

Confessions of a Pathwork Tourist

By Chris F.

First of all, let me say how delighted I am to have finally graduated from the Transformation Program. It was a culmination of five years of the most intense and searching self-work that I've ever done. Fifteen years in recovery previous to my finding Pathwork cemented my belief that I pretty much already had my act together. I was sober, but at 42 there was something missing and it was time to take the next step (whatever that was) in growing up.

We're told not to compare ourselves to others. For the first 40-odd years, I judged my worth based either on the approval of others or by building self-esteem by judging them so that I have the negative pleasure of feeling superior. I resisted identifying myself as a 'joiner', as it reinforced the image I wanted to maintain that that there was at least something that made me special, and who can be special if they're another one of the masses and riding the same bus with everyone else? So admittedly, there has always a part of myself that stayed skeptical about certain parts of Pathwork. We all know what they are. It's in the section on Year One. I buy in, but not all the way, so I can maintain a distance. And I've always despised doing homework. So I may say that I'm a Pathwork Tourist, but it isn't exactly so. Not really. I put more effort into it in some times, less others. I've been a student in a Pathwork class, but not always a student of Pathwork.

Baseline

I've tended to be a Skeptic, with an exceptionally well developed intellectual stubbornness and (apparently) an equally poorly developed connection with my true feelings. After living through a childhood of tears and terror, I apparently decided on numbness as an adult. I have this tendency to live life from the outside looking in, I proudly wear a sarcastic streak, and I generally lived in a low-grade state of fear and doubt that I had a right to suck air along with everyone else. My parenting was slightly effective; Dad was a recovering alcoholic, but Mom was a catastrophe, and she and I had a lifetime of emotional wreckage between us. I have a family history of chemical addiction which I gladly inherited as a teenager and nurtured into my late 20s. At 27, I was diagnosed with MS; subsequently I started the deepest emotional slide of my life and a little over a year later, I hit bottom and began my journey to emotional and physical sobriety. I did enough work to stay sober and intellectually trick myself into a committed arrogance that I was a grownup, but not having a clue that I was emotionally about 14. Fast-forward that fifteen years through a 7-year flight across country to escape the ghosts of my past, a broken marriage while I was there, another broken engagement (still while I was there), and fleeing back to Philly to escape the ghosts of the wreckage I left on the West Coast. At least I have the comfort of knowing my purpose in my ex-wife's life was to take her to Oregon so she could meet her second husband.

Introduction to Pathwork

I did a 4-week lecture study on Meditation. I went with a woman I was dating at the time. I think I'd known her about a month. I'm not sure what I was expecting; perhaps something more of the Buddhist ilk. But Pathwork meditation lecture studies don't have any chanting or Yoga in them. What they do have are perfect opportunities to bring up a lot of buried baggage in Pathwork neophytes, causing both of them to project quite unhappy aspects of their emotional history with others on each other.

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After that, the dating part didn't go especially well. So FYI, don't take unfamiliar women to Pathwork. You probably shouldn't take familiar women there either. I will say, though, the lecture study went pretty well. I was intrigued.

Finding the Transformation Program

Luckily for me, Year One of the Transformation Program was starting the next month. I was an adrenaline junkie, so the promised emotional upheaval from challenging every cherished illusion or immature emotional belief I ever had was just the ticket. Except I didn't know it yet.

Year One - the Basics

Year one taught us the basics. The Introduction to the lectures and the Guide. I was standoffish about the idea of 'channeled' literature. The lectures are pretty thick, and considering I always had difficulty 'dropping' into them, they were mostly just words on the page. If you've heard Charlie Brown's teacher over the intercom, you get the point. Wah wah wah wah wah. The meditation process, something called Daily Review™ (in five years I rarely had the discipline to do one), and the core of Pathwork process work, the Holy Trinity: identifying Lower Self, Conscious Ego and Higher Self. And learning how to be able to step into each of those parts of myself. I had never worked with a process that actually taught me to become schizophrenic. I named Lower Self 'Junior' and Conscious Ego 'The Rabbi'. I was pretty clueless about Higher Self for a number of years. See Year Four. More on them later. Considering the Guide, and all that, maybe the whole thing was a bit cultish. If we had used a Ouija board to support our classwork I likely would have lost it. But the value of the core teaching of the first year, even though it was foreign to any emotional work I had ever done before, began to provide me with tools that I could use for a lifetime.

Year Two - Negativity

Year Two was about Negativity. I loved it. I was all about negativity. Bitterness, sarcasm, fear, bring it on. That year I got it. The lectures kind of made sense, too. 80% of the members in my group were women, and some of them cried a lot. So I sucked up that emotion like a vampire. Seriously, my eyes lit up sitting through that ocean of tears. But throughout the second year, I started getting honest with my negative self-images that I hadn't acknowledged up until that point. I started looking at my bitterness towards my mother and began to pay attention to my very deep-rooted belief that I had little value as a human being. I always believed that I was inherently defective, and this was probably the point where I recognized the depth of my belief that having MS was my fault and that I deserved it. When it was over, I sort of wanted to do the year over again.

