

The Step-by-Step Analysis of the Problem*

©Pierre Grimes, Ph.D.

Now, since you know there are few things more important than reflecting on your own life, you might want to arrange your time so you can devote sufficient time and attention to this important task. Secondly, after you write down your answers in your journal, study them, review them, and add to them as you recall new material and insights. So then, let us explore a troublesome problem you are having.

I. State the nature of your problem:

1. The first step is to state as clearly as you can the nature of your problem. What reasons do you give yourself for not achieving your most personally significant goals?
2. As you consider these goals and why you have not achieved them, could you explain the effect this failure has had on your life?
3. Again, what is it like when you anticipate facing these problems in your daily life?

II. Describe the scenes in the present and the recent past:

Now, take this present difficulty you are having, and as you review it, see if you can determine when it began. Consider the stages it went through, and see if you can identify just where in those stages you felt most "down", depressed, or in some negative state. In the same way, identify the stage(s) where you experienced a "high" or when it was most intense.

1. Further, choose two or three times in the recent past, say within the last few days or weeks, when you felt "down," or were not yourself, and after recollecting these events, please write them down.
2. Carefully compare and contrast this description with the "high" and "down" states you described in 1 above. Examine the sequences of the events for their similarities and differences.
3. Can you explain why these intense "highs" and "downs" occur as they do? Does the presence of these states of mind signal your problem? Is that what it means to have a problem-to face the consequences of these states of mind?

III. Recall early incidents:

Now, keep your mind on the description you just gave of these states of mind and reflect on the role they have played in your life.

Recall early incidents in your life when you experienced these states of mind most intensely. Please make notes of your reflections. How old were you then? Who was present? Describe the states of mind of those present.

What was said at that time? Try to recall the words as exactly as you can. Can you recall the times when you experienced these same words and expressions as thoughts? What effect do those thoughts have upon you? If those thoughts occur when you are trying to achieve a goal-one that is personally significant to you-do these thoughts help or hinder your chance of success? NOTE: It sometimes happens that the incident that you recall may not be one in which you experienced the same state of mind as in your present situation; and that is because you may either have experienced someone other than yourself in that particular feeling state, or you may find it difficult or nearly impossible to recall a particular emotional state in your past. If so, consider if it might be that you often experience that state of mind, or have experienced it for a long period of time; and if this is the case, just choose some time when that state of mind was more intense than at other times. In either case, write down what comes to your mind and continue with your reflections.

IV. Reflect on that early scene:

Now it is necessary to reconstruct that early scene in as much detail as possible. Picture that scene again as if you were watching it being rerun or reenacted. Describe that scene. What impact did it have on you? What effect did it have on the others?

1. After: What did you do after the most intense part of the drama? Did you say anything? Where did you go? Again, what did those around you do after they saw this scene occur?
2. Before: In the same way, describe what happened before that intense scene that you just described. Go back into your recollections to recall all that you can that preceded that scene, asking yourself what you and those around you were doing and what was said.
3. Beginning: Now, please describe the state of mind you were in as this scene began. Note : Now, if you have not recalled a scene when you were living with your parents, or when you were a child, go through these same questions, only this time go back to the time when you were younger and living in your parents' home.

V. Continue reflecting:

It is essential that you continue reflecting and exploring those scenes until you can recall nothing new. Try these questions to help your recollections: Was there a special discipline scene? A particular degree of punishment? Was there a fight? Was there an intense argument? A peak of yelling? Or was there no violence, no injury?

1. How was the "making up" scene enacted? Where? What room? Who was there? What was said? What did they and you do?
2. How did you know when it was over? How did you know when you could "forget it"? How was peace or a truce established?

VI. Chart the event, show the cycle:

Chart the event, or picture it in terms of a time sequence. See if you can put it into a circle; include all the states, because a problem plays itself out periodically as a cycle or circle. You can use this chart later as a personal mandala.

