

COURSE SYNTHESIS NO. 29

WHAT MEANING DO WE GIVE TO OUR LIFE ?

To the question, “What meaning can we give to our life?”, there are several possible answers.

There are those people, for example, who give it no meaning, who have not progressed beyond a childish or pathological, neurotic state. They are irresponsible people, incapable of setting themselves a goal and giving a meaning to their life.

For other people, the meaning of their lives is their family ; they procreate and raise their progeny, and in this way the human species is perpetuated. In a way, these people render a service to humanity, to the human species.

Then we have all the people who give a material and earthly meaning to their lives. That is to say, they set themselves a goal and mobilise the means for attaining it. Among these people we can define three categories.

The first consists of those who are constantly seeking well-being ; they need to feel well physically, and the only thing that is important to them is their own pleasure, even if this is attained at the expense of other people. These are the typical consumers of our society, thinking only of themselves, egoistic and indifferent to other people’s fate. Thus a man or woman who gives this kind of meaning to his life is capable of being your partner for a certain time and of abandoning you the moment some new situation does not please him – if you happen to become ill, for example.

In the second category we can find the warrior types whose life only has meaning when they can fight for something or against someone. They need to win. Like the preceding, they are indifferent to the fate of other people, but even further, they will step on them, since they have got to win. Their life only has meaning when they can beat other people and gain power. They consider everyone who is not like them to be their enemies, and this can lead them to kill. In this category we can find all the people who want to make war, whether they are politicians or in the military or the religions ; it hardly matters to them if thousands of young people die for their cause.

Then we have the people who only find meaning in their lives if they are recognised by other people, if they are admired, or even hated, by others. They seek fame at all costs, other people have got to know that they exist and have got to talk about them. The only thing that counts is the image they give of themselves, and this image is of course generally false.

There exist further categories of people who give a higher meaning to their lives. Certain people, for example, seek knowledge; their goal is to learn or make discoveries, as in the case of scientific researchers. Then we have the artists whose life only has meaning through the search for the beautiful, through art. Finally, there are people who have the goal of salvation, and it is religion that gives meaning to their lives.

Life takes on meaning the moment we set ourselves a goal. In order to attain a goal, we must follow the principles that correspond to the goal in question, obeying the laws of functioning that lead toward it. We must understand these laws of functioning, and most importantly, we must practice them. If we fail to do so, we fail to attain our goal, and our life loses its meaning.

Man often has several goals in his life, and he hopes to attain all of them at once – for example, his family, fame, money, and religion. But the principles that need to be followed may very well oppose each other, and we cannot serve two masters at once – we cannot serve both God and money, for example. We have to make a choice. Moreover, the very same oppositions exist within us ; one of our little “I’s” would very much like to be religious, but right away another materialist “I” thinks to itself, “all right, but provided it is not too expensive.”

Our freedom of choice is limited by factors connected to our birth and early childhood, during which we were conditioned by our parents and teachers. Moreover, according to our astrological sign or the type to which we belong, we will tend to give a particular meaning to our life. Someone whose sign is Taurus, or a physical type, will tend to seek well-being, whereas someone whose sign is Aries, or a warrior type, will tend to seek struggle.

The problem when we are pursuing these kinds of goals is that we can never attain anything definitive. The good mother’s children eventually leave the house, our well-being lasts for a time before we grow old and sick, and someone who spends his life chasing after money becomes embittered and no longer knows what to do with it all. Life thus gradually loses its meaning for these people ; when we have these kinds of goals, we are necessarily condemned to failure – in any case, we all die in the end.

In our current society, the three types of people we admire the most are those who seek well-being, fame, and money. However, these attitudes are pathological, unhealthy, and sometimes even criminal, since such people end up harming both themselves and society.

And then we have the people who want to give a higher meaning to their lives. This higher meaning is often corrupted, however, since elements of a lower nature intermingle with it, such as the desire for money, power, and fame.

A true scientist, for example, a true researcher, is a man like Pasteur who sacrifices everything for the goal he has set himself. In our day, this kind of scientist is on the verge of extinction, replaced by more or less gifted technicians whose research is dependent on economic, and sometimes on political factors.

The true artist is capable of objective art born of an inner and profound awakening to Beauty. The beauty of his work arises independently of the education he has received. But our age is populated by more and more technicians in the field of art as well.

Men and women who devote their lives to a religious dimension are generally corrupted by the religious organisations themselves, in which we find such elements as intolerance and fanaticism. And when they have power or influence on those in power, the religious leaders ensure that their believers remain in a state of ignorance, threatening them with the fires of hell in order to maintain their power, and inculcating them with feelings of guilt, to which the believers only too easily accede. Wars of religion or inquisitions, employing both persecution and physical and moral torture, are not uncommon.

These religions are of course all in flagrant contradiction with the teachings from which they were born, the teachings of Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, to name only the three most famous. Their followers can never find salvation in hate, intolerance, and total lack of respect for other people.

Certain mystics within the religions – Christian Gnostics, the Sufis of Islam, or Zen Buddhist monks – are able to unmask all this abuse of power, hypocrisy, and falseness. They belong to the category of people for whom life only has meaning

through the inner path, and their goal is to awaken. This awakening, which is synonymous with truth and freedom, requires them to unmask what is false in all the other possible meanings that can be given to one's life and to free themselves from their conditioning. Their aim is to develop the truly higher element in themselves, that which rids them of everything arising from human falsification. But these people are often subjected to persecution by the religions because of their difference.

Those who belong to this last category do not reject the other categories, but they are fully aware of their limits. They are not opposed to anything that is just and true in the others, and they may pursue certain other goals as well, but also with an awareness of their limits. This type of people place the Path above everything else; they are capable of living what is lower without being bound to it. Because they understand the limits of everything else, they cannot take other things completely seriously, and they can never take them tragically.

They understand that other people always have an image of us, and that we are accordingly always living in a false reality, in a false relationship with other people; and they understand that in life, it is sometimes necessary to struggle with those who believe they are our enemies, and sometimes even with our friends, since this is also a part of life.

They also understand that they must acquire as much knowledge as possible, and that they must seek their own manifestations of beauty, that force that creates worlds.

And they finally understand that they must be connected to a higher level, as we are told by the religions.

Someone who gives a higher meaning to his life is aware of the positive aspects of the other possible meanings, but he is also aware of their limits. This is why he is committed to the Path, which leads him to the Awakening that alone can permit him to discover a higher Truth.

A man or woman on the Path must follow the rules of functioning that correspond to the higher goal he or she wishes to attain; he or she must also understand the way man functions physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually, and know the laws that govern the material world below in addition to the laws of the higher world above.

In order to know, understand, and apply the higher principles, it is necessary to meet an instructor in the context of a School, since as we are well aware, one man alone can do nothing.

In conclusion, man is capable of choosing the goal he wishes to attain in his life. This goal can either serve the animal or material world or raise him to the spiritual world; the choice is his.