

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED By M. Scott Peck, M.D.

The Road Less Traveled by M. Scott Peck, M.D.

DISCIPLINE

Problems and Pain

Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult--once we truly understand and accept it--then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.

Most do not fully see this truth that life is difficult. Instead they moan more or less incessantly, noisily or subtly, about the enormity of their problems, their burdens, and their difficulties as if life were generally easy, as if life should be easy.

Discipline is the basic set of tools we require to solve life's problems. Without discipline we can solve nothing. With only some discipline we can solve only some problems. With total discipline we can solve all problems.

This tendency to avoid problem and the emotional suffering inherent in them is the primary basis of all human mental illness. Since most of us have this tendency to a greater or lesser degree, most of us are mentally ill to a greater or lesser degree, lacking complete mental health. Some of us will go to quite extraordinary lengths to avoid our problems and

the suffering they cause, proceeding far afield from all that is clearly good and sensible in order to try to find an easy way out, building the most elaborate fantasies in which to live, sometimes to the total exclusion of reality. In the succinctly elegant words of Carl Jung, "Neurosis is always a substitute for legitimate suffering."

But the substitute itself ultimately becomes more painful than the legitimate suffering it was designed to avoid. The neurosis itself becomes the biggest problem. True to form, many will then attempt to avoid this pain and this problem in turn, building layer upon layer of neurosis. Fortunately, however, some possess the courage to face their neuroses and begin--usually with the help of psychotherapy--to learn how to experience legitimate suffering. In any case, when we avoid the legitimate suffering that results from dealing with problems, we also avoid the growth that problems demand from us. It is for this reason that in chronic mental illness we stop growing, we become stuck. And without healing, the human spirit begins to shrivel.

What are these tools, these techniques of suffering, these means of experiencing the pain of problems constructively that I call discipline? There are four: delaying of gratification, acceptance of responsibility, dedication to truth, and balancing. As will be evident, these are not complex tools whose application demands extensive training. To the contrary, they are simple tools, and almost all children are adept in their use by the age of ten. Yet presidents and kings will often forget to use them, to their own downfall. The problem

lies not in the complexity of these tools but in the will to use them. For they are tools with which pain is confronted rather than avoided, and if one seeks to avoid legitimate suffering, then once will avoid the use of these tools. Therefore, after analyzing each of these tools, we shall in the next section examine the will to use them which is love.

Play now, pay later, is their motto.

#### The Sins of the Father

It is not that the homes of these unself-disciplined children are lacking in parental discipline of a sort. More often than not these children are punished frequently and severely throughout their childhood--slapped, punched, kicked, beaten and whipped by their parents for even minor infractions. But this discipline is meaningless. Because it is undisciplined discipline.

One reason that it is meaningless is that the parents themselves are unself-disciplined, and therefore serve as undisciplined role models for their children. They are the "Do as I say, not as I do" parents. They may frequently get drunk in front of their children. They may fight with each other in front of the children without restraint, dignity or rationality.

They may be slovenly. They make promises they don't keep. Their own lives are frequently and obviously in disorder and disarray, and their attempts to order the lives of their children seem therefore to make little sense to these children. If father beats up mother regularly, what sense does it make to a boy when his mother beats him up because he beat up his sister? Does it make sense when he's told that he must learn to control his temper? Since we do not have the benefit of comparison when we are young, our parents are godlike figures to our childish eyes. When parents do things a certain way, it seems to the young child the way to do them, the way they should be done. If a child sees his parents day in and day out behaving with self-discipline, restraint, dignity and a capacity to order their own lives, then the child will come to feel in the deepest fibers of his being that this is the way to live. If a child sees his parents day in and day out living without self-restraint or self-discipline, then he will come in the deepest fibers of being to believe that that is the way to live.

Yet even more important than role modeling is love. For even in chaotic and disordered homes genuine love is occasionally present and from such homes may come self-disciplined children. And not infrequently parents who are professional people--doctors, lawyers, club women and philanthropists--who lead lives of strict orderliness and decorum but yet lack love, send children into the world who are as undisciplined and destructive and disorganized as any child from an impoverished and chaotic home.

Ultimately love is everything. The mystery of love will be examined in later

portions of this work. Yet, for the sake of coherency, it may be helpful to make a brief but limited mention of it and its relationship to discipline at this point.

