

THE FIFTH NIGHT:

*To Live in Earnest in the Here and  
Now*

The young man thought to himself, *Adlerian psychology is engaged in a thorough inquiry into interpersonal relationships. And the final goal of these interpersonal relationships is community feeling. But is this really enough? Isn't there something else that I was brought into this world to achieve? What is the meaning of life? Where am I headed, and what sort of life am I trying to lead?* The more the young man thought, the more it seemed to him that his own existence had been tiny and insignificant.

# Excessive Self-Consciousness Stifles the Self

**PHILOSOPHER:** It's been awhile, hasn't it?

**YOUTH:** Yes, I last came about a month ago. I have been thinking about the meaning of community feeling since then.

**PHILOSOPHER:** So how do you feel about it now?

**YOUTH:** Well, community feeling is definitely an attractive idea. The sense of belonging, that "it's okay to be here," for example, which we possess as a fundamental desire. I think it is a brilliant insight into our existence as social creatures.

**PHILOSOPHER:** It's a brilliant insight, except . . . ?

**YOUTH:** Funny, you caught on right away. That's right, I still have some issues with it. I'll say it straight out—I have no idea what you are going on about with your references to the universe and all that, and it ends up reeking of religion from beginning to end. There's this kind of cultish quality to it all that I just can't shake.

**PHILOSOPHER:** When Adler first proposed the concept of community feeling, there was a great deal of opposition in a similar vein. People said that psychology is supposed to be a science, and here was Adler discussing the issue of worth. That sort of thing isn't science, they said.

**YOUTH:** So in my own way, I tried to figure out why I couldn't understand what you were talking about, and I'm thinking that the order of things might be the

problem. You're starting off with the universe and inanimate objects, and the past and the future and so on, so I lose track of things. Instead, one should get a firm grasp of the "I." Next, one should contemplate one-on-one relationships. That is to say, the interpersonal relationships of "you and I." And once one has done that, the larger community should come into view.

**PHILOSOPHER:** I see. That is a good order.

**YOUTH:** Now, the first thing I want to ask about is attachment to self. You are saying that one has to stop being attached to the "I" and make the switch to "concern for others." I am sure it is exactly as you say—concern for others is important, I agree. But no matter what, we worry about ourselves; we look at ourselves all the time.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Have you thought about why we worry about ourselves?

**YOUTH:** I have. If I were a narcissist, for example—if I were in love with myself and constantly fascinated with myself—maybe that would simplify things. Because your instruction, "Have more concern for others," is a perfectly sound one. But I am not a self-loving narcissist. I am a self-loathing realist. I hate who I am, and that's exactly why I look at myself all the time. I don't have confidence in myself, and that's why I am excessively self-conscious.

**PHILOSOPHER:** At what times do you feel that you are excessively self-conscious?

**YOUTH:** Well, at meetings, for example, I have a hard time raising my hand and making myself heard. I think needless things, like *If I ask this question, they'll probably laugh at me*, or *If the point I want to make is irrelevant, I'll get ridiculed*, and so on, and I just clam up. Truthfully, I falter even when it comes to telling silly jokes in front of people. Every time, my self-consciousness kicks in and puts the brakes on, and it's as if I've been straitjacketed. My self-consciousness won't allow me to behave in an innocent way. But I don't even have to ask for your answer. I'm sure it'll be the same as always: Have courage. But you know, such words are of no use to me. Because this isn't just a matter of courage.

**PHILOSOPHER:** I see. Last time, I gave an overview of community feeling. Today, we will dig deeper.

**YOUTH:** And where will that take us?

**PHILOSOPHER:** We will probably arrive at the question, What is happiness?

**YOUTH:** Oh! So happiness lies beyond community feeling?

**PHILOSOPHER:** There is no need to rush the answers. What we need is dialogue.

**YOUTH:** All right, then. So let's get started!

# Not Self-Affirmation— Self-Acceptance

**PHILOSOPHER:** First of all, let's look at what you were just saying, about your self-consciousness putting the brakes on and not letting you behave in an innocent way. There are probably many people who experience this trouble. So let's go back to the source again and think about your goal. What could you be trying to gain by putting the brakes on your own innocent behavior?

**YOUTH:** It's the genuine desire to not be laughed at, to not be thought of as a fool.

**PHILOSOPHER:** So in other words, you do not have confidence in your innocent self, in yourself just as you are, right? And you stay away from the kind of interpersonal relationship in which you would just be yourself. But I'll bet that when you're home alone, you sing out loud and dance to music and speak in a lively voice.

**YOUTH:** Ha-ha! It's almost like you've set up a surveillance camera in my room! But yes, it's true. I can behave freely when I'm alone.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Anyone can behave like a king when they're alone. So this is an issue that should be considered in the context of interpersonal relations. Because it isn't that you don't have an innocent self—it is only that you can't do such things in front of others.

**YOUTH:** Well, what should I do then?

**PHILOSOPHER:** It's about community feeling, after all. Concretely speaking, it's making the switch from attachment to self (self-interest) to concern for others

(social interest) and gaining a sense of community feeling. Three things are needed at this point: “self-acceptance,” “confidence in others,” and “contribution to others.”

**YOUTH:** Interesting. New keywords, I see. What do they refer to?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Let’s start with self-acceptance. On our first night, I brought up that statement of Adler’s: “The important thing is not what one is born with but what use one makes of that equipment.” Do you remember this?

**YOUTH:** Yes, of course.

**PHILOSOPHER:** We cannot discard the receptacle that is the “I,” and neither can we replace it. The important thing, however, is “what use one makes of that equipment.” One changes one’s way of looking at the “I”—that is to say, one changes how one uses it.

**YOUTH:** Does that mean be more positive and have a stronger sense of self-affirmation? Think about everything more positively?

**PHILOSOPHER:** There is no need to go out of one’s way to be positive and affirm oneself. It’s not self-affirmation that we are concerned with, but self-acceptance.

**YOUTH:** Not self-affirmation, but self-acceptance?

**PHILOSOPHER:** That’s right. There is a clear difference. Self-affirmation is making suggestions to oneself, such as “I can do it” or “I am strong,” even when something is simply beyond one’s ability. It is a notion that can bring about a superiority complex, and may even be termed a way of living in which one lies to oneself. With self-acceptance, on the other hand, if one cannot do something, one is simply accepting “one’s incapable self” as is and moving forward so that one can do whatever one can. It is not a way of lying to oneself. To put it more simply, say you’ve got a score of 60 percent, but you tell yourself, *I just happened to get unlucky this time around, and the real me is 100 percent.* That is self-affirmation. By contrast, if one accepts oneself as one is, as 60 percent, and

thinks to oneself, *How should I go about getting closer to 100 percent?*—that is self-acceptance.

**YOUTH:** So even if you're only 60 percent, there's no need to be pessimistic?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Of course not. No one is perfect. Do you recall what I said when I was explaining the pursuit of superiority? That all people are in this condition of wanting to improve? Put the other way around, there is no such thing as a 100 percent person. This is something we should actively acknowledge.

**YOUTH:** Hmm. What you are saying sounds positive in various respects, but it has a negative ring to it as well.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Here I use the term "affirmative resignation."

**YOUTH:** Affirmative resignation?

**PHILOSOPHER:** This is also the case with the separation of tasks—one ascertains the things one can change and the things one cannot change. One cannot change what one is born with. But one can, under one's own power, go about changing what use one makes of that equipment. So in that case, one simply has to focus on what one can change, rather than on what one cannot. This is what I call self-acceptance.

**YOUTH:** What one can change, and what one cannot.

**PHILOSOPHER:** That's right. Accept what is irreplaceable. Accept "this me" just as it is. And have the *courage* to change what one can change. That is self-acceptance.

**YOUTH:** Hmm. That reminds me of a line that the writer Kurt Vonnegut quoted in one of his books: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference." It's in the novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*.



**PHILOSOPHER:** Yes, I know it. It is the Serenity Prayer. These words are well known and have been transmitted for many years in Christian societies.

**YOUTH:** He even used the word “courage.” I read the book so intently I should know it by heart. But I never noticed this point until now.

