



Pleasure — Full Pulsation of Life

Pathwork Guide Lecture No. 177

1996 Edition

November 7, 1969

Greetings to all my friends here who are gathered together to obtain nourishment and truth, in whatever way they need it at the moment. Tonight's lecture deals with the topic of pleasure -- the meaning and significance of pleasure in the universal scheme, as well as for the individual human entity.

Religion speaks of the ultimate bliss of being. However, most of the time this is completely misunderstood. The bliss of being is believed to be a state totally different from the human state of ultimate pleasure, or from the human potential for it, whether it be realized or not. Therefore bliss seems very remote from the actual human experience. It appears to be something totally disembodied and obtainable only eons later. This kind of bliss appears so unreal and distant from what people consider truly desirable that it remains at best a vague theory.

In truth, there is essentially no difference between the ultimate spiritual state of bliss and the human potential for it. Only the degree of intensity varies, for no human being is capable of the depth of experience which is possible for an unstructured, highly developed consciousness. But pleasure remains pleasure. Spiritual pleasure is not bodiless, for even unstructured consciousness is not formless. Unstructured consciousness creates so-called "subtle bodies" of streaming energy in the purest form. Therefore this energy form is without obstruction; it is pleasure itself. The human body in its gross matter represents an obstruction that can be overcome only when the total personality attains harmony with the energy streamings of cosmic origin.

A liberated human being with little or no blocks and inhibitions, without distortions and negativity, is capable of a high degree of pleasure, for the energy of the subtle bodies penetrates the surface body. We have often spoken about the fact that the simultaneous longing for pleasure and the fear of it constitute one of your most basic inner struggles. You know this from your own experience.

Tonight we shall discuss the legitimate need for pleasure and its purpose for the human entity. I will show that this need is not only not in opposition to true spiritual self-realization -- as many people falsely believe -- but is in fact one of its necessary prerequisites. Or to put it differently, whoever blocks pleasure must, perforce, also block the deep connection with the spiritual self. Conversely, only those who are free enough to let go in one respect are free to do so in the other. These apparently two experiences -- spiritual self-realization and the capacity for pleasure -- become one and the same. They are interactive and interdependent.

We shall also talk about the obstructions that barricade you from the deep experience of pleasure supreme. What are these obstructions? What hinders the realization of that state which will always be the goal of your greatest longing, whether or not you are aware of it? In your own soul, you obstruct this longing and are therefore at war within yourself.

I do not wish to dwell too long on the cosmic meaning of pleasure, to avoid the danger of making it appear too remote from your life in the here and now. This is not so at all, for all cosmic reality is applicable at any state in the now. But it is easy to misread and misapply the meaning of cosmic pleasure. Only when you reach the point where you can open the inner flow to remove all obstructions and blocks so that you experience a high degree of bliss will you deeply know that human pleasure is essentially the same as the cosmic state of bliss, that spiritual and physical pleasure are one -- not opposites.

Pleasure, in the real sense, is intensely fleshly and intensely spiritual. There is no division between the fleshly and spiritual state. This is why there is no need to dwell too much on the philosophical aspects of pleasure in the scheme of creation. The only thing I would like to mention about cosmic reality in this respect is that the ultimate state of liberation, of cosmic being, is total pleasure. So pleasure is the ultimate reality. Bliss is not -- as religion seems to imply in its misunderstood interpretations -- a reward for having been "good." Bliss is the natural state of a unified being in harmony with itself and the universe.

When we speak of pleasure, we must also be clear about what we mean. I do not mean pleasurable pastimes of the mind. I do not mean shallow substitutes and escapes. I mean a state of physical and spiritual bliss that is experienced in every particle of one's body and soul, of the outer and inner being -- with all sensations and faculties alive, awake, and feeling. This blissful state is very much here and now. Yet this state is also the ultimate spiritual reality of every entity. It is your birthright, my friends. Your longing for it is the most real and healthy movement within yourself. It is only your confusions and dualistic splits that create your misconceptions, fears, and shames that are so superfluous.

