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The Crisis of Success

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Introduction

How often we want to think about ourselves, about humanity or about the world, and we do not know where to begin! When our minds are not caught up in distractions, the ideas that do stay with us do not seem to be our own: they are the thoughts of others, the product of unknown minds that tell us what we should think. Moreover, when life turns out differently than what we wanted it to be, our ideas become distorted by our wishes, and we do not know if the way we think is because that is the way things are, or if it is because we want it to be that way.

We live defending ourselves; our opinions are also a way of defending what is ours. Thus the discourse of our thoughts is not free but rather follows whatever interests us at the moment. It's no wonder we do not understand what is happening to us!

The first chapter of this book, "The Meaning of Freedom," deals with different ways of looking at freedom. The meaning of freedom is probably one of the most debated topics of all times. We all defend our freedom. But what freedom are we defending? Rarely do we agree on the answer to that question.

The second chapter, "Towards a New Way of Thinking," assumes that we have the habit of thinking. But do we really ever have our own thoughts? Very few ideas are original; we are so used to spontaneously adopting the opinions expressed by our sources of information that we do not know when we really think for ourselves. Moreover, when we do

think for ourselves, we run the risk of being marginalized, contradicted or discredited. But if we do not learn to think, we run an even greater risk.

The mind is the most precious thing we have; sacrificing its freedom would be to sacrifice what it means to be human. To be able to have this right to think freely, much has been discussed and fought over throughout history. But that freedom would be an illusion if we are not inwardly free enough to be able to think.

And there is still more: we have so separated our daily life from thought itself that our way of living may be in stark contrast with the opinions that we espouse, and neither we nor anyone else sees anything contradictory about this.

The faculty of thinking is usually limited to an abstract reasoning technique that we rarely apply to daily life. For this reason its development has not produced a corresponding advancement in ourselves, because we face not only rational problems but also problems vital to our well-being and development.

It is not uncommon for people with brilliant minds to be unable to solve basic human problems, to fail in their private lives or in their ability to develop sensitivity and inner balance.

The title of the third chapter, "The Crisis of Success" may give the impression of being a criticism of modern society without giving any hope for a solution to our problems. That is not our intention. It would not do much good to point out our shortcomings and then condemn ourselves to die with them. But it is not easy to find real solutions to the problems and tragedies that we ourselves generate. What we need is an inner development that, at the very least, will equal the

progress of modern society. Moreover, we must prepare for future changes that we cannot yet envision, given the rapid pace of the advancement and application of knowledge.

If we were to offer new theoretical plans as a solution to human problems, it would be like taking the same food that previously made us sick and serving it on new plates: it would be no more than a new intellectual framework to distract us from seeing ourselves as we really are. Sometimes it becomes necessary to break the hard shell in which we encase ourselves in order to see what is obvious. It is hard to wake up, when that awakening means we have to change something inside ourselves. Our inner inertia can be so strong that it often seems impossible to bring about a spiritual change in ourselves. But today the need for change is so obvious that each one of us has the responsibility to awaken within and to expand our state of consciousness.

By awaken we mean to shake off the inertia that keeps us prisoners of ourselves, to be able to sincerely acknowledge what we are, what we do and what we pursue, and to have enough inner strength to unfold spiritually.

J.W.

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The meaning of freedom

A natural desire for freedom exists within us all— to live as we wish, to experience, investigate, know, and be. The exercise of this freedom has given us an increasingly complex society that actually gradually limits our freedoms—or our ideas of freedom—in the interest of the advancement of the whole. This happens as much at the national level as in the personal arena: in our work, study, and even in many cases, our times of recreation. This contradiction leads us to ask: What does it mean to be free?

The development of knowledge and the advancement of technology have brought profound changes in our lives, our social structure and our concept of work and usefulness. These changes give us new possibilities and at the same time present new challenges to our imagination and intelligence, not only about what we do but about the values that guide what we do. We are living in a new context that not only makes us rethink how we live, work and relate, but also leads us to reevaluate the ideas we have had until now, especially that of freedom.

In our everyday life, it is common to contrast the idea of freedom with that of slavery, especially in the obligations we have to fulfill. Our life becomes a struggle between pairs of opposites: periods of tension and moments when we relax, periods of much responsibility and those of relative irresponsibility.

If we define freedom as opposite to slavery, we make freedom a contradictory state. On one hand we want to live in a society that makes optimum use of our talents and efforts, increases production and provides for our needs; on the

other, we reject the inevitable consequences of the organization of such a society, feeling our individual liberties are under attack by that very organization.

Similarly, if we want the state to protect our interests, we also give up many of our options; the tighter the organization, the lower the margin for our freedoms.

Although we understand that the exercise of freedom falls within certain limits, when those limits become increasingly narrow, the field where that freedom is possible becomes so small that we do not really know what it is *to be free*.

As the number of people on earth multiply and we deplete natural resources, as human communities grow and interact more, as life becomes more complex and our ability to communicate and share information multiplies, societies organize themselves more and more. All this leads to the progressive dispossession of our private lives *to the point where there is almost nothing we can keep to ourselves. Whatever the circumstances we live or the context in which we unfold, we gradually lose the freedom to be ourselves, to be separate and independent individuals within the whole.* And this was, until now, one of the most defining views of the idea of freedom, at least in our culture.

In today's society our right to dispose of our time, our life, our very being, is increasingly diminishing.

But, in reality, it's not so important to identify the enemies of our freedom; rather we need to become aware that it is technology that is gradually taking away from us what, until now, we've understood freedom to be. Technology is leading us to a complex system of automatic, predetermined responses. Traditional life is replaced by technical efficiency,

individual life by collective life. And with this, it seems, comes the end of our ideals of freedom.

It may seem remarkable that no organized resistance has appeared to defend the freedoms we are giving up for the sake of organizational efficiency and modernization. While we may fear and reject an increasingly cold and less-human efficiency, we don't oppose it. That would be to oppose progress itself.

