

THE TOWN AND HUMAN ATTENTION

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We are in the middle or the beginning stages of a really gigantic development of human beings. Partly my message is going to be: don't be discouraged. There has been an incredible development of masses of people all over the world in my lifetime, which is a little longer than yours — but not that much. Now, in a town that you've never heard of somewhere in Northern Ghana, a kid goes to the movies on Saturday and sees television all week and knows everything that's going on and this is a tremendous development of people. There is literacy in half the world. Even where there is no literacy, there is tremendous awareness that a mass of people have gotten much more similar and much more developed. So that is the first thing I want to say.

Secondly, there has been a smaller development of millions of people who are now psychologically sophisticated. Not just in the West or East, but everywhere. What I mean is this: you sit on a bus and the woman behind you is telling her friend, for instance, "I am not his mother!" And you realize that there is a level of sophistication that has come psychologically to, certainly not the majority, not to the mass of people, but nevertheless to some seriously significant number (a hundred million or so...?) who are so much more aware. There are, so to speak, all of these so-called 'methods' from our global neighbors. There are all kinds of trainings, and interactions in energy, in Non Violent Communication, in Dialogue, and in a whole list of happenings that are now helping human beings develop and become increasingly more sophisticated — and this is happening worldwide. I'd call this a kind of minority, a creative minority (I hope!)

Here's a comparison: Some really major changes happened between agriculture and industry back 300 or 400 years ago, when the basic thing that people were doing changed from agriculture to industry. Agriculture used to take 99.9% of people's energy — just to grow food. There were very few people who had the time to devote to outside interests. Then it changed. A small percentage (maybe something like 5% of the world's population) needed to attend to agriculture, and 95% of the population was suddenly freed-up to do that other thing — that new thing. What was the new thing then? It was industry, trade, finance, and other new areas.

The world changed. It changed inside and outside. This split between inside and outside is something you have to *go across*. The split between individuals and society, between finding yourself and dialogue cannot be split — yet the external conditions had changed.

I'm saying, for example, that for industry everything changed. A man went to work in the factory, a kid went to school, a woman went to see her friends — all totally different people. The people that the man met in the factory were not the parents of the kids who went to

school, and not related to the friends that the woman had in the town. This new piece split up everything, and made all the conditions of living different.

So, some people say that it is external change that determined the difference in those people. But it also goes the other way. There was a *human development* for people — to learn how to run machinery, for example. They had to be taught how to read instructions; they had to be taught how to be careful with powerful machinery; they had to be taught to arrive on time at 8 o'clock in the morning because the whole factory couldn't operate properly unless everybody was there. There were designated assembly lines, and if two guys were missing the whole thing would stop! So everybody had to buy a watch, everybody had to learn numbers. This was the tremendous development of people, inside and outside.

And it's happening again. Because now it's enough for 5% of the population to work in industry and produce things. Look how much is produced and made in China, for instance, while we are doing something else over here. And what are we doing? What's the new product?

Well, up to here I am sure I am right. From here on in — we'll see. I think the new product is called INTERHUMAN ATTENTION. I think what people are doing in developed countries is *paying attention to each other*. Some people call that the service industry. Some people call it the business world. It's a lot about having meetings the whole day and writing memos to each other.

Now we are still in a phase. There is a characteristic phase that took a long time when the forms of society were still involved with agriculture (even though the main activity was no longer agricultural, and took revolutions to get extricated from...) So if people wanted to ship some products from Marseille to the port down on the Mediterranean and up to Paris, they had to pay 20 different land-owners fees along the road. They had to stop every time, and do all kinds of burdensome things in order to ship the products. Why? Because the 'forms' people used to *relate to each other socially* were still from agriculture — but what was really going on was no longer from agriculture.

