

PAMPHLET 50

INNOCENCE AND PSEUDOINNOCENCE

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EVIL: The use of power to destroy the spiritual growth of others and to defend and preserve the integrity of one's sick self. Evil is a kind of immaturity of the soul and spirit. Evil is the opposition to life. Evil kills spirit. (Scott Peck, MD)

The new senior executive came into the conference room. I knew nothing of him and had not seen him before. I was far below him in the organizational structure and worked in another division. I felt revulsion. I felt the presence of someone sinister. This man, my intuition warned, would hurt others from something angry and twisted inside of himself. I felt guilty for such a reaction and criticized myself for such feelings about another person. I didn't share this feeling with another person for a long time.

Many years later I challenged his behavior, believing he wanted to live by the values he espoused (see Pamphlet 26, Keeper of the Values). I feared he would be upset at me but hoped this leader of the company would reflect on his actions and at least be willing to discuss the situation. Values can conflict and there can be misunderstandings. Maybe I was wrong.

Instead he ridiculed me and warned bitterly that if I upset him again my career would be over. He wasn't interested in talking about values; he was interested in resisting self-examination. On another occasion he told me to contribute less than what I could in a team project. He was the project leader and would be in control and have the ideas. I was not to outshine him. I got the message (and found a way to get off the project).

My feeling of revulsion deepened as I observed this man surround himself with mindless corporate sycophants and destroy good and life sustaining activities with no regard for the harm he did others. I stood up to the darkness as long as I could. But I lacked the power

to counter inhumanity, and inhumanity only responds to raw power. I could not follow this fear-filled and frightening man or those who did his bidding without losing myself. I left the company scapegoated and depleted of energy as did many other leaders of spirit, feeling, and passion.

Organizations are filled with men and women like the pitiful man I described only briefly. I can tell story after story of abuse and injustice done to others in organization after organization by sick people with power and so can you. We just don't talk about it as we should. Instead many collude with such behavior. In abuse-filled and addictive organizations, how could it be otherwise?

I do not believe these men and women think of themselves as villains. They would be shocked and offended deeply to be characterized as inhuman. Most likely they think of themselves as terrific people. I believe they are people who have not confronted, accepted, or absorbed their shadow side. They are not aware of themselves, their emotions, their drives, and they project their most destructive selves onto others. They lack empathy and awareness of their impact on others. They deny the spirit and kill it. As Scott Peck wrote, such behavior is a type of immaturity.

Many of us consider ourselves to be part of a movement of increased consciousness that we hope will evolve the world to be a better place for all. Yet so many of us also deny the existence of maliciousness in ourselves, in our families, in our organizations, and in the movement we consider ourselves part of. We make excuses for those who choose evil acts to express their impotence. Understanding another's pain and motives does not excuse the acts they choose to express themselves. Nor does compassion excuse accountability. This denial of evil will doom efforts at transformation.

Rollo May defined a pseudoinnocent as someone who is naïve, who has blinders on, and who does not see real dangers. I was a pseudoinnocent (at least as to how I viewed some in leadership roles) for much of my time in the corporate world. I thought, I am embarrassed to say, if a person led a company, the leader would be a good person who behaved responsibly and with maturity. I believed leaders would care about people and would do what is right for the organization. I believed if you did what was right, you would be protected. I believed if you worked hard and did good things you would be rewarded. I believed good people of power would come to the aid of the less powerful when injustice was perpetrated.

I did not know, in my youth as a leader, that many in positions of power and leadership are not good people who do not behave responsibly or maturely. I did not know that many in positions of power and leadership do not care about others or the organization. I did not know that doing good things often threatens those in power who will abuse and scapegoat the organizational artists. I did not know that others with power would stand by and ignore injustice. My disillusionment was necessary for my mental health and spiritual growth for mental health requires us to see reality as it is and spiritual growth requires us to absorb and acknowledge destructiveness--in ourselves and in others.