We feel that being against the advancement of science and its application in technology would be backwards and curtail the most prized freedom of the individual—that of knowing. But one of the consequences of this knowledge actually contradicts our ideas of freedom, enclosing and imprisoning us. The need for organization takes away the freedom of being disorganized. And perhaps this freedom—disorganization, to follow the whim of the moment—is one of the few freedoms we really know.

In this age of amazing achievements, which until recently were no more than the dreams of visionaries, it is tragic to see the outdated doctrines that are intended to support us and which, in the best of cases, belong to an era that we left behind more than a century ago in years and a universe away in distance.

It becomes necessary to rethink the assumptions that place us in the world and life, on pain of being marginalized by history and unaware of the possibilities open to us today.

We believe that we are free if we can give our opinions as we please; we have freedom of conscience if we can choose the belief that we see fit. We also think that nobody can force us to go to work or school if we don't want to, and that no one has the right to interfere in our private lives as long as we

obey the law. But at the same time we do not always want to do what we know we have to do, and when we choose not to fulfill our obligations we believe we are exercising our freedom. But is it really up for discussion not to do what we have to do?

What is left of freedom when our duties, obligations and responsibilities continually increase?

When an organization reaches a certain level of complexity, our condition of being human in something as basic as the right to decide and choose is encroached upon. The uniform satisfaction of needs, conditioned by advertisement and the media, gradually diminishes our capacity to consciously choose and decide how to meet these needs.

That leads us to ask ourselves: what is the one area where each of us can exercise our freedom, that area which is inherent to our very nature and which no organization can reach?

How can we reconcile the idea of freedom with the fact that we participate in a society that threatens to make us disappear into anonymity?

If we limit life to a succession of acts that we perform, almost nothing is left for us. The real issue here is that we know very little of life outside of this realm of constant doing, of coming and going, of gaining and winning. Our idea of who we are is based essentially on our ability to do. And we project this doing continually onto concrete external actions and goals.

The concept we have of people, events, and even values, is marked by our identification with what we do and, quite often, by what we get from what we do. We very seldom bridge the gap between what we do and who we are. It is

true that what each person does bears the stamp of who he or she is; so much so that few of the great and noble human achievements have not also involved suffering and destruction.

Our emphasis on exterior acts turns the search for freedom into our ability to move, do, talk; but this does not necessarily mean we have the freedom to think. For example, the way we understand the freedom of worship makes this “freedom” rather relative, since the vast majority of people born within a belief die in it. It's good that everyone is true to his or her faith, but very few consciously choose what to believe, out of freedom.

Real freedom of thought is very rare indeed. More often it is confused with the right to dissent. It is, for example, relatively easy to be able to say what the general views and opinions of a person are going to be just by knowing what country he or she was born into, what his or her economic status, religion, or social circle is, and the books he or she reads.

We did not choose nor develop most of the ideas and values that we think of as our own. Quite simply, the only thing we have done is to accept some of the ideas we have heard. This acceptance becomes so complete that we believe we think as we choose to think. But what is really happening is that we end up thinking according to our religion, political ideology, class, race, or country. We think according to the circle in which we belong; if we don't, we become marginalized, labeled as rebellious or a misfit or, put simply, the enemy. If what we work for is exterior freedom—after all, freedom of expression is exterior—we will find support and sympathy. But if we feel that freedom really begins with inner freedom, only then do we begin to understand the price of

freedom. And only then do we understand something of its meaning.

It is still possible to escape the tyranny of organized society; here and there in the world are a few uninhabited islands, secluded corners where we could experience and live a kind of natural freedom. However, very few think of us seriously consider moving to a desert island. We know that it would be an escape, a fleeing from reality and from our commitment to humanity and the world; a commitment we gladly assume even when it brings us sorrow that we never wanted to bear.

Today we still continue to defend our freedom with all our might, and it often conflicts with the freedom of those around us. There is no fixed boundary marking where personal freedom begins and ends and where the rights of the community lie. The meaning of personal rights is intricately related, in fact, to the sense of responsibility that each one of us has for the community. And this responsibility is not yet well understood, since when society's rights are mentioned, most of us become quite defensive. We do not fully understand that we cannot separate society from ourselves.

When we see ourselves as individuals as opposed to members of society, we create a division within ourselves and, consequently, an opposition between what we understand as our own needs and rights and what we are entitled to as members of society.

If we see ourselves as individuals in conflict with the masses, individualism versus social responsibility, we become divided and there is neither peace within ourselves nor in the world. The struggle between any system of ideas is really a struggle going on inside us; the personality that we have

acquired is not giving up the fight against what we are as human beings.

I cannot be free as long as my life is a continual struggle between what I want and what I have to do. When such an inner battle wages, how can I know who I am, what I want, what I should do and what are my possibilities?

In reality, neither ideas nor structures are at the center of this inner conflict, but rather the individual. And this individual: what one is as a person, as a social being, as an existential reality, is what we are really talking about here.

In today's world nothing is untouchable. Previously held beliefs and positions are now challenged and are no longer considered unquestionable. Has this made us free? No, it has only led to greater insecurity and fear. As we do not really know how to live and think for ourselves and as we can no longer rely on ideological frameworks to do that for us, we feel we have no support and nowhere to turn. All this makes us feel that we are living waiting, waiting for something to happen, hoping that, somehow, this intolerable situation will come to an end, and that some kind of great change will come. Meanwhile, our fear leads to anguish, aggression, and even a tendency toward self-destruction.

But no action makes sense if the outcome is destruction; no valid change or real new values come about by spontaneous generation. While today we see how many of the foundations of our societies are coming apart, we do not clearly see any new and better options.

If we have been conditioned to think and act the way we do, we cannot call that freedom. It is difficult to escape such conditioning; the one who has always been led by the hand does not learn to walk on his own.

