

# Healing ourselves: How to resolve our inner conflicts and use our power for good (#106)

## Introducing Peter Michaelson

Jean intro 0:10

Hello, everybody. I am welcoming back Peter Michaelson. Peter is a depth psychologist and therapist who has now written his ninth book. He and I had a great conversation last time. And when I realized he had a new book, I wanted to talk with him again.

His new book is called "*Our Deadly Flaw: Healing the Inner Conflict that Cripples Us and Subverts Society*." Our conversation last time was about overcoming self-doubt and self-sabotage. His new book goes in further about self-sabotage and how we use it to undermine ourselves. And in so doing, we undermine society.

It always stuns me when I see people undermining the very thing they claim they want to have. And when I find that I'm doing it myself, it's even more stunning. So, here's a chance for us to learn what causes us to do that, and how we can stop undermining ourselves and contribute better to society for the good of all.

Jean

Hello, everybody. I am beyond delighted to bring to you Peter Michelson. Some of you may recall that I interviewed him before: we had a great discussion, you can find it in blog #73 [[Turning passivity into strength: How to overcome self-doubt and self sabotage](#)]. And he talked about how to overcome self-doubt and self-sabotage.

Peter sent me his new book. I said, "Oh, wow, bring it on. Can we meet again? Can we do this again? Can we talk about your book?" And he was gracious enough to say yes, and here we are. He's a depth psychologist, and he's currently still seeing patients. And we're going to talk about the premise of his book. Welcome, Peter.

Peter 2:22

Thank you, Jean. Pleasure to be here again.

## **The compulsion to self-punish**

Jean 2:24

I'm really delighted. We're going to jump in on Chapter 6, which is called "recognizing the compulsion to self-punish." Right then and there, we've got five hours' worth of discussion. That's impossible. So, we're going to do the best we can in this little short hour. Talk to me, tell us about the compulsion to self-punish, and why we want to self-punish.

Peter 2:56

Unconsciously we are in conflict with our inner critic. And our inner critic is the agency within us, the drive or the force or the intelligence, even a primitive intelligence that has a punishing nature.

It comes at us with all sorts of allegations, insinuations, accusations about our assumed weaknesses or deficits and deficiencies. And it simply has that energy about it, a self-aggressive kind of energy. And if we allow it, if we take it seriously, if we don't see it clearly enough, then we absorb punishment from it.

Jean 3:40

Okay, hang on, let me make sure I got this. Because we talked about this before, that little voice in our head that tells us something's wrong. We're bad. We shouldn't have done this. All of that. That's what you're calling the inner critic.

Peter 3:53

Correct.

Jean 3:54

Okay.

Peter 3:55

Now there are two voices. There's the inner critic, which is more punishing. And then there's the inner passivity, which is a sort of a weaker, more of a whiny voice, a self-pitying voice within us. But we're talking now about the inner critic, which is more punishing.

### Jean 4:13

Okay, so the inner critic says, "Oh, you're so terrible. You're terrible." And then the passive voice says, "Oh, you're so right, I'm bad."

### Peter 4:22

It accepts a lot of the punishment. Sometimes it tries to defend itself. We try to defend ourselves, but at least a large part of the time, we don't do well when we allow our inner passivity to represent us, because it's just a weaker part of us.

So we want to try and connect with our better self so that we know, understand when we're engaging with the inner critic, that we can stand on a more solid ground, and feel stronger against the inner critic, and not allow its often irrational allegations to penetrate. We learn not to take it seriously, sort of in one ear and out the other, as we become more watchful and more skillful at deflecting the inner critic.

### Jean 5:15

Well, wait a minute, you seem to be implying that the inner critic is wrong about us. You called it irrational. If I've done something, or if I think I've done something, ain't I right? Shouldn't I feel bad? Shouldn't I be punished?

### Peter 5:33

Not necessarily. Sometimes, of course, we make mistakes and do things badly. But the inner critic is relentless. It'll punish us day after day, week after week, month after month, even year after year, for something we did a long time ago, that we might have forgiven ourselves for that others might have forgiven us for.

