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“To Be That Self Which One Truly Is” A Therapist’s View of Personal Goals

In these days most psychologists regard it as an insult if they are accused of thinking philosophical thoughts. I do not share this reaction. I cannot help but puzzle over the meaning of what I observe. Some of these meanings seem to have exciting implications for our modern world.

In 1951 Dr. Russell Becker, a friend, former student and colleague of mine, invited me to give a special lecture to an all-college convocation at Wooster College in Ohio. I decided to work out more clearly for myself the meaning of the personal directions which clients seem to take in the free climate of the therapeutic relationship. When the paper was finished I had grave doubts that I had expressed anything which was in any way new or significant. The rather astonishingly long-continued applause of the audience relieved my fears to some degree.

As the passage of time has enabled me to look more objectively at what I said, I feel satisfaction on two counts. I believe it expresses well the observations which for me have crystallized into two important themes: my confidence in the human organism, when it is functioning freely; and the existential quality of satisfying living, a theme presented by some of our most modern philosophers, which was however beautifully expressed more than twenty-five centuries ago by Lao-tzu, when he said, “The way to do is to be.”

THE QUESTIONS

“What is my goal in life?” “What am I striving for?” “What is my purpose?”

These are questions which every individual asks himself at one time or another, sometimes calmly and meditatively, sometimes in agonizing uncertainty or despair. They are old, old questions which have been asked and answered in every century of history. Yet they are also questions which every individual must ask and answer for himself, in his own way. They are questions which I, as a counselor, hear expressed in many differing ways as men and women in personal distress try to learn, or understand, or choose, the directions which their lives are taking.

In one sense there is nothing new which can be said about these questions. Indeed the opening phrase in the title I have chosen for this paper is taken from the writings of a man who wrestled with these questions more than a century ago. Simply to express another personal opinion about this whole issue of goals and purposes would seem presumptuous. But as I have worked for many years with troubled and maladjusted individuals I believe that I can discern a pattern, a trend, a commonality, an orderliness, in the tentative answers to these questions which they have found for themselves. And so I would like to share with you my perception of what human beings appear to be striving for, when they are free to choose.

SOME ANSWERS

Before trying to take you into this world of my own experience with my clients, I would like to remind you that the questions I have mentioned are not pseudo-questions, nor have men in the past or at the present time agreed on the answers. When men in the past have asked themselves the purpose of life, some have answered, in the words of the catechism, that “the chief end of man is to glorify God.” Others have thought of life’s purpose as being the preparation of oneself for immortality. Others have settled on a much more earthy goal—to enjoy and release and satisfy every sensual desire. Still others—and this applies to many today—regard the purpose of life as being to achieve—to gain material possessions, status, knowledge, power. Some have made it their goal to give themselves completely and devotedly to a cause outside of themselves such as Christianity, or Communism. A Hitler has seen his goal as that of becoming the leader of a master race which would exercise power over all. In sharp contrast, many an Oriental has striven to eliminate all personal desires, to exercise the utmost of control over himself. I mention these widely ranging choices to indicate some of the very different aims men have lived for, to suggest that there are indeed many goals possible.

In a recent important study Charles Morris investigated objectively the pathways of life which were preferred by students in six different countries—India, China, Japan, the United States, Canada, and Norway (5). As one might expect, he found decided differences in goals between these national groups. He also endeavored, through a factor analysis of his data, to determine the underlying dimensions of value which seemed to operate in the thousands of specific individual preferences. Without going into the details of his analysis, we might look at the five dimensions which emerged, and which, combined in various positive and negative ways, appeared to be responsible for the individual choices.

The first such value dimension involves a preference for a responsible, moral, self-restrained participation in life, appreciating and conserving what man has self-restrained participation in life, appreciating and conserving what man has attained.

The second places stress upon delight in vigorous action for the overcoming of obstacles. It involves a confident initiation of change, either in resolving personal and social problems, or in overcoming obstacles in the natural world. The third dimension stresses the value of a self-sufficient inner life with a rich and heightened self-awareness. Control over persons and things is rejected in favor of a deep and sympathetic insight into self and others.

The fourth underlying dimension values a receptivity to persons and to nature. Inspiration is seen as coming from a source outside the self, and the person lives and develops in devoted responsiveness to this source.

