

BOOK REVIEW

The Pathwork of Self-Transformation by Eva Pierrakos, Bantam Books, (New York: 1991), 241 pages, \$9.95.

From the mid-fifties until her death in 1979 Eva Pierrakos was the channel for a spirit entity who came to be known as the Guide. Pierrakos transmitted 258 lectures focusing on the nature of spiritual reality and outlining a unique process of psychological development. Known as the Pathwork, this process of personal growth is predicated on the paradox that only by fully embracing our flawed humanity can we truly realize our essential divinity. The lectures stress the importance of squarely confronting what Jung called our “shadow” self so that we might transform its negativity back into the life-affirming energy of which it is a distortion.

For over two decades, the Guide’s teachings have been a rich source of inspiration for thousands of people all over the world who have practiced the teachings of the Pathwork. Now seventeen of the Guide’s key lectures have been compiled and edited to make this spiritual wisdom accessible to a larger community.

Beginning with an orienting lecture entitled “What Is the Path?” the selections build upon one another sequentially. The early chapters discuss issues of childhood: why we first develop “idealized self-images,” how we confuse God with the authority figures in our life, in what ways we continually recreate the hurts of our youth. The middle chapters address

the challenges of adulthood—sex, marriage, crises, self-esteem—while the final chapters consider more existential philosophical and spiritual topics, such as the nature of consciousness, the problem of evil, and the creative emptiness met through meditation.

In their joint preface, Judith Saly (a Pathwork leader and teacher, and one of the early founders of the Phoenicia Pathwork Center in Phoenicia, NY) and Donovan Thesenga (a trustee of the Pathwork Foundation and cofounder of the Sevenoaks Pathwork Center in Madison, VA) distinguish this collection of channeled material from the scores of other such books. Because it integrates emotional work with spiritual practice, the Pathwork, they note, “addresses both the frustrations in our personal lives and the limitations that prevent our spiritual awakening.” Much current literature on personal growth, they point out, falls short of helping us genuinely understand why we fail to create the lives we want, precisely because it neglects the sticky issue of how—in a practical and realistic way—we face our crippling fears and our self-negating impulses.

In a tone as strikingly reasonable as it is transcendent, the Guide goes directly to the heart of our nagging inner conflict. The lectures center on tough questions to which we intuitively have no facile answers: Why are some aspects of myself so hard to change? What explains my resistance

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to love, pleasure and vitality? How can I acknowledge my negativity without either glossing over it or being devastated by it? If I cannot overcome my imperfections, am I condemned by them?

The Pathwork offers no quick fixes or easy escapes. The multiple challenges involved in transforming our “lower selves” and expanding our consciousness demand a deep and sustained effort. To examine and correct our faulty childhood assumptions about life, to separate our “mask-self” (the image we present to the world) from our real self, to overcome our limiting attachment to dualism, to expose and purify our negative urges, to accept that we are in no sense victims of external forces, to learn detached self-observation— these are the challenges of true liberation.

Yet the Guide insists that such aims are entirely within the reach of anyone who can willingly suspend disbelief and entertain the possibility that bliss is our birthright: “Heaven is a state of consciousness that can be realized at any time by any entity” (p. 58). A fairly revolutionary thought for those of us raised on Christian fodder.

The book gently reminds us of the resources available for meeting the obstacles we encounter along the Path. Prayer, creative visualization, meditation, and asking for divine assistance can soften the labor. Yet above all the Guide encourages our most profound longings for fulfillment, our intimations of something better:

Do not abandon the longing that comes from the sense that your life could be much more, that there is a state in which you can live without painful, tortured confusions, where you can function on a level of inner resilience, contentment, and security, where you are capable of deep feelings, of blissful pleasure and can express them, where you are capable of meeting life without fear because you no longer fear yourself. (P-4)

In recent decades writers such as Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and Stephen Levine have taught us to confront our terror of death, while numerous books on addiction and co-dependency have showed us how to deal with our fear of pain by healing our wounded inner child from a spiritual perspective. It is now time, according to the Guide, to face the third major human fear—namely, that of evil.

At the core of the book lies the startling proposition that, like death and pain, evil loses its hold over us if we confront it head-on. The Guide explains that destructive impulses are nothing other than positive, creative energy gone awry. We waste our time and hinder our development trying to suppress them or wish them away, for of course, the repressed has the habit of surfacing in spite of ourselves.

Instead, we must bring our “evil” tendencies out into the open in order to scrutinize the fears and misconceptions at their source. Only when we comprehend their origins can we apply our conscious minds to the task of inner re-education. Seen, then, as

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errors in understanding rather than as inherent blemishes on the soul, destructive thoughts and behaviors become material to rework instead of uncontrollable forces to plague or paralyze us.

There is something particularly compelling about this book, and I suspect it lies in the balance the Guide achieves between rigorous honesty and loving-kindness. The Guide gives his greatest gift by telling us the truth about ourselves. "Begin to see how

you all sit back, hoping for a comfortable spirituality that leaves out your personal involvement in the world of feelings" (p. 115).

Such forthrightness is at once sobering and uplifting. It leaves one feeling quite certain that the task of self-realization, the oh-so-hazy goal of the New Age, is not nearly as elusive or far-flung as one might have feared it was. This is a book of hope.

Katie Brooks

