



# **The Power of the Powerless**

## **Fri. 22 – Sun. 24 February 2019**

**All the documents**

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## 18.00 - EVENING MEAL

### **A) Vaclav Havel's text**

#### **01) 19.00 – Introduction (15')**

Rules: 1) Try not to go astray in our sharing and discussion. Focus on the theme / on the questions. 2) Contribute with awareness to the evolution of the debate. 3) Do not confront others but you may challenge them. 4) Keep it confidential.

#### **02) 19.15 – The content and meaning of Havel's text (90')**

The situation: Czechoslovakia in the 70s, under Soviet domination. Four interpretations: Vaclav Havel: *The power of the powerless*, This text has been written in 1978 by the founder of the Charter 77, ex Czech “dissident” and first President of the Czech Republic after the fall of the Wall. It is addressed to the Polish trade union Solidarnosc to help them find the right attitude in order to be free witnesses and not reactive to any form of official power. Havel describes the path of living in the truth as the true power we have when we do not engage in the conflict but stand rooted in truth.

This text is fascinating because it can be read on many levels:

- 1) historically as a political paper of that time,
- 2) politically as a description of the role of ideology and the attitude of resistance under totalitarianism,
- 3) philosophically as a demonstration of what true freedom is, independently whether the ideology involved is totalitarian or market oriented, and
- 4) spiritually as a (only implicit) description of what our personal evolution, transformation and growth means.

Reading the short version: remember that this text was written in 1978 in Czechoslovakia, under soviet domination. Yet read it at the same time as a description of a totalitarian system and of our market society. Almost each sentence can indeed apply to our western market society, especially when one replaces the coercive system by advertisement, greed and desire to conform.

Q: We read the text (short version). Comments by participants.

### **Summary**

“The potential political power of living within the truth [is] rooted in the hidden sphere”.

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SATURDAY MORNING

07.30 – MEDITATION

08.00 – BREAKFAST

### **B) What is ideology?**

#### **03) 09.00 – The role of ideology (30')**

##### **Totalitarian ideology**

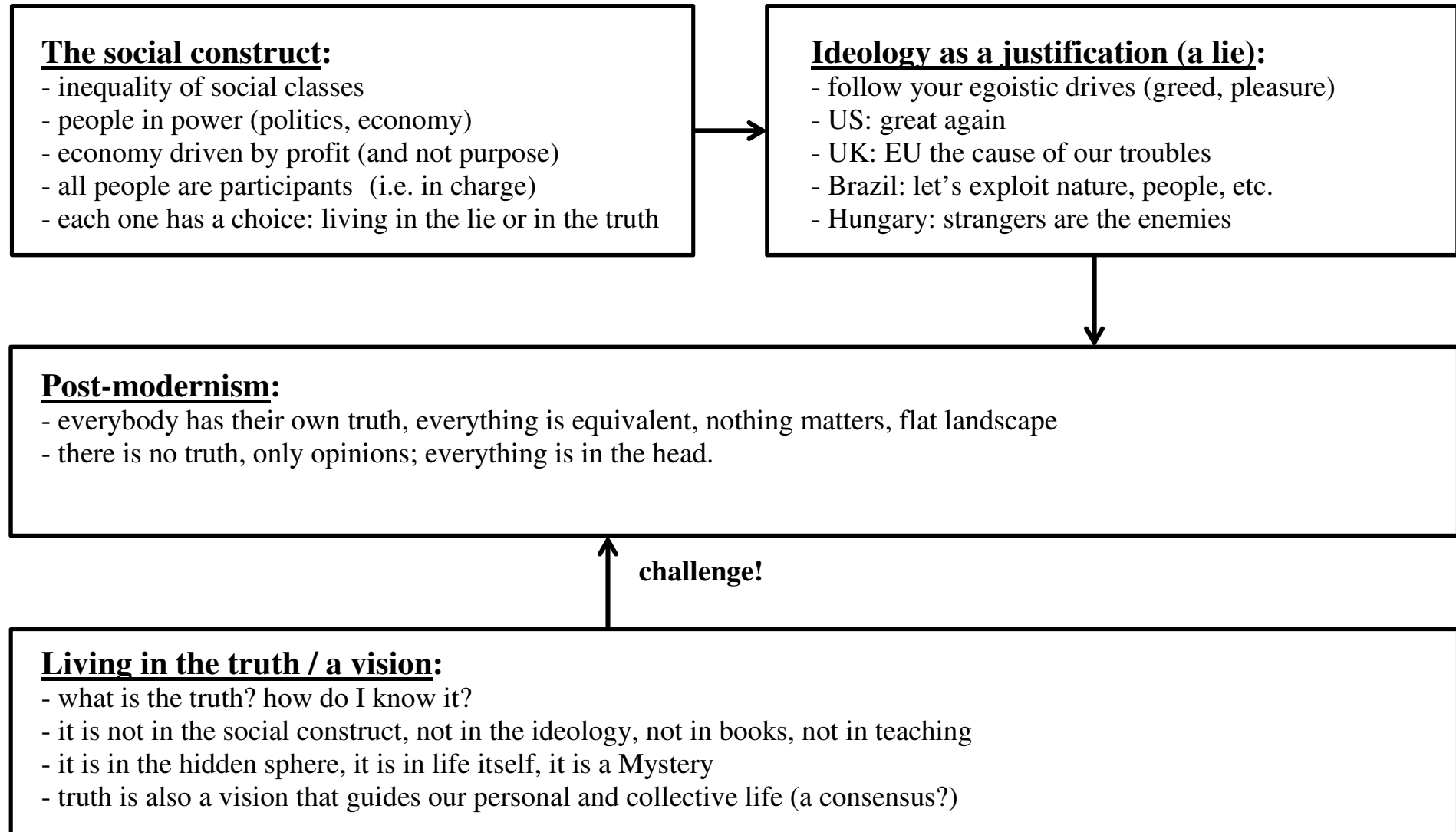
What is ideology: in a totalitarian system (official lie that bridges the gap between aims of the system and aims of life). E.g. China.

##### **Western ideology**

In our market system (follow your individualistic trends: greed, desires, hedonism). E.g. USA (America great again), UK (Brexit – our troubles because of EU), Brazil (Bolsonaro – exploitation without limits), Hungary (the enemy is the stranger), etc.

