

GIFT OF PAIN AND DISENABLEMENT IN A SUFFERING WORLD: the importance of *awareness* and *self-awareness* (2)

1. "The inner world is as real as the outer world: it has its contours, possibilities, its boundless regions... these two worlds are fed by each other. You must not neglect one at the expense of the other." (June 1941) ... "One must keep in touch with the real world and know one's place in it; it is wrong to live with the eternal truths, for then one is apt to end up behaving like an ostrich. To live fully outwardly and inwardly, not to ignore external reality for the sake of the inner life, or the reverse – that's quite a task. (25th March 1941)

2. "Once a person has a centre, all external impressions can find an anchorage there. Anyone who lacks a centre, grows increasingly uncertain, while the centre of the former grows more constant with every impression. I was nothing but a fluttering insecure little bird. And now deep inside me, there is a centre of strength which also radiates strength to the outside... a small closed-in centre into which I sometimes withdraw... all my senses are focused on the outside reality and what they observe there, they convey to the centre." (March, 1941)

3. "It has to be learned... A lot of unimportant inner litter and bits and pieces have to be swept out first... One's innermost being is a vast empty plain with none of that treacherous undergrowth to impede the view so something of God can enter you, and something of love too... the love you can apply to small everyday things..." (8th June 1941)

4. "... What we have here is organized disorder. So much capital lies scattered about here, so much capital of spiritual and human values, but all it does is lie about badly managed and without any purpose." (ibid)

SELF-AWARENESS AS SELF-REFLECTION Using the Diaries of ETTY HILLESUM 1941-1943

Crammed into 12 exercise books come these beautiful reflections from someone who battled with depression and not only conquered it – but was able to help others in the 'death camps'.

Her last communication on her way to Auschwitz from a staging camp was this scribble on a card: "We left the camp singing."

Clearly she had developed a vision of life and an inner strength that assisted her in helping others. The principles for cultivating a strong connection between the inner and outer life are drawn from the extracts which you see written on either side (1-8)

1. **First principle**, is to actually become aware of and discover *that we have an inner life*.
2. **Second**, once having discovered it, to learn *how the inner and outer worlds interact with one another*.
3. **Third**, having nurtured such an inter-play between *inner and outer*, there is the task of identifying and establishing *a centre* into which and through which we continually draw *strength* which radiates to others and gives them strength.
4. **Fourth**, all this takes *time* and *discipline*: it has to be learned, and the channels have to be cleared.
5. **Fifth**, if we practise this discipline, we will learn to deal with *loneliness* by distinguishing **two kinds of loneliness**: one that is self-centred, and the other that sees the self as connected to others.
6. **Sixth**, as we practise this discipline of awareness and self-awareness, we discover and begin to appropriate the *human values* and *capital* that lies untapped within us.
7. **Seventh**, the discipline teaches us to accept circumstances and situations over which we have no control without feeling powerless – and allow those situations to help us spread love among others
8. **Eighth**, the discipline teaches us how to soften our experience of suffering..

5. "There are two sorts of loneliness. One makes me feel dreadfully unhappy lost and forlorn the other makes me feel strong and happy. The first always appears when I feel out of touch... with everything, when I am completely cut off from others and from myself and can see no purpose in life or any connection between things nor have the slightest idea where I fit in. With the other kind of loneliness I feel strong and certain connected with everyone and everything and with God and realize that I can manage on my own and that I am not dependent upon others. Then I know that I am part of a meaningful whole and that I can impart a great deal of strength to others." (9th August 1941)

6. "There is a really deep well inside me. And in it dwells God. Sometimes I am there too. But more often stones and grit block the well, and God is buried beneath. Then He must be dug out again." (26 August 1941)

7. "Be gentle with your suffering and it will be gentle with you. It grows with desire and indignation; it is lulled asleep by gentleness, like a little child." (30th October 1941)

8. "Cycling through cold dark Lairessestraat-everything I babbled out then... something like this: 'God, take me by your hand, I shall follow you... and not resist too much. I shall evade none of the tempest life has in store for me... and then grant me a short respite... I shall accept all the inevitable tumult and struggle and delight in warmth and security, but I shall not rebel if I have to suffer cold, should you so decree, I shall follow wherever your hand leads me and shall try not to be afraid. I shall try to spread some of the genuine love for others wherever I go... I don't want to be anything special, I only want to be true to that in me, which seeks to fulfill its promise. I long for the seclusion of a monastery, but I know I must seek you among people in the world." 25th November 1941