

## V. The Constant Influence of Manner of Use in Relation to Change

### PART I THE HUMAN ELEMENT

WE ALL know how difficult it is to change habit and to keep newly made resolutions which involve our reacting in a different way from that which is habitual to us. Many people will tell you that they have succeeded in doing so by exercising self-control, but as a friend once said to me: "I am coming to the conclusion that what most people call exercising self-control against a bad habit is merely a process of elimination," and I agree with him. My friend was thinking of all those cases of immoderate indulgence in drinking, smoking, etc., in which the persons concerned were forced to give up smoking and drinking entirely, because they found that if they drank and smoked at all they did it to excess.

An attitude of dependence upon instinct (nature) is revealed in the ordinary attitude towards self-control. If a person habitually manifests undesirable emotional or other reactions, such as outbursts of temper, irritability, lying, drunkenness, stealing, etc., it is assumed that, except in special circumstances, these reactions can be controlled by that person, and he is advised or urged to exercise control, or he may decide to do this independently. The same is true of the general attitude towards functional troubles, defects, and peculiarities.

Strange it is that this belief in control, as such, still exists, seeing that few people are intentionally uncontrolled, and that throughout man's experience in civilization the need and value of self-control has been advocated by all moral, educational, and religious teaching. Those who accepted the teaching have met with small success, however, and this must be evident to any unbiased observer of individual or mass reaction today.

The truth is that so far man has failed to understand fully what is required for changing habit if the change is to be a fundamental one, because he has not realized that the establishment of a particular habit in a person is associated in that person with a certain habitual manner

of using the self, and that because the organism works as an integrated whole, change of a particular habit in the fundamental sense is impossible as long as this habitual manner of use persists.

True, we have all heard of people who claim to have succeeded in “curing” habits by following precepts of some teaching method, just as others will claim that they have made changes in themselves by “willing” themselves to do, or not to do, on the trial-and-error plan.

Yet it is a demonstrable fact that control of the use of ourselves and control of emotional and other reactions is as closely associated as is control of manner of use and control of all that prevents interference with the raising of the standard of functioning. Therefore, if people beset with defects and bad habits try to make changes in themselves without first making that change in their use which raises the standard of their general functioning, the constant influence for ill associated with their wrong habitual manner of use remains, and any change claimed to have been made may justly be deemed merely a matter of transfer.

Understanding of this whole problem has been retarded by mistaking “cure for transfer” for permanent change. It is true that the activity, which up to a certain time has habitually manifested itself in one form of reaction, may in response to some new stimulus manifest itself in another form, and one which, when taken by itself, may be considered according to individual outlook to be a great improvement on the old reaction (habit). But unless our aim is merely that of suppressing one specific symptom, or of dropping some specific form of indulgence, without reference to the effect upon the organism *as a whole*, the value of the improvement brought about by any method of change must be judged entirely according to whether or not the standard of general functioning is being raised or lowered in the process, and in the latter case, whether by-products harmful to the general functioning have been brought about.

To change habitual reaction permanently without the accompaniment of harmful by-products it is necessary to change the manner of use of the self that is associated with it. This reconditions the reflex activity of which this manner of use is a manifestation, and means that for the old reaction associated with the old reflex activity, there is substituted a new reflex activity resulting in a new changed reaction, and a consequent disappearance of the old reaction.