When we love something it is of value to us, and when something is of value to us we spend time with it, time enjoying it and time taking care of it. Observe a teenager in love with his car and note the time he will spend admiring it, polishing it, repairing it, tuning it. Or an older person with a beloved rose garden, and the time spent pruning and mulching and fertilizing and studying it. So it is when we love children; we spend time admiring them and caring for them. We give them our time.

Good discipline requires time. When we have time to give our children, or no time that we are willing to give, we don't even observe them closely enough to become aware of when their need for our disciplinary assistance is expressed subtly. If their need for discipline is so gross as to impinge upon our consciousness, we may still ignore the need on the grounds that it's easier to let them have their own way--"I just don't have the energy to deal with them today." Or, finally, if we are impelled into action by their misdeeds and our irritation, we will impose discipline, often brutally, out of anger rather than deliberation, without examining the problem or even taking the time to consider which form of discipline is the most appropriate to that particular problem.

The parents who devote time to their children even when it is not demanded by glaring misdeeds will perceive in them subtle needs for discipline, to which they will respond with gentle urging or reprimand or structure or praise, administered with thoughtfulness and care. They will observe how their children eat cake, how they study, when they tell subtle falsehoods, when they run away from problems rather than face them. They will take the time to make these minor corrections and adjustments, listening to their children, responding to them, tightening a little here, loosening a little there, giving them little lectures, little stories, little hugs and kisses, little admonishments, little pats on the back.

So it is that the quality of discipline afforded by loving parents is superior to the discipline of unloving parents. But this is just the beginning. In taking the time to observe and to think about their children's needs, loving parents will frequently agonize over the decisions to be made, and will, in a very real sense, suffer along with their children. The children are not blind to this. They perceive it when their parents are willing to suffer with them, and although they may not respond with immediate gratitude, they will learn also to suffer. "If my parents are willing to suffer with me," they will tell themselves, "then suffering must not be so bad, and I should be willing to suffer with myself." This is the beginning of self-discipline.

On the other hand, children who are truly loved, although in moments of pique they may consciously feel or proclaim that they are being neglected, unconsciously know themselves to be valued. This knowledge is worth more than any gold. For when children know that they are valued, when they truly feel

valued in the deepest parts of themselves, then they feel valuable.

The feeling of being valuable--"I am a valuable person"--is essential to mental health and is a cornerstone of self-discipline. It is a direct product of parental love. Such a conviction must be gained in childhood; it is extremely difficult to acquire it during adulthood. Conversely, when children have learned through the love of their parents to feel valuable, it is almost impossible for the vicissitudes of adulthood to destroy their spirit.

This feeling of being valuable is a cornerstone of self-discipline because when one considers oneself valuable one will take care of oneself in all ways that are necessary. Self-discipline is self-caring. For instance--since we are discussing the process of delaying gratification, of scheduling and ordering time--let us examine the matter of time. If we feel ourselves valuable, then we will feel our time to be valuable, and if we feel our time to be valuable, then we will want to use it well. The financial analyst who procrastinated did not value her time. If she had, she would not have allowed herself to spend most of her day so unhappily and unproductively. It was not without consequence for her that throughout her childhood she was "farmed out" during all school vacations to live with paid foster parents although her parents could have taken care of her perfectly well had they wanted to. They did not value her. They did not want to care for her. So

she grew up feeling herself to be of little value, not worth caring for; therefore she did not care for herself. She did not feel she was worth disciplining herself. Despite the fact that she was an intelligent and competent woman she required the most elementary instruction in self-discipline because she lacked a realistic assessment of her own worth and the value of her own time. Once she was able to perceive her time as being valuable, it naturally followed that she wanted to organize it and protect it and make maximum use of it.

In summary, for children to develop the capacity to delay gratification, it is necessary for them to have self-disciplined role models, a sense of self-worth, and a degree of trust in the safety of their existence. These "possessions" are ideally acquired through the self-discipline and consistent, genuine caring of their parents; they are the most precious gifts of themselves that mothers and fathers can bequeath. When these gifts have not been proffered by one's parents, it is possible to acquire them from other sources, but in that case the process of their acquisition is invariably an uphill struggle, often of lifetime duration and often unsuccessful.

#### Problem-Solving and Time

Having touched upon some of the ways in which parental love or its lack may influence the development of self-discipline in general, and the capacity to delay gratification in particular, let us examine some of the more subtle yet quite devastating ways in which difficulties in delaying gratification affect

the lives of most adults. For while most of us, fortunately, develop sufficient capacity to delay gratification to make it through high school or college and embark upon adulthood without landing in jail, our development nonetheless tends to be imperfect and incomplete, with the result that our ability to solve life's problems is still imperfect and incomplete.