Let us now come to the meaning of pleasure for the human being on all levels of existence. The pleasure we speak about here is, as I said, a total experience, not a divided experience. It is not a physical experience with the spiritual side left out, nor is it a spiritual state that does not include the physical state. Your entire being vibrates and pulsates, undividedly, in harmony with yourself, the universe -- and hence with another human being. There is no division in you, no No-current, no doubt about the rightfulness of your bliss, no ifs and buts because your bliss interferes with the world around you. You feel no guilt or hesitation. On the contrary, you will feel deeply that the greater your ecstasy and joy, the more you contribute to the world.

When you reach this inner awareness -- not a theoretical, but an experiential awareness -- you will create the following conditions within yourself: You will make the total experience of pleasure a spiritual and practical goal. You will act unceasingly on behalf of this goal. You will remove all inner obstructions and patiently explore your unconscious to bring the obstructions to light. You will devote time and effort to this venture. You will feel increasingly that personal fulfillment and pleasure further spiritual growth and self-realization, and vice versa. The capacity to love intimately and completely with your body, soul, and spirit will be the goal that simultaneously advances your self-purification -- for one cannot exist without the other. I will say more about this later.

Let us first discuss what full pleasure means on all levels of the human personality. On the physical level: physical health and well-being are regulated by and dependent on the state of pleasure the body is capable of allowing.

The streamings of pleasure are the simultaneous forces of life, health, selfrenewal and regeneration. Therefore health and longevity result from the capacity for pleasure. Conversely, to the degree you deny yourself pleasure -- due to shames, fears, misconceptions, negativities, impurities -- to that degree you cut off your body from the wellspring of the universal flow.

You have often heard me say that each human entity is a microcosm of an entire universe within, representing the macrocosmic universe. The same laws and conditions apply to both. Therefore, if your inner universe is in harmony with itself, the universal flow of spiritual healing power, life, health and pleasure that permeates the entire creation can also permeate you. You become part of the universe and the universe is part of you. You transcend the structural limitations even while you are still within your body. The universal, unlimited abundance of ever self-renewing life will become a part of you -- in a relative way, because you are still in the body. This happens in an absolute way only when the body is transcended.

But do not think that the feelings you experience in an unblocked body and soul cease to exist when you die. On the contrary, the body feelings come from the subtle bodies and can manifest because the body blocks are removed. When bodily existence is transcended, the identical feelings will manifest ever so much stronger because they are even less blocked by the gross matter of physical life. It is important to understand that feelings of pleasure and bliss that you register in your body will not cease in an existence beyond the earth life. They will only be intensified. You will be more capable of sustaining the feelings of pleasure supreme, ecstasy, bliss, love, and what is called sexuality in this earth sphere -- a total fusion with another being. Here I am talking about entities who have put false fears and obstructions behind them; otherwise their spiritual existence will not be different from their earthly one.

Any kind of physical illness or deterioration, including physical death, is a manifestation of division, conflict, and denial of pleasure. Spiritual unfoldment must bring an increase of pleasure and not, as many authoritarian religions want to have it, denial and sacrifice of pleasure. This concept of martyrdom is a total misunderstanding of spiritual truth. But the truth can be understood only when pleasure is no longer felt to be negative, when it is no longer at the expense of another human being, when it no longer carries destructive currents. Anyone can confirm that the degree of deeply experienced pleasure determines energy and well-being. This is not something you have to take at face value. You can experience it yourself.

Now let us go to a deeper level in exploring the importance of pleasure. On the psychological level, the importance of pleasure is at least as great as on the physical. How can you shoulder mature self-responsibility? How can you accept the difficulties of the temporary reality which surrounds you and which is, in effect, the expression of your present state within yourself? How can you cope with the frustrations that come your way?