But the inner critic, if it sees a weakness there, and if it feels it can penetrate with punishment, it will continue to do so, even something that happened way in the past. So sometimes the inner critic is on the mark, in terms of recognizing that we need to acknowledge some foolishness on our part. But oftentimes, it's simply punishing. It's simply that its nature is to inflict that aggressive energy upon us.

### Jean 6:29

Okay, and so why do we accept that then? Why do we allow it to happen?

## **Our inner critic and our passive enabler**

### **Peter 6:39**

We allow it because we don't see it clearly enough. We don't see exactly what's happening. We feel the presence of the inner critic, but we don't recognize it for what it is. We just feel this rather vague sense of right and wrong. Did I do right? Did I do wrong? And we get kind of confused typically about more precisely what is going on within us.

And we also allow it to happen because there is a passive side of us that somehow rather enables the inner critic, sort of plays along with it. That's the inner passivity. Sometimes it'll defend or try and defend us. But oftentimes, as I said, it's weaker, and it just doesn't do a good job of representing us in our integrity and our goodness, it allows the inner critic to make all sorts of allegations that often are just entirely unfair. And sometimes they're really quite cruel, and abusive.

### **Jean 7:45**

When I first started teaching, and for the longest time, somebody would say something to me, and it would send me into a spiral. And it was like, the sun just went up behind the clouds, and I would sink. And I could stay there for days, replaying that comment over and over and over again, wondering what I could have done differently. What you're saying is, that was the inner critic operating, right?

### **Peter 8:16**

Yes. The inner critic now picks up on what that person said, and repeats it back to you, as if it's a loop going on in your mind. And because it can get away there with releasing that self-aggressive drive, it's just a primitive energy. It's a primitive part in our psyche. And so, you know, it goes over and over runs like that inside us. And if we don't see it for what it is, we'll take it seriously, we'll believe that there's some validity in it. And we will allow ourselves to be on the receiving end of that sort of mistreatment.

### **Jean 8:57**

Okay. Peter, at some point, I recognized that that was ridiculous. That I could teach, I didn't need to do that. But I was lost as to how to stop the voice.

### **Peter 9:10**

Well, yeah, that typically is what happens. And this again is simply because, you know, once you see the dynamics, the inner dynamics more clearly, then

you realize you have the capacity, you start to understand how you have the capacity to shut down the voice.

And that really comes from understanding the passive side more clearly. Passive side is kind of like an emptiness inside us. It's like a no man's land that our consciousness hasn't penetrated. And so, it operates on its own principles, and its own principles are kind of weak, and they do not really represent us very well.

Jean 9:55

You're saying, I couldn't defend myself?

Peter 10:00

Yeah, so then you can't defend yourself, right? Because all you got is your inner passivity trying to do it, and it's not enough. Your consciousness has to come into the awareness there, so that your consciousness goes in there, penetrates that area.

And now you feel more connected to yourself; connected to your value, integrity, and goodness. And you are then refusing to allow the inner critic to say those kinds of things or imply those kinds of things, because it has no business biting into your life.

Jean 10:34

Okay, so we've got the inner critic, and the inner passivity over here. And you've contrasted with better self, and consciousness. Say more about those two terms. And how are we supposed to find them somewhere in ourselves?

Peter 10:51

With a better self is the belief in yourself, it's just what we're capable of, what we aspire to. It's being at our best instead of at our worst, we're in conflict, we want to be strong consciously, but we have all these ways that we can be weak.

So, when we're strong, we really connect with that. And that becomes part of us. And that becomes more stable within us and then we're connecting with our better self. If we're not connecting with that, and we're more on the more weak and unstable side, then we're connecting with a weaker sense of self.

So, the whole idea is to become conscious: conscious of those dynamics, conscious of all the elements of that. So that we understand more how we can ourselves use consciousness as a way to become healthier, stronger, and wiser.

### Jean 11:57

I'm trying to remember how I got myself out of that, I went into therapy, doing some part of that of course. Whenever my life gets out of balance, I do a workshop, go into therapy, I do something. So, I think that helped. But I'm trying to think of the mindset change. And I think the mindset change is what you're saying, I just decided I was better than that.