This dependence stands in the way of real freedom. On the one hand, we could distance ourselves from the environment in which we live, but no matter where we go, we cannot escape ourselves. On the other, we come to realize that we are slaves to ourselves as much as to whatever system we may live in.

No structures, social organizations or systems can by themselves condition and enslave us, unless we let them. And we have, through our selfish desire to have possessions or goods for personal happiness. This is an unstoppable force that launches us into an unconscious, meaningless race of greed that adds to the indifference, separativity and suffering that we already endure. Desire becomes our ruler, and we believe we are free to obey. But as long as we are slaves to ourselves we cannot stop being slaves of outside forces; greed makes us weak.

We would not have become conditioned to consumerism if we had not already had in us the desire to possess and consume far more than what we really need. The desire to possess shows us our insecurity: we seek things or popularity, because we don't know how to grow as human beings.

We have learned to live by satisfying our needs. But these days we are not very clear on what we really need since we have been programmed by the media. We have been taught to be good consumers of all kinds of goods: material as well as economic, ideological and spiritual goods. We cannot separate our way of living from the need to consume. We identify so much with what we consume that we cannot really say who we are.

We have to train ourselves if we want to accomplish something we consider desirable. In the same way, we have

to train ourselves to be free of what we achieve. When we acquire a skill or learn something we tend to identify with what we can do or what we know; we think that is who we are.

We limit the idea of who we are to a personality that we have acquired, decorating it with what we learned, material goods—or something that we consider valuable—that we can show off or be known by. For example, we study to be a doctor, lawyer or engineer. Once we have our degree, we go to a place and everyone says, “Here comes the engineer,” even if we are going to a meeting that has nothing to do with engineering. The point is not so much what we call ourselves, but what we feel we are because of what we studied or what title we’ve earned. This feeling usually makes us act like professionals, or artists or technicians, or whatever we believe we are wherever we go, and not simply as persons. It can even make us patronizing, feeling we are above others who know less than what we know.

Hence the importance of understanding that, tied as we are to the desire to possess, our accomplishments enslave us instead of liberating us. To be really free, we have to be able to detach ourselves from the results of our achievements when faced with new horizons. We also have to recognize it is much harder to be free enough to let go of a possession than it is to get what we want. But it is that very freedom that transforms a conquest into a real good. This is because the freedom from what we have and from what we gain transforms an external possession into an inner one. Inner freedom shows us what is really ours. Since it is intrinsic, we cannot lose it. It cannot be separated from who we are.

In the same way, we need to understand our limitations. We generally think whatever structure we are opposed to is

what enslaves us, without realizing that we're more dependent on the structure we're supporting ourselves on.

Freedom is, precisely, that which allows us to question these points of support.

When we have to keep up with technology or follow the daily routine of an organization, we often think that we lose our freedom. But in reality, it is our own weaknesses that can bind us to these systems.

Let us recognize that we take part knowingly in an organization because we believe more in what it gives us than in what it takes from us. And it takes from us, precisely, an idea of freedom that we're not very happy about.

Does this mean the negation of the longing for freedom that we assume is inherent to our being? No, what is really happening is that we want a freedom that is not a mere concept; we want a profound, real freedom. We look for it through science and technology, through social movements and through various spiritual doctrines. And in that search we often confuse and mix up different ideas of freedom.

We hurry to put ourselves in a kind of standardized box in which we can assert ourselves and feel safe: we identify ourselves as the intellectual, the materialistic, the dreamer, the successful one, the loser, the rebel, the ignorant one, the mediocre or dogmatic or conformist. But what box could ever define a human being?

It wouldn't do us much good to break exterior structures if we didn't understand our internal, unilateral and conditional structure.

Every time we advance in the understanding of what we are not, of what does not belong to us because it is the product of history, circumstances, environment, we also advance in

the knowledge of who we are. We know more about our inner possibilities, what it means to be human, what it means *to be*. This is the step that leads to freedom.

What good would it be to have the freedom to express ourselves, to move, to do things, if these movements were not genuinely ours?

The truth is that freedom and plenitude are inner goods that do not depend on what we receive or on our material achievements. Freedom and plenitude are the result of our attitude about material goods, society, life and the world.

If external freedom is not balanced by the development of our state of consciousness, we may become increasingly more efficient, like machines or robots, while we lose who we are as human beings.

Insofar as we understand ourselves as inseparable from humanity and the world, we free ourselves from the limited and partial idea of who we are; we attain a consciousness that encompasses all human beings and a world that expands in ever-widening circles.

Inner freedom is much more difficult to achieve than outer freedom, and it is even harder to define, because it is not about overcoming an oppressive society, or being victorious over someone or something else. It is about inner development, the capacity of being free respecting ourselves. This requires an inner work, which means a new kind of effort. Inner struggles cannot be objectified like an external enemy can. This changes our ideas about who is the enemy and what is victory. Destructive inner passions require from us an effort of transmutation, because we cannot remove parts of ourselves that we consider bad; we can only transform them.

The same is true about our efforts to achieve a more peaceful society. When we stop dividing the world into friends and enemies, we discover humanity, perhaps for the first time. And this discovery, produced by our inner expansion, translates into a total responsibility for all human beings and the world. This new inner sense of responsibility makes us give up our personal and separate idea of freedom; we come to understand that we are free only when we renounce our individual freedom.

With this inner commitment, we can no longer think of freedom as the ability to do what we please; our choice comes down to deciding, at any time, if we are willing to be and do what know we should be doing in the context of an increasingly broader and more inclusive state of consciousness.

Freedom becomes a real need to live our inner commitment to humanity, the world and ourselves.

Freedom begins, then, with the ability to grow inwardly beyond our limitations and conditioning; to grow expansively, consciously and fully. This growth transforms the vision we have of life itself, of ourselves, of humanity and of the world, integrating it with reality, until it ceases to be something opposite: *my* reality vs. *the* reality, and becomes an inner state of participation where all contradictions disappear.

