

THE COURAGE TO BE DISLIKED

The Japanese Phenomenon That Shows You How to Change Your Life and Achieve Real Happiness

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- Group 4: The Classified

Contents

Authors' Note

Introduction

THE FIRST NIGHT:

Deny Trauma

The Unknown Third Giant

Why People Can Change

Trauma Does Not Exist

People Fabricate Anger

How to Live Without Being Controlled by the Past

Socrates and Adler

Are You Okay Just As You Are?

Unhappiness Is Something You Choose for Yourself

People Always Choose Not to Change

Your Life Is Decided Here and Now

THE SECOND NIGHT:

All Problems Are Interpersonal Relationship Problems

Why You Dislike Yourself

The young man entered the study and sat slouched in a chair. Why was he so determined to reject the philosopher's theories? His reasons were abundantly clear. He lacked self-confidence and, ever since childhood, this had been compounded by deep-seated feelings of inferiority with regard to his personal and academic backgrounds, as well as his physical appearance. Perhaps, as a result, he tended to be excessively self-conscious when people looked at him. Mostly, he seemed incapable of truly appreciating other people's happiness and was constantly pitying himself. To him, the philosopher's claims were nothing more than the stuff of fantasy.

YOUTH: Well, that's not a particularly unusual story.

PHILOSOPHER: Don't you see? In a word, anger is a tool that can be taken out as needed. It can be put away the moment the phone rings, and pulled out again after one hangs up. The mother isn't yelling in anger she cannot control. She is simply using the anger to overpower her daughter with a loud voice and thereby assert her opinions.

YOUTH: So anger is a means to achieve a goal?

PHILOSOPHER: That is what teleology says.

YOUTH: Ah, I see now. Under that gentle-looking mask you wear, you're terribly nihilistic! Whether we're talking about anger or my reclusive friend, all your insights are stuffed with feelings of distrust for human beings!

PHILOSOPHER: That is not true. If your lifestyle is not something that you were naturally born with, but something you chose yourself, then it must be possible to choose it over again.

YOUTH: Now you're saying I can choose it all over?

PHILOSOPHER: Maybe you haven't been aware of your lifestyle until now, and maybe you haven't been aware of the concept of lifestyle either. Of course, no one can choose his or her own birth. Being born in this country, in this era, and with these parents are things you did not choose. And all these things have a great deal of influence. You'll probably face disappointment and start looking at other people and feeling, *I wish I'd been born in their circumstances*. But you can't let it end there. The issue is not the past, but here, in the present. And now you've learned about lifestyle. But what you do with it from here on is your responsibility. Whether you go on choosing the lifestyle you've had up till now, or you choose a new lifestyle altogether, it's entirely up to you.

YOUTH: Then how do I choose again? You're telling me, "You chose that lifestyle yourself, so go ahead and select a new one instantly," but there's no way I can just change on the spot!

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, you *can*. People can change at any time, regardless of the environments they are in. You are unable to change only because you are making the decision not to.

YOUTH: What do you mean, exactly?

PHILOSOPHER: People are constantly selecting their lifestyles. Right now, while we are having this tête-à-tête, we are selecting ours. You describe yourself as an unhappy person. You say that you want to change right this minute. You even claim that you want to be reborn as a different person. After all that, then why are you still unable to change? It is because you are making the persistent decision not to change your lifestyle.

YOUTH: No, don't you see that's completely illogical? I do want to change; that is my sincere wish. So how could I be making the decision not to?

would want to get involved with a guy as warped as me." I'm sure you understand this already. Why do you dislike yourself? Why do you focus only on your shortcomings, and why have you decided to not start liking yourself? It's because you are overly afraid of being disliked by other people and getting hurt in your interpersonal relationships.

YOUTH: What do you mean by that?

PHILOSOPHER: Just like the young woman with the fear of blushing, who was afraid of being rejected by the man, you are afraid of being negated by other people. You're afraid of being treated disparagingly, being refused, and sustaining deep mental wounds. You think that instead of getting entangled in such situations, it would be better if you just didn't have relations with anyone in the first place. In other words, your goal is to not get hurt in your relationships with other people.

YOUTH: Huh . . .

PHILOSOPHER: Now, how can that goal be realized? The answer is easy. Just find your shortcomings, start disliking yourself, and become someone who doesn't enter into interpersonal relationships. That way, if you can shut yourself into your own shell, you won't have to interact with anyone, and you'll even have a justification ready whenever other people snub you. That it's because of your shortcomings that you get snubbed, and if things weren't this way, you too could be loved.

