

"The Healing of Suffering" **Punta de Vacas, Mendoza, Argentina, May 4, 1969**

Notes:

(1) *At the time Silo gave this speech, the military dictatorship then in power in Argentina had banned all public gatherings in urban areas. Consequently, a bleak spot known as Punta de Vacas that was high in the Andes on the border between Chile and Argentina was chosen as the location for Silo's speech. Early on the morning of May 4, the authorities set up roadblocks on all roads leading to the site. Machine-gun posts, military vehicles, and armed men were stationed along the roads, and everyone was required to show identification papers in order to pass through the checkpoints, a requirement that led to disputes with some members of the international press. Against the magnificent backdrop of the snow-covered Andes, Silo began speaking to an audience of some two hundred people. The day was cold and bright, and by noon the event was over.*

(2) *This is Silo's first public expression of his ideas. In language at times poetic, he explains that the most important knowledge for living ("true wisdom") is not the same as knowledge found in books - knowledge of universal laws or things of that kind - but is a question of inner experience. The most important knowledge for living is related to comprehending suffering, and how to surpass it.*

This speech presents a very simple thesis, which is divided into several parts: 1. It begins by distinguishing between physical pain and its derivations on one hand, maintaining they can be made to recede through progress in science and justice, and mental suffering on the other hand, which cannot be eliminated by such means. 2. Suffering comes to us through three pathways: the pathway of perception, the pathway of memory, and the pathway of imagination. 3. Suffering reveals a state of violence. 4. Violence is rooted in desire. 5. There are various degrees and forms of desire.

By attending to these factors ("through inner meditation"), one may advance. Thus: 6. Desire gives rise to violence ("the more gross the desires"), which does not remain inside people but spreads, contaminating the space of relationships. 7. Violence can be seen in various forms besides its primary form of physical violence. 8. We all need simple forms of conduct by which to orient our lives ("keep simple commandments"): Learn to be a bearer of peace, joy, and, above all, hope.

Conclusion: Science and justice are necessary in order to conquer physical pain in human life, while the overcoming of primitive desires is indispensable to conquer mental suffering.

The healing of suffering

If you have come to hear a man who it is thought transmits wisdom, you have mistaken your way, because true wisdom is not communicated by books or impassioned speeches - true wisdom is found in the depths of your consciousness, just as true love is found in the depths of your heart.

If you have come at the urging of slanderers and hypocrites to hear this man so that what you hear today may later be used in arguments against him, you have mistaken your way, because this man has not come here to ask anything of you, or to use you, because he does not need you.

You are listening to a man who does not know the laws that rule the Universe, who is not privy to the laws of History, who is ignorant of the relationships that govern the peoples of the world. Far from the cities and their sick ambitions, this man addresses himself to your consciousness. Over the cities, where each day is a struggle, a hope cut short by death, where love is followed by hate, where forgiveness is followed by revenge, over the cities of the rich and the poor, over the immense fields of humanity, a mantle of suffering and sorrow has fallen.

You suffer when pain bites your body. You suffer when hunger grips your body. But you suffer not only from the immediate pain and hunger of your body, you suffer also from the consequences of the diseases that befall your body.

We must distinguish between two types of suffering. There is the suffering that occurs as a result of sickness, and which recedes with the advance of science, just as hunger recedes when the empire of justice advances.

There is another kind of suffering that does not depend on the sickness of your body but yet derives from that sickness: if you are disabled, if you cannot see, if you cannot hear, you suffer. But though that suffering derives from your body, or from the diseases of your body, such suffering is of your mind.

There is yet another kind of suffering, which neither the advance of science nor the advance of justice can make recede. This type of suffering, which is strictly of your mind, retreats before faith, before joy in life,

before love. You must understand that such suffering is always rooted in the violence that exists in your own consciousness. You suffer because you fear losing what you have, or because of what you have already lost, or because of what you desperately long to reach. You suffer because of what you lack, or because you fear in general. . . . These, then, are the great enemies of humankind: fear of sickness, fear of poverty, fear of death, fear of loneliness. All these forms of suffering pertain to your mind; all of them reveal your inner violence, the violence that there is in your mind. Notice how that violence always stems from desire. The more violent a person is, the coarser are their desires.

I would like to tell you a story that took place long ago.

