



The Book of **The Community**
for human development



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I. General Explanations

1. Name

The Community (for human development).

2. History

The Community (for human development) was formed in 1980 as the social and cultural organisation of the *Humanist Movement*.

The *Humanist Movement* was born on May 4, 1969 with a public presentation by its founder, Silo¹, entitled "*The Healing of Suffering*", in an outpost in the Andes Mountains called Punta de Vacas, close to the border between Argentina and Chile.

The *Humanist Movement* is based on the current of thought known as New Humanism or Universalist Humanism, which is developed in the work of Silo² and various other authors who were inspired by him.

This current of thought, which also implies a feeling and a way of life, is reflected in diverse fields of human endeavor, giving rise to various organisations and action fronts. All of

them are applied to their specific fields of activity with a common goal: to humanise the earth, thereby contributing to the increased liberty and happiness of human beings.

Among them there is a common methodology based on Active Nonviolence and a proposal for personal change as a function of social transformation.

Other organisms to emerge from the *Humanist Movement* include the *Convergence of Cultures*, the *Humanist Party*, *World without Wars and Violence*, and the *World Center of Humanist Studies*.³

3. Objectives

The objectives of *The Community* are the study, development, dissemination and installation of a new culture based on the fundamental ideas of Universalist Humanism.⁴

The Community promotes projects that serve the concrete implementation of this new culture in different areas of personal and social life.

4. A New Culture

This new culture will be the correlate of the configuration of an advanced consciousness in which all forms of violence provoke repugnance. The installation in society of such a structuring of nonviolent consciousness would be a profound cultural advance. It would go beyond the weak expression of ideas or emotions, found in contemporary societies, and start to form part of the psychosomatic and psychosocial framework of the human being.

The balance between individual and social development can be achieved if people have a **coherent meaning in life**. On the contrary, all existence without direction or distorted in its meaning generates personal and collective suffering. The most important principle represented by this new culture is stated as: *"Treat others the way you want them to treat you"*. There are other principles of valid action that guide behaviour and that will be developed in a later chapter.

The humanist attitude, an essential aspect of this new culture, may be understood, outside of any theoretical approach, as a "sensibility", as a stance in front of the world in which the intention and freedom of others is recognized, and in which a commitment is made to nonviolent struggle against discrimination and violence.

This new culture is based on a new conception of the human being from which a certain scale of values can be derived a methodology of action, and a personal and social project.

5. A Scale of Values

The 6 basic points of this scale of values are:

1. The location of the human being as a central value and concern, so that nothing is placed above the human being and no human being is above another;
2. Affirmation of the equality of all people, working to overcome the mere formality of equal rights before the law and advancing instead toward a world of equal opportunities for all;
3. Recognition of personal and cultural diversity, thereby affirming the characteristics proper to each group of people

and condemning all discrimination based on economic, racial, ethnic and cultural differences;

4. Encouragement of all tendencies that develop knowledge beyond the limitations imposed on thought by prejudices taken as absolute or immutable truths;
5. Affirmation of the freedom of ideas and beliefs; and
6. Repudiation of all forms of violence, recognizing not only physical violence but also economic violence, racial violence, religious violence, moral violence and psychological violence as everyday occurrences found in all regions of the planet.

6. *The Methodology of Action: Active Nonviolence*

The personal and social methodology of action of *The Community* is called "Active Nonviolence", which has as its principle tools:

- The rejection of, and producing a void towards, the different forms of discrimination and violence;
- Non-collaboration with violent practices;
- Denunciation of all acts of violence and discrimination;
- Civil disobedience in front of institutionalized violence;
- Social, voluntary and solidarious organising and mobilizing;
- Strong support for everything that promotes active non-violence;
- Overcoming the roots of violence in oneself, and the development of personal virtues as well as the best and most profound human aspirations.

According to this methodology, social transformation is not opposed to personal transformation. On the contrary, *The Community* understands them as intimately linked and as such proposes simultaneous action to overcome social (external) violence as well as personal (internal) violence.

This is ultimately a personal and social project that aims to surpass the current crisis of violence, disorientation, and lack of meaning that human beings suffer. This project is summarized in the ideal of "Humanising the Earth".

Violence, in its many manifestations, is one of the principle characteristics of the present social system. All individual and social conflict derives from this situation of violence. Violence is growing and invading the personal, group and social spheres; the violence has been installed in the thoughts and feelings of a society that moves dangerously forward, all the while consolidating a false ideology that says: "There is no solution to the problem of violence".

The solution to the problem of different forms of violence exists, and resides in applying a precise methodology: the "Methodology of Active Nonviolence".

Further development on Active Nonviolence can be found in the "Formative Themes" chapter of this book.

7. Participation

The Community is a public and open organisation based on the criteria of friendship, help and experience. Members spread its message according to the means to which they have access and explaining clearly *The Community's* inspiration, goals and procedures. Participation is open to everyone without discrimination.

8. General Organisation

According to the degree of development and growth of *The Community* in each country, and to facilitate the development of objectives in relation to their environment, teams of *The Community* tend to be legalised as "non-profit organisations" (or a similar title, as per the particular norms of each country).

The statutes or legal documents of these "non-profit organisations" will reflect an organisational structure, objectives and principles that are identical to those proposed in the official organisational materials of *The Community* at the worldwide level.

At the worldwide level, *The Community* is organised as a "World Federation" which brings together all teams of *The Community* in the world:

"The Community (for human development)"

World Federation of Teams of The Community
(for human development)
Nonprofit Organisation / Civil Association

At the level of each country and in accordance with its degree of development, *The Community* seeks recognition as a cultural and social non-profit organisation dedicated to human progress. The internal organisational model is developed in Chapter II of this book.

9. Official Bibliography and Recommended Readings

The Community (for human development) has both official and recommended materials.

Official materials:

- *The Book of The Community* (Ed. 2009, updated).
- *Manual of Personal Development for Members of the Humanist Movement*. Center of Studies, Punta de Vacas Park, 2009.
- *Document of the Humanist Movement*, Silo (1992).⁵

Recommended materials:

- *Self-Liberation*, Luis A. Ammann.⁶
- *Complete Works*, Vols. I and II, Silo.⁷

There are also numerous contributions that members of *The Community* have made in the development of certain points-of-view and in application to specific fields; these contributions supplement the recommended bibliography.

10. The Community as a Priority

A key point for any member is how one places *The Community* among one's various personal interests. If one considers *The Community* as just one more thing, interchangeable with others, one will surely get unreliable results. If, on the other hand, *The Community* is placed as a primary reference in life, personal interests will order themselves along a scale of priorities and one's life will gain in coherence. Having a clear reference in a personal and social world that is in constant change, far from limiting one's possibilities, gives meaning, concentrates dispersed energies, and spurs personal development. Using *The Community* as a reference helps to overcome disorientation.

Some people may view the experiences that take place in *The Community* as a type of therapy. If they reflect on it,

however, they will understand that equilibrium and personal development are not achieved through therapy, but rather come from having a meaning in life, clear references and a commitment to activities that go beyond one's personal situation. No one solves their problems by thinking about them all the time; it is through well-oriented action that one overcomes problems. But it is not easy to maintain these actions based on individual intention alone. One needs to have some type of organised activity with others to serve as a reference. *The Community* serves this function.

11. Role of The Community in the Social World

The Community encourages its members to participate enthusiastically in all the different environments in which they carry out their daily lives, always emphasizing the importance of open communication and interchange between diverse groups of people.

12. Explanations for Full Members

Following are some brief explanations that should facilitate the interpretation and application of the different parts and themes that are addressed in this book:

About this book. This material offers the following advantages: 1) it is presented in a way that makes it easy to use, even for inexperienced members or those who have difficulty talking about these themes; 2) it is designed so that those who participate in the activities of *The Community* can have positive experiences of change; and 3) it provides the basic information necessary to adequately publicise the activities of *The Community*.

About the formative themes. These themes are addressed in Chapter 3 through brief expositions that allow the reader or listener to grasp the spirit of *The Community*. They are organized by subject as follows: General Themes; Themes about *The Community*; Themes on Violence and Nonviolence; Themes on Action in General; and Themes on Valid Action.

Each formative theme forms the basis for a reflection that is carried out in the weekly meeting but which could also be studied individually, discussed with others, presented at conferences, or used as a source of inspiration in the production of clarifying or publicity materials.

About the Guided Experiences. The guided experiences work with transference and sometimes cathartic elements, providing containers, connectives and directions in a way that allows each participant to complete them using his or her own internal content. The difficulties or resistances that arise when carrying out the guided experience should be considered as most important, and overcoming these resistances is one of the objectives of the transference process.

Each guided experience consists of a series of short phrases that help the participant to imagine a mental scene in which he or she is located. These scenes produce a particular emotional mood or climate that allows the central knot of a problem to emerge. The phrases are separated by a series of points (...) that cue the reader to pause for a short time, depending upon the difficulty of the images. Asterisks (*) signal the reader to allow longer silences, giving the participant the opportunity to develop the knot of the problem according to his or her particular content. These pauses may vary in time from a few seconds to a maximum of two minutes.

One of the objectives of the experience is to detect resistances, and then to overcome them.

The interchange after the experience fulfills what is known in Operative as "vigilic discussion" and enables the participants to expand and modify their points-of-view of their experience.

A closing recommendation is given, aimed at strengthening the post-transferential elaboration and emphasizing the surpassing of the resistance. It usually consists of an invitation to the participants to observe in daily life and in their own behaviour the resistances that were detected in the experience and, equally, to become aware of any positive changes that appear when these resistances are overcome.

The guided experiences are also available in digital format in different languages, and incorporate special effects that support the mental scenery and emotional climate that are developed in the experience.

13. The Symbol

It is helpful to try to capture the relationship of the symbol of *The Community* to the internal experience that connects to our purpose. Here, very briefly, are a few points related to the meaning of the symbol of *The Community*.

The circle (and its internal field) represents the set of people who participate in *The Community*; the internal equilateral triangle is that which sustains the whole; and the red-orange color represents the work of this whole towards a humanised future.

On another level, more closely linked to principles such as **valid action**, our symbol can be an organised support or reminder, through association, with attitudes such as the coherence of **thinking, feeling and acting in the same direction**.

The Book of The Community

Moreover, this symbol also summarises the values that frame our work of joint action: **Friendship, Help and Experience**, and the internal registers which we aspire to streng then, such as: **Peace, Power and Joy**.

II. Organisation

Overview

These guidelines aim to define the organizational model that promotes the growth of *the Community* in terms of participating members, their action in the environment, and the organisation's geographical and cultural scope.

The Community is an organization that is universal in the sense that its members, regardless of where they live or act, *feel part of the same worldwide humanising action* that is expressed in a diverse but convergent manner.

Its forms of participation are open and flexible. It is a human-based organisation in which each person is responsible for what they initiate and build.

The basic and fundamental structures are the “*Base Teams of The Community*”, which develop their activities at the neighbourhood level, among groups of friends, at schools or universities, citywide, virtually through the internet, etc.

Members and Groups

Anyone who agrees with the basic objectives of *The Community* may become part of the organisation, joining as a full member or supporter, and there in collaborating with planned activities, participating in training sessions and workshops, promoting new actions, and actively participating in *The Community's* organisation, expansion and direction.

Full members are part of the organisational structure of *The Community* and participate in meetings, contribute to the annual financial campaign, and drive its growth, and are trained based on the personal work that *The Community* promotes. They are responsible for choosing by direct vote the coordinators of the *Base Teams* and the members of the *National and World Coordination Teams*. They also drive the development and formation of new *Base Teams* without geographical limitations.

Supporters receive information, participate in and collaborate with the development of activities, but without being included in the organisational structure of *The Community*.

Any action front, group, organisation or group that expresses its commitment to the principles underlying *The Community* may apply for inclusion as a "Supporter" of *The Community*. In that case, without losing its own identity, it can maintain a relationship of mutual collaboration.

Initial groups of *The Community* ("Promoting Groups") are born when a group of people comes together to work based on the proposals of this book and other official materials, developing activities that are related and contribute to the general objectives of *The Community*. This group is coordinated in the first instance by the person who initiated it and is developed following the goals outlined in the official documents and materials of *The Community*.

The "Base Team" of The Community

When a "*Promoting Group*" reaches a minimum development (approximately 10 full members), has permanence in its meetings, and elects by direct vote one of its members to fulfill the functions of coordination and liaison to the "*National or Global Coordination Team*" it thereby constitutes a "*Base Team of The Community*" and from then on becomes part of the organisational structure of *The Community*.

The *Base Team* meets regularly around the materials of *The Community* with the aim of organising training and carrying out practices of nonviolence, non-collaboration with violent activities, and the implementation of exemplary nonviolent actions. At the same time, the participants in this group are also actively working to overcome their own internal violence. Interpersonal relationships within teams are based on the Golden Rule: "Treat others as you want to be treated".

There are also groups of *The Community* that develop their activities virtually, by making use of new technologies through the web and the internet.

From the very beginning, *base teams* put in place three basic mechanisms or functions for their own development:

- Growth: directing action towards others, to other networks and organisations in order to make known and implement in practice their proposals and tools.
- Communication: maintaining easy and regular communication with other base teams and other organisations that share their objectives.
- Formation: attending to the ongoing training of its members, offering them the tools to overcome internal and external violence. These studies and practices are developed in the principal materials.

These teams of *The Community* can generate links with other groups and organisations in their environment (i.e., exchanges, joint actions, collaboration), but should by no means establish an organic relationship with any of them.

Any full members or *base teams* that encourage proposals, actions or procedures that clearly run counter to the objectives of *The Community* may have their recognition as members of *The Community* revoked.

Local and Global Coordination

As these "*Base Teams*" of *The Community* are developed, the need arises for coordination with other teams operating within the same country. When this happens, coordination is assumed by a "*National Coordination Team*". There needs to be a minimum of at least four *Base Teams* in a country to elect a *National Coordination Team*.

These *National Coordinating Teams* have the function of coordinating joint actions (campaigns, forums, etc.), forming responses to specific situations in the environment, addressing administrative and legal issues (if needed), choosing a spokes person, and coordinating relations with the media and with other organisations.

The *National Coordinating Teams* are comprised of a maximum of 12 people and a minimum of four, elected by direct vote of the full members.

Global coordination is the responsibility of the "*World Coordination Team of The Community*", comprised of 12 members elected by the direct vote of all full members of *The Community* worldwide every two years.

The formation of the *World Coordination Team* takes into account the representation of ethnic, cultural and regional minorities.

The *World Coordination Team* has the responsibility of overall worldwide coordination and may propose joint actions of different size and scope.

The tasks of the *Global Coordinating Team* are:

- Coordination of joint actions.
- Coordination of responses to common needs of the whole.
- Disseminating world information to groups and base teams (global bulletin).
- Attending to the representation and participation of minorities.
- Official website (official global website, in different languages, on which official materials and all necessary global information are to be found).
- Official worldwide press releases.
- Relations with other organisations at the global level.
- Admission of organisations and/or action fronts that act on a regional or global level and who wish to join as "Supporters" of The Community.

Any proposal or action that includes the modification of the official materials or important organisational aspects of the organism should be subjected to a direct vote of all members.

Other levels of coordination, such as at a city or regional level, will be formed when the need arises (joint actions, forums, campaigns, etc..), always maintaining the method of election by direct vote of the full members of the place. These

levels of coordination will not be permanent, as are the *National Coordinating Team* and *World Coordinating Team*.

In summary, the *National Coordinating Team* and the *World Coordination Team* are standing bodies of coordination that are elected by direct vote of the full members of the "*Base Teams of The Community*", while other levels of coordination (city or regional) are transient and respond to situational needs. With National Teams and the World Team, there is no possibility of consecutive re-election for any member.

Joint functions

Base Teams and National and World Coordination Teams may, if deemed necessary, define functions that facilitate joint action, such as:

- Spokesperson: responsible for representing *The Community* in institutional activities, to the press and in all activities or situations where it is necessary to present the points-of-view of *The Community*.
- Relations with other organisations.
- Participation of minorities.
- Legal and juridical responsibilities.
- Press/media.
- Other ad-hoc functions.

These functions are chosen by direct vote of the members of the respective *teams (base, national coordination and global coordination)*, and have a duration of 1 year for *base teams*, and 2 years for the *national and global coordination teams*.

These functions are exclusively related to the environment, of service to the whole, without orientation, and respond to a mandate with clear guidelines. People may be re-elected to these functions.

Finances

The Community (for human development) sustains itself through the voluntary contributions of its members. It carries out an annual financial campaign for the support of joint activities with the participation of all full members worldwide. The amount of the collection is defined by the *National Coordinating Teams*, based on a percentage of the average salary in the country in question.

The financial campaign is distributed proportionally among the *Base Teams*, *National Coordination Teams* and the *World Coordination Team* according to a defined proportion.

There may also be occasional collections organised based on needs that may arise in which full members and supporters can participate voluntarily. The amounts of such collections can never exceed the amount of the annual collection.

The funds to run *The Community* come from its members, which is coherent with a human-based organisation.

III. Formative Themes

A. Miscellaneous Themes

Why is happiness considered impossible to achieve?

Sometimes people believe happiness is impossible to achieve because of prejudices. For example, from the time we are children it has been explained to us that to live is to suffer; that everything we achieve is based on suffering; that suffering makes us wiser, and so on.

There are others who claim that one meets difficulties at the very first step.... but of course here one shouldn't confuse those relative difficulties (that sometimes give life an interesting flavour) with the suffering one feels when experiencing a profound contradiction. Neither should one confuse physical pain with mental suffering, as we have seen elsewhere.

It seems that there are also many people who simply wish to hold onto their suffering. This fact appears impossible, unless you consider it from a pathological point of view. Nevertheless, there are many people who reject the possibility of positive

change in their lives because they feel that when they suffer they receive some kind of benefit. This is a trap of the mind.

Finally, there are those who really do aspire towards happiness but who will not make even the slightest effort to achieve it. And so happiness appears to them to be a valuable ideal but one that is impossible to achieve.

We should not misinterpret all of this and assume that we can obtain happiness all at once and for always. Rather, we know that we can go on overcoming suffering, achieving a state of growing satisfaction with ourselves, and we know that all this depends on how clear we become about the real meaning of life. Here we are not speaking of things that are impossible. Nor are we saying that this is only valid for a small minority of people who have their material concerns resolved, because experience tells us differently. What experience does show is that thousands of people are going in the direction we propose because they are experiencing for themselves that these proposals are beneficial to them in their daily lives.

The False Solutions

If someone says "If only I had more money I would be happy!", they should consult those who do have a lot of money and they will find out that these people have not achieved happiness.

We could go through a long list of such criteria and at the end of the chain, we would always find suffering.

One thing that many people do is confuse a brief instant of happiness with a sustained happiness that continues to grow over time. For example, a poet might say, "All I need to do is look at a flower and I am happy". And it is clear that she will be

happy... for a brief moment. This is true of any pleasurable activity. The pleasure of the moment dies with the moment. On the other hand, a state of happiness that lasts through time, no matter how small it may be, will grow. This is possible if that state of happiness is oriented by a meaning in life and not just by a simple action that dies immediately.

We are not saying that pleasure is harmful, but only that it is short-lived. We are saying that it is fine for the moment it happens, but that by itself it cannot give a foundation or meaning to life.

You should be able to tell whether your life is growing more full or more empty as time passes. Then you will know if your happiness is growing or diminishing. But how can you know this? You must learn how to compare different times or moments of your life in an accurate way: if the good moments in my life are less now than those I had in the past, then something is going wrong. If the good moments now are more than before, then I am well oriented.

You must also know how to compare the negative aspects: If my bad moments now are worse than the bad moments I used to have, then something is not right. If my bad moments now do not affect me as strongly as they used to, then I am advancing, growing internally.

In the measure that a new meaning orients my life, the comparison between the positive and negative moments of the past and the present will result in a favourable balance.

No matter what I do, if the end result when I compare is not favourable, then it will be clear that I am living with false solutions that will lead me sooner or later to non-meaning.

Points of the Doctrine⁸

We can synthesize the most important points of the doctrine of *The Community* as follows:

1. The human being tends to move toward achieving happiness;
2. Pain and suffering oppose this happiness;
3. Pain is physical, and its retreat depends on the advancement of society and science. Suffering, however, is mental, and its retreat depends on the individual becoming reconciled with him or herself;
4. One suffers when one lives in contradictory situations, when one remembers them, and when one imagines them: these are the three pathways of suffering;
5. Only a true meaning in life can give unity, can facilitate reconciliation, or, in other words, can break the contradictions in the three pathways of suffering.

In summary: when the real meaning of life arises, the human being becomes reconciled with him or herself, and this makes suffering recede and opens the path towards happiness.

On the guided experiences⁹

The Guided Experiences allow those who practice them to reconcile with themselves, overcoming the frustrations and resentments of the past, providing direction to present activities, and giving a sense of future which eliminates anxiety, fear and disorientation.

The Guided Experiences are varied in form but all have the same objective: mobilising thoughts with reference to conflicts or difficulties so that they can be managed and reorganised in a positive way.

We could define the Guided Experiences as "models of dynamic meditation, aimed at the life of the meditator, in order to reach and overcome conflicts".

The Internal Guide

When you find yourself alone and thinking about your doubts and projects, you may sometimes begin to talk aloud, as though you were talking with another person. Generally you ask and answer silently to yourself though, imagining the things you wish, or regretting having done something badly. There are some people who imagine they are speaking with their parents or other loved ones and they direct their questions to them, even though their parents or loved ones may no longer be living. At other times, we think about what someone else might have done in our place. Or we tend to follow the example of the people we admire – we imitate their attitudes and behaviours and even imagine having conversations with them.

All of the cases we have mentioned above correspond to a useful natural mechanism of the imagination we call the Internal Guide. Anyone can take advantage of their Internal Guides and use the ones for which they have a special preference. It is a very interesting work to recognise the guide or guides who serve as references for us. However, in this work you must try to find an image of a guide who has these three qualities: wisdom, kindness and strength. If any of those are lacking, our relation with that image will not be constructive. If we cannot find an image of a real person who has these three attributes, then we can imagine someone who has them, even if this person is dead or never existed. Once we have found a guide, then in moments when we have doubts or are confused, we can connect with this Internal Guide, and he or she will help us greatly by giving us answers or companionship.

The Aphorisms

We are now going to develop a few ideas that have been synthesized in brief phrases we call "aphorisms".

The first aphorism is: "Thoughts produce and attract actions". What does this mean: thoughts produce actions? This means simply that I act according to a) what I feel now; b) what I remember from the past; and c) what I imagine for the future. Any activity that I develop will depend on what I have done earlier and on my having a clear image or plan of what to do. If my thoughts are confused, it is very likely that my actions will be confused as well.

But how do thoughts "attract" actions? If my actions are confused, this will create confusion in the situations in which I am involved and also in the people towards whom my actions are directed. Then, as a consequence, I will receive the same type of equally confused actions in return. For example, if my thoughts are resentful and I act in this way, surely I will create resentment and attract resentful actions from other people in return. All a person has to do is believe in his "bad luck" and his actions and those of the people around him will wind up producing the "unlucky situations" in which he believes.

The second aphorism says: "Thoughts with faith produce and attract stronger actions". By "faith" we mean conviction, strong feeling, or confidence that something is the way a person believes it to be. It is not at all the same to think something with doubts as it is to think something with a strong emotional feeling. When you realise what a strong feeling like love can do, you will understand what we are saying.

The third aphorism says: "Thoughts repeated with faith produce and attract the maximum strength in actions". The more you repeat something, the more it is engraved in your

memory, the stronger your habits will be, and the more it will predispose you to repeat similar actions in the future. If a person continuously thinks with faith that she is sick, there is a higher probability that she will actually become sick than if she only thought about this a little and without conviction. The same holds true with the projects that I have in my life. I must think them out clearly, and have faith, and I must think about them over and over again. Then, my actions will go in this direction, and they will also create positive responses from my environment and from the people who surround me.

B. Themes about The Community

The Community as helper

A person can understand the doctrine of *The Community* and be in total agreement with it but that does not mean that he will experience a positive change in his life. It is understood that if one does not work actively, everything will remain simply as good intention.

This same person might wish to study the themes proposed by *The Community*, and he might also wish to carry out exercises to modify the behaviour and mental habits that cause him to suffer. He may find, however, that soon after he forgets everything that he had proposed to do, or else he may find it very difficult to maintain his work in any sustained way.

The impossibility of doing something in this way, alone and by oneself, is a consequence of the weight of habits, acquired throughout our life, that push us to do things contrary to what we propose here.

The unfortunate conclusion to be drawn from this can be expressed as such: you cannot sustain profound change, and avoid falling into old habits, if you do not receive help from others who are working in the same direction. We could argue this point all you want, but experience teaches us that if the habits are strong, and people remain in the same environment where these habits were formed, they will not change and therefore will not overcome their suffering by themselves.

This explains the need for an organised work with others, and justifies the formation of *The Community* as the tool that is most suited to help in these matters.

Meetings are held regularly in order to deepen the understanding and the positive changes achieved, and also to help maintain a momentum so that each person can advance in his or her daily life.

The work of The Community is not a therapy

There are those who think that the experiences and work done in *The Community* are a type of therapy. That point of view, apart from being incorrect, limits the possibility of true participation from these people, individually and as part of the group, because they place themselves in a passive position (almost that of a disability) thinking that they are attending to a sort of “treatment” for their ailments. If they reflect, however, they will understand that equilibrium and development are not achieved through therapy but through deeper questioning on the meaning of life, clear guidelines, and commitment to activities that transcend the personal.

Nobody solves their problems by obsessing or getting wrapped up in them. Rather it is well-oriented activity that leads to overcoming one’s problems. This is not so easy to do, however, based on individual intention alone. There has to be an organised work, with certain activities, and this approach is closer to a guide to living than a therapy.

C. Themes on Violence and Nonviolence

The current social situation

Violence, in all its manifestations, is one of the main characteristics of the present social system.

Every social or individual conflict derives from a situation of violence.

Violence is growing and invades all aspects of personal, communal, and social life.

- When we talk about violence we refer not only to physical violence, its most grotesque expression, which includes war, torture, murder, assassinations, criminal aggression and corporal punishment.
- There is also economic violence, seen in exploitation, unemployment and under-employment, the concentration of wealth, and financial speculation.
- There is racial violence, expressed as discrimination, segregation and xenophobia.
- There is religious violence represented as fanaticism or intolerance.
- Violence also grows among family members, in neighbourhoods, in schools, at university, and in the workplace.
- There is violence when women or youth are discriminated against, inhibiting their equal participation in the social sphere.
- Psychological violence is also on the rise, reflected in lack of communication, social isolation, resignation and non-meaning.

In a social context such as this, individuals and groups -- subjected daily to the inhuman psychological pressures of exploitation, discrimination and intolerance -- tend to respond mechanically through violence, thereby creating a growing spiral of violence.

In addition, mental illness, suicide, isolation and marginalisation are disproportionately increasing in our society, expressions or symptoms of an internal violence and suffering in which people are unable to find appropriate responses and to overcome their difficulties.

Violence has not only established itself in areas of power and social decision-making but also in the interior of each person, in personal relationships and among different social groups (regardless of one's cultural or economic status).

The Community explains that violence is the personal and social expression of an inhuman social system. It is the expression of a contradictory direction of life. It is, simply put, the manifestation of a "materialist" culture in decline that needs to be transformed.

Violence is personal and social. It is a problem that affects everyone today.

Violence has been installed in the thoughts and feelings of a society, dangerously considered as advanced; while at the same time it consolidates a "false ideology" that states "There is no solution to the problem of violence".

What will happen if this violent way of thinking, feeling, and acting ends up prevailing?.

What if this "culture of violence" becomes consolidated, undermining all efforts for social solidarity?.

If that happens, social and personal destructureation will expand to their absolute limit, increasing the chaos and uncertainty, and as a consequence human groups will become isolated from each other. People will come to believe there is no way out.

Yet, simultaneous to the growth of these different forms of violence, there will also begin to take hold in society new responses, both individual and communal, based on the values of peace, solidarity and nonviolence. These are signs of a "new culture" in the making.

Social Transformation and personal development

From its beginning, the *Humanist Movement* has taken as its focus both individual change and social change, as well as the relationship between the two. Following this perspective, *The Community (for human development)* proposes personal development in the direction of social transformation.

What does that mean? It means it aims towards social transformation, toward the humanisation of the world, advancing from the field of determination to a field of freedom, increasing the happiness and freedom of human beings.

For centuries, doctrines, philosophies and ideologies have addressed the transformation of the individual and of society in a disassociated manner. Some stated that people first had to experience a personal transformation (i.e., rid themselves of their defects) before attempting the transformation of society. At times, this stance took the form of closed "ideal communities", which, separated from the world, tried to achieve change. And they failed.

Others emphasised changing society first through a new political, economic or cultural order. From this change a new individual would rise (strongly motivated, for example, by a personal ethic directed toward solidarity or the good of the whole). All this would happen as naturally as an apple grows on a tree. They also failed.

Regardless of whether they placed individual transformation before or after the social one, their proposals were always presented in sequential terms: first one thing and then another. Something or someone has to wait until certain conditions are achieved; something or someone has to be postponed. That is, social transformation has to wait until one or several individuals are prepared (that is, are able to lead), or else individuals have to "sacrifice" for a social cause that will benefit others in the future.

These proposals set a trap where humans have to sacrifice their present to achieve something that may (or may not) happen in the future. The inconvenience of thinking like this is clear: the suffering goes on until certain pre-established conditions, sometimes called "objectives", are achieved. But beyond that (which is in and of itself sufficient to disqualify such proposals), history has shown that they failed or, at least, that things did not work in the sequential manner they proposed.

Transformation has to be simultaneous, global, and structural, or else there will be no transformation at all. There are many examples of good social ideals that were ruined by the individuals who implemented them and, vice versa, of individual searches for perfection that never bore social fruit. The *Humanist Movement* therefore proposes the simultaneous transformation of the individual and the society, developing both aspects at the same time.

Those who work on a social cause without considering their personal development (i.e., without humanising themselves) will experience obstacles and personal limitations. Eventually they will reach the limits of their possibilities as nonviolent activists and will abandon their intention or remain stagnant, with their limitations contaminating everything they do.

On the other hand, those who concentrate only on their personal development (whether called "realisation", "salvation", "enlightenment", or some other name), without due regard for the pain and suffering of others, will never get what they want. Their enclosure, being a negative psychological condition, will cause mental and emotional distortions (such as intolerance, weakness, bigotry, and selfishness) that will impede the alleged goal of their personal development. In fact, if we look at the highest examples of personal development, we will always see a spirituality that is accompanied by a high degree of commitment to others.

The *Humanist Movement*, therefore, suggests a simultaneous transformation of the individual and social. This has at least two meanings: one refers to the members of the *Humanist Movement* who, at the same time they work on humanising their society also carry out their personal development work.¹⁰ The other refers to the *Movement's* proposals for society in general and for individuals in particular. Although the *Humanist Movement* does not rely upon detailed plans for the distant future, to the extent that its capacity to transform society grows, the *Movement* will implement the means to promote change in individuals (using, for example, mass communications, education, etc.) at the service of humanisation.

The absence of a pre-conceived "manual" does not invalidate our proposal. On the contrary, it has the advantage of not impeding achievement by providing detailed recipes or formulas that might prove inappropriate in front of future conditions.

Members of the *Humanist Movement* become stronger thanks to their personal development, which provides their action in the world with a meaning that is as much social as personal. One's personal development does not exhaust itself, because working for the freedom and happiness of others only expands and gives a basis and a reference to that development. This leads us to the theme of Valid Action, which we will treat separately.

Violence and its forms. General Ideas

“Human existence develops amidst contradictions imposed by historical conditions at both personal and social levels. Such conditions are inescapable, but no historical necessities are derived from them”.

“Contradiction has its personal correlation in the register of suffering. Because of this, when faced by contradictory social conditions, individual human beings identify their suffering with the suffering of groups of humans that are subject to those same conditions”.

“Social contradiction is the result of violence. The appropriation of the social whole by a part of the whole is violence, and this violence is the root of contradiction and suffering. Violence is expressed as taking away the intentionality (and, most certainly, the liberty) of others. Or, in other words, it is an action of submerging the human being or large groups of human beings, into the world of nature”.

“The different forms of violence (physical, economic, racial and religious) are the expression of the denial of the human in others”.

