

How To Get Along With Oneself

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Under the stress and pressures of our times, it is quite evident that the problem called “peace of mind” is of great concern to most of us. Peace of mind means getting along with oneself: because, believe it or not, no outside conflict, not outside threat, no outside tragedy disturbs us as much as inner conflicts.

Living in peace with oneself does not by any means imply that one can also live in peace with others. But it means that whatever one does in life, one does not degrade oneself. This peace of mind merely permits one to devote his energies to the tasks at hand and prevents the waste of energy in a futile fight with oneself.

Getting along with oneself means nothing more nor less than: Stop fighting with yourself. However, to reach peace of mind, to make peace with oneself, requires so much that those who doubt that man can even live in peace with himself seem to be quite justified. Such an accomplishment necessitates fundamental change in our prevalent concepts, in our beliefs, and in what we have been trained to think. This does not mean, however, that one cannot learn new approaches. They can be learned, can be achieved. Peace of mind is within our reach if we are willing to reconsider some of the basic premises on which we presently operate. We need nothing more, nothing less, than a new religious and a new scientific orientation. Our present concepts cannot induce in us this peace of mind for which we strive.

This statement is not meant to minimize or degrade religion or science. Both have accomplished a great deal. For centuries past, religion was able to provide peace of mind for

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many. A truly religious person believes that everything which happens is the will of God, and he is willing to accept the will of God without reservation. Such a person can achieve this peace of mind because he has a deep sense of belonging in the universe, in the Hand of the Lord; he is at peace with himself even if he has to undergo the tortures of Job. But religious people today, regardless of how pious they are, usually are not willing to accept this kind of relationship to the Master, which previous generations were trained to accept through prevailing political and social conditions.

Let us be specific. At the root of all inner conflict lies a dualism – as we call it – the assumption of two fundamentally opposed forces: God versus the devil; good versus evil; the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak; rational versus irrational; reason versus emotions; objective versus subjective conscious versus unconscious; success versus failure, sin versus virtue. All people who believe in these pairs of contradictions will find it impossible ever to achieve peace of mind. The good in us fighting against the evil is a traditional assumption. Translated into modern terms, the superego fights with the id. Or, irrational forces oppose reason.

Whether popularity or scientifically phrased, it is the same old struggle between good and evil. And the interesting part is that we ourselves are divided between two I's – the good I and the bad I – who are constantly fighting with each other. We are watching over ourselves. Are we doing the right thing, or are we doing wrong? We blame ourselves for having done wrong, and are proud when we've followed the right path. We believe in will-power, of the need to control oneself. Such an idea is based on the assumption that we consist of two parts: good and bad; rational and irrational; emotions and reasons, and we treat each part separately, sliding with one against the other.

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There are few, today, who don't believe in the importance of "controlling oneself" and developing "will-power." Everybody tries to exert will-power, with the inevitable result that he has none – or at least not enough. Everybody fights with himself as if he were several persons; playing simultaneously the role of culprit, states attorney, defendant and judge.

Will-power is one of the most characteristic expressions of our confusion, or our fallacies. What does it mean to have will-power? We take the analogy from our effort to deal with the subjects outside of ourselves. If I want to lift an object, my ability to lift it will depend on two factors: the weight of the object and the physical strength I possess. If I can lift it, I am strong; if I cannot, I am weak. Thus, the amount of strength we have is quite justifiably important when we deal with objects outside of ourselves.

But how is it when we deal with ourselves? Now we are at the same time the one who wins the one who loses; one fighting against the other. There was a Viennese playwright, Nestroy – a wonderful writer of very earthly comedies who, in one of the scenes of his play, presented a soldier dressed as two men. He wore masks of two opposing faces; in each hand he carried a sword. And each half fought with the other. He came onto the scene with the words: "Now I will see who is stronger: me or me." This is what most people do everyday. When one must get up in the morning, he reflects, "Will I have the will-power to get up and go to work, or will I sleep a little longer." "I know I should do this--but how can I make myself do it?" And so one arranges these nice little fights with oneself. Why? Because one assumes that unless he fights with himself he won't be able to control himself; he won't be able to make himself do what he should do. In other words, most people treat themselves as poorly trained teachers treat bad students. They threaten and punish when students don't study or behave. This usually has little effect—the

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children continue their mischief. Similarly, we intimidate ourselves so that we might perhaps be will to behave. We all suffer from a slave mentality doubting that man will ever be decent unless forced by the threat of punishment. We all hold the whip of failure, of humiliation, over our own heads without much faith in ourselves or our fellowmen.

