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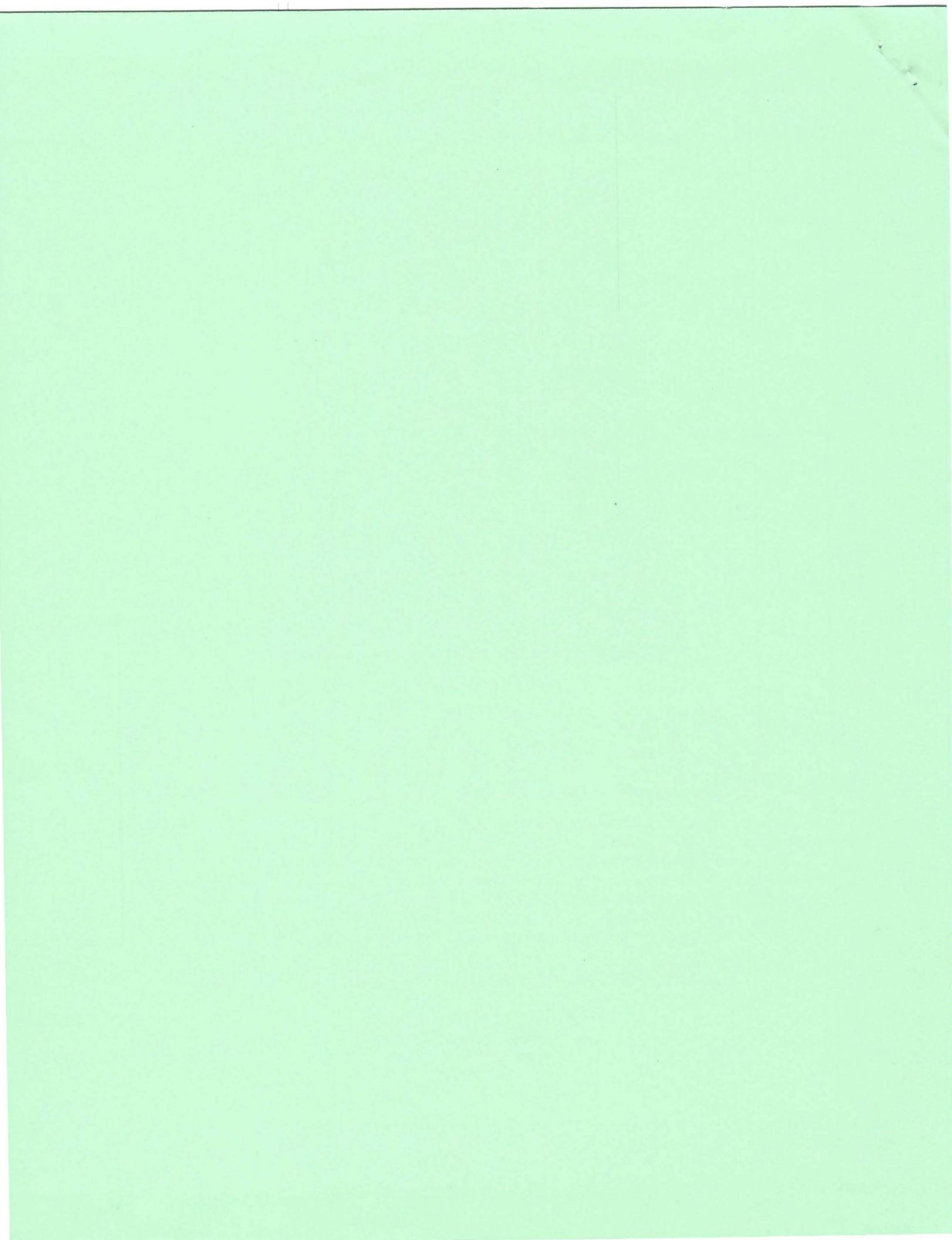
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# THE HEALTHY INFLUENCE OF A GENEROUS HEART

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### When We Occupy "The Seat of the Scornful"

### Overcoming a Critical Attitude Toward Life

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#### Affirmation

Beloved Perfector:

Good health is not merely a product of the right kind of food and regular exercise. These are important. So, also, is fresh air and sunshine. Yet one may have these in abundance, and not possess good health.

