

Robinsons on Parallel The Power of the Social Life

Fortunate enough to be able to attend the International Adlerian Summer School, I soaked up a great deal of useful information for living life. The first day's opening lecture was by Eva Dreikurs Ferguson, who had lived and studied Adlerian Psychology from her birth. She is the daughter of Rudolf Dreikurs who was the teacher who made Alfred Adler's psychology understandable, useful and perpetual.

Before 1700, humans were considered a holy representation of God on earth. Then came the Enlightenment. It was discovered that humans are a result of long biological development. In the 19th century, we knew that human beings had evolved as biological creatures—creatures that have a need to belong and feel included in one or more social circles.

The story is that Alfred Adler left the Sigmund Freud and his group of psychoanalysts in 1911. That was, of course, one hundred years ago. Adler left Freud's group because he understood the major influence that emotions and motivation play in our behavior. He knew the power of the social impact for each of us. We are social creatures from the time we are born into our first social circle, the family. Humans are completely dependent on the care of others, and so we learn what we need to know to survive.

Humans' fundamental nature is social. Humans are a social species. Thus Social Psychiatry was born as a discipline. Adler was the first community psychiatrist. Only now are these ideas being accepted and put into practice. Freud said that the past determines the future. Adler said anticipation of the future gives meaning to our lives today. We each have our own PRIVATE ANTICIPATION.

We act as if we are moving toward the future. We plan our actions, thoughts, emotions, often without being aware of what we are doing. Our private intention leads us to our thoughts, actions, and emotions. Adlerian Psychology puts an emphasis on our beliefs about others, the world and ourselves.

For example, the beliefs we may hold (without knowing it) are quite simple: “I am stupid.” “I am smart.” “Everybody loves me and that’s the way life is.” “All alone; my fate is to suffer.”

Our goals and motivations all center around this private logic. And these goals move us and have us do what we do. It is crucial that we understand the motivations and goals in the persons with whom we live, work, and associate. What are they up to? How are they meeting their needs? Is it useful? How does their private view of life work for them or against them?

WE ARE THE DETERMINERS OF OUR ACTIONS AND OUR THOUGHTS. It is our choice if we marry or divorce; if we fight with our neighbor, spouse, and children or if we live peacefully with them. We decide how we act and what we do.

Do we limp and suffer so we “make sure” people will take care of us? Or do we find ways to be as useful and contributing to others as we possibly can. Some folks go from Dr. to Dr. and magnify their illnesses. Others understand the reality of their limitations. They decide even within the limits of their lives, they can contribute.

Interestingly enough, even Alzheimer’s patients show their personalities to the very end of their lives. Individual psychological choices still function. How we deal with the limits of our bodies is based on our private beliefs about ourselves and how we believe our lives are to be lived. How do we live in the

real world? The body gives us limits and opportunities, and we make choices within those limits. We make choices even though they may not always be sensible or in our best interest.

First we try to understand what we are doing with our illnesses/limitations, then we think about possibilities. What are the choices? It takes courage to make choices. This is where encouragement comes in, whether it comes from the counselors, the significant other, the parents or from WITHIN. Self-encouragement is often what it takes to make tough choices. What choices are best for ourselves and others? If we have courage, we can make far more effective choices. Teachers, parents, work managers all need to be encouragers.

Providing an encouraging community in the family, in schools, and in the workplace lays the groundwork for humans to make courageous choices. Each of us in this world can work to this end.