### Peter 12:24

Good. Well, that's you connecting with yourself. Sometimes you don't always have to see those inner dynamics, sometimes just kind of intuitively or some other processes you can connect with yourself. And then you start to manifest your stronger qualities, your stronger aspects. So, it's probably what happened then for you.

### Jean 12:56

So here, I'm looking at your book. I'm looking at this. You say here: the inner critic's job is to criticize and the inner passivity's job is to defend. Explain this defense again, because if I was beating on myself, and accepting it, I wasn't really defending it until I got stronger.

### Peter 13:27

Well, you might have been defending it. Sometimes the defense, the inner defensiveness is you're sort of semi-conscious. So, you might have been defending it, but perhaps not as effectively as you could have.

The problem there is that once you start defending, then you give credence to the inner critic. It's like you're starting to take the inner critic seriously. So ideally, you don't want to defend. You just want to be able to look at the inner critic and say, you know, you're just nonsense, you are nonsense, go away. I'm not going to listen to you, you're full of you know what. So, you learn not to take it seriously.

### Jean 14:10

You say something similar to that in the politics chapter, which we're going to get to. But basically, the idea is, when you are protesting too much, you're acknowledging the credence of that power.

### Peter 14:27

Yes. Yes. The more anxiously you defend yourself, the more you're giving credence to it. You can see it when a couple is arguing, and one partner is leveling all these accusations against the other partner, and then the other

partner gets all defensive and tries to make all of these excuses. I'll give all these reasons why it happened the way it did and so on.

So, this person is now becoming all defensive, and this just gives credence to the person who's doing all the accusing. Because it'll just often make the accuser even more vigorous with all the accusations, because the defensive person was really taking it seriously and getting in there and defending, defending, defending.

And, if you don't defend like that, it's kind of like dropping the rope in a tug of war. And then you can get more into the heart of the conflict between say the couple, you can penetrate beyond that back-and-forth accusations and defending and get more deeper into the issues for the purpose of resolving.

**Jean 15:47**

Okay, so that back and forth defense kind of defense is basically what we have going on politically right now.

**Peter 15:55**

Yes.

**Jean 15:57**

Counterattack, counter defense, back and forth. And you're saying the way...and I don't want to jump ahead to that chapter yet. But let's finish this one sentence, the way to counter that is to recognize that you're caught in that loop.

**Peter 16:14**

Right, right. Yeah, the more conflicted you are within yourself, the more you'll see the world in terms of conflict. And the more you'll get triggered by all the challenges of life, all the ways that you can disagree with people, you'll start to get triggered emotionally.

Because conflict is how you experience the world, starting with yourself. And so, it extends outward into the world. And you'll just see the world the way you experience your own inner life, through conflict. If you're in harmony with yourself, then your emphasis is to look for harmony in the world and be a force for creating harmony in the world. Because that corresponds with how you feel on an inner level.

Jean 17:07

I have friends -- and it's more than one, and I'm saying that in case any of my friends hear me and think I'm talking solely about them -- I have friends who literally are fearful of what's going to happen in the world and with democracy and with the country and just live in a chronic state of fear. Are you suggesting that comes from some kind of fear already in them that they're projecting onto the world?

### **The root in our inner fear**

Peter 17:42

Everybody has some degree of inner fear. Maybe that comes out in childhood, children can easily become scared and afraid of things, certainly they can easily feel helpless. So, there's some rationale for why they would be fearful. But with this inner fear, we feel it on some level inside ourselves, we usually can't differentiate it, we can't identify exactly what it relates to within ourselves.

We tend to project it then outward into the world. And see "reasons" why we think we should be fearful, reasons that seem to justify our sense of fearfulness. And unconsciously, we'll even go looking, we'll be determined to see things to a certain bias that appear to be reasons to be fearful, when in fact, we're looking to somehow rationalize our own inner fear.

Jean 18:42

I can just hear somebody say, but we are facing a climate crisis. But democracy really is under threat. But dictatorship really is taking hold. But people really are starving and income inequality is ridiculous.

Peter 19:03

Well, that's all true. But in a sense, they are two separate things. There's that reality, and the more passive we are and the more conflicted we are, the less able we'll be able to deal with that reality effectively, to bring reform. So, the idea is as we see that reality, we also want to be doing what we can to strengthen ourselves, partly because we don't want to live in fear. We don't want to be so fearful of what could be happening.

