

Redefining the Value of Relationships

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Abstract

Human civilization today is moving dangerously close towards what some people predict as World War III. Intolerance is at its height at the level of religious faith, national priorities, and racial conflict, right down to the individual in the family group.

This paper explores a new way of defining the goal of all relationships, indeed a new way of looking at and using 'relationships' in ones life. Consequently it is hoped that this paper will become a starting point for both therapists and all those lay people who are struggling to better 'manage' their relationships. It seeks to go beyond the customary typical goals and values, where relationship goals are seen as either, "How to Win Friends and Influence People", or as creating 'win-win' situations. 'Harmony' is often seen as a goal for those relationships where one either seeks support of some kind, or peace at any cost. Could there be something more significant or integral to relationships than this? Lets take a look.

Keywords: Relationships; Human civilization; Goals

Introduction

According to Klein [1] and Fairbairn [2] and others, the early development of children began with a process called 'splitting', where external objects needed to be split into 'good' and 'bad' objects, resulting in a process of simultaneous internal splitting of the child's ego. This simply meant that at the very outset the child learns to differentiate between 'good' and 'bad', and in so doing, develops a defense mechanism to protect it from all that is viewed and so believed to be bad. This process was seen to continue through childhood and adolescence, enabling the child to develop from a 'paranoid-schizoid position' to a 'depressive position', through the process of integrating the good parts with the bad. This would in turn lead towards developing a more holistic and realistic inner representation of the external world, where both good and bad can at least coexist in every 'object'.

The famous Indian sage Krishnamurthy [3,4] talked about the fragmentation of the mind, represented by a fragmented view of the world we have created. Where we continuously, even as adults, engage in creating divisions and separations. A process that seems to somehow strengthen and reinforce our beliefs about ourselves and others. We today continue to live, perceive, and experience everything through these mental fragments. Muslims regard the non-Muslim's as being heretics; White people seem to get something for themselves out of discriminating against coloured people; Hindus feel good about being Hindus and like to exclude all others through their rigid belief systems. Intolerance is on the rise. Krishnamurti [4] went so far as to describe all acts of separation and division as being acts of violence.

Today, evidence of the process of 'splitting' can be observed everywhere. Clearly 'integration' is the greatest need of the day. What could Krishnamurthy [4] have really meant by what he said? Had he read Melanie Klein? Not likely!

This process of early development and learning is significant today both in the lives of the individual and in society, as they endeavor to get a more 'realistic' view of this world, hopefully leaving in their wake a debris of disbanded beliefs and assumptions. Today the various voices of spirituality have come out loud and clear in the need for humanity to embrace a kind of all inclusive unconditional Love, which seeks to unite and include all and do away with the need to exclude any. Was this ultimately the 'integration' that Klein [1] and Fairbairn [2] were talking

about? Are these trends something that we should continue to ignore?

The most common of human problems of intolerance, closed mindedness, attachment to ones beliefs, resistance to learning and development, all come from these early processes as observed in todays context. Perhaps they could all be put under the one heading of - resistance to learning and change. We have grown too attached and overprotective of our views and beliefs of ourselves as being 'good'. Anyone who is seen to challenge us is thus easily dismissed as a 'bad' object, at least in our minds. Our attachment to our 'good' parts has become a much-needed defense against what we like to view as 'bad'. A most narcissistic view of ourselves, our community, our religion, race or creed is thus indulged in.

It should be noted here that the growingly popular yet ancient practice of Yoga needs to be understood in terms of the root meaning of the word 'yoga'. The root word for yoga is 'yug', which in ancient Sanskrit means to unite, to integrate. All of us went through a stage of early development learning to differentiate and separate good from bad. This was certainly necessary for our self-preservation and survival as a species. Now as we mature it is equally important that we learn to 'integrate'. I guess that's what spiritualists and romanticists might call 'Love'.

Relationships are seen as being supports, in a world of inclusion/exclusion. Our world grows increasingly split by the forces of hatred, anger and fear. Differences are seen as being threats not challenges. We continue to teach our children the art of compromise towards the creation of 'win-win' situations or harmony. Our goal remains to learn how to win friends and influence people. We seek harmony sometimes at any cost. Learning to integrate the good with the bad remains a

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distant dream. Self-learning or development has taken a back seat. We expect others to change. Consequently, our fragmentations deepen.