**PHILOSOPHER:** It’s true. We do not lack ability. We just lack courage. It all comes down to courage.

# The Difference Between Trust and Confidence

**YOUTH:** There is something about this “affirmative resignation” that sounds pessimistic. It’s just too bleak if the upshot of all this lengthy discussion is resignation.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Is that so? Resignation has the connotation of seeing clearly with fortitude and acceptance. Having a firm grasp on the truth of things—that is resignation. There is nothing pessimistic about it.

**YOUTH:** A firm grasp on the truth . . .

**PHILOSOPHER:** Of course, just because one has arrived at affirmative resignation as one’s self-acceptance, it does not automatically follow that one finds community feeling. That is the reality. When one is switching from attachment to self to concern for others, the second key concept—confidence in others—becomes absolutely essential.

**YOUTH:** Confidence in others. In other words, believing in others?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Here, I will consider the words “believing in others” in the context of distinguishing trust from confidence. First, when we speak of trust, we are referring to something that comes with set conditions. We refer to it as credit. For example, when one wants to borrow money from a bank, one has to have some kind of security. The bank calculates the amount of the loan based on the value of that security, and says, “We will lend you this much.” The attitude of “We will lend it to you on the condition that you will pay it back” or “We will

lend you as much as you are able to pay back” is not one of having confidence in someone. It is trust.

**YOUTH:** Well, that’s how bank financing works, I guess.

**PHILOSOPHER:** By contrast, from the standpoint of Adlerian psychology, the basis of interpersonal relations is founded not on trust but on confidence.

**YOUTH:** And “confidence” in this case is . . . ?

**PHILOSOPHER:** It is doing without any set conditions whatsoever when believing in others. Even if one does not have sufficient objective grounds for trusting someone, one believes. One believes unconditionally without concerning oneself with such things as security. That is confidence.

**YOUTH:** Believing unconditionally? So it’s back to your pet notion of neighborly love?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Of course, if one believes in others without setting any conditions whatsoever, there will be times when one gets taken advantage of. Just like the guarantor of a debt, there are times when one may suffer damages. The attitude of continuing to believe in someone even in such instances is what we call confidence.

**YOUTH:** Only a naïve dimwit would do such a thing! I guess you hold with the doctrine of innate human goodness, while I hold with the doctrine of innate human evilness. Believe unconditionally in complete strangers, and you’ll just get used and abused.

**PHILOSOPHER:** And there are also times when someone deceives you, and you get used that way. But look at it from the standpoint of someone who has been taken advantage of. There are people who will continue to believe in you unconditionally even if you are the one who has taken advantage of them. People who will have confidence in you no matter how they are treated. Would you be able to betray such a person again and again?

**YOUTH:** Um, no. Well, it would be . . .

**PHILOSOPHER:** I am sure it would be quite difficult for you to do such a thing.

**YOUTH:** After all that, are you saying one has to appeal to the emotions? To keep on holding the faith, like a saint, and act on the conscience of the other person? You're telling me that morals don't matter to Adler, but isn't that exactly what we're talking about here?

**PHILOSOPHER:** No, it is not. What would you say is the opposite of confidence?

**YOUTH:** An antonym of confidence? Uh . . .

**PHILOSOPHER:** It is doubt. Suppose you have placed "doubt" at the foundation of your interpersonal relations. That you live your life doubting other people—doubting your friends and even your family and those you love. What sort of relationship could possibly arise from that? The other person will detect the doubt in your eyes in an instant. He or she will have an instinctive understanding that "this person does not have confidence in me." Do you think one would be able to build some kind of positive relationship from that point? It is precisely because we lay a foundation of unconditional confidence that it is possible for us to build a deep relationship.

**YOUTH:** Okay, I guess.

**PHILOSOPHER:** The way to understand Adlerian psychology is simple. Right now, you are thinking, *If I were to have confidence in someone unconditionally, I would just get taken advantage of.* However, you are not the one who decides whether or not to take advantage. That is the other person's task. All you need to do is think, *What should I do?* If you are telling yourself, *I'll give it to him if he isn't going to take advantage of me,* it is just a relationship of trust that is based on security or conditions.

**YOUTH:** So one separates tasks there, too?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Yes. As I have stated repeatedly, carrying out the separation of tasks returns life to an astonishingly simple form. But while the principle of the separation of tasks is easy to grasp, putting it into practice is difficult. I recognize that.

**YOUTH:** Then you are telling me to keep on having confidence in everyone, to keep on believing in all other people even when they deceive me, and just go on being a naïve fool? That's not philosophy or psychology or anything of the sort—it's just the preaching of a zealot!

**PHILOSOPHER:** I reject that definitively. Adlerian psychology is not saying “have confidence in others unconditionally” on the basis of a moralistic system of values. Unconditional confidence is a means for making your interpersonal relationship with a person better and for building a horizontal relationship. If you do not have the desire to make your relationship with that person better, then go ahead and sever it. Because carrying out the severing is your task.

**YOUTH:** Then what if I've placed unconditional confidence in a friend in order to make our relationship better? I've jumped through all sorts of hoops for this friend, gladly satisfied any requests for money, and been unstinting with my time and efforts in his regard. But even in such cases, there are times when one is taken advantage of. For example, if one were horribly taken advantage of by a person one has believed in completely, wouldn't that experience lead one to a lifestyle with an “other people are my enemies” outlook?

**PHILOSOPHER:** It seems that you have not yet gained an understanding of the goal of confidence. Suppose, for example, that you are in a love relationship, but you are having doubts about your partner and you think to yourself, *I'll bet she's cheating on me*. And you start making desperate efforts in search of evidence to prove that. What do you think would happen as a result?

**YOUTH:** Well, I guess that would depend on the situation.

**PHILOSOPHER:** No, in every instance, you would find an abundance of evidence that she has been cheating on you.

**YOUTH:** Wait? Why is that?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Your partner's casual remarks, her tone when talking to someone on the phone, the times when you can't reach her . . . As long as you are looking with doubt in your eyes, everything around you will appear to be evidence that she is cheating on you. Even if she is not.

**YOUTH:** Hmm.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Right now, you are only concerned about the times you were taken advantage of, and nothing else. You focus only on the pain from the wounds you sustained on such occasions. But if you are afraid to have confidence in others, in the long run you will not be able to build deep relationships with anyone.

**YOUTH:** Well, I see what you're getting at—the main objective, which is to build deep relationships. But still, being taken advantage of is scary, and that's the reality, isn't it?

**PHILOSOPHER:** If it is a shallow relationship, when it falls apart the pain will be slight. And the joy that relationship brings each day will also be slight. It is precisely because one can gain the courage to enter into deeper relationships by having confidence in others that the joy of one's interpersonal relations can grow, and one's joy in life can grow, too.

**YOUTH:** No! That's not what I was talking about, you're changing the subject again. The courage to overcome the fear of being taken advantage of—where does it come from?

**PHILOSOPHER:** It comes from self-acceptance. If one can simply accept oneself as one is, and ascertain what one can do and what one cannot, one becomes able to

understand that “taking advantage” is the other person’s task, and getting to the core of “confidence in others” becomes less difficult.

**YOUTH:** You’re saying that taking advantage of someone is the other person’s task, and one can’t do anything about it? That I should be resigned, in an affirmative way? Your arguments always ignore our emotions. What does one do about all the anger and sadness one feels when one is taken advantage of?

**PHILOSOPHER:** When one is sad, one should be sad to one’s heart’s content. It is precisely when one tries to escape the pain and sadness that one gets stuck and ceases to be able to build deep relationships with anyone. Think about it this way. We can believe. And we can doubt. But we are aspiring to see others as our comrades. To believe or to doubt—the choice should be clear.

# The Essence of Work Is a Contribution to the Common Good

**YOUTH:** All right. Well, suppose I have managed to attain self-acceptance. And that I have attained confidence in others, too. What kind of changes would there be in me then?

**PHILOSOPHER:** First, one accepts one's irreplaceable "this me" just as it is. That is self-acceptance. Then, one places unconditional confidence in other people. That is confidence in others. You can accept yourself, and you can have confidence in others. So what are other people to you now?

