

## The Development of the Cycle of Self-Judgment Leading to Self-Control in the Infant and Child

Infants and very young children have the experience, more often for some than others, that “love is absent.” That something is wrong. If what’s wrong is with the big people, or the earth itself, there’s no hope. It’s a crazy terrifying world. This conclusion becomes a permission, a precursor for extreme behaviors—fragmentation, multiple personalities, violent behavior, or behavior with no conscience or responsibility necessary.

However, most young children decide, “What is wrong is me!”

A child’s best choice is to blame the self, and that’s the good news, because “if it’s my fault, I can do something about that. I can become more this or less that. I can fix this.”

This is the beginning of the development of the mind, of strategy and of self-imposed rules. The mind begins to gain control over choices about behavior, spontaneity and authenticity. It now has the all-important job of rectifying reality so love can become present.

Love is no longer an unconditional state. It becomes a conditional commodity to be gained and earned, however possible, at whatever cost to the authentic expression of self, and manipulated if necessary. It is no longer love, it’s approval. In that family system, if approval is not possible, the child tries to at least “be right.” If that’s not possible, at least “not to be wrong.” Failing all else, he or she can learn to make someone else wrong.

In infancy, there is no energetic separation between Mom, Dad, or caregiver. We feel everything that is happening around us is happening to us. There is not yet a division between self and other. All pain is our pain. All fear is our fear. We are responsible for whatever is happening. It is our fault. At the same time, we have no control. We are powerless and helpless to affect anything that’s occurring. At the same time, there is so much we don’t know, yet we feel an urgent “need to know” for physical survival.

So, as an infant, pain is “badness.” So if “I feel pain, then I am badness.” I will strive to move in the direction of goodness, and to reduce pain. How to do that? Identify the “wrongness.” So we make our first self-judgment: the wrongness is myself! Okay, what to do about it? How to make it better? At this point, strategies are developed that become lifetime shapers of behavior. Now I need more self-control to follow these strategies. What becomes the most important ingredient? The feedback! The self-judgment which constantly tells us how we’re doing. Where we’re falling down on the job or where we need even more control.

So the infant reality of helplessness and powerlessness, combined with “pain is evil,” creates a closed loop of self-judgment and self-control. The rules I impose on myself to carry them out.

How can that loop be broken? When healing and learning truly become the same thing, pain ceases to be evil.

When we take the intrinsic “bad” out of pain, so if I’m in pain it doesn’t mean I’m bad, then we no longer need to hold on to the wounds of the past or continually recreate them in the future.