This is the traditional way in which we treat ourselves and as long as all continue to do so, there is no chance of peace of mind. There is no chance for security because one's security depends always on: "Will I succeed or, perhaps, will I become a failure? Will I be up or down?" And nobody can ever find his place by running after success, nor feel secure through what he obtained from the outside world. Regardless of how much money, power, position, or love we have, it never can give security because it never is enough. And whatever we have may be taken away.

We need to move to another point of view. We must learn to look differently; not only at ourselves, but at our ideas, about what people are like, about our concept of human nature. In so doing, we will find that all these dualistic concepts of good and evil, high and low, success and failure, are fictions of the imagination. We will discover that we are one whole being with the ability to do anything--good or evil. We can use the left hand, we can use the right. We can use our reasoning or our emotional power. All these seemingly contradictory functions are only different aspects of one and the same human being. We have to change our present concept of dualism in human nature to one of holism: that man is one whole who can sit on different chairs; but regardless of what chair he is on, he is the same ego, the same individual, He can move in many different directions, but is the same self.

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Behavior has a purpose. It is directed to a self-established goal. We determine our goals without knowing it, because a great deal of our activity, physical and mental, never comes to the conscious level. We have to realize that something like ambivalence per se does not exist. While one may be constantly torn between “shall I do this, or shall I do that,” (which is ambivalence) he fails to recognize that he can move only in one direction at a time. Ambivalence as such is also a definite movement. It is an arrangement with one purpose. It may be used to avoid responsibility, to demand service, to pretend the intention of moving forward while it actually prevents such movement without eliminating the pretense. In other words, the indecision which is the result of ambivalence has to be understood within the field in which the person moves. And there may be many reasons why he prefers not to decide. The reason may vary, but the movement is always the same.

To illustrate let's assume that a girl is going with a fellow who wants to marry her. He is very much in love with her, has much to offer, including financial “security.” But--she doesn't love him. So she's ambivalent. She may go to a psychiatrist or counselor and say, “I really don't know what to do, shall I marry him or not?” The counselor can easily discover that she is only fooling herself, that she knows exactly whether she actually will marry him or not. She only wants to give the impression that she really doesn't know what she wants. When the man finally talks her in to a marriage, she may say, “But I really didn't want to. Therefore you have to offer me more and more and more and more to make up for this. And if I'm not a good wife, don't blame me--I told you I didn't want to marry you.” In this or similar ways she is able to avoid demands, responsibilities and close cooperation inherent in a close interpersonal relationship.

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Sometimes ambivalence is used to prove one's will power. One erects obstacles to tear them down and become a hero. If one always would admit the choice one made, then life would be so simple, and there would be no need to make so much fuss over the smallest issue. The expediency of an apparent ambivalence permits one to win a battle over one's self, and to have an easy excuse if one is not "strong enough" to withstand temptation. And every little issue can serve as a side show to avoid facing the really important problems in life.

Ambivalence is just as much a fiction as the so-called guilt feelings. A person may feel guilty for what he has done. He does not realize that when he is concerned with what he has done wrong in the past, he ignores some present task. Guilt feelings, as we see them, are the expression of good intentions which we do not have. They are pretenses. Instead of considering what we have to do now, we only think about what we have done before. Whenever we see someone suffering from guilt feelings, we can be sure that he avoids a present task. By feeling guilty, we express our high moral standards without any need to do anything now.

