



BEGINNING *within*

BEGINNING WITHIN MASTER COURSE

3. YOUR POWER SPACE

Dr. Viktor Frankl wrote “Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power...” Learning to slow ourselves down and spend time in this seemingly elusive space is what makes the difference between a flourishing life and a frustrating one.

Our Defensive Self

Welcome back for Module 3! In Module 2 we learned how by living from without as opposed to within, we enter into an endless cycle of buying people's approval and the world's approval. We turn into perpetual seekers. We also internalized how by spending our time gaining their approval we compromise who we are so we can be who others want us to be. We learn to hide. While our entire purpose for hiding is to feel more worthy and gain acceptance from others, what we're actually doing when we hide is make it impossible to get closer to others. Why? Because our true self is not being shared. I hope that through last week's exercise you have begun to see how when we hide, we become more distant from others. It has been said that knowing the problem is half of the solution. That would mean that we are already halfway there. We are now going to start working on the proactive solution to this.

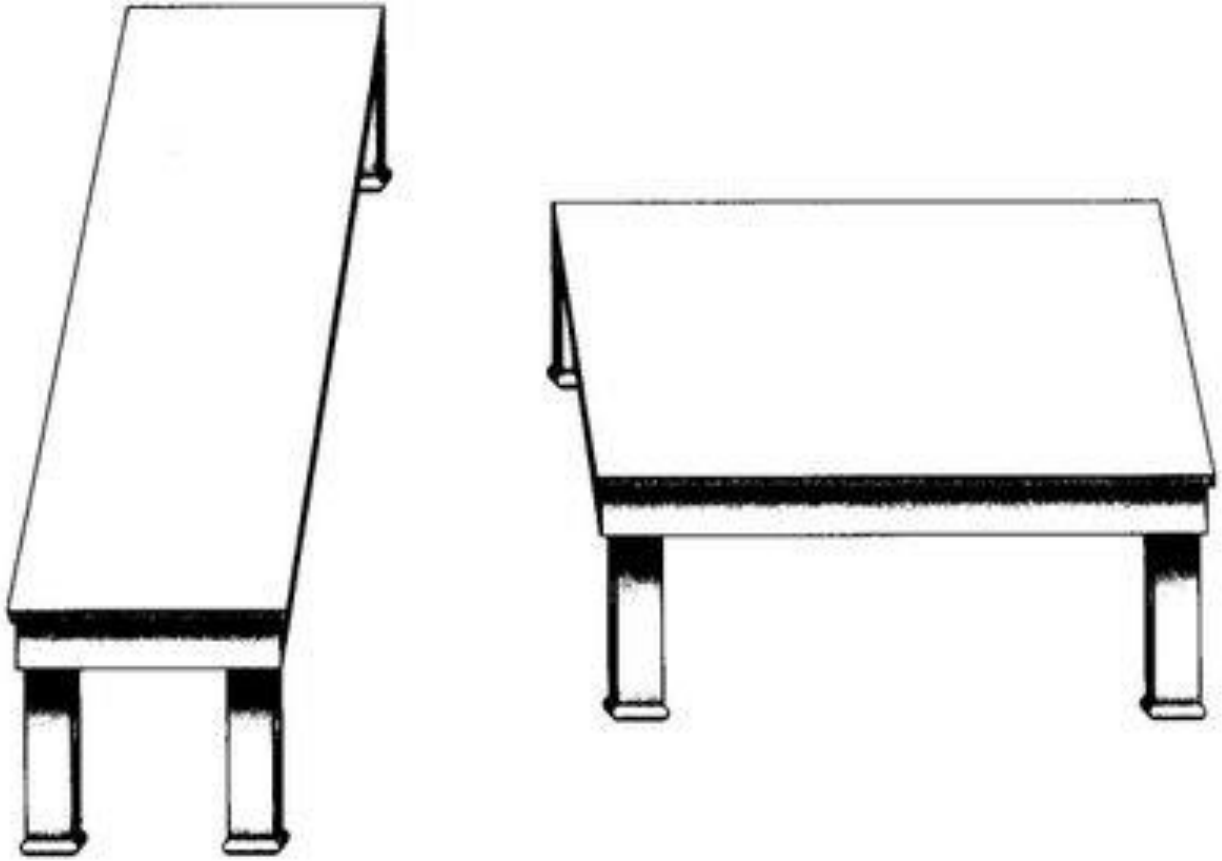
There is one simple point that we must observe. In all of the unhealthy behavior that we've discussed until now, who is it that we are concerned about in all of our interactions? Ourselves. Again, like the person drowning, they will literally drown their rescuer to save themselves. In their desperation, they can only think about one person, themselves. This provides us with the very first thing we must do to fix this problem. That is to begin training ourselves to stop making ourselves the main concern. It's actually a self-perpetuating cycle. The less we focus on ourselves, the less desperate we feel. The less desperate we feel, the easier it is not to focus on ourselves.