So, I am saying that this is where we are right now. We sit on the expressway; it's stuck every single morning at 8:30. We don't even have to get where we're going by 9 o'clock because there is no longer an assembly line. You could stay in your pajamas and write those memos. OK there are meetings but *We* are stuck. You see, we are selling by the hour. The industrial system works by hourly labor. The farm doesn't of course, but on the farm you don't count the hours. You do such-and-such in the winter, and this other thing in the spring, and then something else in the summer. But industrial society has to have everything by the numbers: the time, the money, the exchange, the labor — all of it. And we are still there selling human attention by the hour — it's called therapy! — a bit ridiculous, but that's the form we are currently in. Actually, you are not replaceable. It's not the hours; it is *you* that the person comes to. But then you are on vacation, and you say, "Well, for the next 4 weeks go see doctor... (so-and-so)". That's ridiculous! Doctor so-and-so can't replace you. But that's the way we have it "in case of emergency". We are still in the old forms and we are going to be in the old forms for a long time.

I look back to this history and I wonder: What were the new people doing? But we are the new people... What were the new people doing *then*?

First of all, they lived in towns. The other people were on the land. So, I would like to introduce a new term and call us: THE TOWN. My meaning contains all the new methods, not just Focusing. All the new methods, all the psychological sophistication, all the interactional training, all the therapy, all of it — this is THE TOWN. And we need to become conscious that we are producing a new product. The product is HUMAN ATTENTION — and the product isn't very good right now, nor is the attention — not yet.

However, that said, there is an interesting phenomena going on. You see, back in the Middle Ages, the town's people were important to the land-holding people, because the Duke — or the person who owned the whole province — needed the towns; consequently the towns were given a Charter. This meant that the town had certain rights (as a town) — and they were very important rights. If the serfs that were owned by the landowner ran away into the town, the landowner couldn't go into town and get them back, so it was really important that towns had certain 'rights', so they could grow and develop. The landholder needed the town. He needed the town because the town was the trade center. If he wanted something that didn't grow on the farm, the landowner had to depend on the town. The town could get him wine, spices, silk, jewelry, and all sorts of goods that he thought he needed — so the landowner tolerated the town. Are you following me?

Currently, the business world is looking to this new TOWN, to learn *how* to pay attention. This is universal in the business world. It is well known that in business more than half of the malfunctions that occur have to do with the failure to pay attention properly. Right attention is needed and paid for to get better quality.

I am saying that there are three really important developments, one inside the other. First, there is the broad development of the human species. Information that used to belong to only a very very, tiny, minority is now available all over. Inside of that large development there is secondly what I call "THE TOWN," a peculiar new kind of people who are specialized in attention — in raising the quality of the interhuman attention — and inside of the Town is a third development, Focusing. I think that the center of this Town is Focusing — is us.

The very broad human development has a lot to do with television. It has to do with the internet (now recently), and it has to do with radio before that. For example, back probably 40 years ago, peasants in China all got little radios. Yes, they got them because the central government wanted to control the people, but meanwhile they developed, they learned about their whole world, they (the peasants) are no longer what peasants used to be.

The Town is a small proportion of the population but still a significant number, millions of people... all those engaged in new human processes, psychological, spiritual, interactional. These processes did not exist and were utterly unknown only two generations ago. Now the Town is teaching these processes and Focusing is a major, still further development of human beings and interhuman attention.

Now of course I am making us the center, but that is a human tendency. I do think we are raising the quality of the product to a completely new level...if we can listen...

I have a wonderful quote from Afghanistan. I think that the work being done there is probably one of the most significant things happening right now. So would you please, when you have time, go to the web and click Afghanistan (on the www.focusing.org website). There are three reports there from Afghanistan, and more reports still being sent. One quote I want to share with you.

This is about a village woman from Afghanistan and what she said after a workshop (teaching Focusing to village people, not to therapists). She said: “I went home and I listened to my sick uncle and he brought all his medicines for me to see. And I listened to him. He was very happy and told me his whole heart.”

So there is something that we are bringing to the middle of this whole development — which goes right in. It doesn’t require a huge amount training or complicated theory. She learned something essential (*Listening* to help someone else Focus) — and she went home and just did it — and it worked right away.

