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DISTORTIONS OF THE INSTINCTS OF SELF-PRESERVATION AND PROCREATION

Greetings, my dearest friends. God bless each one of you. God bless this hour.

Tonight I am going to discuss two basic human instincts as they appear in distortion: the instinct of self-preservation and the instinct of procreation. These instincts in their pure form perform a very important role. But where there are psychological disturbances and immaturities, where there is distortion and unreality, these instincts become warped and no longer work constructively.

The instinct of survival -- or self-preservation -- aims at gaining, maintaining, and improving life. By its very nature it works against anything that destroys or endangers life. Just as the body needs health to live, so the soul needs health to live most constructively. In order to live, one needs to be safe from destruction and damage.

We know by now that what the healthy soul considers safe differs from what the unhealthy, immature soul considers safe. The unhealthy soul experiences any rejection -- withholding of love, admiration, and approval -- not only as unsafe, but actually as death. All of you who follow this path have come across similar emotional reactions. Here is a typical example of how the instinct of self-preservation shifts into a wrong channel and manifests erroneously. Your soul believes that in order to preserve its life and safety, you have to fight against the illusion of rejection in any form. The fight assumes various forms. One of them is the creation of the idealized self-image.

Emotional insecurity, is experienced to some degree by every person in childhood. When the instinct of self-preservation is distorted, it fights against this feeling destructively. As you proceed with this work, you learn to become increasingly aware of feelings of utter threat, even though your reason knows that they are exaggerated, irrational, and often entirely untrue. Yet, you cannot help feeling threatened, endangered. Deep within, you panic as though your life were at stake whenever a real or imagined slight occurs. This disharmony is your distorted instinct of self-preservation at work, fighting for soul-safety or, as it is more commonly called, emotional security.

You fight for security and stability in the wrong way. Instead of building the healthy self-respect that comes naturally as a result of removing errors, you inwardly and subtly try to force others to give you security by trying to elicit feelings you think they ought to have for you. You fight against emotional danger by holding yourself in check and damming your outflowing soul-forces because, unconsciously, this seems protective. When healthy, the instinct of self-preservation will lead a person to refrain from self-endangering activity. Yet when the distorted instinct of self-preservation operates, inner or outer action that in itself could be constructive is thought to be dangerous and is therefore not attempted.

The perversion of the instinct of self-preservation brings in its wake further distortions. Certain faults come into being, according to one's character structure; for instance, avarice, rigidity, prejudice. In short, any inner urge that holds on; that cannot let go. The urge may manifest on any level of personality. Outwardly, for instance, you may be generous with material things, but in certain areas of your inner life you may be emotionally stingy. If you carefully examine the emotions of prejudice, you will see that preconceived ideas have the same origin as avarice, stinginess, tightness, the same holding on to something that appears safe.

The tightness is not obvious. Even after having done this work for some time, you will feel it only vaguely at first. But as you proceed with your self-examination, the feeling will become clear. You will become acutely aware of it and then understand its significance. Here, as in any other aspect of this work, the more you become aware of, the more you understand the causes and effects of negative emotions, the weaker they will automatically become.

Inner reactions are soul movements. The soul movement of this particular distortion is a tight holding down of a force that should be fluid. It is an inverted, restricting movement that finally leads to stagnation and inner starvation. This may not affect the entire personality. It depends on where the distortion exists and to what degree. The restriction prevents assimilation of new ideas and attitudes. It also creates rigid rules of behavior and attitude; it freezes ideas and feelings as long as the basic distortion is not changed. It all amounts to an emotional constipation, which may or may not manifest physically.

The instinct of procreation includes more than the physical continuation of the human race. It includes every form of creativity at all levels of being. In its healthy form, it makes you reach out and communicate. You are ready for new eventualities, ready to enjoy, to give and receive, and to experience pleasure and happiness. In other words, your yearning for pleasure supreme is connected with the instinct of procreation.

In distortion, when psychological difficulties are not consciously dealt with and pseudo-solutions are adopted, this instinct can also be led into a wrong channel, thereby generating poison.