From this inner state, then, freedom no longer seems to us to be a goal to conquer and defend; it becomes a new broad and expansive vision of human beings and their possibilities. And this vision places us in the context of all reality, of all that we can perceive, thus awakening in us the consciousness of our individuality.

That is why we say we discover real freedom only when we discover our individuality. And this realization, which is an

inner good par excellence, opens the way to the unfolding of our consciousness, of who we are as beings in a world where the possibility of doing is progressively being taken over by technology.

The transformation of external action into an inner one demonstrates a fundamental shift in our consciousness. And this change marks the beginning of the unfolding of our inner being, which until now we've known only indirectly, through the reactions of someone—our self—who we do not know.

This inner world is the field where we need to develop a new meaning of freedom, of who we really are, of the final encounter with ourselves, to rediscover from there all humanity, the world, the universe. Otherwise, all our advances and discoveries only inform us of a reality that we cannot integrate with ourselves and therefore always remains outside of us.

The struggle for freedom, then, becomes an inner search that is expressed in a renouncement that enables us to know what we want, what we do, what we are. Once we stop identifying with what we want—our things, our material goods, our ready-made ideas—we stop our inner dependence on these things.

This renouncement allows us to take distance, to step back from our reactions, to know why we think the way we do, why we desire the things we desire, why we act the way we act. And this liberates us from a life conditioned to stimulus-reaction, because nothing can tie us down any more.

It is neither by force nor by power nor possessions that we attain inner free-dom. Inner freedom is the fruit of renouncement to ourselves. Our renouncement breaks the

bonds that bind us to things, to illusions, to dreams; it breaks open the jail that conditions us to desires and impulses. It allows us to know and to be who we really are.

This is when we begin to be free.

Toward a new way of thinking

Although we see divisions and different conceptions of life and the world among human beings, if we look more closely we can see that what really divides us are not the ideologies that we hold but the scope that our states of consciousness give to these ideologies.

We might believe that we work for the good of humanity, but in each state of consciousness we see this in quite a different way. Many of us work and struggle only for ourselves; others for our families, our country, creed or race.

And so it is inevitable that all these different human groups clash against one another. Although this conflict often comes about in the name of the noblest ideals, we need to understand that such a struggle develops within the same state of consciousness. This is a consciousness that doesn't integrate existence into a single and unique phenomenon but sees itself through the dualism of opposites: myself and all that is not me: my life and Life; self interest, which is invariably opposed to the people and things that, by existing outside the circle of my "self", don't interest me, don't involve me and don't fall under my responsibility. And, since they are not protected by my spiritual and ethical values—which function only within my circle—I may think of these people and things as fair game to be conquered, pillaged, destroyed.

But whoever uses their family for personal gain loses their family; whoever lives in a community without integrating within it becomes an obstacle to that community's unity and growth. Wherever we set up limits of what is not ours—whether they be goods, people, land or beliefs, we make it

something opposed to us, and therefore we feel free to appropriate, segregate, persecute or annihilate without any moral constraints.

Whoever understands life, the world and humanity as an indivisible unity will work for the good of all. But when one dedicates his or her life for the good of humanity without making differences, too often he or she is misunderstood and opposed by groups which are unable to classify their particular objectives within a universal attitude; they consider it dangerous to their structures. It is becoming increasingly difficult nowadays to explain an attitude that is not partial, to show how it is not for or against something or someone. It is inevitable that this happens; because it is more comprehensive and universal in nature it comes from a broader state of consciousness, beyond separativity.

The apparently irreconcilable differences today that move us to destroy one another are expressions of the same state of consciousness, no matter what ideology or creed we profess.

Of course, we don't mean to say that we all think the same way. What we mean is that the objective of our efforts and that which supports our beliefs— call them what you will— are actually the same basic values and produce the same consequences in the world and in our lives. This statement, which at first glance may seem exaggerated, clearly doesn't pertain to absolutely all human beings, but it is sad to say that it is true for the vast majority of us. Our way of thinking and feeling, although in its moral and spiritual concepts ideally is right and good, in practice positions us against one another. When guiding values arise from a state of consciousness based on separativity, the struggle for dominance is inevitable.

It will be very hard to find solutions for our human ills within this state of consciousness; the problems we suffer are caused by the divisions we make in the unity that is life, humanity and the world. Although knowledge of the divisions gives us some strength, it is the consciousness of the unity that turns this strength into something good for the world.

To make changes, to transcend separativity, is to identify the differences among us instead of destroying them.

We already do not deny the right that we all have to live and develop our possibilities, we understand that the differences between races and cultures are only superficial, that behind the appearances and characteristics of everyone is the human being, with his or her needs and inherent possibilities. However, some human beings continue to struggle very hard simply to survive. Very few human beings really have the opportunity to unfold their possibilities; the vast majority continues to struggle for mere subsistence.

When the unfolding of one person means the exploitation of another, such a development is not real. Similarly, when the advancement of a people is based on the poverty of others, their progress does not imply real growth.

From this point of view, we understand by unfolding the integral development of human beings, not merely the development of some of their capabilities. The current problems in the world demonstrate that technical advancement does not mean an advancement in the person as a human being but rather a mere increase of knowledge that that person has at his or her disposal.

When the growth of material power is greater than the growth of people as human beings, that power turns against

them. People turn against themselves, their own image embodied in the "other": the other person, the other nation, or the other ideology.

The unilateral advancement of material power shows us the backwardness of our humanity, by not walking in step with our knowledge and technology. It would be naive to think that, in order to balance this situation, we would consider stopping the development of science and technology. What we really have to ask ourselves is how to stop the decline of our very selves in relation to this development. We maintain our small spiritual stature as our hands grow disproportionately to become claws of prey and destruction.

