

Memory Guilt Punishment

- an excerpt from the teachings of Eugene Halliday

Much of human anxiety arises from the desire to act against persons that impede the fulfilling of desires, and from the **fear of reprisals** if one does so act. Let us be clear about this. In the human being there are certain forces which tend to drive always towards **getting one's own way**. They show themselves in actions that we call **egotistic**, in behaviour patterns that are aimed, crudely or subtly, at controlling other people's activities, to make them adjust to our own action intentions.

Of course, we can say that people do not **consciously** do this kind of manipulation. We can call upon the psychologist's idea of the "**unconscious**" mind, and blame this for our bad behaviour. But the contents of our "unconscious" mind have various sources, and some of these are our own concern. Let us look at the idea of the "unconscious" a little more carefully than we usually do.

We may distinguish the contents of the unconscious mind in various ways. We know that some of the memories of our activities fade away simply because they are just **not interesting enough** to be worthy of recall. We know also that some of our memories are of actually **physical painful experiences**, memories of painful diseases, which tend to make us unhappy or afraid, if we recall them. Such memories may be **repressed** simply because, when allowed uncontrolled play, they may **impede our physical and mental functions**, so that we cannot properly respond to the real situation of the present.

But we have also other kinds of memories, **memories of our intentions which jar against our self-image**, memories of occasions when our **inner attitudes** towards other persons were not of the highest.

We do not like to think of ourselves as unacceptable to others; we do not like to believe that other persons may actually dislike us; and we have historically good reasons for this.

In the ancient world, when a member of a community did an act which in any way endangered that community, that member was **punished**, that is, **his power was reduced**, so that he could no longer move freely within the group to which he belonged.

Punishment varied with the degree of seriousness of the crime, that is, the degree to which the community believed itself to have been put in danger by it. In extreme cases the punishment was **death**, preceded by **tortures** designed to **frighten** other group-members from committing similar offences. Less serious crimes might be punished by **banishment** from the group. Socrates was given the alternative of banishment or death. He chose death.

When in the ancient world a man was banished from the community, the possibilities of his survival were much reduced. He was put outside of the city walls and so exposed to all the hazards of the wilderness, where wild animals might kill him, or wandering outcasts from other communes might attack him.

Today if we commit any socially unacceptable act we still stand in danger of being refused communion with our fellows, and few can stand this refusal and still keep their inner balance. **Inter-relations with other human beings is for most of us essential to our well-being**. There may be a few individuals who can remain alone and keep their mental balance; perhaps a yogi living in a high mountain cave, engaged in deep meditation on some universal principle, or a rare individual who has dedicated himself to the contemplation of God alone. But for most of us the way of human development and happiness is through human relationships. Few men can long endure total isolation from the rest of mankind.

It is, therefore, not surprising if we do not like to think of ourselves as unacceptable to the human race at large, or to a particular community or group. Almost certainly most of us would not like to be rejected by those with whom we wish to be friends. And here is where, in general, the problem of **inner guilt** becomes important.

For a human community to be safe within its own protecting city walls, there had to be a certain degree of **harmony** between its members. Quarrels between persons had not to reach a pitch sufficient to threaten the unity of the communal group. We have many cases in history of disharmony between families or tribes resulting in their overthrow by an external enemy. The ancient Britons, but for their own internal disagreements, would not have been defeated by the invading Romans. The Scottish clans, but for their own internal quarrels, would not have fallen to the English. **Internal harmony of a group is essential to its survival**.

From this it is clear that when a quarrel between persons results in desire for revenge, the community is endangered. Thus **thoughts of revenge tend to be hidden, to be repressed into the unconscious**. We all know that **revenge can result in counter-revenge**. We all know that personal disagreements can become family disagreements, that family dis-harmonies can become communal conflicts, and that these can become international wars. Today we know also that international wars could spell the destruction of the human race.

It is because of this "unconscious" knowledge that we do not like to admit to other persons that we intend to revenge ourselves for injuries received. Revengeful persons are feared by almost everyone. This fact makes us **dislike admitting, even to ourselves, that we have any tendency to bear grudges**. We know that revenge tends to generate counter-revenge. We do not like to think of ourselves as having initiated an act which might result in retaliation against us.