I want to clarify what focusing on ourselves and others mean as this can be easily confused. Of course, we must focus on taking care of ourselves. We must eat and sleep and make sure people aren't hurting us. I am talking about our interactions with others. When we are defensive, we are so consumed with what this all says about me. When we learn to focus on the other, we actually have the clarity to ask what this all says about them. This gives us the power to address their fears and concerns which always strengthens the relationship. Imagine

the power you have when someone hysterically accuses you of something and instead of getting defensive you simply focus on helping them.

What we always discover when we can focus on the others needs and concerns is a viewpoint that offers more perspective. I cannot tell you how many times I was sure my wife was absolutely wrong or choosing an ineffective way to do something, only to learn how good it was that I listened to her. These repeated experiences with her and others have humbled me to always try and listen to the other person no matter how convinced I am that I know better.

Let's do a fun and shocking exercise. Below this video, you should see a link to a document which I'd like you to print out. On this document, you're going to find a picture of two tables. This is actually referred to as Shepard's Rotated Tables. This exercise is extremely important and if we can keep it at the forefront of our minds it can be life transforming and can have an enormously positive impact on our wellbeing. Once you have the sheet printed out, look at both tables. Which table looks longer to you? I am emphasizing "looks." Write down either right or left depending on which table appears to be the longer table to you. If the table on the left appears to be longer write down left if the table on the right appears to be longer write down right. Then take a tissue. If you need to, pause the video while you get a tissue. Lay it over the longer appearing table and draw an outline of the top of the table so that you will end up with a rectangular shape on your tissue. Now take the tissue and lay it over the other table.



I hope you are now as amazed as I was when I first did this. I want to explain to you why I was so amazed and remain so amazed and the valuable lesson I learned from this. From the moment I was asked the question as to which table looks longer, I suspected that both tables were the same size. However, my eyes refused to be able to see that. Then I drew the outline of the longer appearing table and placed it on the other table and lo and behold it had proven to me that they are in fact the exact same dimensions. But what remains so shocking to me is that whenever I look at these two tables the table to the left always looks longer to me. Even though the truth has been demonstrated, my eyes cannot see it. This, of course, made me question how I determine what reality is. I now have conclusive evidence that what I see is not necessarily the way things are. This lesson is so vitally important because often we are absolutely sure about something just as our eyes are absolutely sure that the tables are not the same dimensions. And we need to learn from this to develop a little bit of humility and

understand that we cannot ever look at anything with pure objectivity. We are inherently biased by our own selves. And as convinced as we are about something we must always second guess ourselves and ask that perhaps it is different than what we think it is.

Perception vs. Reality

Where does this bias come from? First, I want to share a story with you about a great Jewish mystic and spiritual master. His name was Zushe. His disciples once came to visit him and found him pacing about his home, distraughtly saying again and again, “Where is Zushe?” “Where is Zushe?” His disciples thought he may have lost his mind. When he found an opportunity one of the disciples asked him, “What did you mean when asking “Where is Zushe?” Why would a person say to himself, ‘Where am I?’” The master responded: “One day I’m going to die. You will walk in and find my body here on the floor, and I will be exactly as I am right now, the same flesh, the same bones, the same countenance. Yet, you will be crying. Holy master, why did you leave us? Holy master, where did you go? But I will not have gone anywhere. I will be right before you. However, you understand, that I, Zushe, am not a body. My true self is my soul. It will be the true me that you will be crying for. After thinking about this I considered, “Now must be the time for me to discover the real me, not when my soul has already left my body.” This is why I was saying, “Where is Zushe?” I have begun looking for my soul, the real me.

Understanding this helps us see why we have a worthiness issue. It comes from the way we identify ourselves. It comes from the fact that we are made up of matter and spirit, a body and the soul. The body is born and the body dies. The soul is an eternal existence. Our body, being temporary and not eternal, is the part of us that is constantly seeking affirmation to know that it is worthy. Why? Because it knows it is only temporary and how valuable can something temporary be. Our soul, being eternal, knows its inherent worth. You may have also figured out that our body is our external self and our soul is our internal self. The body, in its desperation for worthiness, has a bias to every interaction it experiences. Its bias is to bringing itself worthiness. This is what many people simply call selfishness. Everything revolves around

ourselves because we are so desperate. This is the reason why we look at things, hear things and experience things differently from the way they are. Because our body never seeks to know what the truth is, it only seeks to know how this will affect me. This is the reason why two people can hear someone say the very same thing and walk out saying they heard very different things. We process what we heard through our filter and what comes out the other side is our version of reality. This is not reality at all. The soul has no agenda being is that it is inherently secure with its own worthiness and can, therefore, experience reality for exactly what it is without putting any spin on it. To sum it up, the body never sees reality clearly, and the soul always has a clear vision of reality.

