

## The Chess Metaphor

Imagine a chessboard stretching out to infinity in all directions. On this stage different pieces start to enter. Some are black and some are white, just as in the game of chess. They come close to the center of the board and they begin to align themselves into two separate teams on the different spaces of the board.

Now imagine that each of the pieces represents a different emotion, cognition, memory, or sensation. Some of the pieces are positive, such as happiness, joy, pleasurable feelings, and loving memories. They hang out together as a team. And some of the pieces represent your pain, fears, and failings. Perhaps you are deeply depressed, or perhaps you have been diagnosed with an anxiety condition. See if it isn't true that the negative thoughts and feelings associated with these conditions hang out together as a team, as well, but this team is quite different from the positive team.

Now imagine that the various pieces start doing battle. It is a long, bloody war and pieces are being hewn and smashed to bits all around you. This battle has been going on for years. The black pieces are fighting with the white pieces edging in for the advantage while the white pieces desperately retaliate, trying with all their might not to be taken over by the enemy. They must fight because from the perspective of each "team," the other is life-threatening.

In the introduction, we began this book with a similar scene, but you yourself were in the battle. We suggested that this book was about learning how to leave the battle, not learning how to win the war:

Unknown to [that] person, however, is the fact that, at any time, he or she can quit the battlefield and begin to live life *now*. The war may still go on, and the battlefield may still be visible. The terrain may look very much as it did while the fighting was happening. But the outcome of the war is no longer very important and the seemingly logical sequence of having to win the war before beginning to really live has been abandoned.

When you first read this, it was probably just an abstract idea to you. Now you are further along, and you can begin to consider the possibility that it was only an illusion that took you into battle in the first place. You've been acting as if your favorite emotional and cognitive team must win this chess match. But that makes sense only if the white pieces are you and the black pieces are not. In that posture, you *must* fight because such polar opposites are direct threats to your survival.

If "I'm a bad person" is 100 percent true, then "I'm a good person" is destroyed, and vice versa. Thus, leaving or abandoning the battle is not an option. It is a death sentence. The war must go on and you must win it, because you've jumped on the back of the White Queen and nominated her to be you. She (and thus you) cannot afford to stop fighting.

But suppose none of these pieces is you? In this scenario, who are you? You can't be the chess player: that is still someone trying to win the war and defend certain pieces over others. There is only one part of the metaphor that is in contact with *all* of the pieces. If you are not the pieces—if you can still be you and not have a huge investment in the outcome of the war—then who are you?