Q: What about Australia? Where is the lie?

### 03) Ideology as a lie that justifies a situation / an intention



## 06) The 3 worlds

- 1) The Ground of Being = Source of Life and of everything that is: Essence – Emptiness – the imperishable
- 2) The physical world = the Expression: making visible what is not visible (the Source). Incarnation. Perishable.
- 3) The Projection: our own construct. How we understand the world and what we make of it. Our representation and its visualisation into matter.

### **1) The Source of life: the imperishable**

**Invisible – Our Essence - Emptiness which is Fullness - No way to represent it**

*In this world there are two orders of being,  
the perishable and the imperishable.  
The perishable is all that is visible.  
The imperishable is the invisible substance  
of all that is visible.  
(The Bhagavad Gita)*



### **2) The Expression: making visible**

**Making visible + yet impermanent**

**Nature - the world we see**

**Makes the Source visible**

**Signs that help us to grow**

**Incarnation: see and do / be**



### **3) The Projection: interpretation**

**Our own construct**

**Our projections - fiction**

**The meaning we impose**

**The world of our making**

**The world we change**

## **Ideology as a lie or as a guide?**

The Chinese vision: an all-embracing project that includes all aspects and can act on any partial aspect. Profit is not the only motor. E.g. the project One Belt – One Road (OBOR)

### **04) 09.30 - A vision and perspective (30')**

One can imagine that ideology in the Chinese way also be used for creative noble human purposes. How is it possible?

5min personal reflection then 15min 2 by 2, then sharing.

Q: How can we learn from China how to have an all-embracing vision that could be creative and based on human values? on love, care and sharing? Is there something like an ideology of truth? What could it be: a new anthropology (about the meaning of life), a vision of what is Reality, a guide, rooted in truth. A social perspective.

## **C) Knowing the truth**

### **05) 10.00 – Where the Source of truth is not (30')**

The post-modern model: there is no truth – only constructs. Anything goes.

Science, technology and market as guides. Solutions without meaning.

Individual aims: wealth, success, profession.

We wait for enlightenment: who will bring it to us?

The ready-made solution: doctrine, ideology, philosophy, religion.

Q: Why are there no solutions?

### **Signs of our living outside truth**

Climate change, economic collapse and violence as signs of hubris. Not only a threat but also a warning calling for a radical conversion to a life in harmony.

## *10.30 MORNING TEA*

### **06) 11.00 – Where do we find expressions of truth? (60')**

#### **What is truth? Where do we find it?**

The three worlds W1, W2 and W3 (reminder – see precedent page)

Reality and reality are 2 different things: W1 and W2.

Being / doing / having = 3 levels of perception and being.

#### **The laws of the Universe**

Like with gravitation on the physical level, the Universe is ruled by laws which are spiritual: an intention, an aim, evolution, transformation.

E.g. intelligence, generosity, permanent change, diversification and complementarity, cooperation, unity.

#### **Teaching and experience**

How far can one learn from others? What does one remember?

What is the role of science, knowledge, spiritual teaching in this discovery of truth?

#### **What is the hidden sphere?**

Where is the hidden sphere? How to define / describe it?

#### **The liberating shock of the paradox**

When we get the shock to discover that our perception is wrong, the world seems to widen; a new perspective takes shape that is much broader. Is it not a new perception of truth?

#### **Which other sources / expressions of truth?**

## 07) The great transformation, from ideology (lie) to living within the truth (hidden sphere)

### **Ideology:**

Do what you like.  
Buy what you wish.  
Use available technology  
because it is fashion.  
Have fun.

### **My life:**

My projects  
My desires  
My hedonistic comfort  
Life as a project  
Control and mastery  
Will for doing



### **Truth:**

Reality is given.  
It has its own laws.  
Harmony means adaptation.  
Adaptation means giving up one's  
own will...  
yet remaining oneself,  
free from attachments and expectations.

### **My life:**

Listening, discerning  
Transformation  
Giving and receiving  
Life as a state of awareness  
Wonder and Mystery  
Patience for being

10 min personal reflection then sharing.

1) Which are the expressions of truth for you?

2) What does Havel mean by “hidden sphere”?

And what do you understand personally by that?

3) Which is the source of truth? How do we access it?

Buddha nature. Image of God. True Self. True nature. Ground of Being.

What are they? Is it a search without answer? How does it translate in everyday life?

## **D) Living in the Truth: transformation**

### **07) 12.00 – How do we live in the truth? (45’)**

#### **Three stages of enlightenment**

1) Revelation – new faith (I believe)

2) New mentality – new way of understanding - new perspective

3) Transformation of the person and the way of life

Without (2) and (3), (1) is nothing.

#### **Different levels of reality**

What are they?

#### **Reality beyond reality**

The role of the Spirit (the little voice inside us). A guide to the unreachable truth, to the Mystery (the invisible Ground of Being).

Groups 2 by 2 (20min) then sharing.

Q: 1) What is the big personal transformation from dominating ideology (lie) to truth (the hidden sphere)? see diagram.

How does it translate in our everyday life?

Q: Which are these different levels of reality?

What matters most in life? Be concrete.

## *13.00 LUNCH*

### **08) 14.30 - Our desires and projects vs adaptation to Reality (45’)**

10min personal reflection, then sharing.

Q: How do we see the difference between

A) following our own desires and

B) our adaptation to Reality (truth)?

How can we “measure” (evaluate) this difference? How far can desire lead to truth? Give examples out of your daily life.

### **09) 15.15 – Different forms of attachment (45’)**

In the light of the metaphor of the 3 Worlds and of this trustworthy and permanent solid Ground that supports all life, we can see how attachment appears as a form of absurdity or imprisonment that prevents us from being “Grounded”. Attachment is not love; it forms truly the shackles that prevent our movements.

#### **Attachment as greed**

The most invasive form of attachment is evidently our greed when we feel we need more than we have or than what is given. As rich people we consume so much more than other people on this Earth and yet we want still more. Greed is just killing us. It is also often accompanied by other unresolved emotions such as fear, anger, anxiety, etc. This is the first major obsession we have to get rid of. As long we are not free of this inextinguishable desire we cannot connect with the Ground because our desires call us elsewhere and prevent us from seeing the Ground.