In distortion, the following tendencies come into being, again according to character structure: acquisitiveness; reaching out to grab and receive in a raw, grasping way rather than in a healthy, flexible, receptive way; greed; craving, which leads, in crass cases, to addiction. The craving for pleasure, although perhaps completely unconscious, can be so strong that many repercussions occur within the psyche. I don't want you to misunderstand me as saying that a desire for pleasure, as such, is wrong. Quite the contrary. The healthy soul will aim for pleasure, but in a very different way.

The more unconscious the craving is, the greater is the havoc within the soul. For instance, it is very possible not to experience any longing for pleasure, fulfillment, happiness. In fact, you may be completely resigned to a life of serene detachment, while underneath craving and dissatisfaction do a great deal of damage. The superimposed denial of the longing for pleasure supreme may seem to be expedient because the psyche may feel endangered if it were to give vent to it. In such cases the perverted instinct of self-preservation is stronger. But that does not mean that, stifled as it may be, it does not do equal damage.

Here you have two distinct soul movements. One holding on tightly, not letting go of obsolete things so that new material cannot be assimilated by the soul. This is the restrictive movement. The other movement reaches out, not in a relaxed way, but greedily, compulsively.

These soul movements are very subtle. Only this work can bring them into your consciousness. Since both distortions are intrinsically self-centered, the personality also becomes self-centered. Self-centeredness brings frustration, anxiety, tension, compulsion, guilt and insecurity, to name but a few of the negative emotions thus generated. The error is all the more tragic because the psyche falsely believes that being self-centered will preserve its safety, or satisfy its craving. Nothing can be further from the truth. Nothing induces greater insecurity than being egocentric. Egocentricity calls for fixed, prescribed behavior patterns and rules, however subtly and vaguely felt. When others do not abide by these rules and expectations, the hoped-for and carefully planned safety crumbles. Besides, the constant fear that others may, perhaps, not abide by your rules undermines inner peace. You build on sand and need to rely on things you cannot control.

If you are not self-centered, you can afford to be flexible, however. You can see and experience each situation anew and adjust to its particular requirements. Since self-seeking will not be your central focus, you are safe in adjusting to any given situation, person, or unforeseen requirement. Contrary to your unconscious conviction, safety lies in non-self-centeredness.

In self-centeredness, you need to be given love, admiration, approval. You have to get. This need necessitates planning according to your preconceived rules. Since life does not work that way, your commands are often not obeyed. When the rules prove ineffective, your insecurity is increased for two reasons: 1) you do not receive what you believe you should; and 2) your rules prove unworkable. All your planning and blueprinting is therefore bound to make you blind to reality. It inhibits your spontaneity and intuition and prevents you from adjusting to what is possible. And, this, incidentally, is often just as good, or even better, than what you had planned. Unfortunately, you do not see it because whenever your plans are disturbed, you feel your life is endangered. So you destroy happiness by the very process supposed to obtain it.

Until you advance to these soul areas and understand their full significance, your insecurity increases. You tend to strengthen the rigid rules and commands, despairing more and more when they prove progressively less workable.

The inner process of preparation, based on an imagined need for safety, stems from the imbalance of inner weight. You focus your entire attention exclusively on yourself. You may not think so, but emotionally this is often true. Such one-sidedness is unsafe, yet you attempt to eliminate the danger not by becoming less egocentric but by becoming more so and creating regulations supposed to safeguard your egocentricity. Thus you find yourself in another one of those unfortunate vicious circles. True safety comes from seeing the people you have to deal with, not only in theory, but understanding them emotionally. But this is impossible if you focus your attention almost exclusively on yourself.

Again, this process is subtle and hard to detect. Even though, theoretically, you may understand it quite well and believe that you are acting on your understanding, you must find where this is not so. As a result you will make a very substantial contribution toward establishing real

security and safety. This can be done only by truthfully examining your emotional reactions to situations. Whenever you feel disharmony of any sort, or shyness and timidity, you are bound to find some of these reactions hidden deep within yourself.