The way to assess the development of a group of individuals is to evaluate them for who they are as human beings and not by the power they may use or abuse. Technical and scientific progress is evidence of ability in research and the application of knowledge, but it doesn't demonstrate that whoever has this ability is better than one who does not have it.

Faced by the immense universe that opens before us today, we feel shaken by the new possibilities that rock the values that until now have helped us live and develop.

When events lead us to new situations, we look for solutions. We instinctively resist change because it seems like as a problem, an attack, it throws us off guard. What is new always creates a conflict, because it alters stability. However, in today's society balance does not mean harmony, nor is stability a synonym for justice or peace. Our peace is not opposite to violence but to a change in its hidden violence.

There are no solutions for transformations that are part of life itself. The solutions that are generally offered are the disguise with which we hide our systematic opposition to all

profound change. If life is becoming, it is transformation. Instead of looking for solutions that attempt to restore things to an earlier more primitive state, we need to take on the pace of change that the development of humanity requires of us; and, if we cannot do it, at least to make way and encourage those who can.

Instead of letting imagination run wild, dreaming of what the future world might be, it would be better to try to be what we are already in condition to be as human beings.

Imagining a future world made better by technological progress is a great thought, but it does not commit us. Progress and technology allow us to live differently, but they don't make us different beings. If this is what we want, we have to commit ourselves to that, because it will require from us a reassessment of our place in life.

The goals that move us today are directly related to who we are today. But any goal becomes a reality only over time; when we do we reach our goals, they no longer have much meaning for us because they belong to a person who is no longer here, our past selves. The pace of change today is faster than ever before. Therefore, our aspirations should be based on our own unfolding, so that we progress as individuals at the same rate as our achievements.

A more developed world should be for a more developed human being. Otherwise, when this world becomes a reality, we will be extemporaneous. This means specifically that the impulse that motivates us should be based on the highest and most dignified intentions. The desire for personal profit, the small ambitions for power and notoriety, the craving to get the most of the goods that we take from life or society cannot be the foundation of a better humanity.

When the possibilities are as great as those that we see today, our aspirations should be equally high, until it becomes a calling, a vocation, of fulfillment as human beings. To meet the challenge that the future presents us today requires of us a new inner dimension.

Our goals, then, must be according to our current possibilities and not those of who we were yesterday. This means we need to let go of the values entrenched in us by habit. It especially means to let go of the convenience of not thinking of higher values, because that would require us to change.

It is relatively easy to find those who are willing to do an exterior work; many answer the first call. But an inner change is of a different nature; apathy is strong, and few are willing to work on their own unfolding.

Creativity is currently focused on achieving material advances, with outstanding results, but still we do not know to apply our creativity to the unfolding of the human being. Each one of us should be, for him or herself and for society, the main object of our work on advancement. In that way all our other achievements will have meaning. It is the lack of this ability or willingness to work on an integral unfolding of ourselves as individuals that puts us today in the situation of being at the mercy of our technology and on the brink of destruction. The need for humanity to develop its spiritual possibilities is a question of survival.

It has not helped much to look to the past when looking for solutions to the problems we face today. We are the result of history, and the crossroads where we find ourselves today requires much more imagination than that in recorded history. But if looking to the past does not help, looking to the future might lead us to dreams and fantasies. What we real-

ly need to do is look within ourselves, with depth and inner freedom, with a real yearning for expansion and to participate in the destiny and possibilities of all humankind.

Very often our first reaction is to try to escape from our problems; and our desire to find solutions actually hides our anxiousness to find an personal escape from human anguish. But we seek the impossible; every time we want to isolate ourselves, we end up turning back to the starting point and it forces us to accept what each one of us is: a person, confused, dazed by our power and pain, afraid to leave our cave of petty desires and dreams. The search for a personal escape from our problems reminds us continually that we have to be universal.

As we are used to thinking from a very narrow view of ourselves, we tend to be enclosed, and moved by a possessiveness that takes over reality. Soon our self-centeredness distorts reality, and we voraciously devour not only goods but also possibilities, possibilities that are destructive because we wish them to be ours alone.

There is no personal or isolated solution to a vital problem that includes all of reality of which we are only one particle. We therefore need to think differently, to find a new way of thinking that places us in life, in the world and in its problems as they really are. We need to reach an expansive consciousness that makes us truly universal.

A new way of thinking emerges when we think from a different place inside of ourselves. Instead of limiting life and the world to the small vision of a personal "I", with small desires and circumstantial problems, we contemplate the world and life as we know it to be. The "I" is no longer a point of contradiction between us and the world.

When the starting point of thought is no longer a personal limited self but rather a person who places herself in her universal dimension, the movement of thought becomes expansive. When you leave the center, when you stop being the focal point of attention in a problem that, because it belongs to life it cannot be personal, then it is no longer *this* being but *the* being as the starting point and the purpose of our considerations.

By achieving a broader approach to human problems we understand them in depth; they no longer are seen as the problems of an individual or group, of a people or a race, but as human problems. They become universal in scope and thus require a solution for the human being and not for one human being only.

If the purpose of our efforts is aimed at benefitting one person—myself—separate and opposite to everyone else, the entire course of the considerations and the nature of the conclusions we can come to are distorted and denatured. But when we think not only about our particular problems and conflicts but also about ourselves as human beings within our natural environment, the universe, our thinking expands to have a universal scope. We understand that human conflicts are caused by the limitation of our consciousness and the short range of our aspirations.

The result of universal thinking is the development of consciousness that transcends the borders of the self as a separate person, and consequently gives a better understanding of our problems. Universal thinking changes our behavior, resulting in participation with humanity, resulting in inclusive love. This love that unites one being with *being* and makes of my being *the* being, is not, of course, a mere sentimental movement, a lament for the world's ills or a momentary pity

for the suffering. It is a love that comes from the expansion of our inner reality, which includes all human beings because they are inside us.