“The appropriation of the social whole by a part of the whole is violence and this violence is the root of contradiction and suffering”.

“Personal and social suffering must be surpassed by modifying the means of illegal and violent appropriation which have installed contradiction in the world. This struggle to overcome suffering gives continuity to the historical process and gives meaning to human beings because it affirms the intentionality denied to them by others”.

“The results and development of the struggle for the humanisation of the world (natural and social) accumulate as progress. The different societies do not find themselves within the same framework or moment of process of development, they are rather in different paths of development. This means that the conditions for liberation are constantly available and are not within a distant future when the supposed "objective conditions" will take place.”¹¹

Let’s look at some of the most widespread forms of violence, namely, physical, economic, racial, religious and psychological.

Whoever does something that causes physical or bodily harm to others is exercising **physical violence**. This could include when pain is inflicted, when vital functions are allowed to deteriorate or, in the ultimate case, when death occurs.

The following are examples that can be seen primarily as physical violence, even though they may be accompanied by other forms of violence as well: war, terrorism, murder, physical aggression, torture, domestic violence, famine, endemic illnesses, social ills, suicide, social unrest, the contamination of natural resources, and the conscious marketing of dangerous drugs.

Some cases of violence are caused by reckless incompetence or negligence, through lack of disposition to prevent them, or due to the deviation of resources that could have prevented them to other areas of interest.

Whenever someone causes harm to another's legitimate economic rights, it is an exercise of **economic violence**. In other words, when the livelihood and minimal living conditions of others are threatened, when people are deprived of their legitimate income or property, and so on.

The following examples can be seen primarily as forms of economic violence, though they may be accompanied by other forms of violence as well: monopolisation, exploitation of labour, fraud, bribery, consumer product tampering, excessive pricing, the imposition of unjust fees, speculation, theft, embezzlement, black markets, extortion, speculation, usury, and hoarding.

Whoever does something that causes harm to others based on the religious beliefs they profess or because they do not profess any religious beliefs at all is causing **religious violence**. That is to say when aggressions are based on differences of beliefs or religious practices, when one group harms another because the second group does not accept the religious commandments of the first, or when some people become a target because they do not profess any religion.

These following examples can be seen primarily as religious violence, although they may be accompanied by other ways of violence as well: religious intolerance, obscurantism, bigotry, persecution, defamation, untouchability, caste discrimination, the Inquisition, excommunication, censure, holy wars, the formalization of a religion, and the burning of widows.

There are many other forms of religious violence that restrict the happiness and freedom of the human being, creating divisions among people, blocking the paths of scientific investigation and social progress, justifying (or not condemning) inhumane laws and practices, and restricting freedoms based on "divine" sanction through the use of threats and violence.

Whoever does something that causes harm to others due to their ethnicity, as expressed in physical characteristics or manners (i.e., when a person or group is injured by others because they have a different external appearance) is exercising **racial violence**.

The following are examples that can be viewed primarily as racial violence, even if accompanied by other forms of violence: slavery, discrimination, segregation, apartheid, pogroms, and theories of racial supremacy or inferiority.

There are other forms of racism that are not as obvious, such as sending particular racial groups onto the battlefield first, presenting them in the media in a unfavourable way (showing them as partial, strange, weird, etc.), or applying a double standard when dealing with people of different races.

Whoever does something that causes psychological, mental, moral or emotional harm to others is exercising **psychological violence**. That is to say, actions that harm the external unity of others, their harmony, or inner peace.

The following are examples that can be viewed primarily as psychological violence, but may be accompanied by other forms of violence: threats, induced fear or hatred, the imposition of ideologies, false or negative propaganda, promoting false values of life through the mass media, prejudiced or biased education, censorship of whole areas of knowledge and culture, disinformation, and nihilism.

There is great psychological violence done when a style of life, a belief system, an occupation, or certain customs are imposed on others. In other words, when one's own models are imposed on others through coercion, blackmail, manipulation or ignorance (whether promoted or existent). Much of this often can occur under the guise of "education".

Finally, we can also talk about **moral violence**. This is a form of violence in which someone is complicit in another act of violence. This has different degrees, but anyone who, while not directly involved, promotes, consents, or does nothing to prevent or stop violence is also responsible for that violence and its consequences.

The *Humanist Movement* works as an organised means to fight against all forms of violence which are prevalent in our society. One of the first things that a new member does, therefore, is to stop being a passive witness to violence and begin instead to transform violent conditions in his or her life through active nonviolence.

Following are some brief formative themes that have been developed about violence. One possible way to address their study and exercise is to:

- 1) Read the section aloud and slowly; 2) make comments on each point (e.g., why or how this is true); 3) share and discuss each point with another member; 4) identify cases of violence in journals, magazines, movies, books, etc.; 5) identify cases of violence in everyday life and in history; and 6) make proposals to counteract violence by using active nonviolence.

What is Violence?

In simplest terms, violence is anything that harms people. There is a naïve but widespread notion that violence is only physical; it is therefore usually recognized only in its raw physical expression, while other forms of violence that exist in society are ignored.

But it is also an expression of violence when people's freedom (their intentions and choices) is denied. In these

instances people are treated like objects, like things without intention of their own, used for the benefit of others, simple instruments at the service of another's interests.

The *Humanist Movement* differentiates the different forms of violence and tries to understand the roots of all violence.

Dehumanisation takes place worldwide and has many expressions, and violence is one of the essential manifestations of dehumanisation. To struggle for humanisation in a nonviolent way and overcome the dehumanisation, it is important to learn to recognise the diverse forms of violence that exist among us. Our stance is to use all available non-violent ways to confront and overcome the dehumanisation.

Violence can be divided into internal violence and external violence. The latter is social and interpersonal, it covers all different forms of violence that an individual may suffer or inflict upon others, the violence within groups and between groups. On the other hand, internal violence is the one that a person suffers as a mental and emotional experience.

In summary, the different ways of violence are: physical, economic, racial, psychological, religious, moral and internal.

We will examine them one at a time in the regular meetings.

Economic Violence

Economic violence is one of many forms of violence that occur in human groups (social violence) and between individuals (interpersonal violence).

Whoever does something that causes harm to the legitimate economic rights of others is exercising economic violence. It is economic violence, in other words, when the livelihood and

minimal living conditions of others are threatened, and when people are deprived of their legitimate income or property.

Indeed, the economic harm could be accompanied by other kinds of harm: physical, psychological, etc. But for now we are focusing on the economic aspect of the violence being carried out.

The following examples can be viewed primarily as economic violence, even if accompanied by other forms of violence: monopolisation, workplace exploitation, fraud, bribery, consumer product tampering, excessive prices, the imposition of unjust fees, speculation, theft, embezzlement, black markets, extortion, usury, and hoarding.

Some cases of economic violence are caused by reckless incompetence or negligence, or due to lack of a willingness to prevent them, or from the diversion of resources that could prevent them to other areas of interest.

The Community opposes the use of violence as a means to any end. It opposes violence through active nonviolence.

Physical Violence

Physical violence is one of many forms of violence that occur in human groups (social violence) and between individuals (interpersonal violence).

Whoever does something that causes physical or bodily harm to others is exercising physical violence, whether inflicting pain, causing the deterioration of vital functions or, in extreme cases, resulting in death.

Indeed, physical harm may also be accompanied by other kinds of harm, such as economic or psychological. But for now we are focusing on the physical aspect of the violence being exercised.

The following examples can be viewed primarily as physical violence, even though they may be accompanied by other forms of violence: war, terrorism, homicide, physical assault, torture, domestic violence, mass starvation, endemic disease, social ills, suicide, social unrest, contamination of natural resources, and the conscious marketing of dangerous drugs.

Some cases of physical violence are caused by reckless incompetence or negligence, or due to lack of a willingness to prevent them, or from the diversion of resources that could prevent them to other areas of interest.

The Community opposes the use of violence as a means to any end. It opposes violence through active nonviolence.

Internal violence

Internal (or personal) violence is the violence that an individual suffers as a mental and emotional experience. It is an unpleasant experience that comes from a surge of negative ideas and emotions, physical tension, and disturbances in the affected person.

It is a state in which the person suffers all kinds of imbalances and disharmony (mental, emotional and physical) in various degrees of intensity.

It is the opposite of peace, tranquility, serenity, stability, calmness, equanimity, harmony, and equilibrium. It is also the absence of a growing sense of happiness and internal freedom, of faith in oneself, in others and in the future. It is the opposite of peace, inner strength and joy.

The following are cases of internal violence that are manifested in various ways: hatred, mistrust, prejudice,

resentment, frustration, negative memories, disorientation, uncertainty, indecision, self-enclosure, lack of communication, fear (of losing things, of sickness, old age, death, etc.), cynicism, pessimism, negativity, lack of faith in oneself, others or in the future, lack of meaning in life, false meanings, obsessions, compulsions, nihilism, the disagreement between ideas, feelings and actions, tensions, and contradictions.

All this is generically called suffering. We suffer from what we believe is happening, what we believe has happened, or what we believe will happen. For this reason, internal violence has three main sources within the individual:

- 1) Past frustrations, resentments and negative memories with which the person cannot reconcile;
- 2) Current disorientation, confused or unclear priorities and values, lack of affirmation, behavioural difficulties, problems with self-image or with one's attitude;
- 3) Uncertainties and fears about the future.

Indeed, one's purpose or meaning of life plays a crucial role in generating or not generating internal violence. It plays a big role in how humans treat their main fears: fear of death, of old age, of poverty and of loneliness.

Internal violence expresses itself primarily in two ways: 1) as physical disturbances and sickness; and 2) as external violence, that is to say, as aggression toward others.

The Community provides useful references to overcome internal violence while simultaneously working to overcome external violence in society.

External and internal violence: their interaction

We have looked at internal and external forms of violence. Let us now see how these forms of violence interact.

The internal violence that we suffer (or make) is closely related to the diverse forms of external violence that prevail in society. That is, “personal” violence would be reduced or at least would be different if our society were different (e.g., more just, safe, educated or humanised).

Our personal violence is greatly influenced by, if not caused by, external social, cultural, and economic problems. If the latter were different or solved, the personal violence we suffer would change or disappear.

Our personal violence cannot be understood apart from external factors, nor can it be solved in isolation. The solution is to join forces with others to eliminate the violence in society, as we work to overcome the internal roots of violence, such as fear of death, disease, poverty and loneliness.

In other words, we are saying that the different forms of violence that prevail in society create conditions in which people suffer certain internal violence. That is the reason why many feelings of guilt, failure, or inadequacy are reduced when people realise that their problems are not that special but are rather a social problem shared by many others, under pressure from a society that is set up and operates in a certain way.

Many people realise that they suffer certain problems not because they are special, strange or abnormal, but because the system they live in clashes with their legitimate aspirations, values, and behaviours. And it exerts great pressure on each person to fit in with the established order, making anyone who rebels against it or fails to adapt to it pay dearly. Many times the

problem lies in a dehumanised system and not in the person who suffers its violence; this person, however, will still have to find a way out of his personal violence.

That's why people who are conscious of this fact often choose the path of resentment, hypocrisy, cynicism, enclosure, or violence to confront a violent system they perceive as the source of internal violence. These are all wrong approaches to personal or social change, because our internal situation does not allow us to freely choose the best solution: instead, we can say that the internal violence chooses the response for us.

The above speaks to what can happen with the internal violence that one suffers. It does not remain within the person, but manifests externally and is expressed in many different ways in everyday interpersonal relationships. Thus the internal violence rooted in society is reinjected into society as interpersonal violence, further contaminating the social environment.

It comes back in the forms we experience every day, such as cynicism, hypocrisy, cheating, double standards, lack of communication, competition, insensitivity, selfishness, etc., and which are found in all sectors of society. Sayings such as "Take care of your own business" and "every man for himself" are indicative of a type of psychological state of siege, of retreat and defense, and not signs of psychological strength.

These are the ways of those who have been psychologically beaten down and defeated by a violent system and who, paradoxically, share its forms, returning violence with violence. They do not change anything, they do not improve anything, neither society nor themselves.

The Community, however, maintains that human beings are always free to choose a stance in front of external conditions

or pressures, and do not have to bow down to them. They can decide to accept or deny them, succumb to them or rebel against them. This does not necessarily mean that if they decide to reject those conditions they will in the end be successful.

What is more, human intentionality can choose the way internal violence manifests on the outside.

In this brief manner we have explained how the external and internal forms of violence are not isolated but connected a continuous cycle.

The Community teaches us how to overcome the personal roots of violence while simultaneously striving to overcome social violence.

Moral Violence

Moral violence is one of the many forms of violence manifested in groups (social violence) and between individuals (interpersonal violence).

Moral violence is a form of violence that occurs when someone is an accomplice to another form of violence. This has varying degrees, but anyone who, although not directly involved, promotes, consents, or does nothing to prevent or stop violence, is also responsible for the said violence and its consequences.

Some cases of moral violence are caused by negligence, from the lack of willingness to prevent them, or due to the diversion of preventative resources to other areas of interest.

Attending only to one's personal affairs, indifference, closed-mindedness, insensitivity, lack of communications, selfishness, and hypocrisy are all psychological conditions in which moral violence can take place.

On the other hand, solidarity, social work, communication, attending to social and political matters, etc. can incline one towards another direction, that of active nonviolence to change the violent conditions.

In fact, *The Community* is an organised means to fight against all acts of violence that prevalent in society. Consequently, one of the first things a new member does is stop being a passive witness to violence and start to transform violent conditions through active nonviolence.

Psychological Violence

Psychological violence is one of the many forms of violence that manifest in groups (social violence) and between individuals (interpersonal violence).

Whoever does anything that causes harm to others, psychologically, mentally, morally or emotionally, performs psychological violence. It is psychological violence when another's internal unity, harmony, or inner peace is damaged.

Other types of damage could also accompany psychological damage: economical, physical, etc. But we are now addressing the psychological aspect of the violence being exercised.

The following are a series of examples that could be viewed primarily as psychological violence even though they may be accompanied by other types of violence: threats, inducing fear or hatred, imposing ideologies, false or negative propaganda,

promoting false values of life through the massive media, prejudiced or biased education, censorship of entire areas of knowledge and culture, disinformation, and nihilism.

There is great psychological violence done whenever a way of life, beliefs, an occupation, or certain customs are imposed on others, for example through coercion, blackmail, manipulation or ignorance (promoted or already established).

The Community is opposed to the use of violence as a means to achieve an end. It opposes violence through active nonviolence.

Racial Violence

Racial violence is one of the many forms of violence that manifest in groups (social violence) and individuals (inter-personal violence).

Whoever does anything to harm others due to their ethnic origins, their physical characteristics, or their customs, performs racial violence. That is, when a group or an individual harms others because they are different in appearance.

Racially-motivated violence could also be accompanied by other types of violence, e.g. economical, psychological or physical. But we are now addressing the racial aspect of the violence or being exercised.

The following are examples that could be regarded primarily as racial violence but which might be accompanied by other types of violence as well: slavery, discrimination, segregation, apartheid, pogroms, and theories or racial supremacy or inferiority.

Other forms of racism are not so evident: sending groups of a particular race onto the battlefield first, presenting them in the massive media in an unfavourable manner (e.g., as ridiculous, weird, or strange) or applying double standards when treating different races.

The Community is opposed to the use of violence as a means to achieve an end. It opposes violence through active nonviolence.

Religious Violence

Religious violence is one of the many forms of violence that manifest in groups (social violence) and between individuals (interpersonal violence).

Whoever does anything to harm others because of the beliefs they profess, or because they profess none, performs religious violence. This means, when the aggressions are based on the difference in their religious beliefs or practices, or when one faction harms another because it does not accept its religious mandates, or when someone is targeted for having no religious belief.

Religious violence could also be accompanied by other forms of violence, e.g. economical, psychological or physical. But we are now addressing the religious aspect of the violence being exercised.

The following are a series of examples that could be regarded primarily as religious violence but might also be accompanied by other forms of violence: religious intolerance, obscurantism, bigotry, persecution, defamation, untouchability, caste discrimination, the Inquisition, excommunication, censure, holy wars, the formalization of a religion, and the burning of widows.

There are many other kinds of religious violence that restrict freedom, happiness, and human development, creating division between people, blocking positive scientific investigation and social progress, justifying (or not condemning) inhuman laws and practices, restricting liberty in the name of “divine” cause through various acts of violence and threats.

The Community is opposed to the use of violence as a means to achieve an end. It opposes violence through active nonviolence.

Nonviolence as a means of action

Violence is not an integral part of the supposedly immutable nature of human beings, but rather a primitive stage of their individual or social development.

Violence can be overcome by working on intentional and simultaneous change in the social and personal field. This is what the *Human Movement*, in general, and *The Community (for human development)*, in particular, aspire to and work for.

The *Humanist Movement* states that it is not possible, nor desirable, to overcome social and personal violence through violent methods. Violence, which is born from a dehumanised system and its methodology of action, generates more violence. Only nonviolence is alien to the violent system, and it is therefore the only possible, desirable and worthy solution for human beings.

The *Humanist Movement* acts from a methodology of active nonviolence to overcome violence, thereby enabling positive change in society and its individuals.

The methodology of active nonviolence has very ancient roots in different philosophies, religions, ethical codes, and

legal systems. It has spawned countless precedents of conducts and nonviolent efforts in groups, movements, and important individuals.

In more recent times we have found the remarkable examples of Mohandas Karamchand (Mahatma) Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. More recently, we have its most complete expression in the Silo's thinking and work.

In light of these examples, we should not confuse active nonviolence with simple pacifist or non-belligerent attitudes. These stances only passively aspire for an end to violence or try not to exercise violence themselves, but do not propose carrying out any nonviolent action to resist and change the conditions that give rise to the violence they suffer.¹²

In contrast, the methodology of active nonviolence implies an intentional activism in which a specific action is developed to overcome violence in its ultimate root.

Active nonviolence implies rejecting all forms of violence and executing a coherent action that would tend to modify the existing conditions of the violence; it is the methodology of brave men and women.

As the *Document of the Humanist Movement* says: "All forms of violence —physical, economic, racial, religious, sexual, ideological, and others— that have been used to block human progress are repugnant to humanists. For humanists, every form of discrimination, whether subtle or overt, is something to be denounced. Humanists are not violent, but above all they are not cowards, and because their actions have meaning they are unafraid of facing violence. Humanists connect their personal lives with the life of society. They do not pose such false dichotomies as viewing their own lives as separate from the lives of those around them, and in this lies their coherence".

To “*humanise the earth*” is also to end violence. It is active nonviolence. Active nonviolence is a “valid action” par excellence.

It is fitting to note here the framework offered by Silo to the methodology of nonviolence in chapter IX. Violence, extracted from “The Human Landscape” in *Humanise the Earth*:

1. When people speak of the methodology of action in the context of social and political struggle, the subject of violence frequently arises. There are, however, prior issues that bear on this topic.
2. Violence will continue to color all social activity as long as the human being does not fully realise a human society, a society in which power is in the hands of the social whole and not some part of it that subordinates and objectifies the whole. Therefore, when we speak of violence we must talk of the established world. And if one opposes that world in nonviolent struggle, one must begin by stressing that what characterizes a nonviolent attitude is that it does not tolerate violence. Then it is not a question of justifying any particular type of struggle but of defining the conditions of violence imposed by this in human system.
3. At the same time, many errors result from confusing nonviolence with pacifism. While nonviolence needs no justification as a methodology of action, pacifism, which considers peace to be a state of non-belligerence, must carefully consider what conditions bring us closer to or take us further from that peace. And so while pacifism approaches issues such as disarmament as the essential social priorities, in fact armamentism is but one particular case of the threat of physical violence under the direction of the power established by that minority of people that manipulates the State. The issue of disarmament is of

utmost importance, and it is all to the good that pacifism raises this urgent question. However, even were it successful in its demands it would not thereby be able to modify the context of this violence or, except in the most artificial fashion, to extend its proposals to include modifying the social structure itself. There are, of course, a number of models of pacifism and various theoretical foundations within this current, but none of them can provide a more comprehensive model. If, however, this vision of the world were broader, we would certainly be in the presence of a doctrine that would include pacifism. And in this case we would need to discuss the foundations of that broader doctrine before supporting or rejecting the type of pacifism that derives from it.

When speaking of a methodology of nonviolence, it is not only about the attitudes of groups or individuals, but also about reinforcing and giving direction to an ongoing process. It is inevitable that the general crisis of the System be accompanied by the fortifying of movements in favour of peace and against violence. This way, this movement puts pressure on the established powers in order for them to move in a direction opposite to the one taken today.

For the participation in this current, we must take into account both clarification and mobilization: that is, to clarify and enlighten others about the problems and to simultaneously mobilize one's immediate environment in the direction of peace and nonviolence.

It is particularly important to raise consciousness in society about the conditions of violence and the proposals for overcoming them.

Many and varied are the methods and tactics that can be adopted following a methodology of nonviolence. One can

easily check out the rich history of nonviolence actions; some are well known, others less so. Among many examples we can cite the public denunciation of violence, creating a “vacuum” to all forms of violence, strikes, taking over establishments, non-cooperation, civil disobedience, boycotts, protests, non-payment of taxes, marches and sit-ins.

The exemplary nonviolent actions are those that, beyond their immediate success or apparent failure, inspire and encourage new actions, raise consciousness, and become references as a type of ethical behaviour in front of violence.

Surely the times impose new conditions for nonviolent struggle, and this will result in a great creativity of new ways and tactics to increase effectiveness.

And as humanists develop the **methodology of nonviolence**, they also learn to disarm the bomb of violence that nests inside their heads and hearts, so that their actions are inspired and driven by the best of themselves.

The solution to the problem of different forms of violence exists, and lies in applying a precise methodology, the "Methodology of Active Nonviolence".

Nonviolence is a methodology of action that promotes a profound individual and social transformation.

Nonviolence is a force capable of changing the violent and inhuman direction of current events.

Nonviolence promotes a new internal and external attitude towards life that has as its principal tools:

- Rejecting and producing a vacuum towards the different forms of discrimination and violence.
- Non-collaboration with violent practices.

- The denunciation of all acts of discrimination and violence.
- Civil disobedience in front of institutionalized violence.
- Social organisation and mobilization, voluntary and solidarious.
- The development of personal virtues and the best and most profound of human aspirations.

This methodology is not simply an expression of an intention. This methodology has precise forms that clearly define a way of thinking, a way of feeling and a way of acting. Its application has clear indicators that allow each individual and each group to measure their effectiveness in overcoming the pain and suffering to which they are subjected.

What are the way of operating and the precise parameters that define the methodology of action in personal and social behaviour?

1. A personal approach based on this basic rule of conduct:
"I treat others as I would like to be treated".
2. An internal and external behaviour based on coherence:
"I act on the basis of what I think and feel is best for my life and the lives of those around me".
3. I reject, denounce and make a vacuum towards the various forms of violence that are expressed around me.

What are the personal and social indicators that show the goodness and effectiveness of this behaviour?.

1. The growth of happiness and freedom in those who exercise this behaviour and in their relations with others.
2. The decrease or reversal of the factors causing personal suffering and social violence.

3. A more just society where there is equal opportunity and where diversity is respected and valued.
4. The transformation of Formal Democracy into Real Democracy.

Nonviolence and Spirituality

The methodology of "nonviolence" as seen from the point-of-view of Universalist Humanism takes into account three fundamental aspects:

- First, it arises from the deep interior and profound necessity of the human being, not as mere speculation in search of a result.
- Second, its implementation rejects on principle any deviation, by whatever factor, that transforms the action into violence or as an accomplice to violence.
- And third, nonviolent action is based on a **"higher purpose"**, that is to say a **clear objective to overcome the conditions that cause human suffering**, beginning with those with the biggest need, and keeping outside this framework any action that, while called nonviolent, aims for the progress of only a few or asserts values that are opposed to human freedom and progress.

"Nonviolence" contains then a deep spiritual meaning, understood as the value that connects social and personal action with the most profound and worthy of human intentions and aspirations. "Spirituality and Nonviolence" are inseparable concepts and when they are separated or one is left aside, they lose their profound transformative meaning.

The exemplary projects and actions of leaders and guides such as Tolstoy, Gandhi, King, and more recently, Silo, are exemplary models of what is spoken of here.

D. Themes about Suffering

Happiness and Suffering

One of our objectives is to gain growing satisfaction with ourselves. This is possible only in the measure that we understand the factors that impede our growing happiness. Happiness is a state in which there is no suffering. Is it possible to progressively overcome suffering? Of course it is, even though the opposite appears to happen in everyday life: for many people, suffering only seems to increase as the years go by.

But what do we do in order to obtain growing happiness? We have to comprehend how suffering is produced, and then begin to act in ways different than those that create it.

We must understand, first of all, what we mean by the word "suffering". Many people believe that they do not suffer, but rather that they simply have problems – problems with money, problems with sex, with their family, with other people, etc. They believe that they simply experience tension, anxiety, insecurity, fears, resentment, and all kinds of frustrations.

Well, we call all of these problems "suffering".

It is important to distinguish between pain and suffering. Pain is physical, and the progress of science and society has a lot to do with overcoming it. On the other hand, suffering is mental. Sometimes physical pain will induce mental suffering or mental suffering may in turn produce physical pain and illness. This distinction between pain and suffering is one of the first things we begin to understand through our work in The Community. Later on, one learns to search for the true roots of suffering and thus discovers the need to change the behaviour that produces suffering.

The Three Pathways of Suffering

There are two very important faculties that human beings possess: memory and imagination. Without them it would be impossible to carry out any of our activities in everyday life. When one of these faculties is diminished in capacity or becomes altered in any way, our everyday activities become difficult.

Memory and imagination are essential for life. But if instead of helping us open our way through life we find that they enclose us in suffering, we must take effective action to change this situation. If our memory continually brings up negative images, this will prevent it from giving us the help we need. The same thing can happen with the imagination if it continually feeds us fears, anxieties, and doubts about the future.

We can also consider our senses (which feed us the perceptions of the present instant) as another faculty that is decisive for life. Through our senses we are able to see, hear, touch, and so on. In essence, they give us an account of what is happening around us. Some things that we experience through our senses we like; other things we do not. If we feel hungry or get hit, or if we get too hot or too cold, we register pain through our senses. But in contrast with this kind of pain (which is directly physical), we also experience suffering that is mental. This is the kind of suffering we feel when we do not like what we see in the world around us, or when it seems to us that things are not as they should be.

The memory, the imagination and the senses are the three pathways necessary for life. However, they may become enemies of life if they function in ways that make us suffer.

We suffer through the memory when we remember past failures and frustrations, when we remember lost opportunities, things we have lost, or loved ones we have lost.

We suffer through the imagination through the negative things we imagine in the future. These things produce fears within us – the fear of losing what we have, the fear of being lonely, of sickness, of old age, and of death. Our imagination also makes us suffer when we think it will be impossible to achieve what we desire for ourselves or for other people.

We suffer through our senses when we feel our present situation is not how it should be, or when we do not receive positive recognition from our family or from other people, when we are discriminated against at work, or when we encounter difficulties in the things that we are trying to do.

Then, instead of talking about these three very important faculties (senses, imagination, memory), we have to speak of them as the three pathways of suffering because they are functioning badly. We must also recognize that these three pathways are interconnected, and when something goes wrong in one of them, this interferes with the other two. There are connections between these pathways at many points.

The experiences of The Community work precisely on the three pathways of suffering, overcoming problems in them so that our lives may develop without difficulty. If we are disoriented or if we do not have a direction or a meaning in life, we become lost in these three pathways, and we do not know how to sweep the obstacles out of our path, because we do not even know in what direction we are going. Certainly, discovering a meaning in life is what will most help us to convert these three pathways of suffering into three pathways that are positive for our existence.

Suffering through the Memory

Your memory sometimes produces sensations that are agreeable and sometimes it produces suffering. People suffer

because of what they have lost, and for things they have done that have turned out badly. They prefer not to go over these memories, but, even if they don't wish to, many things in their present life make them remember disagreeable scenes from the past. They try to avoid any reminders of past problems in their present life, and this can limit their activities a great deal.

Often, people do not realise that many present feelings or states of anguish, anxiety or fear have to do with the memory of past negative situations or other disagreeable things. If people knew how to work on these past memories correctly it would solve many problems. The idea of working on them is not simply to remember negative things continuously, because this would just create pessimism and negativity in one's life. Rather, what we are suggesting to work with these memories in an appropriate manner, as we do in some meetings of The Community.

Suffering through the Imagination

The imagination is necessary for life. Thanks to our imagination, we can plan ahead, make projects, and eventually change reality, by putting into practice the actions that come from our imagination. The imagination is an enormous force, but the results depend entirely on how it is directed. If our imagination is channeled toward negative actions, this will produce all kinds of maladjustments and generate suffering.

When a person fears losing something they have, or when they are afraid they will not reach one of their goals, they suffer through their imagination. When a person sees the future as uncertain or disastrous, they also suffer through their imagination. This kind of suffering can sometimes be converted into actual physical pain and illness. We should point out that

many illnesses begin with only imaginary symptoms, but as time passes they become real. Negative imagination produces mental tension that reduces all of our capabilities.

This capacity of the imagination to lead us to act poorly in the world or to negatively influence our bodies can be modified. The Guided Experiences of The Community are based on this great faculty of the human being. In the weekly meetings, we work to separate the imagination from the suffering that has accompanied it until now.

E. Themes about Action in General

Change and Crisis¹³

In this time of great change, not only individuals but society and its institutions are in crisis. Change is occurring more rapidly all the time and the crisis is deepening. This portends further upheaval, which broad sectors of humanity will perhaps be unable to assimilate.

Today's transformations are taking unexpected turns, resulting in widespread disorientation about the future and confusion about what to do in the present. In reality, it is not change itself that is so disturbing to us, because we can recognize many positive things in contemporary developments. What is troubling is not knowing in what direction these changes are heading, and therefore not knowing in what direction to orient our actions.

Everything around us – the economy, technology, society – is undergoing enormous transformations. But above all it is in our own lives that we experience these changes: in our workplaces, our families, our friendships. The changes are modifying our ideas and what we believe about our world, about other people and more than anything about ourselves.

Many of these changes are exciting but others confuse us and leave us paralyzed. Our own behaviour and that of others all too often seems incoherent, contradictory, and as lacking in any clear direction as the events around us.

Since change is inevitable, it is of fundamental importance to guide it, and there is no other way than to begin with oneself. One must find in oneself a direction for this chaotic change, whose future course is unknown to us.

Individuals do not exist in isolation. Thus, if they truly give their lives direction, this will change their relationships with the people in their families, their workplaces, and everywhere they carry out their activities. Giving direction to one's life is not simply a psychological problem that can be resolved within the head of an isolated individual; on the contrary, it is resolved by changing – through coherent behaviour – the situation in which one lives with others.

When we become excited by our successes or depressed by our failures, when we make plans for the future or resolve to change our lives, we often forget the fundamental point: the situation in which we live involves relationships with others. We can neither explain what happens to us nor make any choice in our lives without also including certain people and specific social ambits. Those people who are of special importance to us and the social environments in which we live place each of us in a particular situation, and it is from this situation that each of us thinks, feels, and acts. To deny this or to disregard it creates enormous difficulties both for us and for others. One's freedom to choose and to act is delimited by these circumstances. Any change one desires to make cannot be proposed in the abstract but only with reference to the actual situation in which one lives.

Coherent behavior

If my thoughts, my feelings, and my actions are in agreement, if they all go in the same direction, if my actions do not create contradiction with what I feel, then I can say that my life has coherence. But though I am true to myself, this does not necessarily mean I am being true to those in my immediate environment. I still need to achieve this same coherence in my

relationships with others, treating them the way I would like to be treated. Of course there can also be a destructive type of coherence, which can be seen in those who are racists or fanatics or in those who are violent or exploit others. It is clear, however, that their relationships with others are incoherent, because they treat others very differently from the way they desire to be treated themselves.

This unity of thought, feeling, and action, this unity between the treatment one asks from others and the treatment one gives to others – these are ideals that are not realised in everyday life. Here is the point: to adjust one's conduct in the direction of these personal and social proposals. These values, taken seriously, give life a direction that is independent of any difficulties one may face in realizing them. Here, one's intentions do matter (even though one's actions may not at first coincide with them), especially if these intentions are sustained, perfected, and extended. These images of what one wants to achieve are firm references that give direction in every situation.