Pseudoinnocents cling to childhood assumptions about the nature of the world. We do not see real dangers. When faced with tough issues we cower into this innocence and make powerlessness, weakness, and helplessness virtues. Our empathy and understanding are misplaced. We do not want to acknowledge power or aggression much less use our innate power and aggression. We don't want to be angry, and we want anger to go away as a human drive. We close our eyes to reality to make it go away. Things then seem simple and easy for us. With this innocence we can deny the destructiveness on our self or others. Evil denies spirit and kills it; pseudoinnocence denies evil and colludes with it.

Pseudoinnocence is adaptive but not in life-affirming ways. No wonder so many in organizations act as if they are helpless and powerless victims who whine all day. Such a stance allows them to be irresponsible.

Many in today's movements to transform the world are denigrated as "new agers" in part, I believe, because of this pseudoinnocence. Many seem to believe that if only they could get those invested in the status quo to understand their vision that they would change, and then we would move to a world of peace and tranquility free from anxiety, guilt, and conflict.

Many guru authors and humanistic consultants put forth poetic visions of organizations and leadership without addressing the realities of responsibility, accountability, and the abuse so prevalent in organizations and in our world. If organizations are transformed, they say and write, everyone will find deep meaning, people will be whole, and all will embrace goodness. Consciously evolved and leaderless groups will self-organize around their goodness. What will happen, in these visions, to abuse, addiction, immaturity, and

irresponsibility?

To the extent that we espouse utopian visions and do not see what is real and do not take responsibility for confronting injustice, we are not transforming anything. Instead we avoid the forces that will make the dreamed of transformation just another failed change effort. Such pseudoinnocence is irresponsible, colludes with abuse, and, ultimately, brings forth destructiveness in ourselves as we become immune to the suffering of others and lose our empathy and compassion. Such pseudoinnocence is not growth--it is regression. Be wary of false prophets.

Health requires that we see reality as it is. Villains and injustice exist. We are surrounded by them in, perhaps, more insidious ways than ever before. Much savagery has become institutionalized and accepted as normal. Ernest Becker wrote that if everyone lives the same lies about the same things, there is no one to call them liars (villains). They establish their own sanity and call themselves normal (good).

If we harm the spirits of others to preserve our own shadow sides, we behave in sinister ways. If we do not bear witness when injustice occurs in front of us, we collude with abuse. If we ignore what is real to sell books, gain consulting contracts, and be seen as a prophet, we are not what we purport ourselves to be. To deny our personal power is to collude with the injustice around us. If we do not use our power for good, a vacuum is created and will be filled by those who will use their power to harm others. On the other hand, if we see shadow side behavior for what it is, we may be compelled to do something about it for villains and injustice will not go away because we wish it so.

We need to see life as it is and make wise moral judgments. It is wrong not to. We begin with ourselves and clean up our own inner mess, if we haven't already (see Pamphlet 48). We accept our own aggression and, instead of pushing it away as something bad, use it to claim our own power necessary for life and growth. We use our power to carry out the moral judgments that support and sustain life and spirit--that lead ourselves and others to freedom. Consciousness cannot rest passively. Consciousness must be asserted.

As we scrape away the layers of our pseudoinnocence, authentic innocence emerges, evolves, and matures. Authentic innocence is the innocence of the artist. It is imagination, childlike curiosity and clarity that is fresh, new, and alive. Authentic innocence preserves

childlike attitudes into maturity without sacrificing the reality of one's perception of evil.

Our experience of the good and the bad of life temper us, deepen our awareness, purge us of our mindlessness, and sharpen our sight. We identify with the suffering and the joy of life. We dream noble visions for the future and remain aware of the lessons of history. We open our sensibilities to all of life, stay the course, and fight powerfully for life itself. As Rollo May wrote we are harmless as doves and wise as serpents. This is spiritual growth.

We cannot avoid
Using power,
Cannot escape the compulsion
To afflict the world,
So let us, cautious in diction
And mighty in contradiction,
Love powerfully.

Martin Buber, from "Power and Love"

RECOMMENDED READING: SEVEN ZONES FOR LEADERSHIP: ACTING AUTHENTICALLY IN STABILITY AND CHAOS by Robert Terry.