### **Attachment as projection or expectation**

Another of the principal forms of attachment we practise is linked with the expectations we project onto reality and the others. We expect others to behave in a way that fits our desires. We have so much the tendency to write the script for other people because we perceive our own life in an egocentric way as a form of personal action (project), like on the stage (public life), where every other figure of the show (all others) should adapt to our script (our will or desires); it is as if we had already written the scenes and we wanted each one to play their role as we have planned it. But it does not work that way. People do not behave according to our perceptions, judgements, desires, hopes, etc.; they have no reason to act according to our script; they have their own. And we have all consequently to learn to face the unexpected because reality is meant to develop according surprising tracks that will go mainly against our desires. The first step consists then in our learning to love what is, as it is. Suffering is always not far and tends to cover our reality by a film of pain which can be very strong and justified; yet beyond this pain, underneath, the Ground is not far, maybe not visible but yet always there, present and perceptible in its depth and faithfulness.

### **Attachment as denial of time flow**

Beside our attachment to our greed or to our own expectations, there is still a further form of attachment we practise often which works mainly in our relation of conflict with time. We refuse to see that things are changing ceaselessly in our lives and we resist change. We get principally attached to what was and is no more because we have loved it in the past. It is great to love what is given but this joy in receiving should not be turned into punishment or self-flagellation when the object of our love has disappeared, whether it has passed away, been destroyed or has gone elsewhere. We should rather celebrate what we loved, instead of, too often, turning it into a cause of deep sorrow when it is no more. When we lose a dear one, we should celebrate his or her life and rejoice about what he or she was for us, instead of mourning

the absence. The joy is exclusively in the being of this loved one, and in nothing else. The source of this joy (the being) is the real cause, the disappearance (the non-being) only the shadow which shows more clearly the real source of this joy. We have then to remain focused on this indescribable quality and source of joy instead of focusing on the loss. Attachment does the contrary; it keeps us unmovable in time; we are getting attached or stuck at a certain point in time and believing that nothing should move anymore but remain all as it is, lifeless. By contrast if we could flow with the time and enjoy what is given without getting attached, we would be in bliss at each instant for what it gives us. This would be the perfect way to flow with life, without hindrances.

### **Attachment to the false self**

The source of these different forms of attachment - attachment in our greed or in our illusory expectations or in time, to what was and is no more - is probably the consequence of the basic attachment we have to our false self. We tend to identify with our body-mind-memory because it looks like an independent entity that moves through time and space as if it were our distinct and total identity. But this this body-mind is indeed only a hull that is the physical support or envelop in our incarnation for what we are truly, which is infinitely broader. We are evidently physically distinct from one another as bodies but we are also, at the same time all of us, parts of a same wider whole, as a living body in unity. This is precisely the role of our evolution into further (higher) stages of consciousness to lead us into the discovery of our deep bond with the Universe and the Ground of Being of which we are a tiny part and of which we are also a discrete form of expression. When we can be free from our illusory identification with the false self (the body-mind-memory), we may then learn detachment from our false identity as separate creature and we may experience the bond that links us all together and perceive the oneness of creation; we can let go of our sorrows and our false attachments, and be open to the full experience of life and be free to practise true love.

## **Attachment to conformism**

The last form of attachment is the desire to conform in order to be accepted by others and to flow with the crowd. This happens when we conform to the dominant ideology although we know it is a lie. Comfort seems then to consist in living without questioning but it is soon perceived, with more acuteness, as just laziness and lack of courage. It is indeed a form of freely chosen death, giving up about what life truly is.

General discussion.

Q: We comment each one of these forms of attachment and try to illustrate them with example out of our own lives.

## **10) 16.00 – Power vs powerlessness (45')**

### **What distinguishes / opposes power and powerlessness?**

Dissidence is perceived by any political power as a will for taking over political power. Absurd, but the freedom of dissidence nevertheless threatens it.

The power of powerlessness consists in giving up power, instead of opposing (i.e. using the same weapons, adapting to the strategy of the opponent).

Vow of poverty. Surrender. Renouncing. Giving up control. This is true power (power of life). Life is powerless, i.e. does not aim at domination; see nature.

In the Christian tradition: The crucifixion as utter powerlessness. Siding with the victim. Giving one's life as supreme love.

Powerlessness as our true nature: the recognition of our own awkwardness as a form of freedom. Being who we are.

Powerlessness is not a weakness but an openness to what is.

## **The hidden sphere: Havel's challenge**

“The potential political [or social or whatever kind of public] power of living within the truth [is] rooted in the hidden sphere”

10min personal reflection then sharing.

Q: What is authentic and true power, the power that promotes life? Explain the great contradiction: how can our true recognised and accepted powerlessness become a powerful expression?

Q: How can living in the truth become a [public] power? How is the hidden sphere related to this power? In what consists the force of this power?