Year Three - Relationships

Year Three was Relationships. After the year ended, I discovered that year Three really was about relationship with myself and God. Not about picking up chicks. So kind of a bait-and-switch, but whatever.

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Not really what year 3 was about.

What happened was that I began to understand more clearly that I had a great deal of inwardly-directed anger. I kept developing the skill of being able to step into the strength of The Rabbi and to (generally) be able to identify how and why Junior makes most of the decisions in my life. Being able to focus on an issue consciously and put the emotion of the wounding aside helps to keep being able to work through misconception and identify what happened in my life and to be able to process through it. Junior wants and needs to be understood and loved. So the Rabbi has to give that. My boss can't.

Year Four - God

Year Four was about God. This was a big problem. I was God's personal human piñata. I had NO interest in dealing with the God stuff going into Year Four and would have preferred a different subject. My bitterness towards my family of origin and lack of parenting, my addictions, my inability to maintain romantic relationships, and especially being sentenced to having MS fuelled a lifetime of resentment towards an external God who was looking at every opportunity to screw me yet again. Consciously, my God was the angry Judeo-Christian God, whom I had a lifetime of negativity towards, but unconsciously it was really about by my parents (It really IS always about Mom, apparently).



My God-image before Year 4.

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The year was about breaking down my parent-based God image, and becoming more open to a belief that God isn't a conscious being that throws us a bone every now and then, depending on whether he deems to show us some grace that day. We were introduced to the alternative idea of a loving God, living within each of us. I still have some work to do here. I can acknowledge that my feelings have softened a great deal after having been through the year. Truly, not going into a reaction when the topic comes up is great progress for me. If God and the Universe are not malevolent, at least they're indifferent. About this time I started feeling this pervading sense of impending doom, like I was dying. A part of me was. As I changed, I was changing into someone else. Junior wasn't always running the show, and he was pissed. It took about a year before it went away.

Year Five - Manifestation

My understanding was that TP was originally a 4-year program, but another year was added at the end. The 5th year was called 'Manifestation', but after the four long years leading up to it, it may as well have been called 'Masochism'. Year Five was about conscious creation. Mindful creation that took effort. Creation that wasn't especially easy. Realize that throughout my life, I've rarely mindfully created anything except getting through college, quitting drinking, and moving across country. Drifting along with the current and making life-altering decisions based on coincidental events is much easier, because Junior was running the show, and that's just what little kids do. So...



I got a dog.

Now, this was mindful creation, and it took some logistics to make it happen (I had to pack, and move, and all that) but it wasn't really that difficult. I will say that the change I went through during the first four years had opened me up to being committed to and responsible for another being. But the nature of the Fifth year manifestation was about doing something that was really a stretch, and the point was to dredge up another bunch of crap that we may not have looked at yet in order to get there. It was about using all the tools we learned through the whole program in order to practice purposeful creation

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in our lives. Like a grown-up might do if they were so inclined. So I am happy with my decision, and I've not regretted for a minute having a doggie. But throughout the year I struggled with a manifestation that I needed to parent myself through and not one that was kind of an easy end-around. The true lesson was that there was another layer that keeps me from fully being able to be committed to loving myself. My manifestation is about the next part of healing that continues the transformation into an individual who joyfully takes part in his own life and the lives of others. And believes in the power of creating my own destiny. It took me the whole 10 months to come to that conclusion.

And that's the five years in a nutshell. I'm graduated! It was fun. I got a rose and a certificate.

Sticking the Landing

Pathwork changed me regardless of how I judge my level of participation, and not just intellectually. It's given me many blessings. I've forgiven a mother whom I was estranged with for the last 16 years of her life, and I can now feel compassion for her and how she couldn't cope. I learned the tools for self-parenting: no one else is responsible for me but me, and that continuing to play the victim and blame my parents or God for what happens next in my life has no positive value. My worth as a person isn't defined by whether my boss is in a good mood today; I've begun to value myself from inside because I can separate my fears as a little boy from my strengths as a grown man. Having a chronic illness is a part of my life and I have a responsibility to manage my body as best I can, but it isn't an indictment of who I am as a human being. I've become an active part of a family, whether through blood or friendship. I have two wonderful Aunts who have given me a do-over; they've become the loving mother energy I always wanted, and I've allowed them inside. I have a long-time friend whom I love as if he were a big brother. I'm experiencing the joy of commitment and responsibility for my dog who loves me even when I have a lousy day at work. My whole life I was a gypsy, thinking nothing of moving from place to place to escape whatever urges I had that made me want to run. I avoided long-term relationships because they had only ever resulted in pain and loss, whether I or someone else created it. Now, because of Pathwork, I have roots. I want to stay near to those that I love because I want to share in their lives and have them share in mine. I could go on and on. And I feel these things inside, not just in my head. For many others, living my newfound blessings has always been a part of their lives; they're new for me. Coming into this I didn't know what I didn't know.

All in all, it was the best money I ever spent.