Let's look at this very simple example. A couple is cleaning up after dinner. The husband is washing the dishes and the wife is drying them. After the husband washes a particular dish and hands it to his wife, she comments, "Honey, this dish is still dirty." The husband responds back, "If you don't like the way I wash the dishes you can wash them yourself!"

Let's analyze what happened here. The wife expressed a simple observation, an objective observation, that the dish is still dirty. Anyone that looks at this dish will see that it's dirty. When the husband responded, he simply could have said, "Oh, let me rewash the dish." The reason why he did not respond that way was because he was not responding to the objective reality. He was responding to his biased interpretation of the meaning he attached to his wife's words. Most likely, the interpretation was that she thinks that I don't know how to wash dishes, a form of him feeling devalued or unworthy. So what does he do, he responds to that interpretation by defending himself. She has no idea what he's talking about because that wasn't what she meant. He is almost living a delusional life. This all comes from the bias of our body, the insecurity we have about our worthiness which trickles down into the way we respond to everyday occurrences.

Checking In To Reality Exercise

What we need to begin doing is see reality for what it truly is without shading it with our biased view. I am going to share with you a very basic process, which I call the **Checking In To Reality Exercise**, which you can use in every situation you are in to avoid personalizing what is going on and to begin seeing the reality objectively for what it is. If we were to put our feelings about events into slow motion we would be able to break them down into these five steps:

Event – Judgement – Feeling – Space - Response

The famous psychotherapist, Viktor Frankl, wrote in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*: "Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." When we learn to slow down what's happening and observe these five stages, in any event, we can uncover the space between the event and our response to the event. Let me explain these five steps so we can understand.

The event: This is what occurs without any form of added interpretation. The event is the objective occurrence. In the story of the dish, the husband handed his wife a dish that he just washed and she told him that it is still dirty. That was the objective event.

The judgment: This is how we interpret the event. Our interpretations are personal and typically driven by our biased defensive self. In this story, the husband's judgment is that his wife is saying he doesn't know how to wash the dishes, clearly a judgment because that's not what she said.

The feeling: This is the way our judgment of the event triggers us to feel. In this case, when the husband's judgment of his wife's words is, "I don't know how to wash dishes," this judgment leads to his feeling devalued and unworthy which awakens his instinctive desperation for his emotional oxygen which is worthiness.

The Space: Our power space exists between our feeling and our response. In this moment, which only needs to be a few seconds or less, I must ask myself if my judgment is absolutely true or is it my defensive, biased story? Even if it is, why does it concern me so deeply? Does it define my worthiness?

The response: This is our behavior based on how we feel. The husband reacted very defensively which is no surprise because he was drowning. He hid the truth that his feeling came from his insecurity. He blamed his wife by making himself a victim with the hopes that she will now apologize and shower him with love and acceptance. How does this serve the relationship? Not well at all.

The solution: Whenever an event takes place we need to control ourselves from step five, the response, until we step into our Power Space in step four. We need to identify the objective event, determine how we are putting a biased judgment on the event and see how that judgment is leading us to feel. It is at this point that we can create a change. The moment we become aware of how our feeling is the result of our personal judgment of reality and not the actual reality, that awareness wakes us up and creates a space that permits us to react to the event and not to our judgment and feeling. In the case of the dish, had the husband paused before he reacted, he would have determined that his anger is his own judgment of what his wife meant and not what she actually said. He made this judgment because of his desperate need for worthiness, instinctively thinking his wife was not accepting him. This would give him the clarity to separate the event from his personal judgment and the ability to respond to the event alone. The dish is dirty, okay, I will rewash it.

When we get into the habit of doing this exercise repeatedly, as cumbersome as it may feel, we quickly get very good at it, and we suddenly find ourselves much less reactive, much more secure and we see a significant improvement in our relationships with others.