Physical and mental health is, in part, a product of our attitudes. What we think is no less influential than what we eat. Our conversation may contribute toward a peaceful mind, or to a tense body. Our thoughts may make us relaxed, or they may leave us limp with weariness.

In this Lesson, we will examine the effects upon our health of critical and destructive attitudes toward those about us. We will discover that there is a healthful influence in appreciation and friendliness. We will examine some of the inevitable harm to the personality that follows the tendency to criticize others in a destructive manner.

This study deals with a problem that confronts us every day. We are constantly tempted to be critical of the actions, the manners, and the motives of others. Some criticism is justified and necessary. It contributes to the growth and effectiveness of those we sincerely desire to help. But nagging is destructive. We have to continually battle with the tendency to find fault. It is unfortunate if we allow our tongues to become sharp swords, which bring discouragement and heartbreak to others.

Make this study an experience in self-examination. Don't be afraid to look honestly at your attitude toward those with whom you associate. The barrier to good health may prove to be your relationships with people. This Lesson will help you to see yourself as you really are. The changes which you may want to make in your attitudes may be your key to inner peace and happiness.

Let us now meditate and say the following prayer and then proceed with our Lesson which we have called: THE HEALTHY INFLUENCE OF A GENEROUS HEART.



PRAYER

Dear Father, we praise thee that thou hast put within us the possibilities of health and strength. Forgive the weaknesses that are an affront to thee. Give us generous hearts. Help us to speak to others in love, as thou dost speak to us in love. May thy Spirit gain control over the temptations that press upon us. Overlook what we are, and enable us by thy Grace to be what we ought to be. In Jesus' name. Amen.



WHEN WE OCCUPY "THE SEAT OF THE SCORNFUL"

The Psalmist said: "Blessed is he that sitteth not in the seat of the scornful." Many students of the Bible translate the word "blessed" as "happy." It then follows that happiness and inner calm are at stake when we indulge in carping criticism of those about us.

As we develop from childhood through youth to maturity, the nature of our satisfactions changes from stage to stage. In childhood, the sight of an animal may cause great glee; in youth, a date for a dance may give the greatest amount of pleasure; in maturity, a home and family often bring the deepest satisfactions. But there are people who, in every stage of development, find pleasure in calling attention to, exaggerating, and ridiculing the weaknesses or mistakes of others. At the same time, they ignore the good qualities of those they condemn, and they seem blind to their own shortcomings.

When our tongues indulge continually in carping criticism, we are victims of a weakness in personality that may affect both our health and our happiness. Let us examine a few of the reasons why we tend to speak sharply and critically of other people. Some of us are more addicted to this weakness than others, but few entirely escape its destructive influence.

If you have to battle with an inferiority complex, you struggle also with the temptation to be critical. The one who considers himself inferior, naturally feels a sense of satisfaction in belittling or gossiping destructively about other people. The attitude of critic enables him to experience a certain superiority over those he condemns. The individual who must battle with a jealous disposition tends to single out and exaggerate the weaknesses of those whom he envies.

In the second place, our temperament is always a factor that must be taken into consideration. If you are one who drives yourself mercilessly, you

are more likely to adopt the attitude of the carping critic. You are apt to seize upon any failure of others as an occasion when you can criticize them. If someone is successful, you are tempted to explain away the success as due to favoritism or luck. It is evident, then, that the person who is consistently driving forward in the hope of achieving success or popularity needs to exercise particular care when he is tempted to criticize others. His view may be colored by a subconscious desire to justify his own shortcomings.

In the third place, the carping critic often mirrors his own failures and mistakes. Dr. James A. Hadfield puts it this way: "It is literally true that in judging others we are trumpeting abroad our own secret faults. We personalize our unrecognized failings, and hate in others the sins to which we are secretly addicted." The person who continually criticizes someone as a social climber is probably secretly striving for social position himself. The person who describes another individual as shallow in his thinking is probably hiding an awareness of his own empty thinking.

Examine carefully these three explanations for a critical attitude toward others. Face honestly the ones that give insight into your personal problems. Of course, we must admit that all criticism is not of a carping nature. The Master, Himself, felt it necessary to point out in blunt words some of the evils in the world around Him.

How, then, can you draw a line between honest and helpful criticism and that which is destructive? The answer is found in the Law of Love. If your motive is ridicule, the destruction of a good name, the defeat of honest efforts, then you are a carping critic. If your criticism is motivated by love and concern for someone, then you are making a contribution to his progress. Remember that a sharply critical attitude tends to undermine your health and happiness more than it harms the object of your ridicule.