In the last analysis, of course, frustrations come your way due to your inner limitations. Nevertheless, you have to accept your limitations, and that is not easy. How can you want to give up the various ways in which you violate and impair your integrity, in which you want to secretly cheat life, in which you want others to carry the burden of responsibility for your mistakes? How can you truly commit yourself to integrity, truth, deepest honesty and a positive approach to yourself and life? How can you wish to abandon negative pleasure, the pseudo-satisfactions of your pretenses, your role-playing, your defenses? How can you begin to wholly and consciously commit yourself to the reality of living, not for the sake of appearances but for the sake of what is, if you are not aware of the fact that the deepest bliss awaits you just as a result of abandoning these pseudo-satisfactions and pleasures, these poor substitutes?

As long as you are convinced that these substitutes are all the pleasure you can have and that living a decent life implies sacrifice, you cannot even believe in pleasure. This difficulty is intensified because you cannot bear pleasure exactly to the degree that you cling to all these false ways of life. You become capable of taking in genuine pleasure only to the degree you give up the false, negative pleasure.

You must find a way to break through the vicious circle in which you are caught, which goes like this: The less you truly want to give up all the subtle falsities and destructive defenses, the less you can accept pleasure; therefore you cannot believe in it; therefore you cannot want to give up that which obstructs you from experiencing it; therefore neither the will and commitment to experience pleasure, nor the giving up of destructive, life-inhibiting patterns can exist.

Accepting reality and mature self-responsibility seems an insurmountable hardship if not accompanied by pleasure as a by-product. But to the degree you insist on being an irresponsible child -- wanting to make others pay for your actions or inactions, wanting to secretly, neurotically cheat life -- to the degree you impair your integrity, to that degree you cannot experience pleasure. Your innermost being does not make it possible. Your energy is engaged in negative inner activities. By the same token, to the degree that you assume self-responsibility, to the degree you respect and love yourself because you no longer cheat even in the subtlest of ways, to that same degree you become more and more capable of experiencing pleasure.

The more you can look forward to a full and blissful existence, the less hard it will seem to give up these destructive patterns on the deepest level imaginable, to stand on your own feet, to accept necessary frustrations. The equation of the acceptance of full autonomy with the capacity for pleasure is extremely important to comprehend. One is not possible without the other. If being a deeply self-responsible and decent person in the truest sense seems to imply that pleasure must be renounced, then pleasure cannot really be desired, or if it is, then only in an unhealthy way, as a reward to the "good child" from an authority figure one depends on.

You will want selfhood, autonomy, in the truest sense of the word -- however hard it may first seem to attain it -- when you know that your fear of pleasure will disappear proportionately to your self-purification. To the degree you assume what initially appears as the hardship of adulthood with all that this implies, something in you will ease up and feel less and less threatened. Instead you will become open to pleasure in its deepest and fullest meaning.

All you can meditate about the connection between emotional maturity with all its meanings and the realization of personal pleasure. This is very logical, my friends. You know that you can truly love only when you are self-responsible, not when you cling to someone else, when you are dependent on someone else. Such dependency may have the superficial appearance of love, but you have already experienced in your work on this path that nothing could be further from the truth. Dependency stems from fear and creates greater fear, leading inevitably to resentment and hate. You try very hard to conceal these feelings, because it is threatening to hate the person one needs and depends on.

Love is possible only when you are free, when you are a self unto yourself without depending on another. And pleasure is possible only when you love. As I said before, sexual pleasure without love is very incomplete and must always wind up in a dead-end street. There will always be something missing. It is an expression of inner division of the spirit, the soul, and the body. Total unification of pleasure exists when you love and when you are a sexual being, because then you are also a spiritual being. This means that you have emotional and mental integrity. Therefore pleasure and spirituality, pleasure and decency, pleasure and emotional maturity, pleasure and physical health are all intricately and intimately connected.

Now let us consider the obstructions to pleasure. Some of you who are here for the first time and are unfamiliar with the depths of our work may not know at all what I am talking about when I mention the fear of pleasure. Offhand, you all want pleasure and long for it, strive for it. You believe you want pleasure, but you ignore the fact that you also do not want it, that you also fear it desperately. My friends here, who are already somewhat advanced on this path and have explored their hitherto unconscious being to a sufficiently profound degree, have found indeed that they are often terrified of pleasure. Perhaps they fear it even more than negative feelings within themselves or from others.

