

Newsletter 12: The individual steps within self-knowledge



December 2016

Dear friend of the self-knowledge movement,

The Year of Foretold Promise that we talked about at the beginning of this year is coming to an end. We had announced it with a sense of humour, almost carelessly, at our Christmas meeting twelve months ago at the end of the Year of Decline in 2015. At that time we did not really know what the foretold promise might be and yet in the meantime it has become clear to us that we had not understood this correctly at the beginning. Last year we mistakenly looked out for what could have been promised and should now come true. But this would then have been the Year of Fulfilment, which, as far as we can see, will only come in two or three years' time. No, only in the Year of Promise Foretold did it become clear that a fulfilment was even promised. And this has ultimately carried us through the year. We expect next year to be the Year of Clarification.

In the first eleven newsletters we have tried to make clear what the movement we form is all about, to what extent we form a movement or not, what the concerns and aims of this movement actually are, and what tools and other means of support it uses to achieve them. Commencing with this twelfth newsletter, we want to turn our attention to the main tool to which we are committed, namely self-knowledge, and examine in detail what self-knowledge actually means and how to apply it productively.

What exactly is self-knowledge?

Self-knowledge is quite simply the intention to see and understand one's own behaviour, one's reactions to external or internal events, one's attitudes and beliefs, especially one's own thoughts, one's whole inner life and its expression externally and in our relationships. In particular, self-knowledge is concerned with fathoming out the background that feeds this inner life and its external expression. Self-knowledge is taking stock of one's own internal inventory.

It is important to take a very close look, an unbiased and honest view, to employ a very precise method. Without great honesty, a total willingness for truth, one will not get very far on this path. It is about the "sincerity of the intention to be honest towards oneself" or "intellectual honesty" as Thomas Metzinger in his well worth reading essay¹ by the same name calls it, or rather in which he quotes Immanuel Kant.

The "aims" that we formulated for self-knowledge initially play no role whatsoever in this process. Actually, these are not aims at all, but rather that which ultimately emerges as a simple and natural result of this process. Self-knowledge is sought for its own sake, for the sake of the truth for which it stands. The fact that it additionally also produces something fruitful, just like a tree bears fruit, happens in a completely natural way and is of small concern. What drives us to engage in self-knowledge is precisely this passionate interest in truth, in reality, that is necessary for it. An urge to simply want to know and understand what is, what something is, how we function psychologically.

¹ To be found as a postscript in the book by Thomas Metzinger, *Der Ego-Tunnel*; Piper, 2014. [Published in English without postscript as 'The Ego Tunnel' by Basic Books, 2009]

We humans like to delude ourselves. We construct images of ourselves that please us. We like to rationalize possible wrong behaviour. We have a great ability to manipulate reality and to twist everything in such a way that it finally fits into how we imagine ourselves and the world. The adept of self-knowledge sees this tendency in us, the lying and distortion, and consciously opposes it with his contrary directed interest. He is driven by a love of truth. He recognizes the consequences of such tendencies, sees the suffering, the misery, the conflicts that result from them, and he hopes that by thoroughly uncovering them, he can open up alternatives and find solutions for such tendencies. On this path he quickly realises that behind the reality produced by "normal" human behaviour and way of being, there must lie hidden another true reality. His greatest concern is to come nearer to this other reality.

One aspect of self-knowledge is of course the recapitulation of the past. As a rule, someone who sets out on the path of self-knowledge will already carry a certain past guilt; confusion and ambiguities that have arisen through long-term 'normal behaviour', through avoidance, repression, splitting-off, etc.. Of course, this also needs to be examined with precision and tidied up, and this is usually a considerable part of the work of self-knowledge. Many people like to take advantage of support for this part. This is called psychotherapy. If they are lucky, they will find a true therapist who understands psychotherapy as guidance towards self-knowledge. And if not – as long as they are serious – fate will certainly offer them an alternative option, show them another path that they can follow.

However, aside from this restorative work, self-knowledge is something that takes place entirely in the here and now, in the present. And strictly speaking, this also applies to the tidy-up action regarding the personal past and most probably also the collective past. Self-knowledge always happens right now. By looking exactly, seriously and honestly at what is happening now – what is happening within me now or what is going on between us – you stumble across the unfinished aspects of the past, across the old stories that were not consciously experienced. Painstakingly penetrating these old stories with consciousness leads to them being cleansed and thus dissolved, so that eventually all that remains as a task is the moment to moment understanding of the present. Once an adept of self-knowledge has advanced so far, he has already refined his ability to look sufficiently closely to such an extent that he can be considered a master of his discipline.

