

The Happy Childhood is Hardly worth Your While

By Simon Heathcote

Tina Turner, that gravel-voiced, Ike-battered, comeback kid said this: 'I didn't have anybody, no foundation in life...so I had to discover my mission in life.'

It's a plain enough statement: without support she had to cut out on her own, uncover her path, focus hard to push through the neglect that birthed her talent. It speaks to the victimised child in us all, galvanising the hero to action.

Yet it also says something else, something other and reveals a truth that sprang straight from the author's unconscious without either her awareness or her consent. If you listen to people carefully, with what I call an eye for initiation, often something quite different is going on.

If you ask the right questions more is revealed. The curious mind says, if she had no foundation in life where did her foundation come from? If it wasn't 'in life' could it have come with her from outside of life perhaps? And wasn't it – in stark contrast to the findings of psychoanalysis – neglect that nourished her?

Frank McCourt, whose words form the title of this article, suggests similarly: it was neglect that nursed him not mother or father in a shining childhood. Or perhaps if we look even deeper, not neglect but something other that made neglect bearable. As the Jungian James Hillman tells us in *The Soul's Code*, within us all lies an image or pattern that conforms us to our fate and what accompanies us into life is a guardian angel or daimon that holds us to it. This visitor from another world opens and blocks our path, drops hints and can even cause accidents to keep us on track.

It does not take too much straying and it can force deviances and oddities upon its bearer. Illnesses and accidents, abandonments and losses, are integral to our purpose and should be read not as abnormalities rather as signposts. Darkenings and despairings are essential.

Hillman's book cites cases of extraordinary people from often troubled backgrounds, suggesting the alliance of parents is chosen by the incoming soul and its daimon and not the other way around. This accounts, he says, for some epic misalliances and many short-lived and unhappy affairs.

Plato in his *Republic* said this: we come into the world called and most likely resisted that call; we chose the body, place, parents and circumstances, best suited to our task; within us lies an image, what Michelangelo called the *imagine del cuor*; and we are accompanied here by our daimon.

In Plato's myth (and a myth is something that never happened but always is) each soul has a lot or portion of fate (Moirai) that reflects its character. When each soul has chosen its life according to its lot, she is given a guardian, the daimon. Then at the turning of a spindle the destiny of the chosen lot is ratified. The soul is then spun to make its destiny irreversible and it then passes through the lap of Necessity, which says all things are necessary, even though we may not know why.

In astrological terms we put it this way: at the moment of your birth, the energetic configuration at that precise time is stamped within you. It is your portion of the whole, your lot; that energy is what you have to work with. It unfolds over time, just as unpacking the image in the heart may take a lifetime.

However before we arrive here we pass through the plain of forgetting, and are unaware of all that has gone before although both pattern and daimon remain. Jewish legend has it, says Hillman, the evidence for this is pressed right into your upper lip. That crevice is where the angel pressed its forefinger and when we have an insight that is where our finger goes.

Modern psychology fails us in a myriad ways: although psychology means study of the soul, there is no soul present. In its place are dry data and statistics. Clinicians everywhere reach straight for DSM IV when presented with a troubled client as if the answer to a human being can be found in book. Although psychology believes in individuality, it cannot account for it: that tired chestnut nature/nurture is blind to the essence that is you; it 'trims a life to fit the frame'; in other words you become a theory; it does not imagine life with any romance or flair; psychologies promote anxieties, bypassing beauty altogether, and focusing us more and more on what Hillman calls the parental fallacy.

If everything is about the parenting pattern, and mum and dad always the scapegoats, have we not forgotten something? The role of ancestors, extended family, the lack of mentors, the need for and neglect of nature, the absence of

meaningful ritual and worship, the failure to make offerings to the gods, all these things lie outside the framework of modern industrial understanding.

One of our greatest neglects is our neglect of beauty. In older, wiser times, beauty itself was the cure for the malaise in the soul. A life is quite beautiful but you would not think so when reading many modern texts, says Hillman.

