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STAGES OF CONSCIOUSNESS
MEDITATIONS ON THE BOUNDARIES OF THE SOUL (1984)

BECOMING AWARE OF THE LOGOS
THE WAY OF ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST (1985)

FROM
NORMAL
TO
HEALTHY
Paths to the Liberation of Consciousness
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a mosquito through a magnifying glass? A mere tenfold enlargement, and they look like dangerous mythical beasts. Imagine one the size of an elephant. Confronted with a spider or a mosquito of this size, you would certainly not try to fight it unarmed, and you have no internal weapons. But these creatures have gained their tremendous size with energies stolen from you. If you can win back these energies, your own life blood, then these beings will shrivel up like swollen balloons as the air leaks out. Something similar happens when autonomous I-energies are exercised. The alienated energy forms are sapped of their strength and the energies are returned to their rightful master. The monsters shrink until they are no longer a threat, and there is no need to worry about them: they collapse.

Today's human being is *driven* and *pushed* by life, by the everyday things around him, by inner habits and by resonance, for the whole of his waking hours. In ancient Greece secluded holy areas, *Temenoi*, were intended to create a region protected from the rush of everyday life in which man could be alone with his gods. These protected spatial regions, cut off from all profanity and saved for the purely divine and human, find their contemporary equivalent today in intervals of time, oases in time, during which one does something that is neither necessary for his everyday life nor a result of subconscious impulses, but which is rather a purely autonomous decision and activates the energies of the *I*. At the beginning it does not matter what specific thing we do. These ten to twenty minutes, repeated every day, form a "place" in which the autonomous essence of man can become stronger. Free energies can order themselves, structure themselves, in this place. And in cases where it is not possible for someone to be autonomously active for ten minutes without falling into associations, the presence of another person, the aid of a friend or therapist, can help. In this case it is particularly helpful for the relevant person to report in words on what took place during those ten minutes.

The time oasis establishes a base for the mental health measures to be undertaken by contemporary man. In what

follows we will consider how such an oasis can be used and what other measures may be added to it. These measures must do justice to man's double nature: he lives in the world together with other people; he also has his private life as an individual.

Speaking and Listening

All through life, we are called upon to speak. One's relationship with oneself and with others occurs through words, and words then call up mental pictures and will impulses. Most of mankind feels an urge to say more than is strictly necessary. This unnecessary speaking is not always on a different level of discourse from necessary speech. What level is that, after all?

It is the level of *information*. This refers to all those times when we say something that has already been thought, as opposed to something new, something never before communicated, something freshly thought at that moment. And this *must* take place; we have to inform others and receive information from them. This kind of speech serves everyday life. There is nothing to object to here, we only note that it is not the only possibility; words can have other functions as well.

But not all communicated information is equally important from the standpoint of practical life. There is plenty of superfluous information, gossip, and chatter. Why does this exist at all? As we described in Section 3.4, gossip always carries an egotistical satisfaction by concerning itself with the weaknesses, failings, and failures of other people. But the other important thing to realize about this is that it nevertheless shows, albeit in a low, twisted form, the activity of a fundamental impulse to speak. This impulse is itself *true speech*: man uses speech to make his humanity real rather than potential; he exercises the reality of his existence as man. Speaking in terms of feelings, we could say that people long for the warmth of conversation. Naturally, gossip gives them no access to this warmth, no more than drinking satis-

fies a passion for liquor: it only increases the desire to drink. Because gossip never satisfies the longing for the warmth of the word, for understanding and being understood by others (on the contrary, it promotes the colder element of antipathy), unright speech perpetuates itself as an alcoholic perpetuates his own drinking.

In Goethe's fairy tale about the green snake and the white lily, there is a remarkable conversation. The golden king asks questions and the snake answers:

What is finer than gold?

Light.

What is quicker than light?

Conversation.

Quicker here (German: *erquicklich*) is meant in the old sense of alive or refreshing. Yet few conversations could be called refreshing. What would such conversations be like?

Certainly, there should be nothing "finished" in such a conversation, nothing that has already been thought and spoken many times before. And what someone says should not be listened to as if its contents were already known; it should not be heard beneath the echo of counterarguments and the shadow of the coming answer. Rather, one should meet the speech of others with the greatest possible inner stillness, a receptive silence. And this will influence the speaker, too. He will be ashamed to say anything unmeaningful or to use old forms of thought and speech. This silence with which speech should be met should be like the attentive listening of a child as the child learns to speak. The child *wants* to know and cannot put up an ego against what he hears, because as yet he has no ego. *Right speech* begins with right listening, which prepares us to understand others. This kind of understanding, which can never be substantiated by words or outer signs, is directed not only toward what is said, but toward the other human being who speaks. When the other person speaks from his presentness, from what is now going on

inside him, from what he is just now experiencing, instead of from a set routine, then the word can blossom between two people. Even what was already known earlier can be experienced *newly* for this kind of conversation. Every teacher knows the difference between the effect of a lecture given from memory and a lecture during which what is said is now said anew, newly thought, newly understood.

