

## **Autonomy**

We are taught from birth how to think, feel and behave by our parents/carers. It would seem an essential duty to teach us the way of life, if we are to survive and prosper in the society we are born into.

To be successful in their aspiration to bring us up, they would both strengthen our autonomy and weaken it, especially our awareness, spontaneity and intimacy because they, according to Eric Berne - are the three capacities of autonomy that we are born with.

The chances are our awareness, spontaneity and intimacy were highly influenced by our parents/carers. Freeing ourselves up from our parental misguided or misinformed conditioning therefore would be our eternal challenge - if we dare risk it, that is.

However well-meaning or misguided, we would assume they were doing their best for our future success and survival. The question is. 'how would we know what was well-meaning or misguided?'. We were born without knowing how to think, how to manage our emotions or what it meant to engage in intimacy. Their job was to teach us how to make best use these capacities.

The recovery of our autonomy requires us to re-evaluate those parts of our conditioning that limited our awareness, spontaneity and intimacy. And according to Eric Berne, such re-evaluation is only possible because we started out in life with these capacities of awareness, spontaneity and intimacy in tact.

It is only when we realise we have the aspiration and possibility to re-evaluate our awareness, spontaneity and intimacy that we begin to be capable of recovering our autonomy.

## **Recovering our autonomy**

If we are to achieve autonomy in our lives then we must pay attention to the three capacities that enable us to achieve it, namely: awareness, spontaneity and intimacy.

These capacities are described in Chapter 18 of Eric Berne's book entitled 'Games People Play'. As a result of his many years of research into human

psychology, he reveals (in my opinion) his feelings of hopelessness for the majority of the human race. And yet he does not completely close the door on us, by adding that there is hope for the individuals who are prepared to rise above their conditioning.

Extract from Chapter 18...

*“For certain fortunate people there is something which transcends all classifications of behaviour, and that is awareness; something which rises above the programming of the past, and that is spontaneity; and something that is more rewarding than games, and that is intimacy. But all three of these may be frightening and even perilous to the unprepared. Perhaps they are better off as they are, seeking their solutions in popular techniques of social action, such as "togetherness." This may mean that there is no hope for the human race, but there is hope for individual members of it.”*

By taking a closer look at what he meant by these three capacities, we have the opportunity to recover our autonomy:

## **Awareness**

Awareness means the capacity to see things as they really are - unadulterated by the parental influences of our upbringing. It can be as simple as viewing nature as a collection of sounds, sights and smells, as opposed to the categorisation and labelling that so dominates our early years' education. Or, it can be more complex, such as, how we really want to express ourselves, as opposed to the way we were conditioned to express ourselves by our parents.

Parents would appear to have good reasons to educate us in their ways, even though it might limit our autonomy. Awareness enables us to accept ourselves as we are - warts and all. And it is only then that we can become genuinely autonomous and make new decisions that increase our authenticity and create harmony in our lives.

## **Spontaneity**

Spontaneity means having the option to decide for oneself. We were born with this option, but it got covered up by the conditioning we received in the name of socialisation - conforming with family and societal rules and norms.

- It means the freedom to choose what we want to believe as opposed to what we were taught to believe.
- It means the freedom to choose who we want to be as opposed to who we were programmed to be.
- It means the freedom to choose how we feel without being controlled by an old emotional controlling pattern.
- It means the ability to choose intimacy over 'playing games of togetherness'.

If we are to recover our spontaneity, we must first become aware of how our past programming has limited our spontaneity and then, and only then, can we make new decisions to act spontaneously.

## **Intimacy**

According to Eric Berne, most infants, unless and until they are corrupted, seem to be loving, and that is the essential nature of intimacy.

He goes on to say, 'Intimacy is a function of our natural child that works well if not interrupted by parental influences'. It is demonstrated by our spontaneous and authentic response to another in the here and now'.

If we are to recover our original intimacy, then we must not only learn to express ourselves as we really are, but also learn to accept others as they really are.

This way our relationships will grow in awareness, spontaneity and intimacy and we will recover our autonomy.

## **Reference**

Eric Berne, "Games People Play", 1968.