



Are You Judging Me?

by Penney Peirce

There are times when my mind crosses its arms, leans back a bit, and looks askance at other people, making nonverbal pronouncements about their character, worth, beauty, or intelligence. And there are just as many times when I see other people looking out at me from under their brows, their mind narrowed in judgment. In fact, these days, as I become ever more sensitive, I can actually feel the closing of their minds; it feels like a brick wall or a big metal door clanging shut. I imagine I can even hear it: thud, clank, thwack, clunk. When my own mind becomes critical or judgmental, I can feel it, too. It feels like a cold lump of unpliable clay, or a brittle piece of ice, or as if the opening I see the world through reduces to the size of a pinhole. It doesn't feel good!

When you're the recipient of negative judgment, there's a tendency to want to strike back with something even meaner or cattier. Or to shrink away in avoidance and not provoke a greater contest of wills and cleverness. "So you don't like the way I dress? My clothes aren't as expensive as yours? Well, *you* cheat on your exams, or get good grades because you suck up to the teachers." It starts early for many people. Even in grade school, kids are mean to each other—as if we don't know how bad it feels to be hurt that way, as if we don't feel the pain we cause others. Perhaps at that age, it hasn't occurred to us that if we don't want to feel bad, we shouldn't make others feel bad. But, honestly, I doubt it. Research shows that even babies are highly empathetic.

What's Underneath Our Negative Judgment?

Why do we want to attack people who aren't exactly like us? Why do we want to keep them at a distance? Is "making fun" of others some sort of perverted *fun*? Or is it because if we can keep people from seeing into who *we* are, especially if we're insecure and doubting our own worth, then we feel temporarily "safe"? Perhaps it's because our old skittish reptile brain thinks that if someone isn't like me, they are probably dangerous—the same way crows have learned not to trust humans.

And, what does it feel like to be judged? Let's look into the subtle states of energy and consciousness that this lack of respect elicits in people. If someone judges me as "too much" of anything (young, old, honest, creative-in-a-weird-way, incompetent, ambitious, ordinary, sensitive/insensitive) or "not enough" of something (athletic, political, fashionable, patient, outgoing, detailed), I immediately feel they are acting superior. And of course, then I must be inferior. And that hurts—my energy contracts and it cuts off any productive interaction or possible relationship between us. It creates a separation, a polarity where there was none before.

Now I'm thinking in terms of good and bad, and that takes me out of my natural self-expression. I think I must belong to one group or its opposite: smart/dumb, stylish/dorkish, popular/a misfit. This distracts, stalls, and undermines my joy and my flow. Where there could have been an interesting exchange, with both parties learning something valuable and experiencing an expanded worldview and greater appreciation, instead we get pain, the seeds of hatred and meanness, a hard heart, and a narrower, denser reality.

It's easy to take critical judgments like these personally—and to think the other person is accurate. It's almost a default setting to doubt your experience of your own self, your choices, and life path. Perhaps one culprit is the idea of *perfectionism*: we all think we must be perfect in every way, measuring ourselves against impossible standards determined by magazines and mass media: beautiful/handsome, sexy, smart, physically fit, productive, successful, rich, and admired by all. But don't these crazy standards contribute to that artificial good/bad opposition that hurts us so much?



What might you typically judge or criticize someone for? What's the motive underneath that tendency? What do others judge you for? What might their unconscious motive be?

Turning Judgment into Feedback

I learned over the years, by writing ten books and working with many editors and publishers, that when those professionals suggest reshaping my writing, cutting out sections, or adding extra material to help clarify things, I don't need to feel offended or hurt. They almost always prove to be sensitive and insightful, and though a few were egotistical and fed their need for superiority through heavy-handed negative criticism, most are compassionate and make my creations better. In fact, when I've taken their recommendations as helpful feedback instead of an attack on my very being, I have learned a tremendous amount. I share this because there is a fine line between positive feedback and compassionate critiques and being cut down by insensitive people just so they can feel good about themselves. This is some-

thing you can be alert to. Listen for the helpful input and what sits well with you, and stand up for yourself when the commentary doesn't fit. It's never necessary to respond in attack mode.

What we all want is to be seen for who we really are—and to me that's actually a spiritual thing. At our core, we want to relate with others heart to heart, soul to soul. We want acceptance for all of who we are—the genius and the clumsiness, the talent and the mistakes. We're all human. We want to feel safe—that we can trust ourselves to make the choices we enjoy and craft the flow of our life path in a sort of charmed way. And we want to trust others to be open to possible friendship and sharing. In a nutshell, we want to feel respected and we want to create together.

The Art of Giving Compliments

As with many things, *respect is something you receive more of the more you give*. So why not pause a moment before you judge people and feel what it might be like to be them? What's life like from their point of view? Can you sense their vulnera-

bility? Instead of going for the jugular, try touching their vulnerability with kindness, try understanding how they might have become vulnerable in the first place. Sometimes people act invulnerable to protect themselves—and that might look like bullying, or being snooty and above-it-all, or acting bored and indifferent like “I don’t care” or “What-ever.” Some people keep you at a distance by belittling, complaining, and distracting you with illogical, derailing comments. See if you can feel through those surface behaviors.

There’s a real art to giving people compliments. Some people do it to be charming and well-liked. But you can do it as an act of respect and compassion. To the snooty person, you might say, “Jenn, you look so pretty today.” To the bully, you might say, “You know, you’re really a good athlete.” To the bored, apathetic person, you might say, “You know, Sam, you’re a very interesting person.” See if you can sense what they need to hear to feel relaxed and better about themselves. After all, the word *respect* means “to look at again.” Saying something that helps is no harder than thinking up a cutting, sarcastic remark. When you practice this, notice how *you* feel afterward. You’ll have taken the high road and will remain open, soft-hearted, and clear.

What are the people you know really asking for, underneath their negative, judgmental comments? What might you say to give them what they actually need to feel better?

Finding Our Commonalities

As someone who works with trends, I notice how people seem to be coming together more and more, and sharing common interests, goals for humanity, and talents. It’s becoming a “thing” to find people “on your wavelength” and discover a feeling of spiritual family and belonging. So it really doesn’t make sense to judge people negatively before you find out if they’re one of your potential best friends or soul mates!

Recently, I learned a new term: The Perennials (“*because age ain’t nothin’ but a number*”). No longer do we have to be judged by which generation we are born into, and no longer do we need to be labeled, which can be just another form of limiting judgment. Perennials, like plants that come back year after year, are defined as an ever-blooming group of all ages who live in the present, care about what’s happening in the world, are involved, curious, passionate, compassionate, creative, confident, collaborative, global-minded, and always push against their growing edge. They are inclusive, not divisive, and have good friends of all ages and cultures.

What a wonderful thing to feel yourself as part of a group that isn’t limited and that appreciates you for your uniqueness and authenticity. Look around among your friends and colleagues—who might be a Perennial along with you if given the chance?



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