Because we have a choice, we can experience a lot more pleasure than displeasure, the more conscious we become. We still have to deal with all these challenges, but it doesn't have to be agonizing. It doesn't have to be so



frightful. It can be more heroic, rise to the level of being more heroic, when we rise to the excitement of the challenge, and feel ourselves being at our best.

Jean 20:12

Okay, so you're distinguishing -- and I'm really feeling this because everytime I talk to you or read your stuff, I'm like just bursting with new connections -- there's the external reality. And then there's what I allow my perception of the external reality to do to me.

And whether I let that mess with my life and my sense of self, that's the distinction you're making, do I have that right?

Peter 20:41

Correct. Yeah, the outer reality, which, to some degree, we can feel that we have a certain helplessness there, we want to be, sometimes we want to engage with it, of course, and try and be the reformers. But other times, it's easy to feel like we're helpless on that level.

And so, if we experience it that way, that will become distressful for us. Because that'll accentuate that helpless feeling. And then we'll go deeper into a sense of weakness. So, there's the outer reality, that we bring our own psychological awareness to it. And thereby we become more able either to assimilate it, to live with it, or to engage with it, ideally, in such a way that we are part of the solution.

Jean 21:47

Engage with it. What I sometimes tell people, I have one friend, who literally is not doing really anything except reading the papers and watching the news and getting more and more afraid. What I say is go into action, volunteer somewhere. As you're saying, become part of the solution. I know for me, part of the reason I'm not down under is because I feel like I'm contributing to the world.

Peter 22:15

You're being at your best, you're doing your best. Yeah, absolutely. And you can't do better so that's where your joy is going to come. Even though all this horrible stuff is going on in the world.

Jean 22:32

Okay, so all these folks who say, but I can only do this a little bit, or I can only do that, you're saying, do your best, and you can't do more?

Peter 22:43

Right. And the more you deal with the inner issues, the more you're looking inward, as well as outward, the more you are doing your best. Because you can't necessarily just deal with the outer without doing some, you know, having some basis, some foundation within you from which to operate. Some solid place where you are more confident that you represent what is true and real, you know that you'll be on the side of the angels, rather than on the other side.

Jean 23:22

Okay, so I want to move on to something. Well, something...no, I want to add this. You said, if we can't feel our integrity, we can't protect or value it.

Peter 23:36

Right.

Jean 23:39

Right? That's connected to what we're just talking about. Because part of doing your best is feeling integrity with yourself.

Peter 23:46

That's our better self, once we get in touch with our better selves. Our best self, sometimes a true self, it's called, or the authentic self, that's just marvelous. It's just so fabulous. It's wonderful. And it's all good. And that's integrity and truth and honesty, and all those wonderful things are all part of it.

## **Inner conflict can lead us to punish others**

Jean 24:13

Let's go to this, when we are receptive, I'm reading, when we are receptive to punishment, we're more willing to inflict it on others. Hence, we treat others or regard them the way our inner critic treats us.

So, this cycle, we were talking about how one group is disdainful of another group, and that group then reflects it back and you're saying the inner critic of both sides is what's running the show?

### Peter 24:53

The inner critic is the main driver within us, but its enabler is inner passivity. So, the relationship we have with ourselves is so much based on the degree to which we allow our inner critic to be so influential in how we feel about ourselves. And the degree to which we allow our inner passivity, is an enabler of that and doesn't represent us and allows all of that negative, aggressive energy to penetrate.

If that's happening within us, we can't feel our integrity, because our inner critic is always tearing down our integrity, has no respect for our integrity, it just wants to tear us down, it's so primitive, it's just like a brute.

If you go back in history, human history, there was so much brutality, it comes out of our history, but we've become more civilized and more refined. But we still have a brutal part in us, a primitive part that is ready to just be vicious against our integrity and tear it down. It's just such a narrow, negative energy drive that can be very vicious.

### Jean 26:22

And we project it on to others, is what I'm also hearing you say?

