

Preface

Is it possible to get along with others? Yes, if we have courage

- to take the first step;
- to accept others as they are without any prejudice;
- to become aware of the quality of our own personal feelings;
- to desire the creation of positive and serene relationships;
- to develop respect for the freedom of others;
- to grow in self-assurance and in trust of others.

Is it possible to get along with others? Certainly, if we avoid making unreasonable demands, or attempt to exert tight control over their personal affairs; yes, if we begin to believe in their positive values, and have the generosity to be mindful of and express the goodness of others as we ourselves become aware of it.

Getting along with others is an art which, if cultivated, transforms human relations, enhances

our listening skills, develops our sense of responsibility, and demonstrates to us that each individual is unique and a creature rich in mysteries.

To get along with others presupposes a self-discipline or a mode of loving which first makes itself felt in our capacity to love our own selves. Getting along with others is also our own way of augmenting our capacity of loving, of understanding, of enhancing our trust, and of striving for a complete development of our personality, which is our own prime responsibility.

In reading this book, attentive readers find themselves reflected in these pages and thus realize that there is no reason to get discouraged, to be diffident, or to look to others for a boost to one's own self-confidence.

Happy are they, who in their own families, communities, or teams, keep these truths alive.

To love oneself, it is a distillation of the best in one's neighbour, which uncovers in oneself the mechanism of human relations in all its fullness.

Reaching Out to Others

Surviving in our troubled world involves an acceptance of our inner selves which is fundamental to deep, interesting and positive communication.

To achieve self-control, to delve into oneself with perseverance without despising oneself or being discouraged, requires a knowledge of many psychological factors, which I will attempt to explain.

Experience teaches us that we cannot live alone, that we need a willing and sympathetic ear. A growing loneliness makes us compulsive talkers often taking advantage of the kind and patient listener. As we grow older, we invariably relate the same story with timeless repetition and with the same degree of emotion. Some people will openly tease us, commenting that here is someone who likes the sound of his or her own voice, while others, behind our back, will accuse us of senility, of repeating ourselves, always playing the same old record, the same tune. Without even noticing it, we develop habits, we live in a rut; we become introspective, thus effectively confining ourselves

to tunnel vision. Often times, we foster the growth of negative attitudes.

Are we aware that we have not gone to such an extreme? Do we then believe that we are still capable of growth and that the presence of others does not have to result in a boring monologue?

Society is becoming keenly aware of the contagious disease of loneliness which affects people of all ages and which is also the root cause of drug abuse among troubled youths. We organize ourselves into groups; for the youth, sports offer group discipline; for both youths and adults, clubs are in vogue; golf is no longer the preserve of the rich, and get-togethers of all sorts afford us the means and opportunities to learn to communicate.

It is easier than ever either to be receptive or to reach out to others. We must, however, use particular techniques if we are to join a group, belong to a team, or exert influence in our intimate family circle. First of all, let us realize that our inner mystery is hidden from everyone, even from our own spouses. Values we hold, such as courage, love, and understanding, are not apparent to others because of our fear of communication, or a modesty which is not always laudable. In any attempt at disclosing to others such values, we are afraid of being branded as flatterers, hypocrites and wheedlers. We have not, as a result, endeavoured to know others, to serve them in love and to share our ideas. We have acquired the veneer of superfi-

ciality which often heralds a certain coolness or rupture of companionship.

Let us imagine that we are invited to join a group in which everyone is a stranger to the other. We make our way towards the hall trusting we will certainly meet someone whom we know. Many have been invited. We enter, are greeted warmly; we attempt to smile and introduce ourselves to others. We feel ill at ease, and others do not seem any more at ease than we are. We flit from person to person with a simulated freedom. We look for a leader, but do not find one. In the beginning there is a baffled silence. Awkward and embarrassed, we remain silent. Everyone makes an attempt at being pleasant. We are invited to sit down. We look for a seat; we are disconcerted. We find ourselves face to face with strangers who appear to mirror our own feelings. A purr of conversation breaks a growing silence.

The meeting has no direction, no objective. We neither know nor can we trust the others. On the other hand, we do not intend to be together for long. Frustration and confusion must be overcome before we can launch into serious communication. It is a good start, and normal, to be ill at ease in the beginning. It is good to analyze one's own reactions. Conversation is disjointed and shallow.

