

Out of the Box Coaching Newsletter

Toss the Road Map by Mary Bast

Those aspects of ourselves most painful and most humiliating are the very ones to be brought forward and worked on... (this) may evoke the terror of dissolution or the awe of eternity. ~ Edward F. Edinger, Anatomy of the Psyche: Alchemical Symbolism in Psychotherapy



Before I knew anything about *mortificatio*, I thought only of “mortification,” as in *humiliation* or *shame*—feelings most of us prefer to avoid. But perhaps that’s the point. Humiliation and shame are ego-responses. And a counselor or coach can unwittingly reinforce the notion that unwanted behavior is “bad” by suggesting ways to *stop* doing what clients *don’t like* about their behavior. Instead, we can show them how to be *with*, to embrace those “unwanted” aspects. Paradoxically, they can then find their authentic selves.

Mortificatio—killing or dead-making, consciously working on reduction of ego attachments; in Jungian terms, ‘bringing home’ our projections, going inside ourselves to embrace the shadow so our being reflects the whole instead of a dissociated part.

David, a counterphobic Six, said “I talked to a counselor years ago about my anger but we just scratched the surface. We never got into the soul of what was going on. I’d put Post-It stickers on my dashboard to remind myself not to lose my temper. And that worked... until the Post-It fell off.” As David explored his projections and let go of judging his anger, he had a very different experience:

“I’d been yearning for the change I’m now experiencing, but never found a way to do it. With this approach I’m not self-condemning, I’m simply noting, which has taught me how to be where I want to be anyway. The oddest part is that I haven’t had to sit here and plot some kind of change. What has continued to awe me is the notion of yielding and letting it happen. Just this morning I went to the garage to put some stuff into the trunk of my car and the trunk was locked. My reaction a few weeks ago would have been, ‘Damn it! Why is the trunk locked?’ Instead I noted, ‘Oh, the trunk is locked,’ let the annoyance move through me, walked around to the door and unlocked the trunk. I don’t know where my irritability went, all that pointing of fingers at other people.”

“I marvel at two things. First, that I’ve been able to continue the process as profoundly as I have; I still find it amazing that I don’t have to go through the great labor I’d been enduring for years, trying to curb my anger at others — I’m not struggling or trying. And second, I’d gone through life always having to know where I was going, figuring out everything that could possibly go wrong; otherwise I wasn’t going to do it. Now it’s joy that moves me through the process and I don’t care where it ends. I’ve tossed the road map.”

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Toss the Road Map (continued)

Sublimatio—In the chemical process of sublimation, a heated solid enters a gaseous state and ascends to the cooler top of the vessel where it re-solidifies. Thus in alchemical lore *sublimatio* symbolizes transmuting to a higher form. Metaphorically, we become more spiritual, we move “above” our small ego-types and have a larger worldview.

For many years I’ve been amused by Charles Tart’s coined word, *endarkenment*. Tart, an icon of spiritual consciousness, wrote “... a way to get endarkened really well is to be narrow, to only see things one way.” Like many of you, I’ve experienced occasional shifts to higher stages of consciousness as stepping out of the dark and into the light. But Tart’s somewhat tongue-in-cheek admission, “My specialty is endarkenment,” reflects how occasional those glimpses of light can be.

One of my Seven clients described this larger worldview as a mosaic. “It’s not like the old disappears, but the pieces can be put together in infinite combination.” Below is a brief recap of her particular endarkenment—to put a positive spin on things and ignore reality—as well as one glimpse of light in her mosaic:

“I grew up in a family like the one in *Ordinary People*, where everything looked good on the outside. My parents were upper-middle-class, church-going, and provided for all our needs. But emotionally there was chaos and conflict. My mother was an active alcoholic and my dad worked all the time. I often felt I couldn’t understand what was going on. My friends would say, ‘I wish I had your parents,’ and I’d think, ‘How could that be?’ That was exaggerated in college: “Gosh, how is it that everyone else seems to know what’s going on and says it’s OK, but it doesn’t feel OK to me?”

“I spent my last semester of college in Mexico as part of a Global Justice and Peace program. Fourteen students lived in community and were immersed in Spanish. After that I spent two weeks studying Latin American history and politics in Nicaragua, and then stayed two weeks with a family where there were only two beds in the house and only two of the rooms had paved floors.”



“I became aware not only how my family pretended everything was OK, but that I lived in a country where everyone else looked that way, too. Now I was with people who didn’t live that way at all and—in the midst of that—they had lives. Not only did this heighten my sense of a greater global community and my place in it, it also gave me some different eyes: seeing more of the things we have in common, being open to new experiences.”

“That’s continued to be a reminder to me. When I’m feeling out of my element, instead of running away from reality or trying to put a spin on it, to embrace it and ask, ‘Well, if I were in Mexico, what would I do?’”

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