

TOWARD BECOMING A FULLY FUNCTIONING PERSON

by **Carl R. Rogers**

I am sure that each of us has puzzled from time to time as to his own goals, and the goals which he believes would be desirable for others. "What is my purpose in life?" "What am I striving for?" "What do I want to be?" These are questions which every individual asks himself at one time or another, sometimes calmly and meditatively, sometimes in agonizing uncertainty or despair. They are old, old questions which have been asked and answered in every century of history. Yet they are also questions which every individual must ask and answer for himself, in his own way. They are questions which I, as a therapist, hear expressed in many differing ways as men and women in personal distress try to learn, or understand, or choose the directions which their lives are taking.

THE PROBLEM

As I have worked for many years with troubled individuals, I believe that I can discern a pattern, a trend, a direction, an orderliness, a commonality, in the tentative answers to these questions which these people have found for themselves. And so I would like to share with the reader the picture of the optimum human person, as I have formed this picture from my experience with clients. It is my perception of what human beings appear to be striving for, when they feel free to choose their own direction. It is also my picture of what constitutes personal or psychological health.

The Background from Which the Problem Is Approached

I shall have to make it clear at the outset that my observations are made from a background of client-centered therapy. Quite possibly all successful psychotherapy has a similar personality outcome, but I am less sure of that than formerly, and hence wish it to be clear that I speak from a particular perspective. The trends I have observed have occurred in a relationship which, when it is at its best, partakes of these characteristics. The therapist has been willing to be his real feelings, has been willing to be genuine, in the relationship with the client. He has been able to enter into an intensely personal and subjective relationship with the client -- relating not as a scientist to an object of study, not as a physician expecting to diagnose and cure, but as a person to a person.

The therapist feels his client to be a person of unconditional self-worth; of value no matter what his condition, his behavior, or his feelings. The therapist is able to let himself go in understanding this person; no barriers keep him from sensing what it feels like to be the client at each moment of the relationship, and he has been able to convey to the client something of this empathic understanding. It means that the therapist has been comfortable in entering this relationship fully, without knowing cognitively where it will lead, satisfied with providing a climate which will free the client to become himself.

For the client this optimal therapy has meant an exploration of the increasingly strange and unknown and dangerous feelings in himself; the exploration proving possible only because he is gradually realizing that he is accepted unconditionally. Thus, he becomes acquainted

with elements of his experience which have in the past been denied to awareness as too threatening, too damaging to the structure of the self. He finds himself experiencing these feelings fully, completely, in the relationship, so that for the moment he is his fear, or his anger, or his tenderness, or his strength. And as he lives and accepts these widely varied feelings, in all their degrees of intensity, he discovers that he has experienced himself, that he is all these feelings. He finds his behavior changing in constructive fashion in accordance with his newly experienced and newly accepted self. He approaches the realization that he no longer needs to fear what experience may hold, but can welcome it freely as part of his changing and developing self.

This is a thumbnail sketch of what client-centered therapy might be at its optimum. I give it here to suggest the kind of situation in which I have observed certain trends occurring in clients who have participated in such therapy. I would like now to proceed to my main concern: what are those directions, and what personality characteristics appear to develop in the client as a result of this kind of experience?

CHARACTERISTIC DIRECTIONS

What follows is based both upon clinical observation and upon research. It tries to present the trends I have seen in our clients, but it also pushes these trends to the limit, as it were, in order better to see the kind of person who would emerge if therapy were optimal, the kind of person who might be said to be the goal which individuals discover they are aiming toward.

An Increasing Openness to Experience

A major observation is that the individual moves toward being open to his experience. This is a phrase which has come to have increasingly definite meaning for me. It is the polar opposite of defensiveness. Defensiveness I have described in the past as being the organism's response to experiences which are perceived or anticipated as incongruent with the structure of the self. In order to maintain the self-structure, such experiences are given a distorted symbolization in awareness, which reduces the incongruity. Thus, the individual defends himself against any threat of alteration in the concept of self by not perceiving those meanings in his experience which contradict his present self-picture.