What is being proposed here is not very complicated. We are not surprised, for example, when people dedicate their lives to pursuing great wealth, even when they lack any tangible reason to believe they will achieve it. This ideal spurs them on, despite the absence of relevant results. Why, then, is it so difficult to understand that although these times may not favour thinking, feeling and acting in the same direction, nonetheless these ideals of coherence can provide a clear direction for human actions?.

The Two Proposals

To have one's thoughts, feelings, and actions go in the same direction and to treat others as one wants to be treated – these two proposals are so simple they can be viewed as mere

naiveté by people accustomed to the usual complications. Yet underlying this seeming simplicity lies a new scale of values in which coherence comes first, a new morality in which one's actions are not a matter of indifference, and a new aspiration that entails a consistent effort to give direction to human events. Behind this apparent simplicity one is either staking one's future on a meaning in life that will be truly evolutionary, both personally and for society, or one is following a path that leads toward disintegration.

As mistrust, isolation, and individualism increase, they erode the fabric of society, and we can no longer rely on old values to provide the cohesion among people that is so essential. The traditional solidarity found among members of a given class, or within associations, institutions, and groups is rapidly being replaced by a savage competition, from which not even the closest bonds of marriage or family escape. As this process mechanically proceeds to dismantle social structures, a new solidarity cannot arise out of the ideas and conduct of a world that has already disappeared – it can come only from the concrete need that people have to give direction to their lives. And this new direction will entail changing the environment in which they live. This change in their environment, if it is to be true and profound, cannot be imposed from without, cannot be set in motion by external laws or any form of fanaticism. It can only come from the power of shared opinion and minimum collective action with the people who make up the social environment around them.

Reaching all of society starting with one's immediate environment

We know that by changing our situation in positive ways we will be influencing our surroundings, and that others will share

this point of view and form of action, giving rise to a growing system of human relationships. So we must ask ourselves: Why should we go beyond the immediate environment where we begin? The answer is simple: to be coherent with the proposal of treating others in the same way we want them to treat us. Why wouldn't we pass on to others something that has proven to be of fundamental importance in our own lives?.

If our influence begins to expand, it means that our relationships and therefore the constituents of our environment have also developed. This is a factor we need to bear in mind right from the first, because even though our actions may begin in one small area, their influence can project very far. And there is nothing strange in thinking that others will decide to accompany us in this direction. After all, the great movements throughout history have followed this same course – logically, they began small, and then developed because people felt these movements interpreted their needs and concerns.

If we are coherent with these proposals we will act in our immediate environments, but with our vision placed on the progress of society as a whole. Out of common need, then, those working together to give a new direction to their lives and to events will create environments for direct communication where they can discuss these themes. Later on, as awareness spreads through many means of communication, this surface of contact will grow. A similar process will occur as people create organisations and institutions compatible with this proposal.

The environment in which one lives

We have already seen that the impact of this swift and unpredictable change is experienced as crisis – the crisis with which individuals, institutions, and entire societies are now

struggling. So, although it is indispensable to give direction to developments, how can one do this, subject as one is to the action of larger events? Clearly, one can direct only the most immediate and nearby aspects of one's life, and not the operation of institutions or society at large. Nor is it easy attempting to give direction to one's life, since no one lives in isolation; everyone lives in some situation, in some environment.

We may think of this environment as the universe, the earth, our country, state, province, and so on. each of us has, however, an immediate environment – the environment in which we carry out our daily activities. This is the environment of our family, our work, our friendships, and our other activities. We live in a situation of relationship with other people, and this is our particular world, which we cannot avoid as it acts on us and we on it in a direct way. Any influence we have is on this immediate environment, and both the influence we exercise on it and the influence it exerts on us are in turn affected by more general situations – by the current disorientation and crisis.

Coherence as a direction of life

If we want to give a new direction to events, we must begin with our own lives and include the immediate environment in which we carry out our activities. But the question remains: To what direction will we aspire? Without doubt to one that provides coherence and support in such a changeable and unpredictable environment.

To propose that one will think, feel, and act in the same direction is to propose coherence in life. Yet putting this into practice is not easy, because the situations in which we find ourselves are not entirely of our own choosing. We find ourselves doing the things we need to do, even though these

things may not at all agree with what we think or what we feel. We find ourselves in situations over which we have no control. To act with coherence, then, is more an intention than a fact – it is a direction, which if kept before us guides our lives toward increasingly coherent conduct.

Clearly, it is only by exerting influence within one's own immediate environment that one will be able to change any aspect of the overall situation in which one lives. In so doing, one will be giving a new direction to one's relationships with others, and they will be included in this new conduct.

Some may object that their employment or other factors cause them to frequently change their residence or other aspects of their lives. But this in no way affects the proposal, for every person is always in some situation, is always part of some environment. If we are striving for coherence, the treatment we afford others must be of the same type as the treatment we demand for ourselves, no matter where we are.

There are, then, in these two proposals the basic elements for giving direction to our lives to the extent of our strength and possibilities. Coherence advances as a person is increasingly able to think, feel, and act in the same direction. And we extend this coherence to others – because only in this way are we ourselves being coherent. And in extending this to others we begin to treat other people the way we would like to be treated. Coherence and solidarity are directions; they represent conduct to which we aspire.

Proportion in one's actions as a step towards coherence

How can we advance in the direction of coherence? First, we need to maintain a certain proportion in the activities of our daily lives. We need to establish which among all the things we do

are most important. For our lives to function well, we need to give the highest priority to what is of fundamental importance, less to secondary things, and so on. It could turn out that simply by taking care of two or three main priorities we will achieve a well-balanced situation.

We cannot allow our priorities to be turned upside down or to become so fragmented that our lives grow out of balance. To avoid having some activities proceed far ahead while others fall too far behind, we need to develop all of our activities as a connected whole and not as isolated actions. It is all too easy to become blinded by the importance of one activity and to allow this single priority to unbalance all of our other activities. And then, because our whole situation has been jeopardized, in the end we fail to accomplish what we had considered so important.

It is true that at times urgent matters arise that we need to deal with right away, but it should be clear that this in no way means we can go on indefinitely postponing the things necessary to maintain the overall situation in which we live. It is a significant step in the direction of coherence to establish our priorities, and then to carry out our activities in appropriate proportion.

Well-timed actions as a step towards coherence

There is a daily routine we follow that is set by schedules and timetables, our personal needs, and the workings of the environment in which we live. Yet within this framework there is a dynamic interplay and richness of events that go unappreciated by superficial people. There are some who confuse their routines with their lives, but they are in no way the same, and quite often people must make choices among the routines or conditions imposed on them by their environment.

Certainly it is true that we live amid inconveniences and contradictions, but it is important not to confuse these things. Inconveniences are simply the annoyances and impediments that we all face. While they are not terribly serious, of course if they are numerous or repeated they can increase our irritation and fatigue. Without question we have the capacity to overcome them. They neither determine the direction of our lives nor stop us from carrying a project forward. They are simply obstacles along the way that range from the minor physical difficulty to larger problems that may nearly cause us to lose our way. While there are important differences in degree among inconveniences, they all lie within the range of things that do not stop us from going forward.

Something quite different happens with what are called contradictions. When we are unable to carry out our central project, when events propel us in a direction away from what we desire, when we find ourselves trapped in a vicious circle from which we cannot escape, when we do not have even minimal control over our lives, then we are ensnared by contradiction.

In the stream of life, contradiction is a sort of countercurrent that carries us backward in hopeless retreat. This is incoherence in its crudest form. In a situation of contradiction, one's thoughts, feelings, and actions oppose each other. And though in spite of everything it is always possible to give direction to one's life, one has to know when to act.

In the routine of daily life we often lose sight of whether or not our actions are timely, and this occurs because so many of the things we do are codified or set by convention. But when it comes to major difficulties and contradictions, we must not make decisions that expose us to catastrophe.

In general terms, what we need to do is to retreat when faced with a great force, and then advance with resolution when this

force has weakened. There is, however, a great difference between the timid, who retreat or become paralyzed when faced with any difficulty, and those who take action to surmount the difficulties, knowing that it is precisely by advancing that they will be able to get through the problems.

At times it may happen that it is not possible to go forward immediately because a problem arises that is beyond our strength, and to tackle it head on without due care could lead to disaster. This problem we are facing that is now so large is also, however, dynamic, and thus the relationship of forces will change, either because our influence grows or because the problem's influence weakens. Once the previous balance of forces has shifted in our favour, that is the moment to advance with resolution, for indecision or delay at that point will only allow further and perhaps unfavourable changes in the balance of forces. Well-timed action is the best tool to produce a change in the direction of one's life.

Growing adaptation as a step towards coherence

Let us further consider the theme of direction in life – of the coherence we want to achieve. To propose a direction toward coherence raises the question: To which situations should we adapt?.

To adapt to things that lead away from coherence would, of course, be highly incoherent, and opportunists suffer from a serious shortsightedness on precisely this point. They believe that the best way to live is simply to accept everything, to adapt to everything. They think that to accept everything, as long as it comes from those with power, is to be well-adapted. But it is clear that their lives of dependence are very far removed from what could be understood as coherence.

It is useful to distinguish three kinds of adaptation: nonadaptation, which stops us from extending our influence; decreasing adaptation, in which we do not go beyond accepting the established conditions in our environment; and growing adaptation, through which we build our influence in the direction of the proposals outlined here.

External conduct and internal experience

When a behaviour is followed daily without contradiction, suffering in yourself and those around you recedes.

But in addition to the behaviour that is carried out in the world of relationships, there is the internal individual experience that each one recognizes as sometimes frustrating and without meaning and sometimes as an ideal that stimulates and gives joy.

Just as you can guide your behaviour based on principles of valid action, it is also possible to achieve a personal experience of inner peace, joy and strength. It's possible to have an experience that gives meaning to life.

And it is reasonable that one would be instructed in these two pillars of a full life: valid action and internal experience. One's outward conduct should match one's internal experience. That does not happen often, generating in people this contradictory "split" between what they do and what they say, what they think and what they feel, and so on. To think in one direction, and feel and act in a different one, is very common and this cannot be resolved unless you are trained and work with internal experience and valid action.

The principles or rules of valid action valid must serve for daily life in the same way that the experiences we realise in *The Community* must serve our internal perfection.

Unity and Contradiction

Almost all of the actions we carry out every day are of a routine nature, largely related to habits that we have acquired over a long time through repetition. While these routine actions leave us feeling indifferent, we also carry out other types of actions that give us a very clear sensation of either fulfillment or unease. Some of these actions make us feel good right away and later on, when we remember them, we wish we could repeat them. We also do not grow tired of these actions, but rather when we carry them out we feel that we are becoming better, that we are growing internally.

On the other hand, if we eat a delicious meal, this fills us with a pleasurable sensation, but we become tired of it if we eat too much, if we go beyond certain limits. Furthermore, if we remember this meal when we are hungry, we of course want to go back and eat it again. But, after we have eaten it, we have the simple sensation of being satisfied, not of personal or internal growth.

There is another kind of action that makes us feel good at the moment we do it, but later on when we remember it, the memory of it makes us feel bad. For example, if in order to relieve momentary tensions we argue or fight with someone, we may at that moment register an internal liberation; we may feel better. But later on when we remember this argument, we experience regret and remorse, and so we realise that this type of action is not a good thing to repeat. We also realise that this way of behaving does not help us to grow internally; it does not make us better.

Any action that gives internal unity always has these three qualities: 1) you have a good register when you do it; 2) you want to repeat the action; and 3) you get a feeling of personal improvement or growth from it. If any of these three

requirements are lacking it means that we are dealing with an action that is habitual and necessary to live, but basically neutral. Or instead, we may be dealing with an action that gives us momentary pleasure. Or finally we may be dealing with a contradictory action.

Unifying or contradictory actions not only give you a certain feeling at the moment you carry them out, but you also remember them and their characteristics strongly, and this predisposes you towards similar behaviour in the future. Therefore, avoiding contradictory actions and reinforcing those actions that give internal unity and coherence is of the greatest importance. Your disposition to achieve a coherent and unified life marks the beginning of a true meaning in life and a new orientation in your everyday behaviour.

Thinking, Feeling and Acting in the Same Direction

Frequently, we may notice a division between what we think, feel and do. On the contrary, when we manage to do something that is in agreement with our ideas and our feelings, we feel a sense of unity that we wish we could experience every day. The situations we must face each day are so different and our daily commitments are so opposed, however, that our internal unity is often seriously compromised. This lack of unity creates suffering.

We could say, "We need to live with unity!". But how do I do that?. The way to begin is by examining our daily activities until we understand the profound divisions that exist between how we usually think, feel and act. When we notice this clearly in our activities, an answer will arise. It will not just be a theoretical answer – some idea we could give now – but rather the result of a proven need.

To sum up, we are saying that everyone who examines the contradictions between what they think, feel and do in daily life will recognize the need for change and will draw an appropriate answer from their own experience.

True Solidarity

Let us consider this idea: "Wherever I see suffering and can do something to alleviate it, I will take the initiative. Where I can do nothing, I will joyfully continue on my way". This idea seems useful, but it also leaves us with a feeling of a lack of solidarity, a lack of compassion. How can we continue joyfully on our way, leaving suffering people behind us, acting as if we were unaware of their troubles?.

Let us take an example. Suppose we see a man fall down in violent convulsions on the sidewalk in front of us. And suppose the people passing by crowd around us, giving contradictory instructions and forming a suffocating circle around the ill person. Everyone is acting out of concern, but they are not being effective. On the other hand, the person who goes and calls a doctor, or who gets the on-lookers to stand back to avoid crowding the sick man, would probably be acting most wisely. To help the most, I could take the initiative in this situation, or perhaps I might just assist someone else do something positive and practical. But, if I act out of simple solidarity and the desire to help and instead create confusion or get in the way of those who really can do something, then I don't help; I instead create problems.

From this example we can understand the first part of the saying, but what does the second part mean: "...where I can do nothing I will continue joyfully on my way?" This certainly does not mean that I become happy from the misfortune of this

person. Rather, it means that I should not block my own progress and direction because of events that are inevitable; that once I have done all I can do to help, I should not add more problems on top of the problems that already exist. It means that I must look at the future positively, because doing the opposite is not good for me or for others.

Some people, misunderstanding what solidarity is, negatively criticize those who do not want to be of help, and like this they harm themselves. These people detract from solidarity because the energy they waste in their critical behaviour could have been positively applied in another direction, to other people, to other situations where practical results could actually have been obtained. And when we speak of practical results, we are not referring only to what is grossly material, because even a smile or an encouraging word is useful if there is any possibility that it can be of help.

F. Themes about Valid Action

This chapter covers the twelve “Principles of Valid Action”. Each subjects is accompanied by a brief story, fable or legend, in order to illustrate the principle to which it refers. The principles are taken from “The Inner Look”, from *Humanising the Earth*. The stories in this book have been extracted (and in some cases, substantially modified) from anonymous popular texts from different cultures.

1. The Principle of Adaptation

“To go against the evolution of things is to against yourself”

This principle emphasizes that when we know clearly beforehand the outcome of a situation, the correct attitude is to accept it as completely as possible, trying to find opportunities even in this unfavourable situation.

What we are saying is that we should not oppose things that are inevitable. However, if human beings had believed, for example, that illnesses were something unavoidable, then medical science would have never advanced. Humanity progresses thanks to the need to solve problems and to the possibility of doing so.

If a person becomes stranded in the desert, is it inevitable that he will die? This person will do everything he can to get out of the predicament. And it will be more likely that he will find an oasis or be rescued if he uses all possible resources to make himself visible at a distance. Thus, to be applied correctly this principle is used only in situations that are truly inevitable.

The following tale illustrates this principle:

In a pond there was lived a turtle called Turtleneck, who had as friends two wild geese. A twelve-year drought fell upon the area, which caused the geese to think: "This pond will dry up. We must look for another watering place. We must say goodbye to our friend Turtleneck".

Hearing this, the turtle said: "I am an inhabitant of this place and I could always find some water, but you would not have enough, so I understand your need to leave. But without you life would be boring. Therefore, let's leave together".

"We are unable to carry you with us", the geese said, "because you do not have any wings".

"But", insisted the turtle, "there is an alternative. Bring me a wooden stick".

The geese did so and the turtle grabbed the stick with its mouth and said: "Now hold it tight with your beaks, each of you on one either side, and fly away, up to the heights, until we find another suitable place for the three of us to live".

But the geese replied: "There are two problems with this plan: first, you don't need to go elsewhere, whereas for us it is a matter of life or death. Second, the stick and your weight will endanger our flight and therefore you as well. Besides, if as usual you start talking, you will lose your life".

"Oh!" said the turtle, "You need water and I need company, so we are in the same situation. Regarding my talking, from now on I will take a vow of silence and I will remain silent while we are up in the air".

So the friends carried out the plan, but while they were laboriously carrying the turtle above a neighbouring town, the people below noticed them and a confused murmur arose. Someone asked: "What is that object? It looks like a chariot that

two birds are carrying through the sky. Perhaps it's a maharaja or another powerful being!" The turtle, remembering, the stones the children used who to throw at him when he lived in the pond, wanted to show the people of the village that now he could fly, and so he shouted out proudly:

It is I, Turtleneck!

As soon as he spoke, the poor thing fell down to the ground. And all the people who wanted his meat chopped him up into pieces and ate him.

2. The Principle of Action and Reaction

"When you force something toward an end, you produce the contrary"

This Principle explains that all things and people have their own characteristic behaviour, and that they will resist or facilitate our projects, depending on how we act. When we are moved by irrational impulses and pressure something against its own behaviour, we will find that although initially it may yield to our demands, sooner or later consequences will return that are different from those we wanted to achieve.

Human beings are forgers of events, they define directions for things, they plan and carry out projects. They aim, that is, toward goals. But the important question is: How should we move toward these goals? Suppose a problem comes up; how can we make the other person understand the way to solve it? Do we use violence or do we use persuasion? If we use violence, sooner or later there will be a reaction. If we use persuasion, sooner or later our strengths will join together.

Many people think "the ends justify the means", and they

tend to force everything around them. And they might often achieve successful results. But if they do this, difficulties will surely follow. They achieve their goal, but they will not be able to maintain it for long.

The principle we are discussing refers to two distinct situations. In one, the goal is achieved, but the consequences are opposite to what was hoped for. In the other case, by forcing situations, there is an unfavourable “rebound”.

We will try to explain both cases with a legend and a teaching. Let's look at the first example.

Old Silenus was a satyr (a half man, half goat) who was a wise advisor to Dionysus.

He had a profound and sensitive spirit, but it was hidden behind a grotesque appearance. Because of his appearance, one day he was captured in his sleep by a group of peasants. Proud of their prey, they took Silenus in chains to the king of that place, whose name was Midas. King Midas recognised the satyr's nature and released him; the King then held a big celebration and homage in Silenus' honour, asking him to forgive the peasants for their confusion. Wise Silenus accepted the apology and wanted to reward the compassionate spirit of the king.

"Ask for anything you wish and I will grant it to you", said old Silenus, "but be reasonable, for what I give cannot be taken back".

Then Midas then asked for that which he had always wanted during his whole life. He prayed for a "golden touch", giving the following explanation:

"My kingdom is poor but the people are generous, kind, and united. If I were rich, happiness would fill our efforts

and release us from so much effort and privation; the whole kingdom would benefit from the gift given to their beloved king”.

Silenus fulfilled Midas’s wish and disappeared.

Immediately after, the king’s clothes turned into gold. Then Midas began to visit his dominions and turned farms, ponds, crops and animals into gold, to the astonishment and gratitude of the people.

But once he came back to the palace, that same night, a pitiful clamour was heard. His subjects called to him with loud complaints. "I can not milk my golden cows!" said one, "and my family will not have any meat or milk".

"Our crops will not bear any fruit!" shouted the others.

And sothus, all kinds of complaints came to the king.

Midas, trying to find the solution to the problem, tried to pour himself some wine and eat some food, but there was nothing to be drunk nor eaten because everything was turned into gold. In this moment, his wife tried to comfort him, caressing him, but she was immediately turned into a most beautiful golden statue.

Midas did penance, invoking Dionysius to break the spell of Silenus, and the good god turned everything back as it was previously. The gold vanished, goats turned into goats, ponds filled with water again, crops swayed in the wind and the queen woke up from her golden dream. Then Midas could eat and drink, and he thanked the god for giving poverty back to him and to his people.

Let’s now analyse the concept of the rebound effect of the one’s action. Buddha said: “If a man harms me, I will pay him back with affection. The more he harms me, the more kindness will I give him; the perfume of goodness comes always to me and the sad air of evil goes to him”.

A foolish man insulted Buddha, who asked him: "If a man refuses a gift offered to him, who will the gift belong to?". The man answered: "In that case it will belong to the man who offered it".

"Good", replied Buddha, "if you have made fun of me, but I decline your present and beg you to keep it for yourself, wouldn't this be the a source of misery for you?".

The trickster did not answer and Buddha continued: "A wicked man who offends a virtuous one is like one who spits at the sky: the spit won't make soil the sky but will soil the man himself. The slanderer is like one who throws dirt at another; when the wind blows against him, the dirt will come back to the one who threw it and the one who wishes something that is not for him obtains what is for him".

3. The Principle of Well-Timed Action

"Do not oppose a great force. Retreat until it weakens, then advance with resolution"

Note that this Principle does not recommend that we retreat when faced with the little inconveniences or problems we run into every day. We should only retreat, the principle explains, when facing a force that is too strong, one that will surely overwhelm us if we confront it. Retreating before little difficulties weakens people, it makes them timid and afraid. Not retreating before great forces, in contrast, inclines people toward all kinds of failures and accidents.

The problem appears when you do not know ahead of time which has more strength, you or the difficulty. This leads people to try little "tests", which don't completely commit them. This leaves room to change their position if it turns out

to be unsustainable. In earlier times people used to speak of “prudence”, and this is very close to the idea we are explaining.

There is also another key point: When should we advance? When has the difficulty lost its strength, or when have we ourselves gained enough strength to advance? Here we can use the same idea of trying little “tests” every so often to check, without committing ourselves completely.

When we do find that the balance of strength is in our favour and the inconvenience has weakened, then this is the time we should advance with everything. To hold back reserves in this situation will endanger our success, because we are not advancing with all the energy we have available.

Here we find the corresponding legend:

There was an old fisherman, father of three sons, who was extremely poor. He used to throw his net into the river four times a day, every day. Once, after trying to fish twice in vain, he felt joyful when he realised that his net was heavier than usual. It was so heavy that he could barely pick it up. But his disappointment was huge when he saw that he had captured an old donkey that some bad neighbour had thrown into the river. He moaned aloud about his bad fortune, and casting the net for the fourth time, he said: “Allah’s bounty is infinite. Who knows, maybe I’ll have more luck from now on!” When he pulled the net out of the river, he noticed that it was really heavy, and when he opened it he found a cup covered by a metal lid. He took it and cleaned it for it was full of mud. He looked at it carefully and he was already thinking about selling it when all of a sudden, a column of smoke rose and got thicker giving shape to the figure of a genie of enormous proportions: his forehead was like a high dome, his hands as big wide as a plow, his mouth as black as a cave, his eyes as bright as a

torch and his legs as long as trees. Watching the monster, the fisherman, trembling in fear, tried to escape but the voice of the genie, as imposing as thunder, kept him frozen in place.

"There is no other God than Allah and Solomon is Allah's prophet!" exclaimed the genie, and immediately added: "And you, Oh Great Solomon, Allah's prophet, can give me any order; you have me at your disposal, and I will obey you immediately".

"Oh! Powerful genie!", replied the fisherman, "What are you talking about? Do you not know that Solomon has been dead for more than one thousand and eight hundred years?. Is it possible that you do not know that Mohammed the prophet of Allah came? Are you trying to mock me or are you crazy?".

"Am I crazy? By Allah, I swear that if you insult me again, I will punish you with death!".

"Would you dare to do it, oh genie, after I have released you from the prison where you were trapped?".

"Listen to my story, fisherman", said the genie, "and you will understand that my threat is not in vain. You must know that I am a rebel genie. My name is Shar the genie: all of my kind swore obedience to Solomon, except me, who fled away in order to avoid submitting to him. But a vizier, who ordered me to be captured, trapped me and had me brought to him in chains. When I was before him, he asked me to accept his religion, but, since I refused, he put me inside this cup where you have found me. He sealed it with his seal and ordered it to be thrown into the sea. Inside my small prison I promised, during the first century, to make immortal the man who would free me, but no one did. During the second century I thought about making the one who would help me owner of the largest treasures, but nobody did. After the third century I promised that the one who released me would be able to have my power,

my strength and my wisdom, but all this was in vain. Then, freeing my rage I swore that I would kill the man who set me free. This man is you and no one can spare you from my vengeance".

"But if you kill me, oh genie", replied the fisherman, "you will commit an injustice that Allah will never forgive, for you will pay with a crime the good that I did to you by setting you free. Think, besides, that I am a married man with children who still can not live on their own...".

Nothing seemed to calm the giant whose huge face was becoming fiercer by the moment. The fisherman understood that his luck depended on his inventiveness, and as he was no fool, he decided on a strategy, to which he stuck like a shipwrecked man holding onto a wooden board plank in the middle of the sea.

"Have you really decided to kill me?", asked the fisherman.

"Of course!" answered the monster.

"Ok then, but before you commit such an injustice, I would like you to clarify a doubt I have".

"Speak quickly, we are wasting time!"

"You have told me that you were inside this cup, but this is not true. How could you fit inside it if one of my hands barely fits inside? Only if I see it, will I believe it".

"Ah! That means you do not trust me, right? Well, after this I will kill you with much more pleasure, you distrustful and skeptical fisherman!".

And so the genie began to dissolve in smoke until there was a sort of spiral that entered the cup and totally disappeared. Inside the cup there was a voice that said:

"Are you convinced now, you wary fisherman?".

The answer of the fisherman was to put the cover onto the cup that he had removed when he first found it. The genie, seeing himself trapped again inside the cup shouted and threatened at first, and then he began to beg, but the fisherman did not pay attention either to his threats nor to his pleading and taking the cup he made as if he were going to throw it to the sea. In this way he made the genie make a promise that would have to be fulfilled when he recovered his freedom.

4. The Principle of Proportion

“Things are well when they move together, not in isolation”

This principle means that if, in striving toward a goal, we disrupt our whole life, then we may in turn be subject to numerous accidents that make it hard to reach our goal -- and even if we do reach it, this result will have bitter consequences.

For example, if in order to gain wealth or prestige we harm our health, sacrifice our loved ones, or give up other values, we may have accidents that will keep us from reaching our goal. Or we may obtain it, but no longer have the good health to enjoy it, or loved ones to share it with, or other values that give us meaning.

“Things are well when they move together” is so because our life is a whole that requires balanced, not partial, equilibrium and development. Since some things are more important than others, everyone should have a true scale of values so that first, second, and third priorities can be taken care of in proportion. If energy is applied according to the importance given each priority, everything will truly work together.

We can illustrate what has just been described with a legend in which disproportionate actions produce disastrous effects.

Four magicians were good friends. Three of them achieved great levels of education but lacked judgment. The other hated instruction, but his judgment was excellent. One of the magicians said: "What good is judgment without knowledge? One may know what good or bad is but never how to do one thing or another".

To give an example, the youngest said: "Tomorrow we must go to Persepolis. It is a long distance away and our camels will not be able to make it; with our knowledge, though, we will be able to do it".

Then they asked the wise one to bring out one of the camels, and one of them stretched its legs to the heights of a house of silence. Another one widened its back so that the four of them could sit on one of the added humps, and the last magician gave the animal such a long neck that it could see any point of interest from far away.

The next morning only the three chose to get on the camel, as the wise magician said: "Better three than four when problems add up".

And so the three magicians rode away on the camel while laughing at the timid one.

The ride began quickly, but soon there was no water that could satisfy the thirst of such an animal. To top it all off, the strong sandstones struck the tall head of the monster in such a way that instead of keeping its head up, it had to curl up like a snake chasing its prey. So, weakened and unbalanced because of its abnormal neck position, the camel ended up falling like a tower whose foundations crumble.

Sad was the return of the three magicians but fortunately the wise one was waiting for them to cheer them up.

Be that as it may, they were thus not able to reach their destination on time, and lost their business.

Another day, all four found a dead animal, and once more trying to prove to the wise magician the power of knowledge, the other three said: "Hey! Let's do something with this poor dead lion. But this time let's agree to do it so that all the parts are well built and make a reasonable whole, because the matter of the camel showed the separate skill of each of us, but not our combined skill".

The first one then said: "I know how to bind the skeleton".

The second one said: "I can provide the skin, flesh and blood".

The third one said: "I can bring it back to life".

Thus the first one got the skeleton together and the second one provided the skin, flesh and blood. But while the third attempted to bring life back to it, the wise magician spoke out, warning: "This is a lion: if you give life back to it, it will kill each of us".

"You fool!", said the other, "I will be the one who reduces your judgment to nothing".

"In that case", replied the first, "wait a moment until I climb up that tree".

When he had done so, the other one brought the lion back to life; the animal got up and killed the three magicians. When the lion left, the wise magician came down from the tree and went to his house.

5. The Principle of Acceptance

“If day and night, summer and winter are well with you, you have surpassed the contradictions”

This principle deals, in a figurative way, with situations where there are opposites. Such apparent opposites can be reconciled if one changes one's point of view about the situation or the problem.

The excessive heat of summer makes us think of the cold of winter as compensation, and then the excessive cold of winter makes us think of the warmth of summer. Every difficult situation makes us remember or imagine an opposite one. But once we are in this opposite situation, discontent again arises. The new compensation then leads us back to the opposite point. Whenever suffering appears, a compensation begins. But this compensation does not itself overcome the suffering.

A person who is oriented by a well-defined meaning in life will have a very different point of view and behaviour when facing difficult situations from someone who does not. If people believe that their life has meaning and that everything that happens to them serves for their learning and self-improvement, then they will not simply try to avoid the problems that arise by compensating in the usual way. Rather, they will take on these problems, trying to discover some usefulness in them. The cold of winter can be made use of, as can the heat of summer, and when each arises this person will say, “How do these different seasons oppose each other, if both are useful to me?”.

We will tell a story that demonstrates this point of view perfectly:

There was a man called Job. He was righteous, and fearful

before Jehovah. His offspring were many, his wealth was great, and all was according to God's will.

One day, the children of God came to present themselves to Jehovah, and among them was Satan, the evil one. Jehovah asked Satan: "Where have you come from?" and Satan answered: "From roaming the earth and going back and forth on it".

And Jehovah said, "Have you ever seen one so fair on Earth as Job?"

To which Satan replied: "The work coming out of his hand you have blessed and his property and his children have grown. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face".

Jehovah then allowed evil to touch all of Job's possessions except his person. So his children were killed by some robbers, fire consumed his sheep, the Chaldeans stole his camels and a strong wind blew away his house.

When Job saw all that, he mourned and falling to the ground said: "Naked I came to life from the womb of my mother and naked will I go back. Jehovah gave and Jehovah took away, blessed is His will!".

Then, Satan asked permission of God to curse Job again, and Jehovah accepted so long as he did not take Job's life.

Terrible scabies were sent to Job from which he suffered, from the top of his head to the tips of his toes. He took a brick and scratched himself with it, while sitting in the midst of ashes. And so for many years sorrow and illness befell him, and his wife shouted at him from a distance: "Are you still so humble? Bless God and die!" To which Job answered: "We receive God's good, why should we not receive His evil? Blessed are His name and His will".

His friends and his acquaintances abandoned him, and many of those whom he had previously comforted said: "Good things and bad things are given to all of us throughout life, but who if not a sinner and a hypocrite could receive so much evil? For there are bad people who enjoy benefits, and good people as well. Both receive the rage of God on their heads, but there is no one who receives so much bad in exchange for praise. Is Jehovah unfair?"

To this Job responded: "It is not me who shall judge Jehovah's intention. He gave to me, he took away from me, and blessed is His will".

Then Jehovah heard him and doubled all the evil that he had cast on Job.

And all his brothers and sisters came, as well as everyone he had known previously, and they ate bread in his house, to comfort him and console him for all the evil that Jehovah had thrown over him, and each of them gave him a coin and an earring made of gold.

And Jehovah blessed the rest of his life even more than at the start, as he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, and one thousand oxen and one thousand female donkeys. He had seven sons and three daughters, and no girls on the face of the earth were prettier than his daughters. After this, Job lived for 140 years, and was able to know his grandchildren and his great-grandchildren up to the fourth generation. And Job said then: "Jehovah took away from me, Jehovah gave to me, blessed is His will".