*JRAw*

At the age of 37, I learned how to fix things. Prior to that time almost all my attempts to make minor plumbing repairs, mend toys or assemble boxed furniture according to the accompanying hieroglyphical instruction sheet ended in confusion, failure and frustration. Despite having managed to make it through medical school and support a family as a more or less successful executive and psychiatrist, I considered myself to be a mechanical idiot. I was convinced I was deficient in some gene, or by curse of nature lacking some mystical quality responsible for mechanical ability. Then one day at the end of my 37th year, while taking a spring Sunday walk, I happened upon a neighbor in the process of repairing a lawn mower. After greeting him I remarked, "Boy, I sure admire you. I've never been able to fix those kind of things or do anything like that." My neighbor, without a moment's hesitation, shot back, "That's because you don't take the time." I resumed my walk, somehow disquieted by the guru-like simplicity, spontaneity and definitiveness of his response. "You don't suppose he could be right, do you?" I asked myself. Somehow it registered,

and the next time the opportunity presented itself to make a minor repair I was able to remind myself to take my time. The parking brake was stuck on a patient's car, and she knew that there was something one could do under the dashboard to release it, but she didn't know what. I lay down on the floor below the front seat of her car. Then I took the time to make myself comfortable. Once I was comfortable, I then took the time to look at the situation. I looked for several minutes. At first all I saw was a confusing jumble of wires and tubes and rods, whose meaning I did not know. But gradually, in no hurry, I was able to focus my sight on the brake apparatus and trace its course. And then it became clear to me that there was a little latch preventing the brake from being released. I slowly studied this latch preventing the brake from being released. It became clear to me that if I were to push it upward with the tip of my finger it would move easily and would release the brake. And so I did this. One single motion, one ounce of pressure from a fingertip, and the problem was solved. I was a master mechanic!

Actually, I don't begin to have the knowledge or the time to gain that knowledge to be able to fix most mechanical failures, given the fact that I choose to concentrate my time on nonmechanical matters. So I still usually go running to the nearest repairman. But I now know that this is a choice I make, and I am not cursed or genetically defective or otherwise incapacitated or impotent. And I know that I and anyone else who is not mentally defective can solve any problem if we are willing to take the time. *SAY 3/30*

The issue is important, because many people simply do not take the time

necessary to solve many of life's intellectual, social or spiritual problems, just as I did not take the time to solve mechanical problems. Before my mechanical enlightenment I would have awkwardly stuck my head under the dashboard of my patient's car, immediately yanked at a few wires without having the foggiest idea of what I was doing, and then, when nothing constructive resulted, would have thrown up my hands and proclaimed, "It's beyond me." And this is precisely the way that so many of us approach other dilemmas of day-to-day living. The afore mentioned financial analyst was a basically loving and dedicated but rather helpless mother to her two young children. She was alert and concerned enough to perceive when her children were having some sort of emotional problem or when something was not working out in her child-raising. But then she inevitably took one of two courses of action with the children: either she made the very first change that came to her mind within a matter of seconds--making them eat more breakfast or sending them to bed earlier--regardless of whether such a change had anything to do with the problem, or else she came to her next therapy session with me (the repairman) despairing: "It's beyond me. What shall I do?" This woman had a perfectly keen and analytical mind, and when she didn't procrastinate, she was quite capable of solving complex problems at work. Yet when confronted with a personal problem, she behaved as if she were totally lacking in intelligence. The issue was one of time. Once she became aware of a personal problem, she felt so discomfited that she demanded an immediate

solution, and she was not willing to tolerate her discomfort long enough to analyze the problem. The solution to the problem represented gratification to her, but she was unable to delay this gratification for more than a minute or two, with the result that her solutions were usually inappropriate and her family in chronic turmoil. Fortunately, through her own perseverance in therapy she was gradually able to learn how to discipline herself to take the time necessary to analyze family problems so as to develop well-thought-out and effective solutions.

We are not talking here about esoteric defects in problem-solving associated only with people who clearly manifest psychiatric disturbances. The financial analyst is everyman. Who among us can say that they unfailingly devote sufficient time to analyzing their children's problems or tensions within the family? Who among us is so self-disciplined that he or she never says resignedly in the face of family problems, "It's beyond me"?

