What Is, What Should Be - Study Guide

Overview

In this lecture, Dr. Jordan B. Peterson explores the spiritual journey toward self-discovery and growth, emphasizing the importance of humility, self-awareness, and the tension between order and chaos. He delves into the nature of human consciousness, the role of personal responsibility, and the pathways that lead to meaning and transformation.

Key Themes & Concepts

- ### Pathways Forward
  - **Spiritual Journey**: A journey that requires humility and self-investigation.
  - **Questions to ask yourself**:
    - What beckons me forward?
    - What would truly satisfy me?
    - Am I willing to accept peace and abundance if it comes my way?
  - **Key Insight**: Most people aren't easy to get along with themselves, which is the first obstacle on the path to personal growth.

- ### The Fall of Adam
  - **Adam's Fall and Toil**:
  - The curse of Adam is to toil, and life becomes work.
  - **Toil vs. Work**: Work becomes toil when you're pursuing the wrong thing for the wrong reasons.
  - **Self-delusion**: We must face our self-delusion and truly understand what we want, what impedes us, and how we can improve.

- **Negotiating with Yourself**
  - **Conscience & Calling**:
  - **Conscience**: Negative emotion (anxiety, pain) signals that you're off-course and helps guide you back.
  - **Calling**: Positive emotion (enthusiasm, joy) invites you forward, helping to align you with your path.
  - **Two manifestations of the divine**: The pillar of light (calling) and the pillar of darkness (conscience).

Pathways, Tools, and Obstacles

- **Pathways**
  - **Optimal Pathways**:
  - A path that is neither too easy nor too difficult is ideal. It should challenge your development and push you forward.
  - **Example**: A child playing one-on-one basketball needs an opponent who is challenging but not unbeatable.

- **Tools and Obstacles**
  - **Tools**: Things that help you reach your goals. Example: A chair is defined by its utility, not its size or shape.
  - **Obstacles**: Things that stand in your way. They trigger negative emotions and require you to adjust your strategy or reframe your goals.

Agents of Transformation

- **Social Tools: Friends and Foes**
  - **Friends**: Allies who walk the same path and share your goals. They help you move forward and grow.
  - **Foes**: Those who stand in your way. They present obstacles but also teach

resilience and the necessity of recalibration.

- **Agents of Magical Transformation**
  - **Positive Transformation**:
  - **Higher-order games**: Transformative agents show you better ways to play, like mentors or guides.
  - **Personal Development**: A good mentor challenges you to grow beyond your current abilities.
  - **Negative Transformation**:
  - **Temptations of Power**: Power-based games, like dominance or control, can lead you down a dark path of self-destruction and pride.
  - **Christ's Temptation in the Desert**: He was offered power, which was misaligned with his mission. Similarly, humans are often tempted by shortcuts or false power.

- **The Role of Chaos**
  - **Chaos and Order**:
  - Life exists at the intersection of order and chaos—balance is key.
  - **Chaos**: Represents unknown possibilities, challenges, and opportunities for growth.
  - **Order**: The structure and predictability needed for stability.
  - **The Importance of Chaos**:
  - **Transformation through Chaos**: Facing chaos, dealing with unpredictable events, and learning to navigate them is essential for personal growth.
  - **The Dragon and Treasure**: Challenges and obstacles are both frightening and rewarding; they can lead to growth if faced courageously.

Emotional and Behavioral Responses to Challenges

- **The Emotional Reaction to Anomalies**
  - **Negative Emotions**:
  - Encountering unexpected obstacles can trigger fear, anxiety, and frustration.
  - These emotions are a sign that you're confronting something new and potentially transformative.

- **The Role of Curiosity**:
- Negative emotions (like fear) can give way to curiosity when you allow yourself to explore new possibilities.
- **Exploration**: Moving from negative emotion to exploration is a crucial skill in navigating life's challenges.

- **Managing Stress and Anxiety**
  - **Coping with Stress**:
  - Stress arises when you're overwhelmed by the unknown. Your body and mind prepare you to face everything at once, which can be exhausting.
  - **Voluntary Exposure**: Practicing small exposures to discomfort and uncertainty helps build resilience and prepares you for bigger challenges.

The Landscape of Possibility

- **The Hierarchy of Games**
  - **Life as a Sequence of Games**:
  - Games (or life challenges) exist within a hierarchy, with higher-order games requiring more skill, responsibility, and development.
  - **Examples**: Athletic competitions, relationships, careers—each requires mastery at different levels.
  - The highest-order games involve transforming others as you grow, facilitating growth not just for yourself but for those around you.

- **Navigating the Unexpected**
  - **Predicting Outcomes**:
  - Predictability is a key component of stability. When something unexpected occurs, it disrupts your current path and requires recalibration.
  - **Dealing with Anomalies**:
    - **Small Anomalies**: Minor changes that require minor adjustments.
    - **Major Anomalies**: Cataclysmic events that force a fundamental shift in your worldview and strategy.

Conclusion: Embracing the Journey

- **The Role of the Hero**:
- Just like in mythological stories (e.g., Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit*), embracing unexpected challenges and transforming through adversity is what shapes personal growth.
- The journey is not about avoiding chaos but about navigating it with courage and the willingness to confront the unknown.

Core Questions to Reflect On:

1. **What does it mean to be satisfied?**
2. **What are the obstacles in your path that you're creating for yourself?**
3. **How can you calibrate your goals to align with your personal growth?**
4. **What higher-order game are you playing, and how are you facilitating the growth of those around you?**