6. The Principle of Pleasure

“If you pursue pleasure, you enchain yourself to suffering. But as long as you do not harm your health, enjoy without inhibition when the opportunity presents itself”

This principle may seem shocking the first time you read it, because you may think it is saying, “Enjoy yourself, even if you harm others, because the only thing you need to worry about is your own health”. This is not, however, what it is saying.

This principle explains that it is absurd to harm your health through excessive indulgence in pleasures, or through directly harmful pleasures. But it also stresses that if you negate or deny pleasure because of beliefs or prejudices, this also produces suffering. It also implies that participating in pleasure while you have problems of conscience is harmful to you.

In summary, the main idea is not to pursue pleasure, but simply to enjoy it when it presents itself. To search for a pleasurable object when it is not present, or to deny it when it does appear, are both actions that are accompanied by suffering.

This principle (like all the others) should not be applied separately from the other Principles, nor should it be interpreted in ways that oppose the other Principles. For example, there is another Principle which says, “When you treat others as you want them to treat you, you liberate yourself”. Therefore, the meaning of each principle changes when they are all exercised together, and not only as single, isolated principles.

The following legend describes right and wrong attitudes in front of pleasure.

The master gave the assembly of his disciples a magic cake

from which one could eat as much as one wished without reducing its size. The only condition was to eat only once a day. He gave this gift before making a long trip so as to avoid little problems in the community of monks.

One disciple tasted the cake and was delighted because of its exquisite flavour. But immediately after eating, he began imagining the portion he would eat on the following day. And so, day by day, his obsession began to grow. So unbearable was it that he decided to make it disappear by eating such a large portion that his desire would be totally satisfied until the next portion. But he ended up with such terrible indigestion, that he was brought to the verge of death.

In memory of that event, a plaque was erected at the monastery with the following inscription: "The one who searches suffers as does the one who desires to retain".

A second disciple, taking this into account, at first did not want to taste the cake, in spite of a desire to do so. It had been said that pleasure leads to suffering, and therefore in order not to suffer, one should not enjoy. According to experience, one thing led to the other. Nevertheless it happened that this ascetic disciple imagined mountains of cakes without being able to taste any single bite. Sometimes, while sleeping, enormous cakes appeared in his dreams and he woke up startled as if bitten by a big lonely ant. To avoid more suffering, one day he tasted the wonderful cake thus betraying his convictions and increasing his obsession.

At the monastery another plaque was erected which read: "The sin is not in the cake nor the belly, but what one dreams and thinks of it".

Finally a third disciple turned his attention to the tasks

that the master had entrusted to the community before his departure. He saw that the monastery, the farm, and the animals remained uncared for, and that the diverse various opinions about the cake had divided the community. Thereafter, he began to take charge of everything before the master came back.

While he was tidying up one area of the monastery, he came upon the cause of the scandal. He stopped for a while, cut one good-sized piece and tasted it slowly. Then he forgot about it, so busy was he with the work in of the monastery.

When the master came back he found the two plaques at the entrance of monastery and asked someone to explain it all. This led the master to get rid of the cake. Then he said, "A great injustice has just been committed. Put up a third plaque that says: "The excesses of a big fool and the asceticism of a weak erudite lead to the same result. A crumb to the saintcauses much trouble to the greedy".

7. The Principle of Immediate

"If you pursue an end, you enchain yourself. If everything you do is realised as though it were an end in itself, you liberate yourself"

This principle teaches us to obtain benefit from all the intermediate steps and situations that lead to the achievement of an objective. It doesn't tell us that we should not have goals, since planning any activity is carried out on the basis of goals. Instead it explains that given any goal, all the steps leading to it must be approached in the most positive way possible. Otherwise, the activities prior to achieving the goal produce

suffering, and so, even if the goal is achieved, it loses meaning because of the vital cost represented by the suffering invested in those steps.

The following legend describes the problems that arise when one does not consider the immediate future, but only those distant goals that could be achieved given the circumstances in which you live.

A milkmaid carried on her head a big jar of milk. She wanted to sell it in the village market.

"Here I am carrying a jar of milk", she said to herself, "If scarcity comes, I will get 100 rupees for it. With this money I will buy two goats. Every six months they will give birth to two more goats. After the goats I will buy cows. When the cows have their offspring, I will sell the calves, and then I will buy some buffaloes, and then some mares. The mares will give me a lot of horses and their sale will mean a bunch of gold. This gold will buy a big house with a big inside patio. Then a man will come to my house with the dowry that corresponds to my position and we will marry. We will have a son whom we will call Moon. When he is the right age he will come running towards me and get too close to the horses. Then I will get angry, and call his father so that he takes the horses away, but as he will be too busy with his things he will not do it. Then I will approach the horses and kick them out".

At this moment the milkmaid tripped against a stone that she did not see, so preoccupied was she was with her daydreaming. The jar fell down from her head and crashed against the floor, spilling its contents.

8. The Principle of Wise Action

“You will make your conflicts disappear when you understand them in their ultimate root, not when you want to resolve them”

This principle invites us to avoid improvisations motivated by irrational impulses. It doesn't say that we shouldn't do something about a problem, but that, at the same time that we take action, we should comprehend what we are doing. Almost everyone becomes anxious when faced with a conflict, and tries to solve it without comprehending the root of the conflict. In this way, the problem can become even more complicated and give rise to new problems in a never-ending chain.

Let's examine an example in the form of a legend.

A young shepherd suffered from the cold of the night because of his blanket. This was not because it was of bad fabric or of poor quality. The shepherd explained it this way: “Since I was a child this blanket has protected me from winds, freezing temperatures and snow, but now the cold goes through it. No doubt it has been torn in many places. If it was of use when I was a child, and it can be of use nowadays, it is only a question of mending it”.

So, he mended it and used it again.

When the night arrived he noticed that his feet were not covered by the blanket and were close to freezing. Then he took the blanket and put it over them, uncovering as he did so a good part of his chest, as the blanket was too short. Thus he spent the night, covering first above and then below. The following night he reflected this way: “If this blanket was there with me when I was a boy and it gave good protection then, it should also be useful now, as it is just as new after my mending it. I shall shrink a bit when I sleep because it seems that I have grown too much”.

And the next morning the young man found himself sleepless and sore all over, so uncomfortable had been his shrinkage.

Then he decided: "Neither the blanket has grown nor can I shrink, thus we cannot continue".

9. The Principle of Liberty

"When you harm others you remain enchained, but if you do not harm anyone you can freely do whatever you want"

This principle begins by explaining that if you create problems for others, others will create problems for you as a consequence. But it also says that there is no reason not to do whatever you want if no one is harmed by your actions.

Here we find some teachings about justice and free will.

Jesus said: "Judge not, lest you be judged; by the same measure you use so will you be measured". And with this he demonstrated that the wrong done to others is also a wrong to the one who does it.

And it happened that when Jesus was at the table, many tax collectors and sinners sat next to him, as there were many who followed him.

And his enemies, seeing him eat with tax collectors and sinners, said to his disciples: "How come your master eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?" And hearing this, Jesus answered: "The healthy ones do not need a physician but rather those who are ill".

And when he passed through the crops on a Saturday his disciples began to gather ears of corn. Then his enemies said: "Why do they do on the Sabbath that which is not legal?"

And he answered: "The Sabbath has been created for men, not men for the Sabbath".

And he explained many things by saying: "Go, but before you go, you shall learn what I mean when I say: I ask for compassion and not sacrifice".

10. The Principle of Solidarity

"When you treat others as you want them to treat you, you liberate yourself"

This principle has important consequences because it leads to an opening, to positive communication with other human beings. We know that isolation and self-enclosure generate problems that can be serious. What is called "selfishness" can be reduced precisely to a problem of self-enclosure and lack of communication. This principle gives importance to the act of going positively toward others, and it complements the previous principle that recommends: "Do not harm others", although there is a great difference between the two.

Let's look at the following case.

A disciple asked Confucius: "What is a good man?". The master replied: "You may call a good man the one who you see doing good actions. If a ruler does everything he can for his people, only for this can you call him good. But more than good is saintly: the one who first gets stronger by knowledge and then gives it to others. The one who receives benefits and then gives them to others. The one who does to others what he wants others to do to him. Therefore, without being a ruler, any subject may be saintly in his measure, and this depends neither on his rank nor on his possessions".

11. The Principle of Avoiding Opposition

“It does not matter in which faction events have placed you. What matters is that you comprehend that you have not chosen any faction”

This does not mean that you have to abandon all factions. Rather, it suggests that you consider your position as being the result of factors that have little to do with your own choice: your education and upbringing, your surroundings, etc. This attitude makes fanaticism recede, and at the same time permits you to understand the factional affiliations and the positions of other people. Clearly, this way of considering the problem of factions contributes to a freedom of the mind, and opens a fraternal bridge toward others, even when they do not agree with your ideas, or even appear to oppose your ideas.

This principle, at the same time that it recognizes the lack of freedom in the situations one has not created, affirms the freedom to deny that there is true opposition if others are also part of involuntary situations.

Let's have a look at an ancient teaching on this matter.

Jesus' enemies tried to cause him difficulties by presenting him two alternatives in such a way that if he chose one he would appear to condemn the other. They came close to him and said: "Master, we know you love the truth and that you show with truth God's path, and that you do not bow to anyone, as you do not favour any person. Tell us then what you think: Is it legal to pay tribute to Caesar or shall the tribute be given to religious organisations?". But Jesus, understanding their bad intention, said: "Why do you tempt me, hypocrites? Show me the coin of the tribute". And they showed him a denarius. Then he asked: "Whose figure is this?".

They answered: “Caesar’s”.

Then he answered: “Give unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s”.

Hearing this, his enemies were confused and left.

12. The Principle of Accumulating Actions

“Contradictory or unifying actions accumulate within you. If you repeat your acts of internal unity, nothing can detain you”

This principle is saying that every action one carries out remains recorded in one’s memory, and from there it influences the other two pathways (senses and imagination). Therefore, repeating acts that give internal unity or generate contradiction will in turn shape behaviour that leads to future unifying or contradictory actions.

To repeat acts of internal unity means to practice the Principles in daily life. This twelfth Principle also helps us understand that this does not mean repeating just one action (or Principle) in isolation, but rather repeating a whole set of actions that give internal unity.

Without question, by practicing all of the Principles together we find an integrated discipline which is capable of transforming our condition of suffering into a new way of life, one of growing internal unity, and therefore of growing happiness.

Sometimes the life of a person or a whole human group is built upon an accumulation of contradictory actions. And this person or group may even obtain very successful results for a time. But sooner or later, catastrophe will result, because the

basis of their entire life is false. Many people see only the successful anecdotes, without realizing the process this life will have over time and, above all, its final absurdity.

Let's look at a legend that illustrates an accumulation of contradictory acts.

A proud prince decided to build a huge tower that could reach the sky. He brought together a third of his men and entrusted them with this work. Excepting the wise, the population was as corrupt as their prince. The kingdom was predatory with its neighbours and overly proud of its wealth.

The years went by and the construction was getting as high as the clouds. But the higher it rose, the bigger the problems. The kingdom's forces needed to obtain more and more new resources, animals and slaves. So while the initial third of the population kept working on the tower, another third of the population had to go to war and the final third had to take care of transportation, equipment, administration and craftsmanship.

The years went by and the tower grew bigger and bigger. As their effort continued, stones were added to stones and the tower kept getting higher, carrying up to the heights all the wealth, all the power, and all the suffering of the people. It was like when the sea evaporates: its waters rise up into the air, but the suffering on the land increases because the water does not come back to it because there is no rain.

Then the wise men explained to the prince the consequences that would come from this monstrous project but they were silenced....

As the tower got higher, the arrogance of the sovereign and his subjects grew, until they said: "This tower, which will be a sign of the respect and submission for of all the nations,

requires that its constructors be commensurate with their merit. Therefore the orders from the engineers, architects, master carvers and the ones that direct the lifting shall be given according to their position in the hierarchy and from the height of the tower that corresponds to their position”.

Then it happened that everyone wanted to lead from the last part of the ramp but they were so far away from the ground that when they shouted to those who were below them their words were misunderstood. To make matters worse, the orders of some were in contradiction to the orders of others. Thus they carried up mortar where the levers should be put and others repaired tools without there being anyone to bring them up.

Finally the construction started to get irregular, the cords were cut by the projections, and pulleys and baskets fell down. In some places there was more mixture and in others less, and in the end the chaos that resulted from the multiplication of mistakes caused the tower to lean dangerously. Such was the madness of the builders that they continued adding to the height of the tower, and its foundations failed and it crumbled, carrying in its fall all the directors from the heights.

The wise men got together and said: “Let’s take advantage of the material to do something useful. Let’s use everything so that some benefit comes to our people”.

And so it happened that the waters were collected and taken to far away fields for farming, the houses of the town were strengthened, and the walls of the village extended for defense but not for attack. It all added to the good of the town, and from that time on the town kingdom continued to live in peace with itself and in friendship with its neighbours.

IV. Guided Experiences

Guided Experiences, extracted from the Book of “Guided Experiences”, Silo, Complete Works Vol. I

Introduction¹⁴

Guided experiences are basically works with images.

There are those who maintain that, as in dreams and fantasies, nothing special happens with images since they have no relation to daily life.

Some religions accuse others of idolatry, declaring that to visually imagine God or present different artistic representations is impiety. It's clear that the accusers also have their prayers, imagine sounds and position the body in certain directions, without knowing that in these cases they are also working with images, just not visual images.

Many think that certain images should be prohibited on TV because there they find the cause of present-day violence. Others are of the opinion that thanks to images, leaders

conserve and amplify their power and businesses improve their sales.

Thus, the deceit in these fields is extraordinary and everyone can find a position that best accommodates their interests, or their particular beliefs.

There are various images that correspond to the external senses (visual, auditory, olfactory, taste and touch) and also images that correspond to the inner senses (cenesthetic, proper to the intrabody; kinesthetic, proper to movement and the position of the body; thermal, that correspond to external temperature and many more that correspond to receptors of pressure, acidity, alkalinity, etc.).

For our part, we consider images to be an interesting support for varying the point of view; accelerating mental dynamics and ingenuity, recapturing emotions, remembering life events, and designing projects. Our guided experiences tend to make existence positive, to strengthen contact with oneself, to support the search for meaning in life.

Guided Experiences consist of a series of phrases which describe a mental scene in which the listener places herself, producing emotional climates that allow her particular contents to emerge. The phrases are separated by ellipsis that indicate to the reader that appropriate time should be given for each person to mentally locate the individuals or objects that are most appropriate for him or her. Asterisks (*) indicate more prolonged silences.

This originality permits the listeners – instead of passively following all the development – to participate actively in the experience, filling scenes with their own mental contents. In this way, although the basis is the same for all, the same

experience ends up being different for each person, something that can be verified afterwards during the interchange and discussion about the work carried out.

In general we find the following structure in the experiences:

- Establishment of the Scene
- Tension (knot)
- Resolution
- Exit in a positive climate

The intention is that in the process, this system of imagery becomes integrated into the psychism of the subject until it influences their daily life in a positive way.

In synthesis we can say that:

In the Guided Experiences it is important to establish relationships between what happens in one's own psychism and what happens in daily life. It is also interesting to relate the difficulties that one has with the guided experiences with those that happen in daily life.

What are important are the fundamental modifications that are produced in one's behaviour.

One starts to really develop when, in one's own conduct, responses that overcome and grow emerge. Positive changes are produced in oneself and help is given to others in the same direction.

Recomendations

- During the work with Guided Experiences, it is convenient to have a quiet environment and soft lighting. It is recommended that the exercise be carried out with the eyes closed.
- The Guided Experiences provide a scene or scenes that each one can fill with his own images, so that he is the "protagonist" of the narration. This is what is meant when we speak of "models of dynamic meditation" where the object is one's own life upon which one can meditate with the intention to touch upon conflicts, in order to overcome them.
- The character is the observer, the agent and the recipient of the actions and emotions.
- We call the difficulties in following the representations or images resistances; it is of much interest to take note of them.
- Detecting resistances is very important, and it invites observation in daily life as the resistances are usually reflected in one's own behaviour. In this way, one can make modifications in behaviour when the resistances have been overcome.
- Interchange among participants, after the experience has been carried out, helps to amplify and change one's point of view about one's own experience. This interchange is basically oriented towards detecting and overcoming resistances, referring to the experience carried out in the meeting.

EXPLANATIONS

Explanation about the experiences of reconciliation with the past

THE CHILD: The focus of this experience is to achieve reconciliation with an injustice of the past with the intention of freeing oneself from negative feelings, such as self pity, that limit one's relationships with others.

THE CREATURE: The purpose of this experience is to reconstruct a situation of the past linked to a "phobia" or irrational fear in order to relieve it of its oppressive charge.

AN ENEMY: The purpose of this experience is to achieve reconciliation with a person who generates or has generated turmoil in you. It is important to reconcile ourselves internally with those we believe have harmed us and with whom we harbour resentment. Reconciling is beneficial not only to one's behaviour in the world but also helps one in integrating and overcoming oppressive mental contents.

MY GREATEST MISTAKE: The purpose of this experience is to refocus on an apparently "big mistake" one has made and take a new point of view about it, allowing one to reconcile with oneself.

NOSTALGIA: This experience aims at achieving an understanding of the romantic relationships in one's life. This helps one overcome frustrations and resentments, predisposing one to a more constructive attitude about the present and future.

MY IDEAL: This experience proposes a review of one's romantic relationships that allows one to understand how one's searches, encounters and fantasies are linked to one's image

of the ideal mate, which is not evident in daily life but nevertheless acts upon us and orients us in a very definite direction.

RESENTMENT: Every enemy and resentment within us limits the present and obstructs the future. Reconciliation with the past frees emotional charges and supports personal development.

THE CHIMNEY SWEEP: The purpose of this practice is to achieve immediate relief from internal tensions caused by conflicts that have not been resolved or are by conflicts that one may actually deny exist.

Explanations about experiences of locating oneself in the present moment

THE PROTECTOR OF LIFE: Becoming reconciled with one's body is an experience that is highly recommended for everyone. To accept one's body, exactly as it is, is the first step towards a clear vision of reality.

THE MINER: This experience helps one to comprehend how our thoughts can produce visceral or intra-body tensions. It also brings to light the inverse phenomenon, in which these profound bodily tensions or irritations generate negative images and states of being. The experience can produce profound distortions, and warns us that negative images can frequently produce consequent somatizations.

THE INTERNAL GUIDE: There exists a useful natural mechanism of the imagination: the Internal Guide. Anyone can take advantage of their Internal Guides and use the ones for which they have a special preference.

It is a very interesting work to recognize the guide or guides who serve as references for us. However, in this work you must try to find an image of a guide who has these three qualities: wisdom, kindness and strength. If any of those are lacking, our relation with that image will not be constructive.

Once we have found a guide, then in moments of loneliness or confusion it is a great help to connect with this Internal Guide, and he or she will help us greatly by giving us responses or companionship that ameliorate these states.

In addition to configuring a guide, there are other brief experiences based on the mechanism of the Internal Guide that deal with Disorientation, Annoyance, and Indecision.

Explanations about experiences for proposals for the future

THE RESCUE: This introduces the theme of “good actions” in order to bring about ideas of solidarity and helping others. The experience promotes opening towards and communication with others, while at the same time strengthening attitudes of solidarity.

FALSE HOPES: This experience proposes solving one’s problems with the future by clarifying present projects. This allows one to move without confusion in daily life and to avoid lost time due to false hopes.

Explanations about experiences with the meaning of life

REPETITIONS: This experience proposes an examination of the course of one’s life from the past to the present moment.

This reflection facilitates a change in the direction of one's life; even if the objective is not altogether resolved it is capable of producing profound and positive changes in the simple mechanics that have operated in one's life up until now.

THE JOURNEY: This experience aims toward producing sensations that accompany great discoveries. It permits one to recognize or produce important internal registers.

THE FESTIVAL: This experience suggests unusual images that can lead us towards new ways of seeing things, so that one can discover the world in a new way and with a new meaning in daily life. This experience does not seek to incorporate a uselessly contemplative vision of reality, but rather to help to comprehend that there is a dimension of the mind that is charged with meaning beyond the flatness of the habitual way of seeing things.

DEATH: With this experience one can aim toward transcendence, making use of images and registers that anyone, even those who are skeptical, can experience.

Explanations about the experiences with mobilizing images

THE SNOWMOBILE: This experience deals with one's ease with mobilising images, which will also be reflected in one's behaviour in the world.

DESCENT: Difficulties one may have in descending could reflect respiratory problems (physical), or are linked to accidents one may have suffered being locked in, choked, or asphyxiated. These can bring to light out of control impulses such as obsessive feelings or compulsive attitudes.

ASCENT: Difficulties in the exercise of ascending are related to a fear of falling. This may be due to physical problems or it could reflect an “unstable” situation one is living in in the present. Problems one may have with images of ascending might also reflect the anguish of not reaching a goal or anxiety over an uncertain future. By mobilizing these images, we orient our consequent behaviour in the same direction.

THE COSTUMES: This experience will help improve one’s relationship with other people by providing a greater sense of control over one’s self image. One can work towards overcoming blockages or immobility of one’s self image that can be frequently expressed in daily life as timidity, excessive susceptibility, or hiding.

THE CLOUDS: This provides the elements to exercise images that correspond to freedom of physical movement and recognition of gratifying sensations. It offers the possibility of releasing mental tensions in order to observe daily problems from a more ample and calmer perspective, a state which allows one to find a better solution.

TO AND FRO: This experiences aims toward achieving important positive changes in ones behaviour and everyday activities. Rapid movements in the expereince reveal a similar impulsiveness and lack of control in everyday life. "Breaks" in the sequences coincide with interruptions or uncompleted activities in daily life. Any disorder in sequence during the expereince reflects disorder in one's actions in the world.

GUIDED EXPERIENCES

I. THE CHILD¹⁵

It is early in the morning as I walk through the countryside, and I feel happy and at peace.

Up ahead, I see a stone building that seems to be very old. Its ancient roof is also made of stone, and along the front stand large marble columns.

As I near the building, I can see it has a massive metal door. Suddenly I'm surprised when two ferocious beasts charge toward me from one side of the building. Fortunately they're held back by strong chains that stop them just out of reach.

I can't approach the door without being attacked by the animals, so I throw them a sack of food. The beasts eagerly devour the food, and soon fall fast asleep.

Approaching the door, I inspect it carefully, but can't find a door handle or any other way to open it. Nevertheless I push gently, and the door swings open with an ancient creaking sound.

A long, softly lit room opens before me. I cannot see to the end, but on the left and right are life-size paintings that reach nearly to the floor. Each portrays a different scene. The first, on my left, depicts a magician seated behind a table spread with cards, dice, and other games of chance. My gaze is drawn to this character's curious hat.

I try to run my finger over the hat in the painting, but feel no resistance to my touch—instead my arm enters right into the picture. So I go ahead and put one leg and then my whole body into the painting.

Raising a hand, the magician exclaims, “Not so fast, you can’t come in unless you pay admission!”.

Searching through my pockets, I pull out a small crystalline sphere, which I give to this trickster. The colorful character nods, and I enter.

It is night, and I find myself in an amusement park. Everywhere I see mechanical rides, filled with light and movement, but I do not see any people.

Then I discover a child about ten years old who is facing away from me. As I move closer, the youngster turns to look at me, and I realise it is myself when I was that age. (*)

“What are you doing here?” I ask. The child tells me something about an injustice that has happened, and then begins to cry. To console the child, I promise that we’ll go on some rides, but the youngster insists on talking about the injustice. In order to understand the child better, I try to recall what happened to me at that age that was so unfair. (*)

Now I remember that injustice. And somehow I realise it’s like a situation I’m experiencing in my life right now. I reflect on this, but the child continues to cry. (*)

So I say, “All right then, I’m going to straighten out this injustice that seems to keep happening to me. To begin with, I’ll be friendly toward the people who are creating this situation for me”. (*)

I notice that the youngster is laughing now. With an affectionate pat I say that we’ll be seeing each other again. Saying good-bye, the child goes away very happy.

I leave the amusement park, passing beside the magician, who gives me a quick sidelong glance. As I go by, I brush against his hat, prompting a playful wink from this extraordinary character.

I emerge from the painting, and once again find myself in the long room. Walking slowly, I cross the room and go through the door.

Outside, the animals remain fast asleep, and I pass between them without fear.

The magnificent day greets me. I make my way back across the open fields, whistling and singing, with the sensation that at last I understand a situation that has been a burden to me for a very long time. (*)

II. AN ENEMY⁶

I'm downtown at the height of rush hour, walking hurriedly amid the bustling people and traffic. All at once everything stops as if paralyzed, and I realise that I alone can still move. I begin looking at people, staring at a woman and then at a man. Walking around them several times, I examine them very closely.

Climbing up onto the roof of a car, I look all around and notice that everything has fallen silent.

Reflecting for a moment, I realise that I can do anything I please with the people, the cars, and everything else. Immediately I set about doing all the things that strike my fancy, and carry on at such a frantic rate that soon I'm left exhausted.

While resting I think of new things to do, and again throw myself into carrying out my every whim, without any inhibition.

But who do I see there? It's none other than the very person with whom I have a number of scores to settle. In fact, I feel

this person has done me greater harm than anyone else in my entire life.

Since things won't remain motionless for long, I hurry over to my enemy, who can barely move. Realizing the situation, my adversary looks at me in horror, but is still paralyzed and defenseless. I begin to tell this despicable character everything I've been wanting to say, promising my immediate revenge.

Knowing that my adversary feels every situation in which they had treated me so terribly. (*)

As I reproach my enemy, several people walk past. Hearing my accusations, they stop and begin to harshly criticize the character, who responds between sobs, expressing deep remorse for these past misdeeds. Kneeling on the ground, my adversary begs forgiveness, but more people arrive and continue the interrogation. (*)

After a while the crowd declares that so vile a person cannot be allowed to live, and they condemn my enemy to death.

Just as they're about to lynch the terrified person, who keeps pleading for mercy, I tell them that I forgive my enemy. The crowd unanimously accepts my decision, and the people go on their way. Once again I'm left alone with my adversary, and I take advantage of this to finish getting even. Sensing my enemy's growing desperation, I say and do everything else that I feel is called for. (*)

The sky darkens threateningly, and a driving rain begins to fall. I take refuge behind a storefront window and watch as the city returns to life. Pedestrians run, and cars crawl cautiously through sheets of wind-whipped rain. Continuous flashes of lightning and sharp thunderclaps frame the scene, as I gaze out through the rain-streaked glass.

I feel completely relaxed, as though empty, while I observe almost without thinking.

Suddenly I see my adversary approaching, seeking shelter from the rain. On seeing me, the person exclaims, "How lucky that we're together in this storm!"

As my rain-soaked enemy looks at me sheepishly, I offer a comforting pat on the shoulder, while all the poor soul can do is shrug. (*)

In my mind I begin to consider all the problems that beset this character. I see the difficulties, the failures in life, the person's enormous frustrations and weakness. (*)

I feel the loneliness of this wet and trembling human being who is taking refuge at my side, and see how dirty and pathetically neglected the person is. (*)

Suddenly I'm moved by a strong feeling of solidarity with my companion and declare, "I'm going to help you". The person does not say a word, and growing misty-eyed, can only gaze down at both hands. (*)

The rain has stopped. Going out onto the street, I take a deep breath of the fresh air and leave at once.

III. MY GREATEST MISTAKE¹⁷

I'm standing before some sort of court. Every seat in the silent courtroom is filled, and I'm surrounded by a sea of stern faces. The court clerk adjusts his glasses and picks up a long document. Breaking the tremendous tension that fills the room, he solemnly pronounces, "It is the sentence of this court that the accused shall be put to death".

Immediately there is an uproar—some people applaud while others boo, and I see a woman faint. Finally an official manages to restore order in the courtroom.

Staring at me darkly, the clerk demands, “Does the accused have anything to say?”. When I answer that I do, everyone sits down. I ask for a glass of water, and after a brief commotion they bring me one. Raising the glass, I take a sip, and finishing with a loud and prolonged gargle, I exclaim, “That’s it!”. Someone from the jury harshly demands, “What do you mean, ‘That’s it’?”. “That’s it”, I repeat. But to satisfy the juror, I say that the water here does taste excellent, much better than I expected, and continue with two or three other pleasantries of this sort.

The court clerk finishes reading the document with these words: “Accordingly, the sentence shall be carried out today: You will be abandoned in the desert without food or water—above all, without water. I have spoken!”. “What do you mean you have spoken?” I demand. Arching his eyebrows, the clerk only reaffirms, “What I have spoken, I have spoken!”.

Soon I find myself riding in a fire truck through the middle of the desert, escorted by two firemen. We stop, and one of them says, “Get out!” As soon as I step down from the truck, the vehicle turns around and heads back the way it came. I watch it grow smaller and smaller as it moves off across the dunes.

The sun is setting, but its heat is still intense. I begin to feel very thirsty. Taking off my jacket and putting it over my head, I look around and discover nearby a hollow beside a sand dune. I walk over and sit down in the meager patch of shade cast by the dune.

The wind begins to blow in strong gusts, raising a sandstorm that blots out the sun. Fearing I’ll be buried if the wind grows

any stronger, I leave the hollow. Staccato bursts of blowing sand sting my skin, and soon the force of the wind pushes me to the ground.

Now the storm has passed and the sun has set. In the twilight I see before me a whitish dome several stories high. Although I think it must be a mirage, I get to my feet and make my way toward it. As I draw closer, I see that the structure is made of a smooth material, a shiny plastic perhaps inflated with air.

A man dressed in Bedouin garb greets me, and we enter the dome through a carpeted passageway. A door slides open, and I feel a refreshing rush of cool air. Once inside, I notice that everything is upside down—the ceiling is like a smooth floor from which things are suspended. I see round tables above us with their legs pointing up toward the ceiling. I see water falling downward in streams that curve and return upward and high overhead there are human forms seated upside down.

Noticing my astonishment, the Bedouin hands me a pair of glasses saying, “Try these on!”. When I put on the glasses, everything is restored to its normal appearance—in front of me I see a large fountain shooting streams of water high into the air. The tables and all the other things are right side up, and everything is exquisitely coordinated in color and form.

I see the court clerk coming toward me, crawling on all fours. He says he feels terribly dizzy, so I explain to him that he’s seeing reality upside down and needs to remove his glasses. Taking them off, he stands up and says with a sigh, “Indeed, now everything is fine—except that I’m so nearsighted”. He goes on to say he has been searching for me in order to explain that there has been a most deplorable mistake, and I’m not the person who should have been put on trial at all. Immediately he leaves through a side door.

Walking a few steps, I find myself with a group of people seated on a circle of cushions. They are elders of both sexes, with varied racial features and attire. All of them have beautiful faces. Each time one of them begins to speak, I hear the sound of faraway gears, of gigantic machinery, of immense clocks. I hear intermittent thunder, the cracking of rocks, icebergs splitting off, the rhythmic roaring of volcanoes, the light impact of a gentle rain, the muffled beating of hearts—motor, muscle, life—and everything in perfect harmony, a majestic symphony of sounds.

The Bedouin hands me a pair of headphones, saying, “Try these on, they translate”. Putting them on, I clearly hear a human voice. I realise it is the same symphony of one of the elders, now translated for my clumsy ear. This time as he opens his mouth I hear, “We are the hours, we are the minutes, we are the seconds. We are the various forms of time. Because a mistake was made with you, we will give you the opportunity to begin your life anew. But from what point do you wish to start again? Perhaps from your birth, or perhaps from just before your first failure. Reflect on this”. (*)

I try to determine exactly when it was that I lost control of my life, and I tell the elder what happened. (*)

“Very well”, he says, “and what are you going to do, if you return to that moment, in order to follow a different course this time? Bear in mind that you still won’t have any way of knowing what lies in your future”.

“There is another alternative”, he adds. “You can return to the moment of the greatest mistake in your life, and without changing the events themselves, you can nevertheless change their meanings. In this way you can make a new life for yourself”.