If we use the holistic viewpoint, we discover that, contrary to what some psychologists believe, we are not the victims of emotions but we create them. We decide in which direction we want to go, and then generate emotions which fortify our intention. Emotions are not our masters, but our slaves. Of course, we don't like to admit this. We are only too willing to accept scientific concepts that man is driven by his emotions. For then we are not really responsible for our behavior. What can we do about our overwhelming emotions? Thus we can always let our emotions decide; if we lack the stamina to admit what to do, we can blame our emotions.

Of course, it is quite difficult to adopt the new concept because we are so trained to look at ourselves as the victim of forces: victim of our hereditary endowments, victim of our

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upbringing, victim of our environment, victim of society, victim of our emotions. We are all victimized; and as religious concepts have shown us how small we are, so also has science imbued people with an utter despair in their own abilities to govern their fate. When we do something wrong it is the consequence of a psychopathology or a social pathology. What we have to learn--and there is a whole trend in psychology and philosophy emerging to support this new approach--we have to learn that man is a decision-making organism; that we decide every step we take, although not on the conscious level. We decide which emotions to use; we decide to deny demands, to sabotage what we have to do, to reject our tasks. Or, we decide to meet the needs of the situation, to participate, to cooperate, to contribute, to behave.

This new concept of man gives us two things for which we are not prepared. It gives us full responsibility for whatever we do, and it gives us the freedom to choose what to do. Instead we prefer slavery. We still like to think that we are the victims of circumstances, of our environment, of our past. We give up--only too voluntarily--our birthright of freedom for this fake security of submission to forces. As a result we are distraught because we can't trust ourselves. Nor do we respect ourselves. When we do something good we praise ourselves and become proud as a peacock. The net moment when we do something wrong we look down upon ourselves as if we were utterly stupid and worthless.

In order, then, to get along with ourselves, we must first learn to recognize that we do only what we decide and what we prefer to do. There is a logic behind all our actions, although we usually are not aware of our "private logic," our hidden reasons. This means we are never "stupid" or "unreasonable." We may appear so to others who do not understand our own reasons -- and to ourselves, because we, too, are unaware of our real intentions. This is the reason why we

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all are inclined to push others and ourselves deeper into the conviction of weakness and irresponsibility. We as scientists and as educators have the obligation to bring about a cultural revolution so that we no longer sit in judgment of each other but understand each other better in our motivations. Then a new picture of man's freedom and responsibility will emerge.

Having presented an over-all, picture, let us consider some of the steps necessary to start such revolution. First, we must free ourselves from the prejudice which we have about ourselves. Prejudice is always based on very deep convictions, on generalizations, assumptions, beliefs. It is impossible to become free from any prejudice unless we think the problem through and convert one idea into another. But we cannot be satisfied to change the ideas of any one individual; it is necessary to change opinions held by people in general.

Now what opinions need to be corrected? First, there is the question, "Are we good enough as we are?" there are very few people of sound mind who can say "yes." The sad part is that the only ones who believe that they are good enough are those who are mentally ill. An insane person does not see what's wrong with him, nor does the delinquent and criminal. They think they are alright, only all the others are wrong. In contrast, we find the neurotic who is constantly watching what is wrong with him, not without blaming others for his-difficulties as well. He is continuously afraid of failing, and tries to safeguard himself through a variety of defenses and excuses. What are the alternatives? Do we either have to pretend that we are always right, eliminating the pangs of our conscience, or wallow in guilt feelings and fears of not measuring up?

Here is the crucial point. We have every reason not to be satisfied with everything we are doing. We all make mistakes and many. It is impossible to be perfect, and we cannot even strive

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toward perfection because it is an unobtainable goal and leaves us only with a bitter taste when we see how far short of we fall. To make mistakes is human – and we have to learn to live with ourselves with all our imperfections. If we are not satisfied with ourselves as we are, we will never be able to make peace with ourselves. Whatever we may achieve, something will always be missing. Why then do we hesitate to admit to ourselves that we are good enough as we are, and give others the same privilege? The deeper reason is our lack of faith in human nature. We are convinced that letting anyone know that his is good enough will stop him from growing and developing. Most people think that without a whip nobody will be willing to do his part, study, grow, work. But this is not true.