*16.45 AFTERNOON TEA*

## **F) Freedom**

### **11) 17.15 – The path of liberation (45')**

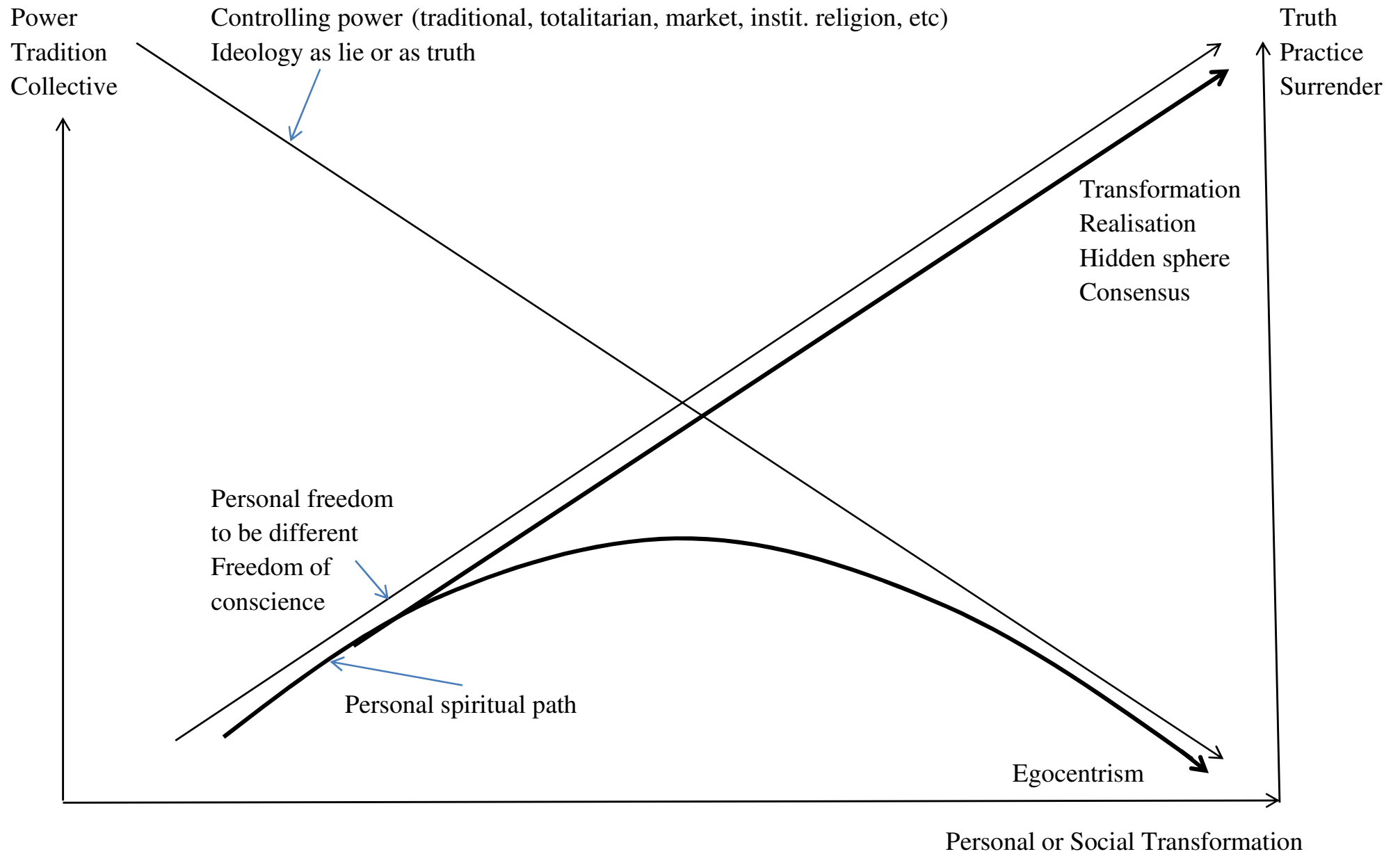
How to be free to be free?

### **Not knowing**

We will never know the truth but yet we get glimpses of it. This text about Brexit (Guardian Weekly Feb. 2019) expresses well this necessity to accept the hidden dimension of things. Like Havel's text, it is about politics, but it is also mainly about ourselves (next page).

*The new Brexit slogan, “Tell them again”, points to menace, not reconciliation or a coming together of differences in productive ways. We are going to take a long time to process the hurt, the shock, the disappointment of societal fracture. We will need to develop ways of talking and listening to get us out of our silos, to protect us from*

## 11) The Path of Liberation



*fixed patterns of thought as we try to remake our country anew.*

*This is a big task. We know how difficult it is even for divorced families to reconstitute themselves so that their members all thrive. A nation rife with inequalities is a formidable proposition. Does psychotherapy have anything to offer here?*

*From Freud to Wilfred Bion to modern practice, psychotherapy has learned much about staying with uncertainty and difficulty, and the ways that this can be productive. It's the bread and butter of psychoanalysis. We often want to act impulsively. To do so is a relief. It expels the difficulty by changing the circumstances that are causing distress. Psychoanalysis disrupts this process by showing how difficult thoughts and feelings can be considered from different perspectives that then enrich the real possibilities for transformation. The process of talking over time allows one to think and feel in such a way that uncertainty itself can be tolerated. It isn't comfortable but is itself a counterblast against closing oneself off.*

*Therapy of all persuasions isn't about what you do know but about what you can't quite let yourself know. If we were transparent to ourselves, we wouldn't need it. Therapy can also be a group process, in which people with different and sometimes dramatically opposed points of view learn to talk together and listen. They make common cause to support each other despite enormous differences, which may start off as contempt or dismissal or just plain dislike. What never fails to impress is the emotional distance people can travel - from rigidity and fear to interest and acceptance of one another.*

*There is now a move to promote regional and national conversations that might start to mend the emotional fallout of the UK's Brexit trauma. These wouldn't bridge the serious economic and social divides. That's an altogether more fundamental project.*

*SUSIE ORBACH PSYCHOANALYST, WRITER AND SOCIAL CRITIC*

Truth is about learning how to not know, becoming aware of our blindness.

### **Truth arises by itself**

We have to learn the feminine way. Truth is not something one conquers by will and power (the masculine way), but it arises by itself. It is rather like the pregnancy of a woman. It takes shape in the hidden sphere without us having control onto what it will become. It remains unknown while it develops in us. We have to receive truth as it is. It happens by grace when we are ready to welcome it.

### **Humility**

We have to learn the path of humility; we never master really what we do; we surely do our best but we are always overwhelmed; we feel awkward. It does not matter because truth arises by itself; yet we need to have the necessary humility to let it arise and to welcome it, to recognise it.

### **The path of liberation**

Q: Diagram: Why do we have the tendency, when not controlled by the power of our "tribe", to evolve toward regression and lower self-focussed freedom, instead of growing into consciousness and true freedom of spirit?

## **(Dis)empowerment**

And similarly: Why do we renounce our empowerment (hidden sphere) when we are free to enjoy it?

## **The Spirit in us**

Life is Mystery. Nobody knows what it is. Truth remains unknown. Yet we have glimpses of it, from inside. The Spirit in us guides us.

## **Giving one's life**

This is all about surrender, giving one's life. True resurrection comes only after surrender, the death of the false self.