As the elder falls silent, I see everything around me reversing in light and color, as if changing into the negative of a film. Then everything returns to normal, except that now I find myself back in time at the moment of the greatest mistake of my life. (*)

Here I am, driven to commit this error. But what is compelling me to do it?. (*)

Aren't there other factors influencing this, which I do not wish to see? What things are steering me toward this fundamental mistake? What should I try to do instead? If I don't commit this error, will this change the pattern of my life? And will the change be for better or for worse?. (*)

I try to understand that the circumstances surrounding this moment cannot be changed, and I accept everything that happened as if it were a natural disaster, like an earthquake or a flood that destroys peoples' homes and livelihoods. (*)

I strive to accept that in such accidents, no one is to blame. My weaknesses, my excesses, the intentions of others—in this case none of these can be changed. (*)

I know that if I don't make peace now by reconciling with this mistake, my future life will only be filled with more of the same frustration. And so, with all my being, I forgive the others involved, and I forgive myself. I accept everything that happened as something beyond my control, and beyond the control of others. (*)

The scene begins to transform, light and dark again reversing as in the negative of a photograph. At the same time I hear a voice say, "If you can make peace with yourself, reconciling with your greatest mistake, your frustration will die and you will be able to change your destiny".

Now I'm standing in the middle of the desert again, and see

a car approaching. "Taxi!" I shout, and soon find myself seated comfortably in the back seat. Looking at the driver, who is dressed as a fireman, I say, "Please drive me home, and take your time, so I can think about everything that has happened". Putting on my jacket again, I say to myself, "Who hasn't experienced some kind of accident? Now I realise I am better than I thought I was, and best of all, I have a future in which to prove it".

IV. NOSTALGIA

The colored lights pulse to the rhythm of the music as I stand face-to-face with the one who was my greatest love. We dance slowly, and each flash of the lights reveals some detail of my love's face or body. (*)

What went wrong between us? Perhaps it was money. (*)

Perhaps it was those other relationships. (*)

Perhaps it was having different goals. (*)

Perhaps it was destiny, or something impossible to grasp then. (*)

Again I dance slowly, but now with another great love. Each flash of the lights reveals some detail of my love's face or body. (*)

What went wrong between us? Perhaps it was money. (*)

Perhaps it was those other relationships. (*)

Perhaps it was having different goals. (*)

Perhaps it was destiny, or something impossible to grasp then. (*)

I forgive you and I forgive myself, for if we dance and the world dances around us, what can we do with those rock-solid promises that turned out to be butterflies of changing colors?.

I rescue what is good and beautiful from my yesterdays with you. (*)

And from my yesterdays with you, also. (*)

And from my yesterdays with all of you who have dazzled my eyes. (*)

Ah—the pain, the suspicion, the parting, and then the wounded pride and endless sadness—these are the excuses. But how small they seem beside those beguiling eyes.

Because the great wrongs I remember are errors made in dancing, and not the dance itself.

I'm thankful to you for your tender smile.

And I'm thankful to you for your softly whispered words.

And to all of you, I'm thankful for the hope of an everlasting love.

At peace with yesterday, my heart is open to the memories of those beautiful moments. (*)

V. MY IDEAL¹⁸

I'm walking through a fairground filled with exhibition halls and displays, and I see many children playing on high-tech mechanical rides.

I come upon a giant figure made of some solid material. It stands upright, and its large head is painted in bright colors.

There is a ladder extending up to its mouth, which the little ones climb to reach the enormous opening. Whenever one enters, the mouth gently closes, and soon the child pops out the back of the giant, coming down a slide and landing in the sand below. One by one the children go in and come out as a song flows from the giant:

“See Gargantua gobble up the children, With great care, not harming a hair, Tra la la, tra la la, With great care, not harming a hair!”.

I decide to climb up the short ladder. As I enter the huge mouth, I meet an attendant who tells me, “Children go down the slide, but grownups use the elevator”.

The attendant continues the explanation as our elevator descends through a transparent tube. Soon I say that I think we’re probably at ground level by now.

“That’s right”, replies the attendant, “although we’re still only passing through the esophagus. The rest of the giant’s body is below ground, unlike the children’s giant, which is completely on the surface. You see”, my guide informs me, “there are actually two Gargantuas in one—one for children, and another one for grownups”.

After a while the attendant announces, “Now we’re well below ground. We’ve already passed the diaphragm, and soon we’ll stop at a very pleasant place—look, the elevator door is opening and I can show you the stomach. Would you like to get out here? As you can see, this modern restaurant serves delicious foods from all over the world”. But I tell the attendant that I’m curious about the rest of the body, so we continue going down.

“Now we’ve reached the lowest part of the abdomen”, announces my guide as the elevator door opens.

“The decor here is quite unique, and the walls of changing colors form delicately lined caverns. In the middle of the lounge is the central fire, the generator that provides energy to the whole giant. There are seats for visitors to rest, and the columns scattered here and there are great for playing hide-and-seek—it’s easy to hide and then suddenly reappear. And the more visitors who play, the more fun it is. Now I’ll leave you here if you wish. To return to the surface, all you need do is approach the elevator and the door will open and take you back up. Everything is automatic—amazing, isn’t it?”

The elevator door closes and I’m left alone in the lounge.

At first it seems as though I’m under the ocean. Then a large fish swims right through me, and I realise that the coral, the seaweed, and all the different species of living things are incredibly realistic three-dimensional projections. I sit down to watch this relaxing spectacle at my leisure.

Suddenly I see emerging from the central fire a human figure, its face covered. Approaching me slowly, the figure stops nearby and says, “Hello there, I’m a hologram. Everyone tries to find in me that special someone, their ideal match. I’m programmed to take on any appearance you wish. So tell me, what does your ideal look like?”

“Before I can begin to look like your ideal, it will take just a little effort on your part. If you try this, your brain waves will be deciphered. Then they’ll be amplified, transmitted, and recoded again in the main computer, and as the computer rearranges the hologram, you’ll see my identity take shape”.

“What should I do?” I ask.

“I suggest that you follow these steps”, the figure says. “First, begin to think of the different people you’ve been emotionally

involved with, and recall which features they've had in common. I don't mean only their bodies or faces, but also their characters. For example, were they protective, or did they inspire you to be protective of them?". (*)

"Were they brave or timid? Were they dreamers? Were they ambitious, deceitful, or perhaps cruel?". (*)

"And now, what unpleasant or negative trait did they have in common?". (*)

"What were their positive qualities?". (*)

"How were the beginnings of all these relationships similar?" (*)

"How were the endings similar?". (*)

"Try to remember the people you've wanted to have relationships with, but things didn't work out—and why didn't they work out?". (*)

"Now, give me your attention, and I'll begin to take on the appearance you most desire. Just say the word and I'll become the person who is, for you, perfect. I'm ready, so go ahead and let yourself imagine. How should I walk? How am I dressed? Just what am I doing? How do I speak? Where are we, and what are we doing?".

"Look into my face, just as it is!". (*)

"Look deeply into my eyes, for now I'm no longer just a hologram, I've become real. Gaze deeply into my eyes, and tell me tenderly what you see in them". (*)

I stand up to touch the figure, but it eludes me, disappearing behind a column. When I reach the spot, I find that the figure has vanished. But then I feel a hand resting softly on my shoulder as a voice says, "Do not look behind you. It should be

enough for you just to know we've been so close to one another, and this experience can bring you greater clarity in searching for your ideal".

As the voice finishes speaking, I turn to see who is behind me, but glimpse only a fleeting shadow. At the same time, the central fire roars and flares brightly, dazzling me.

I know that this setting and the hologram have created a favourable atmosphere for my ideal to appear. But through an impatience I do not understand, my ideal, which is within me and has softly brushed against me, my ideal has slipped through my fingers only to disappear. Still I know that we've been near each other and this is enough for me—I realise that the main computer could never have projected a tactile sensation like the touch I felt on my shoulder.

I approach the elevator, and as the door opens, I hear a children's song:

"See Gargantua gobble down the grownups, with great care, not harming a hair, tra la la, tra la la, with great care, not harming a hair!".

VI. RESENTMENT¹⁹

It is night, and I'm in an old city crisscrossed by canals that pass beneath timeworn bridges. Leaning on a railing, I gaze at the slow movement of the murky liquid mass below. Through the fog I can make out a group of people on another bridge, and I can faintly hear musical instruments that accompany voices sadly out of tune. Faraway bells toll to me in haunting waves of sorrow.

Now the group has gone and the bells have fallen silent. Down a narrow diagonal street, colored neon lights emit their sickly glow.

I move on, once again entering the fog. After wandering aimlessly down side streets and over bridges, I come out into the open space of an old square paved with tiles; the square seems empty, and the tiled surface draws me toward one end that is submerged in still water.

Ahead a boat that looks like a hearse awaits me. But to reach it, I must first pass between two long lines of women dressed in black tunics and holding torches overhead. As I pass they say in chorus:

“Oh Death! Whose unlimited domain reaches the living wherever they may be. On you depends the span allotted to our life. Your endless sleep annihilates the multitudes, for no one escapes your powerful presence. You alone have the judgment that absolves, and no art can prevail upon your fury, nor plea revoke your design”.

I step into the boat, aided by the boatman, who remains standing behind me. Settling into the spacious seat, I notice that the craft rises slightly until we're just above the water. Then we begin to move, suspended above an open and immobile sea that is like an endless mirror reflecting the moon.

We arrive at the island, and in the dim light I can see a long road bordered by cypress trees. The boat rests on the water, rocking gently, and I step out while the boatman remains behind, impassive.

I walk down the road between the trees, which sigh in the wind. I feel that I'm being observed, and I stop, sensing something or someone hidden up ahead. From behind a tree

a shadowy figure beckons me with slow gestures. I begin to approach, and just as I reach it, a grave whisper like the sigh of death brushes against my face.

“Help me!” the shadow moans, “I know you have come to free me from this confusing prison. Only you can do this—help me!”.

The shadowy figure tells me it is someone toward whom I bear a deep resentment. (*)

As though reading my thoughts, the voice adds, “It does not matter whether the person to whom you are bound by this most profound resentment is dead or alive, for the domain of dark memory respects no borders.

“Nor does it matter”, the shadow continues, “whether the hatred and desire for revenge have been knotted in your heart since childhood, or began only yesterday. Here time is immobile. This is why we are always lurking in the shadows, only to emerge again at any opportunity, transformed into your various fears. And these fears are our revenge for the poison we must continually taste”.

Just as I ask what I should do, a ray of moonlight faintly illuminates the figure’s cloaked head. Then the specter allows me to see it clearly, and I recognize the features of the person who has wounded me the most deeply. (*)

I tell the specter all about my resentment, expressing things I’ve never told anyone—I speak as frankly as I can. (*)

The apparition asks me to consider the problem once again, and to communicate everything that is important, even if my words are insulting. The shadow insists that I not fail to express any bitterness I feel, lest it remain imprisoned forever. So I go ahead and follow these instructions. (*)

The specter shows me a strong chain that binds it to a cypress tree. Without hesitating, I break the chain with a single sharp jerk. The cloak collapses and lies spread out on the ground as the shadow vanishes into thin air and the voice recedes toward the heights, repeating these familiar words: "I must be gone, for the firefly's fading glow shows that dawn is near. Farewell, farewell. Remember me!".

Realizing that daybreak will soon arrive, I turn to go back to the boat, but first I pick up the cloak, which is lying at my feet. Draping it over my shoulders, I hurriedly retrace my steps. On my way back to the sea, several furtive shadows ask me if I'll return someday to free other resentments.

Near the shore I see a group of women dressed in white tunics and holding torches overhead. When I reach the boat, I hand the cloak to the boatman. He in turn passes it to the women, and one of them sets it afire. The cloak flares up and is quickly consumed by the flames, without leaving a trace. At this moment I feel a tremendous relief, as though I've sincerely forgiven an enormous wrong. (*)

I step into the boat, which now looks like a modern speedboat. As we push off from the shore, not yet starting the motor, I hear the chorus of women say:

"You have the power to awaken us from our stupor, uniting heart with head, freeing our minds from emptiness, removing darkness and forgetfulness from inner sight. Come, beneficial power: True memory, that straightens life into its rightful meaning".

The motor comes to life just as the sun appears above the ocean horizon. The boat accelerates, and I look at the young driver, his strong clear face smiling toward the sea.

We approach the city swiftly, bouncing lightly on the smooth swells. The sun's golden rays gild the magnificent domes of the city, while bright flocks of doves circle overhead.

VII. THE PROTECTOR OF LIFE²⁰

I'm floating on my back in a lagoon. The water feels very pleasant, and effortlessly looking on either side I discover that I can see the bottom through the crystalline water.

The sky is a brilliant blue. Close by, washed by the waters of the sea, is a beach of soft, almost white sand that forms a quiet inlet without waves.

I feel my body floating gently, becoming more and more relaxed, filling me with an extraordinary sensation of well-being.

I decide to turn over, and begin to swim with smooth strokes until I reach the beach, where I slowly emerge from the water.

The landscape is tropical. I see date and coconut palms, and feel the warmth of the sun and the soft breeze on my skin.

To my surprise, on my right I discover the entrance to a grotto with a stream of clear water flowing nearby. As I approach the grotto, I see a woman standing inside. A crown of flowers adorns her head and I can see her beautiful eyes, but I cannot tell her age. Yet behind her face, which radiates kindness and understanding, I sense there lies a great wisdom. As I gaze at her, all of nature falls silent.

"I am the Protector of Life", she says. Hesitantly I answer that I do not understand what she means. At this moment a fawn approaches and licks her hand.

She invites me to enter the grotto and has me sit on the sand facing a smooth rock wall. I cannot see her now, but I hear her say, “Breathe gently, and tell me what you see”. I begin to breathe slowly and deeply, and immediately a clear image of the ocean appears before me on the rock. As I breathe in, the waves roll onto the beach. As I breathe out, the waves recede.

Then she tells me, “Everything in your body is rhythm and beauty. So many times you have despised your body, without comprehending this marvelous instrument you have for expressing yourself in the world”. At this moment many scenes from my life begin to appear on the rock wall—I see myself feeling shame, fear, and horror about certain aspects of my body. These images follow one after another. (*)

I feel uncomfortable when I realise that she is watching these scenes, but immediately calm myself. Then she adds, “Even in sickness and old age, your body will be like a faithful dog that accompanies you until the final moment. Do not despise your body when it cannot fulfill all your whims. Meanwhile make it strong and healthy. Take care of your body so that it can serve you well, and be guided in this only by the opinions of the wise. I who have passed through all the ages know well that the idea of beauty is ever changing. If you do not regard your body as your closest friend, it will become sad and ill—therefore you must accept it completely. It is your instrument for expressing yourself in the world.

“I want you to see now the part of your body that is weakest and least healthy”. At once the image of this part of my body appears. (*)

The Protector of Life rests her hand on this area, and I feel a lifegiving warmth. I sense waves of energy expanding in this area, and I experience a profound acceptance of my body, just as it is. (*)

“Take care of your body, following only the opinions of those who are wise, and do not harm it with illnesses that exist only in your imagination. Now go, filled with vitality and at peace with yourself”.

Upon emerging from the grotto, strengthened and healthy, I drink the crystalline water of the stream and feel completely renewed.

The sun and the wind kiss my body as I cross the white sand toward the lagoon. When I reach the water, for an instant I glimpse in the depths the kind reflection of the Protector of Life.

As I enter the water, I give thanks within myself for my body, this marvelous instrument I have received from nature. (*)

VIII. THE RESCUE²¹

I'm in a car that is speeding down a large highway. In the strange half-light I'm unsure whether it is dawn or dusk. The driver beside me is someone I've never seen before. In the back seat are two women and a man, who are also, strangers. The car races onward, surrounded by other cars that are driving recklessly, as if their drivers are drunk or crazy.

I ask my companion what is happening. Looking at me furtively, he answers in a strange language, “Rex voluntas!”.

Turning on the radio, which blares noisy static, I can faintly hear a weak metallic voice monotonously repeating, “Rex voluntas . . . rex voluntas . . . rex voluntas”.

The traffic slows, and by the roadside I see wrecked and overturned cars with fire spreading among them. We stop, and abandoning the car, join a sea of terrified people rushing toward the fields.

Looking back through the smoke and flames, I see many hapless souls who are trapped and doomed, but I'm forced to keep running by the human stampede that pushes me along. Some of the people stumble to the ground, and amid this delirium I struggle in vain to reach a woman trying to shield her child as the mob tramples over them.

The chaos and violence are spreading everywhere, so I make up my mind to move in a slightly diagonal direction that will let me escape the crowd; I aim toward some higher ground that diverts this mindless stampede. Many of the fallen clutch at my clothes, tearing them to shreds. But I notice that the crush of people around me is growing less.

Finally I manage to break free of the crowd, and almost out of breath continue to climb.

Stopping for a moment, I notice that the mob is now going in a direction opposite to mine—they must be thinking that running downhill will carry them more quickly out of this crisis.

I realise with horror that the path they are following ends in a cliff. Shouting with all my might, I try to warn the people of this imminent catastrophe, though I fear that only those nearest me will hear the warning.

One man does break free of the mob and comes running toward me. His clothes are in tatters and his body is covered with wounds, yet I feel a great joy that he's been saved. On reaching me he clutches my arm, and yelling like a madman points frantically down the hill. He's speaking a language I do not understand, but I think he wants me to help rescue someone. I tell him to wait for a while—that right now it's impossible. I know he cannot understand me, and his desperation is tearing me apart. Then he tries to go back down,

but just as he's leaving I trip him and he falls headlong. He lies sprawled on the ground, sobbing bitterly. For my part I realise that I've saved both his life and his conscience—his conscience because he did try to rescue someone, and his life by preventing his doomed attempt.

Climbing higher, I reach a freshly plowed field. The earth is loose and furrowed. In the distance I hear gunfire, and think I know what is happening—hurriedly I leave. After a while, everything is silent and I stop once more. Looking back toward the city, I see a sinister glow.

I feel the ground begin to shake beneath my feet, and a rumbling from the depths warns me of an imminent earthquake. Within moments I've lost my balance and find myself lying on the ground. Curled on my side and gazing up at the sky, I'm overcome by waves of dizziness.

The earthquake passes, and I look up to see an enormous, blood-red moon.

The heat is unbearable and the air is filled with an acrid odor. Meanwhile, I'm still uncertain whether the day is just beginning or night is falling.

Sitting down, I hear a growing roar. Soon hundreds of aircraft fill the sky, passing overhead like deadly insects and disappearing toward some unknown destiny.

Nearby I come upon a large dog that is staring up at the moon. It begins to howl, almost like a wolf. I call out to it, and the animal approaches me timidly. When it reaches my side, I gently pet its bristling fur and see shivers running down its body.

The dog pulls away from me and begins to leave. I get to my feet and follow it, and we cross a rocky area until we reach a small stream. The thirsty animal rushes forward and eagerly

begins to drink, but all at once draws back and falls over. Approaching the dog I touch it, and realise that it's dead.

I feel a new earthquake, which threatens to knock me over, but it subsides.

Turning around, I behold far off in the sky four enormous clouds advancing toward me with the muffled rumbling of thunder. The first cloud is white, the second is red, the third is black, and the fourth is yellow. And these clouds are like four armed horsemen riding on the storm, traveling across the heavens and laying waste to all life upon the earth.

I begin running to escape the approaching clouds, for I realise that if their rain touches me I'll be contaminated. As I run toward the highway, suddenly my path is blocked by a gigantic figure—towering over me I see a huge robot swinging a sword of fire in a menacing arc. I shout that I must keep going because the radioactive clouds are approaching, but the robot replies that it has been stationed here to prevent destructive people from entering; adding that it's armed with lasers, it warns me not to come any closer. I see that the robot stands on the dividing line between two distinct areas—the one I'm coming from, barren and dying, and the one ahead, filled with vegetation and life.

So I shout to the robot, "You must let me pass because I've done a good deed!".

"What is a good deed?" the robot asks.

"A constructive action, something that builds and contributes to life", I answer.

"Then tell me what you've done that's so good", the robot demands.

“I’ve saved a human being from certain death, and what’s more, I’ve saved his conscience as well”.

At once the giant robot stands aside, and I leap into the protected area just as the first drops of poisoned rain begin to fall.

Ahead of me is a farm, and a soft light glows through the windows of the nearby farmhouse.

Only now do I realise that the day is just beginning.

When I reach the farmhouse, a rugged yet kindly looking man invites me to come in. Inside, a large family is preparing for the activities of the day. They seat me at the table, which is set with simple and hearty food. Soon I find myself drinking pure spring water as children play around me.

“This time”, says my host, “you have escaped. But when once again you must cross the border between life and death, what coherent behaviour will you be able to show in your life?”.

I ask him to explain, because his words sound strange to me. He says, “Try to remember the truly unselfish things you’ve done in your life, which we might call ‘good deeds’ to give them a name. Of course, I don’t mean those so-called ‘good deeds’ people do when they’re expecting something in return. Think only of the things you have done that left a clear sensation in you that the way you treated others was best for them—it’s just as simple as that.

Now I’ll give you three minutes to review your life and see what inner poverty there is within you, my good friend. And one final suggestion: If you have children or loved ones, do not confuse what you want for them with what is best for them”. Having said this, he leaves the house along with all his people. I’m left alone to meditate on the suggestions of this rustic fellow. (*)

Returning a short time later, he says to me, “Now you see how empty you are within, and if you aren’t empty it’s only because you are confused. That is, in either case you are empty. Let me give you some advice, and heed it carefully, for it is the only thing that will help you in what is to come: From now on, do not let a single day pass without filling your life with an unselfish act”.

We say farewell, and in the distance I hear him shout to me, “Tell the people what you have discovered!”.

I set off from the farm in the direction of my city.

Today I have learned this: When human beings think only of their own self-interest and their own problems, they carry death in their hearts, and everything they touch dies with them.

IX. FALSE HOPES²²

I have arrived outside the office of the doctor who was recommended to me, and I see a small plaque that warns: “You, who enter here, abandon all hope”.

When I ring the bell, the door opens and a nurse shows me into the waiting room. She points to a chair and I take a seat as she sits down facing me behind her desk. Picking up a form, she inserts it in her typewriter and asks, “Name?” I answer her. “Age? Profession? Marital status? Blood type?”.

The nurse continues filling in the form with my family’s medical history.

Then I answer her questions about my own medical history. (*)

I describe for her all the accidents I’ve had since my childhood. (*)

With a piercing stare, the nurse slowly inquires, “What is your criminal record?”. I answer her with a certain uneasiness.

Then she asks, “What are your hopes and dreams?” Abruptly I stop my obedient answers to her questions and demand an explanation. Unperturbed, and staring at me coldly as if I were an insect, she replies, “Hopes and dreams are merely hopes and dreams! So you’d better start telling me yours, and be quick about it, because I have to go meet my boyfriend”.

Rising out of my chair, with one swipe I rip the form from her typewriter. Tearing it to pieces, I throw it in the wastebasket. Then I turn and cross the room to the door through which I entered, but now it won’t open. Exasperated, I yell at the nurse to open it, and when she doesn’t answer I turn and see that the room—is empty!.

Striding to the other door, which leads to the examination room, I feel sure the doctor will be there and I’ll tell him all of my complaints. “This must be how that wonderful nurse escaped”, I mutter as I open the door—and manage to stop myself just short of a wall. “A door with a wall behind it, what a great idea!” I exclaim. Then I rush back to the first door. This time it opens, but again I run into a wall that blocks my way. I realise that I’m trapped.

Over a loudspeaker I hear the doctor’s voice say, “Tell me about your hopes and dreams”.

Regaining my composure, I testily reply that we’re all adults here, and obviously my greatest hope is simply to get out of this ridiculous predicament. But he says, “The plaque on the wall at the entrance warned anyone who entered here to abandon all hope”.

The situation now seems to be some kind of grotesque joke, so I sit down to see how it will turn out.

“Let’s begin again”, says the voice. “Remember how your childhood was filled with hopes and dreams. As time passed, however, you realised that many of them were never going come true.

So you abandoned those beautiful projects. Remember?” (*)

“Later on”. the voice continues, “other hopes and dreams followed, and again you had to resign yourself to the fact that many of your desires would not come true. Remember?” (*)

“Even at this very moment, you have certain hopes and dreams. I don’t mean your hope of escaping this confinement, for the illusion we’ve staged here is already over. I’m speaking of something else. I am speaking about your hopes and dreams for the future”. (*)

“Which of your hopes do you secretly know will never come true? Go ahead, think this over honestly”. (*)

“Without hopes and dreams, we cannot live. But once we know that certain hopes are false, we can’t hold on to them forever, because sooner or later they’ll end in crisis and failure. If you can search deep within yourself and find the hopes you realise will never come true, and if you make the effort to abandon these hopes here forever, you will gain a greater sense of reality”.

“So let’s return to our task. Seek out among your fondest hopes and dreams those you sense will never come true. But don’t be confused, for there are many things that do seem possible! Do not focus on these—choose only those hopes and dreams that will never be realised. Go ahead now, search out your false hopes. Be completely honest with yourself, even if it’s a bit painful”. (*)

“Resolve that when you leave this room, you will leave your false hopes behind forever”. (*)

“And now, let’s finish this task. Let’s study those other important hopes—the hopes and dreams you do consider possible. I’ll give you some help: Guide your life only by what you believe is possible, or what you genuinely feel will come true. And it doesn’t matter if later on some of these things don’t work out, because they have, after all, given direction to your actions”. (*)

“And so, we have finished. You can leave now by the way you came in, and be quick about it, because I have to go meet my secretary”.

I get up. Walking the few steps to the door, I open it and leave the doctor’s office. Looking at the plaque near the entrance, I see that it now reads, “You who leave, abandon here all false hopes”.

X. REPETITIONS²³

It is night, and I’m walking down a dark, narrow alley. I don’t see anyone, but through the fog I can make out the faint glow of a distant streetlight. My footsteps resound with an ominous echo. I quicken my pace, intent on reaching the streetlight ahead.

As I approach the light, a few steps away I see a human silhouette. It is an old hag, her face half-covered. Abruptly, in a raspy voice she asks me the time. Peering at my watch, I answer, “It’s three in the morning”.

I walk away quickly, once more entering the fog and darkness, anxious to reach the next streetlight that I see in the distance.

But there, once again, is the old hag. Looking at my watch, I see it now says two-thirty. I begin running toward the next streetlight, looking back over my shoulder and making sure I'm leaving the old woman behind as she stands motionless in the distance. But when I rush up to the next streetlight, again I see her dark shape awaiting me. I look at my watch—it says two o'clock.

I begin running frantically, passing streetlights and old women until, exhausted, I can go no farther and stop midway between two glowing lights. Looking at my watch, I see in its crystal the face of the old woman. I realise that the end has come.

In spite of everything, I try to understand my predicament. I ask myself over and over again, "What am I running away from? What am I running away from?" The raspy voice answers me, "I am behind you and I am ahead of you. What has been, will be. But you are most fortunate, for you have been able to stop yourself and think for a moment. If you find the answer to this riddle, you will be able to escape from your own trap". (*)

I feel dazed and weary. Still I think there must be a way out. Something makes me begin to remember various failures in my life. I recall the first disappointments of my childhood. (*)

Then I remember the failures of my youth. (*)

Now I recall my more recent failures. (*)

I realise that my defeats will keep repeating in the future, failure upon failure. (*)

All of my defeats have had something similar about them—there was no agreement among the things I wanted to do. They were confused desires that wound up at odds with each other. (*)

I discover that even now many of the things I desire to achieve in the future are contradictory. (*)

I don't know what to do with my life, yet in my confusion I still want many things.

But I fear the future and worry that my previous failures will happen again.

Here in the fog of this narrow alley, my life is paralyzed between dying glimmers of light.

Suddenly a light goes on in a window and a voice calls out to me, "Is there something you need?"

"Yes!" I answer, "I need to get out of here!"

"Oh no—by yourself you cannot get out!"

"Then tell me, how do I get out of here?"

"I can't tell you. Besides, if we keep on shouting we're going to wake up all the neighbors. And we can't take chances with the neighbors' sleep! So good night".

The light goes out, and then I'm filled with one overwhelming desire—I must get out of this trap. I realise that my life will change only if I find a way out of here. This narrow alley appears to have direction and meaning, but is really only a repetition from birth to death, a false meaning. I will end up running from streetlight to streetlight until, at some moment, my strength becomes exhausted forever.

To my left I see a signpost with three arrows. The arrow for this alley bears the name, "Repetitions in Life". The second arrow points toward "Denial of Life", and the third marks the direction of "Building Life". For a moment I reflect on this choice. (*)

I choose the direction of the third arrow, “Building Life”. As I leave the dark alley and emerge onto a broad and brightly lit avenue, I have the strong sense that I’m about to discover something of decisive importance.

XI. THE VOYAGE²⁴

I’m climbing along a mountain path, and stop briefly to look behind me. In the distance I see the thin line of a river and what could be a grove of trees. Farther off, the reddish desert disappears into the haze of the late afternoon.

I walk a few more steps, and the path narrows until it disappears. I know that I still have the last and most difficult stretch ahead of me before I reach the plateau on top. The snow on the ground scarcely hinders my steps, and I continue my ascent.

I come to a rock wall. Studying it carefully, I discover a large crevice that I think I can climb. I begin to climb it, wedging my hiking boots into the footholds. Pressing my back against one side, I lever myself up with one elbow and my other arm. Slowly I inch higher.

Now the crevice has narrowed. I look up and I look down. I’ve reached an impasse—it’s impossible to move in either direction.

I shift my position, flattening myself against the slippery rock face. Planting both feet firmly, I slowly stretch one arm upward. I can feel my moist breath reflecting from the smooth rock. I keep groping with my fingers, not knowing whether I’ll find some small handhold. Gingerly I stretch out my other arm.

Suddenly I feel myself swaying, and my head falls slowly away from the rock. My whole body follows, until I'm on the verge of falling backwards—but at the last second, I find a tiny crack and grasp it tightly with my fingers. Recovering my balance I continue the ascent, making the final assault on the top without difficulty.

At last I reach the plateau. I stand up, and an endless prairie stretches before me. Taking a few steps forward I turn around. Toward the abyss it is already night. Toward the plain the last rays of the sun escape in varied hues. As I compare these two spaces, suddenly I hear a piercing sound. Looking up, I see a luminous disk hovering high overhead. Circling around, it begins to descend.

The disk lands close by. Moved by some inner call, I approach it without hesitation. As I enter the luminous object, it feels as if I'm passing through a curtain of warm air. I find myself inside a transparent bubble that's flattened on its base, and immediately my body feels lighter.

As though propelled by a giant slingshot, we shoot straight upward into the sky. I think we're heading toward the star Beta Hydri, or perhaps the galaxy NGC 3621.

Fleeting I see the late afternoon light on the prairie below. We climb at great speed as the sky turns black and the Earth slips away.

I can feel our velocity steadily increasing, and the clear white light of the stars changes color until all the stars have disappeared in total darkness.

Directly ahead I see a single point of golden light, which steadily grows larger. As we approach, I see it is a vast ring that continues into a very long transparent tube. We enter the tube,

and after a while come to a sudden stop, landing in an open area. Passing through the curtain of warm air, I leave the bubble.

I find myself between transparent walls, which shimmer in musical variations of color as I pass through them.

I walk onward until I come to a flat area. In the center I see a large object, alive with movement, and impossible to capture with my eye as it flows endlessly into itself; regardless of which direction I look on its surface, my gaze always ends up immersed, drawn deep into the object's interior. Feeling dizzy, I look away.

Now I encounter a figure, apparently human, whose face I cannot see. This being extends a hand toward me, in which I see a radiant sphere. I begin to approach, and in an act of complete acceptance, I take the sphere and place it on my forehead. (*)

In total silence I feel something new coming to life within me. A growing force bathes my body in successive waves as a profound joy fills my being. (*)

Somehow I know that even without words this figure is speaking to me, saying, "Return to the world with your forehead and your hands luminous". (*)

And so I accept my destiny, returning to the bubble, and through the vast ring to the stars, and the prairie, and the rock wall below. (*)

Finally I am back on the mountain path, a humble pilgrim returning to my people. (*)

Filled with light, I return to the hours, to the daily routine, to the pain of humanity, and to its simple joys.

I, who give with my hands what I can, who receive both

insults and the warmest of greetings, sing to the heart, which from the darkest abyss is reborn in the light of Meaning.

XII. THE FESTIVAL²⁵

Lying in a bed, I gradually become aware that I'm in a hospital room. Faintly I hear the dripping of a faucet. I try to move my arms and legs and then my head, but they don't respond. It's an effort just to keep my eyes open.