**YOUTH:** My comrades?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Exactly. In effect, placing confidence in others is connected to seeing others as comrades. It is because they are one's comrades that one can have confidence in them. If they were not one's comrades, one would not be able to reach the level of confidence. And then, having other people as one's comrades connects to finding refuge in the community one belongs to. So one can gain the sense of belonging, that "it's okay to be here."

**YOUTH:** In other words, you're saying that to feel "it's okay to be here," one has to see others as comrades. And that to see others as comrades, one needs both self-acceptance and confidence in others.

**PHILOSOPHER:** That's right. You are grasping this more quickly now. To take it a step farther, one may say that people who think of others as enemies have not attained self-acceptance and do not have enough confidence in others.



**YOUTH:** All right. It is true that people seek the sense of belonging, that “it’s okay to be here.” And to get that they need self-acceptance and confidence in others. I have no objection to that. But I don’t know. Can one really gain a sense of belonging just by seeing others as comrades and having confidence in them?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Of course, community feeling is not something that is attainable with just self-acceptance and confidence in others. It is at this point that the third key concept—contribution to others—becomes necessary.

**YOUTH:** Contribution to others?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Is to act, in some way, on one’s comrades. To attempt to contribute. That is “contribution to others.”

**YOUTH:** So when you say “contribute,” you mean to show a spirit of self-sacrifice and to be of service to those around you?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Contribution to others does not connote self-sacrifice. Adler goes so far as to warn that those who sacrifice their own lives for others are people who have conformed to society too much. And please do not forget: We are truly aware of our own worth only when we feel that our existence and behavior are beneficial to the community, that is to say, when one feels “I am of use to someone.” Do you remember this? In other words, contribution to others, rather than being about getting rid of the “I” and being of service to someone, is actually something one does in order to be truly aware of the worth of the “I.”

**YOUTH:** Contributing to others is for oneself?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Yes. There is no need to sacrifice the self.

**YOUTH:** Uh-oh, your argument is starting to crumble here, isn’t it? You’ve done a wonderful job of digging your own grave. In order to satisfy the “I,” one makes oneself of service to others. Isn’t that the very definition of hypocrisy? I said it before: Your entire argument is hypocritical. It’s a slippery argument. Look, I

would rather believe in the villain who is honest about his desires than the good guy who tells a pack of lies.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Those are a lot of hasty conclusions. You do not understand community feeling yet.

**YOUTH:** Then I wish you would provide concrete examples of what you consider to be contribution to others.

**PHILOSOPHER:** The most easily understood contribution to others is probably work. To be in society and join the workforce. Or to do the work of taking care of one's household. Labor is not a means of earning money. It is through labor that one makes contributions to others and commits to one's community, and that one truly feels "I am of use to someone" and even comes to accept one's existential worth.

**YOUTH:** You are saying that the essence of work is contribution to others?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Making money is a major factor too, of course. It is something akin to that Dostoevsky quote you happened upon: "Money is coined freedom." But there are people who have so much money that they could never use it all. And many of these people are continually busy with their work. Why do they work? Are they driven by boundless greed? No. They work so they are able to contribute to others, and also to confirm their sense of belonging, their feeling that "it's okay to be here." Wealthy people who, on having amassed a great fortune, focus their energies on charitable activities, are doing so in order to attain a sense of their own worth and confirm for themselves that "it's okay to be here."

**YOUTH:** Hmm, I suppose that is one truth. But . . .

**PHILOSOPHER:** But what?



Self-acceptance: accepting one's irreplaceable "this me" just as it is. Confidence in others: to place unconditional confidence at the base of one's interpersonal relations rather than seeding doubt. The young man found these two concepts sufficiently convincing. Contribution to others, however, was something he could not quite grasp. *If that contribution is supposed to be "for other people," then it would have to be one of bitter self-sacrifice. On the other hand, if that contribution is actually "for oneself," then it's the height of hypocrisy. This point has to be made utterly clear.* In a resolute tone of voice, the young man continued.

# Young People Walk Ahead of Adults

**YOUTH:** I will acknowledge that work has aspects of contribution to others. But the logic that says that officially one is contributing to others when, in actuality, one is doing it for oneself, is nothing other than hypocrisy. How do you explain that?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Imagine the following kind of scene. It's after dinner at home, and there are still dishes left on the table. The children have gone off to their rooms, and the husband is sitting on the sofa watching television. It's been left to the wife (me) to do the dishes and clear everything up. To make matters worse, the family takes that for granted, and they don't make the slightest effort to help. In such a situation, normally one would think, *Why won't they give me a hand?* or *Why do I have to do all the work?* Even if I do not hear the words "thank you" from my family while I am cleaning up, I want them to think that I am of use to the family. Instead of thinking about what others can do for me, I want to think about, and put into practice, what I can do for other people. Just by having that feeling of contribution, the reality right in front of me will take on a completely different hue. In fact, if I am grumbling to myself as I wash the dishes, I am probably not much fun to be around, so everyone just wants to keep their distance. On the other hand, if I'm humming away to myself and washing the dishes in good spirits, the children might come and give me a hand. At the very least, I'd be creating an atmosphere in which it is easier for them to offer their help.

**YOUTH:** Well, that might be the case in that setting, anyway.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Now, how come I have a feeling of contribution in that setting? I have it because I am able to think of the members of my family as comrades. If I cannot do that, inevitably there will be thoughts running through my head like, *Why am I the only one doing this?* and *Why won't anyone give me a hand?* Contribution that is carried out while one is seeing other people as enemies may indeed lead to hypocrisy. But if other people are one's comrades, that should never happen, regardless of the contributions one makes. You have been fixating on the word "hypocrisy" because you do not understand community feeling yet.

**YOUTH:** Okay . . .

**PHILOSOPHER:** For the sake of convenience, up to this point I have discussed self-acceptance, confidence in others, and contribution to others, in that order. However, these three are linked as an indispensable whole, in a sort of circular structure. It is because one accepts oneself just as one is—one self-accepts—that one can have "confidence in others" without the fear of being taken advantage of. And it is because one can place unconditional confidence in others, and feel that people are one's comrades, that one can engage in "contribution to others." Further, it is because one contributes to others that one can have the deep awareness that "I am of use to someone" and accept oneself just as one is. One can self-accept. The notes you took down the other day, do you have them with you?

**YOUTH:** Oh, you mean that note on the objectives put forward by Adlerian psychology? I've kept it on me ever since that day, of course. Here it is: "The two objectives for behavior: to be self-reliant and to live in harmony with society. The two objectives for the psychology that supports these behaviors: the consciousness that *I have the ability* and the consciousness that *people are my comrades*."

**PHILOSOPHER:** If you overlap the content of this note with what we have just been discussing, you should be able to gain a deeper understanding. In other words, "to be self-reliant" and "the consciousness that *I have the ability*" correspond to our discussion of self-acceptance. And then "to live in harmony

with society” and “the consciousness that *people are my comrades*” connect to confidence in others and then to contribution to others.

**YOUTH:** I see. So the objective of life is community feeling. I think it will be some time before I can get this clear in my head, though.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Yes, it probably will. As Adler himself said, “Understanding a human being is no easy matter. Of all the forms of psychology, individual psychology is probably the most difficult to learn and put into practice.”

**YOUTH:** That’s exactly right! Even if the theories are convincing, it’s hard to put them into practice.

**PHILOSOPHER:** It is even said that to truly understand Adlerian psychology and apply it to actually changing one’s way of living, one needs “half the number of years one has lived.” In other words, if you were to start studying it at the age of forty, it would take another twenty years, until you turned sixty. If you were to start studying at the age of twenty, it would take ten years, until you turned thirty. You are still young. Starting at such an early stage in life means that you might be able to change more quickly. In the sense that you can change quickly, you are walking ahead of the adults of the world. To go about changing yourself and making a new world, in a way you are ahead of me, too. It is okay to lose your way or lose focus. Do not be dependent on vertical relationships or be afraid of being disliked, and just make your way forward freely. If all the adults could see that young people were walking ahead of them, I am sure the world would change dramatically.

