

The Future of Religious Leadership

-A Psycho-spiritual Perspective

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INTRODUCTION

‘Who am I?’ as a leader presupposes ‘who am I?’ as a person. The identity of a leader and the identity of a person as a person cannot be separated. We have certainly moved out of the dualistic thinking into a holistic thinking and living. This is one of the paradigm shifts that the world has made in the twentieth century.

The psychosocial development as mapped out by Erik Erikson is the study of the development of identity of an individual as one progresses from stage/phase to stage/phase. A person may pass on to a new stage with an unresolved developmental task, but one hardly skips a stage. Each stage builds on the previous stage(s) and influences the form of later stages. *“Each stage adds something specific to all later ones, and makes a new ensemble out of all the earlier ones.”* (Erikson, 1961, p.41).

The ‘Who am I?’ quest is asked at every stage and the child’s sense of identity is reconfirmed on a new level. Earlier forms of identity influence later forms. The main theme of life is the quest for identity, it is a spiritual search.

Erikson argued that ego’s nature is determined not only by inner forces but by social and cultural influences. He emphasized that the individual’s interaction with the social environment help shapes the personality; the ego has its “roots in social organizations” (1963). Maturation and society’s expectations together create eight crises or issues that the child and later the adult must resolve. It happens that many adults are still struggling to develop a sense of identity. We see this in religious life as well.

Erikson divides the entire life cycle into “the nine stages of a man (person).” These nine stages refer to nine critical periods when certain life long ego concerns reach a climax. Studies in prenatal psychology indicate that the first stage of life begins at conception rather at birth. So, now we may have to talk about ten stages! Erikson himself together with his wife studied and formulated a ninth stage, ‘the old, old age’!

Because of our uniqueness, each one goes through the stages in a unique way. Let me remind you here that Erikson did some cross cultural work, although his study may have a Western bias. However, in my experience of dialoguing with people across many cultures, I have seen that his developmental theory to be very helpful from a clinical perspective. It also needs to be noted here that Erikson studied healthy persons. Only a

healthy, integrated person can give us a true picture of what it means to be human. Erikson's emphasis on the healthy person allows him to focus on human possibilities, including the development of virtues, with its implication for spiritual development. Erikson also believed that development missed earlier can be remedied later, and that anything can be healed. *"There is little that cannot be remedied later, there is much that be prevented from happening at all"* Erikson.

Let me review with you the stages of life looking at the developmental task of each stage and interpreting it for one's spiritual maturity and for one's leadership development. One needs to give leadership to oneself (personal leadership) before one attempts to co-lead with others (inter-personal leadership). My inter-personal leadership needs to flow out of my own self-development. Today's leadership literature has always a chapter or a section on self-development, and in my opinion rightly so. The religious leader of the future needs to be committed to her/his own development/growth (personal leadership), and call others to a similar growth (inter- personal leadership). This call to growth/conversion, I would see as the primary responsibility of a religious leader.

PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

TRUST

Basic trust versus basic mistrust is the first developmental task of the infancy stage. As a baby, what was my experience? Did I experience more basic trust or more basic mistrust? This is a developmental task that cannot be overlooked. This trust/mistrust is in relationship to the mother or the primary care giver. How strong was the bonding with the mother, the primary object of the infant? The quality of love (acceptance) the baby receives builds trust and bonding.

Erikson defined basic trust as *"an essential trustfulness of others as well as a fundamental sense of one's own trustworthiness,"* and the sense that *"there is some correspondence between your needs and your world."* The baby's inner beliefs (trust itself) and its correlation with the outer reality (the mother's presence) provide the baby with **the first rudimentary sense of ego identity.**

I think trust is the base from where the human being grows. If mistrust is the predominant experience of the infant, that infant's growth will be seriously hurt in her/his future development, especially the development of an identity; the child and later the adult may be frustrated, withdrawn, suspicious, and lack self-confidence. **Credibility** stood number one characteristic that the participants expect from their leader according to many surveys taken in U.S.A.

A certain mistrust is also necessary at all stages in order to detect the impending danger or discomfort and to discriminate between honest and dishonest persons.