The warmth, the refreshment, the nourishment of conversation lies between the words, above the words—in the *word*—in understanding. Most refreshing of all is the completely wordless understanding—in the *word*—that rarely, in lucky moments, lights up between people. A conversation always happens between two people, even when it seems that many are speaking to one another or one is addressing many: it is always one to one.

In such an ideal conversation the essence and the wonder of language, even of wordless language, reveals itself: its sacredness, which makes possible the miracle of a bridge between two separated consciousnesses. It seems as if, with the closing of the fontanel, man shut himself off in consciousness from everyone else. Yet a far-reaching communion and communication is nevertheless possible, without the aid of any physical, mechanical, or biological connection. These latter tend to exclude linguistic or spiritual connectedness, because such connectedness is not an effect; it depends on nothing that has not gone through a process of understanding.

Language really exists so that man can exercise and realize his humanity through it. Without speaking, a human is not really human, and this means that without an interlocutor a human is not really human. In earlier times this partner in conversation was the godhead—his first "thou"—and today it is the nearest godhead: his neighbor, another human being.

*Man has gone through much
and named many of the Divine
since we have become a conversation
and can hear of one another*

This is how Hölderlin speaks about men and gods. But the miracle that

*we are a conversation
and hear of one another*

applies to men among themselves as well.

We saw in Section 1.3 how linguistic ability comes about in man divinely or superconsciously, and accompanies us as a superconscious ability throughout life. This holy faculty, belonging to the innermost essence of man, is active on an unworthy plane when it serves as a currency for the exchange of information, even if this is taken as a matter of course today. Nearly all the myths and popular traditions on earth tell of the heavenly, divine origin of language (also of reading and writing). To talk nonsense—speaking to kill time or to say something worthless—is just as unnatural, from this perspective, as speaking in order to lie, in order to hide one's own intentions, or in order to mislead others. Man causes most of the evil in the world, even when it hurts his human dignity, by means of language. It is a deep truth that when language is decadent, mankind is in danger.

It should come as no surprise, then, that *right speech* is seen as one of the fundamental measures in the health of the soul. Unright speech mostly harms the person who uses it, not his interlocutor. He uses, or rather misuses, the most luminous superconscious faculty by applying it in a distorted, spoiled fashion to an inappropriate plane. If man misuses his speaking, the most essential higher faculty, how can his mental life go smoothly? Speaking is our means of achieving a clear understanding with others; inner speech is part of this as well. "That which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." (Matthew 15:11) "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts . . ." (Matthew 15:18,19) And the kinds of evil thoughts are then listed.

Because language happens in *life*, as the most common

activity, the most common measure in mental hygiene should be practiced in *life*, in the everyday world: right speech. It cannot be practiced alone. It can be practiced during the time oases or, if possible, outside of these times. Every day, or every day on which one intends to do the exercise, one must determine in advance a moment during which one will have a conversation with another person. The exercise consists in several phases, which can be practiced separately or together. In the beginning, it may be advisable to practice a different phase each time; later they can be combined to form a complete exercise.

The first phase of the exercise is right listening, which we could also call *right silence*. One tries to perceive the other person, that is, the *speaker* in him, not his outer appearance. This requires the most thorough attentiveness possible. At first, one must be attentive in *thought*: that is, one tries not to think one's own thoughts, which rise up during the discourse of the other person by way of response, criticism, supplemental observation, or agreement, but rather one makes an effort to think in step with the other, the speaker's, thoughts. From time to time one considers whether one has really understood the other's words, or whether contradictions have not come up through misunderstanding. The next step is then to try to be attentive with deeper levels of the soul, to perceive the speaker with one's feeling. This requires total silence on the part of all sympathy and antipathy, even when spontaneous; it is not a question of the feelings that the speaker calls up in *me*, but of a purely cognitive *feeling*, by which I feel *him*, just as a work of art or a landscape can be experienced through its own feeling hue.

In this inner silence all agreement or disagreement, criticism or pleasure, regarding the *content* of what is said, must be put to rest. For example, judgment should arise in us about the quality of what has been said. Judgments and answers will be more forthright and faster, the more we are *awake* while *listening*, that is to say, absorbed in the speaker and not distracted by our own thoughts and an immediate critical reaction.

