chapter 29: We Need Guilt

Ultimately, this highly convincing “performance” of the inner courtroom, the sense of guilt, and the experience of inner punishment that often accompany excessive self-criticism, all stem from a kind of internal permission that we grant for these things to occur. We are the ones who produce this story and carry it out again and again. There is no one else involved. It is something that takes place only between us and ourselves.

If this is so, and everything depends entirely on us, why does it continue to happen, even when we are already familiar with this phenomenon and have no desire for it to continue?

It continues, among other reasons, because somewhere within us, for reasons that we may not yet be able to fully uncover, there exists a certain need to continue being guilty from time to time. Without this need, it would not occur. Without the secondary gain that we experience from this problematic situation, it would not continue to exist.

As strange as this may sound, there is something encouraging in realizing that we return to feelings of guilt only because we need them. When we learn what truly drives this need and discover ways to address it appropriately, it will no longer lead us to reconstruct that same inner courtroom. We will be able to find other ways to relate to this need, ways that include more compassion, love, gentleness, and creativity, allowing it to calm without dragging us into unpleasant inner spaces.

It is worthwhile to pause for a moment and reflect on this question, especially on an experiential level, through a series of questions that can, and are recommended to, be written down and answered in any way that arises:

What happens to me when I feel guilty?

What emotional processes accompany this feeling?

Do I gain anything from it, even indirectly?

What am I avoiding when I experience this guilt, which often comes together with excessive self-criticism?

What would happen if I existed completely without guilt? Is that something I can imagine?

Can I imagine a human society in which guilt is no longer necessary?

Do I believe that guilt serves some protective role in my life?

Is there something I can offer myself instead of this difficult feeling of guilt?

Can I think of a healthier and more beneficial alternative to this feeling, which mostly causes me pain and paralysis?

These questions, and many others, can help deepen the journey of reducing excessive self-criticism and improving it. It is recommended to return to these questions many times and to remain open to diverse, evolving, and even surprising answers. It is also valuable to formulate additional questions in a similar spirit and to challenge ourselves to answer them with as much directness, openness, and courage as possible.

Among the many aspects that excessive self-criticism restricts within a person, we can pause for a moment on the experience of freedom as an example for this inner exploration. Feelings of guilt reduce the experience of freedom, the space for movement, and the sense of entitlement to positive and fulfilling experiences. This is what happens when we feel guilty, is it not?

We can therefore continue to ask: am I afraid of my freedom, and therefore allow feelings of guilt to manage and restrict me so that I do not fully realize my freedom? Do I believe, in any sense, that there is something dangerous or unbalanced about my fantasies of full freedom, and therefore they must be restrained through excessive self-criticism and guilt?

We can add further questions that help us see this picture more broadly and clearly:

Have there been moments in my life in which I experienced a particularly high level of freedom and release, and alongside them arose feelings of guilt or doubt, as if I was not supposed to allow myself to move so far from who I usually am and from the roles I am accustomed to carrying within me?

Have there been especially sweet moments of freedom, of absence of worries and limitations, that also stirred within me an uncomfortable sense of guilt and questions such as: am I allowed?

Is it acceptable for me to be this free right now?

Guilt is a highly effective tool for reducing a person's freedom. When a person feels guilty, most of their attention contracts around the issue for which they feel guilty. In those moments, they are immersed in the pain of guilt, in regret, and in a range of feelings of "I am not okay."

When a person feels that they are "not okay," the first thing they give up is their freedom. True freedom begins from within, from the feeling of "I am okay, I am good, I am worthy." From this feeling, a person becomes available and deserving of seeking and acting toward their freedom as a central aspect of their life.

When a person feels guilty, the inner foundation that could support the maintenance and expansion of their freedom becomes unstable. In those moments, they feel that they are not worthy of the good things in life, and they become occupied with an obsessive and ineffective inner dialogue with excessive guilt, which, at least for a time, seems to have no exit.

Therefore, at the same time that we seek to reduce excessive self-criticism and the unnecessary and exaggerated guilt it creates within us, it is worthwhile to ask ourselves as many questions as possible about our ability, right now, to grant ourselves more freedom than we currently allow.

It is very likely that our fear of expanding our range of freedom, whatever its reasons may be, is responsible in one way or another for the recurring return of guilt. Guilt

provides fear of freedom exactly what it seeks: that we be less free, less unpredictable, less spontaneous, less surprising, and ultimately less ourselves.

A day without guilt. Two days without guilt. A full week without any guilt. Can such a scenario be imagined? What exists there, in a reality where guilt no longer has a place, no longer has the ability to influence how we feel and how we act?