Actually, there is a defect in the approach to problem-solving more primitive and more destructive than impatiently inadequate attempts to find instant solutions, a defect even more ubiquitous and universal. It is the hope that problems will go away of their own accord. A thirty-year-old single salesman in group therapy in a small town began to date the recently separated wife of another group member, a banker. The salesman knew the banker to be a chronically angry man who was deeply resentful of his wife's leaving him. He knew he was not being honest either with the group or with the banker by not confiding his relationship with the banker's wife. He also knew that it was almost in-

evitable that sooner or later the banker would learn about the continuing relationship. He knew that the only solution to the problem would be to confess the relationship to the group and bear the banker's anger with the group's support. But he did nothing. After three months the banker found out about the friendship, was predictably enraged, and used the incident to quit his therapy. When confronted by the group with his destructive behavior the salesman said: "I knew that talking about it would be a hassle, and I guess I felt that if I did nothing, maybe I could get away with it without the hassle. I guess I thought that if I waited long enough the problem might go away."

Problems do not go away. They must be worked through or else they remain, forever a barrier to the growth and development of the spirit.

The group made the salesman aware in no uncertain terms that his tendency to avoid problem-solving by ignoring a problem in the hope that it would go away was in itself his major problem. Four months later, in the early autumn, the salesman fulfilled a fantasy by rather suddenly quitting his sales job and starting his own furniture-repair business, which would not require him to travel. The group deplored the fact that he was putting all his eggs in one basket and also questioned the wisdom of making the move with winter coming on, but the salesman assured them that he would

make enough to get by in his new business. The subject was dropped. Then in early February he announced that he would have to quit the group because he could no longer pay the fee. He was dead broke and would have to start looking for another job. In five months he had repaired a total of eight pieces of furniture. When asked why he hadn't started looking for a job sooner, he replied, "I knew six weeks ago that I was running through my money fast, but somehow I couldn't believe that it would come to this point. The whole thing just didn't seem very urgent, but, boy, it's urgent now." He had, of course, ignored his problem. Slowly it began to dawn on him that until he solved his problem of ignoring problems he would never get beyond step one--even with all the psychotherapy in the world.

This inclination to ignore problems is once again a simple manifestation of an unwillingness to delay gratification. Confronting problems is, as I have said, painful. To willingly confront a problem early, before we are forced to confront it by circumstances, means to put aside something pleasant or less painful for something more painful. It is choosing to suffer now in the hope of future gratification rather than choosing present gratification in the hope that future suffering will not be necessary.

Responsibility *(best slot 16)*

We cannot solve life's problems except by solving them. This statement may seem idiotically tautological or self-evident, yet it is seemingly beyond the comprehension of much of the human race. This is because we must accept responsibility

for a problem before we can solve it. We cannot solve a problem by saying "It's not my problem." We cannot solve a problem by hoping that someone else will solve it for us. I can solve a problem only when I say "This is my problem and it's up to me to solve it." But many, so many, seek to avoid the pain of their problems by saying to themselves: "This problem was caused me by other people, or by social circumstances beyond my control, and therefore it is up to other people or society to solve this problem for me. It is not really my personal problem."

The extent to which people will go psychologically to avoid assuming responsibility for personal problems, while always sad, is sometimes always ludicrous. A career sergeant in the army, stationed in Okinawa and in serious trouble because of his excessive drinking, was referred for psychiatric evaluation and, if possible, assistance. He denied that he was an alcoholic, or even that his use of alcohol was a personal problem, saying, "There's nothing else to do in the evenings in Okinawa except drink."

"Do you like to read?" I asked.

"Oh yes, I like to read, sure."

"Then why don't you read in the evening instead of drinking?"

"It's too noisy to read in the barracks."

"Well, then, why don't you go to the library?"

"The library is too far away."

"Is the library farther away than the bar you go to?"

"Well, I'm not much of a reader. That's not where my interests lie."

"Do you like to fish?" I then inquired.

"Sure, I love to fish."

"Why not go fishing instead of drinking?"

"Because I have to work all day long."

"Can't you go fishing at night?"

"No, there isn't any night fishing in Okinawa."

"But there is," I said. "I know several organizations that fish at night here. Would you like me to put you in touch with them?"

"Well, I really don't like to fish."

"What I hear you saying," I clarified, "is that there are other things to do in Okinawa except drink, but the thing you like to do most in Okinawa is drink."

"Yeah, I guess so."