The fifth and final dimension stresses sensuous enjoyment, self-enjoyment. The simple pleasures of life, an abandonment to the moment, a relaxed openness to life, are valued.

This is a significant study, one of the first to measure objectively the answers given in different cultures to the question, what is the purpose of my life? It has added to our knowledge of the answers given. It has also helped to define some of the basic dimensions in terms of which the choice is made. As Morris says, speaking of these dimensions, “it is as if persons in various cultures have in

common five major tones in the musical scales on which they compose different melodies.” (5, p. 185)

ANOTHER VIEW

I find myself, however, vaguely dissatisfied with this study. None of the “Ways to Live” which Morris put before the students as possible choices, and none of the factor dimensions, seems to contain satisfactorily the goal of life which emerges in my experience with my clients. As I watch person after person struggle in his therapy hours to find a way of life for himself, there seems to be a general pattern emerging, which is not quite captured by any of Morris’ descriptions.

The best way I can state this aim of life, as I see it coming to light in my relationship with my clients, is to use the words of Soren Kierkegaard—“to be that self which one truly is.” (3, p. 29) I am quite aware that this may sound so simple as to be absurd. To be what one is seems like a statement of obvious fact rather than a goal. What does it mean? What does it imply? I want to devote the remainder of my remarks to those issues. I will simply say at the outset that it seems to mean and imply some strange things. Out of my experience with my clients, and out of my own self-searching, I find myself arriving at views which would have been very foreign to me ten or fifteen years ago. So I trust you will look at these views with critical scepticism, and accept them only in so far as they ring true in your own experience.

Directions Taken by Clients

Let me see if I can draw out and clarify some of the trends and tendencies which I see as I work with clients. In my relationship with these individuals my aim has been to provide a climate which contains as much of safety, of warmth, of empathic understanding, as I can genuinely find in myself to give. I have not found it satisfying or helpful to intervene in the client’s experience with diagnostic or interpretative explanations, nor with suggestions and guidance. Hence the trends which I see appear to me to come from the client himself, rather than emanating from me.

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AWAY FROM FAÇADES

I observe first that characteristically the client shows a tendency to move away, hesitantly and fearfully, from a self that he is not. In other words even though there may be no recognition of what he might be moving toward, he is moving away from something. And of course in so doing he is beginning to define, however negatively, what he is.

At first this may be expressed simply as a fear of exposing what he is. Thus one eighteen-year-old boy says, in an early interview: “I know I’m not so hot, and I’m afraid they’ll find it out. That’s why I do these things. . . . They’re going to find out some day that I’m not so hot. I’m just trying to put that day off as

long as possible. . . . If you know me as I know myself—. (Pause) I'm not going to tell you the person I really think I am. There's only one place I won't cooperate and that's it. . . . It wouldn't help your opinion of me to know what I think of myself."

It will be clear that the very expression of this fear is a part of becoming what he is. Instead of simply being a façade, as if it were himself, he is coming closer to being himself, namely a frightened person hiding behind a façade because he regards himself as too awful to be seen.

AWAY FROM "OUGHTS"

Another tendency of this sort seems evident in the client's moving away from the compelling image of what he "ought to be." Some individuals have absorbed so deeply from their parents the concept "I ought to be good," or "I have to be good," that it is only with the greatest of inward struggle that they find themselves moving away from this goal. Thus one young woman, describing her unsatisfactory relationship with her father, tells first how much she wanted his love. "I think in all this feeling I've had about my father, that really I did very much want a good relationship with him. . . . I wanted so much to have him care for me, and yet didn't seem to get what I really wanted." She always felt she had to meet all of his demands and expectations and it was "just too much. Because once I meet one there's another and another and another, and I never really meet them. It's sort of an endless demand." She feels she has been like her mother, submissive and compliant, trying continually to meet his demands. "And really not wanting to be that kind of person. I find it's not a good way to be, but yet I think I've had a sort of belief that that's the way you have to be if you intend to be thought a lot of and loved. And yet who would want to love somebody who was that sort of wishy washy person?" The counselor responded, "Who really would love a door mat?" She went on, "At least I wouldn't want to be loved by the kind of person who'd love a door mat!"

Thus, though these words convey nothing of the self she might be moving toward, the weariness and disdain in both her voice and her statement make it clear that she is moving away from a self which has to be good, which has to be submissive.