YOUTH: Ha-ha! Well, you've really put me in my place now.

PHILOSOPHER: Don't be evasive. Being "the way I am" with all these shortcomings is, for you, a precious virtue. In other words, something that's to your benefit.

YOUTH: Ouch, that hurts. What a sadist; you're diabolical! Okay, yes, it's true: I *am* afraid. I don't want to get hurt in interpersonal relationships. I'm terrified of being snubbed for who I am. It's hard to admit it, but you are right.

PHILOSOPHER: Admitting is a good attitude. But don't forget, it's basically impossible to not get hurt in your relations with other people. When you enter into interpersonal relationships, it is inevitable that to a greater or lesser extent you will get hurt, and you

Braggarts Have Feelings of Inferiority

YOUTH: Maybe so, but . . .

PHILOSOPHER: Further, you harbor an inferiority complex about education and think, *I'm not well educated, so I can't succeed.* Put the other way around, the reasoning can be, *If only I were well educated, I could be really successful.*

YOUTH: Hmm, true.

PHILOSOPHER: This is the other aspect of the inferiority complex. Those who manifest their inferiority complexes in words or attitudes, who say that "A is the situation, so B cannot be done," are implying that if only it were not for A, they'd be capable and have value.

YOUTH: If only it weren't for this, I could do it, too.

PHILOSOPHER: Yes. As Adler points out, no one is capable of putting up with having feelings of inferiority for a long period of time. Feelings of inferiority are something that everyone has, but staying in that condition is too heavy to endure forever.

YOUTH: Huh? This is getting pretty confusing.

PHILOSOPHER: Okay, let's go over things one at a time. The condition of having a feeling of inferiority is a condition of feeling some sort of lack in oneself in the present situation. So then, the question is—

YOUTH: How do you fill in the part that's missing, right?

PHILOSOPHER: Exactly. How to compensate for the part that is lacking. The healthiest way is to try to compensate through striving and growth. For instance, it could be by

had not been raised by those parents, if that elder brother had never existed, and if he had not attended that school, he could have had a brighter life. The youth had been trying to participate in the discussion as coolheadedly as possible, but now his many years of pent-up feelings came bursting out.

that if we got together again, we'd be able to hang out just as we did back then. A lot of people think that the more friends you have the better, but I'm not so sure about that. There's no value at all in the number of friends or acquaintances you have. And this is a subject that connects with the task of love, but what we should be thinking about is the distance and depth of the relationship.

YOUTH: Will it be possible for me to make close friends?

PHILOSOPHER: Of course it will. If you change, those around you will change too. They will have no choice but to change. Adlerian psychology is a psychology for changing oneself, not a psychology for changing others. Instead of waiting for others to change or waiting for the situation to change, you take the first step forward yourself.

YOUTH: Hmm . . .

PHILOSOPHER: The fact is that you came like this to visit me in my room. And, in you, I have found a young friend.

YOUTH: I am your friend?

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, because you are. The dialogue going on here is not counseling, and we do not have a work relationship. To me, you are an irreplaceable friend. Don't you think so?

YOUTH: I'm your . . . irreplaceable friend? No, I won't think anything about that right now. Let's just keep going. What about the last one, the task of love?

PHILOSOPHER: Think of it as divided into two stages: one, what are known as love relationships; and two, relationships with family, in particular parent-child relationships. We have discussed work and friendship, but of the three tasks, most likely it is the task of love that is the most difficult. When a friend relationship has turned into love, speech and conduct that were permitted between friends may no longer be permitted the moment they become lovers. Specifically, that would mean not permitting socializing with friends of the opposite sex, and in some cases just speaking on the telephone to someone of the opposite sex is enough to arouse jealousy. The distance is that close, and the relationship that deep.

PHILOSOPHER: Then, what did you end up doing?

YOUTH: It seems to me that until I started university, I was never able to ignore my parents' intentions. I was anxious, which was unpleasant, but the fact of the matter is that my wishes always seemed to end up overlapping with my parents'. My place of work I chose myself, however.

PHILOSOPHER: Now that you mention it, I haven't heard about that yet. What kind of work do you do?