A 2014 study by Shigehiro Oishi of the University of Virginia and Ed Diener of Gallup sought answers to an interesting question. What was it that people really wanted most? Happiness or Meaningfulness? The study was enormous and involved about 140,000 people across 132 countries. The results were most surprising. Wealthier places or nations and happy countries like Denmark and Finland had very high rates of suicide. They found that happiness / unhappiness did not predict suicide. Instead, the variable that did influence suicide was meaningfulness, or the lack of it.

In her book, "The Power of Meaning", Smith [5] argues that meaningfulness comes from four main factors: 1) Belonging; 2) Purpose; 3) Story telling; and 4) Transcendence. It certainly appeared quite clear that the latter two were in fact closely related to the first two factors, 'Belonging' and 'Purpose'. 'Relationships' seemed to be the thread that ran through all four of them, helping us all to learn how to create meaningful lives by creating meaningful relationships.

If we take a closer look at 'Belonging' and 'purpose', we find that it is all about 'relationships' and how we deal with them. Do we use them to acquire control, power, support, or harmony? Or would it be more fulfilling to use them as a resource for ones own learning and self-development? What is really more fulfilling? Gratification or personal growth? Well, Oishi's study seemed to indicate that it was 'meaningfulness' and not 'gratification'.

If we are at all going to correct this situation, we must first hand realize that we need to completely redefine the value of 'relationships'. The truth is that the only apparatus we have to learn about ourselves, our resistances to change, our feelings, our prejudices, and the beliefs that we may be overly attached to, are through the eyes of others.

Thus it is that 'Relationships' should be primarily seen as catalysts for learning and change, instead of winning friends and influencing people. Our goal here should be to learn and change ourselves rather than focusing on changing others. To focus instead, in this way, on integrating the good parts of ourselves with our bad parts, to realize a much more 'realistic', tolerant and more conscious whole.

For it is only when we encounter a mind different from our own that we can truly reflect on another independent point of view of ourselves and the world. We then certainly have the choice to reject what we see or to consider, reflect and learn from it. Instead we continue to be self-absorbed with all the going-ons in our own minds, never confronting a mind that is different, in fact rejecting all differences outright, thus we would certainly encase ourselves deeper and deeper into a narcissistic and contracting world, thus developing a cloistered masturbatory mentality.

One might argue that the theories of psychoanalysis are today largely redundant, so lets briefly take a look at what some CBT theorists have to say about their practice -

"Although our childhoods or earlier life experiences can have a great influence on how we think and feel, research shows that many of those whose childhoods were traumatized develop into stable grown-ups, while some adults with idyllic upbringings develop psychological problems. CBT accounts for this difference by looking at how an individual's current thinking style may have developed more from faulty perceptions than from actual events". - Clearly it is all about self-learning and self-development [6].

"A study done in 2010 sought to discover what was driving the increase in mental illness among high school and college students. They found that their respondents were significantly more likely to suffer from mental problems than older generations did as students. This they found was associated to a decreased concern for meaning among the students and an increased social detachment across society" [7,8].

The primary goal of our lives is to learn and discover our true potential of living. A potential that may always keep itself one step ahead of us. We need to see all our Relationships as a most necessary and valuable tool to help us reflect on and discover ourselves. To learn from our differences rather than to run from them or try to battle with them.

Conclusion

This paper seeks to assert the need to take a relook at how we define the value of relationships in today's context. We need to assert the great role relationships can play in our processes of self-learning and consciousness growth. A role that can span the entire length of value creation from the individual to the corporate, from the corporate to Society at large.

Relationships are not something to be managed, avoided, or simply at times enjoyed. They play a much more important role in our lives. Relationships are in fact the best way and perhaps the only way our views and beliefs of ourselves can ever be challenged constructively. Our efforts should go into using our relationships to discover & learn about ourselves and our true potential, our authentic selves, rather than to achieve goals of more harmony, more support or more control. If we succeed in somewhat integrating our ego states, then the world as we see it will do so too.

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