I want to follow on from Hillman's work, and that of other romantics, by helping promote a psychology founded on the call of fate, where we reimagine life with flair and refuse to live lives of quiet desperation. The herd is led by the nose of the conditioned mind. And it almost always follows the consensus: study hard, get a good job, settle down, marry a nice guy or gal, make sure you have a decent pension...and on and on.

This is life governed by the tyrant Time that wants only an inexorable plodding from cradle to grave. It is life as safety, as worthy dullness. You can be sure of one thing: when security is your reason for being, when playing it safe becomes the norm, you have put your daimon to sleep and somewhere, likely in the darkness of your unconscious, he is kicking against the traces preparing to blindside you.

As Jung said, the hardest thing for the child is the un-lived life of the parent. If the parent has given up on its own guardian spirit, his own purpose, then things go seriously awry. Listen to this on modern fathers:

'Without inspiration, what's left is bare, aimless ferocity. Without desire for an ideal, what's left is a lustful fantasy and the seduction of free-floating images that find no anchor in actual projects. Present in body and absent in spirit, he lies back on the couch, shamed by his own daimon for the potentials in his soul that will not be subdued. He feels himself inwardly subversive, imagining in his passivity extremes of aggression and desire that must be suppressed. Solution: more work, more money, more drink, more weight, more things, more infotainment, and an almost fanatic dedication of his mature male life to the kids so that they can grow up straight and straight up the consumer ladder in the pursuit of their happiness.'

Modern psychology is not saving us from this. Instead it is helping store up a world of pain. In their book, *The War Against Children*, the authors describe how a daimon-neglected culture has spawned an alienated generation we have to subdue. When

the spirit is not understood all we see is disorder. We have labels for it now, ADD and ADHD are two of the most popular and we treat our children with drugs to suppress symptoms we do not understand. Yet pathology does not necessarily equal abnormality, it may instead equal extraordinary.

‘Earth is a mirror of heaven,’ said Rumi and in a mirror everything appears backwards. Could it be that in our society, in our world, we have everything backwards, and that which appears true is false and vice versa? The pharmaceutical industry may be a case in point. So too is the idea of growing up. How many of us look grown up while housing a neglected child? How many people win society’s stamp of approval yet in truth have not grown up at all? When the outside looks good, often the inside is dying. ‘Those who are exalted shall be humbled; those who are humbled shall be exalted,’ it says in the Psalms. Yet another clue that perhaps everything is back to front.

Hillman speaks of growing down not up. We come into the world head first like divers. In certain traditions the Tree of Life has its roots in heaven. Watch a small child trying to find its feet, fearful and clinging, not yet at home here, a visitor from another world. It takes a long time to find our feet and many never do. Sometimes the ruthless demands of the daimon are too great, not allowing us to settle into normality. Hillman cites Judy Garland as a case in point. What she wanted – a happy, stable family life – was always beyond her reach. There was always the push of the daimon, which may protect us and guide us, but only insofar as we fulfill its purpose.

The daimon in the child can also be outraged. Yehudi Menuhin, the great virtuoso, received a toy violin for his fourth birthday after expressing a desire to learn. He burst into sobs and threw it on the floor in disgust. He wanted the real thing and his daimon, already the bearer of his genius, was insulted and finally destructive.

Yet according to Necessity, the goddess Ananke and one of a number of great cosmic forces the Greeks cited, all that happens is necessary. We, of course, have our own watchwords today. Growth is one of the biggest and most unquestioned of them all. It is never questioned that growth, unlike greed its uglier cousin, is good. It seems we can never step off the growth merry-go-round. Listen to David Cameron and you will hear yet another Prime Minister tied to his conditioning and belief

system. And we can hardly blame him (although blame is what he constantly seems to need to aim at others!) for Growth is the bedfellow of Time.

And while the ancients' understanding allowed them to step outside of Time, ours does not. Growth and Time are joined at the hip, but existence in time is only a reflection of another world characterised by unconditional love, stillness, joy and compassion. Earth is indeed a mirror of heaven.

