

A Psychology for Life

Key Note Speech by Francis Walton, Ph.D.

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When we put together this morning's program I promised to speak about Adler's Individual Psychology as a guide for living.

Some of you know Alfred Adler wrote that Individual Psychology could serve as a religion for the person so unfortunate to not have one of his own. Well, we are not asking anyone to substitute Individual Psychology for religion, but here are a few ideas as to how we can add to the fullness of our life by paying attention to the tenets of Individual Psychology. This is not so complex to understand and it's entirely do-able, but it's not always so easy to put into practice.

What I am speaking about first is for each of us to do our level best to understand when we are feeling as though we are in a position of inferiority. We may feel put down by a spouse or partner. We may feel below or beneath because of our perception of our position at work, or because we picture ourselves as worth less than others socially. There are probably an infinite number of conclusions we can draw to support a mistaken idea that we are in a position of inferiority, but we can learn to pay attention to such ideas and the feelings generated by those ideas, and especially to the action stimulated by these feelings. We can catch ourselves using such thoughts in a moment in time and we can seize that moment to turn a minus into a plus.

I was speaking with a client very recently. She was telling me of an evening when she heard her husband's car coming into the driveway. I ventured a guess about her thoughts, "Oh shit, he's home again." Well she had a gigantic recognition reflex and we

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laughed together-but then she told me what she had done, which was to roll over and pretend to be asleep.

Friends, this is a simple example of the important responsibility and the powerful opportunity we have as therapists and as human beings, to help our clients and ourselves recognize the purpose of our behavior-the direction of our behavior. In this case, of course, the client was avoiding contact with her husband, perhaps defeating or even punishing her husband. And guess what?...Her relationship with her husband wasn't getting any better.

But let us go a little further to help our clients or ourselves to understand mistaken ideas. In this case, the mistaken ideas that stimulated this woman to avoid or punish her husband. I offer just two pieces of analytical information:

1. Her first early memory conveyed this private logic-"It is so nice to have a caring man at my side as I approach the challenges of life."
2. Her Most Memorable Observation (a conclusion from early adolescence) emphasized this aspect of her belief system-"being deprived of the recognition that is due me as a good achieving person is terribly unfair, and I will do everything I can to avoid such a situation when I become an adult."

Now, we see how this person pictures herself in a position of inferiority. We have helped her see what she is doing about it. This is a key moment folks. Teach our clients and ourselves to spot the choice points-the moment of choice.

At these moments we can ask ourselves-"am I trying to help to improve the situation or am I trying to elevate myself, or am I trying to avoid falling to a position of inferiority? Am I interested in helping, or interested only in taking care of myself?"

A key concept in Individual Psychology that needs to come into play at these moments is the capacity each of us has to learn to care about others, to feel connected to others. (our capacity to develop social interest)

There is scarcely a significant problem which you or your clients will experience in life that does not call for the courage and good sense to say, "I'm alright, I'm worth one, I can't be worth any less than one human being, I can't be worth any more than more human being. Whew! That issue is settled."

"Now since I don't have to spend energy trying to place myself above others, and don't have to spend energy concealing that I'm worth less than others-I have incredibly more energy to spend on lending a hand with the problems that we all face. Suddenly, it's not about me - it's about us."

Thank you.