VII. Reflect further:

Now you must reflect further on what you have done. Consider these questions:

1. How intense were these scenes? How alert and aware were you, and what of the others who were in these scenes?
2. Even though it may have been negative, how much concern was shown you? How much attention was focused on you? Were they showing what mattered most to them? How intimate was it?
3. If the worst thing is to be merely tolerated, because we must know how others feel towards us, then how important is this display of emotion and feeling?
4. When there is no crisis, how do they appear? As real, as powerful, as knowing and as sincere as during the crisis? Did they or you ever show that much feeling at other times? Then can you see why it is at such times that feelings are shown and displayed?
5. Was this event teaching you something? Was it being learned even though you may have preferred some other lesson?
6. Was the lesson you were 'learning' at that time connected with your being accepted and being understood? Is this the time they can show you they care? Does this become the moment when they demonstrate they care?
7. Do you see this is one way of showing feelings of concern, even of love, because few can see the genuine marks of love, and so we are driven to communicate it in ways we have been shown concern in our own youth?
8. Compare your states of mind when the scene began and during the last episode in that scene. Did you move from better to worse? Does your present state of mind reflect this last episode?
9. How frequently did such scenes occur? Looking back, could you say you could have or should have been able to predict their occurrence? Why?

VIII. Reflect back on the statement of your problem:

Reflect on the first stage, the statement you made of your problem, and consider whether that statement fits the past scene and if it is a better way to understand the past than the present. Could a problem statement made in the present actually be a conclusion or a lesson of something learned from a past scene? Why?

IX. Reflect and puzzle out the meaning:

Now that you have written down all that you have seen, it is time to reflect upon it and puzzle out its meaning. If you see the structure or pattern of your problem repeating itself

throughout your life, and can see how it is passed down to each generation, then you have come to acknowledge that it is this that is the cause of our confusion, despair, and suffering. Well, if this is so, then can you get out of it? Yes. If it is a problem it can be solved. Study it carefully. Look for more details, find connections, avoid generalities. Watch yourself when you experience similar states of mind and look for similarities with your past. Study yourself and let your present be a mirror through which to emerge from your past.

Notice another thing. You may see that you are presently in a role that actually was that of another member of your family, perhaps your father's or mother's; that's right, for a problem continues to be played out even when we no longer play the child role.

A problem is learned; we learn from others how to play it; it will survive our death. Just as you learned from your parents, so you will pass it on to those intimate with you, unless, of course, you decide to end it now by seeing it fully and consciously.

When you feel curious about whether you have really understood a problem or not, you may find this question of value: What was happening that made the problem surface? What was going on that made its appearance necessary? Clearly, if you don't see that, then it is likely you will return to the problem again because there is still some part obscure to you. If this is so, study yourself further, look more closely, talk about it, and you will come to see what has escaped your attention. Thus the art of delivering oneself of false beliefs must include testing the truth of one's understanding by facing once more those problems in your everyday experience and discovering whether or not you can now achieve your ideal goals. If you do not succeed with excellence return again for further analysis and reflection.

Accepting the challenge to answer these questions is the doorway into philosophy, not European, nor Eastern, but Platonic philosophy. In the process of resolving problems the most important ideas in philosophy are placed in review: justice, courage, love, understanding, beliefs and knowing. When we concluded as we did in the early scenes, we accepted the image and shadow of those ideas as real and those shadows became the pathologos. From these early scenes we reached conclusions that became believable because we believed those who appeared believable. They appeared sincere, noble, knowing, and caring so that we in turn would accept their message. We traded the genuine and real for the false and delusory and so we passed into the world of false beliefs. When we are in the grip of the pathologos we judge everything through it; in judging through it we are locked into reducing everything to the beliefs of the pathologos, and in that reduction we experience an alienation from those most important to us and a sense of futility because we cannot achieve our most cherished dreams and ideals. A pathologos blocks us from fulfilling our destiny and makes us live a life without reflection. Our fate becomes a shadow of the real but we can recover our direction and become a part of a noble vision that is the true flower of man's destiny.

*Reprinted with permission from *New Perspectives*, July 1994 and Nov/Dec 1994.