"But your drinking is getting you in trouble, so you're faced with a real problem, aren't you?"

"This damn island would drive anyone to drink."

I kept trying for a while, but the sergeant was not the least bit interested in seeing his drinking as a personal problem which he could solve either with or without help, and I regretfully told his commander that he was not amenable to assistance. His drinking continued, and he was separated from the service in mid-career.

A young wife, also in Okinawa, cut her wrist lightly with a razor blade and was

brought to the emergency room, where I saw her. I asked her why she had done this to herself.

"To kill myself, of course."

"Why do you want to kill yourself?"

"Because I can't stand it on this dumb island. You have to send me back to the States. I'm going to kill myself if I have to stay here any longer."

"What is it about living on Okinawa that's so painful for you?" I asked. She began to cry in a whining sort of way. "I don't have any friends here, and I'm alone all the time."

"That's too bad. How come you haven't been able to make any friends?"

"Because I have to live in a stupid Okinawan housing area, and none of my neighbors speak English."

"Why don't you drive over to the American housing area or to the wives' club during the day so you can make some friends?"

"Because my husband has to drive the car to work."

"Can't you drive him to work, since you're alone and bored all day?" I asked.

"No. It's a stick-shift car, and I don't know how to drive a stick-shift car, only an automatic."

"Why don't you learn how to drive a stick-shift car?"

She glared at me. "On these roads? You must be crazy."

### Neuroses and Character Disorders

Most people who come to see a psychiatrist are suffering from what is called either a neurosis or a character disorder. Put most simply, these two conditions are disorders of responsibility, and as such they are opposite styles of relating to the world and its problems. The neurotic assumes too much responsibility; the person with a character disorder not enough. When neurotics are in conflict with the world they automatically assume that they are at fault. When those with character disorders are in conflict with the world they automatically assume that the world is at fault. The two individuals just described had character disorders: the sergeant felt that his drinking was Okinawa's fault, not his, and the wife also saw herself as playing no role whatsoever in her own isolation. A neurotic woman, on the other hand, also suffering from loneliness and isolation on Okinawa, complained: "I drive over to the Non-Commissioned Officers' Wives Club every day to look for friendship, but I don't feel at ease there. I think that the other wives don't like me. Something must be wrong with me. I should be able to make friends more easily. I ought to be more outgoing. I want to find out what it is about me that makes me so unpopular." This woman assumed total responsibility for her loneliness, feeling she was entirely to blame. What she found out in the course of therapy was that she was an unusually intelligent and ambitious person and that she was ill at ease with the other sergeants' wives, as well as with her husband, because she was considerably more intelligent and ambitious than they. She became able to see that her loneliness, while

her problem, was not necessarily due to a fault or defect of her own. Ultimately, she was divorced, put herself through college while raising her children, became a magazine editor, and married a successful publisher.

Few of us can escape being neurotic or character disordered to at least some degree (which is why essentially everyone can benefit from psychotherapy if he or she is seriously willing to participate in the process). The reason for this is that the problem of distinguishing what we are and what we are not responsible for in this life is one of the greatest problems of human existence. It is never completely solved; for the entirety of our lives we must continually assess and reassess where our responsibilities lie in the ever-changing course of events. Nor is this assessment and reassessment painless if performed adequately and conscientiously. To perform either process adequately we must possess the willingness and the capacity to suffer continual self-examination. And such capacity or willingness is not inherent in any of us. In a sense all children have character disorders, in that their instinctual tendency is to deny their responsibility for many conflicts in which they find themselves. Thus two siblings fighting will always blame each other for initiating the fight and each will totally deny that he or she may have been the culprit. Similarly, all children have neuroses, in that they will instinctually assume responsibility for certain deprivations that they experience but do not yet understand. Thus the child

who is not loved by his parents will always assume himself or herself to be unlovable rather than see the parents as deficient in their capacity to love. Or early adolescents who are not yet successful at dating or at sports will see themselves as seriously deficient human beings rather than the late or even average but perfectly adequate bloomers they usually are. It is only through a vast amount of experience and a lengthy and successful maturation that we gain the capacity to see the world and our place in it realistically, and thus are enabled to realistically assess our responsibility for ourselves and the world.

It is said that "enurotics make themselves miserable; those with character disorders make everyone else miserable."