People can grow; people can learn merely from the enjoyment of learning, the curiosity to find out, the desire to extend themselves. Motivation for growth and improvement does not need this doubt in oneself and dissatisfaction with oneself. But for most people, the concept that we are good enough is not acceptable because they have little respect for what they are. This idea, “I am good enough” requires a deep sense of respect for oneself. This is not to be confused with the arrogant pride of one who boasts of how good he is. Such a person doubts himself but hopes to impress others and so to alleviate his self-doubt. The true sense of being “good enough” manifests itself in a confident naturalness, security in “I am what I am.” Because most people doubt that they are worthwhile. They are not here to fulfill their lives, to contribute to be useful. Unless they can prove how good they are, they have no value and then they lose their place. It is a little known but primitive fact of life that every one has a place by the very fact of his existence. However, most people try desperately to “find” their place. They study, amass money, make friends. The sad fact is that anybody who tries to “find” his place will never in his life feel

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that he has found it regardless of how much money, power or love he has – simply because as in Maeterlink’s Bluebird of Happiness, he searches frantically for that which he already has.

Wherever we are, we are part of the group, part of the scent, and participate in the shaping of destiny.

One thinks, “Here am I and there is society. How can I belong?” He is society. One thinks, “Here am I and there is life,” ----big and wonderful as a snow-capped mountain, and a warning tempest. This life is in each of us in all its majesty and all its power. We are part of it.

We fail to realize our strength and always look at our weaknesses. We focus attention on what we cannot do and fail to give ourselves credit for what we are and can do. Rather than being proud that we can speak English, we fell inferior because it is difficult to learn Spanish. With the Spanish it is the reverse. We need to learn to be proud of what we are; because we are a great deal, and we will be much more if we ever let our inner resources emerge. Instead, we hinder ourselves with our fears, with our doubts. We are so afraid of making a mistake because we believe every mistake would humiliate us, would prove us a failure. Humiliation is only in the mind of the person who feels humiliated. A person whose self-evaluation cannot be undermined by the actions of others cannot be humiliated. There are some who do not respond, but so many feel humiliated at the slightest occasion. It is our opinion of ourselves which counts, and we need to learn to respect ourselves. Only then are we in a position to influence ourselves.

The present method we use to influence ourselves is to fight ourselves. In this fashion we reach a deadlock and become powerless to accomplish the very thing we are fighting for. And if we try harder and exert even greater pressure, we only increase the deadlock. Nothing could be more futile.

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To illustrate: Hook the fingers of your right hand into those of your left. How, with all your strength, pull the left hand to the right. What do you experience? That you can't pull at all! The more you pull, the less you can move. You can move the left hand to the right only if you don't use any strength. Why? You can have the sensation of pulling with strength only when you – without being aware of it – pull back at the same time. You can only fight with yourself when there is at the same time something in you which resists, or more correctly, when you, at the same time, arrange a resistance.

Kunkel gave an interesting example of this fight with oneself. A man ran onto a diving board, looked at the water and stopped cold. He retreated and ran again. At the last moment, the threat of the water was too much, and he stopped again. The third time he ran and jumped in. This is a typical example of ambivalence. On one hand, he wanted to jump. On the other, he was afraid of the water--or whatever might happen.

Kunkel used this example to show how we fool ourselves. Did this man want to jump? If not, why did he finally do so? If he did want to jump, why did he finally do so? If he did want to jump, why didn't he do it in the first place? Kunkel showed this to be the behavior of a person who tests his will-power. In order to do so, he must first build up an obstacle and then tear it down. Why does he do this? Because any idiot can jump from the diving board in to the water; but it takes a hero to overcome his fear. He builds an act of heroism from the simple procedure of jumping into the water. Then he goes home and prides himself, "Look! Today I have conquered myself, I have will-power." This works to his advantage. First, he can look down at all the other people who don't have enough will-power. On the other hand, if the time should come when he

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doesn't want to do something, he makes the try for his conscience's sake and can excuse his failure because in this case his will-power happens to be inadequate.

