

Let's Join Our Fellow Human Beings in Order to Survive as a Human Species!

There is no Royal Road

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“One day fear knocked at the door. Courage got up and opened it, but there was no one outside.”

This originally English proverb was attributed to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe at the beginning of 2020. Endowed with the authority of the German poet prince, it quickly became a popular motivational saying against the fear of the Corona virus. The quotation reflects a wisdom of life, which is psychologically reinforced and deepened in the following. If we humans muster the courage to overcome the fear of fellow human beings acquired in our upbringing, if we associate with them in freedom and elevate public spirit to the guiding idea, then the human species has a chance to survive.

Step outside your own front door and see what is available!

Every human being is called upon to make a contribution to solving the urgent problems of our time. And of course we are able to do so if we are aware that it depends on each and every one of us. Why not muster the courage to use our own intellect, not to suppress the current problems of humanity, but to stand up against injustice – intellectually, emotionally, politically. Overcome the inertia of the heart and act! Against all odds, muster the determination to seek the truth and thereby preserve our dignity as human beings and create a future worth living for ourselves and our children.

The Swiss poet and novelist Gottfried Keller (1819-1890) believed:

“No government and no battalions (...) are able to protect law and freedom where the citizen is unable to step outside the front door himself and see what is available.”
(Zurich Novellas)

Romain Rolland (1866 to 1944), French writer and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, even believed that, if necessary, every man must stand alone within all and think and act for all. In the introduction to his 1920 anti-war novel “Clerambault. History of a Free Conscience

in War” he wrote.

“Every man, if he is a true man, must learn to stand alone within all, to think alone for all – if necessary, even against all! To think sincerely is to think for all, even if one thinks against all. Humanity needs those who offer it chess out of love and rebel against it when it is necessary!” (1)

“The Internationale”, the world-famous struggle song of the socialist workers’ movement, also recommends people not to hope for salvation from higher beings, but to take action themselves:

“Wake up, damned of this earth, who are still forced to starve! (...) Army of slaves, wake up! (...) Peoples, hear the signals! To the final battle! (...) No higher being, no god, no emperor, no tribune can save us! To deliver us from misery, that we can only do ourselves!” (2)

Free citizens who stand up against injustice and tyranny have nothing against those in power. They do nothing to them. But neither do they want to live in a system of rule in which they have to remain silent. They fight for a more just order, for their right to life, to freedom, peace and security. Moreover, they have common sense and are autonomous. Autonomy is the state and feeling of life of self-determination, independence and self-government. Philosophically, it is the ability to see oneself as a being of freedom and to act out of this freedom.

Equipped with these abilities, no human being freely hands over to another the power to decide on his or her life and future. Not to another human being or politician, but also not to a supernatural being who is supposed to guide and protect him as a “deity” from earliest childhood to the end of days. After all, we humans are embedded in the community of our fellow species, of whom we do not have to be afraid, but on whose support and solidarity we can build.

Have the courage to associate with our fellow human beings

We just have to muster the courage to face this task and associate ourselves with fellow human beings. This means taking upon ourselves a path that is often arduous, long and not easy to walk, to believe in the goodness in the other person, to empathise with them, to associate with them and to appeal to them without coercion. There is no short, easy and simple path to the goal – no so-called royal road.

The other person, our counterpart, our fellow citizen and conspecific is gladly prepared to accept our offer if he is given the opportunity to decide for it freely and without any coercion. He too wants to live well with his children. He, too, is happy to help the other.

More than 100 years ago, the Russian anarchist, geographer and writer Prince Peter Kropotkin (1842 to 1921) wrote in his book “Mutual Aid in the Animal and Human World” that in nature and society there is by no means only a struggle of all against all (social Darwinism), but that the principle of “mutual aid” also prevails. Those living beings who implement this principle would survive more successfully. Kropotkin observed both nature and natural beings and applied his findings to human beings.

Elevate the sense of community to the guiding idea

This principle of mutual help must be anchored in every possible way in the thoughts and moral principles of action of human beings and in solidarity, in the feeling of belonging together, in brotherhood and in the sense of community of human beings. The teachings of the moral leaders of humanity, the wisdom of Lao Tzu, the commandment to love one's neighbour and the innumerable forms of social life and behaviour in which public spirit is expressed, grew out of the insight that all those who bear a human face belong together.

For Alfred Adler, the founder of individual psychology, the "deepest idea of all culture (...) consists in the final rejection of the striving for power and in the final elevation of public spirit to the leading idea." He said this 100 years ago. All our endeavours in the world and in science should have the guiding principle of producing a type of human being in the future for whom – as Alfred Adler put it – a sense of community and interpersonal solidarity are as natural as breathing (3).

