Gnostic Psychology – Notes 04

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Character and Attitude

The physical body is a marvelous instrument that human beings possess in order to express themselves. A person's attitude and character do not develop in the physical body, but express themselves through it... In many different ways we hear about the importance of 'right attitude', but what do we mean by attitude? We mean **the general state of the person relative to an object or, specifically, their emotional state in regards to it.** If we feel suspicious of the object, then our attitude is one of suspicion. If we feel fear, affection, trust, hope, then our attitude corresponds. The attitude is determined by the emotion evoked in us by the object. This means that our attitude corresponds to our present emotional state or internal state.

Can we change our attitude towards things? Obviously our attitude can be changed for us by circumstances. In regard to most objects and persons, in fact, our attitudes change almost from day to day. One day we like so-and-so very much and are disposed (consequently) to act in a certain way towards that person; but the next day (owing to some perceived change in them or in circumstances affecting ourselves) our attitude can easily change, and we can become cool where we were warm.

Observation of ourselves will easily show how infinitely changeable we are in our attitudes, that is to say, in our emotional responses to things. But the question is: **Can we change our attitude voluntarily at our own discretion, without the stimulus from a change in the object?** If we could do so then we would be on the way to becoming masters of our fate, since circumstances can affect us only as much as we are affectable. If we can adopt any attitude we choose, then whatever happens is all the same to us, and we can feel about the object as we please.

It is clear that the dominant attitude of our lives is our emotional response towards life itself, this is because it colors everything. As we commonly say, some see everything 'through rose-colored glasses' and others have a 'gloomy outlook' on life. For many people as there are, there are just as many attitudes; though all can be reduced to a definite number of groups or categories. And in every case their dominant attitude determines their subordinate attitude.

Life as a Gymnasium

Compare the difference in your attitude (or emotional state) upon entering a gymnasium and upon entering, let us say, a nightclub, or a lecture-hall, or a funeral home. Try to realize what and how you actually feel. When you are prepared for a challenge, then you have the intention of strengthening yourself, and you delight in the difficulties (provided you choose them yourself).

The classic Greek conception of life was just that and the gymnasium (with its lectures and discussions as well as physical exercises) was the most popular institution of Pythagorean Greece. The gymnasium was for the Greeks a symbol of life itself. Their gods ran this planet as a gym for the exercise of human beings: all experiences were to be taken as movements, turns, stretches, or exercises in wrestling, running, lifting, and so on.

Modern people will find what the ancient Greeks found in this image of life: the evocation of a creative emotion, a wonderful opportunity. The clean, strong idea of life as a field of exercise for the development of all our muscles (physical, emotional and intellectual) still has the unspoiled quality of manly and womanly idealism. And life lived in this attitude will certainly be interesting as well as profitable.

Differentiating Between Internal States and External Events

Can you note the difference between your own life and life in general? What do you mean by the term *my life*, like when you say: "My life has been a happy life" or "an unhappy life"? Do you mean that outside things have been pleasant or unpleasant, or inside things? Do you mean that your moods and feelings and so on have been pleasant or otherwise? What is our life? When people wish to tell the history of their lives, they speak of *events*, of other people, of dates, etc. But our life consists of two distinct things which (for the purposes of self-observation) must be realized. Our life consists not only of events, but of *states*. States are internal and events are external. States are states of oneself, they are in oneself. Events are external and come to us from the outside.

It is necessary to try to see that **states and events are two different things**, first, before thinking of how they may be connected together. Let's understand that internal states are: good or bad disposition, preoccupation, depression, superstition, fear, suspicion, mercy, self-pity, over-estimation of oneself (or others), under-estimation of oneself (or others), states of happiness, states of pleasure, etc. **Unquestionably, internal states can correspond exactly to external events, they can be originated by external events, or they can have no relationship with external events at all.** In every case, states and events are different. Events do not always correspond exactly to compatible states. A pleasant (or unpleasant) event could be related (or unrelated) with its internal state. When a long awaited for event finally arrives, we often feel that something is missing... Certainly, the corresponding internal state (which should have been combined with the external event) was what was missing. Many times an unexpected event turns out to be the one which has provided us with the best moments.

How to Live Life Consciously and Intelligently

To correctly combine internal states with external events is to know how to live intelligently. Any event intelligently lived demands its specific corresponding internal state. Nonetheless, people are very much inclined (when thinking of their lives) to believe that if a certain number of *external events* of one kind or another have (or have not) happened to them, and then their lives have been fortunate. But **a person's capacity to live depends on their inner development: on the quality of their inner states**. Because the apparatus for living (in regards to our states) is within, and if this apparatus is swamped by self-pity, worries and other negative emotions, then no matter how delightful the external events may be: nothing can happen properly, simply because the apparatus for living (the person in themselves) is quite unable to combine (in a fortunate) way with such events that come from outer life.

If you work on these wrong states and try to separate yourself from them, then the unpleasant events of life will not catch you so easily and will not draw energy from you. Events are influences that can change at every moment in their various combinations, and some are better than others, but all have to be taken consciously (even good ones), while some of them are very dangerous and must not be identified with at all costs. From what has been said, it will become clearer that **one's life is more to be thought of as one's internal states and a true history of one's life would be a history of one's inner states**. Therefore, this work begins with self-observation and noticing wrong states in oneself and working against them. In this way the inner life becomes purified and since our inner life attracts our outer life, then by changing our internal states (starving some and nourishing others), we also alter not only our relation to events coming from the outside, but even the nature of the events that come to us day by day. It is not what happens to you today that matters (like that you lost something, or something went wrong, or someone forgot you, or spoke to you harshly, etc.), but how you reacted to it all (like what states of yourself you were in) since it is here that your real life is. If our internal states are correct, then no external event can overwhelm us. The capacity to consciously exist depends exclusively on the quality of the interior states of the Soul...