So, we use the concept of will-power to suit our purposes. When we want to succeed, we say, "I have the will power." And if we don't want to do something, we say, "I am sorry, I just don't have enough will power."

To illustrate: It is very easy to give up smoking. It has nothing whatsoever to do with will-power. Achievement depends upon whether one really wants to stop or not. Most people, who say they want to give up smoking, merely pretend so. Then they miss it so much they can't stop. They are unwilling to give it up to pay the price, to miss it, perhaps to feel uncomfortable. But anybody who truly makes up his mind not to smoke can stop. Some people need a doctor's testimony that they are in danger before they do it. Some can do it for other reasons. The extent to which we are able to decide for ourselves is most amazing, and more amazing is how few people know it.

Another example of how we fool ourselves is the problem of insomnia. Suppose one has a good book and wants to read all night. He may be tired the next day, but he didn't have insomnia. Or suppose a friend stays and talks till the early morning hours, or a problem needs thinking through and one doesn't sleep. Still no insomnia. Sleeplessness begins at the very moment one decides; "Now I must sleep! At this moment the conflict starts, and the more one tries to sleep, the more awake one gets. People fail to realize that they can make themselves fall asleep or make themselves wake up. They decide what they intend to do, although without being aware of their decision, or even of their ability to decide. But how long is this done? Suppose a person wakes up in the middle of the night because he is thinking about something, or perhaps

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his digestion is not good. He finds it a little bit difficult again to fall asleep again and tries to talk himself into it. He may have all kinds of tricks: many of which work will on occasion. But then comes the moment when all his little gimmicks just don't help and he doesn't fall asleep. What can he do then? He can have a little talk with himself and say, "Who do you want to fool now? Do you want to fall asleep or do you want to think? Now, don't pretend you want to fall asleep when you actually want to think. What do you want?" And then he can watch himself. That is all he has to do. If he wants to think, he will think. If he wants to sleep, the next thing he will know it is morning.

This is not over-simplification and it is not fantasy. This can be learned. For example: One of my students came to me after a lecture and said: "Do you know what happened in the hour after your talk? I got very sleepy in class and I woke myself up and I tried to write down what you said. Then I fell asleep again. Finally I told myself, 'Now, wait a moment. Do you want to sleep now or do you want to be awake?'" She added, "To my great surprise, I was no longer sleepy."

A similar situation exists when a poorly trained teacher meets a disturbing child. When she tells him, "You can't talk out of turn! You have to sit quiet." Any child who is worth his money will, of course, do the opposite. But when she tells him, "I have to accept your decision. If you want to stand up there is nothing I can do. If you want to sit down, I would appreciate it." If given the responsibility of the decision it is surprising how often children will be willing to do the right thing.

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The same is true of oneself. Instead of fighting oneself, of forcing, subduing, criticizing oneself, one can come to the realization that one is only doing what one decides anyhow and that one is willing to stick by his decisions. Thus the door is opened for a change of mind.

To illustrate: A woman has a letter she should answer, but is not in the mood. She can't get herself to do it. So every morning she thinks, "Today I will do it." But every evening she finds she hasn't done it. She gets more and more mad at herself and less and less the letter is written. Now suppose she were to turn around and treat herself with respect and dignity. She could say, "If I don't feel like writing the letter, "I must accept that the letter won't be written. If I change my mind, I will write it." Suddenly she may find herself saying, "Oh, is that so? Then I will write it." And she does.

We can have these practical experiences when we recognize that regardless of how much we torture ourselves, regardless of how much we try to force ourselves or how much we try to control ourselves, we act only as we decide. If we decide to do the wrong things, then no control and no anger, no humiliation or fear will change it. Each one of us does only what he decides to do at the moment. And while this insight opens the door to a way of freedom, so many don't want it because then they have to admit the full responsibility for their behavior. Our cultural indoctrination makes this an awesome realization. We would rather have an "excuse." Suppose a person loses his temper, insults a friend or breaks a dish. Afterward he feels sorry and upset and guilty. So he apologizes. "It's my nerves. I can't help it." What he really means, "It's you. You should know that I have weak nerves and you shouldn't provoke me." Underneath, his real intention was an attempt to make someone else do what he wanted. Afterwards he feels guilty. This shows that he is really not bad – he has a conscience!