If the experience is more mistrust, it will in turn affect one's spirituality as well, because self-mistrust will be a block to trust in God.

A leader who has serious problem with trust will find it difficult to trust others, and will not easily **empower** others, nor will she/he take **risk** in life. **Venturing into the future and into the unknown** would be a very difficult task, if not impossible for such a person. She/he will stay with the familiar and the secure and would not dare to take new roads.

Basic trust is crucial to let go of the past and to risk new possibilities **in the future**. She/he will not consciously search for God as an ongoing process, but stay with the 'God' of definitions. She/he will be comfortable worshipping a distant God, and will **not be able to surrender oneself to God in total trust** as Jesus did at Calvary (Lk23:46). Such a person is far from being attracted to a contemplative/ mystical experience of God.

There are psychologists who affirm that the first stage of trust begins **at conception**. The child in the womb is sensitive to love and can be hurt by lack of love. (see: prenatal psychology). Trust is an issue that will run right through all the stages of one's life.

Autonomy

The second developmental task is **autonomy versus shame and doubt**. The child becomes mobile and self-propelled, and the child has to learn as to what it can do and what it cannot do. The constant pursuit of new experiences leads the child into a head-on conflict with two demands: (a) submit to being controlled by others; and (b) learn to control and modulate it self. The ability to control oneself (giving a sense of pride) and the inability to do so creates shame and doubt in oneself. The parents' or the primary care givers' shaming techniques frustrate the child. Too much shaming may lead to rebel or leave the child with a **lasting sense of insecurity**.

Shame and doubt about one's self-control and independence come if basic trust was insufficiently developed or was lost, and when the child's will is 'broken' by an over-controlling parent. In this whole process, there is **a clash of wills**, between the child's will and the will of others. Autonomy develops as the child tries to develop its own will. In choosing its own will, the child is seeking **a separate sense of self** (formation of a separate identity) so that it can relate to its mother in a new way. Ideally, parents create a supportive atmosphere in which the child can develop a sense of self-control without a loss of self-esteem. Parents who themselves have a healthy ability to say 'yes' and 'no' are likely to find the right balance between over possessiveness and harsh firmness, and thus create healthy autonomy in their children. **Affirmation** is necessary to build autonomy and a separate sense of self. A certain ambivalence (doubt) is also necessary or the child can turn out to be a dictator. A dependency personality may have its roots in a wounded sense of autonomy. In a dysfunctional family (e.g. alcoholic) the child experiences not autonomy but confusion and shame. If shame and doubt dominate one's life, obsessive compulsive symptomatic behaviour can be expected.

The activities like walking, talking, anal control gives a child a sense of psychological independence (will). The failures in these activities can result in **low self-esteem, lack of confidence**, and continue to lose trust in oneself. The failure to coordinate the opposing tendencies of 'holding on vs. letting go' (retention and elimination) can lead to an 'anal personality' described by Freud as over-controlling, compulsive, messy, stingy, and/or rigid.

In relationship to God, one can overuse one's will and dictate to God what to do and what not to do and when to do and how to do or under use it by not expressing my desires to God. In doubt and shame one is not free to seek God's will. When we can speak out our surface desires, we can speak with our deepest desires. See; the prayer of Jesus at the garden of Gethsemane (Mt.26:36-46).

Obviously we have seen leaders, both political and religious, who have good intentions but they do not have **the will to do it**, and they never do what they intended or even wanted to do. Probably we cannot call them leaders, perhaps not even managers!

Initiative

Initiative versus guilt is the third developmental task of the play age. The mastery of skills is an important activity of this stage. Children of this age possess a "surplus of energy" allowing them to become "self-activated" or "initiators" especially as they master three skills: **language, movement, and imagination**. Since these skills help children **intrude** on the boundaries of the adult world, this stage is also called 'the stage of intrusion.' Children also intrude by movement as they climb up to reach things that even parents thought out of reach. Children intrude especially through their imagination, because they can become whatever they imagine themselves to be.

The child has already learnt what is forbidden, but it's ambitions are unlimited, and the child may become aggressive and manipulative in trying to achieve its goals. Courage to pursue goals without fearing punishment or guilt is the virtue of **purpose**.