### Peter 26:27

When we feel that others are directing malice back at us, or have our worst interest at heart, or are somehow enemies, or oppose us. And very much so, we're seeing them according to how we feel treated by our inner critic. So, they become standard sort of for the inner critic, we feel the malice coming from our inner critic. And we're so prepared, then, to see it coming at us from all directions.

### Jean 27:04

Oh, wow. So, we allow others to beat ourselves up if we're used to beating our own selves up.

### Peter 27:13

Yeah. Others to oppose us, and then to feel like we have to dig in our heels and somehow resist them or oppose them or fight them. That just becomes a primitive way of feeling that we need, or that we're compelled to relate to them.

### Jean 27:34

I want to move into something that's controversial. I'm not sure how I feel about it. You said, we're responsible of when we uncover our unconsciousness, on our conscious willingness to experience self-punishment. Here I'm reading: a good example is the unconscious willingness of multitudes of people to live with the sense of being maliciously oppressed by others when their misery is mostly the result of inner conflicts' self-expression.

I listen to that and I think, if I'm a person in Ukraine, for an example, and I'm watching the buildings being torn around me, is my misery really the result of my inner critics' self-oppression?

### Peter 28:33

Well, again, there are two different things. That is a real horrible oppression, being attacked by Russia, being invaded and treated so badly, that obviously is very oppressive and unjust. So that would be in its own category of oppression and injustice.

The other psychological area here is more about how in more normal circumstances in everyday life, people can feel oppressed by things. Racism is another example of a legit real oppression, obviously. But the person who is on the receiving end of racism can still feel strong within themselves, of course, and mitigate the effect of that oppression by becoming stronger and stronger within themselves and more and more capable of thriving because it becomes stronger within themselves. There's two aspects of it.

### Jean 29:50

Yeah, I don't remember when racist comments stopped being feeling personal with me. But it just stopped. It became all about that other person's lack of awareness, their ignorance, their own misery.

At some point, I saw very clearly that that comment, that insult, they're rolling up their eyes, all of that was not about me.

### Peter 30:21

Absolutely.

### Jean 30:25

You say that so clearly. I've told that to other people and they say, "Well, you just don't know what it is. You just don't know what it's like." And I'm thinking,

"Nah, I don't think so." That train has left the station, I grew up with oppression. And so I don't need to recycle it.

Peter 30:44

Yes. Well, you certainly see this. It's a wonderful thing when people realize they have this inner power to neutralize that incoming hostility. Now you just see where the other person is at.

Jean 31:09

Yeah.

Peter 31:10

Because you're more conscious, you're more conscious of them. And you see where they're at. And, you know, you say, well, I'll help them if I can to get more conscious. But in the meantime, I'm not going to be hurt by all that nonsense.

Jean 31:24

It's like, before they had power. They had the power to hurt me. And now they're just human beings trying to get along in the world.

Peter 31:37

Desperately, and rather badly trying to feel their own power. Or for a sense of power. Yes.

Jean 31:44

Exactly. Using me to try to feel their own power.

Peter 31:50

Right.

## **Our right to be assertive**

Jean 31:51

Wow. Yes. New topic. I'm getting excited. Okay. New topic. Self-doubt arises when parents, through inner passivity, identify with their children. We identify with people, you're saying here that it becomes hard to...I should've begun at beginning, I'm going to start that whole part over.

Parents and people in general often experience self-doubt over their right to be assertive, or to command. I've run into that a lot in doing leadership coaching, people are so eager to show that they are collaborative and accommodating and inclusive and all of these wonderful things that they get walked all over. The person is not respecting them, they're not respecting themselves.

And so, what you're saying is, you're putting it here as part of the inner passivity that's dominating. Am I reading that, right?

Peter 33:11

Yeah, because of inner passivity, people can be uncomfortable with the feeling of power, their own sense of power, is that it's going to be something perhaps, that's inflicted upon them in a way that's unkind or insensitive.

And so, they can associate power, they can identify with the person on the receiving end of power and imagine that person is interpreting it, as if it's somehow insensitive of them and unkind to them. And so, they get kind of a confusion, because they don't see it clearly enough.