**YOUTH:** I am walking ahead of you?

**PHILOSOPHER:** You certainly are. We walk on the same ground, and you are moving on ahead of me.

**YOUTH:** Ha-ha. You’re the first person I’ve ever met who would say such a thing to someone young enough to be his son.

**PHILOSOPHER:** I would like more and more young people to learn about Adler's thought. And I would like more adults to learn about it, too. Because people can change, regardless of their ages.

# Workaholism Is a Life-Lie

**YOUTH:** All right. I readily admit that I do not have the courage to take steps toward self-acceptance or confidence in others. But is this really the fault only of the “I”? Isn’t it also actually a problem brought about by other people, who accuse me unreasonably and attack me?

**PHILOSOPHER:** To be sure, not everyone in the world is a good and virtuous person. One goes through any number of unpleasant experiences in one’s interpersonal relations. But there is something one must not get wrong at this juncture: the fact that, in every instance, it is “that person” who attacks you who has the problem, and it is certainly not the case that everyone is bad. People with neurotic lifestyles tend to sprinkle their speech with such words as “everyone” and “always” and “everything.” “Everyone hates me,” they will say, or “It’s always me who takes a loss,” or “Everything is wrong.” If you think you might be in the habit of using such generalizing statements, you should be careful.

**YOUTH:** Well, that does sound rather familiar.

**PHILOSOPHER:** In Adlerian psychology, we think of this as a way of living that is lacking in “harmony of life.” It is a way of living in which one sees only a part of things but judges the whole.

**YOUTH:** Harmony of life?

**PHILOSOPHER:** In the teachings of Judaism, one finds the following anecdote: “If there are ten people, one will be someone who criticizes you no matter what you do. This person will come to dislike you, and you will not learn to like him



either. Then, there will be two others who accept everything about you and whom you accept too, and you will become close friends with them. The remaining seven people will be neither of these types.” Now, do you focus on the one person who dislikes you? Do you pay more attention to the two who love you? Or would you focus on the crowd, the other seven? A person who is lacking in harmony of life will see only the one person he dislikes and will make a judgment of the world from that.

**YOUTH:** Intriguing.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Some time ago, I participated in a workshop for people who stammer and their families. Do you know anyone who has a stammer?

**YOUTH:** Yes, there was a student at the school I went to who stuttered. That must be hard to deal with, both for the person who has it and for his family, too.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Why is stammering hard to deal with? The view in Adlerian psychology is that people who suffer from stammering are concerned only about their own way of speaking, and they have feelings of inferiority and see their lives as unbearably hard. And they become too self-conscious as a result and start tripping over their words more and more.

**YOUTH:** They are concerned only about their own way of speaking?

**PHILOSOPHER:** That’s right. There are not many people who will laugh at or make fun of someone when he trips over his words now and then. To use the example I just mentioned, it would probably be no more than one person in ten, at most. In any case, with the sort of foolish person who would take such an attitude, it is best to simply sever the relationship. But if one is lacking in harmony of life, one will focus only on that person and end up thinking, *Everyone is laughing at me.*

**YOUTH:** But that’s just human nature!

**PHILOSOPHER:** I have a reading group that meets on a regular basis, and one of the participants has a stammer. It comes out sometimes when it's his turn to read. But not a single person there is the sort who would laugh at him for that. Everyone just sits quietly and waits in a quite natural way for the next words to come out. I am sure this is not a phenomenon that is isolated to my reading group. When one's interpersonal relations do not go well, it cannot be blamed on a stammer or a fear of blushing or anything of the sort. Even though the problem is really that one has not attained self-acceptance or confidence in others, or contribution to others, for that matter, one is focusing on only one tiny part of things that simply should not matter and from that trying to form judgments with regard to the entire world. This is a misguided lifestyle that is lacking in harmony of life.

**YOUTH:** Did you actually convey such a harsh idea to people who suffer from stammering?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Of course. At first, there were some adverse reactions, but by the end of the three-day workshop, everyone was in deep agreement with it.

**YOUTH:** It certainly is a fascinating argument. But focusing on people who suffer from stammering seems like a rather special example. Could you give me any others?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Well, another would be the workaholic. This, too, is an example of a person who is clearly lacking in harmony of life.

**YOUTH:** A workaholic is? Why is that?

**PHILOSOPHER:** People who suffer from stammering are looking at only a part of things but judging the whole. With workaholics, the focus is solely on one specific aspect of life.

They probably try to justify that by saying, "It's busy at work, so I don't have enough time to think about my family." But this is a life-lie. They are simply trying to avoid their other responsibilities by using work as an excuse. One ought

to concern oneself with everything, from household chores and child-rearing to one's friendships and hobbies and so on. Adler does not recognize ways of living in which certain aspects are unusually dominant.

**YOUTH:** Ah . . . That's exactly the sort of person my father was. It was just: Be a workaholic, bury yourself in your work, and produce results. And then rule over the family on the grounds that you are the breadwinner. He was a very feudalistic person.

**PHILOSOPHER:** In a sense, that is a way of living of refusing to acknowledge one's life tasks. "Work" does not mean having a job at a company. Work in the home, child-rearing, contributing to the local society, hobbies, and all manner of other things are work. Companies and such are just one small part of that. A way of living that acknowledges only company work is one that is lacking in harmony of life.

**YOUTH:** It's exactly as you say! And it's not as if the family he's supporting has any say in the matter, either. You can't argue with your father when he growls with a violent tone of voice, "It's thanks to me that there's food on the table."

**PHILOSOPHER:** Such a father has probably been able to recognize his own worth only on the level of acts. He works all those hours, brings in enough money to support a family, and is recognized by society—and, on that basis, he views himself as having greater worth than the other members of his family. For each and every one of us, however, there comes a time when one can no longer serve as the provider. When one gets older and reaches retirement age, for example, one may have no choice but to live off one's pension or support from one's children. Even when one is young, injury or poor health can lead to being unable work any longer. On such occasions, those who can accept themselves only on the level of acts are severely damaged.

**YOUTH:** You mean those people whose lifestyle is all about work?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Yes. People whose lives lack harmony.

**YOUTH:** In that case, I think I'm starting to get what you mean by the level of being, which you brought up last time. And I certainly haven't given much thought to the fact that someday I won't be able to work any longer or do anything on the level of acts.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Does one accept oneself on the level of acts, or on the level of being? This is truly a question that relates to the courage to be happy.

# You Can Be Happy Now

**YOUTH:** The courage to be happy. Well, let's hear what *kind* of courage that should be.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Yes, that is an important point.

**YOUTH:** You say that all problems are interpersonal relationship problems. And then you turn that around and say that our happiness is to be found in our interpersonal relations, too. But I still find these aspects hard to accept. Is what human beings call happiness merely something within our good interpersonal relations? That is to say, do our lives exist for such minuscule repose and joy?

**PHILOSOPHER:** I have a good idea of the issues you are grappling with. The first time I attended a lecture on Adlerian psychology, the lecturer, Oscar Christensen, who was a disciple of one of Adler's disciples, made the following statement: "Those who hear my talk today can be happy right now, this very instant. But those who do not will never be able to be happy."

**YOUTH:** Wow! That's straight from the mouth of a con man. You're not telling me you fell for that, are you?

**PHILOSOPHER:** What is happiness to human beings? This is a subject that has been one of the consistent threads of philosophy since ancient times. I had always regarded psychology as nothing more than a field of philosophy, and as such had very little interest in psychology as a whole. So it was as a student of philosophy that I had concerned myself, in my own way, with the question: What is happiness? I would be remiss if I did not admit to having felt some

reluctance on hearing Christensen's words. However, at the same time that I experienced that reluctance, I realized something. I had given much deep thought to the true character of happiness. I had searched for answers. But I had not always given deep thought to the question: How can one be happy? It occurred to me then that even though I was a student of philosophy, maybe I wasn't happy.

**YOUTH:** I see. So your first encounter with Adlerian psychology began with a feeling of incongruity?

**PHILOSOPHER:** That's right.

**YOUTH:** Then, please tell me: Did you eventually become happy?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Of course.

