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LEARNING TO LIVE TOGETHER IN A DEMOCRACY

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The problems of our children cannot be understood unless we understand the problems of our contemporary society. The problem as I see it, is that of democracy which has occurred and we were not prepared for it. What we witness today is a generalized rebellion of all those who previously were dominated in an autocratic society and no longer accept the dictate of authorities. The revolution which we find is a revolution for participation in decision-making. The problems are that we haven't learned to live with each other as equals all the time when we became equal to each other.

In this frame of reference, then, we have to see the problem of our children. They are the same in all regards where this conflict of power this inability to live with each other as equals, becomes obvious. You have it first between husband and wife. In the democratic revolution, which means a process of equalization, women wanted to be equal to men. So first they tried to imitate men in dress, smoking, behavior. But after the last war when the full impact of democracy and equality, particularly of equality, became obvious in the States no red-blooded American women wanted to be as good as a man. Who wants that? She wanted to be better. And we find ourselves in this situation that women became dominant.

We find the same thing between labor and management. Labor doesn't want to be dictated to by management any more and in many cases imposes its will on management. We find the same between the races. White supremacy is gone. Negroes want to be equal, but in their desire for equality over-compensate too, and they speak about Black Power, looking down on the whites. And in this area of contested power we are aware of these three areas: women want equality, labor wants equality, Negroes want equality.

But very few people realize that the same holds true in the relationship between adults and children. At the moment when the father lost his power over his wife, both parents lost their power over their children. Wherever you have an autocratic remnant society, where the man is still the boss, you will find that the children behave pretty well. You can see this development in the international scene. Wherever children, too, have this realization of their self determination as an expression of their status of equality, you find the children getting out of hand.

We are truly living in a sick society and don't let anybody fool you by saying it ain't so bad. It is. Perhaps one thing clearly indicates that: there never has been any living being on this earth who didn't know what to do with its young, except our parents. They don't have the slightest idea what to do. It is most amazing when you watch from a guidance centre—parent after parent coming for counselling. There are not two women alike in background, personality, or experience; but all of them, without exception, make the same mistakes. They don't know what to do. They are torn between

giving up the power, and becoming laissez-faire, anarchic, or they fall back into fighting. Parents no longer know what to do with their children.

With teachers it is not much better. We have excellent teachers as long as a child wants to study and behave himself. But as soon as he decides to do otherwise, teachers have no idea what to do. We let leaders fail because we don't give them information; parents and teachers have to learn what to do.

Child rearing has always been based on tradition. Margaret Mead in her book on the South Sea islanders describes a number of different societies, each one of them raising children a different way and bringing about different personality patterns. But you can be pretty sure that in each one of these primitive tribes children were raised in the same way for thousands of generations and children and adults knew what to do with each other. What is missing today is a tradition.

The tradition of raising children which came from an autocratic society is no longer effective in a democratic setting. We have to learn new forms of dealing with each other, since our relationship has changed. The relationship in the past was one of dominance and submission; today it is one of equality—and we haven't learned to live with each other as equals. We have not learned to solve problems on the basis of mutual respect, which is the only basis we'll ever be able to solve problems in a democracy. We have not learned, for instance, that reward and punishment are effective only in an autocratic setting.

Rewards and punishments are necessary in an autocratic setting. Both are obsolete in a democratic setting. When you give the child a reward, he doesn't consider that as being an expression of a generous authority; no, when you give him a reward he won't bend another finger unless he gets another reward. We find that in our classes and in our homes—"if there is nothing for me in it, why should I do it?" And it is worse with punishment. The only children who respond to punishment are those who don't need it, with whom you could reason. For those whom you really try to affect with your punishment, it is at best a very temporary result, and the next morning you have to punish them again. But there is something much worse. When you punish children you imbue them with the conviction that power is all that counts. Consequently, they think, "if you have the right to punish me, then I have the same right to punish you too." This act of mutual retaliation fills our homes and fills our schools. We are truly at war with the children.

This war with the generations and the war between the sexes is as old as our civilization, when men tried to dominate women, and adults tried to dominate children. But in the past, society was siding with authorities, and children and women had to submit. Today they no longer have to, they rebel openly. And there is hardly anyone of any significance who realize the state of warfare in which we are involved. The only splendid exception is Maria Montessori. Shortly before her death, in one of her last issues of the *Montessori Journal*, she published a touching appeal for disarmament in education, realizing the warfare which fills our homes and schools. The people are not aware of it.