And their own passivity blocks them from being more comfortable with feeling power, and trusting themselves to use the power wisely, to use it benevolently, and to guide people, to teach people, to guide them and to raise them up to their higher levels, because there's an effort to infuse them with power, make them more comfortable with it.

Jean 34:20

Exactly. I was saying this yesterday to someone who said, "Well, I don't want to be mean and sound like I'm being critical." I said, "You are being critical. This is not right. This person needs to know better. Your job is to help them know better and do better. They want to do better." And as you put it, raise them up, don't let them sit around all misguided.

When I do workshops, I tell people, and I say, "Embarrass me publicly. If I mess up, embarrass me. Don't let me walk around where everybody goes off and talks about me behind my back saying how I messed up on this; embarrass me, give me a chance to make it right."

Peter 35:03

That's commendable of you, that means you're not afraid of any critical remarks, whatever, that you can handle, that you'll deal with it, you won't get triggered by it. So, that's inner strength.

### Jean 35:17

Yeah, better that than be parading around in total obliviousness and ignorance, not knowing that everybody is looking at me saying, "Oh, she shouldn't have done that." And everybody knows it but me.

We have allowed the weak to be exploited, the rich to be exalted, and the earth to be blinded; many on the left think capitalism is the problem. But this financial economic system is itself largely covered by the quality of our individual and collective maturity and wisdom. You got to translate that, because a lot of people are not going to see any connection between who I am and an oppressive economic system.

### Peter 36:12

Oh, it's a little tricky talking too much about it, capitalism is a pretty complex affair. Right now, I can sense sometimes that capitalism is like a system that's driving us to the brink, in terms of environmental degradation. And the way people latch on to it, in a primitive, self-serving way, brings out the worst aspects of it.

And that means that it has no consciousness, it just operates according to the lowest common denominator, which is people striving selfishly to benefit from it. So, in that regard, it's certainly valid to be critical of it, and all we can do really is bring our own consciousness to it, acquire what we can of that awareness, and do everything we can to reform it.

So, the more we bring our wisdom and awareness to it, the more we're going to be interested in reforming it. I think that's happened to some extent, for sure. Certainly, any legislation that tackles climate change is doing that. Again, it all comes back to us, how are we individually going to be part of the solution?

### Jean 37:58

Shouldn't we fight?

### Peter 38:03

Well, there's different ways of fighting. My way of fighting is just to penetrate deeper into all the aspects of it and see the psychology and try and make the psychology of it all as apparent as possible. So that becomes useful or valuable knowledge that can be part of the fight. That's one way of fighting it. But I think we have to fight it with our intelligence and our awareness. Certainly not violently, of course.

Jean 38:45

Okay, are you using consciousness and awareness as synonyms?

Peter 38:53

Pretty much so. Yeah. I generally mean higher consciousness, the consciousness that understands human nature more fully and more expansively, and sees deeper into our weak spots, the areas where we need to grow. That's what I mean by growing consciousness.

Jean 39:23

One of the things I often say that people don't understand change, they don't understand how people change. And they think by walking up to a person and tell them how sorry they are that's somehow supposed to motivate change.

And what you're saying is that if we want to address these oppressive systems, we have to have an understanding of what's happening. The system itself operates on autopilot, we have to have some understanding of the psychology of the individuals who are motivating it, running it, or whatever, are who we're trying to address and have an understanding at a deeper level of them.

Peter 40:16

Yeah. And if we bring that to the table, in the ways that we can, then that's going to influence everyone, that's going to influence the people who want to see things more properly and things go well. It's just the process whereby we make change happen, we just bring that awareness and that insight into the fore and make it part of the discussion.

Jean 40:59

Can you give an example of that? Let's take that, you talk in the book about the pro-life versus pro-choice folks, can you apply what you're just saying, imagining a discussion between those two groups, one person in each group?

## **The advantage of trying to bridge the gap**

Peter 41:28

Well, the first thing there is for the two people to try to feel like they have some respect for each other, and that they appreciate each other as fellow



human beings, trying to figure things out. And feel like they can connect on that level, for starters, and that can be challenging for some people, they can't necessarily easily do that, they're too self-centered, or they're too protecting their belief system, because they're afraid if their belief system crumbles, they won't even know who they are.