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Anyone who loses his temper has complete control over it, although he has no idea that he has. It takes a neighbor to knock on the door to come into the midst of his temper tantrum to stop him. When the neighbor leaves, the temper continues. A person who loses his temper doesn't want to know that he chooses to do so. It is much easier to say, "My father lost his temper and I do it, too." It is much easier to say, "I can't help it. It's my "Oversensitivity."

We have a great reluctance to admit our responsibility for all our actions. But this admission alone can give us true freedom – the freedom to choose. We have this power without knowing how to use it properly. As a result, we all suffer from the fallacy of fear. We try to intimidate ourselves with the bad consequences if we don't act right, and we try to overwhelm our neighbors and our children with the consequences if they transgress. We are a frightened generation, conditioned to fear by century after century of autocratic control. Earthly and heavenly powers were supposed to punish us if we didn't behave. Fear was used to keep subordinates in line. We who have reached political freedom, we have the right to make our own decisions and live by them. But we have not overcome this belief of slaves who need fear in order to function.

Fear is completely unnecessary. Fear, far from avoiding danger, stimulates the possibility of incurring it. We don't need to be afraid of a car in order to avoid being hit by one. However, someone who is afraid a car might hit him would probably be much more exposed to such an accident. Fear is the sin of free men. It has no good purpose and has no relationship to danger. It has been shown that at the moment of real danger one can't afford to be afraid. Fear is present only when one thinks about danger before or after the crisis. At the moment of greatest danger we are concerned with saving our lives and, therefore, have no room for fear. An exception is the

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sensation of panic. It arises only if one feels lost; and the state of panic guarantees that the expectation comes true. In the moment of panic one stops trying to save oneself and manages to get hurt or lost.

One of our strangest motivations--the force which triggers us into action--is anticipation. We all act in line with what we anticipate. Or, as Adler showed, we have a secret plan in our mind and move according to this plan. If a yard-wide board lies on the floor, anyone can walk along it. But if it is placed a hundred feet above ground, many will refuse to walk along it because they are afraid of falling. And some who do try will fall, merely because they expect to.

This is why fear is so dangerous, why fear of failure is so detrimental. We can use all our strength to overcome it, but deep down we are always moving to expose ourselves to the danger which we anticipate. Of course, our anticipations don't always come true, because there are forces outside of us. We expect to succeed and we don't get anywhere because circumstances prevent us. We expect to fail, and for some reason we succeed. But we have to realize that we determine the outcome of our actions to a large extent. We all know someone who is considered a "lucky bird." "Whatever he touches comes out all right. And then there are the "fall guys." Whatever they do is wrong--it never turns out right. The "lucky bird" is the kind of person who assumes, "oh, it will be all right." He sincerely believes this. Therefore he uses all his inner resources; he knows what to do. He will advance when he should advance, he will retreat when he should. He will talk when it is necessary-, be quiet when it is required. He is "in tune" with life and the chances are that he will solve his tasks.

But even the luckiest guy runs in to trouble. What does he do when something goes wrong? Does he blame and scold himself? Hardly. He says, "Now, wait a moment. What did I do

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wrong? What can I do better?" The chances are, he will find something which is better, and again, his approach will be right. Occasionally there are situations where he meets defeat. What does he do then? He responds as if to say, "all right, let's stop right now and wait for a more opportune time. Perhaps next time I can do it." And he does.

But how does the "fall guy" act? From the beginning, he is sure he will make a mess of whatever he attempts. Therefore, he talks when he should be silent, and is silent when he should talk. He gives in when he should be firm, and fights when he should withdraw. Consequently, everything comes out bad for him. Then what does he do? He says, "I expected it," and he gives up. However, the most discouraged character sometimes meets with success. He does something, and to his great surprise it comes out well. So what does he do now? He says, "There must be something wrong somewhere." He then figures out what is wrong, until he messes it up. And in the end, the "lucky bird" has all the successes and the "fall guy" has all the failures.