Whether the child's healthy playfulness, curiosity and initiative continue to develop depends, according to Erikson, on a critical factor, i.e. the management of guilt. It's growing capacities may lead it to dare too much.

The major activity of this stage is **play** which is vitally important to development. In play, the child learns to master reality by repeating difficult situations and tasks, and by finding out what things are for and experimenting with how to make them work. By imitating adults in play, the child learns to anticipate future roles.

Erikson accepts the Oedipus complex of the psychoanalytic school as the way of identification, but emphasizes the social components more than the sexual.

A capacity for guilt comes from an emerging conscience. You begin to know that something is wrong even if no one tells you it's wrong. Children seem so sensitive to

guilt at this stage that not only they feel guilty for what they do (e.g. breaking a cup), but they also feel guilty for things they had little or nothing to do with (e.g. parents' divorce). Children are often unable to distinguish between their **action being bad and their person being bad**. Thus, any criticism or punishment for any of their actions is taken as they are being bad. Sexual fantasies may create guilt. Sometimes, the church also adds to this feeling of guilt by overemphasizing guilt, and punishment by God. They may develop self-hatred. They may project this self-hatred on to others in later life, and even punish others by rebelling against parental values, religious values, or punish their own children. Whether your healthy playfulness, curiosity and initiative continue to develop depends, according to Erikson, on a critical factor. i.e. the management of guilt.

God would be seen as a **punishing** God. Some may in later life, rebel against God and religion. Religious 'leaders?' who developed excessive guilt may punish others and/or impose guilt on others in turn. They will continue to preach a punishing God. See the incident of Jesus, his disciples, and the children in Matthew Ch.19:13-15.

Industry

As the child learns to control its lively imagination and apply itself to formal education begins the ego strength called **industry** at this fourth stage of its life. A sense of failure in this industry leads to **inferiority** which may further add to low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence.

The years spent establishing basic trust, autonomy, and initiative were preparation for this energetic entry into the technological and electronic society. School is not just a place to acquire competence through knowledge and skills, but rather an opportunity to experience the intimacy of shared learning with peers and teachers. Gets involved in team projects. The **teachers** have a great power to make the child feel competent or inferior. If the child learns to **work hard to earn the love** of parents or the significant people in the child's life, the child may be working hard always to earn love but may never feel loved.

Similarly, they may be working hard (do lot of charity, observe rites, rituals, say lot of prayers etc.) to earn God's love, but may never feel loved by God. They will lack the experience of God's love. They will end up in lot of religion but may never step on to the spiritual journey. They may not have the capacity to receive (experience) God's love which is freely given and not earned. Here again, the Church may impose the "unworthiness" of the sinner, more than the "loving Father" (see the parable of the loving Father, usually known as the parable of the prodigal son or the lost son. Luke 15.:11-32.

The leader who has an inferiority feeling, may never feel competent to lead. She/he also will feel rather uncomfortable in team-work. Empowering the participants may not come easy for such 'leaders'. Leaders are called to be creative. I will develop this theme later when I speak of Generativity.

Identity

“The process of identity formation emerges as an evolving configuration- a configuration which is gradually established by successive ego syntheses and re-syntheses throughout childhood; it is a configuration gradually integrating constitutional givens, idiosyncratic libidinal needs, favoured capacities, significant identifications, effective defences, successful sublimations, and consistent roles.” (Erikson,1959, p.116).

Trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry all contribute to the child’s **identity**. At this stage, these concerns reach a climax. Rapid physiological changes produce a “new” body with unfamiliar sexual urges. In addition, social pressure to make occupational and educational decisions force the youth to consider a variety of roles.

The basic task for the adolescent is to integrate the various identifications she/he brings from childhood into a more complete identity. Erikson emphasizes that this whole (the identity) is greater than some of its parts (previous identifications). The young person **begins** to form her/his identity. Adolescents **begin to sense their individuality**. They get a sense that they have the strength to control their destinies and feel the **need to define themselves** and their goals. If the adolescent cannot integrate her/his identifications, roles, or selves, she/he faces **“identity diffusion,”** and her/his personality is fragmented, lacking a core. One is faced with decisions that will have lasting consequences. No wonder the adolescent experiences identity **confusion**. In addition, if they do not know how to give expression to their sexual urges and feelings, it certainly adds to the confusion.