10min personal reflection, then groups 2 by 2 (20min), then sharing.

Q: Comment these difference points on the base of the diagram if it is telling to you. If not, then just comment.

18.30 – DINNER

## **12) 20.00 – One Taste and the pin head (60')**

*This self-luminous, vividly clear, present wakefulness and awareness, in which Form and Emptiness are nondual, is the consciousness in which the three states [waking, dream, sleep] are spontaneously present. Maintain it day and night in a continuous practice, my heart children. This is how nonduality is the natural freedom.*

TSOGDRUK RANGDROL

## **One Taste (Ken Wilber)**

(In the following text, understand “One Taste” more or less as the “Ground of Being”, the supreme Source of all:

*Spirit is not an altered state of consciousness or a non-ordinary state. There is no alternative to it. There is only Spirit, within which the world rolls out. There is only One Taste, within which different states arise. But One Taste itself neither comes nor goes; it is beyond motion and stillness, commotion and quiet, movement or rest. Look to the ends of the world, you will only find One Taste. Let your mind wander to the edge of the universe, you will only find One Taste. Let your awareness expand to infinity, you will still only find One Taste.*

*So where is this amazing One Taste? Well, who is reading this page? Who is looking out from those eyes? Who is hearing with those ears? Who is seeing this world right now? That Seer, that ever-present Witness, which is your own immediate Self, stands on the edge of the nondual revelation in this and every moment. Rest as your very own Self; rest as the clear seeing of this page, this room, this world; rest as the vast pure Emptiness in which the entire world is arising . . . and then see if that world isn't one with that Self. For in this moment of simple resting as the Witness, notice that the feeling of the Witness and the feeling of the world are one and the same feeling (“When I heard the bell ring, there was no I and no bell, just the ringing”). In the simple Feeling of Being, you are the World. Look! It's just this.*

*And once you taste One Taste, no matter how fleetingly at first, an entirely new motivation will arise from the depths of your very own being and become a constant atmosphere which your every impulse breathes, and that atmosphere is compassion. Once you taste One Taste, and see the fundamental problems of existence evaporate in the blazing sun of obviousness, you will never again be the same person, deep within your heart. And you will want—finally, profoundly, and most of all— that others, too, may be*

*relieved of the burden of their sleep-walking dreams, relieved of the agony of the separate self, relieved of the inherent torture called time and the gruesome tragedy called space.*

*No matter that lesser motivations will dog your path, no matter that anger and envy, shame and pity, pride and prejudice will remind you daily how much more you can always grow: still, and still, under it all, around it all, above it all, the heartbeat of compassion will resound. A constant cloud of caring will rain on your every parade. And you will be driven, in the best sense of the word, by this ruthless taskmaster, but only because you, eons ago, made a secret promise to let this motivation rule you until all souls are set free in the ocean of infinity.*

*Because of compassion, you will strive harder. Because of compassion, you will get straight. Because of compassion, you will work your fingers to the bone, push at the world until you literally bleed, toil till the tears stain your vision, struggle until life itself runs dry. And in the deepest, deepest center of your Heart, the World is already thanking you. (One Taste, the Journal of Ken Wilber)*

Q: What does this text say?

## **Erwin Schrodinger**

Austrian physicist, one of the fathers of quantum physics.

*Consciousness is a singular of which the plural is unknown.*

*It is not possible that this unity of knowledge, feeling, and choice which you call your own should have sprung into being from nothingness at a given moment not so long ago; rather, this knowledge, feeling, and choice are essentially eternal and unchangeable and numerically one in all*

*people, nay in all sensitive beings.*

*The conditions for your existence are almost as old as the rocks. For thousands of years men have striven and suffered and begotten and women have brought forth in pain. A hundred years ago, another man sat on this spot; like you he gazed with awe and yearning in his heart at the dying light on the glaciers. Like you he was begotten of man and born of woman. He felt pain and brief joy as you do. Was he someone else? Was it not you yourself?*

## **The pin head**

Now a last difficult exercise:

Try to migrate into this pin head, with your whole being, leaving your body where you sit. And try to see the world (the room, the others, your own body and being) from the point of view of the tiny pin head that has almost no materiality. You are just awareness of what is here and now. Of course you know your own body and your own feelings, or what flows in your mind just now, better than the ones of the others; when it hurts you feel it, and you do not feel the hurt of others, except through compassion. The astonishing thing is that our respective forms of personal awareness will all now, just for a while, be contained in this tiny pin head: one and single awareness maybe, in many forms: Consciousness is a singular of which the plural is unknown.

Q: Is the pin head the hidden sphere?

\* \* \* \*

**SUNDAY MORNING**

**07.30 – MEDITATION**

**08.00 – BREAKFAST AND FEEDBACK**

## **Vaclav Havel: The power of the powerless (extracts)**

### **CONTENT: (chapters by Havel, subtitles by the editor)**

- 3 *The role of ideology*
- 4 *Self-preservation of the system: lies to bridge the gap between life and the system*
- 6 *The person as a victim and an instrument of the system: why to conform*
- 7 *Breaking the lies by living within the truth*
- 8 *Living within the truth: the existential as the hidden sphere*
- 9 *The moral dimension of living within the truth*
- 15 *Living within the truth: how it takes shape and gets significance*
- 20 *The place of humanity in the world: technology, democracy and change of mentality*

**“The potential political power of living within the truth [is] rooted in the hidden sphere”**

[...]