All of us belong in one or the other category, and probably most of us at one time or another have been in each. We don't know the extent to which we produce our own results. We fail to realize the extent of our inner resources which we can utilize. The interesting point is that psychiatrists are beginning to understand the consequences of this fight with ourselves. For a long time Wexberg and I have been using the term "anti-suggestion." When a patient can't sleep, or stutters, or has an annoying symptom, we ask him to produce it. He can't. As Wendall Johnson found out recently, a patient's every symptom will stop if he is asked to produce it. The symptoms will remain only as long as the patient continues to fight them. Whenever one fights, he disturbs a function. Frankl speaks of "paradoxical intention." When a person is induced to produce the intention opposite to that of his distress, the symptoms stop. Knight calls this

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“negative practice.” It is easy to see, then, that when we stop fighting with ourselves, when we try to swing with the punch, when we turn the wheels in the direction of the skid, we suddenly gain control and don’t have to continue the fight. We deprive ourselves of control only by fighting against ourselves.

Consequently, then, in order to be free, we have to accept ourselves as we are and make the best of it. We must stop being so concerned with what we could do. We have to learn to encourage ourselves in the same manner that we instruct teachers to encourage children. We have to turn around and accept a completely different policy in dealing with ourselves. In this way we can gain the inner freedom which is within the reach of every one of us. There is a simple expression found in most basic philosophies: You have to forget about yourself or the opposite occurs; you become self-conscious. This means that we can face life only if we are willing to be concerned with the task at hand, with the problems we have to solve rather than be concerned with the proving how good or bad we are. We have to use whatever we are for the purpose of functioning. Introspection, fighting with ourselves, create an inner friction which takes our energies away from the task which we have to perform. We instruct our teachers to point out to the student who is having a difficult time learning--“you are sitting on two chairs. Make up your mind. Are you interested in mathematics or are you interested in finding out how bad you are?” We can’t work on both problems at the same time. We are here to deal with the problems which life presents to us. It was Frankl who found this inner freedom under the most tragic conditions a human being can experience--in the concentration camps of Hitler. Here he lost everything, including his cherished manuscript which he though would-make him famous. He was confronted with daily humiliation and constant threat of annihilation. Suddenly he

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discovered this freedom when he realized, “I have to decide what this moment means; I have to decide what I do with it.” From this experience came his book, From Death Camp to Existential Analysis.

We, too, can find this freedom whenever we realize that we are here to participate, to cooperate to get the next job done and not here to enjoy glory or suffer humiliation or avoid mistakes. We have a place. Let us see what we can do with it.

To conclude, I would like to present a number of little stories. Sometimes such stories reinforce a point so that it stays with us.

There were two frogs jumping around on a moonlit night when they suddenly landed in a pail of milk. The sides of the pail were steep and slippery. They tried to crawl out and failed. The older frog was a wise frog. He said, What’s the sense of working to get out? We can never make it.” And he gave up and drowned. But the young frog was not so wise, yet. He kept on crawling, crawling, crawling. And when the sun shown again, there he was, sitting on a pat of butter, safe and sound.

Never give up. Never give up.

Another story teaches the opposite. The Danube is a wonderful stream near Vienna, not as blue as the song goes, but very pleasant. The water is fairly warm. It is one of the most beautiful experiences to go upstream and then swim down, carried by the water through the hills with their orchards and green banks. However, every year there are a number of deaths and accidents, because at certain points the stream forms a whirlpool and people are pulled down and drown.

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One time a winning coach told me that nobody needs to drown in a whirlpool if he will only wait a moment and hold his breath. For just as the water pulls him down, so, in a few seconds, it also spills him out again. There is no danger whatsoever. The drownings occur whenever a person tries to swim against the current. They exhaust their strength and so drown.

The secret in life is to know when to keep trying and when to ride the whirlpool. This wisdom is found in the prayer of Alcoholics Anonymous:

“God give me the serenity
to accept what I cannot change,
The courage to change what I can.
And the wisdom to know the difference.”