It is not simply in their role as parents that character-disordered individuals are ineffectice and destructive; these same character traits usually extend to their marriages, their friendships and their business dealings--to any area of their existence in which they fail to assume responsibility for its quality. This is inevitable since, as had been said, no problem can be solved until an individual assumes the responsibility for solving it. When character-disordered individuals blame someone else--a spouse, a child, a friend, a parent, an employer--or something else--bad influences, the schools, the government, racism, sexism, society, the "system"--for their problems, these problems persist. Nothing has been accomplished. By casting away their responsibility they may feel comfortable with themselves, but they have ceased to solve the problems of living, have ceased to grow spiritually, and have become dead weight

The Road Less Traveled By M. Scott Peck, M.D.

for society. They may have cast their pain onto society. The saying of the sixties (attributed to Eldridge Cleaver) speaks to all of us for all time: "If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem".

Escape From Freedom

But after three months I somehow came to see that Mac was right, that it was I, not he, who had the character disorder. My time was my responsibility. It was up to me and me alone to decide how I wanted to use and order my time. If I wanted to invest my time more heavily than my fellow residents in my work, then that was my choice, and the consequences of that choice were my responsibility. It might be painful for me to watch my fellow residents leave their offices two or three hours before me and it might be painful to listen to my wife's complaints that I was not devoting myself sufficiently to the family, but these pains were the the consequences of a choice that I had made. If I did not want to suffer them, then I was free to choose not to work so hard and to structure my time differently. My working hard was not a burden cast upon me by hard-hearted fate or a hard-hearted clinic director; it was the way I had chosen to live my life and order my priorities. As it happened, I chose not to change my life style. But with my change in attitude, my resentment

of my fellow residents vanished. It simply no longer made any sense to resent them for having chosen a lifestyle different from mine when I was completely free to choose to be like them if I wanted to. To resent them was to resent my own choice to be different from them, a choice that I was happy with.

The Road Less Traveled By M. Scott Peck, M.D.

I have a brilliant but morose acquaintance who, when I allow him to, will speak unceasingly and eloquently of the oppressive forces in our society: racism, sexism, the military-industrial establishment, and the country police who pick on him and his friends because of their long hair. Again and again I have tried to point out to him that he is not a child. As children, by virtue of our real and extensive dependency, our parents have real and extensive power over us. They are, in fact, largely responsible for our well-being, and we are, in fact, largely at their mercy. When parents are oppressive, as so often they are, we as children are largely powerless to do anything about it; our choices are limited. But as adults, when we are physically healthy, our choices are almost unlimited. That does not mean they are not painful. Frequently our choices lie between the lesser of two evils; but it is still within our power to make these choices. Yes, I agree with my acquaintance, there are indeed oppressive forces at work within the world. We have, however, the freedom to choose every step of the way the manner in which we are going to respond to and deal with these forces. It is his choice to live in an area of the country where the police don't like "long haired types; and still grow his hair long. He has the freedom to move to the city, or to cut his hair, or even to wage a campaign for the office of police commissioner. But despite his brilliance, he does not acknowledge these freedoms. He chooses to lament his lack of political

The Road Less Traveled By M. Scott Peck, M.D.

power instead of accepting and exulting in his immense personal power. He speaks of his love of freedom and of the oppressive forces that thwart it, but every time he speaks of how he is victimized by these forces he actually is giving away his freedom. I hope that some day soon he will stop resenting life simply because some of its choices are painful.

Dr. Hilde Bruch, in the preface to her book "Learning Psychotherapy" states that basically all patients come to psychiatrists with "one common Problem: the sense of helplessness, the fear and innerconviction of being unable to 'cope' and to change things." One of the roots of this "sense of impotence" in the majority of patients is some desire to partially or totally escape the pain of freedom, and, therefore, some failure, partial or total, to accept responsibility for their problems and their lives. They feel impotent because they have, in fact, given their power away. Sooner or later, if they are to be healed, they must learn that the entirety of one's adult life is a series of personal choices, decisions. If they can accept this totally, then they become free people. To the extent that they do not accept this they will forever feel themselves victims.

DEDICATION TO REALITY

The third tool of discipline or technique of dealing with the pain

of problem-solving, which must continually be employed if our lives are to be healthy and our spirits are to grow, is dedication to the truth. Superficially, this should be obvious. For truth is reality. That which is false is unreal. The more clearly we see the reality of the world, the better equipped we are to deal with the world. The less clearly we see the reality of the world-the more our minds are befuddled by falsehood, misperceptions and illusions-the less able we will be to

determine correct courses of action and make wise decisions. Our view of reality is like a map with which to negotiate the terrain of life. If the map is true and accurate, we will generally know where we are and if we have decided where we want to go, we will generally know how to get there. If the map is false and inaccurate, we generally will be lost.