- Who am I, who are you, who are we, as a human space, when the element of guilt dissolves from us, even as an imagined possibility?
- What kind of change might occur when guilt ceases to play a central role and no longer stands between the person and their true freedom?
- What do you think about issuing a dismissal notice to your guilt, even as a symbolic act? Can we manage without guilt?

Can we take responsibility for mistakes without falling into the painful experience of guilt that excessive self-criticism so easily and quickly creates?

In order to reduce excessive self-criticism, which almost always arrives with some level of guilt, it is worthwhile to pause and ask many questions about the degree of freedom we are willing to grant ourselves, about the freedom we aspire to and are willing to invest in.

Excessive self-criticism and the component of guilt that accompanies it are present, among other reasons, because the level of freedom we allow ourselves is still limited. This limitation, this restriction of freedom, is something we create for ourselves through the permission we give excessive self-criticism to operate without interference.

The more deeply we come to know the form of freedom that is possible for us, and the more we reduce our fear of moving toward it a little more each day, the more naturally we will feel less guilt and less criticism. We will have less need for these artificial limitations, and they will become unnecessary. But for this to happen, we must choose our freedom. As long as we do not, the criticism will remain as it is.

Questions for Self-Reflection (preferably in writing):

1. Write 12 associations for the word “freedom.”
2. What is the most important thing, in your view, that a person gains when they become more free? What improves as freedom increases?
3. Are you aware of the connection between excessive self-criticism, feelings of guilt, and the restriction of human freedom? Do you recognize the contraction of freedom that arises when excessive criticism intensifies?
4. Complete the sentence 6 times: “When I allow myself much more freedom than today, I will probably be able to...”
5. Do you have an idea for some initiative or experiment that could give you a pleasant and sweet experience of freedom in the near future? What could that be?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about what you read in this step? Experiences, insights, questions, feelings?

Chapter 30: This Is Not How We Respond to Pain That Needs Attention

We are concluding this remarkable process with a central emotional theme that looks at one of the most significant and subtle aspects of excessive self-criticism: our relationship with our emotional pain.

This is perhaps the most important place in which to initiate change in terms of the influence of excessive self-criticism, a change that is likely the heart of all the other changes that will grow as a result of reducing this part of the human personality.

This step comes at the end of the process, and in many ways everything we have gone through so far can be seen as preparation for this subject, for this place where we meet our pain and learn how to support ourselves in dealing with it in a way that allows learning and healing to take place. When we succeed in improving this aspect within us, all the other “gifts” of reducing excessive self-criticism become more accessible and closer to us.

One of the most paradoxical and important things to understand in relation to excessive self-criticism is the incorrect use of its mechanisms in a desperate attempt to heal emotional disharmony. This is an attempt that not only fails, but actually intensifies the difficulty and the problem, distancing the person from the path of healing and release that they are seeking.

When there is not enough recognition of the problematic nature and lack of alignment of excessive self-criticism in various situations, there are moments when the human response to inner pain becomes self-hostility and self-intolerance.

For those reading these words, this may sound surprising. How is it possible that we act in a negative and even aggressive way toward ourselves when we are in pain? How is it possible that instead of embracing ourselves, comforting ourselves, calming ourselves, and giving ourselves a safe space for healing and recovery, we instead come to ourselves with complaints, feel disappointed in ourselves, and sometimes even descend into shame and self-condemnation?

This is who we are, and it results from a combination of inadequate education and negative influences. All of this leads to a situation in which a person does not know the right way to deal with their pain. This is a path that will never be simple or short, a path that does not demand immediate change, a path that understands that pain needs a listening, supportive, and non-pressuring space, a space that allows honest and unhurried observation of the discomfort that exists within around a certain issue.

Instead of acting this way toward ourselves, instead of doing what is truly helpful, we have learned and become accustomed to burdening ourselves and narrowing ourselves, precisely at the moment when we need inner generosity, self-compassion, self-

recognition, and the feeling that we are seen in a non-judgmental way, and certainly not through disappointment or shame.

In response to excessive self-criticism, which reflects a disproportionate and unregulated use of masculine energy within the person, we must introduce a more active, present, and engaged feminine energy. This energy insists on compassion instead of criticism, does not give up on emotional containment where there is self-intolerance, provides space for quiet presence within pain and difficulty without pushing for immediate solutions, and reminds the person of the love that exists within them and the great need for it, especially in more complex moments.

Reducing excessive self-criticism is similar to a process of withdrawal, in which we learn to free ourselves from deeply rooted personal and cultural habits, to the point where it is difficult to recognize that they are harmful, unnecessary, and even redundant.

And this is something we must tell ourselves more often: this is not how we respond to pain that needs attention. Any version of creating shame or self-condemnation as a response to pain or any form of inner disharmony is a flawed, mistaken, and even harmful way of relating. Like any addiction, this is a habit that repeatedly creates harm and pain, and it is difficult to release.