The people who are in control right now — and of course there are different people in different kinds of control all over the place — these people don’t have it yet. They are still learning from the **town** more general kinds of things, such as how to listen and interact. Right now in my country, the war party is in control — but they don’t really know what they are doing. First of all, they are having meetings. If you really track what is going on you’ll find... they are considering, they are planning, they are doing what management always does: recycling ideas — yet they can only manage what fits those categories. So what happens? They consider: Is it to go to war with Iran, or it isn’t? Will they support such-or-such government and such-and-such place, or they won’t? The choices that they have when they plan are already cut in such pieces that the situation cannot be coped with adequately. They don’t seem to know about the gigantic development of human beings — and they don’t seem to have a ‘way’ to think about it. They are still bombing peasants. They don’t understand that they are bombing people mostly just like themselves. There is no category for it — yet. But we’ll bring them a category...right?

You *can* look forward to a time when things are going to get a lot better than they are right now. Please don’t be discouraged. If you watch management, both politically and in the business world, these people do want to learn this missing piece. It’s well known that something is missing. I read articles in the business paper informing us that things are no longer the same, always repetitious — and that you can’t routinize them. They want to have small groups because they see that it no longer works to direct their various matters from the top down. That’s the way it used to be done. Now they are all talking about a way that ‘something’ is missing. Of course something is missing! They don’t know how to relate even to each other — let alone to these whole new complicated developments. But I believe that it is coming — and it is coming a lot faster than things used to come historically — and it will come even faster/further in your lifetime. When I started all this, I was a very weird person. I didn’t really change. The world has changed a lot, and I am now a whole lot less weird than I used to be! This will happen to you also.

There is something though that I would like to point out that is difficult. This “**town**” that I am talking about is not conscious of itself. We are conscious that we are teaching (all

of what we teach) and we are teaching it to whoever will listen ... teaching it to villages, teaching it to management, it doesn't matter — teach it to anybody. We are teaching all right, but we are not conscious; I don't yet think even of each other as the **town**. When I say: "Oh...learn everything else, but please don't just do Focusing." I am talking about the "**town**": We are still all these entities, and if you just learn my thing — it is never fully true. You need more than five things.

If we were conscious of ourselves as producing a new kind of product, there is a different world that comes with it — and it is a much better world, where people are aware of each other as people. Everything will be different. It is already becoming different. However, it is not getting different fast enough so that you feel good when you read the paper — but please read the paper. A great many Focusing people I know are no longer reading the paper — it hurts too much. And they feel helpless to do anything about it anyway.

So there is something there about *fresh thinking* that I want to point to.

My colleagues at the University of Chicago, who are high-powered intellectuals, now believe that they can't think about economics. They view it as a kind of science that they don't understand, but highly respect. Economics uses computer models, and graphs and curves that they don't understand. So economics is left to a small group. If you talk to these official economists you discover that they don't have — and don't want to have — any idea about what they are actually doing to the world. They are busy designing computer models that will do what they want them to do — which is mostly to make predictions and profits for banks, but that only works to some extent, until all the banks use the same programs!

They (the proverbial 'they') lower the taxes of wealthy people and then cut social expenditures to make up for the cuts. They say the money will be invested in more business activity and more jobs. And 'they' are lying. They've been lying now for thirty years (or more) on this point. Some of them know they are lying and some don't. But YOU can think about this — not about economic computer models (leave those to those people who want those things). You can think about the fact that if social expenditures are cut, then people have less money to buy things, therefore companies cannot invest to produce more. If you take money out of circulation the demand goes down. Companies will produce less here, not more. They will invest overseas, not here. Why then would lower taxes for rich people create more investments and jobs? You already know that this can't be true. That's very simple. Now, if that's economics...well...don't be scared of it. Let's be able to *think freshly* in that kind of place — not giving up on it because we can't do anything about it anyway. It is important to realize that we *can* think about it.

Here's an interesting example: Japan and South Korea have a different economic model. The government ensures that most money is invested in the country. Some business people actually get incredibly rich there, but the government ensures that money stays invested in the country. Early on in South Korea the government told business people, "You can do anything you want and we will support it, but if you send money out of the country, you go to jail." This is an economic model that is very different from ours — and very successful. You won't read about it in the American paper though. Why? Because our government is all in favor of opening everything up, so that a few individual investors from

anywhere in the world are able to buy everything up. They are building things for everybody else — not staying invested from within.