Curiously enough a number of individuals find that they have felt compelled to regard themselves as bad, and it is this concept of themselves that they find they are moving away from. One young man shows very clearly such a movement. He says: "I don't know how I got this impression that being ashamed of myself was such an appropriate way to feel. . . . Being ashamed of me was the way I just had to be. . . . There was a world where being ashamed of myself was the best way to feel. . . . If you are something which is disapproved of very much, then I guess the only way you can have any kind of self-respect is to be ashamed of that part of you which isn't approved of. . . ."

"But now I'm adamantly refusing to do things from the old viewpoint. . . . It's as if I'm convinced that someone said, 'The way you will have to be is to be ashamed of yourself—so be that way!' And I accepted it for a long, long time, saying 'OK, that's me!' And now I'm standing up against that somebody, saying, 'I don't care what you say. I'm not going to feel ashamed of myself!'" Obviously he is abandoning the concept of himself as shameful and bad.

AWAY FROM MEETING EXPECTATIONS

Other clients find themselves moving away from what the culture expects them to be. In our current industrial culture, for example, as Whyte has forcefully pointed out in his recent book (7), there are enormous pressures to become the characteristics which are expected of the "organization man." Thus one should be fully a member of the group, should subordinate his individuality to fit into the group needs, should become "the well-rounded man who can handle well-rounded men."

In a newly completed study of student values in this country Jacob summarizes his findings by saying, "The main overall effect of higher education upon student values is to bring about general acceptance of a body of standards and attitudes characteristic of collegebred men and women in the American community. . . . The impact of the college experience is . . . to socialize the individual, to refine, polish, or 'shape up' his values so that he can fit comfortably into the ranks of American college alumni." (1, p. 6)

Over against these pressures for conformity, I find that when clients are free to be any way they wish, they tend to resent and to question the tendency of the organization, the college or the culture to mould them to any given form. One of my clients says with considerable heat: "I've been so long trying to live according to what was meaningful to other people, and what made no sense at all to me, really. I somehow felt so much more than that, at some level." So he, like others, tends to move away from being what is expected.

AWAY FROM PLEASING OTHERS

I find that many individuals have formed themselves by trying to please others, but again, when they are free, they move away from being this person. So one professional man, looking back at some of the process he has been through, writes, toward the end of therapy: "I finally felt that I simply had to begin doing what I wanted to do, not what I thought I should do, and regardless of what other people feel I should do. This is a complete reversal of my whole life. I've always felt I had to do things because they were expected of me, or more important, to make people like me. The hell with it! I think from now on I'm going to just be me—rich or poor, good or bad, rational or irrational, logical or illogical, famous or infamous. So thanks for your part in helping me to rediscover Shakespeare's —'To thine own self be true.'"

So one may say that in a somewhat negative way, clients define their goal, their purpose, by discovering, in the freedom and safety of an understanding relationship, some of the directions they do not wish to move. They prefer not to hide themselves and their feelings from themselves, or even from some significant others. They do not wish to be what they "ought" to be, whether that imperative is set by parents, or by the culture, whether it is defined positively or negatively. They do not wish to mould themselves and their behavior into a form which would be merely pleasing to others. They do not, in other words, choose to be anything which is artificial, anything which is imposed, anything which is defined from without. They realize that they do not value such purposes or goals, even though they may have lived by them all their lives up to this point.

TOWARD SELF-DIRECTION

But what is involved positively in the experience of these clients? I shall try to describe a number of the facets I see in the directions in which they move.

First of all, the client moves toward being autonomous. By this I mean that gradually he chooses the goals toward which he wants to move. He becomes responsible for himself. He decides what activities and ways of behaving have meaning for him, and what do not. I think this tendency toward self-direction is amply illustrated in the examples I have given.

I would not want to give the impression that my clients move blithely or confidently in this direction. No indeed. Freedom to be oneself is a frighteningly responsible freedom, and an individual moves toward it cautiously, fearfully, and with almost no confidence at first.

Nor would I want to give the impression that he always makes sound choices. To be responsibly self-directing means that one chooses—and then learns from the consequences. So clients find this a sobering but exciting kind of experience. As one client says—“I feel frightened, and vulnerable, and cut loose from support, but I also feel a sort of surging up or force or strength in me.” This is a common kind of reaction as the client takes over the self-direction of his own life and behavior.