It is all one needs to know: when to fight and when not. This comes only through giving full attention to the needs of the situation.

Then there is a Chinese story which I like very much because it accentuates the acceptance of oneself and of life as it is.

There was a poor Chinese farmer. He has a very poor strip of land to cultivate and only one son to help him, and one horse for the plow. One day the horse ran away. All the neighbors came to commiserate with the farmer and deplore his bad luck that he no longer had this horse to work for him. The farmer sat quietly and said, “How do you know it is bad luck?” The following week the horse came back with wild horses. The farmers again came to congratulate him on his good luck. And the farmer sat quietly and said, “How do you know it is good luck?” A week later his only son, riding one of the wild horses, was thrown and broke his leg. Now the farmer had no son to help him. The neighbors came again to commiserate and deplore his bad luck.

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Again he say quietly and said, “How do you know it is bad luck?” A week later a war broke out, and the soldiers came and took all the young men away except the farmer’s son who had a broken leg.

There is extreme wisdom in this story. We are not here to judge good luck, bad luck, success, and failure. We don’t know what they are. We are here to do our share, to make our contribution and to let the chips fall where they may, which is one of the basic ideas which Adler mentioned time and again. In German: “Man muss seine Sache auf nichts stellen.” We shouldn’t do things because we expect to get something for it. If all goes well, fine: if it doesn’t go right, let us see what happens. Let the chips fall where they may; let us not get personally involved in possible success or failure.

This point can be illustrated by the following personal:

One time a patient came and complained of being tense all the time, afraid of fainting. She felt completely helpless and everything seemed hopeless. She even said she didn’t want help--that she was no good. I had difficulty in convincing her that she could be helped if she wanted. Finally I persuaded her to come just once more to talk it over. She was willing to do this much. When she arrived, the following week discovered something very unfortunate had happened. When a patient leaves he gets a card designating the next appointment, and we also put it in our appointment book. For some reason--probably because of this involved question as to whether she should come again or not--I forgot to put her name in the appointment book, and had another patient scheduled for this time. To make matters worse, she came from out of town, and here she was for nothing. I persuaded my second patient to cut the time short and allow me to give her at least half of the hour. During the ensuing discussion she became willing to enter

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psychotherapy. After a month or so I said to her, “Now, you don’t regret coming here? Tell me, what changed your mind?” She said, “Remember, Doctor, the time when I came and you had no appointment for me? It made me feel so good. If a man like you can make mistakes, maybe I have a chance.” One would have thought that my apparent lack of consideration would have been the end, and that she would never come again. So, we can see that we can never be certain of the consequences of an act, and we don’t need to be. All we have to do is to do, to function.

I would like to conclude with the following story:

Mary was a preacher. She spoke with the tongue of angels. She was such a wonderful preacher that people came from far and wide to listen to her sermons. One day a friend asked her, “Mary how did you become such a fine preacher?” She thought for a moment and said, “Frankly I don’t know. I only know, when I started preaching, the devil came to visit me each time. One day he would give me a pat on the shoulder and say, “Mary, this sermon was lousy.” And each time I had to fight off the devil. Now, since he no longer comes to visit me, I think I am doing all right.”

Mary knew the devil of vanity, the Golden Calf to which we all pray; the vanity that we must be worthwhile, that we must be superior, that we must be a success. All this mad rush and worship of the Golden Calf of success makes us a slave. When Mary became interested in her work than in her vanity, the devil ceased to call.

If we want to get along with ourselves, we must not drive ourselves, criticize ourselves, frighten ourselves, and fight with ourselves. We need to let all that is in us (which is so tremendous that one would be surprised if we could see it) guide us. The strength and power that is within us is as great as the strength and power which was discovered in the completely small

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and insignificant little atom. We have to discover the strength and power in ourselves by letting it come from us. It is there. And when we stop trying to control ourselves, we might then discover that we don't have to control anything, because we will find that we will do what we decide: and that we will decide: and that we will decide much more what is good if we are less afraid that we will do the bad.

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