They want to participate in the society but are afraid of making mistakes. Thus, they **become self-conscious** and often feel embarrassed, and their behaviour becomes **inconsistent**.

If the adolescent feels a sense of being potentially bad or unworthy, they may create a negative identity of themselves, and they may project this onto others. Some young people look for their identities in countercultural movements that espouse values that are completely opposite to the values they were taught at home. Adolescents usually over identify with heroes and heroines, or form cliques that confer a kind of **collective identity** on them and in which they stereotype themselves, their ideals, and their enemies. These behaviours are part of their effort to understand themselves and to formulate values.

Some youth delay in resolving their identity crisis, and Erikson calls this: *“psychosocial moratorium,”* by which he means a time during which adult **commitments are postponed**. It might be interesting to study this factor in different cultures, and even in our religious communities.

From the above descriptions of adolescents, it should become clear that the adolescent life should be lived at home, and not in the seminaries and convents. It is unhealthy, and even unjust to demand from them to make lasting commitments, especially in religious life or the priesthood when they have not found their identity, worse if they are experiencing identity confusion.

Adolescence is the **transition** from childhood to adulthood. Transitions are uncertain and can be confusing. It may not be wise to make lasting decisions during transition times. The questions like- “who am I,” “what am I doing here?” “what am I going to be?”- are difficult questions for the adolescents to respond to, especially if they are already struggling with other unresolved developmental tasks of earlier stages. Some adolescents define themselves by authority’s values, those of her parents, teachers, religion, culture etc. and they become whom they said “she was” or “he should be.” These authority figures can put lot of pressure on the adolescents regarding sexuality, education, religion, and the future. If the adolescents took these values as imposed on them, they may **rebel against them**, or it may pave the way for an adolescent crisis.

Just as they rebel against their parents, they may also rebel against the God of their parents, causing a **“faith crisis.”** Some would argue that such a faith crisis at this stage may be necessary for the individual to distance her/himself from the God of her/his parents, and the God of the Institutional Church so that the individual may find his/her God.

Identity and depth spirituality are connected in the sense when I find my real identity, I also find my real God – a God experience. See: the parable of the loving father (the prodigal son), Lk. 15:11:32. If these adolescent conflicts are suppressed, as Erikson said “the autocracy of conscience” will continue into adulthood, causing maturity problems.

Externals, like academic degrees, professional qualifications, jobs that one holds or the titles that one has received **do not give real identity to oneself**. If at all they mean something, they may **give an external identity**, something that can be given and also taken away. Similarly, the religious congregation that an individual belongs to, does not give that person a ‘religious identity,’ unless she/he has gone through a conversion experience, from ‘be’ to ‘becoming,’ – a God experience, a religious experience. A membership in a religious congregation may give one an external identity that she/he belongs to this or that particular congregation. This is not a religious identity.

A Religious Leader is ‘Born’

A title or an appointment to a position does not make a leader in the real sense of the word not only in politics but also in religion: but a leader has to be “*born*.” Obviously, I am not saying that a leader is born at birth!

Let me cite a few examples to explain my statement. The greatest leader, **Jesus Christ**, went through a conversion experience in the dessert of his life, he discerned his call (the Father’s will for him), and he *became* a leader- a leader was *born*. When he felt **accepted by his father** (Lk.3:32), he anointed himself as a leader. “The spirit of the Lord is on me,” (Lk.4:18), and he also discerned his mission as a leader: “to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord” (Lk.4:18).

A mission flowing out of a conversion-God- experience. I am convinced that the mission of a religious leader need to flow from her/his experience of God- a conversion experience.

Mohandas Gandhi went through a conversion experience as he met with a crisis on that railway platform in South Africa when he was thrown out of the first class compartment because he was brown and not white. A Mahatma Gandhi was *born* – a leader not only for India, but to the whole world. When **Anwar Sadat** experienced a conversion experience in that prison cell no. 50 in Cairo, and there he discovered his future mission. He championed the cause of peace both for Israelites and the Egyptians. He won the Nobel Prize for peace, and is accepted as a great leader.

