



Projections

Outer experience is a reflection of inner reality.

What is a projection and how do we know we're experiencing one? Projections happen when we experience an out-of-balance emotional reaction to a person or situation, then blame that person for our reaction. Any time someone pushes our buttons, in positive or negative ways, we are set up to go into projection.

Positive Projections happen when we put someone up on a pedestal. We see only their good and they can do no wrong in our eyes. When our heroes fall, they fall hard, and we can come to despise those who do not live up to our unrealistic expectations. It is important to remember we are projecting positive attributes that are inside ourselves onto another person. If we didn't have those qualities inside ourselves, we literally couldn't see them in others.

Negative Projections happen when we are projecting what we consider a negative attribute that is inside ourselves onto another person. Any time someone does something that causes a strong reaction inside us (anger, fear, sadness, worry) there is a projection present. When we say *"This guy cut me off in traffic and he made me so mad!"* what we are really saying is his action triggered us and we chose react in anger.

This can be the challenging part of projections for many people. It can feel so good to get mad at someone else and blame them for our reaction. We can feel superior in knowing they are wrong and we are right. But as long as we blame the other person, we give away our power. They can control our mood just by repeating that action. If we take responsibility for our responses though, we take the first step toward owning our own power and staying centered.

Taking responsibility of our own reactions doesn't mean blaming ourselves. Rather, it points our energies toward the part we can change. With practice, we have the ability to control our own inner world, but vanishingly little influence over other people in the external world. This perspective allows us to stop trying to change other people. What a weight off our shoulders!

How to Work With Projections

1. Something happens in the physical world that triggers you. (My brother called me stupid.)
2. You have an emotional reaction. (I feel angry, hurt, sad, or afraid.)
3. You go into judgment. (He's a jerk; only jerks talk that way.)
4. You now have two choices:
 - a. Continue to blame and make the other person wrong and enjoy being self-righteous. If this is your choice, you will go back to step one and the pattern will continue.
 - b. Recognize you are running a projection and you have an opportunity for healing and growth.
5. If you choose "b," look into the mirror the other person is holding up for you. (How do I do the same thing to myself? In what way do I see myself as stupid? What judgments do I hold against myself?)
6. What does the mirror tell you? (My mirror is reflecting to me I am afraid of not being smart or good enough. Do I deserve to be loved if I make a mistake?)
7. Accept this pattern without making yourself wrong for having it. (I take 100% responsibility for this pattern, knowing it has nothing to do with my worth and value as a person.)
8. Move into compassionate self-forgiveness. (I forgive myself for judging my brother as a jerk. I forgive myself for judging myself as being less than, not smart enough and not good enough.)

Projections are not for the faint of heart. Working with them really is an advanced technique because it requires you to own for yourself the very thing you think you despise in other people. Our opportunity is to feel the upset, then follow that line of energy back until we find the place inside that is asking for healing.

The power of owning a projection is to release yourself from old patterns that no longer serve you and to come to a place of compassion for yourself and others.

If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

-- Alexander Solzhenitsyn