TOWARD BEING PROCESS

The second observation is difficult to make, because we do not have good words for it. Clients seem to move toward more openly being a process, a fluidity, a changing. They are not disturbed to find that they are not the same from day to day, that they do not always hold the same feelings toward a given experience or person, that they are not always consistent. They are in flux, and seem more content to continue in this flowing current. The striving for conclusions and end states seems to diminish.

One client says, “Things are sure changing, boy, when I can’t even predict my own behavior in here anymore. It was something I was able to do before. Now I don’t know what I’ll say next. Man, it’s quite a feeling. . . . I’m just surprised I even said these things. . . . I see something new every time. It’s an adventure, that’s what it is—into the unknown. . . . I’m beginning to enjoy this now, I’m joyful about it, even about all these old negative things.” He is beginning to appreciate himself as a fluid process, at first in the therapy hour, but later he will find this true in his life. I cannot help but be reminded of Kierkegaard’s description of the individual who really exists. “An existing individual is constantly in process of becoming, . . . and translates all his thinking into terms of process. It is with (him) . . . as it is with a writer and his style; for he only has a style who never has anything finished, but ‘moves the waters of the language’ every time he begins, so that the most common expression comes into being for him with the freshness of a new birth.” (2, p. 79) I find this catches excellently the direction in which clients move, toward being a process of potentialities being born, rather than being or becoming some fixed goal.

TOWARD BEING COMPLEXITY

It also involves being a complexity of process. Perhaps an illustration will help here. One of our counselors, who has himself been much helped by psychotherapy, recently came to me to discuss his relationship with a very

difficult and disturbed client. It interested me that he did not wish to discuss the client, except in the briefest terms. Mostly he wanted to be sure that he was clearly aware of the complexity of his own feelings in the relationship—his warm feelings toward the client, his occasional frustration and annoyance, his sympathetic regard for the client's welfare, a degree of fear that the client might become psychotic, his concern as to what others would think if the case did not turn out well. I realized that his overall attitude was that if he could be, quite openly and transparently, all of his complex and changing and sometimes contradictory feelings in the relationship, all would go well. If, however, he was only part of his feelings, and partly façade or defense, he was sure the relationship would not be good. I find that this desire to be all of oneself in each moment—all the richness and complexity, with nothing hidden from oneself, and nothing feared in oneself—this is a common desire in those who have seemed to show much movement in therapy. I do not need to say that this is a difficult, and in its absolute sense an impossible goal. Yet one of the most evident trends in clients is to move toward becoming all of the complexity of one's changing self in each significant moment.

TOWARD OPENNESS TO EXPERIENCE

"To be that self which one truly is" involves still other components. One which has perhaps been implied already is that the individual moves toward living in an open, friendly, close relationship to his own experience. This does not occur easily. Often as the client senses some new facet of himself, he initially rejects it. Only as he experiences such a hitherto denied aspect of himself in an acceptant climate can he tentatively accept it as a part of himself. As one client says with some shock after experiencing the dependent, small boy aspect of himself, "That's an emotion I've never felt clearly—one that I've never been!" He cannot tolerate the experience of his childish feelings. But gradually he comes to accept and embrace them as a part of himself, to live close to them and in them when they occur.

Another young man, with a very serious stuttering problem, lets himself be open to some of his buried feelings toward the end of his therapy. He says, "Boy, it was a terrible fight. I never realized it. I guess it was too painful to reach that height. I mean I'm just beginning to feel it now. Oh, the terrible pain. . . . It was terrible to talk. I mean I wanted to talk and then I didn't want to. . . . I'm feeling—I think I know—it's just plain strain—terrible strain—stress, that's the word, just so much stress I've been feeling. I'm just beginning to feel it now after all these years of it. . . . it's terrible. I can hardly get my breath now too, I'm just all choked up inside, all tight inside. . . . I just feel like I'm crushed. (He begins to cry.) I never realized that, I never knew that." (6) Here he is opening himself to internal feelings which are clearly not new to him, but which up to this time, he has never been able fully to experience. Now that he can permit himself to experience them, he will find them less terrible, and he will be able to live closer to his own experiencing.

