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A speech Disorder

"When choosing between ignorance and stupidity - choose ignorance, it can be cured!" J W von Goethe. With this letter I turn to all those who, due to ignorance, do not take stutterers seriously. Hopefully this letter will contribute to cure somebody of such ignorance. If you are already cured then please help spreading the message. Stuttering is a speech disorder with as many variations as the number of stutterers. What everyone should know, however, is that it is a heavy handicap for those who suffer from it. They are basically left isolated to struggle with the problem alone. Unfortunately it is a speech disorder which

1. ..is being **ridiculed** by too many.
2. ..is being **laughed at** by too many .
3. ..often causes severe **insecurity**.
4. .. often **grows worse by impatient listeners!**.

A couple of weeks ago I had the opportunity to lead a seminar for members of the Nordic Stuttering Association about public speaking. Facing this challenge I prepared by reading comprehensive literature and interviewing stutterers, psychologists and speech therapists. My conclusion, being a layman, is that a stutterer's obstacles to reach speech fluency is caused by fear of not getting a message across, not being taken seriously, being ridiculed or being laughed at. In other words fear of being wrongfully convicted to stupidity by stupidity itself, i e by those belonging to group 1 and 2 above. The most striking stupidity is to make fun of or to ridicule stuttering. Also, an impatient listener causes accelerating stress, which makes the stutterer try to speak faster, which in turn makes the stuttering grow worse. Sometimes a stutterer tries to smooth things over with diverting movements or sounds, which may seem strange, but if we understand the reason, then so what?

Those who are familiar with and understand a stutterer's agony and struggle show respect and always patiently let a stutterer speak up in their own way, letting them take whatever time it takes. They understand that people do not stutter for fun and that there is nothing to laugh about. We, listeners, must step down from our pedestal and realize our own fallibility. Only with understanding, respect and patience can we help a stutterer to feel comfortable and to overcome this involuntary disorder.

But all this will be conditioned by our own ignorance being cured and turned into knowledge, insight, respect and understanding.

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