

## **Relationship and the 3 stages of our Evolution**

### **A Brief Sketch**

I have developed this understanding from working with the teachings of David Deida, Adya Shanti, Thomas Hubl, Robert Augustus Masters, John Welwood, and Robert Kegan.

The ones who inspired, and in some cases required that I learn how to live this, are the people in my life: partners, friends, children, clients and students. My deepest gratitude goes out to all of them.

### **How we Move and Grow through these 3 stages**

Nothing in life is really linear, and neither are these stages of development. There may be parts of your life in which you are stuck in the socialized mind, and other areas in which you function in a much more evolved way. These stages are a map—they are not the real, wild living territory of your experience. And I have found this map to be very helpful. It can illuminate and accelerate the natural pathways of our evolution. Understanding these stages allows us to take responsibility for where we are, and for where we are willing to go.

It's a big leap, to move from one stage to the next. We have to work at this, to face things in ourselves, to let go of positions and ways of being that we are deeply attached to. We struggle as we do this, and this struggle is essential. It's not wrong and it's not a sign of our pathology. It's a necessary and essential part of growing up, of becoming our true, authentic self.

### **Stage 1: Co-dependence, Socialized Mind**

In the first stage of our growth, we have not yet fully individuated. We are not standing in a place where we fully value ourselves and our own uniqueness. Our sense of our own worth and value is derived from the way other people value and relate to us. I have a 'reflected' sense of self—it depends on how other people experience me.

The traditional word for this stage is 'co-dependent.' Most relationships of this sort begin with a honeymoon or falling-in-love stage, which is basically a form of infatuation, a trance state. In this trance I imagine you to be all that I want you to be for me. On a deeper level, which is usually unconscious, I imagine that you are the one who will finally meet all the needs that were not met in my childhood. I look to you as the source of my fulfillment and satisfaction. I am still operating out of a 'strategic self,' a self that is motivated by what it hopes it can get. This way of being is very obvious in our intimate relationships, but it can happen with anyone—a friend, a colleague or a teacher.

In our post modern world, we have been cut off from our primary sources of nourishment: our soul, our tribe, our elders, our relationship with nature, and with the ground of our being. In the face of this disconnection, many of us are functioning in a co-dependent way in our relationships. Quite often, this lack of maturity shows us most vividly in our intimate relationships.

The truth is, if I am an adult, I simply cannot get what I want and need from another person. I must find a way to give these fundamental things to myself- to love myself, to value and respect my authentic being. When this understanding really comes alive in me, I move to the second stage.

### **Stage Two: Independence, Self Authoring Mind**

In this stage, I am focused on nourishing and maintaining my sense of independence. Kahlil Gibran in 'The Prophet' has a beautiful image of this kind of relationship. He compares the lovers to two strong trees, who grow side by side. These trees give each other shade, they blow in the same wind, their roots drink from the same earth. But they do not grow so close that they lean against each other.

In this kind of relationship, I begin to learn the distinction between empowering and supporting the people in my life, instead of rescuing and care-taking them. I know how to take responsibility for the experience I am having in each moment. I no longer make anyone else responsible for whatever is happening to me. And I no longer make myself responsible for the feelings and experiences of others. I know how to reach out and ask for help, without demanding or coercing. I understand that it is ultimately up to me to love, nurture and evolve myself.

When I need to make a decision, I am open to feedback from other people, but the ultimate source of guidance and wisdom lives inside me. I am my own authority. I know that my own intelligence is not perfect and infallible, and I rely upon it anyway, learning as I go, how to trust myself more and more.

There are a lot of people in our world right now who are at this stage in their development. Many of them are women, who are moving into a powerful sense of themselves in relation to vocation and career. This is a crucial and necessary stage to reach in our evolution. And it is quite limited in terms of the deeper and wider nature of love. When I allow myself to experience the limitations of my independence, I move into the third phase.

### **Stage 3: Interdependence, the self-transforming mind**

In this stage, I move beyond the polarities of dependence and independence. I begin to experience myself as connected with everything and everyone. I am separate from you, and not separate from you, at the same time. I realize that I cannot say, as I did when I was co-dependent, that I need to receive love from you. And I cannot say, as I did when I was independent, that I do not need to receive love from you. When I need to claim my own autonomy, I can still do so, but I no longer live here.

In this phase, the truth is that I want to love *with* you. I understand that when I am fully and freely myself, my presence allows you to expand and evolve, and your presence does the same for me. I experience love as something I am, rather than something I do. When I live and relate from this core place of love, I experience love as an overflowing, an abundance, something that is never exhausted. I have made a fundamental choice to align myself with this love, and with an experience of myself that is fluid, alive and transparent. Therefore I know, even when I am triggered by circumstances and interactions, that I can still choose to love in the most painful, bewildering and challenging moments of my life. I don't need to feel good, to be happy or strong, to make the choice to love. But this fundamental choice only becomes obvious to me in this third stage of my evolution.

### **If Prayer Would Do It**

If prayer would do it  
I'd pray.

If reading esteemed thinkers would do it  
I'd be halfway through the Patriarchs.

If discourse would do it  
I'd be sitting with His Holiness  
every moment he was free.

If contemplation would do it  
I'd have translated the Periodic Table  
to hermit poems, converting  
matter to spirit.

If even fighting would do it  
I'd already be a blackbelt.

If anything other than love could do it  
I've done it already  
and left the hardest for last.

~ Stephen Levine ~