I seem to hear someone at my bedside saying that fortunately I'm out of danger, and now it's only a matter of resting. Though confusing, these words bring me great relief. My body feels heavy and drowsy, and grows more and more relaxed.

The ceiling is smooth and white. As each drop of water drips from the faucet, a ray of light flashes across the ceiling. One drop, one ray. Then another. Then many rays, and after this I see waves of light. The ceiling keeps on changing with the rhythm of my heart, perhaps an effect of the arteries in my head as blood pulses through them.

Now the rhythm outlines the face of a young person, who speaks to me saying, "Hey you, why don't you come with me?".

"Sure", I think, "why not?".

Up ahead is a music festival, and the sound of instruments floods with light a vast space carpeted with green grass and flowers.

Lying in the meadow facing the stage, I'm surrounded by an enormous sea of people. Happily there is plenty of space, so that no one is crowded. In the distance I see some childhood friends, and I can tell they are truly enjoying themselves.

I fix my attention on a flower, connected to its stem by a slender stalk that, within transparent skin, gleams a deep green. I reach out my hand, lightly running my finger along the polished fresh stem, barely disturbed by tiny knobs. Moving up through emerald leaves, I come to the petals, which open in a multicolored explosion. Petals like stained glass in a solemn cathedral, petals like rubies, petals like embers awakening into flame—and in this dance of hues, I feel the flower lives as if a part of me. (*)

The flower, disturbed by my touch, releases a sleepy drop of dew, barely clinging to the tip of a leaf. As it falls the drop vibrates, forming an oval, then it lengthens, and now in the emptiness it flattens out, only to become round again . . . falling in endless time, falling, falling through endless space . . . finally landing on a mushroom's cap, the drop rolls like heavy mercury, sliding to the edge. There, in a spasm of freedom, it hurls itself into a tiny pool, raising a tempest of waves that bathe an island of marble. (*)

Looking up, I see a golden bee coming to sip from the flower, and in this intense spiral of life I withdraw my disrespectful hand, removing it from that dazzling perfection.

My hand—I look at it astonished, as if seeing it for the first time. Turning it over, opening and closing its fingers, I see the crossroads on my palm. And I comprehend that in those many lines all the roads of the world converge. I feel that this hand and its deep lines do not belong to me, and I give thanks within myself for this feeling of not possessing my body.

Ahead the festival continues, and I know that this music connects me with that young woman gazing at her clothes, and that young man leaning against a tree petting a blue cat.

I know that I have lived all this before, and I have known the

tree's jagged outline, and the sharply defined volume of each thing. Once before I have seen the soft shapes of these ochre clouds, set like cardboard cutouts against the immaculate blue of the sky.

And I have also lived before this timeless feeling in which my eyes seem not to exist, for they see everything so clearly, as if they were not the eyes of everyday seeing, eyes that cloud reality. I feel that everything is alive and all is well, and that the music and the things have no names, and nothing can ever truly name the. (*)

In the velvet butterflies that flutter around me, I recognize the warmth of lips and the fragility of sweet dreams.

The blue cat comes toward me, and suddenly I become aware of something obvious—the cat moves by itself, without cables, without remote control. The cat does everything by itself, and this amazes me. In its perfect movements, behind its beautiful yellow eyes, I know there is a life, and that everything else is a disguise, like the bark of the tree, the butterflies, the flower, the mercurial dewdrop, the clouds like cutouts, the hand with its converging roads. For a moment I seem to communicate with something universal. (*)

But then a soft voice interrupts me just before I pass into another state of consciousness. “Do you believe this is how things really are?” whispers the stranger. “I tell you that things are not this way, nor the other way either. Soon you will return to your grey world—without depth, without joy, without volume. And you will believe that you have lost your freedom. For now you do not understand me because you lack the capacity to think as you wish. Your apparent state of freedom is only the result of the natural chemical processes in your brain. This happens to thousands of people, who all receive my advice. And now, goodbye”.

With this the kindly stranger disappears, and the whole landscape begins to spin into a light grey spiral, until the wavy ceiling appears once more. I hear the water dripping from the faucet, and realise that I'm lying in the hospital room. I feel the dullness in my senses dissolving and try to move my head, and this time it responds, and so do my arms and legs. I stretch, and realise that I'm completely well. Leaping out of bed, I feel altogether refreshed, as though I have rested for years.

I go to the door of the room, open it, and stepping into the hallway walk quickly to the exit of the building. There I see a large open doorway, with many people passing through in both directions. I go down the steps and out onto the street.

XIII. THE CREATURE

It is night, and I find myself in total darkness. Somewhere nearby is the edge of a cliff. Groping ahead with my foot, I can feel uneven ground that is covered with vegetation and rocks. I also sense the presence of the creature that has always provoked in me an unmistakable feeling of terror and disgust. There may be one of them, or there may be many—but I'm certain that something is relentlessly drawing near.

A ringing in my ears, at times mingling with a faraway wind, contrasts with the utter silence. My wide-open eyes cannot see a thing. My heart is pounding, my breathing is shallow, and my dry mouth has a bitter taste.

Something is approaching—what is creeping up behind me, making my scalp bristle and sending cold chills up my spine?.

My knees feel weak, and if something grabs me or jumps on

me from behind I'll be completely defenseless. I'm paralyzed—all I can do is wait. In my confusion, I think about this creature and those other times when it was near me, especially about that most difficult time. I begin to relive those memories. (*)

What happened then? What was going on during that period of my life? I try to recall the fears and the frustrations I was feeling at that time. (*)

Clearly I was at a crossroads in my life, and this coincided with my encounter with the creature—I feel an urgent need to discover how these things are related. (*)

Now I find I can think more clearly again. While I know there are animals that provoke disgust in nearly everyone, I also recognize that not everyone loses control in their presence. I notice just how the terrifying creature makes me feel, and I try to discover the connection between this feeling and what was happening in my life at other times when I've felt similar fears. (*)

Calmly, I try to feel which part of my body I would protect from this dangerous animal. I realize this part of my body is related to the difficulties I was having when the encounter with the creature occurred, so long ago. (*)

Seeing the animal again has reawakened in me that moment of my life, a moment that is still not resolved. I need to shed light on that dark and painful time, which is sometimes difficult to recall. (*)

Above I see the clear night sky, and ahead on the horizon the rosy glow of a new dawn. Very quickly the day brings with it the stirring of life. Here in this soft meadow, I walk freely on a carpet of dew-covered grass.

A van approaches rapidly and stops beside me. Two people dressed as orderlies get out.

Greeting me cordially, they announce that they've captured the creature that frightens me so much. They explain that when they receive a message of fear, they go hunting for the creature that is causing it. When they capture the animal, they display it so that the person who is afraid can study it closely. Now they place the carefully restrained animal right in front of me.

The specimen is indeed helpless. I take advantage of this to examine it thoroughly, very slowly and from all angles, both up close and from a distance. (*)

The orderlies gently pet the docile animal, and it responds in a friendly way. Then they invite me to pet it, too. Feeling great apprehension, I shudder as I try to touch the creature. But I try again and then again, until finally I'm able to pet it. (*)

The animal responds peacefully, with exceedingly lazy movements. Then it begins to shrink, growing smaller and smaller, until finally it disappears.

As the van departs, I try once again to recall the circumstances in my life long ago, when the presence of this animal so terrified me. (*)

On a sudden impulse I begin to run playfully, enjoying the morning and the fresh air. I move rhythmically and tirelessly, breathing deeply. Then I begin to run even faster, my heart and muscles working together like a flawless machine.

As I'm running freely I recall my fear, but feel that I am stronger now, and that soon I'll have conquered it forever.

Bright sunlight streams down from above as I swiftly draw near my city. Filling my lungs with air, I feel my whole body moving in perfect harmony. Those parts of my body that were prey to fear now feel strong and invulnerable. (*)

XIV. THE SNOWMOBILE

I'm on a broad expanse of snow high on a mountain, and all around me I see people participating in winter sports. Despite the splendid sun, I become aware of the cold on seeing my breath in the air. From time to time icy gusts of wind strike my face, but this only feels invigorating.

Several of my friends approach, pushing a snowmobile. They urge me to get in and drive, explaining that this snowmobile has been so carefully designed that the driver can't lose control. I get in and buckle the seatbelt. Lowering my goggles, I start the turbines, which whine like small jets. As I press lightly on the accelerator with my right foot, the snowmobile moves gently forward. Easing back on the accelerator, I press the brake with my left foot, and the machine obediently stops. Then I turn the snowmobile effortlessly to the left and to the right.

Three of my friends leave ahead of me, gliding along on their skis. "Let's go!" they shout and take off downhill, leaving a zigzagging trail behind them as they descend the magnificent mountainside.

I press on the accelerator, and the snowmobile accelerates smoothly. As I start downhill behind the skiers, I see the beautiful landscape, covered with snow and evergreens. Farther down I see wooden cabins, and in the distance a valley bathed in sunlight.

Fearlessly I accelerate, and my friends greet me with shouts as I pass first one, then another, and finally the third. I head toward the pine trees that appear in my path, dodging between them with impeccable movements. Deciding to go even faster, I press the accelerator to the floor and feel the tremendous power of the turbines. Pine trees flash by like blurred shadows

as swirling snow floats behind in a fine white cloud. The freezing wind stretches the skin of my face taut, and I can barely keep my lips together.

Ahead I see a wooden shelter that rapidly grows larger, and on either side of it is a ski-jump covered with snow. Without hesitating I head straight for the ramp on the left. In an instant I'm on it, and as I speed down the ramp I switch off the engines to prevent a fire upon landing.

Taking off, I'm catapulted upward in a fantastic flight, hearing only the roar of the wind as I begin to fall an enormous distance.

Approaching the snow, I can see that my angle of descent exactly matches the slope, and I touch down delicately on the smooth surface. Restarting the engines, I accelerate as I approach the valley floor.

I begin to apply the brakes, and raising my goggles, head slowly toward the hotel complex, from which a number of chairlifts carry skiers back up the mountainside.

Finally I enter a flat expanse of snow near the hotel. Ahead on my right I notice the black mouth of what looks like a train tunnel. Slowly I head toward it, crossing through pools of melted snow. Reaching the mouth of the tunnel, I check for train tracks or tire marks, but do not see any. Even so, I realise that large trucks may use it—perhaps it is a snowplow depot.

Whatever its purpose, I enter the tunnel cautiously. It is dimly lit, so I turn on the headlight. In the powerful beam I can see a straight road extending a great distance ahead of me. I speed up, and the sound of the jets reverberates as their echoes intermingle. Ahead I see that the tunnel curves, but instead of slowing down I go even faster—when I reach the curve, I slide up the wall and then down again without mishap.

Next the road descends, and farther on twists upward, forming a huge spiral like a corkscrew or a coil in some immense spring. I accelerate, heading down at first and then up again—realizing for an instant I'm speeding along the ceiling—only to descend in a long arc onto a level road once more.

Slowing down, I get ready to go down a drop as steep as on a roller coaster. I begin to plunge down the almost vertical incline. Gradually I apply the brakes, and finally slow down as I reach the bottom.

Now I see I'm coming to a narrow bridge that stretches through an endless void. On either side of the bridge there is utter darkness. Very slowly I follow the road straight onto the bridge, which is no wider than the snowmobile. I feel safe, however, because the bridge is solid. Looking ahead as far as the beam of the headlight extends, the road appears like a taut thread, completely removed from any ceiling, any floor, any wall, separated from everything by unfathomable distances. (*)

I stop the vehicle, intrigued by the effect of this scene. Calmly I begin to imagine different perils—the bridge breaking and myself falling into the void. Then I picture an enormous spider descending its thick silk thread, lowering itself toward me as if I were only a tiny fly. Finally I imagine a colossal cave-in, and long tentacles rising toward me from out of the inky depths. (*)

Though these scenes are frightening, I find that I have the inner strength to conquer my fears. So once again I try to imagine something dangerous or terrifying, and lose myself in these thoughts. (*)

Having faced these challenges, and feeling strengthened by this test I've imposed on myself, I restart the engines and accelerate. I finish crossing the bridge and come to a tunnel

like the one I first entered. Traveling swiftly, I ascend a long slope until I reach ground level.

I see a circle of daylight that grows larger, until finally I shoot straight out onto the open expanse of the hotel complex.

Slowing down, I carefully avoid the people walking around me. I drive very slowly until I reach the far side of the area where it connects to the ski slopes.

Lowering my goggles, I begin to accelerate so I'll be going fast enough when I start up the mountain to reach the summit where my journey began—I go faster and faster, and then faster still.

I climb up the slope at the same breathtaking speed I had on my way down. I see the wooden shelter and the ski jumps rushing toward me, but realise that now the vertical wall below the ski jumps blocks my path to the slope above. Veering left, I pass beside the ski jumps and the wall, and continue up the slope.

Pine trees flash by like blurred shadows, as swirling snow floats behind in a fine white cloud.

Up ahead my three friends have stopped, and I see them greeting me with ski poles held high. I circle around them, covering them with a shower of snow, and continue up the mountain. When I reach the summit, I come to a stop and switch off the turbines. Removing my goggles, I unbuckle the seatbelt and climb out of the snowmobile, hardly feeling cold at all. I stretch my legs and then my whole body. On foot once more, I head down the magnificent mountainside. I see the evergreens, and far off in the distance like a tiny irregular dot, I can see the hotel complex.

I enjoy the fresh mountain air and the sun warming the skin on my face, and I feel a strong sense of having gained greater control over my body. (*)

XV. THE CHIMNEY SWEEP

I'm sitting in a room beside someone I've just met. I feel that he's completely trustworthy, however, for I can sense that he has all the qualities of a good advisor—kindness, wisdom, and strength. Notwithstanding these qualities, many people call him by the picturesque nickname “the Chimney Sweep”.

I have come to consult the Chimney Sweep about some personal problems, and he tells me that

I have so much inner tension it would be advisable to do a “cleansing” exercise.

The Chimney Sweep is very discreet, and because he is sitting beside me and not staring at me, I feel comfortable in expressing myself openly. It doesn't take long for us to establish a close rapport.

He asks me to relax completely and loosen any muscular tensions I may have. He helps me by placing his hands on my forehead, and then on the various muscles of my face. (*)

Gently taking my head in his hands, he rocks it left and right, forward and backward, helping me loosen my neck and shoulders. He emphasizes how important it is for me to relax my eyes and jaw. (*)

Next the Chimney Sweep recommends that I relax the muscles in my body—first my chest and stomach muscles, and then the muscles of my back. (*)

He explains that he hasn't been concerned with the tensions in my limbs because, he assures me, my arms and legs will relax by themselves as a result of what I've already done. He suggests that I let my body go limp, like rubber, becoming warm and heavy until I feel a pleasant, floating sensation. (*)

Now the Chimney Sweep says to me, “Let’s get right to the point. Tell me about this problem that’s been bothering you so much, and tell me everything, right down to the last detail.

Remember that I’m not here to judge you, but to help you. I’m your instrument, and not the other way around”. (*)

“Think of something that you would never dream of telling anyone else, no matter what”, he continues. (*)

“Now,” he says, “begin to tell me all about it”. (*)

“If you want to you can go ahead and tell me anything else it would do you good to get off your chest. Don’t worry about the way you express yourself, and let your emotions flow freely”. (*)

After a while the Chimney Sweep rises and picks up a very long, slightly curved pair of forceps. Standing in front of me he says, “Open your mouth!”. When I do, I feel him insert the long instrument into my mouth, and it seems to reach all the way down into my stomach. To my surprise, however, I find that it’s not too uncomfortable.

Suddenly he shouts, “I’ve caught it!”. And little by little he begins pulling out the forceps. At first it feels like something is tearing apart inside of me. But then I feel a pleasant tingling sensation, as if something malignant is being pulled loose from my lungs and internal organs, something that has been stuck there for a long, long time. (*)

As he continues withdrawing the forceps, I’m amazed to feel coming out of my mouth a sweetish, foul-smelling, and slimy creature, writhing in the grasp of the forceps. Finally the Chimney Sweep places this disgusting creature into a clear jar, and I experience enormous relief, like an internal purification of my body.

Standing up, I'm left speechless as I watch this repugnant "thing" begin to melt, turning into a shapeless, gelatinous mass. Within moments all that's left is a dark liquid. Then the liquid turns clear and evaporates, escaping invisibly into the air. In less than a minute the jar is left perfectly clean.

"Now you can see", says the Chimney Sweep, "why we call this procedure 'cleansing.' All in all, today hasn't been so bad. A little daily difficulty mixed with a bit of embarrassment, a dose of betrayal, and a dash of guilty conscience. The result—a little monster that prevented you from sleeping well, digesting your food, and from doing other good things. You should see the enormous monsters I sometimes extract. Oh, and don't worry if you feel an unpleasant sensation for a little while. Now I bid you farewell".

XVI. DESCENT

We're in a boat at anchor on the sea. We begin to hoist the anchor, only to discover that it's caught fast. Telling my companions I'll go see what's wrong, I climb down a short ladder and enter the calm water.

Diving down, I see a school of small fish, the hull of the boat, and the anchor chain. I swim over to the chain and begin using it to pull myself down.

I notice that I can breathe normally, and continue to follow the chain down until I reach the dimly lit bottom. Here I find the anchor, but it's entangled in some metal wreckage. Grasping the chain, I pull sharply upward and see the bottom give way, raising a hidden cover to reveal a square opening. Entering the opening, I continue going down. (*)

I swim deeper and deeper until I feel a cold underwater current, and I swim in the direction of the current. After a while I come to a wall that is covered with patches of seaweed. Staying close to the smooth surface, I float upward, and notice that everything is becoming lighter. (*)

I emerge in a pool of water within a dimly lit cavern. Climbing out onto a kind of platform, I take a few steps and discover a stone stairway. Cautiously I begin to descend the stairs.

I see burning torches placed at regular intervals along the small passageway, which becomes even narrower as I go down the slippery steps. The stairs are almost vertical, and the air feels humid and suffocating. (*)

Now I come to an iron gate that blocks my way. I push against the rusty bars and the gate creaks open. Here the steps end and now there is only a muddy ramp. As I pick my way down the slick surface, a dank tomb-like odor fills the air. (*)

A sudden gust of wind threatens to extinguish the torches. At the bottom I can hear the roar of an angry sea crashing against the rocks. I begin to have doubts that I'll ever be able to get back.

Whistling loudly, the wind blows out the bottom torch, and I set out to climb back up, resisting my rising fears.

Slowly I ascend the muddy ramp until I reach the rusty gate—but again I find it is closed. Pulling open the gate, I wearily continue climbing the nearly vertical stairs, while behind me the torches keep going out. The stone stairs become increasingly slippery and I must step carefully.

At length I reach the cavern. I step onto the platform and submerge myself in the pool of water, just as the final torch is extinguished.

It is pitch black. Brushing against the smooth, sea weed-covered surface, I descend into the depths once more. (*)

Feeling the cold current, I swim against it with great effort. (*)

I escape the current, and swim upward until I encounter a stone ceiling—then I search in every direction to find the square opening. (*)

At last I find the opening, and swim upward through it. Freeing the anchor from where it is caught, I plant my feet on top of it and pull on the chain to alert my companions.

I ride up on the anchor as they hoist it from above. While I'm rising toward the surface, I observe a fascinating rainbow of ocean life, and all around me the underwater space grows lighter.

Finally I reach the surface. Letting go of the anchor chain and grasping the ladder of the boat, I climb aboard to the cheers and greetings of my friends. (*)

XVII. ASCENT

It is daytime when I enter the house and slowly begin climbing the stairs. I reach the second floor, and continue going upstairs until I come outside onto the flat rooftop. High overhead is a water tank atop a tower.

I see the metal spiral staircase that I must climb to reach the top of the water tank—but there is no handrail. Calmly I go up the spiral stairs.

Reaching the top of the tank, I stand up. The base of the tower is narrow and the whole structure sways with each gust of wind, but I maintain my footing. (*)

Venturing over to the edge of the tank, I look down and see the roof of the house beneath me. I'm drawn toward the empty space below, but I catch myself and continue looking down. Then I let my gaze wander over the landscape around me. (*)

Suddenly a helicopter appears overhead. As it approaches, I see a rope ladder with wooden rungs being lowered toward me. Grasping the ladder, I place both feet on the lowest rung, and slowly the ladder rises as the helicopter ascends. Below me the water tank grows smaller and smaller. (*)

I climb up the ladder until I reach the door of the helicopter. When I try to open it, I find that it's stuck. Then I look down. (*)

Suddenly the metal door slides open and the young pilot reaches out a hand to me. I climb into the helicopter, and we begin to gain altitude rapidly.

A voice announces that we're experiencing engine failure. I hear the grinding of broken gears and the main rotor stops—we begin falling, faster and faster.

The crew members pass me a parachute, and they leap out into space.

I'm perched in the edge of the doorway as the helicopter plunges earthward at a dizzying speed.

I make up my mind to jump, and fall face downward. I'm falling so fast it's difficult to breathe. I pull the ripcord, and the parachute streams upward in a long sheet overhead. With a strong jolt it opens, I bounce, and my fall slows dramatically.

I must land on top of the water tank, or else I'll fall into the high-tension wires, or the tops of the pine trees that await me like sharpened stakes. I maneuver the parachute by pulling on the canopy lines—fortunately I'm aided by the wind. (*)

The parachute envelops me as I land on top of the water tank and roll to the edge. Freeing myself, I see the parachute fall in a tangle. I get to my feet, and slowly begin to descend the spiral stairs.

When I reach the rooftop, I go down to the second floor, and unhurriedly continue going downstairs until I reach the room I first entered.

Once more on the ground floor of the house, I walk to the door, open it, and leave.

XVIII. THE COSTUMES²⁶

I find myself standing naked in a nudist camp, and I can feel that I'm being closely observed by men and women of various ages.

Someone tells me these people are studying me because it's obvious to them I have certain problems. This person suggests that I cover up my body, so I put on a hat and some shoes. As soon as I do, the nudists lose interest in me.

I'm expected at a party soon, so I finish dressing and leave the nudist camp.

As I enter a large house, in the hallway I meet a fashionably dressed gentleman. He informs me that this is a costume party, and that to enter the ballroom I must be appropriately dressed. He directs my attention to one side, where I see a dressing room that is filled with unusual masks and costumes of every kind. Taking my time, I begin to choose carefully among them.

Before me are several mirrors set at angles, and as I try on different masks and costumes, I can see myself from all sides.

First I try on the costume and the mask that look worst on me. (*)

Then I try on the best costume and the best mask, and study myself from all angles. Any imperfection I see is immediately corrected, until my whole costume is perfectly coordinated. (*)

Resplendent, I make my entrance into the grand ballroom where the party is going on. The room is filled with people, and all of them are wearing masks and costumes.

A hush falls over the crowd, and then everyone applauds my perfect costume. Urging me to go up on stage, they call for me to sing and dance—and so I do. (*)

Next the audience demands that I take off my mask and repeat my performance, but just as I'm about to, I realise I'm dressed in that hideous costume I tried on first. To make matters worse, my face is now exposed—I feel ugly and ridiculous. Nevertheless I sing and dance before the crowd, enduring their scornful jeers and whistles. (*)

Leaping onto the stage, a brash musketeer jostles and insults me. To his dismay, I begin to transform into an animal.

I continue changing into different animals, but always keeping my own face. First I am a dog, then a bird, and finally an enormous toad. (*)

At this point a chess piece, a rook, comes over to me and says, "You should be ashamed of yourself, frightening the children this way!". I return to my normal appearance, dressed in my usual clothing.

Now I find that I'm growing smaller—already I've shrunk to the size of a small child.

Stepping down from the stage, I look up at the enormous

costumed people peering down at me from above. All the while, I continue growing smaller. (*)

Screaming hysterically, a woman cries out that I'm an insect. But just as she's about to squash me with her foot, I shrink to microscopic size. (*)

Quickly I grow back to the size of a child, and then to my normal size. I continue growing larger and larger while the crowd around me scatters, running in all directions.

My head now reaches the ceiling and I look down on everything from above. (*)

Recognizing the woman who tried to squash me, I pick her up in one hand and set her down on the stage as she screams hysterically.

Returning to my normal size, I decide to leave the party.

When I reach the hallway, I see a mirror that completely distorts my appearance. Then I rub the surface until the mirror reflects back to me that beautiful image I have always longed for. (*)

Giving my regards to the dapper fellow at the entrance, I leave the house at peace with myself.

XIX. THE CLOUDS²⁷

In total darkness I hear a voice that says, "In the beginning there was neither being nor nonbeing. There was neither air nor sky above, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. There were neither human beings nor animals, not even one bird, fish, or crab, no stones, caves, or cliffs, no prairies or forests. There were neither galaxies nor atoms—nor were there

department stores. Then you were born, and sound and light began, and heat and cold, and rough and smooth”.

The voice falls silent, and I become aware that I’m going up the escalator in a huge department store.

I pass by several floors, and then I see the roof of the building opening above me. Slowly and effortlessly the escalator carries me up into the clear sky.

Down below I can see the building, looking very small. The sky is a deep blue. I feel the pleasant rippling of my clothes in the breeze, and with great serenity I take deep breaths of the fresh air.

Passing through a layer of fine mist, I encounter a sea of very white clouds.

The escalator gradually levels out, and I begin to walk on it as if it were a sidewalk. I move forward, and realise I’m walking on a floor of clouds.

I can walk without effort, and gravity is so weak that I can leap long distances. Taking advantage of this, I flip head over heels, landing on my back and rebounding as if bouncing on a huge trampoline. I seem to move in slow motion, with perfect freedom. (*)

I hear the voice of an old friend greeting me, and see my friend running gracefully toward me. Coming together in an embrace, we roll over and over, bouncing and tumbling, laughing and singing. (*)

Finally we sit down, and my friend takes out a retractable fishing rod and extends it. For tackle, instead of a hook we tie on a horseshoe-shaped magnet. Then we let out the line, and the magnet descends through the floor of clouds.

After a while the pole begins to jerk and my friend exclaims, “I think we’ve caught something good!”. Immediately we begin to reel in the line, and soon a large tray emerges, stuck to the magnet. The tray is filled with all kinds of food and drink, and everything is exquisitely arranged. Setting down the tray, we prepare for a great feast.

Every dish I taste has a delicious flavor. Even more remarkably, we can eat everything we want without gaining weight, and the food never runs out. All we have to do is wish, and new dishes appear to replace any we have eaten. I begin helping myself to all my favourite kinds of food, savoring every mouthful. (*)

At last, completely satisfied, we lie back on the soft mattress of clouds, enjoying an incredible sensation of well-being. (*)

My body feels warm and soft and completely relaxed, as gentle thoughts wander through my mind. (*)

I notice that I feel no sense of hurry or restlessness or any desire at all. I feel I have all the time in the world for myself. (*)

In this state of complete fulfillment and well-being, I recall the problems I had in everyday life. I feel able to handle these problems without undue tension, and clear objective solutions appear to me. (*)

After a while I hear my friend say, “It’s time for us to return”.

Standing up and taking a few steps, I realise I’m on the escalator again. It begins to slope gently downward, passing through the floor of clouds. I feel a fine mist as I begin going back down to the earth.

Approaching the building, the escalator enters the roof. As I descend past the different floors of the department store, all

around me I see people worriedly trying to choose which objects they will buy.

I close my eyes and hear a voice say, "Then there was no fear, no worry, no desire, for time did not exist". (*)

XX. TO AND FRO

In a large, well-lit room, I walk a few steps to the door, open it, and go slowly down a hallway. Entering a door on my right, I discover a new hallway and begin walking down it. Entering a door on my left, I continue on. Entering a new door on my left, I continue walking. Then I go through still another door on my left and continue on.

Slowly retracing my steps, I return to the room where I began. (*)

On the right side of the room is a large sliding-glass door that opens onto a garden. Opening the door, I step outside. On the ground is a device that supports a steel wire, suspending it a short distance off the ground. The wire follows an erratic, zigzag path. Stepping onto the wire, I balance myself, taking one step, then another; without difficulty I walk along the straight sections, as well as the wire's twists and turns.

Walking backwards, I retrace my steps to the starting point. (*)

Stepping down from the wire, I return to the large room, where I find a full-length mirror. As I walk slowly toward the mirror, I observe that logically my image comes toward me. I keep going until I can touch the mirror. Then, still facing the mirror, I back away from it, observing that my image also moves away.

Again I approach the mirror until I can touch it, but this time discover that my image is moving away from me, until it disappears. Then I see my image coming toward me, walking backwards. It stops before reaching the mirror, turns on its heel, and comes the rest of the way toward me.

I go outside onto a courtyard made up of large tiles. In the center of the courtyard is a large armchair positioned precisely on top of a black tile. All the other tiles are white. Somehow I know that this chair has the power to move by itself—always facing the same way—in any of the four directions. Settling into the chair I say, “Three tiles forward”. The chair moves three tiles forward. Then I say, “Four to the right. Two back. Two to the left. One back. Two to the left.” And we end up on the black tile.

Now I say, “Three back. One to the right. One back. Four to the right. Four forward. Five to the left”. We end up on the black tile.

Finally I say, “Three to the left. Two back. One forward. Two to the right. Three back. One to the right. Four forward”. Again we end up where we started.

Getting up from the chair, I leave the house. As I stand in the middle of a large highway without a car in sight, I see someone I like very much coming straight toward me, until we’re so close we’re almost touching. (*)

The person then moves away, receding into the distance and finally disappearing. (*)

I see someone I dislike intensely coming toward me until we’re very close to each other. (*)

This person also moves away, receding into the distance and finally disappearing. (*)

Sitting down, I recall a very unpleasant scene in which I'm in front of other people. I walk away from them. (*)

Finally I recall a situation in which I'm having a lot of fun. I walk away from this situation, too. (*)

XXI. THE MINER²⁸

It is very early in the morning, and a light drizzle is falling from the leaden skies. I'm dressed as a miner, and standing with other miners as we wait for the mine elevator to arrive.

In the distance I see the black silhouette of the factory with its blast furnaces glowing. The chimneys belch fire, and smoke rises in thick columns. Above the slow and distant rhythm of the machinery, I hear a shrill siren that marks the change of shift.

I see the elevator coming up slowly. With a heavy shudder it stops at my feet, and we move forward until we're standing inside on the metal floor. The gate slides shut, and amid the murmur of voices we begin going down.

In the dim light of the elevator I can see the rocky wall passing by very close to me. As we descend, the air grows warmer and turns quite stale.

We stop at a tunnel, and most of the miners get out here. When the gate closes again only four or five of us are left. We continue to descend until we stop at another tunnel, where the rest of the miners get off the elevator. I continue going down alone.

Finally with a crash the elevator comes to a stop. I pull open the gate and step off, entering a dimly lit tunnel. I can hear the noise of the elevator as it goes back up.

Ahead I see a mining car that runs on tracks. I climb in, start the motor, and begin moving slowly through the tunnel.

I stop the car at the end of the tracks. Climbing out, I switch on the light on my helmet and begin to unload the tools.

As I listen to the distant echoes of hydraulic drills and jackhammers, suddenly I hear a faint, stifled human cry—I realise someone is trapped! Quickly I seize a pick and sling a coil of rope over my shoulder. Abandoning the rest of the tools, I advance resolutely through the tunnel. As the tunnel narrows, I leave the electric lights far behind, and now have only the light on my helmet to guide me. From time to time I stop to listen for the direction of the cry.

Nearing the end of the tunnel, I must walk hunched over. Just ahead, in a recent excavation, the tunnel comes to an end—some loose debris tells me there has been a cave-in. Water trickles down around the rocks and broken wooden beams. The floor is a quagmire, and my boots sink into the sticky mud.

Using my pick, I begin to clear away the rocks. Soon I uncover a narrow hole that goes into the wall. While I'm trying to figure out how I can possibly squeeze into it, I distinctly hear the cries—the trapped miner must be very near.

Wedging the handle of the pick between two large rocks, I tie one end of the rope to it. Passing the other end around my waist, I fasten it securely with a buckle.

With great difficulty I manage to wriggle headfirst into the tight opening. Dragging myself forward on my elbows, I crawl slowly down the steep incline. By the light on my helmet I can see that the passage narrows until it closes off. The heat and humidity are so stifling that I can hardly breathe. (*)

Thick mud flows down around my feet, slowly covering my

legs and oozing stickily under my chest. I realise that this narrow hole will soon be completely filled with mud.