Elsewhere I have pointed out the connection between the fear of negative feelings about yourself, about others, and the fear of pleasure within you. For only because you fear pleasure do you inadvertently but logically want the opposite -- the unpleasure. Thus you fear the result of your negative desire. Deep inside, you know that what you want will be so. The less conscious you are of what you want, the more you must fear the result. Hence, fear of death always connotes an unconscious death wish.

Conversely, pleasure is made possible when the state of mind and emotions is quietly confident, calmly expectant and receptive, patient and unanxious, unhurried and unworried. Otherwise your battle against your own fear of pleasure will consciously manifest in an excessive striving for pleasure, in an anxiety about not being able to realize it, in a pessimism or even hopelessness about it. Such pessimism makes you fluctuate between two damaging extremes: either resignation or compulsive, blind, and consequently inappropriate overactivity. This obstructs the attainment of pleasure to a considerable degree.

Fear of pleasure must be made conscious in order to battle it. One of the first obstructions to look for is the dichotomy of anxious striving versus hopeless resignation, arising from an unconscious rejection of the desired result -- whether pleasure or anything else, for that matter. Hence awareness of being afraid of pleasure must be transformed into acute and direct awareness of the fear. This is not easy, but it is certainly possible on this path. Anyone who seriously desires it can bring what is unconscious into awareness.

I said in the last lecture that you must make your negative creations, your negative pleasure conscious to overcome them. You must also be in touch with your denial of pleasure. I might safely say that no human being is completely free of such denial. The degree varies, but it is only a question of degree. I ask even those of you who are relatively free from fear of pleasure not to overlook those areas within where you shrink away from pleasure as though it were a danger. Meditate and commit yourself to wanting to be aware of it. Then the next step can be taken: the exploration of the validity or invalidity of this fear, so that you can finally want to give up the fear and obstruction to pleasure to an ever-increasing degree.

Only when you are acutely conscious of how you fear and deny your pleasure will you stop making others responsible for your deprivation, which makes you keenly suffer. The deep inner burden of being puzzled and hopeless about attaining what you deeply yearn for will dissolve. This burden is subtle and unpronounced. Once you can ascertain in full consciousness, "I am afraid of pleasure," the hopelessness will disappear. You will feel the two forces within yourself: one pulling you toward pleasure, the other away from it. You will feel these two forces on all levels of your being: in your mind, in your feelings.

When the battle goes on unbeknownst to your conscious mind, it is extremely painful. When you know of its existence, you can begin to settle the conflict. Once the struggle is conscious, it can be met, but not when it is unconscious. This is why becoming conscious of any inner condition is such an important undertaking for any human being. You can never free yourself of the vague anxiety and the feelings of hopelessness and inadequacy which result from your not knowing that you deny what you want, that you wish on the one hand and fear on the other. As it is impossible to overcome your destructiveness and negativity without knowing that you want to be negative, so

it is impossible to settle this struggle unless you know and feel and experience that this fight goes on within you.

Just as with the negativity I discussed in the last lecture, you will also have to find out the further consequences of your denial of pleasure. You are afraid of pleasure because your holding on to the negativity, your not wanting to give up negative and destructive patterns of behavior and feelings, makes the real pleasure not only undeserved in your own unconscious estimation, but also actually frightening. It is too frightening for you to be open to pleasure, for your negativity creates a state of soul and body that is essentially incompatible with pleasure. Your negativity creates tension, separateness, contraction. It comes from an excessive egoorientation and is therefore totally alien to a state of pleasure.

Negative pleasure is always more geared to gratifying ego goals than fulfilling the real and legitimate need of the entity for bathing in the light of pleasure supreme. It harbors the three attitudes that are at the root of all destructiveness and deviation: pride, selfwill and fear. I said many years ago that where there is pride, where there is selfwill, where there is fear, there must be a state of contraction.