There appears to be a continuum of non-violating behavior of our children. At one end of the continuum you have the child whom you can't

get up in the morning, whom you can't get to bed in the evening, who doesn't dress properly, who eats too much or too little, who fights with his brothers and sisters, who doesn't want to do anything around the home, who also doesn't want to do any homework—in other words the average American child. And on the other end of the continuum is the juvenile delinquent. Contrary to assumptions that a delinquent is pathological, and that every disturbing child is emotionally sick, we are dealing here only with a quantitative difference in rebellion. There is no qualitative difference between the honor student and the delinquent. They operate on the same kind of dynamics. We have to realize that the generalized warfare between adults and children is equal to the warfare between labor and management and equal to the warfare between the races. Since most of our leaders have no idea how to integrate or to bridge this gap, we find ourselves in this day-to-day collision course where there is hardly any chance that we can avoid civil war on our campuses and in our schools on the one hand, and between the Negroes and the whites on the other hand. We haven't learned anything; we have no tradition to help us to solve problems on the basis of mutual respect.

So, we come to some basic principles of problem-solving which are the same in all areas whether it's the child at home or in the school, the relation with husband and wife, the community factors in national and international situations. There is almost total ignorance about the methods which could bring solutions based on mutual respect; they speak about equality and don't know what it is.

We have no tradition to guide us in how to live with each other as equals. The situation is very simple, at least as I see it. Whenever people live together, conflicts of interests are inevitable. But how to deal with it? When a mother and child are in conflict the mother usually does one of two things. She either fights with the child, violates respect for the child, or she gives in and violates respect for herself. The same question is posed by teachers. To what extent should one be permissive? To what extent should one be restrictive? What is better, to be hanged or to be shot? If you are permissive, the children run wild, and they have no respect for you. If you are restrictive and punish them, they punish you back in reverse. To solve problems you must avoid both fighting or giving in—and there are hardly any people who know how to do it.

There is a technique which can be learned; in our books we discuss how people, be it in school or at home, can solve the problems without fighting and without giving in. All effective methods have to meet this requirement—not fighting, not giving in.

Our schools are bankrupt. They are still mistake-centered: the children who are already discouraged become more discouraged. We don't know how to deal with mistakes which are an essential part of learning—but an extremely destructive factor when you don't know how to deal with them. We still are at war and fight without the realization that nobody has to fight with the children unless he decides to do so. But, he decides to do so because he still believes that he can get good results through pressure and punishment.

Teachers send love letters home. You know what love letters are? To inform the parents that the child doesn't study, that he daydreams, that he fights, that he forgets. Teachers say that they send them because the parents

want to know what the child is doing—but if teachers were able to influence the child, they wouldn't send such letters. They feel so much defeated by the child in the classroom that they want to mess it up for him at home—and that's what they succeed in doing.

There is another principle that we have to recognize: the less we know what to do with a child, the more we know what others should do. The less the mother knows what to do with the child, the better she knows what the father should do. The less the teacher knows what to do with the child, the better she knows what the parents should do. If the counselor doesn't know what to do, he talks of resistance. Simple enough. Always the fault of the other one—and we are justified because nobody knows what to do anyhow.

Parents and teachers have to learn as fast as possible what to do with kids, how to become a match for them. We can safely say that a teacher who knows how to influence the children can actually upset all the damage done by the home and community. Oscar Speil, in his book *Discipline Without Punishment*, discusses an Adlerian experimental school in Vienna, in the worst district of the town, where they have had no failure, no flunking. They have been so effective that delinquents are sent there to be rehabilitated. We are no longer groping for the answers, we know them.

Teachers first have to learn to understand the motivation of children. At the present time most teachers are effective if the child has, as we call it, the proper motivation. Our Adlerian approach provides us with a psychology which we find extremely helpful in understanding children. We look at the child as a social being who wants to belong. As long as he is not discouraged and is sure of his worth, his desire to belong will express itself by his willingness to look at the situation as it is and do what is supposed to be done about it. All children except the completely retarded ones know exactly what to do; you don't have to explain it to them as you usually do. They know it, only they don't want to do it. And why? If they are discouraged—and all our children are discouraged because our methods of raising children present them with a series of discouraging experiences in home and in school—if they are discouraged they no longer believe that they can find their place through useful contribution, so they switch to the useless side.