I press upward, but my back hits solid rock. I try backing up—it's now impossible. Again I hear the plaintive voice very close by. (*)

Suddenly I yell at the top of my lungs as the floor gives way beneath me, dragging me down in its collapse—I plunge downward until a sharp jerk on the rope at my waist abruptly breaks my fall; I'm left dangling absurdly at the end of the rope like some muddy pendulum.

My fall has been stopped just above a carpeted floor, and I see before me an elegant room flooded with light. I glimpse some sort of laboratory filled with enormous bookshelves, but my predicament is so pressing that I'm completely absorbed in trying to free myself.

With my left hand I grasp the taut rope above; with my right hand I release the buckle fastening the rope around my waist, and tumble softly onto the carpet.

“What manners, my friend, what manners!”, says a high-pitched voice behind me. I spin around and stop short.

Standing before me is a little man, scarcely taller than my knee. Except for his slightly pointed ears, he could be described as very well-proportioned. He is dressed in bright colors, yet in the unmistakable style of a miner.

I feel at once ridiculous and dismayed when he offers me a glass of punch. It's quite refreshing, however, so I drink it straight down.

Now the little man cups his hands before his mouth and makes the plaintive cry I recognize so well. On hearing it I'm

outraged, and demand to know just what he means by tricking me this way. To my bewilderment, he replies that thanks to this trick, in the future my digestion will be much improved.

This extraordinary little character goes on to explain to me how the rope squeezing my waist and stomach during my fall has done me a world of good, as did the journey I made through the tunnel crawling on my elbows. He concludes his strange remarks by asking me whether the expression, “You are in the bowels of the earth”, means anything to me.

I answer that this is just a figure of speech, but the little man assures me that in this case it holds a great truth. Then he adds, “You are in your own bowels. When something goes wrong in their viscera, people can think all kinds of crazy thoughts. In turn, these negative thoughts can harm their internal organs. So from now on you must take good care of yourself in this regard. If you don’t, I’ll begin walking around, and you’ll feel sharp pangs and all kinds of internal discomfort. And I have colleagues who are in charge of other parts of your body like your lungs, your heart, and so on”.

Having said this, the little man begins walking around on the walls and ceiling. As he does so, I feel twinges of discomfort near my stomach, liver, and kidneys. (*)

Afterwards the little man sprays me from head to toe with a stream of water from a golden hose, thoroughly cleansing me of all the mud, and in an instant I’m dry. I stretch out on a spacious sofa and begin to relax. Rhythmically the little man passes a soft brush over my waist and abdomen, producing a remarkable sensation of relaxation in these areas. I realise that when discomfort is relieved in my stomach, liver, and kidneys, my ideas and feelings change for the better. (*)

I feel a strong vibration, and find myself back in the elevator, rising toward the surface of the earth.

XXII. CONFIGURATION OF THE INTERNAL GUIDE

I find myself in a luminous landscape, a place where I have felt a great happiness. (*)

I can see the sun, and it is growing larger. I can look at it without any harm or discomfort. Remarkably, two rays come down from it, one gently reaching my head, and the other reaching my heart.

I begin to feel very light, and feel myself being drawn toward the sun. Following the luminous rays, I move upward toward the sun.

I feel the soft and beneficial warmth of the enormous disc of the sun, which becomes a gigantic sphere as I draw nearer.

I enter the sun, and once inside, I breathe in and out, fully and deeply. The light that surrounds me enters my body with the rhythm of my breathing, filling me with more energy with each breath I take.

I feel peaceful and radiant. Then, with my best feelings, I ask for my inner guide to appear before me, in whatever manner is best. (*)

My guide responds, "I represent your inner Force, your energy, and if you know how to use me, you will have direction in life, you will have inspiration, and you will have protection. But you must make an effort to see me very clearly, or to feel my presence strongly". (*)

I ask my guide to place their hands on my forehead, and to leave them there for a few moments.

I begin to feel that starting from the center of my chest, a transparent sphere is growing outward, until it contains both of us. (*)

I ask my guide for a profound feeling of love for everything that exists to be reborn within me, and to accompany me in life, giving me joy and peace. (*)

I ask about the meaning of life, and wait for my guide's answer. (*)

I ask about the value of my life, and wait for my guide's answer. (*)

I ask what death really is, and wait for my guide's answer. (*)

In a reflective way, I ask about some special situation in my life, and wait for my guide's answer. (*)

I ask my guide always to be with me in moments of doubt and distress, and also to accompany me in moments of joy.

Now my guide moves away from me, and transforms into a large flower whose open petals contrast with the luminous background of the sun's disc. Then the flower continues to change in shape and colors, as though it were a harmonious kaleidoscope. And I realise that my guide will answer all my requests.

I begin to move away from the brilliant sun, filled with life and strength.

I descend, following the two luminous rays back down to the beautiful landscape, recognizing that within me there is a great kindness that seeks to express itself in the world of people. (*)

XXIII DISORIENTATION AND THE INTERNAL GUIDE

I have finished my activities for the day. I go home the way I usually do.

I arrive home, and I am alone in my room. I feel discouraged.

I am living in a difficult situation that I cannot continue. I have to make a decisión, but I don't know exactly which one is the best. (*)

I walk towards a mirror, and observe my tired face. I think about and call my Internal Guide in my usual way, as if my Guide were a person. I concentrate on my own reflection in the mirror and say, "Oh Guide, what advice can you give me in this situation?". At the same time, I try to understand clearly the problem I must resolve. (*)

Now, I observe that my image becomes blurry, and then the mirror becomes dark. After a little while, I see the back of the mirror become lighter, and then the people and situations that have to do with my problem begin to appear. (*)

Suddenly, I hear a voice that explains my difficulties. In the mirror I see my guide pointing out the direction I must follow. (*)

Now, the mirror becomes clear again, and reflects the image of my face. I feel comforted, and I experience within myself the beginning of the solution to my problem. (*)

XXIV ANNOYANCE AND THE INTERNAL GUIDE

I have left my house, and I meet someone who I find disagreeable and who upsets me very much. I say hello to the person so that I can continue to walk on by, but the person approaches me, takes me by the arm, and invites me to come

into a bar that is right there. We enter the bar.

We are sitting down, and for no apparent reason, the person begins to harshly criticize some things that are very private for me. (*)

Now, the person becomes insulting and, speaking in a loud voice, points directly at me several times. Nearby, I see other people I know watching us intently, and they listen to the harsh criticism of my accuser. (*)

I try to get up and leave, but the person grabs my shoulder, and continues to make disagreeable insinuations.

The person insults me openly, and threatens to ruin me. I realize that I could do several different things, but that no matter what I do, this person will use it to harm me. (*)

This scene goes on in such an embarrassing way, that I feel ready to just react, no matter what the consequences will be...but then I remember my guide, and I mentally say, "Oh, Guide, give me self control". I hear an internal voice answer me, "Ask the person for advice!".

So, I tell this person I do not know what to do, and I beg them to give me some advice. Then, the person's mood changes, and they become solemn and conceited, and begin to preach about my obligations. The conversation continues. After a while, the person begins to tell me about their own personal problems, and they start to drink heavily. I listen in silence to their pathetic story. The people around me do the same. (*)

Now, I get up and say goodbye affectionately and leave. My companion, completely drunk, begins to harass our other acquaintances, but he falls on top of the table; it is a very sad scene.

I leave and walk out onto the street, filling my lungs deeply with the fresh air.

XXV INDECISION AND THE INTERNAL GUIDE

I enter a building, and I consider the pending situation I must face. (*)

I believe, at this moment, that everything will turn out badly. I know that if I begin with this feeling of failure, it makes me feel insecure, my strength is diminished and, I will wind up being defeated. I comprehend this, and I stop. I am ready to give up. I feel like running Hawai, back the way I entered. But at the same time, I know I have to make an effort. I feel divided between what I must do, and what I am not able to do. (*)

I reflect for a moment, and say to myself, "Oh Guide, give me the Force!". In an instant, I feel my respiration becomes beeper and my body straightens. I begin to walk forward again. My steps are longer and firmer. I have regained my confidence. I comprehend that all will come out well depending on how I do things and now I know that I will proceed with my maximum potential. (*)

XXVI. DEATH

Everything is dark but I believe I'm in a theater. Slowly everything becomes illuminated, and I see that I am standing on the stage.

The whole place feels like something out of a movie. On one side I see the light of torches, and toward the back a huge balance with two arms. I think that the ceiling, which is probably vaulted, must be very high because I can hardly see anything above me. I can make out walls of stone, some trees, and swamp-like terrain encircling the center of the stage. Everything

appears surrounded by thick jungle, and everywhere I can see human figures moving furtively.

Suddenly two hooded figures take me by my arms. Then a grave voice asks, "Where do you come from?"

I don't know what to answer, so I explain that I come from "inside". "What is 'inside'?", says the voice.

I venture an answer: "I live in the city, so being here in the country is 'outside'. But for people who live in the country, the city is also 'outside'. Since I live in the city, that is, 'inside', that's why I say I come from 'inside' and now I'm 'outside'".

"What utter nonsense. You have entered our domain, and therefore you come from 'outside'. And this is not the country but rather your 'insides'. Didn't you think, perhaps, this was a theater? And you have entered this theater which is, in turn, in your city. And the city where you live is outside the theater".

"No", I respond, "the theater is part of the city where I live".

"Listen, insolent one," says the voice, "let's put an end to this ridiculous discussion. To begin with I will tell you that you no longer live in the city. You used to live in the city, and therefore your 'inside' and 'outside' spaces are something from the past. Now you are in another space-time. In this dimension things work differently".

Immediately an old man appears before me carrying a receptacle in his right hand. He approaches me, extending his other hand inside of me, as if my body was made of butter. First he removes my liver and places it in the receptacle, and then he proceeds to do the same with my kidneys, stomach, and heart. Finally, in a very unprofessional manner, he removes everything else that he finds until the receptacle is overflowing. Throughout this procedure I feel nothing unusual.

This strange character then turns around and, carrying my viscera over to the balance, deposits them on one of the large dishes, and the balance tilts downward until it comes to rest on the floor.

I have the sensation that I'm in a butcher shop where they weigh the various cuts of meat as the customers look on. Indeed, a lady carrying a shopping bag tries to snatch my internal organs from the dish, but the old man stops her. He shouts, "What's this? Who told you that you could take any of these pieces?". Then he climbs up a short ladder until he reaches the empty dish at the opposite end of the balance, where he places the feather of an owl.

The voice then addresses me saying: "Now that you are dead and you have descended to the threshold of the world of shadows, you will say to yourself: 'They are weighing my viscera,' and you will be correct. To weigh your viscera is to weigh your actions".

The hooded characters flanking me on either side let go of my arms, and I begin to walk slowly, without any direction.

The voice continues, "Your lower viscera are in the infernal fire. The keepers of the fire are always active, preventing those you desire from coming close".

I realise that the voice is guiding my steps, and with each insinuating phrase the scene changes.

The voice says, "First you must pay the keepers. Then, enter the fire and remember all the suffering that you have caused others in the chain of love". (*)

"Ask forgiveness from those you have mistreated, and leave the fire only when you are reconciled". (*)

“Then, call by name all those you have wronged, and beseech them to let you see their faces. If they agree, listen carefully for their advice, for it is as soft as a faraway breeze”. (*)

“Thank them sincerely, and depart following the torch of your guide. Your guide will lead you through dark passageways until you reach a chamber where are kept the shades of all those toward whom you have been violent in the course of your existence. They, all of them, remain in the same suffering condition in which you once left them”. (*)

“Ask them for forgiveness, reconcile yourself, and kiss them one by one before you leave”. (*)

“Follow your guide, who knows well how to lead you to the sites of your shipwrecks, to the places of things irreparably frozen. Oh world of great losses, in which smiles and enchantments and hopes are your burden and your failure! Contemplate your long chain of failures, asking your guide to slowly illuminate all these illusions”. (*)

“Reconcile with yourself, forgive yourself, and smile”.

“Then you will see how, from the horn of dreams, a wind arises that carries the dust of your illusory failures to nothingness”. (*)

All at once the whole scene changes, and I find myself somewhere else. I hear the voice say: “Even in the cold and dark forest, you must follow your guide. Birds of ill omen brush against your head. In the swamps treacherous snares surround you”.

“Have your guide lead you to the grotto. You can advance no farther unless you pay the price to the hostile forms who guard the entrance. If, at last, you are able to enter, ask your guide to illuminate to the left and to the right. Beseech your guide to bring his torch closer to the large marble bodies of all those you have not yet been able to forgive”. (*)

“Forgive them one by one, and when your feelings are true, each of these statues will turn once again into human beings who will smile at you, stretching out their arms toward you in a hymn of gratitude”. (*)

“Follow your guide out of the grotto, and do not look back for any reason”.

“Leave your guide and return here, where the actions of the dead are weighed”.

“Now look at the dish on the balance where your actions are deposited, and see how it rises and is lighter than a feather”.

I hear a metallic sound even as I see the dish that bears my viscera beginning to rise.

The voice concludes: “You have forgiven your past. You have achieved more than enough to think of going any further for now. Were your ambition to carry you further it could happen that you might not return to the region of the living. You have gained too much already with the purification of your past. I say to you now: Awake and leave this place”.

The lights on the stage slowly dim, and I begin to feel that I am again outside of that world and part of this one. But I also realise that I have kept with me the experiences of that other world even though I've returned to this one.

ANNEX I

The Document of the Humanist Movement

Humanists are women and men of this century, of this time. They recognize the achievements of humanism throughout history, and find inspiration in the contributions of many cultures, not only those that today occupy center stage. They are also men and women who recognize that this century and this millennium are drawing to a close, and their project is a new world. Humanists feel that their history is very long and that their future will be even longer. As optimists who believe in freedom and social progress, they fix their gaze on the future, while striving to overcome the general crisis of today.

Humanists are internationalists, aspiring to a universal human nation. While understanding the world they live in as a single whole, humanists act in their immediate surroundings. Humanists seek not a uniform world but a world of multiplicity: diverse in ethnicity, languages and customs; diverse in local and regional autonomy; diverse in ideas and aspirations;

diverse in beliefs, whether atheist or religious; diverse in occupations and in creativity.

Humanists do not want masters, they have no fondness for authority figures or bosses. Nor do they see themselves as representatives or bosses of anyone else. Humanists want neither a centralized State nor a Parastate in its place. Humanists want neither a police state nor armed gangs as the alternative.

But a wall has arisen between humanist aspirations and the realities of today's world. The time has come to tear down that wall. To do this, all humanists of the world must unite.

I. Global Capital

This is the great universal truth: Money is everything. Money is government, money is law, money is power. Money is basically sustenance, but more than this it is art, it is philosophy, it is religion. Nothing is done without money, nothing is possible without money. There are no personal relationships without money, there is no intimacy without money. Even peaceful solitude depends on money.

But our relationship with this “universal truth” is contradictory. Most people do not like this state of affairs. And so we find ourselves subject to the tyranny of money—a tyranny that is not abstract, for it has a name, representatives, agents, and well-established procedures.

Today, we are no longer dealing with feudal economies, national industries, or even regional interests. Today, the question is how the surviving economic forms will accommodate to the new dictates of international finance capital. Nothing escapes, as capital worldwide continues to concentrate in ever fewer hands—until even the nation state depends for its

survival on credit and loans. All must beg for investment and provide guarantees that give the banking system the ultimate say in decisions. The time is fast approaching when even companies themselves, when every rural area as well as every city, will all be the undisputed property of the banking system. The time of the parastate is coming, a time in which the old order will be swept away.

At the same time, the traditional bonds of solidarity that once joined people together are fast dissolving. We are witnessing the disintegration of the social fabric, and in its place find millions of isolated human beings living disconnected lives, indifferent to each other despite their common suffering. Big capital dominates not only our objectivity, through its control of the means of production, but also our subjectivity, through its control of the means of communication and information.

Under these conditions, those who control capital have the power and technology to do as they please with both our material and our human resources. They deplete irreplaceable natural resources and act with growing disregard for the human being. And just as they have drained everything from companies, industries, and whole governments, so have they deprived even science of its meaning—reducing it to technologies used to generate poverty, destruction, and unemployment.

Humanists do not overstate their case when they contend that the world is now technologically capable of swiftly resolving the problems in employment, food, health care, housing, and education that exist today across vast regions of the planet. If this possibility is not being realised, it is simply because it is prevented by the monstrous speculation of big capital.

By now big capital has exhausted the stage of market economies, and has begun to discipline society to accept the

chaos it has itself produced. Yet in the presence of this growing irrationality, it is not the voices of reason that we hear raised in dialectical opposition. Rather, it is the darkest forms of racism, fundamentalism, and fanaticism that are on the rise. And if groups and whole regions are increasingly guided by this new irrationalism, then the space for constructive action by progressive forces will diminish day by day.

On the other hand, millions of working people have already come to recognize that the centralized state is as much a sham as capitalist democracy. And just as working people are standing up against corrupt union bosses, more than ever citizens are questioning their governments and political parties. But it is necessary to give a constructive orientation to these phenomena, which will otherwise stagnate and remain nothing more than spontaneous protests that lead nowhere. For something new to happen, a dialogue about the fundamental factors of our economy must begin in the heart of the community.

For humanists, labor and capital are the principal factors in economic production, while speculation and usury are extraneous. In the present economic circumstances, humanists struggle to totally transform the absurd relationship that has existed between these factors. Until now we have been told that capital receives the profits while workers receive wages, an inequity that has always been justified by the “risk” that capital assumes in investing—as though working people do not risk both their present and their future amid the uncertainties of unemployment and economic crisis.

Another factor in play is management and decision-making in the operation of each company. Earnings not set aside for reinvestment in the enterprise, not used for expansion or diversification, are increasingly diverted into financial speculation, as are profits not used to create new sources of work.

The struggle of working people must therefore be to require maximum productive return from capital. But this cannot happen unless management and directorships are cooperatively shared. How else will it be possible to avoid massive layoffs, business closures, and even the loss of entire industries? For the greatest harm comes from under investment, fraudulent bankruptcies, forced acquisition of debt, and capital flight—not from profits realised through increased productivity. And if some persist in calling for workers to take possession of the means of production following nineteenth-century tea-chings, they will have to seriously consider the recent failures of real socialism.

As for the argument that treating capital the same way work is treated will only speed its flight to more advantageous areas, it must be pointed out that this cannot go on much longer because the irrationality of the present economic system is leading to saturation and crisis worldwide. Moreover, this argument, apart from embracing a radical immorality, ignores the historical process in which capital is steadily being transferred to the banking system. As a result, employers and business people are being reduced to the status of employees, stripped of decision-making power in a lengthening chain of command in which they maintain only the appearance of autonomy. And as the recession continues to deepen, these same business people will begin to consider these points more seriously.

Humanists feel the need to act not only on employment issues, but also politically to prevent the State from being solely an instrument of international capital, to ensure a just relationship among the factors of production, and to restore to society its stolen autonomy.

II. Real Democracy versus Formal Democracy

The edifice of democracy has fallen into ruin as its foundations—the separation of powers, representative government, and respect for minorities—have been eroded.

The theoretical separation of powers has become nonsense. Even a cursory examination of the practices surrounding the origin and composition of the different powers reveals the intimate relationships that link them to each other. And things could hardly be otherwise, for they all form part of one same system. In nation after nation we see one branch gaining supremacy over the others, functions being usurped, corruption and irregularities surfacing—all corresponding to the changing global economic and political situation of each country.

As for representative government, since the extension of universal suffrage people have believed that only a single act is involved when they elect their representative and their representative carries out the mandate received. But as time has passed, people have come to see clearly that there are in fact two acts: a first in which the many elect the few, and a second in which those few betray the many, representing interests foreign to the mandate they received. And this corruption is fed within the political parties, now reduced to little more than a handful of leaders who are totally out of touch with the needs of the people. Through the party machinery, powerful interests finance candidates and then dictate the policies they must follow. This state of affairs reveals a profound crisis in the contemporary conception and implementation of representative democracy.

Humanists struggle to transform the practice of representative government, giving the highest priority to consulting the people directly through referenda, plebiscites, and direct election of

candidates. However, in many countries there are still laws that subordinate independent candidates to political parties, or rather to political maneuvering and financial restrictions that prevent them from even reaching the ballot and the free expression of the will of the people.

Every constitution or law that prevents the full possibility of every citizen to elect and to be elected makes a mockery of real democracy, which is above all such legal restrictions. And in order for there to be true equality of opportunity, during elections the news media must be placed at the service of the people, providing all candidates with exactly the same opportunities to communicate with the people.

To address the problem that elected officials regularly fail to carry out their campaign promises, there is also a need to enact that will subject such officials to censure, revocation of powers, recall from office, and loss of immunity. The current alternative, under which parties or individuals who do not fulfill their campaign promises risk defeat in future elections, in practice does not hinder in the least the politicians' second act—betraying the people they represent.

As for directly consulting the people on the most urgent issues, every day the possibilities to do so increase through the use of technology. This does not mean simply giving greater importance to easily manipulated opinion polls and surveys. What it does mean is to facilitate real participation and direct voting by means of today's advanced computational and communications technologies.

In real democracy, all minorities must be provided with the protections that correspond to their right to representation, as well as all measures needed to advance in practice their full inclusion, participation, and development.

Today, minorities the world over who are the targets of xenophobia and discrimination make anguished pleas for recognition. It is the responsibility of humanists everywhere to bring this issue to the fore, leading the struggle to overcome such neo-fascism, whether overt or covert. In short, to struggle for the rights of minorities is to struggle for the rights of all human beings.

Under the coercion of centralized states—today no more than the unfeeling instruments of big capital—many countries with diverse populations subject entire provinces, regions, or autonomous groups to this same kind of discrimination. This must end through the adoption of federal forms of organisation, through which real political power will return to the hands of these historical and cultural entities.

In sum, to give highest priority to the issues of capital and labor, real democracy, and decentralization of the apparatus of the State, is to set the political struggle on the path toward creating a new kind of society—a flexible society constantly changing in harmony with the changing needs of the people, who are now suffocated more each day by their dependence on an inhuman system.

III. The Humanist Position

Humanist action does not draw its inspiration from imaginative theories about God, nature, society, or history. Rather, it begins with life's necessities, which consist most elementally of avoiding pain and moving toward pleasure. Yet human life entails the additional need to foresee future necessities, based on past experience and the intention to improve the present situation.

Human experience is not simply the product of natural physiological accumulation or selection, as happens in all species. It is social experience and personal experience directed toward overcoming pain in the present and avoiding it in the future. Human work, accumulated in the productions of society, is passed on and transformed from one generation to the next in a continuous struggle to improve the existing or natural conditions, even those of the human body itself. Human beings must therefore be defined as historical beings whose mode of social behaviour is capable of transforming both the world and their own nature.

Each time that individuals or human groups violently impose themselves on others, they succeed in detaching history, turning their victims into “natural” objects. Nature does not have intentions, and thus to negate the freedom and intentions of others is to convert them into natural objects without intentions, objects to be used.

Human progress in its slow ascent now needs to transform both nature and society, eliminating the violent animal appropriation of some human beings by others. When this happens, we will pass from pre-history into a fully human history. In the meantime, we can begin with no other central value than the human being, fully realised and completely free. Humanists therefore declare, “Nothing above the human being, and no human being beneath any other”.

If God, the State, money, or any other entity is placed as the central value, this subordinates the human being and creates the condition for the subsequent control or sacrifice of other human beings. Humanists have this point very clear. Whether atheists or religious, humanists do not start with their atheism or their faith as the basis for their view of the world and their actions. They start with the human being and the immediate

needs of human beings. And if, in their struggle for a better world, they believe they discover an intention that moves history in a progressive direction, they place this faith or this discovery at the service of the human being.

Humanists address the fundamental problem: to know if one wants to live, and to decide on the conditions in which to do so.

All forms of violence—physical, economic, racial, religious, sexual, ideological, and others—that have been used to block human progress are repugnant to humanists. For humanists, every form of discrimination, whether subtle or overt, is something to be denounced.

Humanists are not violent, but above all they are not cowards, and because their actions have meaning they are unafraid of facing violence. Humanists connect their personal lives with the life of society. They do not pose such false dichotomies as viewing their own lives as separate from the lives of those around them, and in this lies their coherence.

These issues, then, mark a clear dividing line between humanism and anti-humanism: humanism puts labor before big capital, real democracy before formal democracy, decentralization before centralization, anti-discrimination before discrimination, freedom before oppression, and meaning in life before resignation, complicity, and the absurd. Because humanism is based on freedom of choice, it offers the only valid ethic of the present time. And because humanism believes in intention and freedom, it distinguishes between error and bad faith, between one who is mistaken and one who is a traitor.

IV. From Naive Humanism to Conscious Humanism

It is at the base of society, in the places where people work and where they live, that humanism must convert what are now only simple isolated protests into a conscious force oriented toward transforming the economic structures.

The struggles of spirited activists in labor unions and progressive political parties will become more coherent as they transform the leadership of these entities, giving their organisations a new orientation that, above short-range grievances, gives the highest priority to the basic proposals advocated by humanism.

Vast numbers of students and teachers, already sensitive to injustice, are becoming conscious of their will to change as the general crisis touches them. And certainly, members of the press in contact with so much daily tragedy are today in favourable positions to act in a humanist direction, as are those intellectuals whose creations are at odds with the standards promoted by this inhuman system.

In the face of so much human suffering, many positions and organisations today encourage people to unselfishly help the dispossessed and those who suffer discrimination. Associations, volunteer groups, and large numbers of individuals are on occasion moved to make positive contributions. Without doubt, one of their contributions is to generate denunciations of these wrongs. However, such groups do not focus their actions on transforming the underlying structures that give rise to the problems. Their approaches are more closely related to humanitarianism than to conscious humanism, although among these efforts are many conscientious protests and actions that can be extended and deepened.

V. The Anti-Humanist Camp

As the people continue to be suffocated by the forces of big capital, incoherent proposals arise that gain strength by exploiting people's discontent, focusing it on various scapegoats. At the root of all such neo-fascism is a profound negation of human values. Similarly, there are certain deviant environmental currents that view nature as more important than human beings. No longer do they preach that an environmental catastrophe is a disaster because it endangers humanity—instead to them the only problem is that human beings have damaged nature.

According to certain of these theories, the human being is somehow contaminated, and thus contaminates nature. It would have been better, they contend, had medicine never succeeded in its fight against disease or in prolonging human life. "Earth first!" some cry hysterically, recalling Nazi slogans. It is but a short step from this position to begin discriminating against cultures seen to contaminate or against "impure" foreigners. These currents of thought may be considered anti-humanist because at bottom they hold the human being in contempt, and in keeping with the nihilistic and suicidal tendencies so fashionable today, their mentors reflect this selfhatred.

There is, however, a significant segment of society made up of perceptive people who consider themselves environmentalists because they understand the gravity of the abuses that environmentalism exposes and condemns. And if this environmentalism attains the humanist character that corresponds, it will direct the struggle against those who are actually generating the catastrophes—big capital and its chain of destructive industries and businesses, so closely intertwined

with the military-industrial complex.

Before worrying about seals, they will concern themselves with overcoming hunger, overcrowding, infant mortality, disease, and the lack of even minimal standards of housing and sanitation in many parts of the world. They will focus on the unemployment, exploitation, racism, discrimination, and intolerance in a world that is so technologically advanced, yet still generates serious environmental imbalances in the name of ever more irrational growth.

One need not look far to see how the right wing functions as a political instrument of anti-humanism. Dishonesty and bad faith reach such extremes that some exponents periodically present themselves as representatives of “humanism”. Take, for example, those cunning clerics who claim to theorize on the basis of a ridiculous “theocentric humanism”. These people, who invented religious wars and inquisitions, who put to death the very founders of western humanism, are now attempting to appropriate the virtues of their victims. They have recently gone so far as to “forgive the errors” of those historical humanists, and so shameless is their semantic banditry that these representatives of anti-humanism even try to cloak themselves with the term “humanist”.

It would of course be impossible to list the full range of resources, tools, instruments, forms, and expressions that anti-humanism has at its disposal. But having shed light on some of their more deceptive practices should help unsuspecting humanists and those newly realizing they are humanists as they re-think their ideas and the significance of their social practice.

VI. Humanist Action Fronts

With the intention of becoming a broad-based social movement, the vital force of humanism is organising action fronts in the workplace, neighbourhoods, unions, and among social action, political, environmental, and cultural organisations. Such collective action makes it possible for varied progressive forces, groups, and individuals to have greater presence and influence, without losing their own identities or special characteristics. The objective of this movement is to promote a union of forces increasingly able to influence broad strata of the population, orienting the current social transformation.

Humanists are neither naive nor enamored of declarations that belong to more romantic eras, and in this sense they do not view their proposals as the most advanced expression of social consciousness or think of their organisation in an unquestioning way. Nor do they claim to represent the majority. Humanists simply act according to their best judgment, focusing on the changes they believe are most suitable and possible for these times in which they happen to live.

This Document of the Humanist Movement gives greater definition of certain aspects of contemporary humanism, and in the next letter we will go on to consider other matters.

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ANNEX II

Charter for a World Without Violence

Violence is a preventable disease ²⁹

No state or individual can be secure in an insecure world. The values of nonviolence in intention, thought, and practice have grown from an option to a necessity. These values are expressed in their application between states, groups and individuals.

We are convinced that adherence to the values of nonviolence will usher in a more peaceful, civilized world order in which more effective and fair governance, respectful of human dignity and the sanctity of life itself, may become a reality.

Our cultures, our histories, and our individual lives are interconnected and our actions are interdependent. Especially today as never before, we believe, a truth lies before us: our destiny is a common destiny. That destiny will be defined by our intentions, decisions and actions today.

We are further convinced that creating a culture of peace and nonviolence, while a difficult and long process, is both necessary and noble. Affirmation of the values contained in this Charter is a vital step to ensuring the survival and development of humanity and the achievement of a world without violence.

We, Nobel Peace Laureates and Laureate Organisations;

Reaffirming our commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

Moved by concern for the need to end the spread of violence at all levels of society and especially the threats posed on a global scale that jeopardize the very existence of humankind;

Reaffirming that freedom of thought and expression is at the root of democracy and creativity;

Recognizing that violence manifests in many ways, such as armed conflict, military occupation, poverty, economic exploitation, environmental destruction, corruption and prejudice based on race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation;

Realizing that the glorification of violence as expressed through commercial entertainment can contribute to the acceptance of violence as a normal and acceptable condition;

In the knowledge that those most harmed by violence are the weakest and vulnerable;

Remembering that peace is not only the absence of violence but that it is the presence of justice and the well-being of people;

Realizing that the failure of States to sufficiently accommodate ethnic, cultural and religious diversity is at the root of much of the violence in the world;

Recognizing the urgent need to develop an alternative approach to collective security based on a system in which no

country, or group of countries, relies on nuclear weapons for its security;

Being aware that the world is in need of effective global mechanisms and approaches for nonviolent conflict prevention and resolution, and that they are most successful when applied at the earliest possible moment;

Affirming that persons invested with power carry the greatest responsibility to end violence where it is occurring and to prevent violence whenever possible;

Asserting that the values of nonviolence must triumph at all levels of society as well as in relations between States and peoples;

Beseech the global community to advance the following principles:

First: In an interdependent world, the prevention and cessation of armed conflict between and within States can require the collective action of the international community. The security of individual states can best be achieved by advancing global human security. This requires strengthening the implementation capacity of the UN system as well as regional cooperative organisations.

Second: To achieve a world without violence, States must abide by the rule of law and honor their legal commitments at all times.

Third: It is essential to move without further delay towards the universal and verifiable elimination of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. States possessing such weapons must take concrete steps towards disarmament, and a security system that does not rely on nuclear deterrence. At the same time, States must sustain their efforts to consolidate

the nuclear non-proliferation regime, by taking such measures as strengthening multilateral verification, protecting nuclear material and advancing disarmament.

Fourth: To help eliminate violence in society, the production and sale of small arms and light weapons must be reduced and strictly controlled at international, regional, state and local levels. In addition there should be full and universal enforcement of International disarmament agreements, such as the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty, and support for new efforts aimed at the eradication of the impact of victim-activated and indiscriminate weapons, such as cluster munitions. A comprehensive and effective Arms Trade Treaty needs to be enacted.

Fifth: Terrorism can never be justified because violence begets violence and because no acts of terror against the civilian population of any country can be carried out in the name of any cause. The struggle against terrorism cannot, however, justify violation of human rights, international humanitarian law, civilized norms, and democracy.