Gradually clients learn that experiencing is a friendly resource, not a frightening enemy. Thus I think of one client who, toward the close of therapy, when puzzled about an issue, would put his head in his hands and say, "Now what is it I'm feeling? I want to get next to it. I want to learn what it is." Then he

would wait, quietly and patiently, until he could discern the exact flavor of the feelings occurring in him. Often I sense that the client is trying to listen to himself, is trying to hear the messages and meanings which are being communicated by his own physiological reactions. No longer is he so fearful of what he may find. He comes to realize that, his own inner reactions and experiences, the messages of his senses and his viscera, are friendly. He comes to want to be close to his inner sources of information rather than closing them off.

Maslow, in his study of what he calls self-actualizing people, has noted this same characteristic. Speaking of these people, he says, "Their ease of penetration to reality, their closer approach to an animal-like or child-like acceptance and spontaneity imply a superior awareness of their own impulses, their own desires, opinions, and subjective reactions in general." (4, p. 210)

This greater openness to what goes on within is associated with a similar openness to experiences of external reality. Maslow might be speaking of clients I have known when he says, "self-actualized people have a wonderful capacity to appreciate again and again, freshly and naively, the basic goods of life with awe, pleasure, wonder, and even ecstasy, however stale these experiences may be for other people." (4, p. 214)

TOWARD ACCEPTANCE OF OTHERS

Closely related to this openness to inner and outer experience in general is an openness to and an acceptance of other individuals. As a client moves toward being able to accept his own experience, he also moves toward the acceptance of the experience of others. He values and appreciates both his own experience and that of others for what it is. To quote Maslow again regarding his self-actualizing individuals: "One does not complain about water because it is wet, nor about rocks because they are hard. . . . As the child looks out upon the world with wide, uncritical and innocent eyes, simply noting and observing what is the case, without either arguing the matter or demanding that it be otherwise, so does the self-actualizing person look upon human nature both in himself and in others." (4, p. 207) This acceptant attitude toward that which exists, I find developing in clients in therapy.

TOWARD TRUST OF SELF

Still another way of describing this pattern which I see in each client is to say that increasingly he trusts and values the process which is himself. Watching my clients, I have come to a much better understanding of creative people. El Greco, for example, must have realized as he looked at some of his early work, that "good artists do not paint like that." But somehow he trusted his own experiencing of life, the process of himself, sufficiently that he could go on expressing his own unique perceptions. It was as though he could say, "Good artists do not paint like this, but I paint like this." Or to move to another field, Ernest Hemingway was surely aware that "good writers do not write like this." But fortunately he moved toward being Hemingway, being himself, rather than toward some one else's conception of a good writer. Einstein seems to have been unusually oblivious to the fact that good physicists did not think his kind of thoughts. Rather than drawing back because of his inadequate academic

preparation in physics, he simply moved toward being Einstein, toward thinking his own thoughts, toward being as truly and deeply himself as he could. This is not a phenomenon which occurs only in the artist or the genius. Time and again in my clients, I have seen simple people become significant and creative in their own spheres, as they have developed more trust of the processes going on within themselves, and have dared to feel their own feelings, live by values which they discover within, and express themselves in their own unique ways.

THE GENERAL DIRECTION

Let me see if I can state more concisely what is involved in this pattern of movement which I see in clients, the elements of which I have been trying to describe. It seems to mean that the individual moves toward being, knowingly and acceptingly, the process which he inwardly and actually is. He moves away from being what he is not, from being a façade. He is not trying to be more than he is, with the attendant feelings of insecurity or bombastic defensiveness. He is not trying to be less than he is, with the attendant feelings of guilt or selfdepreciation. He is increasingly listening to the deepest recesses of his physiological and emotional being, and finds himself increasingly willing to be, with greater accuracy and depth, that self which he most truly is. One client, as he begins to sense the direction he is taking, asks himself wonderingly and with incredulity in one interview, "You mean if I'd really be what I feel like being, that that would be all right?" His own further experience, and that of many another client, tends toward an affirmative answer. To be what he truly is, this is the path of life which he appears to value most highly, when he is free to move in any direction. It is not simply an intellectual value choice, but seems to be the best description of the groping, tentative, uncertain behaviors by which he moves exploringly toward what he wants to be.

Some Misapprehensions

To many people, the path of life I have been endeavoring to describe seems like a most unsatisfactory path indeed. To the degree that this involves a real difference in values, I simply respect it as a difference. But I have found that sometimes such an attitude is due to certain misapprehensions. In so far as I can I would like to dear these away.