### **3 - The role of ideology**

*The manager of a fruit-and-vegetable shop places in his window, among the onions and carrots, the slogan: "Workers of the world, unite!" Why does he do it? What is he trying to communicate to the world? Is he genuinely enthusiastic about the idea of unity among the workers of the world? Is his enthusiasm so great that he feels an irrepressible impulse to acquaint the public with his ideals? Has he really given more than a*

*moment's thought to how such a unification might occur and what it would mean?*

*I think it can safely be assumed that the overwhelming majority of shopkeepers never think about the slogans they put in their windows, nor do they use them to express their real opinions. That poster was delivered to our greengrocer from the enterprise headquarters along with the onions and carrots. He put them all into the window simply because it has been done that way for years, because everyone does it, and because that is the way it has to be. If he were to refuse, there could be trouble. He could be reproached for not having the proper decoration in his window; someone might even accuse him of disloyalty. He does it because these things must be done if one is to get along in life. It is one of the thousands of details that guarantee him a relatively tranquil life "in harmony with society," as they say.*

*Obviously the greengrocer is indifferent to the semantic content of the slogan on exhibit; he does not put the slogan in his window from any personal desire to acquaint the public with the ideal it expresses. This, of course, does not mean that his action has no motive or significance at all, or that the slogan communicates nothing to anyone. The slogan is really a sign, and as such it contains a subliminal but very definite message. Verbally, it might be expressed this way: **"I, the greengrocer XY, live here and I know what I must do. I behave in the manner expected of me. I can be depended upon and am beyond reproach. I am obedient and therefore I have the right to be left in peace."** This message, of course, has an addressee: it is directed above, to the greengrocer's superior, and at the same time it is a shield that protects the greengrocer from potential informers. The slogan's real meaning, therefore, is rooted firmly in the greengrocer's existence. It reflects his vital interests. But what are those vital interests?*

*Let us take note: if the greengrocer had been instructed to display the slogan "I am afraid and therefore unquestioningly obedient," he would not be nearly as indifferent to its semantics, even though the statement would reflect the truth. The greengrocer would be embarrassed and ashamed to put such an unequivocal statement of his*

own degradation in the shop window, and quite naturally so, for he is a human being and thus has a sense of his own dignity. To overcome this complication, his expression of loyalty must take the form of a sign which, at least on its textual surface, indicates a level of disinterested conviction. It must allow the greengrocer to say, "What's wrong with the workers of the world uniting?" Thus the sign helps the greengrocer to conceal from himself the low foundations of his obedience, at the same time concealing the low foundations of power. It hides them behind the facade of something high. And that something is ideology.

Ideology is a specious way of relating to the world. **It offers human beings the illusion of an identity, of dignity, and of morality while making it easier for them to part with them.** As the repository of something suprapersonal and objective, it enables people to deceive their conscience and conceal their true position and their inglorious *modus vivendi*, both from the world and from themselves. It is a very pragmatic but, at the same time, an apparently dignified way of legitimizing what is above, below, and on either side. It is directed toward people and toward God. **It is a veil behind which human beings can hide their own fallen existence, their trivialization, and their adaptation to the status quo.** It is an excuse that everyone can use, from the greengrocer, who conceals his fear of losing his job behind an alleged interest in the unification of the workers of the world, to the highest functionary, whose interest in staying in power can be cloaked in phrases about service to the working class. The primary excusatory function of ideology, therefore, is to provide people, both as victims and pillars of the post-totalitarian system, with the illusion that the system is in harmony with the human order and the order of the universe.

[...] It acts as a kind of bridge between the regime and the people, across which the regime approaches the people and the people approach the regime. This explains why ideology plays such an important role in the post-totalitarian system: that complex machinery of units, hierarchies, transmission belts, and indirect instruments of manipulation which ensure in countless ways the integrity of the regime, leaving nothing to chance, would be quite simply unthinkable without

ideology acting as its all-embracing excuse and as the excuse for each of its parts.

#### **4 - Self-preservation of the system: lies to bridge the gap between life and the system**

[...] **Ideology, in creating a bridge of excuses between the system and the individual, spans the abyss between the aims of the system and the aims of life.** It pretends that the requirements of the system derive from the requirements of life. It is a world of appearances trying to pass for reality.

The post-totalitarian system touches people at every step, but it does so with its ideological gloves on. This is why life in the system is so thoroughly permeated with hypocrisy and lies: government by bureaucracy is called popular government; the working class is enslaved in the name of the working class; the complete degradation of the individual is presented as his ultimate liberation; etc...[...]

Individuals need not believe all these mystifications, but they must behave as though they did, or they must at least tolerate them in silence, or get along well with those who work with them. For this reason, however, they must live within a lie. **They need not accept the lie. It is enough for them to have accepted their life with it and in it.** For by this very fact, individuals confirm the system, fulfill the system, make the system, are the system. [...]

#### **6 - The person as a victim and an instrument of the system: why to conform**

[...] Part of the essence of the post-totalitarian system is that it draws everyone into its sphere of power, not so they may realize themselves as human beings, but so they may surrender their human identity in favor of the identity of the system, that is, so they may become agents of the system's general automatism and servants of its self-determined goals, so they may participate in the common responsibility



for it, so they may be pulled into and ensnared by it, like Faust by Mephistopheles. **More than this: so they may create through their involvement a general norm and, thus, bring pressure to bear on their fellow citizens.** And further: so they may learn to be comfortable with their involvement, to identify with it as though it were something natural and inevitable and, ultimately, so they may—with no external urging—come to treat any non-involvement as an abnormality, as arrogance, as an attack on themselves, as a form of dropping out of society. **By pulling everyone into its power structure, the post-totalitarian system makes everyone an instrument of a mutual totality, the auto-totality of society.** [...]The fact that human beings have created, and daily create, this self-directed system through which they divest themselves of their innermost identity is not therefore the result of some incomprehensible misunderstanding of history, nor is it history somehow gone off its rails. Neither is it the product of some diabolical higher will which has decided, for reasons unknown, to torment a portion of humanity in this way. It can happen and did happen only because there is obviously in modern humanity a certain tendency toward the creation, or at least the toleration, of such a system. **There is obviously something in human beings which responds to this system, something they reflect and accommodate, something within them which paralyzes every effort of their better selves to revolt.** Human beings are compelled to live within a lie, but they can be compelled to do so only because they are in fact capable of living in this way. Therefore not only does the system alienate humanity, but at the same time alienated humanity supports this system as its own involuntary master plan, as a degenerate image of its own degeneration, as a record of people's own failure as individuals.

The essential aims of life are present naturally in every person. In everyone there is some longing for humanity's rightful dignity, for moral integrity, for free expression of being and a sense of transcendence over the world of existence. Yet, at the same time, each person is capable, to a greater or lesser degree, of coming to terms with living within the lie. Each person somehow succumbs to a profane trivialization of his inherent humanity, and to utilitarianism. In everyone there is some

willingness to merge with the anonymous crowd and to flow comfortably along with it down the river of pseudolife. This is much more than a simple conflict between two identities. It is something far worse: it is a challenge to the very notion of identity itself.