**YOUTH:** How can you be so sure?

**PHILOSOPHER:** For a human being, the greatest unhappiness is not being able to like oneself. Adler came up with an extremely simple answer to address this reality. Namely, that the feeling of "I am beneficial to the community" or "I am of use to someone" is the only thing that can give one a true awareness that one has worth.

**YOUTH:** Do you mean the "contribution to others" you mentioned earlier?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Yes. And this is an important point: When we speak of contribution to others, it doesn't matter if the contribution is not a visible one.

**YOUTH:** It doesn't matter if the contribution is not a visible one?

**PHILOSOPHER:** You are not the one who decides if your contributions are of use. That is the task of other people, and is not an issue in which you can intervene. In principle, there is not even any way you can know whether you have really made a contribution. That is to say, when we are engaging in this contribution

to others, the contribution does not have to be a visible one—all we need is the subjective sense that “I am of use to someone,” or in other words, a feeling of contribution.

**YOUTH:** Wait a minute! If that’s the case, then what you are calling happiness is . . .

**PHILOSOPHER:** Do you see it now? In a word, happiness is the feeling of contribution. That is the definition of happiness.

**YOUTH:** But . . . but that’s . . .

**PHILOSOPHER:** Is something wrong?

**YOUTH:** There’s no way I can accept such a simplistic definition. Look, I’m not forgetting what you told me before. You said that even though on the level of acts, one might not be of use to anyone, on the level of being, every person is of use. But if that’s the case, according to your logic, all human beings would be happy!

**PHILOSOPHER:** All human beings can be happy. But it must be understood that this does not mean all human beings *are* happy. Whether it is on the level of acts or on the level of being, one needs to *feel* that one is of use to someone. That is to say, one needs a feeling of contribution.

**YOUTH:** So you are saying that the reason I am not happy is that I don’t have a feeling of contribution?

**PHILOSOPHER:** That is correct.

**YOUTH:** Then how can I get a feeling of contribution? By working? Through volunteer activities?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Earlier, we were talking about desire for recognition. In response to my statement that one must not seek recognition, you said that desire for

recognition is a universal desire.

**YOUTH:** Yes, I did. But honestly, I'm still not entirely certain about this point.

**PHILOSOPHER:** But I am sure that the reason people seek recognition is clear to you now. People want to like themselves. They want to feel that they have worth. In order to feel that, they want a feeling of contribution that tells them "I am of use to someone." And they seek recognition from others as an easy means for gaining that feeling of contribution.

**YOUTH:** You are saying that desire for recognition is a means for gaining a feeling of contribution?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Isn't it so?

**YOUTH:** No way. That contradicts everything you've been saying until now. Because isn't receiving recognition from others supposed to be a means for gaining a feeling of contribution? And then you say, "Happiness is the feeling of contribution." If it is, then fulfilling one's desire for recognition is directly linked with happiness, isn't it? Ha-ha! At last, you've acknowledged the necessity of the desire for recognition.

**PHILOSOPHER:** You are forgetting an important issue. If one's means for gaining a feeling of contribution turns out to be "being recognized by others," in the long run, one will have no choice but to walk through life in accordance with other people's wishes. There is no freedom in a feeling of contribution that is gained through the desire for recognition. We are beings who choose freedom while aspiring to happiness.

**YOUTH:** So one can have happiness only if one has freedom?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Yes. Freedom as an institution may differ depending on the country, the times, or the culture. But freedom in our interpersonal relations is universal.



**YOUTH:** There's no way that you will acknowledge the desire for recognition?

**PHILOSOPHER:** If one really has a feeling of contribution, one will no longer have any need for recognition from others. Because one will already have the real awareness that "I am of use to someone," without needing to go out of one's way to be acknowledged by others. In other words, a person who is obsessed with the desire for recognition does not have any community feeling yet, and has not managed to engage in self-acceptance, confidence in others, or contribution to others.

**YOUTH:** So if one just has community feeling, the desire for recognition will disappear?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Yes, it will disappear. There is no need for recognition from others.



The philosopher's points could be summed up as follows: People can be truly aware of their worth only when they are able to feel "I am of use to someone." However, it doesn't matter if the contribution one makes at such a time is without any visible form. It is enough to have the subjective sense of being of use to someone, that is to say, a feeling of contribution. And then the philosopher arrives at the following conclusion: Happiness is the feeling of contribution. There certainly seemed to be aspects of the truth there. *But is that really all that happiness is? Not if it's the happiness I'm searching for!*

# Two Paths Traveled by Those Wanting to Be “Special Beings”

**YOUTH:** You still have not answered my question. Maybe I could actually learn to like myself through contribution to others. Maybe I could come to feel that I have worth, that I am not a worthless being. But is that all a person needs to be happy? Having come into this world, I think that unless I am able to accomplish the sort of grand undertaking that future generations will remember me for, unless I can prove myself as “I, who am no one else but me,” I will never find true happiness. You are trying to frame everything within interpersonal relations without saying a thing about self-realizing happiness. If you ask me, that’s nothing but evasion!

**PHILOSOPHER:** I’m not really sure what you mean by “self-realizing happiness.” What exactly are you referring to?

**YOUTH:** It’s something that is different for each person. I suppose there are those who want to succeed in society and those who have more personal objectives—a researcher endeavoring to develop a wonder drug, for instance, or an artist who strives to create a satisfying body of work.

**PHILOSOPHER:** What is it for you?

**YOUTH:** I still don’t really know what I am looking for or what I’ll want to do in the future. But I know that I’ve got to do something. There’s no way I’m going to spend the rest of my days working in a university library. When I find a dream that I can devote my life to, and I attain self-realization, that’s when I’ll

experience true happiness. My father was someone who buried himself in his work from day to night, and I have no idea if that was happiness to him or not. To my eyes, at least, he seemed forever busy and never happy. That is not the kind of life I want to lead.

**PHILOSOPHER:** All right. If you think about this point using children who engage in problem behavior as an example, it might be easier to grasp.

**YOUTH:** Problem behavior?

**PHILOSOPHER:** That's right. First of all, we human beings have a universal desire that is referred to as "pursuit of superiority." Do you recall our discussion of this?

**YOUTH:** Yes. Simply put, it's a term that indicates "hoping to improve" and "pursuing an ideal state."

**PHILOSOPHER:** There are many children who, in their early stages, try to be especially good. In particular, they obey their parents, comport themselves in a socially acceptable manner, apply themselves assiduously to their studies and in sports, and excel in extracurricular activities as well. In this way, they try to get their parents to acknowledge them. However, when being especially good does not work out—their studies or sports don't go well, for example—they do an about-face and try to be especially bad.

**YOUTH:** Why do they do that?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Whether they are trying to be especially good, or trying to be especially bad, the goal is the same: to attract the attention of other people, get out of the "normal" condition and become a "special being." That is their only goal.

**YOUTH:** Hmm. All right, please go on.

**PHILOSOPHER:** In any case, whether it is one's studies or one's participation in sports, either way one needs to make a constant effort if one is to produce any kind of significant results. But the children who try to be especially bad—that is to say, the ones who engage in problem behavior—are endeavoring to attract the attention of other people even as they continue to avoid any such healthy effort. In Adlerian psychology, this is referred to as the “pursuit of easy superiority.” Take, for example, the problem child who disrupts lessons by throwing erasers or speaking in a loud voice. He is certain to get the attention of his friends and teachers. Even if it is something that is limited to that place, he will probably succeed in becoming a special being. But that is a pursuit of easy superiority, and it is an unhealthy attitude.

**YOUTH:** So children who commit delinquent acts are engaging in the pursuit of easy superiority, too?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Yes, they are. All types of problem behavior, from refusing to attend school, to wrist cutting, to underage drinking and smoking, and so on, are forms of the pursuit of easy superiority. And your shut-in friend, whom you told me about at the beginning, is engaging in it, too. When a child engages in problem behavior, his parents and other adults rebuke him. Being rebuked, more than anything else, puts stress on the child. But even if it is in the form of rebuke, the child wants his parents' attention. He wants to be a special being, and the form that attention takes doesn't matter. So in a sense, it is only natural that he does not stop engaging in problem behavior, no matter how harshly he is rebuked.