I think this is going to change. It's going to change because we can't bomb people out of whatever they are doing anymore. The process of change is occurring. At the moment, there are no categories to define this change, so the policy makers aren't thinking about it yet. But they will. They are already thinking about how their military strategy doesn't work.

The United States puts a lot of pressure on Japan and South Korea to get them to "reform" and "open" their economies, and these countries have resisted that. They have said, "No, we have our own model and we are building our own country." South Korea has imitated a model that Japan has been using now for a hundred years, maybe more; building their country from within.

There are very good reasons that people don't want to read the newspaper. Partly, the news often makes us feel bad; partly, there's a feeling that we can't do anything about it. Sometimes the paper seems just plain dull. Everything is cut in terms of certain pro and con issues — both sides of which are clearly wrong. For example, either you support the mother and don't give a damn about the infant, or else you support the infant and don't give a damn about the mother. But why do I have to choose either of those? Either you are for continuing the hopeless war, or else you are for bringing our troops home, giving up, making the country look like terrible embarrassment. Well, if I had to choose, I'd rather they came home, but obviously that's not the point. Why must it be bombing military attacks on people, or nothing?

We have vast economic power that has not even begun to reach most populations. Most of our allies in underdeveloped countries are unable to provide even minimal government services to their people. Such governments have completely failed in most of the Islamic world. The only services for people, the only clinics, the only schools, the only clothing, the only food being distributed, is by groups who are trying to organize people against the West. By one estimate, there are 30,000 such schools in just one of these countries. As long as these groups are the only ones, how can we blame people for supporting the only model that exists? There might be some other way to get them clothes and schools; unfortunately, the scale of such an effort is still far from being considered.

Reading the paper, you have to be alert to pick up significant items that appear now and then — and you have to remember them, because they will never be mentioned again. Then, with awareness, you can begin to think into the detailed texture beyond the pre-cut alternatives.

The point I am trying to make is this: The way the issues are cut, we can know in advance that both sides are going to be wrong. Either you want to kill all of these people, or you want to kill all of those people. And then they want us to choose. I say, "to hell with that...," but then we have to allow ourselves to think about the issues in some new way. We have to ask: "Does that really make sense?"

The latest process that we developed is TAE, which is teaching people that they can actually think freshly. The message is: YOU can! What we learned in school was that we couldn't. We were not supposed to think freshly. We were supposed to learn 20 concepts and

keep rearranging them. That was the only way to get good grades — so fine, we learned how to do that. But that is not very appealing, or inspiring.

Thinking is something else. Thinking is like Focusing, but in Focusing we usually deal with a particular situation. In Thinking we would be saying, “Well, what is wrong there with this issue — that either I am supposed to do this or that? It can’t be like that. Why do I feel it can’t be like that?” Then you’ve already got something. If you allow yourself to let fresh language flow out, you can lay out different parts of the issue. You say, “Oh look, I’ve got five things now — where as before I only had “uh?” Now I have five things. Well, let me list 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 . . . Oh... there’s the 6th, well how do they go together?” And *in there* we have a way for people to be able to think.

Of course not everybody wants to think, that’s fine. TAE is not only for thinking, TAE is also to let people say — and hear themselves say — what they *are living through*. Right now, the public language has few categories for the intricate texture of experience. And it is with the subject of categories that I want to end. I want to come back to where I started.

This whole philosophy allows you to realize — and it only takes you a few moments — that what we care about *doesn’t come in categories*. The reality of other people, of ourselves, of our kids, or something odd and nameless, such as your talent, what you deeply wish to be doing, will not/does not (fortunately!) fit into the existing categories. It doesn’t manifest all chopped up on graph paper; it doesn’t come out like that! So we don’t have to stay with the categories that are given to us. In fact, we cannot stay within them.

And, we must not give up. Things are changing, and in very interesting ways. We can think about them if we don’t fall for “economics”, or assume that we consist of “neurology”, or any of those wonderful analytical tools that people make up. The people who have charge of everything are still thinking in the categories, so please don’t be discouraged just because things aren’t going so well at the moment. It is changing.

That’s all. Thank you.