Sixth: Ending domestic and family violence requires unconditional respect for the equality, freedom, dignity, and rights of women, men and children by all individuals, institutions of the state, religion and civil society. Such protections must be embodied in laws and conventions at local and international levels.

Seventh: Every individual and state shares responsibility to prevent violence against children and youth, our common future and most precious gift. All have a right to quality education, effective primary health care, personal safety, social protection, full participation in society and an enabling environment that reinforces nonviolence as a way of life. Peace education, promoting nonviolence and emphasizing the innate

human quality of compassion, must be an essential part of the curriculum of educational institutions at all levels.

Eighth: Preventing conflicts arising from the depletion of natural resources, in particular sources of energy and water, requires States to affirmatively and, through creation of legal mechanisms and standards, provide for the protection of the environment and to encourage people to adjust their consumption on the basis of resource availability and real human needs.

Ninth: We beseech the UN and its member states to promote appreciation of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. The golden rule of a nonviolent world: Treat others as you wish to be treated.

Tenth: The principal political tools for bringing into being a nonviolent world are functioning democratic institutions and dialogue based on dignity, knowledge, and compromise, conducted on the basis of balance between the interests of the parties involved, and, when appropriate, including concerns relating to the entirety of humanity and the natural environment.

Eleventh: All states, institutions and individuals must support efforts to address the inequalities in the distribution of economic resources, and resolve gross inequities which create a fertile ground for violence. The imbalance in living conditions inevitably leads to lack of opportunity and, in many cases, loss of hope.

Twelfth: Civil society, including human rights defenders, peace and environmental activists must be recognized and protected as essential to building a nonviolent world as all governments must serve the needs of their people, not the reverse. Conditions should be created to enable and encourage civil society participation, especially that of women, in political processes at the global , regional, national and local levels.

Thirteenth: In implementing the principles of this Charter we call upon all to work together towards a just, killing-free world in which everyone has the right not to be killed and responsibility not to kill others.

To address all forms of violence we encourage scientific research in the fields of human interaction and dialogue, and we invite participation from the academic, scientific and religious communities to aid us in the transition to nonviolent, and non-killing societies.

ANNEX III

Conference

“The Meaning of Peace and Nonviolence in the World Today”, The World March for Peace and Nonviolence.

Silo, Berlín, November 11, 2009

A march is crossing the world. The March for Peace and Nonviolence.

It is as the founder of Universalist Humanism and the inspiration behind the World March that I would like to speak briefly to the forum. The March has galvanized numerous initiatives and activities, such as the symbolic journey of a team of enthusiasts who, having begun on October 2nd in Wellington, New Zealand, are traveling for three months through a number of countries until the conclusion on January 2nd, 2010 at the foot of Mount Aconcagua in Punta de Vacas, midway between Argentina and Chile.

The March was launched at the Symposium of the World Center of Humanist Studies, at the Park of Study and Reflection in Punta de Vacas on the 15th of November 2008, one year ago, with the clear intention of creating awareness of the dangerous global situation in which we are living, which is marked by, an increased probability of nuclear conflict, by the arms race, and by violent territorial military occupations.

This proposed social mobilization is galvanized by the Humanist Movement and its organisations. In only a few months, the World March has the support of thousands of people, groups supporting pacifism and nonviolence, various institutions working for human rights, and important figures who are sensitive to the urgencies of the moment, from the worlds of science, culture, and politics. It has also inspired an enormous number of initiatives in over 100 countries, forming a rapidly growing phenomenon of cultural diversity. In this vein I must report that the initial core team has been joined by another that is travelling through various countries of the Middle East and a third that is doing the same in Central America...

We know very well that in all latitudes the current situation is critical and characterized by poverty across vast regions, by the clash of cultures, and by the violence and discrimination that contaminates daily life for large segments of the population. Today there are armed conflicts in numerous points, and simultaneously a profound crisis in the international financial system. On top of all this is the growing nuclear threat, which is certainly the greatest emergency of our time. It's an extremely complex situation. To the irresponsible interests of nuclear powers, and the madness of violent groups with possible access to compact nuclear weapons, we must also add the risk of an accident that could unleash a devastating conflict.

All of that is not the sum of individual crises, but rather a picture that reveals the global failure of a system whose method of action is violence and whose central value is money.

To avoid the nuclear catastrophe that appears to threaten the world in the more or less immediate future, we must work, starting today, to surpass social and personal violence while we call for:

- Global nuclear disarmament.
- The immediate withdrawal of invading troops from occupied territories.
- The progressive and proportional reduction of weapons of mass destruction.
- The signing of nonaggression treaties between countries, and
- The renunciation by governments of the use of war as a means to resolve conflicts.

The most urgent task is to create awareness of Peace and disarmament. But it is also necessary to awaken a consciousness of Active Nonviolence, which allows us to reject not only physical violence, but all forms of economic, racial, psychological, and gender violence. Of course, we hope that this new sensibility can take root in and inspire social structures, opening a path to the future Universal Human Nation.

The World March calls on all people to join forces and to take into their own hands the responsibility to change our world, overcoming personal violence and supporting the growth of this positive influence in their immediate environment.

During this time many cities and towns are holding marches, festivals, forums, conferences, and other events to raise

awareness of the urgent need for Peace and Nonviolence. And throughout the world the campaigns of endorsement of the March are spreading this signal beyond what had been imagined until now.

For the first time in history an event of this magnitude has been put in motion by the participants themselves. The true strength of this impulse is born in the simple act of one who, out of conscience, joins a dignified cause and shares it with others.

During the March and until January of 2010 when the Humanist Movement will be restructured, Rafael de la Rubia, representative of the humanist organisation World Without Wars, and the spokespersons for each continent – Michel Ussene for Africa, Sudhir Gandotra for Asia, Giorgio Schultze for Europe, Tomas Hirsch for Latin America, and Chris Wells for North America – have taken on the task of receiving from the Nobel Peace laureates at this Berlin Summit, the “Charter for a World Without Violence” with the commitment to disseminate it in all the countries through which the World March passes.

Precisely in this charter are embodied the principles to which people of good will in all latitudes can subscribe.

Without dwelling too long on this I would like to highlight the ninth principle of the Charter, which says: “We call on the United Nations and its member states to consider means and methods to promote a meaningful appreciation of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in the multi-ethnic national states. The principle moral for a nonviolent world is “Treat others as you want to be treated”.

This moral principle goes beyond all policies and all legalities to establish its preeminence in the human terrain, through the register of our collective recognition that surpasses all calculation and all speculation.

This principle, known since antiquity as the "Golden Rule" of coexistence, is one of the thirteen considered in this wonderful document, which must be widely disseminated.

In addition, we must not let pass some topics that will allow a greater understanding of our activities in the field of Nonviolence. It is evident that the negative preconceptions towards us were born and developed in South America during our sustained, nonviolent struggle against the military dictatorships there. It is clear that the discrimination we suffer in various fields stems from the systematic disinformation and defamation to which we were subject for decades in our home countries, including Argentina and Chile. The dictatorships and their organs of "disinformation" were spinning their web since the times when our activists were prohibited, imprisoned, deported, and killed. Even today, in different latitudes one can examine the persecution we suffer, not only at the hands of fascists but also at the hands of the "sanctimonious pundits" of some sectors. And it should be noted that as our activities have developed, many who recite the word Peace have thrown up their hands in horror, demanding our silence and even lashing out at any group or individual who mentions us publicly.

Even though these insults are a thing of the past, today they continue denigrating nonviolent action, arguing that beyond making declarations nothing more can be done in the face of the "real" powers that determine world situations. To illustrate, let's look at some cases.

The first concerns the campaigns against mandatory military service carried out a few years ago by Humanists in Argentina.

At that time some maintained that it was impossible to change the law that made military service obligatory. Especially after one and a half million signatures, gathered during a year

of activity, were rejected without justification. Then, the Executive Power launched a publicity campaign about how misguided this project was, which would "leave the nation defenseless against possible aggression from neighboring countries". However, public opinion had been so sensitized that this debate (without mentioning the authors of this project) came to light and the media was its echo. Finally, there came a moment when the President of the Republic signed a "decree annulling compulsory military service", replacing it with voluntary military service. At the time it was said he had taken this measure because a soldier had died in a barracks due to maltreatment. OK so that's how things are. But it became clear that the long campaign and mobilization of the humanists was not in vain because this arbitrary law was laid to rest.

The other, more recent, case occurred in the Czech Republic.

The so-called "Missile Defense Shield" had been planned since 2002 without the knowledge of the people of the Czech Republic or the European Union. In June of 2006, the Humanist Movement started to promote an alliance of grassroots social and political organisations, which made it clear that 70% of the population was against the missiles. And at the same time that they demanded a referendum, they also asked that the project be suspended given its dangers. Two humanists began a hunger strike, and the protests began to receive the support of nonviolent peace organisations. This kind of protest was maintained for over a year, engaging artists, scholars, scientists, and mayors. Finally, the protest spread to the European Parliament. In March 2009 the government fell, through a confluence of several factors, but popular protests and parliamentary opposition delayed ratification of the treaty between the Czech Republic and the USA. In September 2009, Obama gave up the star wars shield in the Czech Republic and Poland.

Let us now consider two subjects whose social impact is not yet understood.

As we all know, the themes of ecology and environmental protection have taken root in our societies. While some governments and certain stakeholders deny the dangers of neglecting the ecosystem, they are nonetheless being obliged to take progressive steps because of the pressure of a population increasingly concerned about the deterioration of our common home. Even our children are becoming more aware each day of the dangers of the situation. Through the media, and even in the humblest schools, attention is paid to issues of preventing environmental deterioration, and no one can escape these concerns.

But we are considerably behind this when it comes to concern over the issue of violence. What I mean is that the defense of human life and the most basic human rights have not yet taken root at a global and general level. It seems we are still apologists for violence when it comes to arguing that it is for defense, or even "preventive defense", against possible aggression. And even massive destruction of defenseless populations doesn't seem to horrify us. Only when violence touches us in our civic life through violent crimes do we become alarmed, but we still do not stop glorifying the bad examples that poison our society and children, starting in earliest infancy.

It is clear that neither the idea nor the sensibility that would provoke a profound repudiation and moral disgust that would move us away from the horrors of violence in its various forms have yet to take hold.

For our part, we will make every effort to install in the social environment the validity of the themes of Peace and Nonviolence, and it is clear that the time will come when both

individual and mass reactions will be produced. That will be the moment of a radical change in our world.

To conclude my brief remarks I wish to again consider the "Charter for a World Without Violence", proposed by the Nobel Peace Laureates and Nobel Peace Organisations, in order to promote their proposals during the World March for Peace and Nonviolence. We are honored to share its principles in concrete actions of social activity that will surely lead us towards this new world we have mentioned.

Nothing more, thank you very much.

NOTES

¹ Silo, Mario Rodríguez, is the spiritual guide who is arising in these convoluted, violent and hopeless times. His message is simple and at the same time profound. His work transcends all frontiers and his followers are found in the most diverse cultures on all the continents.

Silo's public life began in 1969 with two important events: a talk entitled **The Healing of Suffering**, addressed to a handful of people on May 4th at a small Andean town called Punta de Vacas located near the border between Argentina and Chile. There Silo also wrote **The Inner Look**, which was published in 1972. The talk and the book form the cornerstone of Silo's teaching. In the talk he proposes the root of suffering – *"...Only inner faith and inner meditation can end the violence in you, in others, and in the world around you..."* – while in **The Inner Look** he elaborates on the true meaning of life – *"Here it tells how the non-meaning of life can be converted into meaning and fulfillment. Here are joy, love of the body, of nature, of humanity, and of the spirit. Here sacrifices, feelings of guilt, and threats from the beyond are rejected. Here the worldly is not opposed to the eternal. Here it tells of the inner revelation at which all arrive who carefully meditate in humble search"*.

Silo has given lectures and conferences, and has participated in massive gatherings where he has expressed his point of view and his teachings to hundreds of thousands of people, from Mexico to Mumbai, from Paris to Moscow, from Manila to Copenhagen, in Sri Lanka and Napoli, in New York and Quito. Everywhere people are adhering to his proposal of hope, of the

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possibility of change, and of the certainty that the human being can become truly human, leaving behind our prehistory of suffering, nihilism and violence. *"...But in spite of everything...in spite of everything...in spite of these unfortunate constraints, something soft as a far off sound, something light as a dawn breeze, something that begins gently is opening its way in the interior of the human being..."*

In addition, Silo has inspired a new current called Universal Humanism, a line of thought that is both plural and convergent, confronting discrimination, fanaticism, exploitation and violence.

In 2002 **Silo's Message** was born and organised around a book by the same title, which is divided into three parts: **The Book**, which is The Inner Look; **The Experience**, consisting of eight ceremonies capable of producing spiritual inspiration and positive changes in daily life; and **The Path**, containing reflections and suggestions on personal, interpersonal and social life. In a short time the followers of this spiritual guide - the "Sage of the Andes", as he has been called - have developed communities that are spreading Silo's Message to all corners of the globe.

2 Silo, Complete Works Vol. 1 and 2, Ed. Plaza y Valdez, 2004-6

3 Convergence of Cultures: an organisation that works toward the opening of dialogue among ethnicities and cultures.

Humanist Party: internacional party of humanist base groups;

World Without Wars and Violence: organisation dedicated to disarmament and pacifism;

World Center for Humanist Studies: organisation applied to the study and deepening of diverse themes with the perspective of Universalist Humanism.

4 Universalist Humanism (extracted from Dictionary of New Humanism, Silo, Magenta Ediciones, 1996).

Also called *New Humanism* (*). Characterized by an emphasis on the *humanist attitude*. The humanist attitude is not a philosophy but a point of view, a sensibility and a way of living in relationship with other human beings.

u.h. maintains that in all cultures, in their most *creative moment*, the humanist attitude tings the social environment. In such periods, discrimination, wars and violence in general are repudiated. Freedom of ideas and beliefs is fomented, which in turn provides incentive for research and creativity in science, art and other social expressions. **u.h.** proposes a dialogue between cultures that is neither abstract nor institutional, but rather an agreement on fundamental points and a mutual and concrete collaboration between representatives of different cultures based on their respective and symmetrical humanist “moments” or eras (*Humanist moment). The general ideas of **u.h.** are formulated in the “Document of the Humanist Movement” (*Humanist Document).

⁵ Silo, Complete Works Vol. I, P. 580, Ed. Plaza y Valdez, 2004.

⁶ Luis A. Ammann, Self-Liberation, Ed. Altamira, 2004.

⁷ Silo, Complete Works Vol. I, Ed. Plaza y Valdez, 2004.

⁸ The exposition of the doctrine supports insights of different depths. Thus, this gives a different level to this commentary with respect to what is discussed in the Formative Themes section (Chapter II). In general, we can say the following: 1) Human beings tend to move towards achieving happiness, 2) Pain and suffering oppose that happiness; 3) Pain is physical and regresses through the advancement of society and science, while suffering is mental and it recedes depending on the meaning of life that one has; 4) One suffers through living in contradictory situations, but also through memory and from imagines of the future. These forms are called the "three pathways of suffering".; 5) There may be temporary "meanings" of life that appear at different stages of life, but all are subject to this final truth: "Life has no meaning if everything ends in death".; 6) The true meaning of life comes with the recognition that everything does not end with death. This recognition allows us to break the three pathways of suffering, giving unity and direction to the human being. Life suffers a total conversion and everyday problems become surmountable problems along the path of learning and perfecting.; 7)

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The recognition that not everything ends with death, or equivalently of transcendence beyond death, supports the following positions: a) undeniable evidence (albeit improvable, non-transferable to others), provided by experience, b) simple belief through education or the environment, like an undeniable fact of reality, c) the desire to have the experience or belief; d) intellectual suspicion of the possibility of beyond-life without any experience, without belief and without the desire to possess. 8) These four positions, and a fifth that denies any possibility of transcendence, are called "the five states meaning of life". Each state supports, in turn, varying degrees of depth or definition.

In sum: The doctrine of The Community explains that a true meaning in life is related to the affirmation of transcendence beyond death; that the discovery of this meaning transforms life influencing the three pathways of suffering and that every person can arrive to perfect this meaning no matter what the state or grade one finds oneself with respect to this.

9 The guided experience, besides being a novel tool for internal work, erupts as a completely new literary style (at least according to our loyal information). In effect, we recognize stories, tales, novels and descriptions of all kinds, written in first person, but that "first person" is not the reader, but the author. In our case, it is quite the reverse. Moreover, in the formulation of the core problem, representing the "knot" of literature, the description is only a framing, with the practitioner filling the stage with his or her own content. This originality allows a group of people to undergo the same experience, yet each of the participants builds his or her own "knot", which would destroy any argument in literary terms. Finally, in all productions, the reader or viewer (in the case of theater, film or television) can more or less fully identify with the characters but recognize at the time a posteriori differences between these characters that are included in production and the observer, who, of course, is "outside" of the work and is none other than himself. However, in the guided experience the character is the same observer, agent and patient of actions and emotions, forming a indissoluble structure. We could go even further with the difference, noting that the literary "knot" changes not only for different practitioners but for the same person over time as the proposed resistance matures, trying to modify is the nucleus of the problem.

Based on the foregoing, the guided experience represents not only an

interesting technique of dynamic meditation on oneself, but a literary genre unexplored to the present moment.

10 See “Manual of Personal Formation for the Members of the Humanist Movement”.

11 Founding documents of the “Humanist International”, Florence, 07/01/1989.

12 See “IV. From Naive Humanism to Conscious Humanism”. Document of the Humanist Movement. Sixth Letter to My Friends. Silo – Complete Works-Vol.1. Ed. Plaza y Valdez.

13 Silo – Complete Works-Vol.1. Letters to My Friends, Letter 3, Ed. Plaza y Valdez.

14 In each guided experience there is an ambientation that is more or less extended according to the “climate” that is necessary to achieve the correct placement of the nucleus of the problem. In the ambient resistances will appear. Nevertheless, they are not those taken into account, but rather it only refers to the nuclei mentioned in the experience. In accordance with this, one could ask, Why don’t the nuclei appear directly, if this is the crux of the work? It could happen but this risks not profundicizing at the level of active semi-sleep, with the emergent possibility of greater resistances of rationalization, covering up, or forgetting. For a better understanding of this point, consult “indicators” and “indicators of resistance” in Lesson 5, of the Chapter on Operative in the book of Self Liberation.

Guided Experiences notes

15 *The Child*. The painting through which the reader enters the amusement park is inspired by the first card of the Tarot. This card bears the image of the Magician, who has always been associated with the inversion of reality,

sleight of hand, and trickery. He is related to the prestidigitator, and opens a vein of irrationality that allows the reader to enter that dimension of wonder so helpful in awakening childhood memories.

16 *An Enemy*. The “paralysis” that dominates a good part of this tale enables the reader to recreate situations in which certain emotions lose their previous intensity as a result of slowing down the movement of the corresponding image. In this way a climate of reconciliation can be generated, and we note that the “forgiver” ends up in a better situation than the “offender”, who previously had the initiative.

17 *My Greatest Mistake*. The scene with firemen as agents of justice and executioners is inspired by Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*. In the present narrative, this image is used as a contrast to the sentence of dying of thirst in the desert. A similar contrast highlights the absurdity of the trial, when the accused, instead of speaking in self-defense to “discharge” the supposed guilt, takes a drink, “charging” his or her mouth with a swallow of water. The court clerk’s concluding remark, “What I have spoken, I have spoken!” echoes the words of Pilate, recalling that other surrealistic trial. The Elders who personify the hours are inspired by D. H. Lawrence’s *Apocalypse* and the *Writings on Revelation*. The glasses that invert things are well-known in experimental psychology and have been cited by, among others, Merleau-Ponty in *The Structure of Behaviour*.

18 *My Ideal*. The image of the giant is inspired by Rabelais’s *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. The children’s song recalls the festivals of the Basque people and the songs that accompany their parades of floats and giant effigies with oversized heads.

The holographic image is reminiscent of the projections in Arthur C. Clarke’s *Childhood’s End*.

The theme of the search for one’s “ideal” and the injunction, “Do not look behind you”, allude to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in Hades.

19 *Resentment*. The plot is set in a classical context, although the initial scenes of the city recall Venice or perhaps Amsterdam.

The recital by the first chorus is an adaptation of the Orphic Hymn to Thanatos or Death, which reads as follows:

TO THANATOS

Hear me you who steer the course of all mortals
and give holy time to all ahead of whom you lie.
Your sleep tears the soul free from the body's hold
when you undo nature's tenacious bonds,
bringing long and eternal slumber to the living.
Common to all, you are unjust to some
when you bring a swift end to youthful life at its peak.
In you alone is the verdict common to all executed,
for to prayers and entreaties you alone are deaf.
But, O blessed one, with sacrifices and pious vows
I beg you to grant long life,
that old age might be a noble prize among men.

The recital by the second chorus is based on the Orphic Hymn to Mne-mosyne, which reads:

TO MNEMOSYNE

I call upon queen Mnemosyne, Zeus' consort,
who gave birth to the holy, sacred and clear-voiced Muses.
Evil oblivion that harms the mind is alien to her
who gives coherence to the mind and soul of mortals.
She increases men's ability and power to think,
and, sweet and vigilant, she reminds us of all
the thoughts that we always store in our breasts,
never straying, and ever rousing the mind to action.
But, O blessed goddess, for the initiates stir the memory
of the sacred rite, and ward off oblivion from them.

The specter in this guided experience concludes its dialogue by saying, "I must be gone, for the firefly's fading glow shows that dawn is near. Farewell,

farewell. Remember me!". This is inspired by Act I, Scene v of Hamlet, in which the ghost of Hamlet's father reveals to the Prince the identity of the person who murdered him by means of poison.

The boat in this narrative, which is also a hearse, recalls the root of the word carnival, *carrus navalis* (the author believes this etymology to be more accurate than what is generally reported). To this day the black carriages or vehicles used as hearses are often covered with flowers and adorned with large oysters or shells, recalling the final voyage across the water in Greek mythology. The floral displays and the waters of the Roman festival of Lupercalia share this same origin. In the present tale, we find disguises and transformations through which, by the conclusion of the story, the somber Charon has become the young driver of the speedboat returning from the island of the dead.

This narrative embodies a strikingly rich and complex play of images in which each element deserves individual study: The immobile sea, the boat suspended above the water, the burning cloak, the choruses of women and cypresses (which evoke an atmosphere of Greek islands and cemeteries), and so on.

20 *The Protector of Life*. The figure of the Protector of Life is inspired by the twenty-first card of the Tarot. The image in the Tarot is closer to the figure of this guided experience than are the images of the first compilation of Court de Gebelin, the Tarot of the Bohemians, or the pseudo Egyptian Tarot.

Regarding Anima Mundis, known as "The World" in the Tarot, there is an illuminating engraving in the work by Robert Fludd, *Utriusque Cosmi Maioris Scilicet et Minoris, Metaphysica, Physica atque Technica Historia*, first published in 1617. Jung also refers to this archetype in his *Psychology of the Unconscious: A Study of the Transformations and Symbolisms of the Libido*.

Nor have these virgins of the grottos been overlooked by the religions. In this sense the Protector of Life is a virgin of the grottos, with elements from Greek paganism, such as her crown of flowers and the fawn that licks her hand, bringing to mind Artemis or her Roman counterpart Diana. One need only exchange her crown of flowers for one of stars, or place her feet atop a half moon to be in the presence of a virgin of the grottos, but now as part of the heritage of the new religions that displaced paganism.

The plot is set in a tropical locale instead of the classical setting one might expect for a virgin of the grottos, accentuating the rather singular circumstances of this story. The qualities of the water that the protagonist drinks recall the life-giving waters of the fountain of youth. All of these elements move toward the same end—encouraging a reconciliation with one's own body.

21 *The Rescue.* The overall eeriness of the plot is achieved through the ambiguity of time (“I’m unsure whether the day is just beginning or night is falling”); the contrast of place (“I see that the robot stands at the dividing line between two distinct areas—the one I’m coming from, barren and dying, and the one ahead, full of vegetation and life”); the inability to communicate with other people and the Babel-like confusion of tongues (“I ask my companion what is happening. Looking at me furtively, he answers in a strange language, ‘Rex voluntas’”); and finally by leaving the protagonist at the mercy of uncontrollable forces (heat, earthquakes, strange astronomical phenomena, polluted water, a climate of war, an armed giant robot, and so on).

Owing to these devices, a person emerging from this chaotic space-time is able to reflect carefully upon less catastrophic aspects of his or her own life, and thus formulate solid proposals for the future.

The four threatening clouds have as a co-present reference the apocalypse of the Revelation of St. John the Divine 6:2—6:9: “And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer. And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword. And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine. And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a

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pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. . . .”

22 False Hopes. This guided experience opens with elements from Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*. Inscribed on the lintel over the famous portal, Dante and Virgil read:

*Through me you enter the woeful city,
Through me you enter eternal grief,
Through me you enter among the lost
Justice moved my high maker:
The Divine Power made me,
The Supreme Wisdom, and the Primal Love.
Before me nothing was created
If not eternal, and eternal I endure.
Abandon every hope, you who enter.*

23 Repetitions. The third pathway breaks the repetition, this is inspired by the “*Andromechie*” of Euripides. We remember “...and of the closed pathways, god always finds an exit”.

24 The Voyage . The rapid motion of the bubble recalls the journey so splendidly recounted by Olaf Stapledon in *Star Maker*.

We also find a reference to the Doppler Effect, in which the color of the stars changes with increasing velocity: “I feel our velocity increasing, and the clear white light of the stars changes color until all the stars have disappeared in total darkness”.

Here we encounter a curious consideration: “As if propelled by a giant slingshot, we shoot straight upward into the sky. I think we’re heading toward the star Beta Hydridis or perhaps the galaxy NGC 3621”. We clearly understand in this context that the bubble ascends straight upward. Why, then, are these cosmic directions noted? Since the sun is setting at the moment being described (“Toward the abyss it is already night. Toward the plain the last rays of the sun escape in multiple hues”), this is sufficient to tell us the local time

at which the event takes place. This book was written in mid-1980 (that is, around June 30), at longitude 69° west and latitude 33° south; for this date and location, the local time at sunset was 7:00 p.m. (four hours behind Greenwich Mean Time). At sunset, at elevation 90° (the point directly over the bubble toward which it is heading), we would see a sky between the southern constellations Crux and Corvus and near Antlia in which several celestial bodies could easily be discerned. Among these, the most outstanding would be the star Beta Hydris and the galaxy NGC 3621. However the author does not specify which of these celestial bodies the bubble is heading toward, although Beta Hydris is at azimuth $125^\circ 28'$ west, elevation $87^\circ 35'$, right ascension 11h 52m 0s, and declination $-34^\circ 23'$, while NGC 3621 is at $92^\circ 08'$ west, elevation $80^\circ 43'$, 11h 17m 3s, and $-32^\circ 52'$. To be precise, the direction of the bubble would actually be closer to Beta Hydris (number 103.192 in the Draper catalog, magnitude 4.3, spectral class B9, variable, 326 light years distant), whereas NGC 3621 (a spiral galaxy some 16 million light years away) would be rather more to one side. Perhaps the author's hesitation in deciding on Beta Hydris lay in the fact that the galaxy NGC 3621 is the more beautiful celestial body, so why not choose it as a destination instead? Among all the oddities that appear in these guided experiences, such astronomical license should not be too ill-received.

Regarding the body in motion, the guided experience reads as follows: "I walk onward until I come to a flat area. In the center I see a large object, alive with movement, and impossible to capture with my eye as it flows endlessly into itself; regardless of which direction I look on its surface my gaze always ends up immersed, drawn deep into the object's interior. Feeling dizzy, I look away". Clearly this description alludes to those topological constructions of modern geometry that are represented or modeled as "enveloping" objects that flow into themselves. By putting this kind of object into motion, the author produces a disconcerting effect. Remembering Escher's woodcut engraving of a Möbius strip helps us approach the central idea: Escher's work, though static, gives the sensation of paradoxical surface and perception. Hofstadter, in *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*, explains: "Implicit in the concept of Strange Loops is the concept of infinity, since what else is a loop but a way of representing an endless process in a finite way? And infinity plays a large role in many of Escher's drawings.

Copies of one single theme often fit into each other, forming visual analogues to the canons of Bach". According to this, the object that appears in this guided experience is an endless loop "flowing into itself".

25 *The Festival.* In *Heaven and Hell*, Huxley remarked: "For most of us most of the time, the world of everyday experience seems rather dim and drab. But for a few people often, and for a fair number occasionally, some of the brightness of visionary experience spills over, as it were, into common seeing, and the everyday universe is transfigured".

What follows is the point of view of a psychologist who delved deeply into this guided experience, meditating on it while another person read it aloud: "I saw that a state of 'heightened perception' could be induced without resorting to drugs or other more or less dissociative procedures like sleep deprivation, fasting or very low-calorie diets, hyperventilation, sensory deprivation in isolation tanks where you're immersed in darkness and immobility, experimentally or religiously induced trances, and so forth. To me this represents a great advance, both because of how innocuous it is and because of the possibilities it offers the researcher investigating special states of consciousness. "Furthermore, why couldn't we make use of the guided experiences as therapeutic tools in professional practice? Although it has been explained to me that they were not conceived with this intention, I would hope that this possibility is not overlooked. Moreover, in the field of social psychology, perhaps an important number of people who now resort to drugs or alcohol as a panacea could find guidance through making use of the guided experiences. "These are my professional concerns. As for me personally, perhaps because this guided experience had such a strong impact on me, this material has opened a new area of study about myself that wouldn't have occurred to me only a few hours ago".

26 *The Costumes.* Numerous elements in this guided experience bring to mind Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. We recall the expansions and contractions of this passage: "Well, I'll eat it", said Alice, "and if it makes me grow larger, I can reach the key; and if it makes me grow smaller, I can creep under the door; so either way I'll get into the garden, and I don't care which happens!". She ate a little

bit, and said anxiously to herself, “Which way? Which way?”, holding her hand on top of her head to feel which way it was growing. And we note the transformations of space in this passage: “Let’s pretend the glass has got all soft like gauze, so that we can get through. Why, it’s turning into a sort of mist now, I declare! It’ll be easy enough to get through”. Similarly, in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, we encounter images transformed through reflection in a watery form of the magical mirrors that occur so frequently in universal mythology. As for humans transforming into animals, an unbroken line connects the most ancient traditions with Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*. These themes, then, are widely known, yet this guided experience still proves to be highly original. It would seem, as Plato reminds us in the *Phaedrus*, that the best writings serve in reality to awaken the memory of that which we already know.

27 The Clouds. This story bears the name of Aristophanes’ comedy, first performed in 423 B.C. Throughout the guided experience, there is a lighthearted, playful background in homage to the spirit of the original Greek work. The voice heard at the beginning of this story incorporates into a single passage elements inspired by the genesis passages of three important works. The opening is inspired by the “Hymn of Creation” of the Rig Veda, which reads, “Neither nonbeing nor being was as yet, neither was airy space nor heavens beyond”. The next phrase, “and darkness was upon the face of the deep”, is a direct quotation from the first book of Moses (Genesis 1:2). The following sentence is reminiscent of the Chichicastenango manuscript of the *Popol Vuh*, the sacred Council Book of the Quiché Mayan people, which reads, “There is not yet one person, one animal, bird, fish, crab, tree, rock, hollow, canyon, meadow, forest”. With the next phrase, “There were neither galaxies nor atoms”, we reach the realm of present-day science journalism with its debates on the Big Bang theory. And finally, “nor were there department stores”, derives, according to a note by the author, from an explanation by a four-year-old girl. Here is the anecdote in question: “So tell me, Nancy, what was everything like before the world began?": “There was no mommy and daddy”, the little one replied, “and no department stores, either”.

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28 *The Miner.* The little man of the mine is a gnome, a character from the depths who appears widely throughout European tales and legends. In this guided experience, the little character is an allegory that corresponds to the transformation of physical intrabody sensations (visceral cenesthesia) into visual images in the reader's mind.

29 *Charter for a World Without Violence:* Charter for a World Without Violence: A document prepared by the Nobel Laureates for Peace in 2006 and delivered to the co-convener of the World March for Peace and Nonviolence for worldwide dissemination at the 10th World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates in Berlin, November 11, 2009.