**YOUTH:** It's because of their rebuking that he doesn't stop the problem behavior?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Exactly. Because the parents and other adults are giving him attention through the act of rebuking.

**YOUTH:** But previously, you spoke of the goal of problem behavior as being revenge on the parents, right? Does that connect with this in some way?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Yes. “Revenge” and “pursuit of easy superiority” are easily linked. One makes trouble for another person while trying at the same time to be “special.”

# The Courage to Be Normal

**YOUTH:** But how . . . ? It would be impossible for all human beings to be especially good, or anything like that, wouldn't it? No matter what, people have their strengths and weaknesses, and there will always be differences. There's only a handful of geniuses in the world, and not everyone is cut out to be an honors student. So for all the losers, there's nothing for it besides being especially bad.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Yes, it's that Socratic paradox, that no one desires evil. Because to children who engage in problem behavior, even violent acts and theft are accomplishments of "good."

**YOUTH:** But that's horrible! That's a line of reasoning with no way out.

**PHILOSOPHER:** What Adlerian psychology emphasizes at this juncture are the words "the courage to be normal."

**YOUTH:** The courage to be normal?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Why is it necessary to be special? Probably because one cannot accept one's normal self. And it is precisely for this reason that when being especially good becomes a lost cause, one makes the huge leap to being especially bad—the opposite extreme. But is being normal, being ordinary, really such a bad thing? Is it something inferior? Or, in truth, isn't everybody normal? It is necessary to think this through to its logical conclusion.

**YOUTH:** So are you saying that I should be normal?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Self-acceptance is the vital first step. If you are able to possess the courage to be normal, your way of looking at the world will change dramatically.

**YOUTH:** But . . .

**PHILOSOPHER:** You are probably rejecting normality because you equate being normal with being incapable. Being normal is not being incapable. One does not need to flaunt one's superiority.

**YOUTH:** Fine, I acknowledge the danger of aiming to be special. But does one really need to make the deliberate choice to be normal? If I pass my time in this world in an utterly humdrum way, if I lead a pointless life without leaving any record or memory of my existence whatsoever, am I to just be satisfied with my lot, because that's the sort of human being I am? You've got to be joking. I'd abandon such a life in a second!

**PHILOSOPHER:** You want to be special, no matter what?

**YOUTH:** No! Look, accepting what you call "normal" would lead to me having to affirm my idle self! It would just be saying, "This is all I am capable of and that's fine." I refuse to accept such an idle way of life. Do you think that Napoleon or Alexander the Great or Einstein or Martin Luther King accepted "normal"? And how about Socrates and Plato? Not a chance! More than likely, they all lived their lives while carrying the torch of a great ideal or objective. Another Napoleon could never emerge with your line of reasoning. You are trying to rid the world of geniuses!

**PHILOSOPHER:** So what you are saying is that one needs lofty goals in life.

**YOUTH:** But that's obvious!



*"The courage to be normal"—what truly dreadful words. Are Adler and this philosopher really telling me to choose such a path? To go about my life*

*as just another soul among the utterly ordinary, faceless masses? I'm no genius, of course. Maybe "normal" is the only choice I have. Maybe I will just have to accept my mediocre self and surrender to leading a mediocre, everyday existence. But I will fight it. Whatever happens, I will oppose this man to the bitter end. We seem to be approaching the heart of our discussion.* The young man's pulse was racing, and despite the wintry chill in the air, his clenched fists shone with sweat.



# Life Is a Series of Moments

**PHILOSOPHER:** All right. When you speak of lofty goals, I am guessing that you have an image of something like a mountain climber aiming for the top.

**YOUTH:** Yes, that's right. People, myself included, aim for the top of the mountain.

**PHILOSOPHER:** But if life were climbing a mountain in order to reach the top, then the greater part of life would end up being "en route." That is to say, one's "real life" would begin with one's trek on the mountainside, and the distance one has traveled up until that point would be a "tentative life" led by a "tentative me."

**YOUTH:** I guess that's one way of putting it. The way I am now, I am definitely an "en route" person.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Now, suppose you didn't make it to the mountaintop, what would that mean for your life? With accidents and diseases and the like, people don't always make it all the way, and mountain climbing itself is fraught with pitfalls and often ends in failure. So one's life would be interrupted "en route," with just this "tentative me" leading a "tentative life." What kind of life would that be?

**YOUTH:** That's . . . Well, that'd be a case of getting one's just deserts. So I didn't have the ability, or I didn't have the physical strength to climb a mountain, or I wasn't lucky, or I lacked the skill—that's all! Yes, that is a reality I am prepared to accept.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Adlerian psychology has a different standpoint. People who think of life as being like climbing a mountain are treating their own existences as lines. As if there is a line that started the instant one came into this world, and that continues in all manner of curves of varying sizes until it arrives at the summit, and then at long last reaches its terminus, which is death. This conception, which treats life as a kind of story, is an idea that links with Freudian etiology (the attributing of causes), and is a way of thinking that makes the greater part of life into something that is “en route.”

**YOUTH:** Well, what is your image of life?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Do not treat it as a line. Think of life as a series of dots. If you look through a magnifying glass at a solid line drawn with chalk, you will discover that what you thought was a line is actually a series of small dots. Seemingly linear existence is actually a series of dots; in other words, life is a series of moments.

**YOUTH:** A series of moments?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Yes. It is a series of moments called “now.” We can live only in the here and now. Our lives exist only in moments. Adults who do not know this attempt to impose “linear” lives onto young people. Their thinking is that staying on the conventional tracks—good university, big company, stable household—is a happy life. But life is not made up of lines or anything like that.

**YOUTH:** So there’s no need for life planning or career planning?

**PHILOSOPHER:** If life were a line, then life planning would be possible. But our lives are only a series of dots. A well-planned life is not something to be treated as necessary or unnecessary, as it is impossible.

**YOUTH:** Oh, nonsense! What an absurd idea!

# Live Like You're Dancing

**PHILOSOPHER:** What is wrong with it?

**YOUTH:** Your argument not only denies the making of plans in life, it goes as far as to deny even making efforts. Take, for example, the life of someone who has dreamed of being a violinist ever since childhood, and who, after years of strict training, has at long last become an active member in a celebrated orchestra. Or another life, one of intensive studies that successfully leads to the passing of the bar examination and becoming a lawyer. Neither of these lives would be possible without objectives and plans.

**PHILOSOPHER:** So in other words, like mountain climbers aiming to reach the mountaintop, they have persevered on their paths?

**YOUTH:** Of course!

**PHILOSOPHER:** But is that really the case? Isn't it that these people have lived each and every instant of their lives here and now? That is to say, rather than living lives that are "en route," they are always living here and now. For example, the person who had dreams of becoming a violinist was always looking at pieces of music, and concentrating on each piece, and on each and every measure and note.

**YOUTH:** Would they attain their objectives that way?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Think of it this way: Life is a series of moments, which one lives as if one were dancing, right now, around and around each passing instant. And when one happens to survey one's surroundings, one realizes, *I guess I've made it*

*this far*. Among those who have danced the dance of the violin, there are people who stay the course and become professional musicians. Among those who have danced the dance of the bar examination, there are people who become lawyers. There are people who have danced the dance of writing and become authors. Of course, it also happens that people end up in entirely different places. But none of these lives came to an end “en route.” It is enough if one finds fulfillment in the here and now one is dancing.

**YOUTH:** It’s enough if one can dance in the now?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Yes. With dance, it is the dancing itself that is the goal, and no one is concerned with arriving somewhere by doing it. Naturally, it may happen that one arrives somewhere as a result of having danced. Since one is dancing, one does not stay in the same place. But there is no destination.

**YOUTH:** A life without a destination, who ever heard of such a thing? Who would acknowledge such an unsteady life, that bends whichever way the wind blows?

**PHILOSOPHER:** The kind of life that you speak of, which tries to reach a destination, may be termed a “kinetic (dynamic) life.” By contrast, the kind of dancing life I am talking about could be called an “energeial (actual-active-state) life.”

