

ON EMPTINESS AND CLOSENESS

PART II

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It is useful to think of emptiness in a larger framework, in three parts. There is the part of emptiness that everyone feels. There is another part that comes from not knowing and/or using one's own self. The third part consists of the emptiness that comes from relationships that do not work. When self and relationships are confused, emptiness ensues. People continually try to get from others what they really can get only from themselves, or from themselves what they can get only from a relationship. The confusion of these two leads to fusion and distance.

I have called the emptiness that is in everyone the "fifth dimension" of self. The other four dimensions are the depth dimension (everything that is in a person but without any movement), the object dimension (movement toward objects), the personal dimension (movement toward people), and time. The fifth dimension refers to the natural incompleteness of self and systems. No matter how hard or long one tries, he will never be complete. He cannot be complete as an individual nor can he be complete by marrying or having children. A system does not make a complete whole. The sum of its parts do not add up to a whole. Consequently, everyone is at least a little lonely, feels that he is inadequate, a failure — in a word, feels some emptiness. It is important to realize and acknowledge this natural incompleteness. The myth that completeness exists, the desperate search for it, leads people to attempt the impossible. If one learns to accept incompleteness, to define the fifth dimension of self, then he will engage in the possible. One cannot have complete emotional tranquility, do everything intellectually. If one tries to fill the fifth dimension of self, he can do it only by the unfulfilled expectation for it, by wishful thinking, by fantasy. When not acknowledged, people fill it in by drugs, sex, alcohol, money, attempts to accumulate self from others, conflict, helplessness, mysticism, causes, power seeking, phony types of religion, activities, etc. It leads to an unreal picture of life governed by what should be fairness, righteousness, what people ought to do, doing good — a dream. There is a confusion between ideals and reality. The way to handle the fifth dimension is to acknowledge and accept it. Once the implications of the natural incompleteness of self and systems is

accepted and understood, the problem is largely solved. No longer does one look for or expect perfection. There is more self satisfaction in one's own humanity.

The second and third parts of emptiness can be worked on effectively, and modified. These parts cause a confusion between what one gets from self and from others. There are many functional processes between people — sex, companionship, touch, communication, sharing, openness, feedback, etc. There are many within self — responsibility, decision making, self esteem, development of values and goals, etc. It is the confusion between these two issues that leads to all the problems of identification and differentiation in families and, eventually, to acute feelings of emptiness. This confusion accounts for the "pendulum effect" wherein a person shifts from one extreme to another. This confusion accounts for homeostasis in systems as people struggle for the least uncomfortable position in a system, by trying to borrow self from others, or introduce more self from outside the family (the therapist.)

The confusion accounts for the shift of symptoms, the problems, the individual cures (accumulations of self at the expense of others,) that we all observe within families. Such confusion of identification and differentiation accounts for the emptiness that families bring to us.

Clinically, emptiness can be seen as mild, moderate or severe. In the mild forms, merely talking about the emptiness makes it better. People in the family are able to look at it closely and sit in it without disintegrating. Therapy proceeds by a direct examination of the emptiness in the person and tracking it back into the extended family. Re-evaluations of past unworkable expectations lead to change in the present ongoing systems.

In the moderate forms, people want relief, to leave the state of emptiness. They experience severe degrees of hurt, anger, emotional upset and misery. Hopelessness and helplessness are high. The opposite polarity may exist. The desire to change some other person consumes one and fills his head. This is disguised emptiness — an attempt to run away from personal emptiness by focusing on others. The helplessness is dealt with systematically by encouraging the people around the helpless one to distance from that person but stay connected. They