It is clear that this small, harmless exercise of right listening or right silence is not at all simple; it requires and presupposes a whole suite of inner gestures. Particularly if we take into account that the absorption we have talked of must be neither a pose nor a cramped, strained attitude. It may be unavoidable for it to begin as a pose, but gradually one can work at the realization of this gesture so as to dissolve the pose and replace it with real interest: it is a pose as long as one does not know *what is to be done*. And straining does appear, at the beginning, in every exercise, and can even be felt as a bodily cramping. The dissolution of such cramps is an exercise in itself. A cramped exercise is no exercise, just as one cannot be artistically active when cramped. This dissolution is not sufficient if it goes no further than a loosening of bodily cramps. If the mental cramp is not taken care of, the physical tightness will soon reappear. Mental straining can best be dissolved by imagining natural processes that are completely cramp free and then trying to live into and become one with these processes. Appropriate pictures for this exercise could be the way a leaf moves in the wind—not taken away by the wind, remaining on its twig, but lightly, with no resistance. Or the way a swan lightly, effortlessly floats on the water, the way a cloud sails in the sky; the way a leaf bends under the weight of the snow until finally the snow slides smoothly off. But it is best for you to find your own examples. During this exercise it is particularly useful not to gratify the frequently felt impulse to interrupt and interject some comment while the other person is speaking, but still to notice that the impulse is there. Slowly the impulse itself will disappear. Such renunciation stimulates the power of the autonomous I-being.

In time, this conversational silence will grow from being a negative, renouncing gesture to a positive, helpful mental attitude. Our inner stillness not only counterbalances most disturbances and difficulties, it also builds a friendly dwelling place for the other person's words, a presentiment that he will be understood. And he or she will have an easier time speaking, and speaking well. This receptivity is just as little

an agreement as a disagreement with the content of what is said. One's understanding must be free of all judgment and may even help the speaker to understand himself or herself properly.

You will notice that this exercise, like the following exercises, works counter to habits and to the impulses of the subconscious. Everything consciously, intentionally undertaken by the autonomous I-being goes against the current of subconsciously motivated habits. This is one of the reasons why the exercises generally should not and cannot be extended over the whole day. They are to be limited to a planned time span of ten to thirty minutes. They will work their way more strongly into the whole course of our day the less we worry about them outside of the assigned time of the exercise. When the time for the exercise is over, life should be lived spontaneously and without concern. Of course this does not mean that one pays no attention to language. For example, one should not listen to the unright speech of others if this is not necessary; one should not listen in, therefore, if one has nothing to do with the conversation. Unright speech is always woven with unright feelings, which attract us and cause unhealthy attitudes of the soul in the listeners. When he wanders through hell, Dante listens eagerly to the virtuoso argument between two of the damned so that his guide, Vergil, first scolds and then comforts him.

*And merely think, that I am always by you
If it ever happens that chance leads you
Where people argue so,
For it is a low desire to hear such things.*

When right hearing has been practiced for some time and has taught us something, then the exercise can be taken further by means of another not doing. One tries to make sure not to say anything superfluous, not to speak just to have something to say, not to gossip. Naturally, it is difficult to determine what is superfluous, and conversations can be investigated in this light after they are over. We are often

tempted to say something that we could very well leave unsaid. When this renunciation is realized, it will be noticed that forces flow from us that make possible a better understanding of what was left unsaid. By renouncing gossip, energies trapped in the subconscious come under the direction of the speaking I-being. One should particularly be aware of impulses to speak ill of a third party, to discuss their failings, which one would never do if they were present. It is useful to ask oneself, would I say that to him or her directly? And one simply does not say anything that one would not say in front of the person involved. One should also renounce saying anything in the absence of the person that one could say in his or her presence.

Naturally these suggestions do not represent fixed rules. There are cases when one must interrupt the speaker. It is to be done gently, without emotion and without stirring up his or her emotions. There are cases when one has to speak of someone who is not present, but this should be done as far as possible as if the person *were* present.

When the more passive aspects have been practiced—listening and renunciation of superfluous speaking—then the more positive parts of the exercise can be addressed. This part is easily formulated: one says something only when one has something to say. You may have the impression that even this part of the exercise would consist of silence!

How often, in fact, do we really have something to say to our fellow beings? There is a real truth here. We have seen that the adult rarely thinks a new thought. But in right speech it is not a question of new thoughts, or of the content of what is spoken at all. Speaking is always speaking to and with someone, so that the content and the manner is determined by the partner with whom we are speaking. And so the content of the conversation is not the whole of it, for example when the emphasis is on speaking *to* someone in order to bring him or her into the conversation or in order to comfort the other person so that he or she will feel part of human society. Naturally, all this can also take place in silence, suggested simply by one's behavior; this often works even better than words. Right speech does not mean that one

gives forth only pearls of wisdom: this speech must be right for the situation. "I have something to tell you"—and the "something" and the "you" form a unity, neither of which can be right by itself. Often this something is hard or impossible to express: the formulation of such things should not be given up quickly, but if it is impossible, then a wordless speaking can very well occur, and it is often a better kind of speech.