**YOUTH:** Kinetic? Energeial?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Let’s refer to Aristotle’s explanation. Ordinary motion—which is referred to as *kinesis*—has a starting point and an end point. The movement from the starting point to the end point is optimal if it is carried out as efficiently and as quickly as possible. If one can take an express train, there is no need to ride the local one that makes every stop.

**YOUTH:** In other words, if one’s destination is to become a lawyer, it’s best to get there as quickly and as efficiently as one can.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Yes. And the road one takes to get to that destination is, in the sense that one's goal has not yet been reached, incomplete. This is kinetic life.

**YOUTH:** Because it's halfway?

**PHILOSOPHER:** That's right. *Energeia*, on the other hand, is a kind of movement in which what is "now forming" is what "has been formed."

**YOUTH:** What is "now forming" is what "has been formed"?

**PHILOSOPHER:** One might also think of it as movement in which the process itself is treated as the outcome. Dance is like that, and so is a journey.

**YOUTH:** Ah, I'm getting confused . . . What is this about a journey?

**PHILOSOPHER:** What kind of goal is the act of going on a journey? Suppose you are going on a journey to Egypt. Would you try to arrive at the Great Pyramid of Giza as efficiently and quickly as possible, and then head straight back home by the shortest route? One would not call that a "journey." You should be on a journey the moment you step outside your home, and all the moments on the way to your destination should be a journey. Of course, there might be circumstances that prevent you from making it to the pyramid, but that does not mean you didn't go on a journey. This is "energeial life."

**YOUTH:** I guess I'm just not getting this. Weren't you refuting the kind of value system of aiming for the mountaintop? What happens if you liken energeial life to mountain climbing?

**PHILOSOPHER:** If the goal of climbing a mountain were to get to the top, that would be a kinetic act. To take it to the extreme, it wouldn't matter if you went to the mountaintop in a helicopter, stayed there for five minutes or so, and then headed back in the helicopter again. Of course, if you didn't make it to the mountaintop, that would mean the mountain-climbing expedition was a failure. However, if the goal is mountain climbing itself, and not just getting to the top,

one could say it is energeial. In this case, in the end it doesn't matter whether one makes it to the mountaintop or not.

**YOUTH:** That sort of argument is just ridiculous! You've fallen into a completely self-defeating contradiction. Before you lose face before the whole wide world, I'll cut through your shameless nonsense, once and for all.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Oh, I'd be much obliged.

# Shine a Light on the Here and Now

**YOUTH:** Look, in your refutation of etiology, you rejected focusing on the past. You said that the past does not exist, and that it has no meaning. I acknowledge those points. It is true that one cannot change the past. If there is something that can be changed, it is the future. But now, by advocating this energetic way of living, you are refuting planning; that is to say, you are rejecting even changing one's future of one's own volition. So while you reject looking back, you are rejecting looking forward, too. It's like you're telling me to just walk blindfolded along a pathless path.

**PHILOSOPHER:** You can see neither behind you nor in front of you?

**YOUTH:** That's right, I can't see!

**PHILOSOPHER:** Isn't that only natural? Where is the problem here?

**YOUTH:** What? What are you talking about?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Imagine that you are standing on a theater stage. If the house lights are on, you'll probably be able to see all the way to the back of the hall. But if you're under a bright spotlight, you won't be able to make out even the front row. That's exactly how it is with our lives. It's because we cast a dim light on our entire lives that we are able to see the past and the future. Or at least we imagine we can. But if one is shining a bright spotlight on here and now, one cannot see the past or the future anymore.

**YOUTH:** A bright spotlight?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Yes. We should live more earnestly only here and now. The fact that you think you can see the past, or predict the future, is proof that rather than living earnestly here and now, you are living in a dim twilight. Life is a series of moments, and neither the past nor the future exists. You are trying to give yourself a way out by focusing on the past and the future. What happened in the past has nothing whatsoever to do with your here and now, and what the future may hold is not a matter to think about here and now. If you are living earnestly here and now, you will not be concerned with such things.

**YOUTH:** But . . .

**PHILOSOPHER:** When one adopts the point of view of Freudian etiology, one sees life as a kind of great big story based on cause and effect. So then it's all about where and when I was born, what my childhood was like, the school I attended and the company where I got a job. And that decides who I am now and who I will become. To be sure, likening one's life to a story is probably an entertaining job. The problem is, one can see the dimness that lies ahead at the end of the story. Moreover, one will try to lead a life that is in line with that story. And then one says, "My life is such-and-such, so I have no choice but to live this way, and it's not because of me—it's my past, it's the environment," and so on. But bringing up the past here is nothing but a way out, a life-lie. However, life is a series of dots, a series of moments. If you can grasp that, you will not need a story any longer.

**YOUTH:** If you put it that way, the lifestyle that Adler is advocating is a kind of story, too.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Lifestyle is about here and now, and is something that one can change of one's own volition. The life of the past that looks like a straight line appears that way to you only as a result of your making ceaseless resolutions to not change. The life that lies ahead of you is a completely blank page, and there are no tracks that have been laid for you to follow. There is no story there.

**YOUTH:** But that's just living for the moment. Or worse, a vicious hedonism!



**PHILOSOPHER:** No. To shine a spotlight on here and now is to go about doing what one can do now, earnestly and conscientiously.

# The Greatest Life-Lie

**YOUTH:** To live earnestly and conscientiously?

**PHILOSOPHER:** For example, one wants to get into a university but makes no attempt to study. This an attitude of not living earnestly here and now. Of course, maybe the entrance examination is still far off. Maybe one is not sure what needs to be studied or how thoroughly, and one finds it troublesome. However, it is enough to do it little by little—every day one can work out some mathematical formulas, one can memorize some words. In short, one can dance the dance. By doing so, one is sure to have a sense of “this is what I did today”; this is what today, this single day, was for. Clearly, today is not for an entrance examination in the distant future. And the same thing would hold true for your father, too—he was likely dancing earnestly the dance of his everyday work. He lived earnestly here and now, without having a grand objective or the need to achieve that objective. And, if that was the case, it would seem that your father’s life was a happy one.

**YOUTH:** Are you telling me to affirm that way of living? That I should accept my father’s constantly work-burdened existence . . . ?

**PHILOSOPHER:** There is no need to make yourself affirm it. Only instead of seeing his life as a line that he reached, start seeing how he lived it, see the moments of his life.

**YOUTH:** The moments.

**PHILOSOPHER:** And the same may be said with regard to your own life. You set objectives for the distant future, and think of now as your preparatory period. You think, *I really want to do this, and I'll do it when the time comes.* This is a way of living that postpones life. As long as we postpone life, we can never go anywhere and will pass our days only one after the next in dull monotony, because we think of here and now as just a preparatory period, as a time for patience. But a “here and now” in which one is studying for an entrance examination in the distant future, for example, is the real thing.

**YOUTH:** Okay, I'll accept that. I can certainly accept living earnestly here and now, and not setting up some fabricated line. But I don't have any dreams or objectives in my life. I don't know what dance to do. My here and now is nothing but utterly useless moments.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Not having objectives or the like is fine. Living earnestly here and now is itself a dance. One must not get too serious. Please do not confuse being earnest with being too serious.

**YOUTH:** Be earnest but not too serious.

**PHILOSOPHER:** That's right. Life is always simple, not something that one needs to get too serious about. If one is living each moment earnestly, there is no need to get too serious.

And there is another thing I would like you to keep in mind: When one has adopted an energetic viewpoint, life is always complete.

**YOUTH:** It's complete?

**PHILOSOPHER:** If your life, or mine, for that matter, were to come to an end here and now, it would not do to refer to either of them as unhappy. The life that ends at the age of twenty and the life that ends at ninety are both complete lives, and lives of happiness.

**YOUTH:** So if I have lived earnestly here and now, those moments will always be complete?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Exactly. Now, I have used the word “life-lie” again and again throughout our discussion. I would like to conclude by talking about the greatest life-lie of all.