Once there was a traveler who had to make a long journey. He yoked his animal to a cart and began the journey to his faraway destination, a journey he had to finish within a certain time. He called the animal Necessity and the cart Desire; he called one wheel Pleasure and the other one Pain. The traveler veered sometimes to the right and sometimes to the left, yet never stopped moving toward his destiny. The faster the cart traveled, the faster the wheels of Pleasure and Pain turned, carrying as they did the cart of Desire and connected as they were to the same axle. But the journey was very long, and at length our traveler grew bored. And so he decided to decorate his cart, and he began to adorn it with all manner of beautiful things. But the more he loaded down the cart of Desire with these decorations, the heavier became the load for Necessity to pull. On the curves and steep hills of the road, the poor animal grew exhausted and unable to pull the cart of Desire. And where the road was muddy the wheels of Pleasure and Suffering became mired down.

One day, because the road was long and he was still so far from his destination, our traveler grew desperate. That night, he decided to meditate on this problem, and in the midst of his meditation he heard the neighing of his old friend, Necessity. Comprehending the message, very early the next morning he began to lighten the cart of its burden - stripping it of all its fine adornments - and then he set off once more toward his destiny with the animal Necessity pulling the cart at a brisk trot. Still, he had lost much time, time that was now irrecoverable. The next night our traveler again sat down to meditate, and he realized - thanks to another message from his old friend - that now he had to undertake a task that was doubly difficult, because it meant letting go. At daybreak, he abandoned the cart of Desire. It is true that when he did so, he lost the wheel of Pleasure, but then he also lost the wheel of Suffering. And so, abandoning the cart of Desire, he mounted the animal called Necessity and astride its back galloped off across the green fields until he reached his destiny.

See how desire can trap you. But notice also that desire can have different qualities. There are cruder desires, and there are more elevated desires. Elevate desire, surpass desire, purify desire! In doing so, surely you will have to sacrifice the wheel of Pleasure, but you will also become free of the wheel of Suffering.

The violence in a person, spurred by desire, does not simply lie like a sickness upon the consciousness of that person - it acts in the world of other people and is exercised on others. And do not think that when I talk of violence I am speaking only about the armed act of war, where some people destroy others. That is one form of physical violence. But there is also economic violence. Economic violence is the violence through which you exploit other people; economic violence occurs when you steal from another, when you are no longer a brother or sister to others, but become a bird of prey upon other people. There is also racial violence. Or do you think that you are not engaging in violence when you persecute a person who is not of your race, do you think you are not engaging in violence when you defame that person for being of a race different from your own? And there is religious violence: do you think that you are not engaging in violence when you refuse work, or close your doors to a person, or dismiss that person because that person does not share your religious beliefs? Do you think that it is not violence when you use defamation to build a wall around other people, excluding them from your society because they do not share your religious beliefs - isolating them within their families, segregating them and their loved ones because they do not share your religious beliefs?

There are other forms of violence that are imposed by the Philistine morality. You wish to impose your way of life upon another; you wish to impose your vocation upon another. But who has told you that you are an example that must be followed? Who has told you that you can impose a way of life because it pleases you? What makes your way of life a model, a pattern that you have the right to impose on others? This, then, is another form of violence.

Only inner faith and inner meditation can end the violence in yourself and others and the world around you. What appear to be ways out of the violence are really false doors, false solutions, that cannot end the violence. This world is on the verge of exploding and people have found no way to end the violence! Do not seek solutions that are false. There is no politics that can solve this mad urge for violence. There is no political party or movement on the planet that can end the violence. Do not accept these false doors, they will not lead us out of the violence in the world. . . . I have been told that all over the world young people are turning to false paths to escape the violence and inner suffering. They turn to drugs as a solution. Do not accept these false doors to try to end the violence.

My brother, my sister - keep these simple commandments, as simple as these rocks and this snow and this sun that bless us. Carry peace within you and carry it to others. My brother, my sister - back in history is a human being bearing the face of suffering. Look at that suffering face. . . but remember that it is necessary to move forward, and it is necessary to learn to laugh, and it is necessary to learn to love.

To you, my brother and sister, I throw this hope, this hope of joy, this hope of love, so that you may elevate your heart and elevate your spirit, and so that you do not forget to elevate your body.