As he stood by the side of the casket of one his priests shot dead by the Government forces in El Salvador, **Archbishop Romero** went through a conversion experience, and eventually he died for a cause and became a martyr. Finally, in our own times, **Nelson Mandela** was imprisoned for his fighting the apartheid system in South Africa. The long twenty- six years of imprisonment could neither break him nor his cause, but on the contrary the man went through ‘a conversion experience’ in the solitary prison, and his vision for life became larger than ever. What began as a fight for the oppressed became a fight for both the oppressed and the oppressor because he thought that they both were un-free. It is this vision and conviction, in my opinion, gave him that tremendous courage to forgive, and he did forgive all his torturers. He stands today as a great moral leader in the world. This is the type of leadership I would like to envision for the future religious leaders.

Without a fairly well established identity of ‘who I am,’ a conversion may not be possible. Conversion is change or growth. This change or growth is possible only if I am **open** to change, if I am **open to be challenged** by the situation/the reality/the signs of our time, and **respond** to the challenge. Those individuals who experience a weak identity will resist openness and change because of fear of the unknown and the uncertainty of the immediate future, and consequently, the fear of insecurity.

Intimacy

The developmental task of the sixth stage is **intimacy and solidarity versus isolation**. If reasonably a well integrated identity emerges from the previous stage, psychological intimacy with other people and even with oneself is possible. With the firm sense of identity, the person is ready to share her/himself in a trusting relationship. The relationships that are built enhances one’s own identity and furthers the growth of one’s personality.

If a young person fears that she/he may lose her/himself in someone else, she/he may feel unable to fuse her/his identity with someone else. A shaky identity combined with a fear of responsibility will prevent an individual from forming any close relationships. The inability “to take chances with one’s identity by sharing true intimacy” leads to isolation. Then, social relationships are stereotyped, cold and empty.

One aspect of intimacy is the feeling of solidarity of “us” and the defence against “them,” the threatening “forces and people whose essence seems dangerous to one’s own” (Erikson, 1959, p.96).

Self-intimacy can facilitate intimacy with others. Jesus, the leader invited his disciples to **friendship** with him by being **transparent** with his disciples. “*I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my father.*” Jn.15:15. At the same supper, Jesus was very intimate with his friends, and invited them to interpersonal intimacy and ‘divine intimacy’ – a mystical experience. “*May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us,*” Jn. 17:21. Speaking of religious conversion, Bernard Lonergan writes; “it’s falling-in-love,” and “being-in-love.” Commenting on this description of religious conversion, William Johnston writes that’s his definition of mysticism. As religious, we are invited to a contemplative life - mystical life. ***A religious leader of the future needs to be a contemplative- a mystic her/himself, and consistently call others to the same.*** This is an aspect of religious leadership that has been neglected for the most part by religious leaders.

Generativity

Generativity versus stagnation and self-absorption is the developmental task of the seventh stage of a person. Generativity –“the interest in establishing and guiding the next generation” (Erikson, 1959, p.97) through child rearing and/or creative or productive endeavours. It is the faith in the future, a belief in the species, and the ability to care about others seem to be pre-requisites for development in this stage. It is also creating a better world for others to live. The continuity of society is part of generative task. A lack of generativity is expressed in stagnation, self-absorption (self-indulgence), boredom, and a lack of psychological growth.

Human beings also need to generate ideas and products, and create a new world of opportunities for posterity. This is a parental drive. Otherwise, the result is stagnation, where the personality becomes impoverished, and regresses into self-concern.

This is the time (stage six) both in politics and in religion (including religious life), women and men take up to leadership. The leaders of the future need to create a new world order where all women and men could live equally, and with dignity and freedom. These leaders are called to be the ‘liberators’ of the oppressed in their many faces. They need to care for the suffering and the marginalized. They need to be peace- makers in this violent world.

The parental drive is the drive to be co-creators of the world, to create ‘new’ life, a new world order, a new environment. ***They are called to co-create new forms/models of***

religious life for the future. They are called to be re-formers of the deforming religious life as we have it to day.