Both soul currents, being utterly self-centered, prohibit you from experiencing and dealing with defeat. From the findings you have made in connection with your idealized self-image, you know that its nature is very proud. This pride cannot admit defeat. Since defeat is occasionally inevitable, when it does come, it threatens the very ground you stand on, the precarious pseudo-safety of your idealized self-image. The healthy personality can take defeat. You all have to take it. No one can escape it. But how do you take defeat? That is the question! It is possible that your outer behavior in defeat leaves nothing to be desired. But we are not concerned with appearances. We are not even concerned with your thoughts. We are concerned with the inner truth, with the inner experience, with what you really feel. And that is not so easy to bring into awareness. It takes considerable willpower, self-honesty, and patience to become aware of how you really feel.

It is sometimes easy for a person successfully to experience a big defeat in an important issue in life. But the small daily rejections and failures threaten your security and belief in yourself. They cause shame or humiliation that has to be hidden from others so that your defeat will not be exposed. Test yourself on how you embellish a situation to your friends; how you hide by subtly coloring that which seems painful and humiliating for you; how you belittle others who are supposedly responsible for your defeat to save face. All these reactions, and many more, indicate the truth about what your attitude really is to defeat. Test how you fear exposure of certain reactions and incidents and how you avoid them. Examining these ingrained reactions which have truly become second nature is more difficult than finding deeply hidden, important new insights. Here you have to deal with what is quite on the surface. But you have become so accustomed to examining the deeper reactions that it hardly occurs to you to examine the surface reactions and behavior patterns.

To experience defeat in a healthy, mature way presupposes true humility, not a false superimposed one. It presupposes a certain generosity of feeling, a certain greatness in that you can admit defeat without loss of dignity. This very attitude actually brings dignity. The child in you believes that the less defeat you suffer, the greater you are. Nothing could be further from the truth. The truth is that you are great to the degree that you cope with defeat honestly, humbly, with dignity and poise; without embellishment, projection, humiliation, or pretense.

The pretense can go in either of two opposite directions, again according to your personality structure and chosen pseudo-solution. If your pseudo-solution is the quest for power, then your reaction to defeat will be extreme humiliation that has to be hidden at any cost. This very process of concealment takes a heavy toll on your life-force. It induces such a deep guilt and fear of exposure that its effects are too numerous to be discussed at this point. You may or may not succeed in keeping the truth from yourself. Usually you half-see the deception and pretense, and remain half-unaware of the extent to which you deceive others as well as yourself.

One way of dealing with a defeat that cannot be hidden is to belittle others by making them seem responsible, so that your defeat becomes theirs. This creates additional guilt in you. The hostility flows in two directions, toward others and yourself.

If your pseudo-solution is the quest for serenity, you will deny the very existence of defeat as long as possible. There is in this course a dangerous self-deception; the lack of awareness of what you really feel, why you act in certain ways as a result.

Even if a person predominantly uses only one of these pseudo-solutions, one or both of the other tendencies still exist. It is possible to deal with one defeat in one way and differently with another defeat. All this has to be individually found and applied.

My advice is to ask yourself, "How do I really take defeat?" Not how it appears, but how you feel about it, deep inside. Think back to recent happenings or into the past. When did something occur that was a defeat for you? What is or is not a defeat may vary with each person. What to one would seem a major personal disaster, a loss of face, another will not experience as such. A professional setback may not be a defeat if your attitude is relatively mature in this area. You may regret or dislike any material disadvantage resulting from the setback, but you will not feel as though your value as a human being, your dignity, is at stake. However, you may have an overly strong reaction to little incidents, such as a person being unfriendly or unpleasant one day. Not being greeted may seem like a defeat. Though you may not think of it in these terms, your emotional reaction may amount to just that.

