

Pathwork on
Importance of Forming Independent Opinions

This is a long quote from Pathwork Lecture 51 by that same title. I include it all because it has been important to me.

16	<p>We shall now discuss the subject of <u>opinions</u>. It becomes increasingly important on this path to find out just what your true opinions are. Many of you are completely unaware you have opinions that you have accepted ready-made, without asking yourself whether they were really yours, and why.</p>
17	<p>Human beings are often so involved in their emotional problems that they remain unaware of holding opinions not their own, and why they do so. It is beside the point that the opinion you hold may be objectively valid. If it is not your own, arrived at through mature deliberation, it is more harmful to the soul than a wrong opinion honestly reached. This may surprise you, but I will try to show why it is better to have a wrong opinion if it is really your own than a right one if it is not.</p>
18	<p>In the first case you may be mistaken. Why not? You are human beings and therefore fallible in judgment. An honest mistake, as I always say, is much better than a lack of courage and all the other sick and weak reasons that make you cling to an opinion not honestly arrived at.</p>
19	<p>Why do you voice opinions that are not your own? One possibility is, simply, laziness and inertia. Anything that does not touch you personally is not important enough to make an effort for -- in this case the effort to think independently for the sake of truth. Hence you quickly adopt the opinions of others. It is one thing not to have an opinion at all about a subject that is neither important nor interesting to you, but another if you hold other people's opinions.</p>
20	<p>Inferiority feelings are another reason for not having your own opinions. You are so certain that other people know better than you that you rely on their opinions rather than on your own. By going on in this way you create a vicious circle: the more you hold opinions not your own, the more you unconsciously despise yourself for it. And the more you despise yourself, the greater the apparent need to adopt other people's opinions. Thus you see can how every wrong inner condition creates a vicious circle, apart from the great vicious circle I discussed last time. The only way to break the circle is to have the courage to examine the subject, to review it freely and independently. If then you arrive at a different view and have the courage to live up to it, at the price of differing from your environment, you will automatically respect yourself a lot more -- and thus begin to break this particular vicious circle. On the other hand, if you arrive at the same opinion again, but this time it has really become your own, your courage and labor to free yourself from the yoke of your own weakness will have the same positive effect.</p>
21	<p>Another motive for holding opinions not your own is a desire to conform. The desire for conformity has a few subdivisions. For instance, the child or the immature person feels different from her or his surroundings, has a feeling of not belonging, of being isolated and unique in a negative sense. This is why all children want to be like other children and feel deeply ashamed about their imagined difference. The maturing of the soul will change this tendency, but until then a person will be inclined to hold on to others' opinions.</p>
22	<p>Another motive for conforming and therefore not daring to seek one's own opinions is in the area where you still rebel against authority. Since you still crave to belong, and your rebellion is not only hidden but is limited to certain realms of your life, you want to make up for the rebellion by conforming to your environment in other ways.</p>
23	<p>Still another motive for holding others' opinions is to cover up the exact wish that you deny yourself by adopting the opposite opinion. Because your desire does not conform to public opinion, you are convinced of its wickedness. Added to this is your general guilt feeling that arises from the main vicious circle. Hence, you are compelled to have an opinion that is not in harmony with your emotions and unconscious desires. Whether you consider these emotions and</p>