Suddenly, someone is carried away by his own feelings and, spontaneously, wishes to come to the help of others. He proposes a subject with the intent

of stimulating everyone's interest. While he is explaining his purpose, another person is not listening but burns with the desire to offer his own suggestions and proposals. Albert proposes topics to promote a deeper communication. Bruno, unheeding, makes suggestions completely opposed to those of Albert. Increasing confusion, frustration and restlessness are written on many faces. There is a painful silence. Andrew wants to restore the peace and makes a further series of propositions: "What if we attempt to delve into ourselves before entering into a discussion; if you so wish, we could introduce ourselves to one another; each one could disclose his name, his profession, his marital status, his place of residence, and the responsibilities he assumes. After the introduction, it will be easier to discover topics of conversation agreeable to the majority. Thus, gradually, ideas will crystallize, and, perhaps, we will feel the need for subsequent reunions."

We can already realize that we have to make an effort to meet people, and that such efforts often involve uneasiness, frustration, confusion, and exposure to the risk of confrontation. We must become aware of what is happening, analyze our own reactions and ask ourselves the question: How are we to control the feelings we experience at the start of every communication, be it between married persons, celibates, members of a team or community?

Acceptance of Others

Having initiated ourselves into a group we have allowed our eyes to roam and take stock of those who are with us. We feel a certain indifference toward some and a deep sympathy for others. Perhaps, the suggestions of some are disconcerting.

In the group, sentiments become self-evident, suggestions demand attention, personal attitudes crystallize, and each person evokes very different reactions. Some are introspective, while others express themselves to correct, to sanction or simply to obtain a little more information. Some take others' suggestions in good faith; they discover that the suggested procedure is flexible and valuable and that the person who expressed himself or herself is spontaneous, disinterested and endowed with a certain ability. Such a person reflects the image of a leader, which appears to be opportune.

He who thus takes others in good faith is conscious that personally he does not have the aptitude to express himself; he fears that others would ridicule him and easily detect his failings and his shortcomings. He underestimates his own capabilities to the extent that he is paralyzed by his

limitations in direct proportion to the success of the leader. He is constantly afraid of being judged rashly. Such a person experiences the ill effects of a veritable paralysis because he is tortured by the thought of the possible criticism of others. This unhappy person is more concerned with the evil that others may think of him than with the analysis of his inner self. This stultifying fear negates profound thought and inhibits easy communication.

We seek more often to please others than to be our best selves. Our actions express our lack of profundity. We dare not risk another's displeasure or rash judgement. In our relationships, we ought to seek to be ourselves at the risk of causing disappointment to others by not living up to their expectations. This risk, though great, has to be accepted to promote personal growth. This is a hurdle to be cleared if one wishes to fashion one's personality so as to accept others unconditionally.

Are we receptive to the ideas of others? Let them express themselves, allow them time and space without interruption to say their peace. This requires patience and indulgence on our part and an excellent capacity to listen. Many, however, have difficulty communicating and it is not our own unique situation.

We notice the serious faces in a group, the artificial air of solemnity, the worried and tired looks; this, again, is normal. Nothing appears to penetrate them. One could say that they are devoid

of emotions. They remain immobile, manifesting neither sorrow nor joy. Although they are present in their bodies, one is entitled to wonder where their spirit is.

Someone who received a remark on his air of indifference, on his impenetrable frame of mind, was content to respond: "I have so many repressed emotions that I seem to have nothing left. This situation makes me unhappy. I really do not know how I can get out of it. Even though I have successfully hidden my feelings, I feel them locked in my heart, more acutely than ever." This avowal caused the group to reflect and led it to progress. The person thus appeared to have won the sympathy of the majority of those present.

Others in the group or team appear to be unhappy because they are considered to be of the opposition. In all verbal encounters they find the path of contradiction and of condemnation. They ferret out inconsistencies, they demand precision, they split hairs, they are the very soul of others' discomfort.

One day, John, a naturally introspective and morose person, decides to pour out his heart to the group in order to attempt to overcome his shyness, and to be receptive to someone's help. He recounts the misfortunes of his family, his marital problems. Someone, surely the "bully" of the group, interrupts to defend the absent spouse whom he does not even know. Poor John! In fact, he was not

attempting to disparage his wife but rather to find a solution to his problem. The interruption stops him in his tracks. If the "bully" cut John short, it is because he, himself, felt vulnerable and dreaded another's unfavourable opinion; he is afraid to open up, and, in order to bolster his self-confidence, makes himself the defender of the absentee instead of coming to the aid of him who, awkwardly, seeks help in the face of a stifling timidity.

Let the others speak, let us turn an attentive ear with an attitude of sympathy; let them come to the end of their tale of woe, even though, in the process, they will pluck at our heart strings. Thus we will succeed in transcending the evil spoken of us and gracefully accept the compliments that others, on occasion, will pay us. To accept with humility what others think of us is to be able to grasp the more complex problems of our era, namely those of human relationships.