

[June 1986]

[These paragraphs were written in anticipation of eventually writing a much longer essay.]

The Importance of Being Important

The desire to be an important person is nearly universal, and has, in most cases, been transformed into a burning need. Why? Why do we want to be important? For example, why do you walk down the street and hope every stranger you see understands that you are an important person?

There is something pathetically self-deceptive about both the millionaire who sails his yacht into a harbor when the crowds are thickest and the kid who saunters into the schoolyard with a wide grin displaying his missing tooth's hole. They are both searching vainly for the overwhelmingly positive reaction they sometimes received when they toddled into a crowded room of relatives when they were two.

In our search for importance we are also searching for ourselves, blindly attempting to recognize the simple fact that we are indispensable to ourselves. We each can't live without ourselves. Unfortunately, recognizing that simple fact of our own indispensability to ourselves is the only way to fulfill the desire to be that important.

When that solution is relied upon, the need disappears and, depending on other personality traits, the finder could simply find further pleasure in being useful, in being valuable, to others, without demanding unconsciously to be indispensable to them. This realization, though, is rare, as it requires us to conclude that, although we can be quite valuable to others, and quite useful, we

will never be indispensable to them, never crucial to their lives, and therefore never as important as we wish to be.

Realizing that even the friendliest people only have a few dozen close, personal friends, for whom he or she is more than a source of gossip, helps dissolve this unfulfillable and unrealistic need.

Not even Buddha or Jesus or Mohammed are indispensable, nor are any of our influential political leaders. Over time, each such leader has simply become a symbolic entity, a sophisticated source of gossip, serving to fulfill our myths. But otherwise they are not all that important, and certainly are not indispensable.

The human race had this affliction, and has always taken care of it, since long before Buddha lived. His personality served as a mannikin upon which the myths of mankind could be draped, but another outstanding person could have, and often has, served the same purpose.

Buddha is not indispensable to us. He was, however, indispensable to himself. He could not live without himself.

We are, when it comes right down to it, basically a source of gossip for other minds. And our Sisyphean attempts to mold that gossip to the image of ourselves which we want to project to others, which we want others to believe in (so we can believe in it ourselves), is at the core of the neurotic need for indispensable importance.

Unfortunately, the underlying fact of our own indispensability to ourselves has been chased by our unswift imaginations all over kingdom come. But the kingdom never came. And it never will. And all we have to show for the chase is a wide variety of debilitating neuroses that we could live without.

Or should live without.

Hopefully will live without.