Here is the source of much of our **anxiety**. All of us have been to some degree injured by others. Our paths somewhere have crossed, and we have impeded each other's purposes and so antagonised each other. It is not easy for us to make the adjustments in life which are necessary for harmonious living together. And because of the unpleasantness of being impeded we tend to feel resentful.

- **Resentfulness tends to breed desire to retaliate.**
- Possible retaliation to our retaliation makes us feel anxious.
- Anxiety creates tension in us.
- **Tension reduces the efficiency of our organism.**
- Reduced efficiency spells reduction in our capacity for self-protection.
- Reduced capacity for self-protection increases our nervousness.
- We have created an anxiety-wheel within our soul.
- This wheel will spin faster and faster if we do not find a solution to the problem of its generation.

What is the solution?

The solution is in the words, "perfect love casts out fear". But how are we going to generate perfect love inside our soul? The fearful do not have much power to love.

First we must remind ourselves that the whole of mankind is in the same predicament. **Fear** stalks through everyone's unconscious mind. We are all inheritors. We all have ancestors, and the very substance of our bodies is a portion of the original protoplasm, the very stuff of our ancestors. We cannot escape the fact that we have **tendencies** to reactivity. Already the newborn baby demonstrates to us the basics of human behaviour. We see tears as well as smiles, self-pity as well as courage. The baby can show us in little what we ourselves know ourselves to be at large.

The stuff of our bodies, the protoplasm of which we are made, is not new. It comes to us from our parents, who got it from their parents, who received it from their parents, and so backwards through history to our first ancestors. This is what is implied in the doctrine of "original sin". Simply, our substance, our flesh, is an **inheritor** of our ancestors' tendencies. Protoplasm, the substance of our bodies, is a near-perfect recording material. It records not only the shapes of things that we experience, but also the feelings and emotions and action tendencies that accompany these. Our physical substance is like a library of L.P.s, ready at any moment to be replayed and to give us once more the old sounds, the ancient statements of our ancestors.

But **we do not have to put on the records and re-play them just because we have them** in our library. We can be selective; we can discriminate between those records worth replaying, and those which are not.

Our ancestors have not had only unhappy experiences, with memories of pain and fear and revenge. They have also had their moments of love, their moments of courage and mutual forgiveness; and these records are worth replaying and listening to and agreeing with.

If we listen inside ourselves we will hear records replaying, some good, some bad. That the records are there in us is a fact. That **we do not have to obey their commands** is also a fact. We have in us the God-given power to choose to listen to them or not, to act on their recommendations or not. **The Spirit of God in us is our freedom**. And this freedom fully realised in us is the perfect Love which casts out fear.

Why does perfect love cast out fear? In this is hidden the greatest mystery in the world, the mystery of **sacrifice**.

In God, who is infinite power, Love and Reason are absolutely at one. His Reason is the Reason of Love, His Love is the Love of Reason. Here "Rea-son" is identical with **perfect justice**. "He who judges us is He who made us." He who made us knows us absolutely, without and within, **because** He made us. He knows that to be **created** is to be made **finite**, to have **limits** imposed on one's being. He Himself is infinite, unlimited in every way. He cannot make mistakes, because He has unlimited knowledge and infinite power. He knows that creatures, of whatever kind, are limited in power and knowledge. Therefore He knows that they are a **possibility** of error; a possibility, not a **necessity**.

God has created man and given to him the capacity for **free choice**. This capacity for **freedom** is man's greatest gift, the foundation of his claim to **human dignity and grace**. It is also his greatest danger, because he can, if he wills to do so, choose to revolt against his very freedom, for freedom implies **responsibility** for one's self and for one's actions.

The sense of responsibility lies heavily on the human soul, for it signifies that there is a power above man, a power that can call him to account for his actions, and for their effect on other creatures. "Inasmuch as you do it to the least of these little ones, you do it to Me," says the incarnate God.

The world is like Christ's seamless garment. **We cannot pull upon it anywhere without pulling at it, everywhere. The universe is a power-continuum, a partless whole. Action anywhere in it means action everywhere.**