DOES IT IMPLY FIXITY?

To some it appears that to be what one is, is to remain static. They see such a purpose or value as synonymous with being fixed or unchanging. Nothing could be further from the truth. To be what one is, is to enter fully into being a process. Change is facilitated, probably maximized, when one is willing to be what he truly is. Indeed it is the person who is denying his feelings and his reactions who is the person who tends to come for therapy. He has, often for years, been trying to change, but finds himself fixed in these behaviors which he dislikes. It is only as he can become more of himself, can be more of what he has denied in

himself, that there is any prospect of change.

DOES IT IMPLY BEING EVIL?

An even more common reaction to the path of life I have been describing is that to be what one truly is would mean to be bad, evil, uncontrolled, destructive. It would mean to unleash some kind of a monster on the world. This is a view which is very well known to me, since I meet it in almost every client. "If I dare to let the feelings flow which are dammed up within me, if by some chance I should live in those feelings, then this would be catastrophe." This is the attitude, spoken or unspoken, of nearly every client as he moves into the experiencing of the unknown aspects of himself. But the whole course of his experience in therapy contradicts these fears. He finds that gradually he can be his anger, when anger is his real reaction, but that such accepted or transparent anger is not destructive. He finds that he can be his fear, but that knowingly to be his fear does not dissolve him. He finds that he can be self-pitying, and it is not "bad." He can feel and be his sexual feelings, or his "lazy" feelings, or his hostile feelings, and the roof of the world does not fall in. The reason seems to be that the more he is able to permit these feelings to flow and to be in him, the more they take their appropriate place in a total harmony of his feelings. He discovers that he has other feelings with which these mingle and find a balance. He feels loving and tender and considerate and cooperative, as well as hostile or lustful or angry. He feels interest and zest and curiosity, as well as laziness or apathy. He feels courageous and venturesome, as well as fearful. His feelings, when he lives closely and acceptingly with their complexity, operate in a constructive harmony rather than sweeping him into some uncontrollably evil path.

Sometimes people express this concern by saying that if an individual were to be what he truly is, he would be releasing the beast in himself. I feel somewhat amused by this, because I think we might take a closer look at the beasts. The lion is often a symbol of the "ravening beast." But what about him? Unless he has been very much warped by contact with humans, he has a number of the qualities I have been describing. To be sure, he kills when he is hungry, but he does not go on a wild rampage of killing, nor does he overfeed himself. He keeps his handsome figure better than some of us. He is helpless and dependent in his puppyhood, but he moves from that to independence. He does not cling to dependence. He is selfish and self-centered in infancy, but in adulthood he shows a reasonable degree of cooperativeness, and feeds, cares for, and protects his young. He satisfies his sexual desires, but this does not mean that he goes on wild and lustful orgies. His various tendencies and urges have a harmony within him. He is, in some basic sense, a constructive and trustworthy member of the species *felis leo*. And what I am trying to suggest is that when one is truly and deeply a unique member of the human species, this is not something which should excite horror. It means instead that one lives fully and openly the complex process of being one of the most widely sensitive, responsive, and creative creatures on this planet. Fully to be one's own uniqueness as a human being, is not, in my experience, a process which would be labeled bad. More appropriate words might be that it is a positive, or a constructive, or a realistic, or a trustworthy process.

Social Implications

Let me turn for a moment to some of the social implications of the path of life I have attempted to describe. I have presented it as a direction which seems to have great meaning for individuals. Does it have, could it have, any meaning or significance for groups or organizations? Would it be a direction which might usefully be chosen by a labor union, a church group, an industrial corporation, a university, a nation? To me it seems that this might be possible. Let us take a look, for example, at the conduct of our own country in its foreign affairs. By and large we find, if we listen to the statements of our leaders during the past several years, and read their documents, that our diplomacy is always based upon high moral purposes; that it is always consistent with the policies we have followed previously; that it involves no selfish desires; and that it has never been mistaken in its judgments and choices. I think perhaps you will agree with me that if we heard an individual speaking in these terms we would recognize at once that this must be a façade, that such statements could not possibly represent the real process going on within himself.