It is possible to suppress the exhortations of the human sense of community; they can never be completely eradicated, for the gift of evolution consists in the moral consciousness of the individual, in the insight into the responsibility of all towards all. Our task for the future, therefore, seems to be above all the cultivation and strengthening of communal feelings. No means must be too small for us, no effort too arduous, in order to better integrate man into the social fabric.

Overcoming the fear of fellow human beings acquired in education

For most people, however, this noble goal is opposed by an emotional reaction acquired in childhood that is difficult to overcome: fear of fellow human beings. This fear is not innate. People are born without fear and acquire it only in the course of their development as a result of traditional authoritarian and religious upbringing. That is why almost all adult humans have fear – consciously or even more often unconsciously. It is an expression of irritation and has little to do with the real situation.

Fear permeates the whole of a person's life, his actions, how he presents himself and moves in life and in the community. It prevents him from thinking and makes him incapable of assessing any situation in a real and reasonable way. He is no longer the doer of his life, but fear drives him.

The image of man of the Christian occidental culture says that man – even the small child – carries bad qualities within himself. With this information – be it conscious or unconscious – the educator of today approaches the child. He always suspects ill will in the child. He does not know that the child is completely oriented towards the relationship persons, that his whole longing and aspiration is to be loved and appreciated by the parents, that he still likes to cooperate so much. The child is good by nature.

In reality, parents and educators instil great fear in the child with every use of force, be it in the form of strictness or also spoiling. The child learns to be afraid; it learns to feel threatened by fellow human beings; it experiences that it is not good to eat with human beings. The emotional reaction of fear becomes part of its character. The image of man that the child acquired from its parents in the earliest years of childhood is unconsciously carried into every relationship.

Even today, the child is brought up with violence and disregard for its personality. As a result, the child begins to turn away from the human being. This results in a negating

tendency that influences his later life. It no longer expects much from the human being. The violent treatment deeply shakes his personality and awakens in him aversion to his fellow man. Trust in human beings, which is actually the foundation of the personality and the natural conception of life, cannot develop.

The child also experiences that parental authority is above everything. It experiences that there is only one correct opinion, and that is that of the father, the authority. It learns that certain opinions should not be held. They learn to fear the violence and sanctions that come from their parents to such an extent that they no longer dare to contradict them, neither in thought nor in action. As an adult, man is no longer able to form his own thought because his fear of the consequences – earthly or supernatural – paralyzes him. He becomes nervous and indignant when he even hears a different opinion.

On this ground it is not possible for the human being to deal with other opinions. He can only accept something from the other person with difficulty. His fear becomes the dominating problem in relationships. He does not know free discussion, he only knows command and obedience. He is used to accepting the opinion of authority unchecked. He also experienced as a child that he was burdened with many opinions that he could not check in any way. So he comes to terms with the fact that many things cannot be understood and that the incomprehensible must not be doubted.

This intimidation of understanding and reason goes hand in hand in our culture with religious education, with unreal information about spirits, devils and angels.

Man is born neither religious nor believing in God, but the mentally healthy and uncrippled child enters a society in which delusional ideas and illusions prevail. No sooner does the little child show its first mental impulses and learn to speak than it is “taken into care” by society, i.e. by the parents and the church. It is made clear to him that his nature is not allowed to develop freely with regard to his feeling for nature and his world view. If it wants to avoid being punished with general contempt and hellish chastisements, it must press its being into a certain ecclesiastical form.

Outlook

Thanks to the findings of scientific psychology, we now know how fear of fellow human beings arises. We know exactly what causes it. We also know how people can put fear behind them. Today’s people should therefore no longer be plagued by fears. These fears can be changed or overcome in a trusting therapeutic relationship with a professional. By experiencing compassion and understanding, the person can lose these fears (4).

And pedagogy in the parental home and school has to renounce the authoritarian principle – which for centuries was regarded as the unquestionably valid basis of educational behaviour – and the use of violence. Educators must adapt themselves with true understanding to the child’s soul life, respect the child’s personality and turn to him or her with friendship. Such education will produce a type of human being who does not have a “subject mentality” and will therefore no longer be a docile tool for the rulers in our world.

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Notes

(1) Rolland, Romain (1988). Clerambault. History of a free conscience in war. Reinbek near Hamburg, p. 12

(2) https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Die_Internationale

(3) Ansbacher. Heinz L. / Ansbacher, Rowena R. (eds.). (1982). Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology. A systematic presentation of his teachings in excerpts from his writings. Munich, Basel

(4) Op. cit.

Featured image: Human rights activists, including Canadian Michaela Lavis, before being arrested by Israeli authorities in Khan Al-Ahmar

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