In highly simplified terms, it could be said that the post-totalitarian system has been built on foundations laid by the historical encounter between dictatorship and the consumer society. **Is it not true that the far-reaching adaptability to living a lie and the effortless spread of social auto-totality have some connection with the general unwillingness of consumption-oriented people to sacrifice some material certainties for the sake of their own spiritual and moral integrity?** With their willingness to surrender higher values when faced with the trivializing temptations of modern civilization? With their vulnerability to the attractions of mass indifference? And in the end, is not the grayness and the emptiness of life in the post-totalitarian system only an inflated caricature of modern life in general? **And do we not in fact stand (although in the external measures of civilization, we are far behind) as a kind of warning to the West, revealing to its own latent tendencies?**

## **7 - Breaking the lies by living within the truth**

Let's us now imagine that one day something in our greengrocer snaps and he stops putting up the slogans merely to ingratiate himself. He stops voting in elections he knows are a farce. He begins to say what he really thinks at political meetings. And he even finds the strength in himself to express solidarity with those whom his conscience commands him to support. In this revolt the greengrocer steps out of living within the lie. He rejects the ritual and breaks the rules of the game. He discovers once more his suppressed identity and dignity. He gives his freedom a concrete significance. His revolt is an attempt to live within the truth.

The bill is not long in coming. He will be relieved of his post as manager of the shop and transferred to the warehouse. His pay will be reduced. His hopes for a holiday in Bulgaria will evaporate. His

children's access to higher education will be threatened. His superiors will harass him and his fellow workers will wonder about him. Most of those who apply these sanctions, however, will not do so from any authentic inner conviction but simply under pressure from conditions, the same conditions that once pressured the greengrocer to display the official slogans. They will persecute the greengrocer either because it is expected of them, or to demonstrate their loyalty, or simply as part of the general panorama, to which belongs an awareness that this is how situations of this sort are dealt with, that this, in fact, is how things are always done, particularly if one is not to become suspect oneself. The executors, therefore, behave essentially like everyone else, to a greater or lesser degree: as components of the post-totalitarian system, as agents of its automatism, as petty instruments of the social auto-totality.

Thus the power structure, through the agency of those who carry out the sanctions, those anonymous components of the system, will spew the greengrocer from its mouth. The system, through its alienating presence in people, will punish him for his rebellion. It must do so because the logic of its automatism and self-defense dictates it. The greengrocer has not committed a simple, individual offense, isolated in its own uniqueness, but something incomparably more serious. By breaking the rules of the game, he has disrupted the game as such. **He has exposed it as a mere game. He has shattered the world of appearances, the fundamental pillar of the system. He has upset the power structure by tearing apart what holds it together. He has demonstrated that living a lie is living a lie. [...]**

## **8 - Living within the truth: the existential as the hidden sphere**

*Individuals can be alienated from themselves only because there is something in them to alienate. The terrain of this violation is their authentic existence. Living the truth is thus woven directly into the texture of living a lie. It is the repressed alternative, the authentic aim to which living a lie is an inauthentic response. Only against this*

**background does living a lie make any sense: it exists because of that background.** In its excusatory, chimerical rootedness in the human order, it is a response to nothing other than the human predisposition to truth. Under the orderly surface of the life of lies, therefore, there slumbers **the hidden sphere of life in its real aims, of its hidden openness to truth.**

The singular, explosive, incalculable political power of living within the truth resides in the fact that living openly within the truth has an ally, invisible to be sure, but omnipresent: this hidden sphere. It is from this sphere that life lived openly in the truth grows; it is to this sphere that it speaks, and in it that it finds understanding. This is where the potential for communication exists. But this place is hidden and therefore, from the perspective of power, very dangerous. The complex ferment that takes place within it goes on in semidarkness, and by the time it finally surfaces into the light of day as an assortment of shocking surprises to the system, it is usually too late to cover them up in the usual fashion. Thus they create a situation in which the regime is confounded, invariably causing panic and driving it to react in inappropriate ways.

**It seems that the primary breeding ground for what might, in the widest possible sense of the word, be understood as an opposition in the post-totalitarian system is living within the truth.** The confrontation between these opposition forces and the powers that be, of course, will obviously take a form essentially different from that typical of an open society or a classical dictatorship. **Initially, this confrontation does not take place on the level of real, institutionalized, quantifiable power which relies on the various instruments of power, but on a different level altogether: the level of human consciousness and conscience, the existential level. [...]**

This power does not participate in any direct struggle for power; rather, it makes its influence felt in the obscure arena of being itself. The hidden movements it gives rise to there, however, can issue forth (when, where, under what circumstances, and to what extent are difficult to predict) in something visible: a real political act or event, a social movement, a sudden explosion of civil unrest, a sharp conflict inside an

apparently monolithic power structure, or simply an irrepressible transformation in the social and intellectual climate. [...]

## **9 - The moral dimension of living within the truth**

*The profound crisis of human identity brought on by living within a lie, a crisis which in turn makes such a life possible, certainly possesses a moral dimension as well; it appears, among other things, as a deep moral crisis in society. A person who has been seduced by the consumer value system, whose identity is dissolved in an amalgam of the accouterments of mass civilization, and who has no roots in the order of being, no sense of responsibility for anything higher than his own personal survival, is a demoralized person. The system depends on this demoralization, deepens it, is in fact a projection of it into society.*

*Living within the truth, as humanity's revolt against an enforced position, is, on the contrary, an attempt to regain control over one's own sense of responsibility. In other words, it is clearly a moral act, not only because one must pay so dearly for it, but principally because it is not self-serving: the risk may bring rewards in the form of a general amelioration in the situation, or it may not. [...]*

## **15 - Living within the truth: how it takes shape and gets significance**

*Our greengrocer's attempt to live within the truth may be confined to not doing certain things. He decides not to put flags in his window when his only motive for putting them there in the first place would have been to avoid being reported by the house warden; he does not vote in elections that he considers false; he does not hide his opinions from his superiors. In other words, he may go no further than "merely" refusing to comply with certain demands made on him by the system (which of course is not an insignificant step to take). This may, however, grow into something more. The greengrocer may begin to do something concrete, something that goes beyond an immediately personal self-defensive reaction against*