So, the first thing to do is try to connect on that level, and appreciate each other that way, and then just gently start having a discussion. You know, this is how I see it, this is how you see it. And then, bring out all your different arguments and ways of seeing it.

Jean 42:34

What would be the point of that? People say to me all the time, why should I talk with that person, they're not going to change their mind?

Peter 42:43

Well, they might not change their mind, but they might open their heart. And so, there can be a softer sense of each other, rather than more conflicted, or hardnosed sense of each other. It can soften the dialogue and start to soften so that there's more capacity then to care for the other person, care for the wellbeing of the other person, and conceivably even have more compassion for them and their point of view and so on and be interested in finding a common ground.

You know, there's certainly likelihood once you start to feel more open towards the other person, there's likelihood of finding at least some little common ground somewhere. And then that can grow, be expanded. And it's just a process that opens up in that way.

Jean 43:46

Let's up the ante. Literally this week, a friend of mine asked me would I be willing to talk with someone from KKK, the Ku Klux Klan? I said, Absolutely. Why are you even asking me that? And she said, under no conditions would I want to talk to them. And I said, why not? And she said, why would I want to talk to them? Her exact words as I recall it, "I'm not interested in talking to anyone who wants to kill me."

Peter 44:19

Well, in that experience of talking to that person, even if that person remains hostile towards you, you can still feel a great satisfaction in bringing your best foot forward and representing everything that's great about you. Your integrity, your dignity, your knowledge, your humanity, you bring all of that to

the table and that'll feel great for you. So even if you don't have much influence on the other person, you'll feel pretty darn good about yourself.

Jean 44:59

Yes, and you're bringing something positive to the world, instead of all of this animosity. You bring in the positive energy into the world.

Peter 45:10

Right.

Jean 45:11

Well, okay. I have one more. I just have a note here, I want to read this. I think we've already covered it. But I love this. What gets in our way is the idea that power is inherently manipulative or abusive. And that's part of our resistance to becoming more powerful. We don't want to be powerful, because we regard power as manipulative. That's what you're saying, right?

Peter 45:47

We will tend to identify with the person that is sort of being subjected to our power and feel somehow rather that they're not liking it, or feeling oppressed by it, or they're feeling manipulated or controlled by it. Which then comes back to our own issues, our own sensitivities. And so, again, our own issues, our own sensitivities, make it harder for us to see our way forward and to grow. They hold us back.

Jean 46:27

So, if I disrespect power, how can I allow myself to be powerful? Which means how can I allow myself to bring forth my better self? Is that how that connects?

Peter 46:44

When you say disrespect power, I'm not quite clear what you're...

Jean 46:48

If I think power is inherently manipulative, or abusive.

Peter 46:52

Well, you begin to see the bias that you bring to that sensitivity, you see your own bias, you see why you have that particular take on power. It's based on your own issues with power, that you yourself can't quite allow yourself to feel it.

Partly because the inner passivity gets in the way, partly because you're conflicted, partly because you're still somewhat passive to your inner critic, and you're somewhat disconnected from yourself. So, you don't trust yourself fully to represent power wisely.

Jean 47:43

Yes.

Peter 47:44

And so, you lose your footing, you don't quite know what end is up, you've got too much going on there that you're not seeing.

Jean 47:56

I'm thinking of people I know who don't want to feel powerful. And you're saying they're not giving themselves the credit to be able to use power wisely.

Peter 48:08

Yes, they're basically somewhat afraid of it. They're afraid of it from others, and they're afraid of it allowing it to blossom in themselves. And partly, there's resistance to the whole process. Because as you grow, whether it's becoming more powerful or wiser or just happier, it feels as if you're losing all your old identifications, which is your old ego sort of sense of self, your ego base sense of self.

And it feels as if you lose that, you won't even know who you are, like some mysterious stranger is going to step in your house and take over the place. There's a resistance to that. Just like you're sort of hanging on to what's familiar than risk allowing all this big unknown to come into your life.

Jean 49:09

You know, every time I read your stuff, or talk with you, I get new insights. It's like a bottomless well of pearls of wisdom. So, tell us the name of your book, how they can find it, and how they can reach you.