Other beings are no longer “humanity” as an abstract and amorphous group that allows us to separate ourselves from their problems and to see them as strangers. Humanity is every single person, and it is oneself. Because one is this, that and every single human being. One is all human beings because one is *the* human being.

Love transcends the emotional stage and becomes a state of consciousness; it is the deep inner knowledge that gives a comprehensive and universal starting point for establishing values consistent with the universal place we have as beings in the cosmos.

The first step in expanding our consciousness is that which we give to our neighbor. We could not achieve cosmic consciousness if we excluded the people who are around us. Then we include each person as humanity. From there, our notion of being grows to encompass all of our reality and places us *with* humanity and *as* humanity in the cosmos.

This movement which leads to a broader and more complete awareness of who we are implies a new way of thinking; that is, an expansive way of thinking that takes human problems to their cosmic scale and thus shows them in their true dimension. It also reveals the sad and small extent of our consciousness when we engage in conflicts that are so far removed from our extraordinary possibilities; when we get entangled in petty conflicts we miss what life could be.

It is unfortunate, therefore, to see how backward some ideologies are today considering the progress achieved in the development of our knowledge. To solve our problems,

which come from such rapid development, we rely on ideas that were created for a different time, when knowledge and its possibilities were much more limited.

Despite our great scientific and technological achievements, including those that take us beyond the earth and out into the cosmos, expanding the frontier of human experience, this progress has not had an appreciable effect on our consciousness of the values of humanity as a whole.

The experience of seeing our planet from space ought to generate in us a sense of human community, free of the small circle of our problems, and place us within the universe where we can really unfold. But we have not placed ourselves *within* humanity, and even less so within the cosmos. Our consciousness of life has not expanded to match the reaches of our knowledge and experience. Our advances have slipped over the surface of our small "I" and have not reached our choices, our objectives or our aspirations.

We need to better understand the origin of our ideas, our hopes for renewal and our resistance to transformation.

You could say that the origin of our desire to know is two-fold: Self-preservation, which we have in common with all animals, and the longing for liberation, which only we as human beings have.

Self-preservation has in us a certain effect: every time we reach a goal we want to turn that attainment into something absolute and definitive. The instinct of preservation causes within us a resistance to change; it makes us interpret stability, the state of no-change, as security.

Moreover, the desire for freedom goes far beyond what the instinct of self-preservation may bring out in us. It makes us feel dissatisfied with the stability that we have reached; it

keeps alive in us an unease that drives us forward in the search for knowledge, it encourages us to be proactive in seeking not only a renewal but also our development, our unfolding as individuals and the realization of the new possibilities we glimpse or discover.

The struggle between these two forces delineates our history. This struggle takes place not only between different ideological groups or between generations, but within us, and it takes different forms throughout our lives.

The prevalence of each of these forces periodically determines the characteristics of the different moments of the human being throughout his or her development, both as an individual, and as humanity as a whole.

Each time we take a step forward in the knowledge of life and the universe we need to see ourselves differently. That is, every advance in our knowledge should result in an improvement in the vision we have of ourselves and our relationship with the world and the universe and, consequently, an improvement of our values. This means we find a place that allows us to remain dynamic, not crystalized, within the growing reality that we include in our consciousness.

What we want to emphasize is not only the need for renewal but that this renewal be continuous. Otherwise, we would change a vision of the world that is no longer current for another that is current but of the same nature.

We cannot stop the progress of our knowledge; life is continuous experience. This development forces us to grow within to the rhythm of our knowledge. Otherwise, our knowledge would be an accumulation of data rather than a transforming teaching.

Continuity in renewal makes our life experience continuously renovated, true dynamic transformation. But this requires of us inner freedom.

We need to learn to become conscious of the world we know and not only that we see. Although we build telescopes that enable us to see into the infinity of the cosmos, we continue basing our goals and behaviors on the natural perception of the senses; that is, we perceive at the same level as any member of any animal species.

Our creativity capacity and greater knowledge has not yet given us more depth in our values and aspirations, but only the power to get more possession and dominate more; desires of a minuscule person relative to the powers he wields. This qualitative distance between the individual and his power currently leads to conflicts that we do not know how to solve.

We divide problems according to the categories in which we have divided society: economic, social, political, spiritual. Of course, there is no solution when we do this; the individual is a unity. We also have a very particular idea of what a solution should be. Life is not a problem that needs remedy; human problems are not riddles to be solved. Most of our problems are created by ourselves and not by life. Hunger is satisfied with food, but the problem of hunger in the world today is not a lack of food but our distortions about the value of individuals, their needs and rights.

The circumstances today that put us on the brink of global catastrophe are not a natural consequence of life but of the insatiable greed for possession, of indifference, the myopia of our aspirations and the closed nature of our ideas and way of thinking.

Our world has grown, but we've been left behind. We tend not to realize what is happening because we remain outside what is now our reality. There is no escape outside ourselves; we need to face life with what we are. Instead of looking for scapegoats, each of us should look at our own selves, broaden the approach we take to life, other people and their individual lives. Not doing this has led to many tragic situations which seem to have no solutions.

We have talked about changing structures, although until now we have not reached agreement on what specific changes need to be made, the manner in which we will carry them out, or how the new structure should be. Actually, what we need to change is our state of consciousness. We need to expand within.

But we cannot reach a more universal outlook suddenly; it would be like jumping into the void. We can begin, though, by understanding ourselves and our immediate problems more broadly, by expanding our field of consciousness from a small circle to a larger one, and so on, gradually opening the way for greater possibilities of unfolding.

While not many quickly come to a greater understanding of the individual and our place in life, we all have the possibility of developing a more universal vision of ourselves, society and the world.

When we are able to place ourselves in a comprehensive way in life, this changes our interpretation of reality and, therefore, our way of thinking. The problems we are experiencing today are then seen as belonging to a stage we've already overcome in human development, which we cannot solve through exclusively external means but only from a place within ourselves, from ourselves.