So what does an exact method mean – whether applied in creating order with respect to the past or in understanding the present? As soon as this refinement in perception has taken place, it means not missing anything anymore, being actually aware of every blink of the eye. Self-knowledge takes place from moment to moment and in the end there is no longer a moment that does not happen in full awareness of what you are doing and what is going on inside you. And by that I really mean from moment to moment. The bad habit of occasional awareness resulting in acting out rather than paying close attention at the decisive moment – the moment of anger, of fear, of insult – is widespread among the half-hearted disciples of self-knowledge. Being really awake from moment to moment for an entire lifetime, that is serious self-knowledge.

The refinement of perception is brought about exactly by this precise perception: the gaze is trained by seeing itself. It is an endless process of differentiation of one's perception through perception. No control, no impulse of will, no discipline in the sense of effort and coercion is necessary. It is enough to see. Real seeing leads immediately to insight and understanding, and thus also to new or corrective action. Seeing is understanding, gaining insight and acting. Awareness, from which attentiveness is born, is enough. It monitors itself, has its own discipline, the discipline of mindfulness, the discipline of love. Awakening for this is enough to set the process of self-knowledge in motion and to drive it forward.

Attentiveness permeates everything not yet perceived in the past and the present with consciousness until the point is reached where all that remains is the easy passage through what is there in the present. This permeation with consciousness dissolves all the past guilt that has accumulated and does not allow any new guilt to be deposited in the present.

How does this dissolving happen?

It is, so to speak, an alchemical transformation process in which the metal lead is converted into gold. The lead is the guilt of the past, the densification of energy that materialized to a certain extent in the body from feelings that were not consciously perceived and worked through. Sluggishness, dullness and apathy alongside possible psychosomatic side effects are the consequences, on which perception can focus in order to awaken the inherent dormant stories.

This awakening, this flooding with consciousness of all that is condensed within, transforms the heaviness into something light. What perception dignifies and liberates from unconsciousness, that is the gold. A wonderful transformation process: everything that has been painfully condensed and hidden in the darkness of unconsciousness becomes transformed through the process of being seen; it transforms itself, by itself, into free, light energy, into which it dissolves. Nothing remains of the past. All that has been retained dies again into the eternal moment, until only the eternal moment and the eternal movement of awareness remain.

At this point, what could be mistaken as the “aim” of self-knowledge – though it is rather an innocent and natural result that emerges from its truthfulness - inevitably becomes apparent. Just being free of all past guilt and its accompanying fixations and prejudices is a regal state. To be able to go through life as someone liberated, once again as free energy, what a joyful, intelligent state! From within this state it also becomes possible for the adept of self-knowledge to recognize once again this true reality in all its possible unfolding behind the painful reality created by repression of true reality. The blissful state of liberation is its beginning.

Penetrating this true reality with perception, and furthermore with perception from moment to moment, has no end. True reality has an infinite depth. Even if the seeker in addition finally receives the grace to penetrate to the very deepest of everything, to experience the unity of all being, this is only the beginning of an endless journey into a completely new story, a story of truthfulness that is here only just beginning.

Through the refinement that takes place within us as our perception becomes increasingly differentiated by exact moment to moment awareness, we begin to comprehend in progressively more accurate detail the truth and reality that, at first, we could only recognize in rough outline. This is the reason why recapitulation seems for a long time to have no end. Again and again you will have to re-examine the material to illuminate events from another new perspective using the extra light of the increased attentiveness that has been granted to you. Even though at the beginning it may be a matter of crude admission and retraction of denials in relation to past events or what is currently taking place, contemplating the background to what has taken place will nevertheless bring further and more delicate insights to light.

Most importantly, your attention will shift away from your crude reactions to patterns of behaviour and will increasingly focus on the most delicate and subtle thoughts behind them. The thoughts with which you control your life. It will become increasingly clear that it is thinking itself that is the main problem and the main culprit behind all suffering. You will eventually become aware of these ulterior motives in you, especially those present in each and every current moment. You will see that you direct your life with controlling and

manipulating thoughts and that this is responsible for all the problems you have. You will also recognize how flawed this is and see that a life directly guided by perception – by seeing – brings a much more joyful existence and lets you enter a reality that lies beyond the suffering of the world.

There is no choice here. You become an outsider in regard to all untruth and everything false. Meditation is the freeing of the mind from all dishonesty, states Krishnamurti in confirmation of the statement by Kant mentioned at the beginning, Meditation is the movement of this honesty in silence. And freedom means infinite space.

May you know yourself, dear friend.

Samuel Widmer Nicolet

PS: The next newsletter (13) will be published after mid-January 2017, as we will visit our Indian friends over Christmas/New Year. Registrations for the seminar in India between the 27.12.16 - 3.1.2017 should be sent to Karin Engelkamp (karin.engelkamp@gawnet.ch).