

Deep Caring XXXIV: Bridging Spirit and Soul

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In essence, the work of generative men and women involves moving inward as well as outward. We must return home to our family and our own inner life. We must cross the border into new worlds and new experiences. We must ultimately bridge the chasm between soul and spirit. One of our Sage leaders reflects on this bridge in his own life:

Early in my own life I repeatedly dreamed at night of this bridging and integrating process. I now realize that this dream was preparing me for my future life, as do many repetitive dreams in our lives. I dreamed of climbing a flower-strewn mountain. This mountain rose up singularly and impressively from a plain. I now realize that it was a strong image of spirit and of masculine achievement for me. Near the top of the mountain there was always a cave. This was a hideaway. I looked forward to reaching this cave while climbing up the mountain. The hideaway was always damp.

He moves deeper by reflecting on a project engaged during his childhood:

This cave closely resembled a “clubhouse” that my brother and I built as small boys living in Illinois. We dug a big hole in the ground and covered it with plywood. The clubhouse wasn’t very pleasant. It was very dirty and offered little light. It soon was filled with water and spiders; yet, for a brief period of time this clubhouse represented safety and a respite from our schoolwork and family responsibilities. It was an enduring image for me of a soulful presence in my life. Similarly, the cave in my dream represented safety and a reprieve from the climb. The dream has taught me that I need to blend the spirit of the mountain and my climb up the mountain, with the soul work of the cave and “clubhouse.”

Quiet Generativity: Finding Truth and Being Honest

As mature men and women, we must move beyond our dancing to tunes that other people are playing. If we are to be truly the guardians of values (Generativity Three), the mentors and motivators to other people (Generativity Two) and the advocates for and promoter of civic causes (Generativity Four), then we must discover that which does seem to be true and of value in a world that challenges both truth and

veracity. We must move beyond getting by and fitting in. As one of our Sage leaders puts it regarding her own life:

When I reflect on how I have changed over the years, the first thing that comes to mind is that when I was younger, I needed a title to make me feel that it was o.k. to be a leader. As I have gotten older, it's just who I am. Take it or leave it. It's probably not waiting to be empowered, it's just being who I am – saying I can do that. People will either accept the help or they won't. If they don't, if the door doesn't open, then that's not the right place for me. It's just knowing that.

We must move beyond "being good IN the world" to a place of seeking to be "good FOR the world." The key is to somehow combine the spirit-ful caring that comes with engaging the world with agency, energy and vision, with the soul-ful caring that comes with persistent and often less-visible acts of communion and what we identified in an earlier essay as "quiet generativity". One of our Sage leaders describes her own transition away from personal ambition and power. She stated it this way:

In thinking back over my work life, I have found I became less able to put a good face on things when I didn't really want to. Earlier in my work I could do this because it helped me to nurture my career and advancement. If I had a bad boss, I could suck it up and live with it. And when I had a good boss, I'd enjoy being able to grow. So, I went through that phase of my career where I was able to be whatever I had to be, not just to get ahead but to get the job done. After I got into my 50s, however, I became less and less patient with bad leadership. It was a good thing I retired when I did at 55 because I don't think I could have continued to put on a good face when it wasn't warranted.

Another of our Sage leaders came to a similar conclusion regarding the work he had been doing and what he now does:

The same thing holds with my experiences in the nonprofit world. I often get to a point of frustration where I just say, "Screw it. The governance is so broken that I'm not going to bat my head against the wall anymore." What this means is that I can be extremely effective in the right environment but no longer have any interest in putting on a good face in a lousy environment. I'd rather walk away from it and plant myself somewhere else.

The Nature of Deep Caring

Living in a world and society many centuries removed from our own, Plato offers us an important insight when suggesting that our fear of death is partially assuaged through generativity. He observed that we seek out multiple ways to be generative to ensure that we live beyond ourselves in at least one domain of our life. (Wakefield, 1998, pp. 152-163) Do we engage in good deeds, as Plato suggests, in order to be honored by other people and to spoke of after our death as a person of integrity -- a person who led a "good life." Do we, as Ernest Becker suggests, seek to be heroic in our caring from other people and institutions as a means to deny or even defy death? (Becker, 1973, p. 11) In alignment with Plato and Becker, Wakefield offers the following straightforward observation about humankind:

[I]t makes people happy to know that they will be admired after they are gone for the same reason that it makes them happy to know that they are admired while they are alive by people they have never met; in fact people just like to be admired, irrespective of where when or by whom. (Wakefield, 1998, p. 163)

One of our Sage leaders offers an equally straightforward observation about the generative motive associated with aging:

I think it was Justice Black of the US Supreme Court who said, "All of the rules of relevancy are simply related to a realistic acceptance of the concession of the shortness of life." If we were going to live 300 years, we'd have plenty of time to endlessly talk things through. But as we get older we'd like to see progress made on some things before we are sent to the crematorium or planted in the back 40 under a little stone. This isn't a dress rehearsal, so let's get on with it and see if we can really get something achieved.

