



Aliveness and Harmony, by Christopher Alexander

A man is alive when he is wholehearted, true to himself, true to his own inner forces, and able to act freely according to the nature of the situations he is in.

[...] To be happy, and to be alive, in this sense, are almost the same. Of course, a man who is alive, is not always happy in the sense of feeling pleasant; experiences of joy are balanced by experiences of sorrow. But the experiences are all deeply felt; and above all, the man is whole; and conscious of being real.

To be alive, in this sense, is not a matter of suppressing some forces or tendencies, at the expense of others; it is a state of being in which all forces which arise in a man can find expression; he lives in balance among the forces which arise in him; he is unique as the pattern of forces which arises is unique; he is at peace, since there are no disturbances created by underground forces which have no outlet, at one with himself and his surroundings.

This state cannot be reached merely by inner work.

There is a myth, sometimes widespread, that a person need do only inner work, in order to be alive like this; that a man is entirely responsible for his own problems; and that to cure himself, he need only change himself. This teaching has some value, since it is so easy for a man to imagine that his problems are caused by "others." But it is a one-sided and mistaken view which also maintains the arrogance of the belief that the individual is self-sufficient, and not dependent in any essential way on his surroundings.

The fact is, a person is so far formed by his surroundings, that his state of harmony depends entirely on his harmony with his surroundings.

Some kinds of physical and social circumstances help a person come to life. Others make it very difficult.

-- Christopher Alexander, in *_The Timeless Way of Building_*