

Dick Cheney Lives! (Therapy 1)

Dale Easley's blog

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Dick Cheney is alive and well and living in my upper chest in a dark ball that threatens to choke me. George W. Bush's Darth Vader is in a collapsed Death Star that has become a black hole that sucks all the joy from anywhere near it, emitting only the occasional bursts of anxiety rays. Unfortunately, he has hid out there since my youth, well established, self-righteous, and paranoid. No, not paranoid, according to him, but realistic. People are deceptive, manipulative, and untrustworthy, which only he recognizes when others want to be diplomatic. However, before you think I'm mentally ill, let me explain how therapy helped me to admit, I am Dick Cheney.

For several months, I've been going through a type of psychotherapy based on the Internal Family Systems Model. IFS starts with the assumption that all of us have within our minds different parts that play different roles in who we are. For example, St. Paul talked about the part of him that wants to do good and the part that does the opposite. Similarly, Buddhists recognize the inner dialogue constantly going on in our heads. In fact, most of us have had the experience of an ongoing commentary that criticizes what we're doing or how we are. Sometimes it seems like there is a war going on in our minds. IFS seeks to bring peace between the combatants, helping them understand each other and appreciate their contributions. Last night was about getting Dick Cheney to appreciate diplomacy.

When the session started, I didn't know Dick Cheney was hiding out within me. What I wanted to deal with was anxiety, the kind that wakes me up in the middle of the night to tell me that I should have done something different or remembered to do something or somehow do better. I often hear the part as saying, You're not good enough. That anxiety often keeps me from enjoying accomplishments and relationships. And it certainly doesn't help me sleep.

As we began the visualization of the anxiety part, it appeared to me as a dark lump in my upper chest threatening to choke me. As my therapist guided my exploration and befriending of it, I began to see its isolation and hurt, years of feeling judged and found not good enough, of being deceived and taken advantage of. To protect me, this part took on being realistic about how people are, deceptive and manipulate and hypocritical. This part had a strong core that was protecting me from my own people-pleasing behavior, from my own neediness and weakness. And the anxiety was actually hyper-vigilance, a

constant watching for dangers and threats. Dick Cheney emerged.

Bound up in the worldview of this part was my view of growing up in the South. Southern women in particular were (are) disempowered by traditions and institutions. However, some, including my mother, learned to work within those systems and still get most of what they wanted. Part of the approach is to make men think something is their idea and they need to accomplish it. Affection, acceptance, warmth, and charm all follow the accomplishments. But a woman's disappointment is annihilating. To judge you and find you lacking—that is true power. And to salt the wound, mom would start with praise, You did a good job, but ... Always the but.

One of the results of this power manipulation is that Southern culture can be overwhelmingly hypocritical. As an example, a scene from *The Color Purple* stands out. After Oprah Winfrey's character gets out of prison, essentially put there because she's too uppity, she ends up as a maid in a white woman's house. The white lady learns to drive and carries Oprah out to visit her family. However, when trying to turn the car around she gets flustered and then interprets as a threat the attempts of Oprah's relatives to help. To stave off this invented danger, she shouts, I've always been good to you people.

So Dick Cheney hunkers down in my mind and shouts, I've always protected you. And he really believes he has. He reminds me of all the disappointments and judgments and deceits that have accumulated through the years, how my people-pleasing behavior has been take advantage of over and over. The world is a dangerous place. He isn't hyper-vigilant. He's realistic.

My goal now is to appreciate Dick Cheney's intentions and contributions without letting him run the show and ruin the joy. I suspect that many people who grew up with constant subtle criticism probably have a similar part trying to run their lives. I also suspect that a lot of addictive behavior comes from simply trying to shut Dick Cheney up. But as the real Dick Cheney has shown, he won't shut up and he won't go away. Can I learn to appreciate him? Another part of me screams, "No way!" The battle continues.