Suppose we speculate for a moment as to how we, as a nation, might present ourselves in our foreign diplomacy if we were openly, knowingly, and acceptingly being what we truly are. I do not know precisely what we are, but I suspect that if we were trying to express ourselves as we are, then our communications with foreign countries would contain elements of this sort. We as a nation are slowly realizing our enormous strength, and the power and responsibility which go with that strength.

We are moving, somewhat ignorantly and clumsily, toward accepting a position of responsible world leadership.

We make many mistakes. We are often inconsistent.

We are far from perfect.

We are deeply frightened by the strength of Communism, a view of life different from our own.

We feel extremely competitive toward Communism, and we are angry and humiliated when the Russians surpass us in any field.

We have some very selfish foreign interests, such as in the oil in the Middle East.

On the other hand, we have no desire to hold dominion over peoples.

We have complex and contradictory feelings toward the freedom and independence and self-determination of individuals and countries: we desire these and are proud of the past support we have given to such tendencies, and yet we are often frightened by what they may mean.

We tend to value and respect the dignity and worth of each individual, yet when we are frightened, we move away from this direction.

Suppose we presented ourselves in some such fashion, openly and transparently, in our foreign relations. We would be attempting to be the nation which we truly are, in all our complexity and even contradictoriness. What would be the results? To me the results would be similar to the experiences of a client when he is more truly that which he is. Let us look at some of the probable outcomes.

We would be much more comfortable, because we would have nothing to hide.

We could focus on the problem at hand, rather than spending our energies to prove that we are moral or consistent.

We could use all of our creative imagination in solving the problem, rather than in defending ourselves.

We could openly advance both our selfish interests, and our sympathetic concern for others, and let these conflicting desires find the balance which is acceptable to us as a people.

We could freely change and grow in our leadership position, because we would not be bound by rigid concepts of what we have been, must be, ought to be.

We would find that we were much less feared, because others would be less inclined to suspect what lies behind the façade.

inclined to suspect what lies behind the façade.

We would, by our own openness, tend to bring forth openness and realism on the part of others.

We would tend to work out the solutions of world problems on the basis of the real issues involved, rather than in terms of the façades being worn by the negotiating parties.

In short what I am suggesting by this fantasied example is that nations and organizations might discover, as have individuals, that it is a richly rewarding experience to be what one deeply is. I am suggesting that this view contains the seeds of a philosophical approach to all of life, that it is more than a trend observed in the experience of clients.

Summary

I began this talk with the question each individual asks of himself—what is the goal, the purpose, of my life? I have tried to tell you what I have learned from my clients, who in the therapeutic relationship, with its freedom from threat and freedom of choice, exemplify in their lives a commonality of direction and goal.

I have pointed out that they tend to move away from self-concealment, away from being the expectations of others. The characteristic movement, I have said, is for the client to permit himself freely to be the changing, fluid, process which he is. He moves also toward a friendly openness to what is going on within him—learning to listen sensitively to himself. This means that he is increasingly a harmony of complex sensings and reactions, rather than being the clarity and simplicity of rigidity. It means that as he moves toward acceptance of the “isness” of himself, he accepts others increasingly in the same listening, understanding way. He trusts and values the complex inner processes of himself, as they emerge toward expression. He is creatively realistic, and realistically creative. He finds that to be this process in himself is to maximize the rate of change and growth in himself. He is continually engaged in discovering that to be all of himself in this fluid sense is not synonymous with being evil or

uncontrolled. It is instead to feel a growing pride in being a sensitive, open, realistic, inner-directed member of the human species, adapting with courage and imagination to the complexities of the changing situation. It means taking continual steps toward being, in awareness and in expression, that which is congruent with one's total organismic reactions. To use Kierkegaard's more aesthetically satisfying terms, it means "to be that self which one truly is." I trust I have made it evident that this is not an easy direction to move, nor one which is ever completed. It is a continuing way of life.

In trying to explore the limits of such a concept, I have suggested that this direction is not a way which is necessarily limited to clients in therapy, nor to individuals seeking to find a purpose in life. It would seem to make the same kind of sense for a group, an organization, or a nation, and would seem to have the same kind of rewarding concomitants.

I recognize quite clearly that this pathway of life which I have outlined is a value choice which is decidedly at variance with the goals usually chosen or behaviorally followed. Yet because it springs from individuals who have more than the usual freedom to choose, and because it seems to express a unified trend in these individuals, I offer it to you for your consideration.

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