

## Newsletter 17: The Defensive Feelings (Pleasure)



May 2017  
(drafted in October 2016)

Dear friend of self-knowledge,

It is already cool. But the sun is warming me despite the crisp air. A cleansing barrenness fills the autumn days here in the mountains. It is good to be alone, far from the madness of humans and feel once again the centre of everything. The leaves cast shadows and sway in a light breeze. They form a swell of oneness. The sky is cloudless, now in the evening hours, and so transparently clear. It is quiet despite the cowbells in the distance. And all is still in itself even though there is this motion in everything. One is permeated by order, the sacred order of glorious being.

In this newsletter we will deal one last time within the framework of our examination of self-knowledge with the defensive feelings that first overwhelm us when we venture out of the realm of conditioning, compliance and conformity, and honestly start trying to explore the question "What am I really?" or maybe better "What is it, that actually perceives?".

One defensive emotional attitude plays a particularly important role in this context: pleasure, the human tendency to pursue pleasure and ultimately use it as an essential factor in the defence against a difficult and serious confrontation of issues. This problem – defence through being pleasure-oriented – we will address today in particular, as it is so all-dominant in our world.

Hedonism, the orientation towards pleasure, is the essence of the superficial, frivolous society produced by humans, the essence of their morality or rather immorality. It corresponds to the "way of life", society's lifestyle, indeed its attitude to life, and it is an expression of greed, avarice and competition, the values underlying this society, which we examined in detail on the last few occasions.

It may be that hedonism is inspired by the human penchant for comfort, the nearly invincible laxness of the human condition, as the warriors have called it. Another explanation is certainly the early traumatising, which most people are exposed to in their childhood, and the pain, which they therefore do not want to experience again later on. Most probably a multi-factor event comes into play here anyway. For us here on the path of acquiring self-knowledge, the causative factors are only of marginal importance. They play merely a subordinate role in overcoming the whole problem. Understanding the causes of something is interesting, but it only brings an intellectual understanding. To overcome a problem requires something quite different, namely the recognition of the problem in all its emotional facets.

Pleasure, what is it?

There is innocent curiosity, the innocent passion and joy of life. Happiness and gaiety. That is not what I mean by pleasure. In innocent happiness, there is not yet any thinking that has taken possession of it or wants to organise it.

Natural happiness and joy of life go together with sensitivity, with receptiveness and touchability. They originate directly from the sensual awareness of the beauty of everything, the immediate openness for everything that can spontaneously delight us.

Pleasure, which is produced by thinking in the attempt to organise innocent happiness, is something quite different. Pleasure takes away the delicacy of sensitivity, dulls us and ultimately makes us unhappy. It is a product of thought that, in turn, like all defensive tendencies, is born out of the fear of and the insecurity in regards to what is truly alive.

Fear, with its anxious thoughts, creates psychological time. It deprives us of the present, the only place in which innocence and thus real joy can show themselves. The fear of not having our needs met, not getting enough, alternates between the future and the past, either believing a past misfortune might be repeated in the future, or a once existing happiness might again be lost in the future.

Fear and pleasure therefore always go hand in hand. What they produce, however, is never happiness and joy of life, but instead endless suffering. The pleasure they create has long lost the ease of real enjoyment and suffers from a severity, an attachment, that leads to endless entanglement and thus to conflict and despair. The dullness that comes upon us reveals itself in the confusion of being no longer able to distinguish between real and unreal, between true and false. The natural intelligence and ability, inherent in the sensitivity of the innocent Now, to directly recognise true and false, has disappeared.

If we look closely at ourselves in the process of self-knowledge, observe how we act, react and respond, we will see that fear arises from thinking, from the conscious and the deeper flowing unconscious thoughts. Fed by the experiences and injuries of the past, or simply by negligence, the fearful thinking tries to avoid repeating the misfortune and to prevent it from happening in the future. However, it overlooks the fact that it thereby ruins everything and manoeuvres itself into a misery, from which it can hardly escape anymore. In the same way, thinking tries to protect itself by attempting to repeat past happiness as pleasure, to keep hold of it and forcibly bring it about again in the future. This, of course, can never succeed, and leads at most to pleasure, this cheap reflection of happiness.

Human society, spoiled and corrupt as it is -whether we want to see it or not-is based on greed, avarice and competition, and on an immoral attitude that prioritises the pursuit of pleasure above all else. But not the pursuit of happiness. This is, as a rule, taboo and forbidden: its spontaneity would be much too dangerous and unpredictable for the established power structures that cement the customary rights of this society.

Fear and pleasure bring suffering and hence they produce dependency and addiction as means to escape the suffering. The dependency and addiction are desirable because they can be exploited and they occupy the victims in such a way that they are no longer able to confront the more serious and deeper issues. Thus, they do not pose a threat to the ruling system.