We respectfully suggest that Plato, Becker, Wakefield and our Sage leader are only partially right. We certainly seek a form of immortality through the good deeds that we perform in life and long for a linking remembrance as a good person who led a decent and caring life. There seems to be something more, however, to the search for soul through generativity. Living beyond ourselves seems to be something more than the desire for immortality. It seems, ultimately, to be about *actions of deep caring* that extend us in space and time beyond our current concerns and our current reality. We live beyond ourselves not only to outlive our self, but also to contribute in an extended and sustained manner to the welfare of our family, our community and our world.

What then, in essence, is deep caring? We have proposed in these essays that deep caring, as manifest in an act of generativity, is about extending time and space. Deep caring is more than a single act of generosity. As McAdams and his colleagues have proposed, deep caring and generativity are more than an orientation toward altruism: "Generativity, unlike simple altruism or general prosocial behavior, involves the creation of a product or legacy in one's own image, a powerful extension of the self." (McAdams, Hart and Maruna, 1998, p. 25)

More than altruism, which involves doing something good in the world for its own sake, generativity involves sustained "good works." Generativity provides opportunities for mentoring and motivation. It involves organizing a parade that is intended to be a yearly event or building a monument that will endure for many centuries. It involves leading a community project that impacts many people, directly and indirectly. One of our Sage leaders describes the impact of generativity as it is manifest in several different ways that extend both time and space beyond the single act of good will:

Nurturing writers and then seeing them get published has given me much meaning and satisfaction. There is also nothing more rewarding than seeing a single-parent family getting a house for the first time after spending hundreds of hours working on a Habitat site to realize that dream.

We have proposed, furthermore, that deep caring is more than just a narcissistic desire to extend and outlive ourselves. Immortality is a part of the generative incentive, but not the entire soulful nature of generativity and deep caring. There is something more that resides at the heart of generativity and that is enhanced by one's residence in a generative society. We identify this something more as a virtue -- the virtue of deep caring.

Conclusions

Carol Gilligan (1982) is one of the developmental theorists who have built upon the foundation established by Erik Erikson—but has expanded and modified Eriksonian theory in several important ways. First, Gilligan has sought to capture a portrait of adult development that is more often aligned with women (and many nonwestern cultures) than with men. She writes about women finding their voice, rather than just expressing themselves through more masculine action. In many ways, Gilligan

has placed greater emphasis on the communal side of the generative than on the agency side. Gilligan also describes a contextual process of reasoning and decision making that moves beyond the emphasis placed by Erikson (and many other developmental theorists) on the capacity for abstraction and consistency in decision-making processes and outcomes irrespective of the context. In this re-envisioning of the reasoning process, Gilligan seems to align with a model of generativity that emphasizes diversity of generative roles and engaging generative roles within the context of a larger play and a more generative society.

Perhaps of greatest importance regarding generativity is Gilligan's portrait of mature adult development as an embrace of care as a fundamental virtue in life. It is necessary, according to Gilligan (1982, p.98), to recognize "the importance throughout life of the connection between the universality of the need for compassion and care. The concept of the separate self and of moral principles uncompromised by the constraints of reality is an adolescent ideal . . ."

As we have done throughout this series of essays on deep caring, Gilligan expands the notion of care in both space and time. As a result:

. . . the notion of care expands from the paralyzing injunction not to hurt others to an injunction to act responsively toward self and others and thus to sustain connection. A consciousness of the dynamics of human relationship then becomes central to moral understanding, joining the heart and the eye in an ethic that ties the activity of thought to the activity of care. (Gilligan, 1982, p. 149)

Thus, the ethic or (more broadly conceived) virtue of deep caring becomes a thoughtful, sustained initiative engaged through all four of the generative roles we have identified in this series of essays. It extends time and space, offering a bridge of creation and caring tying together multiple generations within the context of a generative society: "The virtue of care ties together different generations, promotes exchange between generations, and passes on values from generation to generation. Thus, generativity includes both *creating* and *caring*." (Imada, 2004, p. 91)

We have journeyed through many ideas and narratives offered by many generative players. We have gained insights about deep caring through this journey and hope that you, the reader, have also learned

something about why and how people engage in deep caring. We conclude by turning back to where we started-- by offering the thoughts about caring offered by Erik Erikson, the wise visionary who first initiated this journey of discovery about generativity more than fifty years ago: "*Caring is the widening concern for what has been generated by love, necessity, or accident; it overcomes the ambivalence adhering to irreversible obligation.*" [Italics in the original] (Erikson, 1964, p. 131)