#### OVERCOMING A CRITICAL ATTITUDE TOWARD LIFE

Now we must examine how we can best overcome a critical attitude toward people and situations. Personality development demands that we deal with this problem. However much we know about the techniques of getting along with people, they will prove futile unless we understand and deal with this problem, which centers in our own personality.

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First, if you have any weakness, recognize it for what it is - a threat to your health and happiness. If you are so blind that you cannot see the person you really are, or if you refuse to face the necessity for a change of attitude, you immediately shut yourself off from the help you need.

After you have spent a social evening, or shared a conversation with a friend or acquaintance, honestly analyze your part in the conversation. Ask yourself whether what you said was destructive or constructive. Discover whether your

point of view was consistently negative. It matters not whether the conversation centered on your close friends or upon government officials, the effect of sharp and unfair criticism will be no less dangerous to the health of your body and mind.

If a fair appraisal of your attitudes reveals a critical state of mind, admit your need to change your habits of thought and conversation. The road to a controlled and triumphant personality begins at the point where you admit your failures. Then you can go forward with constructive change.

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Second, place a careful guard upon your words when you are physically tired, or when you are ill. Marriage counselors are aware that family dissension usually begins when either the husband or wife is sick, or both are weary. When you are exhausted you are also strongly tempted to find fault and to criticize those about you.

It is not enough to remind ourselves that we ought not to become exhausted, that we should seek brief periods of rest to break the pressure that makes for complete weariness. We should strive to do this, but we cannot avoid every experience that drains our reserves of physical and emotional power. Yet we can recognize that at such moments we must carefully guard against speaking words of sharp criticism. It is when we are not our best selves, physically or mentally, that we tend to indulge in sarcastic and destructive remarks, even to those whom ordinarily we regard with affection or appreciation.

One of the foremost opera stars of this generation has frequently been an embarrassment to herself and to others by her scathing criticisms of people, and by her temperamental outbursts. She has one of the great voices of this generation, but her bitter tongue has deprived her of recognition and honors naturally belonging to her. In a recent interview, her personal maid excused the outbursts by saying that they almost always occurred when she was not entirely herself due to pressure and weariness.

This is no less true of each of us. We are seldom our best selves when we are tired. It is important, for that reason, that we guard our comments about people at such times.

When you are weary reserve your judgment for another day. Probably it will be kinder if you do. Remember, also, that carping criticism has a more damaging effect upon your own personality when you are weary. When the conscious mind is tired, the guilt that so often accompanies sharp words is pushed into the subconscious. It remains there like a tiger in a cage. It may cause unforeseen difficulties in personality adjustment for the remainder of your life.

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Third, endeavor to understand the contributing factors in any situation before you indulge in criticism. The carping critic finds fault where there is no real ground for criticism. When some cause for denunciation does exist, he receives satisfaction in believing the worst, and in passing it on to others. He takes great interest in ferreting out anything unfavorable in the lives of those about him, while scheming to hide anything unworthy in his own record. He never

pauses to consider the factors in the heredity in any individual, or to be sympathetic with another's intense struggle.

Never be blind to the hardships or lack of opportunity that have shaped the lives of those with whom you associate. Your awareness of the forces with which others are forced to contend should silence bitter and unkind words before they are uttered.

A group of women were recently raising funds for an important community project. Because of the size of the building program each one was expected to make a substantial gift. One woman was severely criticized because her pledge was small. Scathing comments were made. It was said that the woman and her husband were stingy. Then they learned by chance that the woman's brother, in business in another city, was close to bankruptcy. In order to save him from disgrace and to pay his creditors, the woman and her husband had not only given their savings, but had mortgaged their home. Needless to say, when the facts were known, all estimates of the character of this woman and her husband were radically changed.

Get the facts before you allow negative or destructive thoughts to take control over your mind. Don't speak an unkind word when your judgment may be wrong. Consider the probability that you lack knowledge or understanding of a situation. Never utter words that you may regret later.