YOUTH: I'm now working as a librarian at a university library. My parents wanted me to take on my father's printing plant, like my brother did. Because of this, ever since I started my current job, our relationship has been somewhat strained. If they weren't my parents, and instead were enemy-like presences in my life, I probably wouldn't have minded at all. Because no matter how much they might have tried to interfere, I could always just ignore them. But as I've said, parents to me are not enemies. Whether or not they are comrades is another matter, but, at the very least, they are not what I would call enemies. It's a relationship that is much too close to be able to just ignore their intentions.

PHILOSOPHER: When you decided which university you would go to in line with your parents' wishes, what sort of emotion did you feel with regard to your parents?

YOUTH: It's complicated. I did have feelings of resentment, but on the other hand there was this sense of relief, too. You know, that I could get them to recognize me if I went to that school.

PHILOSOPHER: You could get them to recognize you?

YOUTH: Come on, let's stop the roundabout leading questions. I'm sure you know what I'm referring to. It's the so-called desire for recognition. It's interpersonal relationship problems in a nutshell. We human beings live in constant need of recognition from others. It is precisely because the other person is not an abhorrent enemy that one wants recognition from him, isn't it? So yes, that's right; I wanted to be recognized by my parents.

How to Rid Yourself of Interpersonal Relationship Problems

YOUTH: I don't know, it just doesn't sit right with me.

PHILOSOPHER: Then let's envision a scene in which your parents are vehemently opposing your choice of place of employment. They were in fact against it, weren't they?

YOUTH: Yes, they were. I wouldn't go so far as saying they were vehemently opposed, but they did make various snide remarks.

PHILOSOPHER: Well, let's exaggerate it and say they were vehemently opposed. Your father was ranting and raving with emotion, and your mother was protesting your decision with tears in her eyes. They absolutely do not approve of you becoming a librarian, and if you will not take on the family business like your brother has, they may very well disown you. But how to come to terms with the emotion of "not approving" is your parents' task, not yours. It is not a problem for you to worry about.

YOUTH: Now wait a minute. Are you saying that it doesn't matter how sad I make my parents feel?

PHILOSOPHER: That's right. It doesn't matter.

YOUTH: You've got to be joking! Could there be such a thing as a philosophy that recommends unfilial behavior?

PHILOSOPHER: All you can do with regard to your own life is choose the best path that you believe in. On the other hand, what kind of judgment do other people pass on that

But conducting oneself in such a way as to not be disliked by anyone is an extremely unfree way of living, and is also impossible. There is a cost incurred when one wants to exercise one's freedom. And the cost of freedom in interpersonal relationships is that one is disliked by other people.

YOUTH: No! That's totally wrong. There is no way that could be called freedom. That's a diabolical way of thinking to coax one into evildoing.

PHILOSOPHER: You've probably been thinking of freedom as "release from organizations." That breaking away from your home or school, your company or your nation is freedom. However, if you were to break away from your organization, for instance, you would not be able to gain real freedom. Unless one is unconcerned by other people's judgments, has no fear of being disliked by other people, and pays the cost that one might never be recognized, one will never be able to follow through in one's own way of living. That is to say, one will not be able to be free.

YOUTH: Be disliked by other people—is that what you are saying?

PHILOSOPHER: What I am saying is, don't be afraid of being disliked.

уоитн: But that's—

PHILOSOPHER: I am not telling you to go so far as to live in such a way that you will be disliked, and I am not saying engage in wrongdoing. Please do not misunderstand that.

YOUTH: No. Then let's change the question. Can people actually endure the weight of freedom? Are people that strong? To not care even if one is disliked by one's own parents—can one become so self-righteously defiant?

PHILOSOPHER: One neither prepares to be self-righteous nor becomes defiant. One just separates tasks. There may be a person who does not think well of you, but that is not your task. And again, thinking things like *He should like me* or *I've done all this, so it's strange that he doesn't like me*, is the reward-oriented way of thinking of having intervened in another person's tasks. One moves forward without fearing the possibility of being disliked. One does not live as if one were rolling downhill, but instead climbs the slope that lies ahead. That is freedom for a human being. Suppose

YOUTH: There are such frameworks as one's household, school, workplace, or local society.

PHILOSOPHER: When Adler refers to community, he goes beyond the household, school, workplace, and local society, and treats it as all-inclusive, covering not only nations and all of humanity but also the entire axis of time from the past to the future—and he includes plants and animals and even inanimate objects.

