

Robinsons on Parallel Social Equality Between the Sexes

Zivit Abramson delivered a most interesting and provocative lecture at the Adlerian Summer Institute (ICASSI) in Switzerland this summer. Ms Abramson, the author of three books on couples and sex therapy, is a psychologist in Israel.

She began by asking questions and raising issues about equality such as: between couples, how can a decision be made? Who is right? Who suffers the most? Who is wiser? Who will decide who is wiser? Do the young have more rights than the old? Do the old have more rights than the young? Will a man make the decision? Will a helpless, delicate female make the decision because she is weak? Who has more money? Does one who has more money get to decide for those who have less? In all of these instances, one would be the winner free to make the decision; one would be the more powerful; one would be less respected.

Did you ever meet a person who didn't want to be listened to, who is willing not to count? Rudolf Dreikurs, the most respected proponent of Alfred Adler, stated that the first step toward conflict resolution was mutual respect, which is based on the assumption of Social Equality. Social Equality is expressed through mutual respect and cooperation.

This means that Conflict can only be solved by people who know that each of the parties is equal: parents, couples, nations in conflict. Making decisions for another is oppression. Everyone has the right to participate in decision making if we want to live in harmony. Once equality is established, the real issue can be addressed. Dreikurs taught us that there are **4 steps of conflict resolution** and they were:

1. Establish mutual respect.

2. Pinpoint the real issue
3. Reach an agreement using cooperative problem solving in which nobody loses; nobody wins.
4. Take responsibility for the implementation of the agreement.
5. Revise.

As long as there is a power struggle there is no solution. **The problem cannot be solved when the real issue is winning.**

Tony Blair, the former Prime Minister of England said this:

“In the end stability comes not just from having clever solutions for the problems we have, it comes from people knowing in their hearts that the other is equal, that it is important to respect the other because freedom is not just about my freedom, it is about the right to recognize.”

Dreikurs says the deepest desire of humanity is to live in harmony—for this, humans have lived and died. We know that from the beginning, no one lives in isolation. To have civilization develop, we had to have cooperation and division of labor. Each person’s contribution was necessary.

Zivit Abramson then asked a very unusual but thoughtful question: “How many people had to contribute for you to be sitting here in this auditorium listening to this lecture?” We brainstormed together: generations, builders, electricians, drivers, mine workers, inventors of the wheel, travel agent, communication devices, the developers of the language we use. **WE ALL DEPEND ON EACH OTHER. ALL HUMANITY THROUGH HISTORY IS INTERCONNECTED!**

What about the sick, the helpless, the handicapped? Do they also make a contribution? One does not have to make a contribution to have a place in this world. For example, Zivit’s partner was nearly

helpless. A couple took care of him. The money they earned was used to build a home. He was needed just the way he was. He helped the couple to build their home. WE ARE ALL INTERCONNECTED.

In Rudolf Dreikurs' book, Children: the Challenge, the chapter on Natural and Logical Consequences describes Natural consequences as the ones that happen naturally versus Logical Consequences that parents/teachers/adults provide. Children are expected to live in the family group in a safe, cooperative way. When parents let consequences happen, children learn. If children make decision, they learn from the consequences. There is no humiliation in learning from mistakes.

When marriage is not based on equality, it always carries the seed of crises: the wise man and the stupid, little sweetie, who has opinions of her own and wants to be respected. The couple in which the wife takes on all the responsibility and she is SUPER WOMAN: the husband is appreciative and charming—the division of love and responsibility are not equal. The contract must be changed or extreme frustration will take over.

Again, Tony Blair has some wisdom for our discussion: “The movement for democracy will not go away. Freedom is not a passing phase in history. It is an existential human impulse. I may be what I am but I can respect you as different, and together we can build a different and better world. (It is about) the essential belief in the creativity, the ‘innovation and the endeavor of the human spirit.’”

Alfred Adler himself equated a personal sense of being equal with mental health. How is it that people create hierarchies all the time? What is the origin of inequality among human beings? Is it a result of nature?

Zivit quoted Jean-Jacques Rousseau who conceived two species of inequality among human beings: one, which she calls natural or physical inequality because it is established by nature and consists in the differences of age and experience. The other species is composed of political inequality because it depends on a kind of convention (and is established, or at least authorized by the common consent of mankind). Since it is all about belief/understanding, we can change.

True equality is difficult to imagine, but each person in this world deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. This is our equality. Zivit Abramson's thoughtful presentation proved helpful to the therapists and therapeutic to the couples this summer in Switzerland at ICASSI.