

A Matter of Life and Death

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Here I am again; flying away from El Paso. It's a short trip this time, a conference in Dallas. As I try to get my thoughts together- I have to battle the competition of the flight attendant giving the usual pre-flight instructions. I hope I never have to worry about finding out whether I understand them right. Flying is still the safest mode of transportation, but it does not cease to amaze me how some people have the fear of flying and even anticipate some kind of tragedy and death.

Death, there is a word for you, as much as we would like to avoid saying it, discussing it or accepting it; it is a big part of our reality. For some people the end of our reality and for others, another step in our evolution and /or spiritual growth. The truth is that it is one of the certain things we can count on, sooner or later. In fact, at the risk of sounding rather morbid, we must admit that any discussion of death needs to start with the mention of birth, and therefore LIFE. Agree?

Life; I will begin with conception, and from there take on a description of the development of a human being as I see it. This is not going to be an easy task, since I feel compelled to include scientific information to back this up, and not lose you in the process. But as a Libra in the Aquarius Age, I must let knowledge prevail and lead our way in the search for discovery and truth, I hope!

At the time of conception-two humans get together and involve themselves in the sexual act (which hopefully included love) initiating the creation of a new individual; initially an embryo, then a fetus and finally a baby. The baby is the sum of the mother's (50%) and the father's (50%) gene pool. All the early information about its neurophysiological, anatomical and psychological formations is there-in the form of DNA (Deoxyribonucleic Acid); the number of brain cells (therefore, the intellect), the color of the skin, size of the body, everything to include the temperament, is included in its genetics and then amazing, the miracle of life!

Have you ever heard the expression; he or she is just like his or her father/mother? There it is, this is what I am talking about, but it does not end there it is not that simple (it was not meant to be). There are 13 trillion probabilities of how that new individual would look or be like. That is how complicated that genetic mapping is, but we will skip the neurogenesis and jump back to life, in an attempt to make it simple.

The unique temperament of that baby has to respond to the demands of its environment especially significant others, such as mother, father, siblings, relatives, then friends, teachers, school, etc. Such interaction is responsible for the development of the baby's character. And follow this, the combination of the temperament and the character is going to form the personality of that new individual. And by the way, most specialists in the field would agree that the basis for the personality is found by age seven (but its growth continues, of course).

These early steps of development are very important, and the consensus is that the new person has to be successful at mastering one, so the next one is equally well mastered, hopefully smoothing the way for a well-balanced individual. This is called the epigenetic principle (word stolen from Embryology). Parents, and significant others are crucial in helping this happen, since not resolving one stage theoretically- would interfere with further "normal development." For example, Dr. Erickson (PhD Developmentalist)—concluded that the 1st of these steps was the development of trust. Obviously, the mother plays a critical role here- with the tasks of meeting the baby's needs (warmth, food, shelter, bonding, etc.) and the sense of trust and the security the baby needs to develop this early in life. From there, he/she should go on to develop a sense of autonomy. Around this time ambulating sets in-so this should facilitate that next step as well. But again, it is not that simple. Around this same time, the phenomenon of separation/ individuating (Dr. Margaret Mahler) is

observed. The toddler now, - equipped with the power of locomotion can go explore. Such exploring becomes an adventure and since an important boundary should have developed, now there is the realization of a separate unit that can go on their own. On the other hand, since the concept of permanency is not quite that well developed-the infant has to go make a check on the permanent object (mother) to make sure she is still there. Then it's okay to go explore some more and push the limits. This includes the apparent "negative stage" of the "terrible two's." The "NO" is a big part of defining that boundary.

For those of you who have adolescents, this might sound familiar, with the constant challenge of their individuality and the pushing of those limits and those boundaries ever further, in an attempt to set them loose. This is in fact, reliving the separation/individualization. The big difference is that they don't have to go back and check on the permanent object. Understand that a degree of rebelliousness at this stage is considered to be normal. Although there are certain boundaries that were not meant to be crossed and this must be clear to the adolescent and the parents.

I am sure that for a good reason the age of onset (when it starts) of most mental conditions is adolescence and time thereafter. It is a very tough stage as well as for the parent. It needs to be facilitated not interfered with, but easier said than done, of course.

Assuming that it all went relatively well-that adolescent enters the stage of early adulthood. By this time, the art of appropriate interpersonal relationships skills should be emerging and hopefully later mastered, as the person develops use of stability and self-confidence. To do that he/she needs to develop a good understanding of personal boundaries, not only their own, but that of others. There is nothing wrong on agreeing or disagreeing. There should not be a need for one person to prove the other wrong and vice versa. One might be right and the other wrong, but both might be right or both might be wrong (you follow?). Opinions are like umbilical cords-we all have and should have one. Let's respect that.

Then there is the phenomenon of co-dependency-in a nutshell this is when a person starts neglecting their own needs to meet the needs of others. In turn their needs are not taken care of by anyone including themselves. Others grow dependent on having their needs met and expect this to continue, and it usually does. This is not healthy anger, resentment, guilt (only to mention a few and perhaps with good reason. It is a set up!). The person starts expecting from the other what they cannot (or will not) give, or perhaps they are not capable of giving. This is a set-up! And it's not a matter of whose fault it is, that is not the point! The point is that you need to recognize this dynamic so you can have healthy, well-balanced relationships. Notice that it does not need to be perfect, that is another set up. It was not meant to be a perfect relationship-let's accept that. Let's work on the balance, in being a better US-each single day, which should take us very far-and if I am wrong and you do hit perfect (in this lifetime)-good for you-NIRVANA; write it up, please!

By this time, we have to be as far as mid adulthood. The stage of accomplishments, changes, personal growth and stability. A very productive stage on our development (hopefully) professional, family/friends, spiritual goals should be other achievements, or within grasp. This should get the time to start sharing that knowledge and wealth in order to let the pendulum swing in the right direction.

As we approach late adulthood, you could imagine that age starts being a factor. We start to slow down (and perhaps we should)-the sharing is even more important now-especially the wisdom achieved. We start looking back and putting all the pieces together looking at the puzzle of our lives in a complete bright form! Wow-we did it! Perhaps we can still do more, or maybe it's time to let others take the lead-but one thing is for sure, death does await. A time for farewells, another stage in our development and evolution. Do not let the farewell be hurtful ("Que no duela este Adios") it's going to take some getting used to, but life goes on and everyone should be "okay" with that farewell. Is only natural and temporary, a part of life?