

## **States and Stages**

### **Growing old vs. growing up**

*"The least of things with a meaning is worth more in life than the greatest of things without it." - Carl Jung*

Do you know any 20-somethings at work, at home, at play or in relationship - who are "wise beyond their years?" Not intellect, intelligence, book knowledge or trivial facts. But in their orientation to, and perspective about, life and living. Conversely, do you know 40-somethings or 60-somethings who are childish (not child-like) in the way they approach life and living?

### **Stages - phases of adult life**

Developmental psychologists and anthropologists often view life as a series of developmental stages. These stages can be characterized as turning points where opportunities or pivotal moments present themselves - opportunities for growth. The stages are chronological: 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, etc. Generally, folks in their 20s may come to view life and answer life's questions from a different perspective from folks in their 30s; folks in their 60s may come to view life and answer life's questions from a perspective different from folks in their 40s etc. So, depending on what life stage or phase one is in, one may respond differently to questions like:

- What do you love about your work?
- How aware are you of your motives for acting and interacting?
- Are you aware of your deepest fears, motives and impulses?
- Who are you?
- Why are you on the planet?
- Are you a trusting and trustworthy individual?
- How do you demonstrate trust, trustworthiness and integrity?
- What causes you to act counter to your values or your heart?
- What do you get from relationships?
- What is your relationship to money?
- What are you doing with your life, and why?
- Is this all there is?
- What should you do with your life now?

From a spiritual perspective, individuals in the early stages of life often create a "false self" - a self based mostly on "externals" - a self that is caught up in ego needs for control, recognition and security, a self that lives life more unconsciously, robotically, instinctively and according to reactive, unconscious habits and patterned ways of do-ing and be-ing.

While the answers to such questions are often based on the particular stage one is in, they are equally based on the "state" (level of consciousness) one is experiencing as well - the reason a 20-something can be "wise beyond her years" and a 60-something can be behaving like a child.

### **States - phases of consciousness**

So, along with the chronological stages that appear at 20, 30, and 40, etc., there are the conscious states that accompany the stages. As one grows older, one can move from a "false self" to a place where one is conscious, truly conscious, about "be-ing" a son, daughter, father, mother, friend, colleague, mentor, wise person, benefactor, and/or one's True and Real Self.

Stages cannot be juxtaposed; they are not malleable or transferable; however, states can occur at any time, during any stage.

From a more psycho/emotional/spiritual perspective, the degree to which one "matures" as they progress through these life stages depends on how "conscious" one is during the transitions, i.e, what conscious "state" they are experiencing i.e., how in touch one is with one's heart, core values, emotions, feelings and life purpose; to what degree one is self-reflective and aware of "who one is" and "how one is" in living life at work, at home, at play and in relationship - a consciousness that comes not from "external drivers" but from an intuitive, guided, truthful, loving and universal sense from within.

So, for each of the questions, above, the initial answer is: "It depends." It depends at which stage one is and what state one is experiencing.

We can also "grow" through "stages of states of consciousness" our consciousness itself can grow and mature - moving from ego-centric, for example, to ethno-centric, to world-centric, to cosmic-centric and beyond. The move through the psychological "stages of conscious states" is also developmental - one follows the other; they are sequential. The important point here is that "states of consciousness" can be experienced during any and all stages.

So, this is why, generally, folks in their 20s may respond to such questions differently from folks in their 30s; folks in their 30s differently from those in their 40s, etc.,

### **Becoming conscious**

States of consciousness are accessed through spiritual practices e.g., meditation or prayer; physical practices like martial arts, Tai Chi or yoga; or through the "sacredness" of art, deep intimacy, sexuality, and relationships.

The stage-state dynamic is the reason different folks interpret the same "reality" - event, circumstance, person, or place - differently; it depends on their *state* when they do the interpreting.

Each of the questions, above, will generate responses depending on the (psycho/emotional/spiritual) state of the one inquiring. Looking at the questions, "Is this all there is?," or "What should I do with my life now?," the person in their 20s might answer with, "Heck, I'll just have to try a different drug;" the person in their 40s, "Heck, I'll just have to try a different spouse/partner;" the person in their 60s, "I'll work for the good of humanity instead of just for myself."

Psycho/emotional/spiritual growth is about finding a connection between where one is in the course of their life (stage), the issues they're facing and the psycho/emotional/spiritual state where one is. A highly "conscious" person may very successfully deal with and resolve issues in their 20s whereas an "unconscious" person in their 50s or 60s, may still react to life's issues and challenges as they did in their 20s - with no appreciable resolution, having grown "old," but never "up" - aged, but not matured emotionally, psychologically or spiritually. Such folks often feel "lost" and meander, stumble, grope, and flounder through life and relationships.

When we understand the nature of stages and states in life, we are more able to experience a true sense of well-be-ing in whatever life stage we happen to be in. The opposite is also true. Many folks unsuccessfully navigate the various stages in their life as they have never become conscious, or self-aware of their state.

When we ask these questions from a deeper level exploring the truth of our "stories," our rationales, our assumptions, our premises, our reactivities, judgments and worldviews - we are reflecting at a higher level of consciousness. As we consciously and honestly reflect on how we typically move through our day - at work, at home, at play and in relationship - we use our heart and body's inner wisdom and intelligence and open up to higher states of consciousness. From this place we are more able to live a life of balance and harmony, a life that is inner-directed, a life that is characterized by wisdom and maturity - not years.

Such is the difference between "growing old" and "growing up."

*"There is not one big cosmic meaning for all, there is only the meaning we each give to our life, an individual meaning, an individual plot, like an individual novel, a book for each."* - Anais Nin

**So, our \$10 food for thought questions are:**

- How old are you, chronologically?
- How old are you emotionally? What would others say if you asked them?
- Is your life at work, at home, at play and in relationship authentic and inspiring? If not, why not?
- Do you experience meaning, passion, and purpose in your life?
- Do you have a spiritual (i.e., not religious or theological) practice focused on self-inquiry?
- What are your five most important values? Do you live these values in your day-to-day life?
- Are you truly happy or do you strive and effort to live the appearance of happiness?
- How self-aware (vs. being habitual, robotic and reactive) are in your day-to-day interactions?
- As you grow older, are you growing up? What's supporting you to grow up? How so? What are you seeing about yourself in the growing-up process?

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