Here's a very important point you need to know. Until you get very good at this exercise, you'll want to begin using it on events that already happened which you already responded to. In fact, you can do this right now. Think of an event that triggered a response from you. Break it down into the five steps. The objective event, your judgment of what the event meant to you, the feeling that was created by your judgment and then how you reacted. Now question the judgment you made. Is it possible that you were wrong with your judgment and were personalizing the situation which led to you being defensive? How would your response have been different? The more you practice this exercise with past events, the easier it will be to begin practicing it in the moment as the event is happening. Also know that sometimes, especially when we're new to this, we are so stuck in our judgment of what happened that we can't separate our judgment from the objective event. This is when a good friend can be enormously helpful in helping us see the event more objectively. This is also the benefit of our Facebook group where you can share an event and I or others will guide you towards seeing your judgment.

This is the powerful step we can take to get our worthiness from within. This exercise prevents us from personalizing everything that happens to us. We change this by slowing down the events that occur in our lives and breaking them down into five steps. This permits us to notice our bias and step out of our bias before we react from that desperate unhealthy place.

Now I can't tell you how many times I've insisted that my biased judgment was the truth. I told myself that I knew this person for years and I knew exactly what they meant when they said what they did. I would tell myself, "Don't tell me that it is my biased judgment. This is the reality." So firstly, we need to trust trying a new way and to stop being so sure that we know. Nothing will change if we continue doing the same thing. As Einstein said, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results."

And here's the more important point. Let's go back to the dish scenario. Even if the wife did mean to say that he doesn't know how to wash the dishes, creating this space between the

stimulus and the response will change everything. Here's why. The fact that he lets his wife's opinion crush him is because he is dependent on others, in this case, her, to get his worthiness. It may also be that he depends on this ability to do things well for his worthiness and the fact that the dish was dirty devastates him. We must realize that when someone says something which results in us feeling something, they didn't create that feeling. Our own insecurity did. Has anything about his inherent value changed because of his wife's comment? Did anything about his inherent value change because of the dirty dish? Only in his insecure imagination but not the reality. We will discuss this idea more, owning our emotions, in the next module.

Equanimity

There is a teaching from the founder of the spiritual Chassidic movement, the Baal Shem Tov. The teaching is called *hishtaavut*. This Hebrew word means equanimity. The dictionary translates equanimity to mean: mental calmness, composure, and evenness of temper, especially in a difficult situation. In other words, what goes on outside of me is not what determines what goes on within me. The more our equanimity increases, the better we are doing. When we seek our acceptance from without we become more and more dependent on everything and everyone around us and cannot possibly stabilize our emotions. Why? Because our emotions are in the hands of everything and everyone else which we have no control over. And so as the saying goes, you never know. To the extent that someone lives their life beginning within, they will have a greater level of equanimity which, in other words, is peace of mind.

How would you react if you saw a parent walking a child with a leash around their neck or better yet, an adult going for a walk with their spouse with a leash around their neck? Well, no kidding, it actually happens all the time. Very often, it is our neck that the leash is on. The reason we don't see the leash is because it's invisible to us. The moment we begin seeing this leash we transform our lives for the better. You see, every time someone says something that gets you upset, you are handing all your emotions over to them and saying, "Here, control how

I feel.” It’s the like kids who know how to press the button that makes their parents furious. It’s as if the kids have a leash on their parent’s neck. Now imagine your emotions were your own. You owned and controlled them. They weren’t up to the whims of others. This is equanimity.

What surprises some is that equanimity works in both directions, it is true whether someone insults me or compliments me. When we raise our level of equanimity, not only do we not get upset when insulted, we don’t become jubilant when praised. In both scenarios, we assess the comment made as objectively as we can. If it has merit, we let it teach us. If it doesn’t, we move on.

You may be thinking, “Everyone I know gets down when someone insults them and everyone’s excitement spikes when someone praises them.” This is very true because there are many people who turn to the people and things outside of them to receive their validation. The very first time that you begin to own your own feelings and not let them be the outcome of what other people say or think you will realize how unbelievably liberating and powerful it is. And I want you to know that through following this process you will have that experience. Now don’t get me wrong, pure equanimity is a very advanced level of emotional health. We’re not here to seek perfection, but rather to make sure we are moving along in the right direction of developing ourselves.

Emotional Stability

One last point, equanimity doesn’t mean we shouldn’t be emotional. Emotions are a very beautiful part of who we are. Equanimity means that our emotions are not out of our control but in our control. Equanimity means that we choose to respond to objective reality and not triggers created by our perception of reality. This means crying when someone passes and being joyous upon a birth. Feeling happy when you see the results of your efforts and when you experience true goodness. So by no means should you shut down your emotions. In fact, this process will help you have the courage to let your emotions flow as you begin living more from

within. One of the primary reasons we control our emotions is because it takes vulnerability. One more way to speak our truth is by letting our healthy emotions flow.