

Self-Esteem

SHE HAD COME with three of her friends; they were all earnest and had the dignity of intelligence. One was quick to grasp, another was impatient in his quickness, and the third was eager, but the eagerness was not sustained. They made a good group, for they all shared the problem of their friend, and no one offered advice or weighty opinions. They all wanted to help her do whatever she thought was the right thing, and not merely act according to tradition, public opinion or personal inclination. The difficulty was, what was the right thing to do? She herself was not sure, she felt disturbed and confused. But there was much pressure for immediate action; a decision had to be made, and she could not postpone it any longer. It was a question of freedom from a particular relationship. She wanted to be free, and she repeated this several times.

There was quietness in the room; the nervous agitation had subsided, and they were all eager to go into the problem without expecting a result, a definition of the right thing to do. The right action would emerge, naturally and fully, as the problem was exposed. The discovery of the content of the problem was important, and not the end result; for any answer would only be another conclusion, another opinion, another piece of advice, which would in no way solve the problem. The problem itself had to be understood, and not how to respond to the problem or what to do about it. The right approach to the problem was important, because the problem itself held the right action.

The waters of the river were dancing, for the sun had made on them a path of light. A white sail crossed the path, but the dance was not disturbed. It was a dance of pure delight. The trees were full of birds, scolding, preening, flying away only to come back again. Several monkeys were tearing off the tender leaves and stuffing them in their mouths; their weight bent the delicate branches into long curves, yet they held on lightly and were unafraid. With what ease they moved from branch to branch; though they jumped, it was a flow, the taking off and the landing were one movement. They would sit with their tails hanging and reach for the leaves. They were high up, and took no notice of the people passing below. As darkness approached, the parrots came by the hundred to settle down for the night among the thick leaves. One saw them come and disappear into the foliage. The new moon was just visible. Far away a train whistled as it was crossing the long bridge around the curve of the river. This river was sacred, and people came from far distances to bathe in it, that their sins might be washed away. Every river is lovely and sacred, and the beauty of this one was its wide, sweeping curve and the islands of sand between deep stretches of water; and those silent white sails that went up and down the river every day.

"I want to be free from a particular relationship," she said.

What do you mean by wanting to be free? When you say, "I want to be free," you imply that you are not free. In what way are you not free?

"I am free physically; I am free to come and go, because physically I am no longer the wife. But I want to be completely free; I do not want to have anything to do with that particular person."

In what way are you related to that person, if you are already physically free? Are you related to him in any other way?

"I do not know, but I have great resentment against him. I do not want to have anything to do with him."

You want to be free, and yet you have resentment against him? Then you are not free of him. Why have you this resentment against him ?

"I have recently discovered what he is: his meanness, his real lack of love, his complete selfishness. I cannot tell you what a horror I have discovered in him. To think that I was jealous of him, that I idolized him, that I submitted to him! Finding him to be stupid and cunning when I thought him an ideal husband, loving and kind, has made me resentful of him. To think I had anything to do with him makes me feel unclean. I want to be completely free from him."

You may be physically free from him, but as long as you have resentment against him, you are not free. If you hate him, you are tied to him; if you are ashamed of him, you are still enslaved by him. Are you angry with him, or with yourself? He is what he is, and why be angry with him? Is your resentment really against him? Or, having seen what is, are you ashamed of yourself for having been associated with it? Surely, you are resentful, not of him, but of your own judgment, of your own actions. You are ashamed of yourself. Being unwilling to see this, you blame him for what he is. When you realize that your resentment against him is an escape from your own romantic idolization, then he is out of the picture. You are not ashamed of him, but of yourself for being associated with him. It is with yourself that you are angry, and not with him.

"Yes, that is so."

If you really see this, experience it as a fact, then you are free of him. He is no longer the object of your enmity. Hate binds as love does.

"But how am I to be free from my own shame, from my own stupidity? I see very clearly that he is what he is, and is not to be blamed; but how am I to be free of this shame, this resentment which has been slowly ripening in me and has come to fullness in this crisis? How am I to wipe out the past?"

Why you desire to wipe out the past is of more significance than knowing how to wipe it out. The intention with which you approach the problem is more important than knowing what to do about it. Why do you want to wipe out the memory of that association.

"I dislike the memory of all those years. It has left a very bad taste in my mouth. Is that not a good enough reason?"

Not quite, is it? Why do you want to wipe out those past memories? Surely, not because they leave a bad taste in your mouth. Even if you were able through some

means to wipe out the past, you might again be caught in actions that you would be ashamed of. Merely wiping out the unpleasant memories does not solve the problem, does it?

"I thought it did; but what is the problem then? Are you not making it unnecessarily complex? It is already complex enough, at least my life is. Why add another burden to it?"

Are we adding a further burden, or are we trying to understand what is and be free of it? Please have a little patience. What is the urge that is prompting you to wipe out the past? It may be unpleasant, but why do you want to wipe it out? You have a certain idea or picture of yourself which these memories contradict, and so you want to get rid of them. You have a certain estimation of yourself, have you not?

"Of course, otherwise..."

We all place ourselves at various levels, and we are constantly falling from these heights. It is the falls we are ashamed of. Self-esteem is the cause of our shame, of our fall. It is this self-esteem that must be understood, and not the fall. If there is no pedestal on which you have put yourself, how can there be any fall? Why have you put yourself on a pedestal called self-esteem, human dignity, the ideal, and so on? If you can understand this, then there will be no shame of the past; it will have completely gone. You will be what you are without the pedestal. If the pedestal is not there, the height that makes you look down or look up, then you are what you have always avoided. It is this avoidance of what is, of what you are, that brings about confusion and antagonism, shame and resentment. You do not have to tell me or another what you are, but be aware of what you are, whatever it is, pleasant or unpleasant: live with it without justifying or resisting it. Live with it without naming it; for the very term is a condemnation or an identification. Live with it without fear, for fear prevents communion, and without communion you cannot live with it. To be in communion is to love. Without love, you cannot wipe out the past; with love, there is no past. Love, and time is not.