Contraction cannot be fully given up, ever, no matter what approaches of therapy are used and no matter how good they may be, if pride, selfwill, and fear are not abandoned. In pride, selfwill, and fear the ego-structuring becomes more tight and rigid. Selfwill says, "Me, me, me!" meaning the little me, the little self. That self puts its stake only into the outer, conscious ego personality and completely disregards, ignores, and rejects the Universal Consciousness of which you are an expression.

Unless the total person is unified with the greater consciousness that transcends the ego, holding on to the ego becomes imperative. The ego would not be so emphasized if the false belief did not exist that the self is annihilated the moment the ego is not the sole ruler of human life. Hence, when you identify exclusively with the ego, you can neither identify with the greater consciousness, nor with the feelings in your body, for they go together. Direct experience of spontaneous feelings in your body is as much an expression of the universal truth of being as the guidance, inspiration, and knowledge that spontaneously flow into you when you identify with your being that extends beyond the ego consciousness.

The tight ego structure says: "It is my ego world that counts. This is all there is to me and therefore I cannot give it up. Otherwise I cease to exist." With this attitude, pleasure becomes impossible, for total, real pleasure depends on the ability of the ego to let go of itself and to let itself be carried and lived by a greater power within the body and the soul.

Pride says, "I am better than you." This means separateness, one-upmanship, everything that is opposed to a state of love. Pride may also manifest as, "I am worse than others, I am worthless, I have no value. But I must hide this fact, so I must pretend that I am more." Of course, these thoughts are not articulate, but they may not be altogether unconscious. Distorted pride, as opposed to healthy dignity, is always comparing and measuring the self with others and is thus perpetually in illusion. For no true evaluation of a person's worth can ever come from this attitude. It is a hopeless and endless chase for an illusory goal that leaves the personality not only exhausted, but also more and more frustrated. The chasm between the self and others widens forever more, love becomes less possible and hence pleasure further removed.

It does not matter whether you actually think you are more than others or only pretend in order to hide your feelings of worthlessness. It is all the same. This attitude cannot produce love -- and how can true pleasure ever be realized in a loveless state? Love is not a command that is supposed to deprive you. Love is the most selfish of all attitudes, for it brings the greatest of all pleasures -- physical as well as mental and emotional pleasure. It simply

feels good in itself. Love opens you up. You flow and pulsate in a state of peace, security, vibrancy, excitement, stimulation and utter confidence. Your innermost being and your outer limbs feel sweet and fulfilled when you love. But when you are in an ego state of pride, you must be tense, anxious, contracted. You cannot pretend when you are in a relaxed state, and pride always leads to and requires pretense of some sort. A relaxed, struggle-free and unpretending state is the absolute prerequisite to pleasure.

Fear is a total contraction. It cannot trust anyone, neither the self nor the universe. Therefore the self that is in fear cannot let go of itself. Pleasure is unrealizable when the personality is bound to the ego in selfwill, pride and fear -- bound in the negative creations, in the struggle within itself that denies its own negativity and so does not know it exists. The personality does not know the nature of its own suffering. The self is bound in the struggle of wanting and fearing the same thing. Unawareness of this struggle leads to frustration and discontent, as well as to blaming others for the lack. This in turn elicits resentment, bitterness, anger, and defiance. The resulting confusion is torment for the soul.

As I said, the realization of pleasure you all deeply long for comes from letting go of all of these destructive attitudes. Let me recapitulate: for pleasure, a totally relaxed inner state is needed, but relaxation is not passive apathy, paralysis or inertia. True relaxation is a constant, harmonious movement. It is the movement of the universe. Any human entity who is sufficiently free to be in the unified state of pleasure will feel the cosmic pulsating rhythm and will be in harmony with it.

The pleasurable rhythm of the universe is in each microcosmic universe. It requires being very finely attuned to the cosmic rhythm within. It follows the soul movements -- not the distortions, but the reflections of the greater cosmos. In order to be thus attuned, an inner calmness must prevail. All agitation of the mind must settle down. The turbulence must cease. Then another kind of movement within you will make itself known that is neither active nor passive in the outer sense, but it combines an inner activity of the most pleasurable rhythm with an inner calm receptivity and apparent motionlessness. Such receptivity is not contradictory to movement, but an intrinsic part of it. What appears to be a contradiction on the ego level becomes a unification on a different wavelength. In that state there can be no division or struggle against the self, no pushing or tense striving. In that state there is no harassment from time, for there is timelessness, even now while you are in the body.