The search for deeper and more meaningful way of living often involves a confrontation with inner darkness, and stagnation. This confrontation is evident of life: giving personal leadership before doing leadership with others.

I would like to share with you at this point, what I read in Robin S. Sharma's leadership Wisdom, 2003/2005-

Visionary leaders see themselves as **liberators** than limiters of human talent. Their primary priority is to develop their people's full potential. They realize that every leader's task is to transform the work place into a place of realized genius. The visionary leader understands that his company (her congregation) must, above all else, become a place and *opportunity for self-development and personal fulfilment*. He has the wisdom to know that in order for his/her followers to become deeply committed to her/his vision and offer the true extent of their capacities she/he is duty bound *to provide them with challenging work (ministry)*. *She/he must offer them a chance to grow as people through work/ministry. One of the human hungers is the need for growth and self-actualization. The visionary leaders satisfy this hunger by freeing people's strengths. Every single person on this planet has a deeply felt desire to expand and improve as a person. A leader must dedicate her/himself to liberating rather than stifling the talents of the people under her/his leadership, she/he will reap quantum results in terms of loyalty, productivity, creativity and devotion to the leader's compelling cause. Remember that people who feel superb about themselves generate superb results.*

The sad fact is that most people have no idea how much talent and potential slumbers within them.

William James, the founder of modern psychology said: *"Most people live –whether physically, intellectually, or morally---in a very restricted circle of their potential being. We all have reservoirs of life to draw upon, of which we do not dream."*

If the average person caught even a glimpse of how powerful she/he truly is that individual will be astonished. And yet most people have never taken the time to look within themselves to discover who they really are.

Story

Acc. To an India mythology:

All people were once gods. However, they began to abuse their power so the supreme god, Brahma, decided he would take this gift away from them and hide the godhead in a place where they would never find it. One adviser suggested it be buried deep within the ground, but Brahma did not like the idea. 'Mankind will one day dig deep to find it,' he said. Another adviser suggested it be hidden in the deepest part of the ocean. 'No,' said Brahma, 'one day mankind will dive deep enough to discover it.' Yet another adviser suggested the godhead be placed on the highest peak of the highest mountain, but

Brahma replied, 'No, mankind will eventually find a way to climb to the top and take it.' After silently thinking about it, the supreme god finally found the ideal resting place for the greatest of all gifts, "here's the answer: let's hide it within man himself. He will never think to look there."

(It is interesting to compare this story with that of the Bible. Why the first couple were cast out of the paradise).

The point of the story is that all people have more energy and ability within them than they could ever imagine. *A leader is to uncover this truth for the benefit of her/his participants. That's the challenge of leadership.*

Genius is all about an exceptional natural ability. We all have our special gifts and capacities. The problem is that most leaders have never offered their people opportunities to test and liberate those gifts. Rather than showing them what success look like and then letting them use their creativity and usefulness to get there, the vast majority of leaders micromanage and dictate the path to be followed at every step of the way. They treat their team members as children, as they are absolutely in capable of independent thought. Over time, this type of leadership stifles imagination, energy and spirit.

H.G. Wells: *"Leaders should lead as far they can and then vanish. Their ashes should not choke the fire they have lit."*

As leaders, challenge your participants and allow them to grow. Let them try new things and learn new skills. Let them fail from time to time, since failure is nothing more than learning how to win. Failure is the high way to success. Visionary leaders have the wisdom *to push her/his people up* rather than keep them down.

Be a liberator and not a limiter of people's highest talents. Stop micromanaging and let people have more responsibility for their results. Start specifying goals and not methods so people could bring more creativity and ingenuity to their work. Let people develop as people on the job and challenge them more. Let people do the jobs they were capable of doing, without your constant monitoring and supervision.

Be strong and tough when the circumstances require, but not yelling and screaming, not talking behind people's backs or keeping secrets. Don't manipulate and do arm-twisting. People need to know that you stand for something. The leaders understand that when his people succeed, he succeeds.

Bernard Gimbel: *Two things are bad for the heart- running uphill and running down people."*

"The ultimate task of the visionary leader is to dignify and honour the lives of those she leads by allowing to manifest their highest potential through the work they do."