YOUTH: Huh?

PHILOSOPHER: In other words, he is espousing that community is not merely one of the preexisting frameworks that the word might bring to mind but is also inclusive of literally *everything*—the entire universe, from the past to the future.

YOUTH: No way. Now you've lost me. The universe? Past and future? What on earth are you talking about?

PHILOSOPHER: The majority of those who hear this have similar doubts. This is not something one can comprehend immediately. Adler himself acknowledged that the community he was espousing was "an unattainable ideal."

YOUTH: Ha-ha. Well, that's perplexing, isn't it? How about the other way around, then? Do you really comprehend and accept this community feeling, or whatever it is, that includes the entire universe?

PHILOSOPHER: I try to. Because I feel that one cannot truly comprehend Adlerian psychology without comprehending this point.

YOUTH: Okay then!

PHILOSOPHER: As I have been saying all along, Adlerian psychology has the view that all problems are interpersonal relationship problems. Interpersonal relations are the source of unhappiness. And the opposite can be said, too—interpersonal relations are the source of happiness.

YOUTH: Indeed.

Do Not Rebuke or Praise

YOUTH: Well, all right. But don't you see? You haven't touched on the essential point, that is, the course of progression from the separation of tasks to community feeling. So first, I separate the tasks. I think of my tasks as being up to this point, and everything beyond that is other people's tasks. I don't intervene in other people's tasks, and I draw a line so that other people won't intervene in mine. But how can one build interpersonal relations with this separation of tasks and arrive in the end at the community feeling that "it's okay to be here"? How does Adlerian psychology advise us to overcome the life tasks of work, friendship, and love? It seems like you're just trying to confuse me with abstract words, without going into any concrete explanation.

PHILOSOPHER: Yes, you've hit on the important point. How does carrying out the separating of tasks connect with good relations? That is to say, how does it connect with building the kind of relations in which we cooperate and act in harmony with each other? Which brings us to the concept of "horizontal relationship."

YOUTH: Horizontal relationship?

PHILOSOPHER: Let's start with an easily understood example, that of the parent-child relationship. Whether the circumstances are, for example, those of child-rearing, or of training junior staff in the workplace, generally speaking there are two approaches that are considered: one is the method of raising by rebuke, and the other is the method of raising by praise.

YOUTH: Ah. That is a hotly debated issue.

PHILOSOPHER: Which one do you think is the better choice? To rebuke or to praise?

YOUTH: It's better to raise by praising, of course.

PHILOSOPHER: No, it is the same.

YOUTH: What is the same about it? Try and give me a more everyday example, please. If you can't, I won't be able to agree with this.

PHILOSOPHER: All right. When we look at other people, we are prone to construct our own ideal images of ourselves, which we then detract from and judge. Imagine, for example, a child who never talks back to his parents, excels in both schoolwork and sports, attends a good university, and joins a large company. There are parents who will compare their child to such an image of an ideal child—which is an impossible fiction—and then be filled with complaints and dissatisfaction. They treat the idealized image as one hundred points, and they gradually subtract from that. This is truly a "judgment" way of thinking. Instead, the parents could refrain from comparing their child to anyone else, see him for who he actually is, and be glad and grateful for his being there. Instead of taking away points from some idealized image, they could start from zero. And if they do that, they should be able to call out to his existence itself.

YOUTH: Okay, but I'd say that's just an idealistic approach. So are you saying that even with the kind of child who never goes to school or gets a job, but just shuts himself in and stays home, one should still communicate one's gratitude and say thank you?

PHILOSOPHER: Of course. Suppose your shut-in child helped you wash the dishes after a meal. If you were to say then, "Enough of that already—just go to school," you would be using the words of such parents who detract from an image of an ideal child. If you were to take such an approach, the child would probably end up even more discouraged. However, if you can say a straightforward thank you, the child just might feel his own worth and take a new step forward.

YOUTH: That's just utterly hypocritical! It's nothing more than the nonsensical talk of a hypocrite. It sounds like the "neighborly love" that Christians talk about. The community feeling, the horizontal relationships, the gratitude for existence, and so on. Who on earth could actually do such things?

PHILOSOPHER: With regard to this issue of community feeling, there was a person who asked Adler a similar question. Adler's reply was the following: "Someone has to start. Other people might not be cooperative, but that is not connected to you. My advice is

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?

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: 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."

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.