When talking about a new way of thinking we are not thinking of changing the structure of thought nor do we intend to invent new values. A new way of thinking is to make our thinking— rather than pointless reflection without purpose or conscience— expansive and fully conscious, with creative results and inspiring aspirations.

This new way of thinking gives flight to our thought, moves us to free ourselves from the tangled web of our small personal interests and to discover broader, more ample interests in our objectives. A new way of thinking, then, is to stop thinking from an “I” dwarfed by selfishness, and to think instead of human beings, as individuals and as humanity, as the center of our interests and our efforts. Our very being—and that of each human being—thus appears to us in their untold possibilities. We are no longer mere consumers of material and intellectual goods, but we open up to our spiritual potential and our capacity for inner realization.

The crisis of success

Our society is the society of success.

Nevertheless, we do not always have a clear notion of what we really want from life. We want to succeed, we want to be "somebody", but what really do we mean by success?

When we say we want success, we usually really mean that we want fulfillment. But we don't usually look for fulfillment through the only means that can bring it: a profound awareness of who we are and what we yearn for, as complete human beings. Instead we pursue fulfillment through the tacit ideas society gives us about how to be successful: love, money, recognition, power.

We are not going to discuss these goals here; we take for granted that they have their place for each person, his or her family or country, or the world. But neither is it easy to say when we have achieved success, because it is not easy to identify which kind of love is love, or how much money, power or recognition is the measure of success.

The price of success and consumerism in our society is a heavy price to pay: even our name matters only to the extent that it is recognized; we are generic consumers, not only of goods but of ideas. Nor are we offered many options from which to choose: the news we hear is partial and biased reporting. We have not learned to think for ourselves because we cannot tell the difference between collective opinions and our own judgments; we have not learned to be free because we are afraid. And so we react: we look for possessions to compensate for our inner emptiness. And in our eagerness to possess, we jump after possessions and

after artificial and conventional values that are alien to life: *the symbols of success*. And that's where we lose as human beings, trying to incorporate into our being goods that are foreign to us, like hairpieces that hide baldness but do not make it go away.

We start to confuse success with the possession of the symbols of success and, finally we end up confused, thinking we are the symbols that we show off.

We don't say: I have money; we say, *I am* rich, without even thinking what it means to be rich. We don't say: I know something about this profession; we say, *I am* a doctor, *I am* a lawyer, *I am* an engineer. We identify with a symbol which in the end is a sign on the door, a name with a title that tells us who we are, instead of simply stating what we know or do.

We lose our identity. We think, feel and act according to the symbols we acquire. We don't question the symbols, conditioned as we are to an exterior and superficial success. But what is artificial and conventional cannot be long enjoyed; it can only hide what we really are searching for.

The craving for these exterior signs is seen in large scale. The symbols of success are mass produced, from dollar bills to luxury cars.

But the yearning for plenitude is not filled with exterior goods nor with conventional symbols. The inner need for fulfillment is satisfied individually in a profound way, within oneself, by oneself.

Inner values, those that can give the peace and happiness we yearn for, have no place in the race for success; they cannot be seen, counted or put on display.

It no longer matters, for example, if the home is a mere formality, without love and understanding; it has value according to the symbols: house, furniture, appliances, electronics, location.

Rarely does it matter if one's job is a fraud, if our capacity is wasted and we are reduced to someone sitting at a desk. What matters is salary; that's what gives status.

Rarely does it matter if our job merely allows us to survive and doesn't respond to what we were born to do, is not up to our aptitude; we say, "Everyone's got to make a living."

Rarely does it matter if the social circles in which we move are empty, snobby or corrupt; what matters is how "important" are the people in it and their economic level.

We pledge our lives, our possibilities, our happiness to a race after the acquisition of artificial symbols. And in so doing we lose the deep meaning of human values. The road to success leaves us empty, with nothing of real value.

Our place in society is not based on us as individuals, but on the symbols we can show off.

We lose ourselves behind those symbols, we no longer exist as persons, like the main character of a movie who gives up his mission to go around carrying trinkets.

We lose the respect we owe to ourselves.

We want more than we need and use, because having excessive possessions is a symbol of success, even though we do not need these things nor can even take advantage of them because we have more than we can ever use.

The blueprint for success derives from a system of ruthless competition.

The race for the artificial symbols of success always results in the loss or failure of others, whether as individuals or as groups.

How often have we heard: "In this country, anyone who really wants to can make it, we all have opportunities." But in the pyramid of success there is less room the higher you climb. At the top, there is room for only one, who looks down on all the others.

This kind of competition turns success into opposition--between the individual and society, between the person and the environment.

It is almost as if we are like primitive man who, in the face of the dangers of nature, had to either kill or be eaten.

We forget that we no longer live in the cave or the jungle, that we have changed and we have other possibilities.

Nevertheless, most of the time the triumph of some means the demise of many.

The blueprint for success rests on assumption that social relations are aggressive and violent and that the law of the jungle applies to human relationships.

Competition between individuals in order to climb the ladder of success in the end destroys moral and spiritual values, and makes the individual a beast devouring the possibilities of other individuals.

The important thing in the world today isn't to discover what's true but who wins, *because whoever wins is right and their truth is the truth.*

Winning is the symbol of success. A good concept applied to the most ferocious beast cannot be used to measure human

accomplishments. However, the triumph of violence is the crown of our symbols of success.

Slogans drive everyone to external success, but ignore or refuse to recognize that the world is not populated with millionaires nor fashion designers.

In today's society very few can achieve the symbols of success.

To encourage everyone in an illusion that few can attain is to sow the sense of failure in those who surely will not arrive, and who will have to endure the disillusion before those who win.

The symbols of success promise fulfillment and the joy of living, they say: Succeed and you'll be happy. The message we get is that once you have enough money, power or glory, you'll be fulfilled, at peace with yourself and the world.