*manipulation, something that will manifest his newfound sense of higher responsibility. He may, for example, organize his fellow greengrocers to act together in defense of their interests. He may write letters to various institutions, drawing their attention to instances of disorder and injustice around him. He may seek out unofficial literature, copy it, and lend it to his friends.*

*If what I have called living within the truth is a basic existential (and of course potentially political) starting point for all those "independent citizens' initiatives" and "dissident" or "opposition" movements this does not mean that every attempt to live within the truth automatically belongs in this category. On the contrary, in its most original and broadest sense, living within the truth covers a vast territory whose outer limits are vague and difficult to map, a territory full of modest expressions of human volition, the vast majority of which will remain anonymous and whose political impact will probably never be felt or described any more concretely than simply as a part of a social climate or mood. Most of these expressions remain elementary revolts against manipulation: you simply straighten your backbone and live in greater dignity as an individual.*

*Here and there—thanks to the nature, the assumptions, and the professions of some people, but also thanks to a number of accidental circumstances such as the specific nature of the local milieu, friends, and so on—a more coherent and visible initiative may emerge from this wide and anonymous hinterland, an initiative that transcends "merely" individual revolt and is transformed into more conscious, structured, and purposeful work. The point where living within the truth ceases to be a mere negation of living with a lie and becomes articulate in a particular way is the point at which something is born that might be called the "independent spiritual, social, and political life of society." This independent life is not separated from the rest of life ("dependent life") by some sharply defined line. Both types frequently co-exist in the same people. Nevertheless, its most important focus is marked by a relatively high degree of inner emancipation. **It sails upon the vast ocean of the manipulated life like little boats, tossed by the waves but always***

*bobbing back as visible messengers of living within the truth, articulating the suppressed aims of life.*

*What is this independent life of society? The spectrum of its expressions and activities is naturally very wide. It includes everything from self-education and thinking about the world, through free creative activity and its communication to others, to the most varied free, civic attitudes, including instances of independent social self-organization. In short, it is an area in which living within the truth becomes articulate and materializes in a visible way.*

*[...] The first conclusion to be drawn, then, is that the original and most important sphere of activity, one that predetermines all the others, is simply an attempt to create and support the independent life of society as an articulated expression of living within the truth. In other words, serving truth consistently, purposefully, and articulately, and organizing this service. This is only natural, after all: if living within the truth is an elementary starting point for every attempt made by people to oppose the alienating pressure of the system, if it is the only meaningful basis of any independent act of political import, and if, ultimately, it is also the most intrinsic existential source of the "dissident" attitude, then it is difficult to imagine that even manifest "dissent" could have any other basis than the service of truth, the truthful life, and the attempt to make room for the genuine aims of life. [...]*

## **20 - The place of humanity in the world: technology, democracy and change of mentality**

*[...] It would appear that the traditional parliamentary democracies can offer no fundamental opposition to the automatism of technological civilization and the industrial-consumer society, for they, too, are being dragged helplessly along by it. People are manipulated in ways that are infinitely more subtle and refined than the brutal methods used in the post-totalitarian societies. But this static complex of rigid, conceptually sloppy, and politically pragmatic mass political parties run by professional apparatuses and releasing the citizen from all*

*forms of concrete and personal responsibility; and those complex focuses of capital accumulation engaged in secret manipulations and expansion; the omnipresent dictatorship of consumption, production, advertising, commerce, consumer culture, and all that flood of information: all of it, so often analyzed and described, can only with great difficulty be imagined as the source of humanity's rediscovery of itself. In his June 1978 Harvard lecture, Solzhenitsyn describes the illusory nature of freedoms not based on personal responsibility and the chronic inability of the traditional democracies, as a result, to oppose violence and totalitarianism. In a democracy, human beings may enjoy many personal freedoms and securities that are unknown to us, but in the end they do them no good, for they too are ultimately victims of the same automatism, and are incapable of defending their concerns about their own identity or preventing their superficialization or transcending concerns about their own personal survival to become proud and responsible members of the polis, making a genuine contribution to the creation of its destiny. [...]*

For the complete text (47p) see:

[www.desertcreekhouse.com.au/texts/powerless.pdf](http://www.desertcreekhouse.com.au/texts/powerless.pdf)

# **The Power of the Powerless**

## **22 – 24 February 2019**

*18.00 - EVENING MEAL*

### **A) Vaclav Havel's text**

01) 19.00 – Introduction (15')

02) 19.15 – The content and meaning of Havel's text (90')

Summary

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*SATURDAY MORNING*

*07.30 – MEDITATION*

*08.00 – BREAKFAST*

### **B) What is ideology?**

03) 09.00 – The role of ideology (30')

04) 09.30 - A vision and perspective (30')

### **C) Knowing the truth**

05) 10.00 – Where the Source of truth is not (30')

*10.30 MORNING TEA*

06) 11.00 – Where do we find expressions of truth? (60')

### **D) Living in the Truth: transformation**

07) 12.00 – How do we live in the truth? (45')

*13.00 LUNCH*

08) 14.30 - Our desires and projects / adaptation to Reality (45')

09) 15.15 – Different forms of attachment (45')

10) 16.00 – Power vs powerlessness (45')

*16.45 AFTERNOON TEA*

### **F) Freedom**

11) 17.15 – The path of liberation (45')

*18.30 – DINNER*

12) 20.00 – One Taste and the pin head (60')

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*SUNDAY MORNING*

*07.30 – MEDITATION*

*08.00 – BREAKFAST AND FEEDBACK*

### **Vaclav Havel: The power of the powerless (extracts)**

*3 - The role of ideology*

*4 - Self-preservation of the system: lies to bridge the gap between life and the system*

*6 - The person as a victim and an instrument of the system: why to conform*

*7 - Breaking the lies by living within the truth*

*8 - Living within the truth: the existential as the hidden sphere*

*9 - The moral dimension of living within the truth*

*15 - Living within the truth: how it takes shape and gets significance*

*20 - The place of humanity in the world: technology, democracy and change of mentality*