In the person who is open to his experience, however, every stimulus, whether originating within the organism or in the environment, would be freely relayed through the nervous system without being distorted by a defensive mechanism. There would be no need of the mechanism of "subception" whereby the organism is forewarned of any experience threatening to the self. On the contrary, whether the stimulus was the impact of a configuration of form, color, or sound in the environment on the sensory nerves, or a memory trace from the past, or a visceral sensation of fear or pleasure or disgust, the person would be "living it," would have it completely available to the awareness.

Perhaps I can give this concept a more vivid meaning if I illustrate it from a recorded interview. A young professional man reports in the forty-eighth interview the way in which he has become more open to some of his bodily sensations, as well as other feelings.

Client: It does seem to me that it would be possible for anybody to relate all the changes that you feel. But certainly have felt recently that I have more respect for, more objectivity toward, my physical make-up. I mean I don't expect too much of myself. This is how it works out: It feels to me that in the past I used to fight a certain tiredness that I felt after supper. Well now I feel pretty sure that I really am tired - that I am not making myself tired - that I am just physiologically lower. It seemed that I was just constantly criticising my tiredness.

Therapist: So you can let yourself be tired, instead of feeling along with it a kind of criticism of it.

Client: Yes, that I shouldn't be tired or something. And it seems in a way to be pretty profound that I can just not fight this tiredness, and along with it goes a real feeling of I've got to slow down, too, so that being tired isn't such an awful thing. I think I can also kind of pick up a thread here of why I should be that way in the way my father is and the way he looks at some of these things. For instance, say that I was sick, and I would report this, and it would seem that overtly he would want to do something about it, but he would also communicate, "Oh, my gosh, more trouble." You know, something like that.

Therapist: As though there were something quite annoying really about being physically ill.

Client: Yeah, I am sure that my father has the same disrespect for his own physiology that I have had. Now last summer I twisted my back; I wrenched it; I heard it snap and everything. There was real pain there all the time at first, real sharp. And I had the doctor look at it and he said it wasn't serious; it should heal by itself as long as I didn't bend too much. Well this was months ago - and I have been noticing recently that - hell, this is a real pain and it's still there - and it's not my fault, I mean it's -

Therapist: It doesn't prove something bad about you -

Client: No - and one of the reasons I seem to get more tired than I should maybe is because of this constant strain and so on. I have already made an appointment with one of the doctors at the hospital that he would look at it and take an X-ray or something. In a way I guess you could say that I am just more accurately sensitive - or objectively sensitive to this kind of thing. I can say with certainty that this has also spread to what I eat and how much I eat. And this is really a profound change, as I say, and of course my relationship with my wife and the two children is - well you just wouldn't recognize it if you could see me inside - as you have - I mean...

... There just doesn't seem to be anything more wonderful than really and genuinely - really feeling love for your own children and at the same time receiving it. I don't know how to put this. We have such an increased respect - both of us - for Judy, and we've noticed just - as we participated in this - we have noticed such a tremendous change in her - it seems to be a pretty deep kind of thing.

Therapist: It seems to me you are saying that you can listen more accurately to yourself. If your body says it's tired, you listen to it and you believe it, instead of criticizing it, if it's in pain you can listen to that, if the feeling is really loving your wife or children, you can feel that, and it seems to show up in the differences in them, too.

Here in a relatively minor but symbolically important excerpt, can be seen much of what I have been trying to say about openness to experience. Formerly he could not freely feel pain or illness, because being ill meant being unacceptable. Neither could he feel tenderness and love for his child, because such feelings meant being weak, and he had to maintain his facade of being strong. But now he can be genuinely open to the experience of his organism -- he can be tired when he is tired, he can feel pain when his organism is in pain, he can freely experience the love he feels for his daughter, and he can also feel and express annoyance toward her, as he goes on to say in the next portion of the interview. He can fully live the experiences of his total organism, rather than shutting them out of awareness.