While this is obvious, it is something that most people to a greater or lesser degree choose to ignore. They ignore it because our route to reality is not easy. First of all, we are not born with maps; we have to make them, and the making requires effort. The more effort we make to appreciate and perceive reality, the larger and more accurate our maps will be. But many do not want to make this effort. Some stop making it by the end of adolescence. Their maps are small and sketchy, their views of the world narrow and misleading. By the end of middle age most people have given up the effort. They feel certain that their maps are complete and their

The Road Less Traveled By M. Scott Peck, M.D.

Weltanschauung is correct (indeed, even sacrosanct), and they are no longer interested in new information. It is as if they are tired. Only a relative and fortunate few continue until the moment of death exploring the mystery of reality, ever enlarging and refining and redefining their understanding of the world and what is true.

We may decry the new information as false, dangerous, heretical, the work of the devil. We may actually crusade against it, and even attempt to manipulate the world so as to make it conform to our view of reality. Rather than try to change the map, an individual may try to destroy the new reality. Sadly such a person may expend much more energy ultimately in defending an outmoded view of the world than would have been required to revise and correct it in the first place.

**TRANSFERENCE: THE OUTDATED MAP**

This process of active clinging to an outmoded view of reality is the basis for much mental illness. Psychiatrists refer to it as transference. There are probably as many subtle variations of the definition of transference as there are psychiatrists. My own definition is: Transference is that set of ways of perceiving and responding to the world which is developed in childhood and which is usually entirely

appropriate to the childhood environment (indeed, often life-saving) but which is inappropriately transferred into the adult environment.

Such an adjustment, however, is the basis for future problems.

Such an adjustment, however, is the basis for future problems. To a child his or her parents are everything; they represent the world. The child does not have the perspective to see that other parents are different and frequently better. He assumes that the way his parents do things is the way that things are done. Consequently the realization - that this child came to was not "I can't trust my parents" - the "reality" - that this child came to was not "I can't trust people." Not trusting people therefore became the map with which he entered adolescence and adulthood. With this map and with an abundant store of resentment resulting from his many disappointments, it was inevitable that he came into conflict after conflict with authority figures - police, teacher, employers. And these conflicts only served to reinforce his feeling that people who had anything to give him in the world couldn't be trusted. He had many opportunities to revise his map, but they were all passed up. For one thing, the only way he could learn that there were some people in the adult world he could trust would be to risk trusting them, and that would require a deviation from his map to begin with. For another, such relearning would require him to revise his view of his parents - to realize that they did not love him, that he did not have a normal childhood and that his parents were not average in their callousness to his needs. Such a realization would have been extremely painful. Finally, because his distrust of people was a realistic adjustment of the reality of his childhood, it was an adjustment that worked in terms of diminishing his pain and

The Road Less Traveled by M. Scott Peck, M.D.

and suffering. Since it is extremely difficult to give up an adjustment that once worked so well, he continued his course of distrust, unconsciously creating situations that served to reinforce it, alienating himself from everyone, making it impossible for himself to enjoy love, warmth, intimacy and affection. He could not even allow himself closeness with his wife; she, too, could not be trusted. The only people he could relate with intimately were his two children. They were the only ones over whom he had control, the only ones who had no authority over him, the only ones he could trust in the whole world.

Truth or reality is avoided when it is painful. We can revise our maps only when we have the discipline to overcome that pain. To have such discipline, we must be totally dedicated to truth. That is to say that we must always hold truth, as best we can determine it, to be more important, more vital to our self-interest, than our comfort. Conversely, we must always consider our personal discomfort relatively unimportant and indeed, even welcome it in the service of the search for truth. Mental health is an ongoing process of dedication to reality at all costs.

The tendency to avoid challenge is so omnipresent in human beings that it can properly be considered a characteristic of human nature. But calling it natural does not mean it is essential or beneficial or

unchangeable behavior. It is also natural to defecate in our pants and never brush our teeth. Yet we teach ourselves to do the unnatural until the unnatural becomes itself second nature. Indeed, all self-discipline might be defined as teaching ourselves to do the unnatural. Another characteristic of human nature—perhaps the one that makes us most human—is our capacity to do the unnatural, to transform and hence transform our own nature.