Whoever doesn't attain all these things feels like a failure, but the one who does, even though he sees that it has all been an illusion, cannot admit it to himself. It would be to admit that he has not gotten anywhere: he *must* feel that he has achieved success, he *must* continue the story of the winner, he *must* prove to everyone that he has arrived. But where is that?

The symbols of success promise a happiness that they cannot give.

When they don't fall into decadence and degradation, the successful pay the hefty price of therapists and sedative drugs.

Whoever lives at the foot of the mountain lives the illusion of the summit. It has something to be desired, a specific objective to go after, and to focus the efforts of life.

The road to success is full of promises, but the arrival at the summit means an empty space that only leads down.

Human success is admired and envied from the outside, but only from within can one know its emptiness and loneliness.

Society does not forgive; he or she who reaches the top is immediately pushed off by those who want to be there.

The crisis of success is seen in the desperation of a society to win that destroys the world to save it.

The individual fails so that the symbols succeed.

Where are our desires for fulfillment, the desire of becoming, to be, to reach fulfillment through an inner transformation produced by our own development?

We sacrifice what we are by flaunting the symbols of success.

We disappear under the weight of our symbols of fantasy.

Success is a ghost that does not embody in life.

The consequences of our definition of success include sadistic competence—whether between individuals or nations; demagoguery as policy; and war as an economic recourse.

We cannot put ourselves in opposition, one against another, in the name of an illusory triumph; the result is a divided society, on the road to self-destruction.

In most countries, when children reach school age, they have already seen an average of eight thousand hours of television.

In this way they have seen delinquency, crime, planned destruction and the efficiency of modern warfare; criticism of those wars, religious and spiritual crises, melodramas that

distort moral values, what one should desire and consume to be considered successful.

As a result, later on these youngsters usually react to the generations that preceded them and their values.

But they have already been under an ideological pressure by advertisement that has standardized their ideas before they have had the chance to develop defenses and enough insight to protect themselves from such propaganda.

While on the one hand they react against society, they can no longer stop being influenced by it. Already the symbols that they feel they must attain are already embedded in their minds. They are already programmed to be what the media wants them to be: efficient and insatiable consumers of goods, fashion, news, ideas.

Young people may reject the society in which they live, but they continue to consume desperately its symbols. They are divided; in reacting against society one reacts against oneself. Inwardly one rebels, but can only recognize and identify oneself as one more product of society. Through rebellion one thinks one has one's own thought, yet this reaction is a simple consequence of being part of that environment.

What can we do?

In the dualistic vision he has of solutions, only two attitudes remain for him: to accept or to rebel. But rebellion leads to inner destruction. He cannot understand himself, cannot know what he really needs and aspires to. He cannot see what is the difference between what he is programmed to do and who he really is.

He is programmed by his culture and by the media and advertisement.

He is programmed by an education that informs but does not form. He is removed from life by a school system that disregards the context in which we live, an education that alienates the student from reality and the problems they face without knowing why, by overwhelming information that humanity already knows, but does not connect with the moment in which we live and separated from the problems of life; an information that, when it does look at the vital problems of life, gives a partial vision or a theory that leads to harmful results. He learns theories, techniques and doctrines but he does not learn how to live. Later his place in the world is left to the free play of chance, of luck, and of his ability to adapt and survive.

But he or she is already programmed to aim for a success that he or she will never reach; launched on a course of career with no end and no destination. This forces us to become aware.

Many of us might say: "I don't have a problem, I'm not looking for any special kind of success; I don't have great ambitions; I'm happy with what life brings me." This is ok. It is easy to live a life without great pretensions. But it is also possible that this way of looking at things hides a superficial view of life, a way of hiding from problems. It is very difficult to lead a life aimed at nothing.

The possession of symbols isn't individual realization; quite simply it is accumulation.

The symbols that we pursue are not worth what we pay for them.

Life and being don't have a material price.

Our mistake lies in wanting to buy the meaning of our life with material symbols.

We need to reexamine what we hold to be true and analyze our symbols, keeping in mind that we react in an automatic and unconscious way when we choose our goals. We need to become individuals to be able to discern.

To discern is to be able to tell the difference between what is true and false. When we really discern, then, we rescue our very selves.

Instead of egging us on and destroying us, we should turn success into a universal concept that includes all people and expands our notion of being.

This capacity for success would have to be linked to an expansive idea of responsibility. But the personal concept of success destroys the possibility of joint effort and realization.

As long as we hold onto the personalistic idea of what success is, without including the awareness of human unfolding, individual efforts will always end in a confrontation with the whole.

Personal triumph needs to be inseparable from the good of the whole.

This would change our concept of success; it would stop being the right of free enjoyment of the symbols and become a good that is transmitted to all.

The differences between human beings are undeniable; some have the ability to achieve what others could never do by themselves. These differences have been exploited through the accumulation of symbols that are used by some over others. But personal know-how is a good when it is turned into a good for the whole through a sense of inner participation.

If a person does not use his or her gifts to their full extent, they diminish that person. When we give away our gifts to the symbols of success, we are left alone with the symbols, always to the detriment of our inner values.

But when we offer our abilities for the good of all, those abilities multiply and transform our inner reality because they expand our awareness. This expansion is expressed in a deep and abiding inner good, an asset that we will never lose. It leads us to a summit that no one can take away because it is intrinsic to our being. It is the result of our inner unfolding, our spiritual realization.

To offer the best of ourselves, to share our gifts, those that really belong to us: that is what makes us grow, because we know that to give ourselves is so much more than what we could give from our pocket.

We grow when we stop collecting symbols and we unfold as human beings; we grow when, through the offering of our abilities, we multiply our possibilities. We succeed when we let go of symbols. We become free when we do not depend on the signs of success.

Success, then, is no longer a synonym of triumph. It is the living symbol of permanent inner unfolding, through the expansive realization of our countless possibilities.