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What is the psychological difficulty which I can best study by experience?

In each one of us there is a difficulty which is more central than all the others; it is the one which, relative to the part we have to play in the world, is like the shadow of that light, a shadow which gradually dissolves, fades more and more as the light becomes more intense, more brilliant, more powerful and extends to the whole being.

This difficulty, which is particular to each one, seems to me to be the one which deserves all our attention and effort, for if we know how to observe ourselves, we shall see that it is the source of all the others which may obstruct our way.

So this evening, I shall make a brief survey of a difficulty of this kind.

Some people have an excessive sensitivity, which becomes most acute when it does not manifest itself outwardly. This sensitivity is of an affective, emotional kind.

It usually comes from a supra-nervous substance which is highly intellectualised but not spiritualised enough for its degree of intellectualisation.

It is a stage of evolution in which the being is ready for self-giving, for he is conscious of himself; but, as a result of the work of individualisation, of intellectualisation he has undergone, he has acquired the habit of considering everything in relation to himself and has carried the illusion of personality to its utmost limit.

Thus it is sometimes very difficult for him not to watch himself acting, feeling and thinking, and this results in a lack of spontaneity which verges on insincerity.

The being takes pleasure in his extreme sensitivity; he is

a delicate instrument which responds marvellously to the least vibration, and so, instead of exteriorising himself and forgetting his own self as he should, he withdraws into himself, observes and analyses and almost contemplates himself.

Thus cultivated, the emotional sensitivity goes on increasing, sharpening and refining itself. And since in life opportunities for suffering are more frequent than opportunities for joy, the need to experience and study these subtle movements of feeling develops an inclination, a taste for suffering, a true mystical aberration which is nothing but self-seeking through suffering, a refined but very pernicious form of egoism.

The practical results of this need to suffer are altogether disastrous if you add to it the intuitive but still inaccurate perception that the work you have to accomplish, your purpose in life, is to draw towards yourself, to take upon yourself, the suffering of others and change it into harmony.

As a matter of fact, on one hand this knowledge is incomplete because you do not know that the only way to relieve others, to eliminate a little suffering in this world, is not to allow any sensitivity, however painful it may seem, to arouse suffering in yourself or to disturb your peace and serenity. On the other hand the idea of the work to be accomplished is itself warped by the illusion of personality. The correct idea is not to draw all suffering to yourself, which is unrealisable, but to identify yourself with all suffering, in all others, to become in it and in them a seed of light and love which will give birth to a deep understanding, to hope, trust and peace.

Until this is well understood, the taste for sacrifice rises in the being; and each time an opportunity for it appears, since you are not *disinterested* in this matter, since you *desire* this sacrifice, it becomes something sentimental and irrational and results in absurd errors which sometimes have disastrous consequences. Even if you are in the habit of reflecting before acting, the reflections preceding the act will necessarily be biased, since they are warped by the taste for suffering, by the

Words of Long Ago

desire to have an opportunity to impose a painful sacrifice on yourself.

Thus, consciously or not, instead of sacrificing yourself for the good of others, you sacrifice yourself for the pleasure of it, which is perfectly absurd and of no benefit to anyone.

No action should be deemed good, no action should be undertaken until we know its immediate and, if possible, its distant consequences, and until it appears that they must in the end add, however little, to earthly happiness. But to be able to give a sound judgment on the matter, this judgment must in no way be disturbed by any personal preference, and this implies self-detachment.

Not the detachment which is equivalent to the annihilation of the capacity to feel, but the detachment which brings about the abolition of the capacity to suffer.

By this you should understand that for the time being I am excluding insensitive people, those who do not suffer because the substance they are made of is still too unrefined, too crude to feel, those who are not even ready for suffering.

But of those who have achieved a high development of sensitivity, it can be said that their capacity to suffer is the exact measure of their imperfection.

Indeed, the expression of a true psychic life in the being is peace, a joyful serenity.

Any suffering is therefore a precious indication to us of our weak point, of the point which demands a greater spiritual effort from us.

Thus, to cure in ourselves this attraction for suffering, we must understand the absurdity, the petty egoism of the various causes of our sufferings.

And to cure our excessive and ridiculous desire for sacrifice — too frequently for its own sake, regardless of any useful results — we must understand that if we are to remain in contact with all human sufferings through our sensitivity, we must also be vigilant and discerning enough to dissolve these

28 May 1912

sufferings as they come; to the clear-sighted, they are purely imaginary.

For, from this point of view, the only way to come to the help of men is to oppose to their suffering an immutable and smiling serenity which will be the highest human expression of Impersonal Love.

Finally, in a case such as the one I have just shown to you, even more than in any other, it is indispensable to keep in mind that true impersonality does not consist only in forgetting ourselves in our acts, but above all in the fact of not being aware that we are forgetting ourselves.

In short, to be truly impersonal, we must stop noticing that we are being impersonal.

And then the work can be accomplished with a large-hearted spontaneity, in all its perfection.