I have used this concept of availability to awareness to try to make clear what I mean by openness to experience. This might be misunderstood. I do not mean that this individual would be self-consciously aware of all that was going on within himself, like the centipede who became aware of all his legs. On the contrary, he would be free to live a feeling subjectively, as well as be aware of it. He might experience love, or pain, or fear, living in this attitude subjectively. Or he might abstract himself from this subjectively and realize in awareness, "I am in pain"; "I am afraid" "I do love." The crucial point is that there would be no barriers, no inhibitions, which would prevent the full experiencing of whatever was organismically present, and availability to awareness is a good measure of this absence of barriers.

Openness to experience is not a construct which is easy to measure with our present instruments, but such research as exists tends to support the notion that it is characteristic of those who are coping effectively with life. Chodorkoff, for example, found in a very careful study that the better adjusted subjects perceived themselves more accurately. They were, that is, more open to the facts of their experience and thus perceived themselves in the same way as they were seen by a group of competent and unbiased observers. Even more interestingly, they tended accurately to recognize threatening experiences in this case tachistoscopically presented threatening words) more quickly than they recognized neutral experiences. They thus seemed very open even to stimuli which were threatening. The poorly adjusted group showed the reverse trend, and seemed to have a set toward keeping threatening experiences inadequately differentiated and inadequately symbolized.

Toward Becoming a Process

A second major trend which I have observed is that the individual moves toward more acceptantly being a process, a fluidity, a changing. He lives in a more existential fashion, living fully in each moment. Let me see if I can explain what I mean.

I believe it would be evident that for the person who was fully open to his experience, completely without defensiveness, each moment would be new. [Buber's *I-Thou* relationship which "hallows" the everyday - Bill] The complex configuration of inner and

outer stimuli which exists in this moment has never existed before in just this fashion. Consequently, such a hypothetical person would realize that, "What I will be in the next moment, and what I will do, grow out of the moment, and cannot be predicted in advance either by me or by others." Not infrequently we find clients expressing this sort of feeling. Thus one, at the end of therapy, says in a rather puzzled fashion, "I haven't finished the job of integrating and reorganizing myself, but that's only confusing, not discouraging, now that I realize this is a continuing process... It is exciting, sometimes upsetting, but deeply encouraging to feel yourself in action and apparently knowing where you are going even though you don't always consciously know where that is."

One way of expressing the fluidity which is present in such existential living is to say that the self and the personality emerge from experience, rather than experience being translated or twisted to fit a preconceived self-structure. It means that one becomes a participant in and an observer of the ongoing process of organismic experience, rather than being in control of it. As one client put it: "I have a feeling that what I have to do is to take more the position of passenger than driver. See how things go when they're left alone. It's awful kind of scary - feeling that nobody's at the wheel. Of course it's a tremendously challenging feeling, too. Perhaps this is the key to freedom."

Or again, the same client, a bit later: "I'm not changing from me into something else, I'm changing from me to me. More like being an amoeba than a caterpillar-butterfly. The amoeba changes shape, but it's still an amoeba. In a way that's sort of a relief. I can keep the parts of me I really like. I don't have to chuck the whole thing and start over again."

Such living in the moment, then, means an absence of rigidity, of tight organization, of the imposition of structure on experience. It means instead a maximum of adaptability, a discovery of structure in experience, a flowing, changing organization of self and personality.

It is this tendency toward existential living which appears to me very evident in people who are involved in the process of psychological health. It means discovering the structure of experience in the process of living the experience. Most of us, on the other hand, bring a preformed structure and evaluation to our experience and never relinquish it, but cram and twist the experience to fit our preconceptions, annoyed at the fluid qualities which make it so unruly in fitting our carefully constructed pigeonholes. To open one's self to what is going on now, and to discover in that present process whatever structure it appears to have -- this to me is one of the qualities of the healthy life, the mature life, as I see clients approach it.

An Increasing Trust in His Organism

Still another characteristic of the person who is living the process of health appears to be an increasing trust in his organism as a means of arriving at the most satisfying behavior in each existential situation. Again let me try to explain what I mean.

