

## Dealing with Criticism

### Receiving Criticism

Receiving or hearing about criticism levelled at you can be very painful. One of the ways we can help ourselves to deal with this positively and from the highest within us is to understand what causes people to be critical.

Criticism is a way in which a person seeks to regain their control in relation to us (see Being Critical). At that point the person feels insecure, though we may find that hard to believe when it involves someone in authority! It is one way in which they are attempting to feel safe again—safe in the sense of us behaving in a way which they desire perhaps, or a way which they feel comfortable with. In some way our behaviour, or very nature, is threatening their own sense of self. The bully, for example, is often very insecure emotionally; anything which appears different to a bully is a menace, any opinion or action dissimilar to their own will threaten their self-esteem.

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### Being Critical

When we are critical of others it is because we feel powerless. Part of us feels we have no control over what the other person does and how they behave. As a result we can feel threatened. It may not seem that way at first, but much criticism arises out of an attempt by the body-self to find ways of reasserting its own strength, control, position etc. A way to help oneself feel strong again is to stand in one's own strength and space—literally as well as metaphorically. To pull oneself erect, so that the spine feels in alignment helps to bring the feeling of being true to oneself. In this position, even if one can only visualise it, there is a feeling of polarisation between heaven and earth; the crown and heart are open and the feeling can come of being receptive to divine will, so even if at an earthly level we feel weak, we begin to reclaim our link to the power of the spirit within.

*'As soon as you realise what is happening, stand upright with head erect, sending forth a thought to those spheres above the mists of earth, and you will receive through the head centre the baptism of the heavenly light and strength.'*

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### Feeling Powerless and Regaining Control

Powerlessness is a characteristic of criticism. Therefore in order to release our own critical habits, we need to remind ourselves of our own strength and that the outside persona that a person presents to the world is often very different from how they feel inside. This is as true of someone in authority as it is of anyone. The 'hat' of authority may lend that person an air of 'rightness', but it does not mean that they feel secure.

There are ways of working together to get things done which are very different from condemnation. 'How can we make this work?' is the question to be asked, rather than offering blatant criticism. When either party begins to look at how to make things work, then they are regaining power in the situation, rather than reacting to a threat.

If one feels powerless under attack, the best way to deal with it is to turn and face the attacker and grip what is happening. This may feel a very scary thing to do at first, but it will increase the sense of being in control again. White Eagle puts it this way:

*'One of the important tests is that of fearlessness—how many of you have had the experience of coming up against something very undesirable in your sleep? Perhaps an animal may threaten to destroy you, with the result that you have had the feeling of running away as hard as you could go—and sometimes the legs won't go! If only the individual would turn round and face the pursuer, nothing could harm him; the pursuer would vanish. So long as you run, of course it will follow. Translate this to life. Grasp your nettle boldly. People want to run from things they dislike, instead of facing up to them. Face them, and the terror will go.'*

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### **Misunderstanding**

Criticism is often based on incomplete understanding. Even when we see something unhelpful or what we think of as potentially damaging, we may never know the sequence of emotional, mental and physical events which led to it. In the same way, when we are criticised we need to remind ourselves of how the picture we present to the world is often very different from how we feel inside and our inner motives and aspirations. We used this quotation when looking at anger, but White Eagle's words are so wise it bears repeating:

*'How vital it is for us when on the spiritual path to learn to look beneath the surface and into the heart of one's fellow traveller, to recognise the spirit and to try to understand the motive behind another's action, and not to assume always that the motive is unkind. We should endeavour with human compassion and love to see the heart of him or her who appears to be our enemy.'*

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### **Nothing is Perfect**

Appreciating spiritual law and putting it into practice are very different things. The mind may understand the need to always be loving, but the solar plexus (emotions) may react in fight or flight mode when the limited self feels challenged. Part of letting go of our critical nature involves realising that because of this, life and people are rarely perfect. There is always something to learn, which is why we are here. Sometimes to say to oneself: 'Nothing is perfect', helps us to release the critical mind and come back to the compassion in the heart for the struggle we often experience to live up to our principles. White Eagle reminds us:

*'Let us all aspire to lose criticism, and to love. We fail, of course we all must fail at times; all souls, according to their level of development, have their failures. We should not be in this form, manifesting as we are, if we were above failure. Let us remember that though the brother/sister by our side fails, we fail too—and because of this, we know how he or she feels. Let us remember also that through failure, we may mount the hill of vision. Failure is good; many a great and glorious temple is built upon a strong foundation which was built through the lessons learnt by failure.'*

### **Open and Safe**

It is important to recognise that there is both insufficient understanding and/or a lack of security present in the person who is criticising us. There are two ways to deal with this, both of which are important if the criticism is not to escalate and if we are going to be able to work together.

Firstly, we need to keep communication open, or initiate communication face to face. This may be hard to achieve, since the critical person may not feel secure enough to face one in an open-hearted way, but it is important to persevere as lovingly as one can. Through direct communication one can give more information about what is happening inside oneself, and one has the opportunity to take on board what is being said, seek to compromise, or let it go.

Secondly, when one is face to face with another, helping that person to feel more safe will aid the whole process of understanding and reconciliation. If insecurity of whatever kind is an issue for the other person, then the more we can be open-hearted, receptive, undefended, relaxed and willing to listen, the more the criticiser will be able to really hear us and release their initial condemnation in the light of new information or awareness. It is not easy to realise the vulnerability of another when they are criticising us but White Eagle says:

*'Remember the trials and difficulties in another person's life which may make them irritable and sharp. Turn away wrath by gentleness and love, remembering that as you feel hurt and irritated, so may your companion feel too.'*

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### **Strengthening the Nerves**

As we move more into the Aquarian Age we are becoming more sensitive. White Eagle says: *'In the course of development the nervous system becomes very sensitive, and you feel annoyance and irritation doubly—but that is all part of the training. You have to learn poise, which comes from the spirit.'*

The stimulation of the nervous system which comes as a result of increased spiritual awareness, can sometimes result in us reacting to what we perceive to be criticism, where once we would have let it go. White Eagle has given us the word poise as a characteristic to aim for, and the practice of conscious breathing is one of the greatest tools we have to bring poise to the whole self. As the breath deepens not only does the heart rate and blood pressure drop, but the whole nervous system is calmed and strengthened. White Eagle describes how this practice can affect us in deeper and more strengthening ways:

*'We would suggest to you the practice of breathing. Not only physical breathing; not only the air which is drawn in and pumped out of the lungs. We mean the breathing-in of the light, of the life of God; and the breathing-out of love. Breathe in God's love. Breathe out God's blessing upon life.'*

*'This rhythmic breathing does something more than affect your body. Seen clairvoyantly, the person breathing-in the divine life in full consciousness is radiating a great light. He or she is strengthening the soul and causing it to expand and send out feelers of light, shafts of light. There is no limitation, no limitation of space in spirit realms. Instantly, by power of the divine will within, you can reach out across the world, or reach up into spheres immeasurable. There is no separation in spirit where there is the impetus of divine love.'*