



Meeting Needs and Growing through Contact – Part 1

As I take in my morning cup of coffee, and reflect upon this last weekend's encounter group experience, I find myself thinking through the usual questions about the purpose of an encounter group, and what we are "supposed" to do together. I want to move in this direction now by discussing the subject of "contact".

Human beings have basic needs that drive behavior. By looking at some of the parts that make us up, we can identify some of needs that arise from each part. Man has a body, a mind, a heart, and a soul or spirit. Accordingly, each of these parts manifests needs that want satiation. Our body wants to remain physically safe and healthy. Our mind drives curiosity and the desire to solve challenges. We want to know how things work. Our heart gives rise to social dependence because we want to love and be loved for that which we truly are. As social beings, we also want to belong to a group. As we age, and our soul develops, we seem to need and enjoy having an overarching purpose. Each of these needs is solved through contact; contact with people, the environment, and from within ourselves.

For our purposes, I would like to discuss intra and interpersonal contact, and avoid the environmental/physiological contact discussion for now. Man, through his senses and awareness, makes contact with himself and others to satiate his needs. He will break this contact if he feels that his needs will be unfulfilled, or threatened. As an example, I want to approach a woman because I want to satiate my need to love and be loved. I worry, however, that she might reject my advances, which I take as being unloved by her, and perhaps unlovable by others and myself. As a result, I might avoid contact if I feel that the risks outweigh the rewards. In this case, I might wait for someone to contact me, rather than initiate contact, and thereby avoid a lot of the risk.

Alternatively, I might color my contact through various methods so that I get what I want, at least in the short-run. So, I might agree outwardly with others so that I am accepted: I become confluent with the way they are, rather than how I am. I might behave in the way my parents want me to be, rather than who I am, with their values, rather than my own. I might lie to my family, my spouse, or a loved one so that I can do what I want, without facing their rejection and loss of love. Or I might avoid feedback from others, so I can con myself about myself. In some sense, I use my mind and intellect as a tool to manipulate contact.

In a perfect world, prior to initiating contact, I think I would like to be all that I truly am, just as I am – blemishes and all. I like to think of how I would be, in totality, if there were no social pressures to define and accept me. How would I be on a desert island, just me, with no external judges? I wonder how I can evolve and grow to make this really happen. **Read part 2 of "Meeting Needs and Growing Through Contact" in the next newsletter!**