It begins with recognition. Recognizing that this is a kind of mistake, a kind of misunderstanding, a kind of misguidance, that as long as we cooperate with it, it will indeed lead us into unpleasant experiences such as shame, self-condemnation, or a vague and unexplained inner pain. This is not how we respond to the emotional challenges we encounter regularly. We must recognize that this is a path worth moving away from, and at the same time acknowledge that we carry a deep habit of continuing to move within it.

We will want to replace this path with new ways that are more aligned with the needs of human growth and healing. These ways can be explored within the spaces of the Psycho-Creative world. But before we set out on those explorations, and also after we begin to experience them, we will need to remind ourselves again and again that excessive self-criticism tends to return even after deep processes of change. Therefore, we will repeatedly declare to ourselves: this is not the right way to treat ourselves. This is a mistake, an error, an expression of inner imbalance, and first and foremost we must refuse this way and the negative messages it produces.

When it happens, and it cannot always be prevented, we must at least pause. We must identify the process while it is happening. We must notice the gradual emergence of the unpleasant feeling, the quiet guilt that builds together with a vague sense of shame that is not entirely clear in its origin or its message.

When this occurs, we must observe ourselves, remain aware of what is happening, breathe, and try to remind ourselves that in those very moments excessive self-criticism is attempting to take control of our emotional state. And if we allow it to do so, this is exactly how we will feel about ourselves. This state may even express itself outwardly

through unpleasant interactions with someone close to us, sometimes without understanding why we chose in that moment to speak or act in a way that is not beneficial.

In those moments, we need a higher than usual level of self-compassion. We need more self-patience. We need greater emotional care in our relationship with ourselves. These are moments in which our emotional state is generally weakened, and therefore it is precisely then that we should call upon the softer and more gentle aspects within us, those that can give us breathing space and prevent feelings of shame and self-condemnation from gaining too much power.

In these moments, it is also helpful to find within ourselves the ability to set a boundary to this emotional cloud, and to tell ourselves that this is a moment of excessive self-criticism and nothing more. It is an illusion that exaggerates difficulty, and we are not required to join the drama that is being created within us. We can breathe, smile at ourselves in the mirror, perhaps practice some form of emotional transformation, and choose to tell ourselves again and again, until we begin to believe it from within, that this is not how we respond to pain that needs attention.

In general, the journey of reducing excessive self-criticism includes a significant use of inner resistance. It is a journey of refusal, of rebellion, of setting new boundaries. It is a journey of learning what we must stop doing. It is a journey of redefining our internal values, and of choosing again how we relate to ourselves, how we speak to ourselves, how we respond to ourselves, how we care for ourselves, how we protect ourselves, and how we stand on our own behalf.

The message of this step is extremely important. The message is: this is not how we treat our pain. This message likely needs to be repeated countless times. This is not how we respond to pain and difficulty. It may sound logical and reasonable that we should not respond to pain with critical attack, yet in practice this is exactly what often happens automatically or almost automatically.

If we do not clearly and firmly deliver this message, that this is not how we respond to our pain under any circumstances and for any reason, it will continue. Excessive self-criticism will be activated in a way that not only does not help, but actually interferes with and harms the healthy processes needed to deal with pain.

This is a learning journey, to say no to criticism after it has already appeared, even when we are in the midst of a difficult emotional experience. We do not want this temporary state of vulnerability to receive a distorted and limiting response. For this, we must remain aware of the role of excessive self-criticism in these moments, and repeatedly update ourselves internally: this is not how we respond to pain within us.

Thank you for being here. And thank you for your presence as you continue along the path.

Thank you for choosing to reduce your excessive self-criticism, for yourself and for all those who may be inspired by you in learning how to relate to ourselves with respect, self-worth, courage, and the willingness to make mistakes, with self-tolerance.

All of this, along with an ongoing encouragement to seek the natural expressions of freedom and creativity that exist within, while consistently and firmly limiting excessive self-criticism, which it is our role to help become less excessive, and even kind and helpful.

Questions for Self-Reflection (preferably in writing):

1. Think about the central mistakes in your life, going far back into the past. What happens when you wrap them with deep compassion?
2. What expressions or words can you offer instead of the word “mistake”?
3. If we reach the understanding that there is no such thing as a “mistake,” what would that do to our lives?
4. What currently frightens you most about your future mistakes?
5. Can you wrap your future mistakes with love and even gratitude, knowing they may take you to places you cannot yet imagine reaching?
6. Write a letter to your excessive self-criticism. Explain to it what you now understand about it and about its presence in your life. Update it on how your relationship will be from this moment onward.
7. Is there anything else you would like to share or write about what you read in this step? Experiences, insights, questions, feelings?