We have found the four goals of disturbing behavior. These four goals are limited, exclusive to young children, up to the age of ten. They still can be found even in adults, but they are not exclusive any more, because other ideas about finding *status* are developed by children and grown-ups. But young children have one of these four goals: first they want to get attention. They prefer to get attention in a pleasant way, but if they can't they don't mind provoking and getting it badly. The worse thing for them is to be ignored; then they feel lost. Attention is their way of saying, "That is where I count, if I can keep you busy."

The fight becomes more intensive then the child switches to a second goal: power. He feels it is his right to do what he wants and to have everybody else let him do it. If everybody doesn't care for him, doesn't love him, it's unfair. Whatever you tell them to do, they won't do, and as soon as you tell them what not to do they feel honour bound to do it. The fight becomes more intense when the child is no longer interested in attention and in power and can find his place only through revenge—if he can hurt and punish you

as much as he is hurt and punished by you. Goal number 4 is where a deeply discouraged child simply wants to be left alone. As long as you demand anything from him, it doesn't become apparent how deficient he is.

Now the sad part is that almost all adults who try to correct a child, do the worst possible; namely, exactly what the child expects of them. When a child wants attention they go after him, nag him, and talk to him. When he wants power, they show him "you can't do that to me," so that he turns around and shows that he can. Nobody who fights with a child wins. When the adult feels deeply hurt and resentful, then he does what the child wants him to do. When a child wants to give up, the adult feels like throwing up his hands and saying, "I don't know what to do;" then he is doing exactly what the child wants him to do—"leave me alone, you can't help."

It is amazing to what extent a child always carries out what he wants and the adults have no idea of what to do with him. The children know how to manipulate the parents and the parents have no idea how to manipulate the children. *This is where the adults need help to become a match.*

One of the most powerful methods of helping children to bring about an improvement in their relationships is the process of encouragement. Of course everybody is for encouragement as everybody is against sin—only one doesn't know how to avoid one and how to practise the other. The technique of encouragement is extremely complex. There is no preparation for it because we all know only how to discourage each other and ourselves, sitting in judgment, looking down at ourselves and others if something goes wrong.

The process of encouragement is of crucial significance. It is my experience that whatever you do with a child, regardless of how justifiable it may be, the effect of your action will depend on whether you have encouraged the child and improved his concept of himself, or whether you have more deeply discouraged him. You will find out that most teachers' and parents' actions in correcting the child provide only increasing discouragement, and then nobody knows why they don't work.

Parents and teachers have to learn leadership, democratic leadership. We all believe in democracy but we don't know how to do it. Democracy is not that you stop being autocratic. If you merely stop being autocratic, you are *laissez-faire*—anarchic.

Democracy requires leadership. Parents and teachers can no longer succeed as bosses. They have to learn to become leaders—guides—and in this guidance there is one thing without which no democratic classroom and no democratic family can function: a family council, a classroom discussion, once a week, in which for the first time those opposing each other begin to listen to each other. Most talk is done in the moment of conflict when nobody listens. And in the family council and in the classroom discussion everybody has the right to express himself, has the right to be heard, and has the obligation to hear and listen to the other. Only in this way can we win approval.

We can no longer run schools *for* the children—only *with* them. Which by the way does not mean that I suggest anarchy and letting children run wild. On the contrary, today when we don't know how to influence children the children are running wild. It is a child today who decides for himself that

he wants to study or to learn or behave or not, and adults know very little about what to do. Once you sit down with the kids, think it through, win their cooperation, then you are in the position to work out the problem together with them as partners, and that is the final step in the community. Our children have to be regarded as partners and not as subjects. No university president and trustee can force the children to give in. If you don't win their partnership, work it out with them together, you have rebellion on a collision course and no escape from that. How to deal with children as partners is possible to learn, provided you want to. The community has to let their children—the youngsters—participate in their community problems which are problems for adults and children alike. This rebellion of youth which starts with the rebellion on the issues, race relationship and others, because they fight for the right of all submissive groups, for the right of all human beings—there is an alliance between labor, between students, between coloured races all over the world as we become democratic, fighting against the establishment which seems to rule. The rule of bosses has come to an end, and until the function of leaders is established, "I'm afraid you will have anarchy, rupture, revolution, and there is now way out except beginning to learn.

REFERENCES

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