So when I invite you to question your attitude toward defeat, do not only think about what is generally recognized as such. You have to find what you experience as defeat, humiliation, failure. Search in this direction, my friends. For once you recognize this, a great wave of inner strength will come, as it always does from any healthy self-recognition and insight. Merely by observing your reactions, you will weaken the defeat's negative impact. Beware of superimposing the ideal reaction that you are not yet ready for over your actual emotions.

Just observe, and little by little you will grow into true dignity. You will lose your sense of shame, which, after all, is nothing but the reverse side of the inordinate pride of the idealized self-image that cannot allow for any semblance of defeat. As your idealized self-image weakens, you will no longer command yourself to be victorious at all times, so you will not feel exposed and humiliated when you suffer defeat. You will thus gain the true dignity that will set you free. You no longer have to fight against impossible odds. You no longer have to keep up a pretense. You no longer have to exhaust yourself senselessly to grab at victory that cannot be yours at all times. You no longer have to exhaust yourself at proving something. We have often discussed this "proving current." Some of you have detected its existence. Some of you realize how much energy it takes.

At first all this is difficult to find, even though it is partly on the surface. You look away from it because it is so subtle and so easily camouflaged. The less you are aware of it, the greater is the obstruction to freedom and strength; to happiness, inner health, and peace.

Now are there any questions?

QUESTION: It is very difficult to find only one tendency in the emotions. For instance, when you feel humiliated, one set of emotions recognizes that what the other person did came perhaps out of insecurity. Then another set of feelings erupts that spell anger. Between these two sets of feelings -- one forgiving and understanding, the other angry -- there is always a conflict. How can one find out which is the right feeling?

ANSWER: I should think it not too difficult to know which is the right feeling, provided both feelings are genuine. Of course, it may be that the first, and obviously right reaction, is superimposed. One tries to have it because one has recognized its theoretical value. But it is not yet felt. Therefore it is constantly interfered with by the emotion that is still predominant, the childish proud one, all the more persistent because one tries to superimpose on it and does not allow it to fully reach surface awareness.

Therefore the negative feeling has to be let out in its full impact. That does not mean one should act upon it, but one has to become aware of the intensity of the anger, the childish demands and claims, which are the real reason for one's anger, defeat being inadmissible. If these emotional reactions are allowed to come to the surface with all their childishness and irrationality, without your rationalizing and explaining them away, they will eventually weaken, so that the other set of feelings will become genuine and dominant. Often, if goodwill is superimposed, it becomes an obstruction unto itself. So, goodwill for purification has to be guided into the right channel. If used in the wrong way, it can be a hindrance and lead to a forced, insincere reaction and self-deception.

Allow yourself to have all emotions come out without policing them. Then, and only then, will it become utterly clear how outrageous and childish your demands are on others and on yourself; how you reject, at least emotionally, the world you live in, yourself included. You demand of yourself a perfection you cannot yet have. And what you think you demand of the other, is, as I pointed out, an externalization of your own demands on yourself. You reason that if others were as they should be, then you, in turn, could be as you want to be, or think you ought to be: your idealized self. The anger at others is, in reality, nothing but blame that they prevent you from being as you think you should be.

Of course, none of this is conscious. It is not understood in the unconscious that if the idealized self were a reality and not a fake, you could never be prevented by others from being what you are. But the idealized self-image pretends. Often, the goodwill to superimpose ideal standards is a mixture of the true good intentions and the demands of the idealized self. Therefore the pretense is prohibitive. It does not allow the truth to come to the surface.

I cannot emphasize strongly enough that to recognize these childish emotions does not force you to act upon them. This is constantly being misunderstood. People often conclude, incorrectly, that to recognize a feeling and to act accordingly are the same. Actually, this wrong conclusion is also a pretense used to maintain a guise of decency, while underneath the pretense there is a need to battle against recognizing the falsity of the idealized self-image and the consequent reluctance to give it up.