Real happiness, real joy, spontaneous ecstasy born out of the present are an enrichment; they create no misery. They come and go and leave no trace. The desire for them is part of our natural, primary and healthy constitution. It is only when thinking comes along, born out of painful experience and sustained by social customs and conditioning, that the vicious circle of anxiety occurs, in which we have lost ourselves. The desire itself, the longing, is a flame within us. A flame of passion and intelligence, capable of penetrating all untruths. It is only when thinking takes possession of this hunger in us, that this pure power is corrupted into a craving for pleasure and it sinks into the stream of suffering that has gripped and dominated all mankind.

In order to be free from this misery, we shall have to free ourselves from the fear, and hence from this secondary kind of supposed happiness, from pleasure. Fear and pleasure are inseparable and belong together. One cannot take them apart. The path of liberation lies in self-knowledge, the intelligent observation and the uncovering of all these interrelations. To enjoy life, to enjoy the beauty of existence, is never the problem, even though the "authorities" of a corrupt world have always wanted to make us believe so.

On the contrary, real, very present enjoyment of life is exactly the solution, that which ultimately frees us again and leads us out of painful starvation. However, you will have to put an end to the fear in you, stop wanting to hold on to happiness, forgo security, and accept the ephemeral nature of existence. True life unfolds in freedom, in a freedom for which there are no guarantees.

How can one end this malign mechanism? Is it enough to see how thinking constantly seeks and constantly wants to avoid fear and suffering and to repeat what was pleasurable? Can one really put an end to the suffering that comes from it? Halt the thinking that causes it?

The human mind has adapted itself to suffering. It does not really seek a solution to this misery. It stubbornly and constantly hopes to win the lottery every time, despite the fact that common sense indicates otherwise. It does not see the problem. It seems to be too weak to resist the pull of pleasure, too weak to regain the intelligence of seeing, which it has long since given up.

The human mind has adapted itself to the misery, creating a humanity full of fear and pain, degenerated in a rotten society. That it is suppressing this and simultaneously refusing to believe it does not change anything. Sooner or later the truth invariably catches up. Depression and demise are inevitable.

Is there a solution? Is it enough to face it, to confront it? Do we expect a change on the part of society?

Society will only change if the individual takes new paths. Nobody will solve my problem, unless I do it myself. But if I stand fundamentally renewed in this world, this will be my contribution to the transformation of society.

Does the end of fear, the end of suffering, the solution to this whole drama, come from my own intention to really look, from the persistence to really face it? Will it bring to life an intelligence, a sensitivity and sensibility that will find the solution, that is the solution?

And when I see that pleasure orientation is a fundamentally wrong way of life both for me and for mankind, a way of life from which only misfortune can come, what would then be the right attitude to life?

Can this newly awakened intelligence and newly awakened touchability that comes out of the awakening for the problem and the understanding and penetrating of the problem, linger at the curiosity, the beauty, the happy moment, the moment of joy, without there emerging any thinking that wants to organise this innocence? Can this openness and clarity see the danger that lie within and renounce it? Can this seeing let the happiness of the moment die again at any time, let it go to be ready for what life will bring next? Can a fully developed perception find an innocent ecstasy in this way, in which fear and pleasure cannot arise again?

A pleasure-orientated basic attitude does not only end in an unhappy mankind. It also prevents real happiness as well as the possibility for the space and leisure to emerge, the possibility to pursue the really great questions that mankind will have to answer. It is an additional and endless tragedy that we cannot see that a joyous, common commitment to overcoming poverty and hunger in the world, to a co-existence on equal terms with nature, to a new and fair money system, etc. etc., could be in itself a happiness of compassion that goes far beyond all repetition of shallow pleasure. All the insight we need for it has long been born in mankind. Whether we are thinking of Wilhelm Reich, Karl Marx, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Silvio Gesell, or many, many others, one can clearly see that it is one of the tricks of the forces that want to maintain the status quo at all costs, to quickly and repeatedly present every truth as already failed and obsolete, thereby trying to defuse it.

This brings us to the end of the contemplation of the defensive feelings and internal states that are the first things that we encounter once we start following the path of self-knowledge into our innermost. The defensive feelings and internal states are all aspects or expressions of fear. Of course, there are many other facets to this – stubbornness, complacency, underhandedness, falsehood, domineering behaviour, violence, and distrust, for example –, here we have only looked at the most important of them. Starting with the next newsletter, let us turn to a deeper layer in us, one which ultimately reveals to us self-knowledge. Not yet the innermost truth, we will come to this later, but one which fear and its offshoots, such as greed, avarice and envy, defend against. Anxiety defends against pain, the hurt we do not want. It too appears to us in many facets, of which we also want to consider the most important. Facing the pain, both personal and collective, is the step that lies ahead for humanity as a whole. If we pave the way for this step individually, we become pioneers of self-knowledge. The pain and its many extensions, everything that is rejected in us, form the gateway to the innermost, to the sanctuary of innocence, which the adept of self-knowledge seeks.

May you find this sanctuary, dear friend

Samuel Widmer Nicolet