Of course, this state cannot be attained at all times. But it can be attained again and again, leaving you each time a stronger, more unified, more complete person, with your ego fully intact, more integrated with the greater self. Evolution, growth, and self-development must bring you to more frequent realizations of this state, which is most significantly and intensely experienced in a love relationship. But in different ways you will experience this state in all you do and all you are, as you live, move, and have your being in the Universal Consciousness.

Wherever you are at any given moment, you can transcend this one instant, no matter how unpleasurable it is. If you go sufficiently deeply into yourself to fully explore the you in this moment, in this situation -- if you do not escape from it -- this very moment of unpleasure must turn into its ultimate nature: pleasure supreme.

It is not easy to do this when you are separate in your perception of yourself, even after you have experienced some of the truths and states I mentioned. In such a state of disconnectedness, going into yourself requires probing and groping to find the right measure of self-discipline, self-facing, and summoning your goodwill to see the truth and change the destructiveness. It also requires both a patient letting go and a waiting, trusting expectancy. You have to find the right answers and attitudes, of struggling and not struggling, both in the right way and the right measure. Remembering a former similar state of your mind will be of little help. The truth must be recaptured each time anew. Memory will only help you to know that the truth can be attained and is not an illusion. No, it is

not easy to transcend your now and tune into your inner cosmic rhythm. But the more often you attempt it, the more often will it become possible, until this eventually becomes your normal state and disconnectedness the exception. The difficult times will increasingly serve the purpose of bringing you toward your inner center where pleasure supreme reigns.

These difficult moments will then be the catalysts they are meant to be to ready your whole person for the state of unconflicted pleasure that is within you. Accept the pain that you have created through your misconceptions and destructiveness, and do not cringe or run from it but explore it. Hold still instead of fighting against it with your subterfuges, negativities, with your games, roles, and pretenses, with your projections and your escapes. Truly look at yourself. The attainment of pleasure and the state of being in pleasure will ultimately and increasingly unfold for you. You will become an integral part of it. That must be the aim.

Pleasure is, at one and the same time, the ultimate spiritual and human goal. It is also the curative agent without which you cannot heal.

I think you begin more and more to realize that such a path is not to be dreaded as a difficult chore. Every step is the most joyful thing in itself, not only because it ultimately brings liberation, but even while you are struggling, and each time you win, such a path brings you bliss in varying degrees. The exact degree depends on your ability to overcome your resistance.

Be in the state of bliss that is your birthright, that is the ultimate destiny for all of you. Realize the truth that there is nothing to fear. Be blessed.

Edited by Judith and John Saly

For information to find and participate in Pathwork activities world wide, please write:

The Pathwork® Foundation
PO Box 6010, Charlottesville, VA 22906-6010, USA
Call: 1-800-PATHWORK, or
Visit: www.pathwork.org

The following notices are for your guidance in the use of the Pathwork® name and this lecture material.

Trademark/Service Mark

Pathwork® is a registered service mark owned by The Pathwork Foundation, and may not be used without the express written permission of the Foundation. The Foundation may, in its sole discretion, authorize use of the Pathwork® mark by other organizations or persons, such as affiliate organizations and chapters.

Copyright

The copyright of the Pathwork Guide material is the sole property of The Pathwork Foundation. This lecture may be reproduced, in compliance with the Foundation Trademark, Service Mark and Copyright Policy, but the text may not be altered or abbreviated in any way, nor may the copyright, trademark, service mark, or any other notices be removed. Recipients may be charged the cost of reproduction and distribution only.

Any person or organization using The Pathwork Foundation service mark or copyrighted material is deemed to have agreed to comply with the Foundation Trademark, Service Mark and Copyright Policy. To obtain information or a copy of this policy, please contact the Foundation.