Often, the real self actually manifests, and what you described as the first set of feelings may not even be forcefully superimposed. It may be quite genuine, but one does not heed its voice. The compulsive pride of the idealized self-image exerts its rules, dictating to the personality to act accordingly. A "should" is sometimes not even outwardly right and cannot be rationalized as being up to the spiritual standards one wants to abide by: one should be angry and unforgiving; one should despise and not understand; one should not be kind and loving, etc. Such rules can develop to the point where one should actually hate. This is a typical example of how unrealistic all negative emotions are.

In the last analysis, all negative emotions are compulsive. There comes a time on this path when one clearly sees that. At this point one may not yet be ready to let go of the compulsion, but one recognizes both its nature and the underlying reality, certainty, and stability of the real feeling slowly coming to the fore. Yet a part of the personality still clings to the supposed safety of the negative reaction.

This holds true particularly with people who do not trust their emotions and intuitions, but put all their trust into their intellectual, volitional nature. At times, the intellect forbids hate and negative emotions. But whenever it can be rationalized and justified, reason holds on to the superimposed, compulsive aspect and does not allow the true feelings to guide you. Due to some instances in which you discovered negative instincts, you at one time made the mistake of concluding that all instincts and emotions are negative. Therefore you do not give the chance for growth to the parts of your intuitive nature that still need growing. The parts that are already constructive and mature are blocked by a superimposed level, vastly inferior to the intuition.

Such overemphasis on the reasoning power constantly prevents the real self from coming out. Thus it systematically discourages your inner nature from functioning, from guiding you and you cling to what seems safe, the little pride.

QUESTION: Here is a question from an absentee that I think was already partly answered. I shall read it: "We present our idealized self-image to ourselves, as well as to the world. This must put intolerable strain on human relationships, as well as bring out lots of negative reactions. Could you talk to us about this and could you tell us how to recognize and accept the real self in the other person?"

ANSWER: Yes, it is to a large extent answered. Let me add just one more thing. It would be a grave mistake to set out thinking, "How can I recognize the real self in the other person?" You have a difficult enough job doing this with yourself. To do so with the other is quite impossible. But as you proceed and make progress in becoming aware of your own real self -- which comes only after the sustained effort of discovering and understanding your idealized self -- to that degree you automatically sense, experience, and reach the real self of the other person. Conversely, in the same way your distortions affect and reach the corresponding distortions in the other person.

Therefore, recognizing the real self in another person cannot be simply cultivated and learned. It is a natural byproduct of growth and awareness. You become more seeing, more alert, more intuitive. This cannot be a volitional process. I venture to say that the person who asked this question would fall into the same category as the friend who asked the last question: he places an overemphasis on thinking and reason rather than on feeling and intuition. The very fact that this question was asked is an indication of that.

QUESTION: Doesn't this correspondence between two real selves often happen in silence?

ANSWER: It can happen in any way, in any form of communication. If you now reread the lecture I gave some time ago on communication, you will find that it applies here. As your real self manifests, relaxed receptivity results and therefore reaches the inner or real self of the other person. Contrarily, the grabbing, craving motion I described in this lecture, the distortion of the instinct of

procreation, causes the other person to withdraw, because the movement is too grabbing. On the other hand, the distortion of the instinct of self-preservation, creating the restrictive, holding back, inverted motion, will prevent communication. So what I have said in all these recent lectures ties in with communication. Every lecture is intimately connected with all the others.

Now how that communication between the real selves occurs is entirely unimportant and will happen according to the situation at hand. It may be in silence, it may be in words, it may be through any of the human faculties used in communication.

QUESTION: Many times people are reluctant to change something about themselves. It might be something either physical or psychological. We give ourselves the excuse, "If I do change in such and such a way then I will no longer be myself." Is that a perversion of the self-preservation instinct?

ANSWER: You are quite right. The perversion of the self-preservation instinct is resistant to any change or growth. That is its nature. It is static and tends toward stagnation. All of you who do this work have experienced it, and traditional psychoanalysis in any form knows it too. The resistance to change is one of the greatest hurdles to be overcome. It can be rationalized in many ways, but whatever the conscious reason for such resistance, deep down you all battle against giving up the glory of your idealized self. You fear that especially, above and beyond anything else. You think or feel you have to hold on to your idealized self-image for dear life because, after all, it was chosen as a solution. And, since this process of choosing was unconscious, the same unconscious reasons still make you hold on to the belief that, perhaps, after all, your idealized self may still bring you safety and security through the distortion of the instinct of self-preservation, as well as happiness and pleasure through the distortion of the instinct of procreation. This is always the underlying force of your resistance, no matter what the outer rationalizations are.