Yeats: *"In dreams begin responsibilities."* The visionary leader owes his people the responsibility of helping them develop and flourish. He understands that the greatest privilege of leadership is the chance to elevate lives.

Abraham Maslow: “ *the unhappiness, the unease and unrest in the world today are caused by people living far below their capacity.*”

Can you see your people as bundles of human potential just waiting to be unleashed for a worthy purpose? *A visionary leader measures her/his success through how many lives he/she touches and how many people she/he transforms. He/she measures his/her success, not by the extent of his/her power; but by the number of people she/he empowers.*

Robin S. Sharma, Leadership Wisdom, 2003/2005

Integrity

In this late adulthood stage, the developmental task is: **integrity versus despair.** A person lives with what she/he has built over her/his life-time. Hopefully, the individual has reached some level of integrity.

Integrity involves the acceptance of the limitations of life, a sense of being a part of a larger history that includes previous generations, a sense of owning the wisdom of the ages, and a final integration of all the previous stages... It is the acceptance of one's own and only life-cycle and of the people who have become significant to it... free of the wish that they should have been different, and an acceptance of the fact that one's life is one's own responsibility” - Erikson.

The women and men in this stage perceive that their lives have had an order, an order in spite of chaos and a meaning with a larger order (see: chaos theory). They can see that others have lived differently, but they are prepared to own the dignity of their own life styles. One creates one's own life style within the culture or civilization in which one lives. Thus, the integrity of one's life style becomes in a sense, one's inheritance from one self. Erikson says that “integrity is the patrimony of the soul,” i.e. we inherit our integrity from ourselves; our integrity reflects all that we have been and done and achieved. A feeling of completeness can counteract the feeling of being helpless and dependent, of being finished with life.”

“Leadership is not about popularity, it's about integrity. It's not about power, it's about purpose. And it's not about title but rather talent”- Robin S. Sharma, Leadership Wisdom, 2003/2005.

If integrity outweighs despair, one acquires the virtue of wisdom. Wisdom is what have I learnt from life: the gains and the losses, the joys and the sorrows, the strengths and the

weaknesses, successes and failures, and making meaning out of all these experiences for my personal life.

“Wisdom consists in doing the next thing you have to do, doing it with your whole heart and finding delight in it,” Meister Eckhart. Wisdom comes from giving thanks. *“Always be joyful; pray constantly; and for all things give thanks; this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus,”* (I Thess.5:16-18). *“It is not happiness that makes us grateful, but it’s gratefulness that makes us happy,”* David Steindhl-Rast. It is this wisdom that we pass on to the next generation. In the stage of integrity, even death can give meaning.

Regret for what one has done or not done with one’s life, fear of approaching death, and disgust with oneself leads to **despair**. Life does not give any meaning to such persons. Despair begins with contempt of individuals, then encompasses institutions, and finally leads to contempt of oneself. “Old patients seem to be mourning not only for time forfeited and space depleted but also... for autonomy weakened, initiative lost, intimacy missed, generativity neglected –not to speak of identity potentials by passed, or indeed, an all too identity lived.” Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*.

Leaders can be had from this stage of life as well, for it is not the age that matters, but the maturity of the person. Wise women and men could be good leaders. The chronology of age of the person should not determine the leader, but the developmental growth of the person can determine the quality of leadership.

Oblate Scholasticate
Ampitiya, Kandy
Sri Lanka

June 14 2006

Dear Sr. Monica

Greetings of peace to you from the little hills of Ampitiya, Kandy where I came to meet my scholastics (seminarians). But, I am at your “conference”. I have written two of my presentations incorporating human development and leadership development. I re-wrote the whole thing. I had to, considering your questions. It was a good exercise for me too. I got some insights for myself.

I keep making changes all the time, and it never seems to end! So let me stop here, send you a copy of my first two presentations, and for the most part (90%) I will keep to this script so that the translators may not worry too much. However, I will make some minor changes as I continue to reflect on this theme, and as I reflect on my own leadership. It is challenging and therefore creative as well. I do hope it is O.K. by you and the translators.

Your comments are most welcome. After all we all want the best and the meaningful themes.

Thank You
Sincerely

S.M. Selvaratnam, omi