

3rd Prize Essay: The Meaning of Stuttering

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After certain experiences get alive inside of you it is difficult to imagine how it used to be before. For almost 25 years I had gone through various ups and downs in stuttering. Then I reached a particular point where everything seemed to be quite simple. It happened on a walking tour through a forest near Dresden, the city I live, in the middle of December 2006. I tried to catch a group which had started one hour before I did. Actually, I had not really been in a hurry and walked alone for almost two hours before I finally reached them. On my lonesome – but not lonely – way an idea as clear as a ray of sunlight entered my mind: *Stuttering is a corrective for the unconscious use of speech in the society; just like not being able to talk for mute people.*

But, what does that mean?

Everyone of us is a part of *the* society. Getting conscious about our own speaking always starts with ourselves; in exchange with other people. What did we say? How did we say it? Why ... all these questions. Usually people don't take that much care about the things they say. Yet, isn't every word a thing that can change other things, other people's minds? Changed minds can change other minds. In the end, it's the minds which give orders for any action using the spoken word or a signature as tools. Our words will be in some way materialized in the very end. Doesn't even the Bible say: *"In the beginning there was the word"*? If so, then we can be sure, that shortly after the first occurrence of speech there was also the first abuse of the word. If God exists then a specific countermeasure to limit that abuse must have been introduced to the world as well. But how did it happen? How can we recognise it?

Well, let's take a very popular example. Most of us were raised up in a time when TV and cars were common things of our everyday lives. Not so for our grandparents for who both things were as amazing as the Internet is for us nowadays. In some households the TV set(s) won't get switched off the whole day. Plenty of people drive their cars every day. How can we see and feel the difference of a life without TV sets or cars? Usually there's no reason for us to stop using such things unless a time will come when we get sort of fed up with them. Sometimes – and I assume that this is more probable – by certain circumstances we won't have a TV set or car anymore. Perhaps we're on holiday or had a car crash. In these times we may recognise that neither a TV set nor a car is really necessary for life. Surely, sometimes it's good to have one, but in fact these aren't things which will decide whether we'll survive or not. On the contrary, we're not in the least aware of the various side effects of watching TV and driving cars regularly. Not being able to watch TV in a crowd of TV freaks and lovers must almost be like not being able to speak freely in a crowd of "speak-the-whole-day-about-what-I-like" people. It must be similar to walking in a queue of four wheel cars.

However, times have changed. People who watch TV unconsciously are quite often overloaded with information, not being aware of what they see and feel in fact. Car drivers end up in traffic jams in at least half of their driving times. So, what's the advantage of using your own eyes to make up your opinion instead of watching the world on a TV screen? What's the benefit of walking in times of high speed and world-wide mobility? What's the use, the advantage ... well, the *meaning* of

stuttering in a time that puts communicative skills on the top of the agenda of necessary things in everyone's life?

It is the contrast. Stuttering creates distinctions, changes and thus awareness; no matter if we want that or not. It's up to us how we see and use it. Slowing down – not only on the streets and in the TV sets – is an issue of our recent lifetime; slowing down in speech as well. Speaking slower and less fluent demands some effort of the people listening. Usually people try to listen. Even if not ... is it our problem?

Scientific research has shown that the nervous system of people who stutter is different from those of fluent speakers. It makes us more sensitive when we speak. We, the people affected by stuttering, can decide whether we call this very characteristic a progressive, evolutionary development or a malfunction. Ignorance and missing self-esteem very often make us look like "poor people" who have to be helped in managing our lives. Sure, we need

the support of some people. Yet, it starts with the acceptance that stuttering is simply another way to talk. Firstly, we have to accept it as a part of us, of our souls. If stuttering was dangerous for the existence of our species then stuttering people would have died out over the centuries. However, more than 3200 years after Moses – another famous person who stuttered – lived, still millions of people stutter ... world-wide.

Stuttering is something very useful, maybe even necessary for human evolution. Years over years we were taught that – coming back to cars and watching TV once more – having a small car or even no car at all or not being informed about the last episode of the daily soap opera or the latest news won't allow us to be recognised members of the society. All that is only valuable when really needed – used consciously, meaning in time and with efficiency. More than fluent speaking, stuttering is a beneficial tool to watch ourselves and other people speak. Let's take it as a guide on our adventurous journey to consciousness.

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