Peter 49:33

Okay, it's called "Our Deadly Flaw." Its subtitle is "Healing the Inner Conflict that Cripples Us and Subverts Society." And it's available at Amazon. It's also available through my website, which is [whywesuffer.com](http://whywesuffer.com), which is a website dealing with depth psychology. And they can go there and email me if they care to and get information about doing sessions and such.

### Jean 50:08

Okay. Peter, this has been magnificent, I thank you for it. Every time I think of the name of your website I break into a smile; it's a stroke of genius, [whywesuffer.com](http://whywesuffer.com). That's the coolest name of a website as anything. Thank you for sharing your time and your wisdom with us. It has been just a delight for me. And I encourage everybody to go to [whywesuffer.com](http://whywesuffer.com) and buy your book.

### Peter 50:48

Thank you very much, Jean. I really enjoyed it.

### Jean's summary 50:51

That was a fascinating discussion. Here are my takeaways. First, I have a much clearer understanding of the battle between our inner passivity and our inner critic. Our inner critic comes from our parents or whoever told us we weren't good enough. Our inner passivity is the weak part of ourselves that tries to defend us, but because it's the passive part of ourselves, it doesn't do a good job.

The battle between our inner critic and our inner passivity affects how we feel about others, whom we regard as oppressive or whatever. If we're already beating on ourselves, telling ourselves we are not worthy or we should feel ashamed, then when someone comes out saying the same thing, we're already primed to believe it. We may try to defend ourselves or counterattack which then causes them to counterattack us. Then we are locked in the battle of attack, counterattack, defense, counter defense, and that keeps us all stuck.

The second takeaway has to do with how to regard bad things happening in the world. Peter says the more conflicted you are within yourself, the more you will see the world in conflict and the more you will get triggered by all the challenges of life. The question is, what do we do about ourselves or think about ourselves in the face of that reality?

The key is that if we don't want that oppressive reality to keep us down, or that oppressive person's words to take to heart, then we have to realize those words are not about ourselves, those words are about that person and their reality. We don't have to take that into ourselves as real.

If someone implies that I'm not worthy, I'm this or I'm that because I'm Black, and I'm female, or whatever. Those words will hurt me to the extent that I allow them to and feel that they are real. I think a lot of people are having

trouble with that idea. They'll think, "Oh, those words came at you and you should feel badly about that person."

Peter says we bring ourselves up. Don't let external voices or people dictate how we feel about ourselves. And look deeply to see why are these words wounding us anyway? What are these words tapping into, leading us to believe about ourselves? Why are we vulnerable to those words?

The last takeaway was Peter's response when I told him that some people don't want to talk to those they regard as oppressive or whatever, because I can't change that person's mind. And you hear that, I can't talk to that person because I can't change their mind. A friend of mine said she could not talk to the member of the KKK, because she can't change their minds and they want to kill her, so why bother?

Peter's response was breathtaking. He said you may not be able to open their minds, but maybe you can open their hearts. And he's right because I've seen it happen. I've seen people stay stuck in a position and their hearts open. I know it's possible.

That's it. Thanks for listening. Let's commit to be willing to open hearts including our own. If you want the opportunity to discuss this blog or others, consider joining Pathfinders. You can find out how to do so on our website.



Psychotherapist Peter Michaelson is a former journalist and science writer who possesses a unique ability to render depth psychology into easily understood self-help information.

Peter spent the 1970s and early 1980s searching for answers to his own dissatisfaction and career setbacks. In 1985, he began doing weekly sessions with a psychotherapist who worked very deeply in the unconscious. In these sessions, he acquired the insight that resolved the inner conflicts that had been disrupting his life. In 1987, he obtained his master's degree in counseling from Antioch University in Ohio.

Since then, Peter has been using this unique psychotherapy with his own clients. He has now written nine books that discuss different aspects of this deep approach. These books examine the causes of low self-esteem, addictions, indecision, compulsions, loneliness, depression, failure, self-sabotage, and inner passivity. He lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

His website is [WhyWeSuffer.com](http://WhyWeSuffer.com): *Transformative Insights from Depth Psychology*.

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