In choosing what course of action to take in any situation, many people rely upon guiding principles, upon a code of action laid down by some group or institution, upon the judgment of others (from wife and friends to Emily Post), or upon the way they behaved in some similar past situation. Yet as I observe the clients whose experiences in living have taught me so much, I find that increasingly such individuals are able to trust their total organismic

reaction to a new situation because they discover to an ever-increasing degree that if they are open to their experience, doing what "feels right" proves to be a competent and trustworthy guide to behavior which is truly satisfying.

As I try to understand the reason for this, I find myself following this line of thought. The hypothetical person who is fully open to his experience would have access to all of the available data in the situation, on which to base his behavior; the social demands, his own complex and possibly conflicting needs; his memories of similar situations; his perception of the uniqueness of the situation. The data would be very complex indeed. But he could permit his total organism, his consciousness participating, to consider each stimulus, need and demand, its relative intensity and importance, and out of this complex weighing and balancing, discover that course of action which would come closest to satisfying all his needs in the situation.

An analogy which might come close to a description would be to compare this person to a giant electronic computing machine. Since he is open to his experience, all of the data from his sense impressions, from his memory, from previous learning, from his visceral and internal states, are fed into the machine. The machine takes all these multitudinous pulls and forces which are fed in as data, and quickly computes the course of action which would be the most economical vector of need satisfaction in this existential situation. This is the behavior of our hypothetical person.

The defects which in most of us make this process untrustworthy are the inclusion of information which does not belong to this present situation, or the exclusion of information which does. It is when memories and previous learnings are fed into the computation as if they were this reality, and not memories and learnings, that erroneous behavioral answers arise. Or when certain threatening experiences are inhibited from awareness, and hence are withheld from the computation or fed into it in distorted form, this too produces error. But our hypothetical person would find his organism thoroughly trustworthy, because all of the available data would be used, and it would be present in accurate rather than distorted form. Hence, his behavior would come as close as possible to satisfying all his needs -- for enhancement, for affiliation with others, and the like.

In this weighing, balancing and computation, his organism would not by any means be infallible. It would always give the best possible answer for the available data, but sometimes data would be missing...

... Because of the element of openness to experience, however, any errors, any following of behavior which was not satisfying, would be quickly corrected. The computations, as it were, would always be in process of being corrected. The computations, as it were, would always be in process of being corrected, because they would be continually checked against their consequences.

Perhaps the reader will not like my analogy of an electronic computing machine. Let me put it in more human terms. The client I previously quoted found himself expressing annoyance to his daughter, as well as affection, when he "felt like it." Yet he found himself doing it in a way which not only released the tension in himself, but which freed this small girl to voice her annoyances. He describes the differences between communicating his annoyance and directing his feeling of anger at, or imposing on, her: " 'Cause it just doesn't feel like I'm imposing my feelings on her, and it seems to me I must show it on my face. Maybe she

sees it as 'Yes, daddy is angry, but I don't have to cower.' Because she never does cower. This in itself is a topic for a novel, it just feels that good." In this instance, being open to his experience, he selects, with astonishing intuitive skill, a subtly guided course of behavior which meets his need for release of angry tension, but also satisfies his need to be a good father and his need to find satisfaction in his daughter's healthy development. Yet he achieves all this by simply doing the thing that feels right to him.

Another way of saying this is that the individual guides his behavior by the meanings which he discovers in the immediate feeling process which is going on within him. Gendlin terms this immediately present feeling process "experiencing," and shows how the individual can turn again and again to his experiencing to discover further meanings in it. The experiencing is thus a referent by which the individual may guide his behaviour.