Sometimes the factors that make acquaintances or business associates appear stingy or lacking in generosity, are mental rather than economic. If a person has been brought up in poverty-stricken surroundings, he is likely to attach more importance to money than one who has been accustomed to affluence. The money he now possesses may have been earned by hard toil and saved by great sacrifice. When he gives money away, it is like giving away something of himself. Of course, you can rightly conclude that a sense of stewardship would help him to gain a better perspective toward material things, but a knowledge of his background should help you to understand him. It should halt the sharp words of criticism that might cause him discouragement and pain.

All of us are the products of our heritage and our environment. You should give thanks to God every day if your selfish nature has been tempered and controlled by the force of religious faith. Be generous to those who have not had opportunities similar to yours. If you understand the forces that contributed to make them what they are, you probably will not want to criticize. You will desire, instead, to offer sympathy, or even praise.

You may have noted the difference in attitude we take toward people when they are with us, and when they are taken from us. While they are alive, we charge them with ignorance, lack of culture, lack of sincerity, and even dishonesty. When they are gone, we tend to look for their good points. How pitiful that we do not search for the favorable qualities while they are alive. After death, our commendation is of little use to them. In life this might have encouraged and strengthened them in a battle against adversity. There is validity in the old motto: "If you have nothing good to say about a person, then say nothing at all."

Fourth, cultivate the habit of self-examination. If you honestly face your own weaknesses and failings, most of the critical remarks about the weaknesses and failings of others will remain unspoken. All of us tend to be so completely absorbed with the questionable records of our neighbors, that we fail to recognize our own shortcomings. It is difficult to become sufficiently objective to see ourselves as others see us. Our close-range view of our own personality seldom coincides with what is seen through the eyes of others.

Jesus of Nazareth attached great importance to this principle. He asked, "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." Jesus knew the danger to the personality that is involved when we criticize those about us, while being blind to the weaknesses in our own nature.

Words of sharp criticism directed against others become a menace to our mental and physical health. Such words sow seeds of guilt when we know we have been unfair or dishonest. The guilt tends to build up poison within the system. It becomes a potential threat to physical and mental health.

Furthermore, sharp words of criticism create a false estimate of our own virtue and strength. They encourage us to make totally unfair estimates of our accomplishments. Then when we face life as it really is - as inevitably we must - the shock can be devastating. The humiliation in discovering that we are not what we thought we were, can wreak havoc upon our personalities.

Many of you, Beloved Students, will be aware that humility is the product of maturity in personality development. Rather than feeling arrogant or having any sense of superiority, a mature individual is continually conscious of the forces beyond himself that made his personal advancement possible.

Endeavor to evaluate your motives and your accomplishments. Be aware of the contribution others have made to your spiritual growth. As you follow this course you will find little need for the false superiority that a critical attitude tends to encourage. You will discover that life possesses a new depth of happiness as you develop a kind and generous heart.

#### THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATION

By way of summary, note several of the basic principles which make for constructive conversation.

1. Discover the best and strongest points in the lives of those with whom you converse.
2. Give every person credit for sincerity until you have reason to revise your opinion. Avoid suspicion of his motives. Assume that he struggles with problems that you cannot now

understand. Make this your practice even when his comments are obnoxious to you.

3. Avoid the temptation to disparage any person by classifying him with a group that, for you, suggests lack of culture. Consider the struggle he is making to break away from his previous social, economic, or cultural heritage.
4. Emphasize the points of agreement with the one you are tempted to criticize.
5. Whenever grounds for misunderstanding appear, go directly to the person to talk over the matter.
6. Whenever others are being critical, seek for the favorable characteristics in the person who is being mentioned.
7. Refuse to listen to gossip or second-hand information.
8. Pray for those whom you are tempted to criticize.



#### CONCLUSION

Physical and mental health depend upon many factors. Not the least of the destructive influences upon the personality is the tendency to criticize everything and everyone. Poisonous words shrivel up the soul and poison the mind.

It may seem strange that what you say about others can affect favorably or unfavorably your personal health and happiness. But the laws of life are inexorable. You will travel a long distance down the road toward a strong and healthy personality if you will studiously avoid the temptation to become a carping critic. Start a new life today in which your conversation becomes food to make for a strong and healthy body and mind.

#### AFFIRMATION

Recognizing the relationship between my conversation and good health, I will:

- \* Try to see myself as others see me.
- \* Avoid the temptation to become critical of others.
- \* Look for the good points in those about me.
- \* Endeavor to understand rather than to blame.
- \* Seek Divine help to enable me to become the person I ought to be.

Blessings,

Your Instructor.