We always speak to someone. It is worthwhile to think this thought through. What we say should therefore always be individual, according to our partner in conversation. A lecturer has the same problem, only in a more complicated form, because he or she often has to take a diverse public into account. If a lecture is at all good then it is a conversation: the lecturer has to feel what is right, and when it is right for the listeners. He or she has to *hear* how they stand in relation to what is said and be concerned with a great deal that flows from the audience.

Economy with words has nothing to do with a pose of frugality: too little is no better than too much. Speak in such a way that the partner is *stimulated to understand*. Speak in such a way that your partner is stimulated to think further may be a better formulation.

Conversation is always a source of the unexpected, of the improvised, and the more it is, the better the conversation, for it always leads to surprises. Thus conversation is a continuing exercise of spiritual presence in words. Many people have problems with just this quality; the "right" answer doesn't occur to them immediately, but comes up often much later, after the conversation is over. If we ask why this happened, and if we call to mind our mood and our gestures at the time, we can ascertain that we were not being matter of fact. Our attention was divided between the matter at hand and, perhaps, the will to be successful in the conversation, to do it right, to assert ourselves, and so on. The exercise that works on concentrated awareness can help us to say the right thing at the right time, as we will see in the course of this chapter.

The unexpected may also come up in unsuccessful conver-

sations, but here it will have the quality of a destructive force. These are always cases in which the personal is addressed; instead of an ideal content, the words seek to bring about personal feelings or to mobilize personal feelings toward some end. This introduces an element that is actually quite foreign to conversation. It does not belong to the word, and it chases after a goal that lies outside of the conversation. Because it speaks to the personal, generally egotistical element within us, it is naturally difficult to respond rightly, that is, in accord with the original purpose of the conversation. On the other hand, it is very easy to meet this attempt at disrupting us from out of our own egotistical side. The difficulty of the right answer lies here in the fact that we are distracted from a matter-of-fact attentiveness and led away into the personal realm. The best method, when we discover an attempt to distract us (and we do not always discover it, in which case the attempt is successful) is to leave a pause before answering. This brings the disruptive speaker out of his rhythm and gives us the chance to drop personal considerations and give an answer that is really to the point, while taking the attempt to distract us into full consideration.

When I have said something and then receive the answer, I should again be listening with an inner stillness. I also pay attention to whether and how much I have been understood by my partner. It may well be that he or she has understood my thoughts better, more deeply, than I did myself. This is the case when I am not practiced in expressing myself or when my partner in conversation knows the subject matter, or me, particularly well.

Let it be emphasized once more that right speech is an exercise and so it should be tried out in a limited, predetermined time span, not spread out over the entire day. Its intensity would almost certainly be insufficient for this. A short but intensive exercise will gradually have an effect on the whole day. It is clear that this exercise, like all the others, can be deepened infinitely, since, in order to speak rightly, I must know the truth; in order to speak rightly, I must know my partner. But how far, how deeply, do I know the truth and the human with whom I am speaking? This task is unending.

The apostle James in his letter (3:2) says, with good reason: "For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body."

The whole of a human life could be right speech: this is a distant, nearly unreachable goal. But if we do not strive for the unattainable, we will not achieve the attainable either.

How to Deal with Time

It must have become clear to the reader by this time that the human being today has to do something for his mental health. This something and this doing are certainly limited, in terms of both time and intensity; we can't spend the whole day worrying about our souls. This would be just as wrong as doing nothing and it would take us away from our tasks and duties in life. At the start, this doing should be limited to a minimum—we all have so little time! Our grandparents had far, far less comfort, fewer labor-saving machines—did they have less time? We have two work-free days in the course of the week, and we work shorter hours. How is it that we still have no time? Where does the saved-up time go to? Is the writer Michael Ende right after all in his book *Momo* when he says that someone has stolen our time? It is not a bad idea to give an account of what you do with your time. Such an account would show that we are not very economical with this resource. But to learn to use time more effectively, we have to live more consciously. This means that we should not give ourselves over to *any* spontaneity in this matter, just as we learned to use our legs when we learned to walk or our hands when we learned to grasp and point, or our speech organs when we learned to speak. *Everything* is instinctive for an animal: a baby tiger, separated from birth from its kind and released as an adult into the wild, can do practically everything necessary for its life, for communications, for mating, and so on. Man must be protected, taken care of, before he can survive and maintain himself indepen-