Observation has shown that clients who appear to have gained the most from therapy come to trust their experiencing. They accept the realization that the meanings implicit in their experiencing of a situation constitute the wisest and most satisfying indication of appropriate behavior. I think of one client who, toward the close of therapy, when puzzled about an issue, would put his head in his hands and say, "Now what is it that I'm feeling? I want to get next to it. I want to learn what it is." Then he would wait, quietly and patiently, until he would discern the exact flavor of the feelings occurring in him. Often I sense that the client is trying to listen to himself, is trying to hear the messages and meanings which are being communicated by his own physiological reactions. No longer is he so fearful of what he may find. He comes to realize that his own inner reactions and experiences, the messages of his senses and his viscera, are friendly. He comes to want to be close to his inner sources of information rather than closing them off.

Again there is a bit of research evidence to indicate that this trust of one's own experiencing is associated with the healthy personality. Crutchfield, in a most interesting study, presented potential military leaders with a situation in which the individual's clear perception and experience of a given situation appeared to be at variance with the judgment of all the other members of the group. Should he now rely on the evidence of his own senses or defer to the judgment of the group?

The evidence shows that those who trusted their own experiencing were better adjusted individuals, more mature, with greater leadership ability. Those who distrusted their own sensing of the situation and adopted the group judgment were the less mature, less well adjusted persons.

It seems to be this trust of his own experiencing which guided the scientific behavior of Einstein, holding him toward a given direction, long before he could give any completely conscious and rational basis for it. During this initial period he simply trusted his total organismic reaction. He says, "During all those years there was a feeling of direction, of going straight toward something concrete. It is, of course, very hard to express that feeling in words, but it was decidedly the case, and clearly to be distinguished from later considerations about the rational for of the solution". This is the type of behavior which is also, I believe, characteristic of the person who has gained greatly from therapy.

SOME IMPLICATIONS

The three trends I have tried to describe - toward openness to experience, living as a process, and trust of one's own experiencing - add up to the fact that the person in whom they are observed is becoming a more fully functioning person. This picture of a more fully functioning individual has many implications, but I will restrict myself to pointing out three which I believe have special importance.

Integration Is Implied

The trends I have presented describe an individual who is becoming integrated. He is unified within himself from the surface level to the level of depth. He is becoming "all of one piece." The distinctions between "role self" and "real self," between defensive facade and real feelings, between conscious and unconscious, are all growing less the further these trends continue. All that the individual experiences and is, within the envelope of his organism, is increasingly available to his conscious self, to himself as a person. There is a continuing growth of good communication between all the different aspects and facets of himself.

Creativity Is Implied

Watching my clients, I have come to a much better understanding of creative people. El Greco, for example, must have realized, as he looked at some of his early work, that "good artists do not paint like that." But somehow he trusted sufficiently his own experiencing of life, the process of himself, so that he could go on expressing his own unique perceptions. It was as though he could say, "Good artists do not paint like this, but I paint like this." Or, to move to another field, Ernest Hemingway was surely aware that "good writers do not write like this." But fortunately he moved toward being Hemingway, being himself, rather than toward someone else's conception of a good writer.

Einstein seems to have been unusually oblivious to the fact that good physicists did not think his kind of thoughts...

... Rather than drawing back because of his inadequate academic preparation in physics, he simply moved toward being Einstein, toward thinking his own thoughts, toward being as truly and deeply himself as he could. This is not a phenomenon which occurs only in the artist or the genius. Time and again in my clients, I have seen simple people become significant and creative in their own spheres, as they have developed more trust of the processes going on within themselves, and have dared to feel their own feelings, live by values which they discover within, and express themselves in their own unique ways.

Such a person would, I believe, be recognized by the student of evolution as the type most likely to adapt and survive under changing environmental conditions. He would be able creatively to make sound adjustments to new as well as old conditions. He would be a fit vanguard of human evolution.

Trustworthiness of Human Nature Is Implied

It will have been evident that one implication of the view presented here is that the basic nature of the human being, when functioning freely, is constructive and trustworthy. For me this is an inescapable conclusion from a quarter century of experience in psychotherapy. When we are able to free the individual from defensiveness, so that he is open to the wide

range of his own needs, as well as to the wide range of environmental and social demands, his reactions may be trusted to be positive, forward-moving, constructive. We do not need to ask who will socialize him, for one of his own deepest needs is for affiliation and communication with others. When he is fully himself, he cannot help but be realistically socialized. We do not need to ask who will control his aggressive impulses, for when he is open to all of his impulses, his need to be liked by others and his tendency to give affection are as strong as his impulses to strike out or seize for himself. He will be aggressive in situations in which aggression is realistically appropriate, but there will be no runaway need for aggression. His total behavior, in these and other areas, when he is open to all his experience, is balanced and realistic -- behavior which is appropriate to the survival and enhancement of a highly social animal.