**YOUTH:** Please do.

**PHILOSOPHER:** The greatest life-lie of all is to not live here and now. It is to look at the past and the future, cast a dim light on one’s entire life, and believe that one has been able to see something. Until now, you have turned away from the here and now and shone a light only on invented pasts and futures. You have told a great lie to your life, to these irreplaceable moments.

**YOUTH:** Oh, okay!

**PHILOSOPHER:** So cast away the life-lie and fearlessly shine a bright spotlight on here and now. That is something you can do.

**YOUTH:** That is something I can do? Do you think I have in me the courage to live out these moments earnestly, without resorting to the life-lie?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Since neither the past nor the future exists, let’s talk about now. It’s not yesterday or tomorrow that decides it. It’s here and now.

# Give Meaning to Seemingly Meaningless Life

**YOUTH:** What are you saying?

**PHILOSOPHER:** I think this discussion has now reached the water's edge. Whether you drink the water or not is entirely up to you.

**YOUTH:** Ah, maybe Adlerian psychology, and your philosophy, are actually changing me. Maybe I am trying to let go of my resolve not to change, and choose a new way of living, a new lifestyle . . . But wait, there is one last thing I'd like to ask.

**PHILOSOPHER:** And what would that be?

**YOUTH:** When life is taken as a series of moments, as existing only here and now, what meaning could it possibly have? For what was I born, and for what am I enduring this life of hardship until I reach my last gasp? The point of it all is beyond me.

**PHILOSOPHER:** What is the meaning of life? What are people living for? When someone posed these questions to Adler, this was his answer: "Life in general has no meaning."

**YOUTH:** Life is meaningless?

**PHILOSOPHER:** The world in which we live is constantly beset by all manner of horrendous events, and we exist with the ravages of war and natural disasters all

around us. When confronted by the fact of children dying in the turmoil of war, there is no way one can go on about the meaning of life. In other words, there is no meaning in using generalizations to talk about life. But being confronted by such incomprehensible tragedies without taking any action is tantamount to affirming them. Regardless of the circumstances, we must take some form of action. We must stand up to Kant's "inclination."

**YOUTH:** Yes!

**PHILOSOPHER:** Now, suppose one experiences a major natural disaster, and one's response is to look back at the past in an etiological manner and say, "What could have caused such a thing to happen?" How meaningful would that be? An experience of hardship should be an opportunity to look ahead and think, *What can I do from now on?*

**YOUTH:** I agree entirely!

**PHILOSOPHER:** And Adler, having stated that "life in general has no meaning," then continues, "Whatever meaning life has must be assigned to it by the individual."

**YOUTH:** Assigned to it by the individual? What does that mean?

**PHILOSOPHER:** During the war, my grandfather was firebombed, and his face was severely burned. In every way, it was a horrendous and inhumane event. It would certainly have been within the realm of possibility for him to choose a lifestyle with the perspective of "the world is a horrible place" or "people are my enemies." However, when my grandfather rode the train on visits to the hospital, there were always other passengers who would give up their seats for him. This is something I heard about through my mother, so I do not know how he actually felt. But this is what I believe: My grandfather chose a lifestyle with the perspective of "People are my comrades, and the world is a wonderful place." That is exactly what Adler is pointing to when he says whatever meaning life has must be assigned to it by the individual. So life in general has no meaning

whatsoever. But you can assign meaning to that life. And you are the only one who can assign meaning to your life.

**YOUTH:** Then, please tell me! How can I assign proper meaning to a meaningless life? I do not have the confidence yet!

**PHILOSOPHER:** You are lost in your life. Why are you lost? You are lost because you are trying to choose freedom, that is to say, a path on which you are not afraid of being disliked by others and you are not living others' lives—a path that is yours alone.

**YOUTH:** That's right! I want to choose happiness, and choose freedom!

**PHILOSOPHER:** When one attempts to choose freedom, it is only natural that one may lose one's way. At this juncture, Adlerian psychology holds up a "guiding star" as a grand compass pointing to a life of freedom.

**YOUTH:** A guiding star?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Just like the traveler who relies on the North Star, in our lives we need a guiding star. That is the Adlerian psychology way of thinking. It is an expansive ideal that says, as long as we do not lose sight of this compass and keep on moving in this direction, there is happiness.

**YOUTH:** Where is that star?

**PHILOSOPHER:** It is contribution to others.

**YOUTH:** Huh? Contribution to others!

**PHILOSOPHER:** No matter what moments you are living, or if there are people who dislike you, as long as you do not lose sight of the guiding star of "I contribute to others," you will not lose your way, and you can do whatever you like. Whether you're disliked or not, you pay it no mind and live free.

**YOUTH:** If I have the star of contribution to others high in the sky above me, I will always have happiness and comrades by my side.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Then, let's dance in earnest the moments of the here and now, and live in earnest. Do not look at the past, and do not look at the future. One lives each complete moment like a dance. There is no need to compete with anyone, and one has no use for destinations. As long as you are dancing, you will get somewhere.

**YOUTH:** A "somewhere" that no one else knows!

**PHILOSOPHER:** That is the nature of energetic life. If I look back on my own life up to now, no matter how I try, I will never arrive at a satisfactory explanation as to why I am here and now. Though, at one time, the study of Greek philosophy was my focus, before long I took up the study of Adlerian psychology in tandem with it, and here I am today, deep in conversation with you, my irreplaceable friend. It is the result of having danced the moments—that is the only way to explain it. When you have danced here and now in earnest and to the full, that is when the meaning of your life will become clear to you.

**YOUTH:** It will? I . . . I believe you!

**PHILOSOPHER:** Yes, please believe. Through my many years living with Adler's thought, there is something I have noticed.

**YOUTH:** And that is?

**PHILOSOPHER:** It is that the power of one person is great, or, rather, "my power is immeasurably great."

**YOUTH:** What do you mean?

**PHILOSOPHER:** Well, in other words, if "I" change, the world will change. This means that the world can be changed only by me and no one else will change it



for me. The world that has appeared to me since learning of Adlerian psychology is not the world I once knew.

**YOUTH:** If I change, the world will change. No one else will change the world for me . . .

**PHILOSOPHER:** It is similar to the shock experienced by someone who, after many years of being nearsighted, puts on glasses for the first time. Previously indistinct outlines of the world become well defined, and even the colors are more vivid. Furthermore, it is not only a part of one's visual field that becomes clear but also the entire visible world. I can only imagine how happy you will be if you have a similar experience.

**YOUTH:** Ah, if only I'd known! I wish I had known this ten years ago, or even just five years ago. If only I had known five years ago, before I got a job . . .

**PHILOSOPHER:** No, that is not the case. You say you wish you had known this ten years ago. It is because Adler's thought resonates with you now that you are thinking this. No one knows how you would have felt about it ten years ago. This discussion was something that you needed to hear now.

**YOUTH:** Yes, I certainly did!

**PHILOSOPHER:** One more time, I give you the words of Adler: "Someone has to start. Other people might not be cooperative, but that is not connected to you. My advice is this: You should start. With no regard to whether others are cooperative or not."

**YOUTH:** I cannot tell yet if it is I who have changed, or if it is the world that I can see from that vantage point that has changed. But there is one thing I can say with conviction: Here and now is shining brightly! Yes, it is so bright that I can see almost nothing of tomorrow.

**PHILOSOPHER:** I believe that you have drunk the water. So young friend who walks ahead, shall we walk together?

**YOUTH:** I believe you, too. Yes, let's walk together. And thank you for all your time.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Thank you, too.

**YOUTH:** I hope you will not mind if, at some point, I visit you here again. Yes, as an irreplaceable friend. And I won't be saying anything more about taking apart your arguments.

**PHILOSOPHER:** Ha-ha! At last, you have shown me a young person's smile. Well, it's quite late already. Let's pass our own nights, and greet the new morning.



The young man slowly tied his shoelaces and left the philosopher's house. On opening the door, he found a snowy scene spread out before him. The full moon, its floating form obscured, illuminated the shimmering whiteness at his feet. *What clear air. What dazzling light. I am going to tread on this fresh snow, and take my first step.* The young man drew a deep breath, rubbed the slight stubble on his face, and murmured emphatically, "The world is simple, and life is too."