	unconscious wishes desirable or undesirable is not the issue here. But under no circumstances do you eliminate possibly wrong desires by conforming outwardly, by adopting the opposite opinion out of fear and weakness. Such opinions are often particularly rigid -- and even violent.
24	In all these instances, you violate your personality; you lack the courage to be yourself and to arrive at your own conclusions. You sell out your truth for an imagined personal advantage, which increases your self-contempt, though this is usually quite unconscious.
25	I might add that often you hold an opinion only because it represents the exact opposite of a hated and rejected authority's, be it a parent or someone else. In this case your motive is not conformity but the exact opposite. It is defiance, rebellion, and hate that make you hold the opinion. You are thus just as much in bondage as by conforming. You are just as dependent.
26	Now you can surely see how harmful it is to hold opinions that you did not arrive at independently, that are not free from your emotional involvement. Find out which of these motives apply to you and bind you. Perhaps a combination of them applies to you. In some instances one may be predominant, but the others may still be present.
27	The danger is that your rationalizations -- the way you may succeed in justifying your opinions -- may hide the weak and dependent motives. Do not forget that the validity of the opinion is the not the point here. What you expound may be right -- but why do you really have the opinion? How did you get it? What are your inner motives for holding the opinion? This is the difficulty in the work. The validity of the opinion may be so strong that you cannot find the emotional and subjective reasons behind it. Finding your motives requires the utmost self-honesty, and a little more. It also requires an understanding of all subtleties described here and a deep-rooted goodwill to apply them to yourself -- to detect the slight emotional flavor in your reactions to some of your opinions. By listening to or feeling your reactions you will be able to get to their roots. Beware of your good reasoning capacity! The more successful you are, the graver is the danger that you are hiding your true motives.
28	I suggest that you take certain general subjects on which you have strongly formed opinions and examine them in the work you are doing by yourself and with your coworker. Take politics, religion, your idea about love and sex, or whatever it is that concerns everyone to some extent. What do you really think about it? Why? Think whether you would have the same opinion if you had grown up in a different environment, if different influences around you had prevailed, or if your life circumstances were different? This self-questioning is healthy because it will give you a more objective outlook.
29	One can find justification for almost any viewpoint. There is also always a point in the opposite view. Try to see it. And then try to detect how subjective you may have been so far. It will already be great progress if you can admit that you have a personal stake in holding on to your opinion -- that it is not based solely on objective deliberations. This self-honesty is of great benefit to the soul.
30	Are there any questions about this subject? QUESTION: There is something I don't fully understand. It seems to me that time is so extremely limited that one could not collect enough information and analyze it sufficiently to arrive at an adequate opinion on many subjects. And therefore one is compelled, consciously, to adopt an opinion on an emotional basis.
31	ANSWER: In the first place, my dear, let me ask you this question. Are you really aware of instances when you have adopted an opinion on an emotional basis? I doubt this very much.
32	QUESTION: Well, I am sure that there are many occasions when one isn't aware of that. But there are others when one is fully aware. For instance, when the subject is not of sufficient interest to devote what little time there is.
33	ANSWER: The moment you are emotionally influenced, the subject is of importance. It

	<p>is unimportant only when you cannot be emotionally touched. There are many questions that cannot touch you emotionally. If it is not important for you, you can say, "I do not know." Therefore you will have no opinion. For instance, in the case of a scientific subject it would not be difficult for you to say that you do not know. It does not touch you personally. However, a scientist working in a particular field may be emotionally involved. Or, if not, the subject is still important to him. Therefore, he must study it. But you may say that you hold no particular opinion on the subject, except when you are too proud to admit that there is a subject that you know nothing about. In that case you do become emotionally involved. And this will lead you to adopt an opinion you know nothing or too little about. For it is perfectly true that you cannot possibly study all subjects in existence. I did not say that it is necessary to have opinions on all subjects. I merely said that where you have opinions, they should be your own.</p>
34	<p>Furthermore, the moment one realizes that one's opinion is based on emotion and therefore subjective -- even if it should happen to be objectively true as well -- this realization already is a great deal. Many people are utterly unaware of this. In fact, this is the reason I spoke on the subject tonight -- to help you find out just that. Perhaps the best you will be able to do for quite a long time is to make such realizations. You cannot become completely objective all at once. To reach such detachment, you must go through the stage where you realize that you cannot be objective in certain areas of life. It is healthy to say, "Here I am not objective, for I am emotionally involved. For the moment, my opinion is such and such, but I realize it is subjective, and therefore I take it with a grain of salt. I do not take it too seriously." The danger is when you are convinced that your opinion is completely objective and you expound it with very good arguments, while being utterly unaware that notwithstanding all the good arguments you are deeply and subjectively involved.</p>
35	<p>QUESTION: Did I misunderstand then in interpreting what you said to mean that one should have opinions when one is not qualified to have any?</p>
36	<p>ANSWER: You certainly did misunderstand. There is nothing wrong with saying about as many subjects as you wish that you do not know. On the contrary, that is fine. However, when you feel disharmonious whenever an opinion contrary to yours is being offered, when you feel angry inwardly or when you feel the great need to convince others that your opinion is right, then you should examine where and how you are emotionally involved. It would be very foolish if I were to advise you to have an opinion about every conceivable subject.</p>
37	<p>QUESTION: What about the problem of being unable to form an opinion on a subject on which the majority seems to have an opinion?</p>
38	<p>ANSWER: That does not matter. The fact that many people have opinions -- often not their own -- is no reason that you must have opinions on subjects that you did not study. There is nothing wrong in that. Only if it becomes a pattern: when a subject is of importance to you and you cannot form an opinion, then you should look into yourself. If you examine the pattern, it will reveal something to you. You will find out why you are unable to form an opinion. What are the psychological reasons behind your inability? It could be a fear of committing yourself. It could be that a person constantly refrains from having opinions in order to avoid friction, to be liked and "respected," to never differ from other people, or avoid a certain responsibility. From the moment you have a conviction, it entails a certain responsibility. That may be behind the inability to form an opinion. From a little and seemingly unimportant symptom you may find out something infinitely more important. By reviewing your life from this new viewpoint, you will find certain clues about the hidden reasons why you hold opinions not your own or why you are incapable -- I should rather say, unwilling -- to form an opinion for psychological and emotional reasons that are still hidden.</p>