We believe that all things move through this river of time. And just like time a river is constantly moving without getting anywhere. Analagous to this would be the awe-inspiring visuals of Earth from outer space. It is a small spinning, beautiful blue planet and it is going precisely nowhere. Its pointlessness is its beauty.

In *Siddhartha*, Herman Hesse's prize-winning novella, the river becomes a metaphor for oneness and stepping outside of Time. In it, the eponymous hero goes through various phases, through many darkenings and despairings and concludes, speaking to his friend, this:

'The world Govinda is not imperfect, or on a slow path to perfection: no, it is perfect in every moment, all sin carries the divine forgiveness in itself, all small children already have the old person in themselves, all infants already have death, all dying people the eternal life. It is not possible for any person to see how far another one has already progressed on his path; in the robber and dice-gambler, the Buddha is waiting; in the Brahman, the robber is waiting. In deep meditation, there is the possibility to put time out of existence, to see all life which was, is and will be as if it was simultaneous, and there everything is good, everything is perfect, everything is Braham. Therefore, I see whatever exists as good, death is to me like life, sin like holiness, wisdom like foolishness, everything has to be as it is, everything only requires my consent, my willingness, my loving agreement to be good for me, to do nothing but work for my benefit, to be unable ever to harm me. I have experienced on my body and on my soul that I needed sin very much, I needed lust, the desire for possessions, vanity, and needed the most shameful despair, in order to learn how to give up all resistance, in order to learn how to love the world, in order to stop comparing it to some world I wished, I imagined, some kind of perfection I had made up, but to leave it as it is and to love it and to enjoy being part of it.'

And so he steps outside of the growth/time paradigm and into Oneness. We could say he stands behind, outside or beyond time. As he listens to the river he hears many voices, voices of woe and pain, voices of joy, and he realises that all is one and he too is that. There really is no separation.

Another great teacher Adi Da says this: 'The childish individual wants someone to save him; the adolescent wants to fulfil himself absolutely and independently; the true man simply serves good company and surrenders to Truth, the living God.'

The content is profound and speaks to us all, but again it is what is hidden that is interesting. Seeing with an eye for initiation, we can notice that the child and adolescent are both reaching out for a result in time but the true man rests quietly in the present. He is a servant of something greater, there is no personal self going anywhere. As Eckhart Tolle might say, he is one with life.

What keeps us out of timeless presence are things like hope, motivation, interpretation or projection, what the teacher Tony Parsons calls the dream of individuality. In awakening what dies is all expectation, judgment and effort to become. Picasso put it this way: 'I don't develop, I am.'

As Parsons says: 'To live passionately is to let go of everything for the wonder of timeless presence. When this apparently happens, there is a residing in the source of Everything and Nothing.' It is not that our usual way of being is wrong, goal setting, chasing success etc, more that it is simply the by-product of the unawakened mind.

Why does he say apparently happens? Because the awakened state is all there is. It is only the mind that cannot see it and so when revealed it looks like it has happened or appeared. Yet awakening cannot happen as it always is, and it certainly cannot happen to anyone because in awakening there is no one, rather all is one. We are living as Everything and Nothing.

That something other lives through us is one of the major ideas behind this talk. I notice it particularly during rebirthing that there comes a point where the breath takes over, life is living through us, we are indeed vehicles for something greater. I also see it in relationships. Just like the epic misalliances mentioned earlier, the

relationship has its own purpose, its own life, and does not give a fig for the suffering of its protagonists!

Adi Da put it this way: 'Spiritual life begins when seeking fails.' In other words the life of the ego must wind down for awakening to be revealed. One cannot (apparently) exist in the presence of the other.

The other major tenet of this talk is that what appears true is false and what is false is true. Peter Kingsley, who has completely rewritten the origins of western culture, says that Love, that thing we always look to as the solution is instead the problem. It is Aphrodite or Venus who binds us to the world, seducing us, tempting us, and it is another great cosmic force, Strife, that frees us.

If it is indeed conflict that takes us home, the happy childhood is hardly worth our while.

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