

The very peculiar problem in our culture is not the unwillingness to experience terrible negative trials and tribulations as such. The problem is the way we resist the pain of the trials and tribulations and the way we feel unworthy to experience pleasure. A couple, for example, may be willing to go through a painful separation and divorce proceedings. There can be a lot of rancor in the division of property and assigning the custody of children. But the partners may totally resist feeling the pain and sadness of the breakup of their marriage, much as they were unwilling to experience pleasure during their life together. As long as pleasure can be experienced, it does not matter how hard people work or how intense they are. If people give themselves the right to experience pleasure, it equalizes their lives.

The medicine for the pain, then, is to feel the pleasure. But this is difficult. Even if the pleasure is there, people cannot avail themselves of it because they do not believe they deserve it. We all have numerous opportunities for success and for taking important steps in life. But until the place of unworthiness is resolved, there can be no movement. We may find many justifications and rationalizations for failure later on, but the problem is in the unwillingness to experience pleasure, in the fixation on the pain.

An example of how the negative fixation works would be a person who has both positive and negative aspects, which includes everyone. Both aspects are attached to the pleasure principle. If the person is in a relationship with another, the internal conflict between the positive and negative aspects will be at work in the relationship.

In this relationship, Arthur is very creative and open. But Betsy cannot handle this and becomes negative and contracted. She pulls away. Arthur tries to open to Betsy a few more times. She continues to remain contracted and closed. Arthur finally withdraws from the relationship. He feels justified and experiences pleasure from withdrawing. He says, "I tried; I really tried. You wouldn't open up, so it's your fault." Then Arthur starts gloating about Betsy's faults. He puts more energy into his negative attitudes which are attached to his pleasure principle than he does into positive effort. He has become lost within himself by identifying with the negative part of himself. He is unwilling to experience the pain of disappointment. If Betsy then opens up, Arthur probably will close off and withdraw. Then Betsy will start gloating and wallowing in the pleasure of his withdrawal.

This dynamic occurs in many relationships. It shows that there are lots of traps in the way of being able to stay with the positive feelings. When we are wronged by another person, we often gloat over how wrong that person is. We then feel that we must put a lot of energy into covering up that we are being negative also. We lose perspective on life and fall into pain.