The Programs That Run Us

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Computers seem to be everywhere these days. Lately I have found myself thinking about programming in terms of ourselves. A computer program is a series of instructions which the computer obeys without thought or knowledge. Just as well of course in a computer -- if I type in a word into a word processing program, the last thing I want is for something else to happen like it playing a tune or even shutting itself down.

Survival strategies

Unfortunately, something like this happens to us as children and young adults. Being loved as a child appears as a life or death need and, as children, we will do anything to keep that love coming. The only alternative (it seems to us at the time) is annihilation. So what we do in the face of conditional love, in the face of parental and later societal agendas, is to abandon the personalities which are truly ours and develop survival personalities. The problem with survival personalities is that, because they are not truly who we are, they prevent us from feeling and being at a deep and genuine level. The other problem of course with survival personalities is that they are unconscious. We identify with them. We think that this is truly who we are. And so the program runs without conscious choice on our part. Except, that is, for a sort of feeling of dissatisfaction, a feeling that there must be more than this, that we are missing out on something important. And of course we are.

Childhood wounding

Other things happen when we are young. Some sort of damage or wounding happens to most of us when we are very young. This may be the sort of damage (like child abuse) which we can all recognise as such, or it may be something much more subtle which may not look like damage to anyone else but ourselves. Very often this early damage (or as some psychologies would refer to it -- primal wounding) results from some sort of failure of empathy from our parents (or significant others) and is usually something which is repeated enough to form a sort of groove in our soul.

What this leaves us with is another sort of programming -- we find ourselves triggered by circumstances which, unconsciously, remind us of that basic wounding. We react, again unconsciously, with a depth of feeling, rage, sadness, grief, which is quite inappropriate to the current moment. And it hurts, it doesn't serve us.

So, here we are, going through life like little computers reacting, time after time, completely predictably (and usually painfully) to the circumstances of life. And wondering why.

One of the tasks of personal development is to bring into awareness this programming which comes from old wounds and from the strategies we used to fit ourselves to circumstances which were beyond our power to change. One of the real rewards I got from my own journey was the realisation that there were bits of who I was which were more true than the ones I thought were me, and that, excitingly, once I knew this, I had some choice in the matter. I had some choice in who I was, in how I expressed who I was and how I reacted to the opportunities and the vicissitudes of life.

I won't say that my life changed dramatically all at once -- but it definitely did over a period of ten years or so. Most of that change stemmed from the realisation that I had a choice and that the more awareness I could develop, the more power I could have to choose.

I think that one of the most important things that personal development workshops can do is to create a space which is both exciting and safe, giving us the opportunity to let go of some of that programming and allow the bits of ourselves we abandoned to return and inspire us.

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