I have little sympathy with the rather prevalent concept that man is basically irrational, and that his impulses, if not controlled, would lead to destruction of others and self. Man's behavior is exquisitely rational, moving with subtle and ordered complexity toward the goals his organism is endeavoring to achieve. The tragedy for most of us is that our defenses keep us from being aware of this rationality, so that consciously we are moving in one direction, while organismically we are moving in another. But in our hypothetical person there would be no such barriers, and he would be a participant in the rationality of his organism. The only control of impulses which would exist or which would prove necessary is the natural and international balancing of one need against another and the discovery of behaviors which follow the vector most closely approximating the satisfaction of all needs. The experience of extreme satisfaction of one need (for aggression, sex, etc.) in such a way as to do violence to the satisfaction of other needs (for companionship, tender relationship, etc.) - an experience very common in the defensively organized person - would simply be unknown in our hypothetical individual...

... He would participate in the vastly complex self-regulatory activities of his organism - the psychological as well as physiological thermostatic controls - in such a fashion as to live harmoniously, with himself and with others.

BECOMING A FULLY FUNCTIONING PERSON

Let me conclude by drawing together these observational threads into a more unified strand. As I have observed individuals who appear to have made important strides toward psychological health, I believe they may be thought of as moving toward an implicit goal - that of becoming a fully functioning person.

I find such a person to be a human being in flow, in process, rather than having achieved some state. Fluid change is central in the picture.

I find such a person to be sensitively open to all of his experience - sensitive to what is going on in his environment, sensitive to other individuals with whom he is in relationship, and sensitive perhaps most of all to the feelings, reactions, and emergent meanings which he discovers in himself. The fear of some aspects of his own experience continues to diminish, so that more and more of his life is available to him.

Such a person experiences in the present, with immediacy. He is able to live in his feelings and reactions of the moment. He is not bound by the structure of his past learnings, but

these are a present resource for him insofar as they relate to the experience of the moment. He lives freely, subjectively, in an existential confrontation of this moment in life.

Such a person is trustingly able to permit his total organism to function freely in all its complexity in selecting from the multitude of possibilities that behaviour which in this moment of time will be most generally and genuinely satisfying. He is thus making use of all of the data his nervous system can supply, using this data in awareness, but recognizing that his total organism may be, and often is, wiser than his awareness.

Such a person is a creative person. With his sensitive openness to his world, and his trust of his own ability to form new relationships with his environment, he is the type of person from whom creative products and creative living emerge.

Finally, such a person lives a life which involves a wider range, a greater richness, than the constricted living in which most of us find ourselves. It seems to me that clients who have moved significantly in therapy live more intimately with their feelings of pain, but also more vividly with their feelings of ecstasy; that anger is more clearly felt, but so also is love; that fear is an experience they know more deeply, but so is courage; and the reason they can thus live fully in a wider range is that they have this underlying confidence in themselves as trustworthy instruments for encountering life.

I believe it will have become evident why, for me, adjectives such as happy, contented, enjoyable, do not seem quite appropriate to any general description of this process I have called psychological health, even though the person in this process would experience each one of these feelings at appropriate times. But the adjectives which seem more generally fitting are adjectives such as enriching, exciting, rewarding, challenging, meaningful. This process of healthy living is not, I am convinced, a life for the fainthearted. It involves the stretching and growing of becoming more and more of one's potentialities. It involves the courage to be. It means launching oneself fully into the stream of life. Yet the deeply exciting thing about human beings is that when the individual is inwardly free, he chooses this process of becoming.

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