To find that the resistance exists is important enough. But then, the deep underlying reason has to come to awareness, for only then will your solution prove to be unworkable and you will come to give it up, little by little. As long as the real reason for the resistance to change is unconscious, it is not amenable to change, correction, or reconsideration, since anything activated out of the unconscious resists reality. While you may consciously have some new ideas and change certain attitudes and approaches to life, this hidden part within yourself has remained static and has battled with the other part that wants change. Unconsciously, you hold on to what you chose as salvation and safety: the pseudo-solution. It makes change, growth, and liberation extremely difficult.

The reason you cited is just one of the many other possible excuses or rationalizations. As to the value of this particular rationalization -- fear of not remaining oneself -- I do not think that you need any further elucidation on it. It hardly stands up, for just the opposite is true. The more conflict-bound you are, the less you are your real self. Change and growth will bring the real self into the foreground, and this real self will in no way feel strange, for you are, of course, permeated with it, in spite of all the distortions.

QUESTION: In this process of self-improvement, the more we understand others and forgive, the more our emotional reactions will become toned down. Don't we thus tend to level off

all our emotions in some way, even anger or other strong feelings? Our emotions will not be as strong anymore.

ANSWER: It is difficult to generalize. A certain stage of development does tone down your violent emotions. You genuinely feel more serene. But you should always keep in mind that such serenity may be artificial, if actually, unconsciously, you are seething with strong repressed emotions. These have to reach the surface consciousness before they can be properly assimilated and dispensed with.

For example, if you are very afraid of your emotions, you may believe your lack of strong negative feelings is a sign of spiritual progress and emotional growth. So it cannot be judged whether lack of anger, or other negative emotions, is a sign of growth and harmony, or whether it is a sign of repression. It may be either artificial or genuine. The very first step in growth and the process of gaining maturity is to become aware of emotions you may never have thought you had.

QUESTION: My question was really whether this would ultimately develop to the extent where we have less strong reactions.

ANSWER: No, that is not so, except for negative emotions. Make your goal the leveling off of negative emotions. Eventually true serenity will bring this about. But I might say it is always dangerous to take on a distant goal when you first have to attain nearer goals. The dangers are manifold. For instance, you may be tempted to skip a very necessary phase that is unpleasant at the moment but without which you cannot reach the ultimate goal. It may lead you further into increased self-deception, the very same self-deception you want to uncover instead of avoiding. This should be one of the near goals. Only gradually can further goals be envisaged, until true serenity will come by itself. The view of the far goal may enlarge the idealized self-image. So the near goal should be the next step, not the end result.

The near goal would be, "I want to become aware of what really is in me." When that is accomplished to some degree, the next goal will present itself.

This is like being a wanderer or a mountain climber. If you are wise you will not set out with the final goal in view. The distant summit you eventually want to reach may take days and weeks of hard climbing and endurance. By contemplating this very distant peak you will get tired before you begin. You may then lie down and dream that you are walking up. The dream may seem very real, but in reality you are not moving one inch forward because you are too tired to reach the top before you even get started. But if you set your goals hour by hour, where you can see the objective, rest, and then proceed again, you will not become exhausted. You will not have to deceive yourself by only dreaming you are moving up. This is what I have to say.

May you all derive further instruction and benefit from these words. May they open further vistas, further doors, further understanding. May they strengthen you a little more to face yourself as you are now. For nothing will be as life-giving, life-preserving, and as conducive to true pleasure and happiness as your inner truth.

Be in peace, my dearest ones. Be blessed. Be in God!

Edited by Judith and John Saly

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