Parenthood: Blind, Failed, or a new possibility?



Posted on May 11, 2018 by anita

I recently offered a one day version of the Parenting Inside Out program at a school, where parents and teacher participated in the exploration of what it means to be a parent and a teacher. The program is based on the approach that is the basis of our work at Ritambhara, which has evolved by integrating yoga (as a philosophy, process and practice), texts from the Indian tradition mainly the Itihasa Purana, and Upanishad, theater, and process work.

After an initial introduction to the framework of yoga and the approach for the session, we got into exploring some parent-child contexts from stories from Itihasa Purana. Participants were given 4 triads to choose from and enact a short scene of about 3-5 min from a story that has this triad.

The triads were –

1. Dasaratha, Kaikeyi and Rama,
2. Shantanu-Satyavati-Bheeshma,
3. Dronacharya-Ekalavya-Arjuna and
4. Dhritarashtra-Gandhari-Duryodhana.

After each enactment, we shared what was evoked within us, as audience as well as actors.

Meeting The Actor Within



Each person got in touch with something deep from within themselves. This was a reflection of their inner world, as it met the outer scene being enacted or the role they took up in that act. Those who were initially hesitant, said that the experience of acting got them in touch

with the way they connected or could not connect to the character that they played. It also helped them see the character more personally, from the inside out rather than as an external role/character.

Many shared statements from their role/personal context:

"I can connect to the part in me that is like Kaikeyi, to use the opportunity to steer things the way I want"

"I feel the burden of being privileged, knowing what many others have given up or do to be/keep me where I am,"

"I felt the struggle within me for my longing and desires for myself and my child,"

"I feel the heaviness of being an obedient son or daughter," and many many more.

At the end of the program, I asked participants to share a statement on what they were taking back with them.

Some of the statements included

- To learn to stay with my problem without feeling helpless and to create space for it instead of being consumed by it
- Ponder on the question of what is my idea of an ideal parent or child?
- To be aware of my rush to find solutions
- To learn to take responsibility for my actions, own up to my fears and desires
- To recognize that there is a lot for me to learn and pass to my child from my tradition

As a facilitator a few things that emerged/got clarified for me were

1. The re-affirmation in the power of this approach in bringing to the fore the tensions that people experience with respect to their role-identity and not giving instant solutions. My sraddha in this approach and my committment to study and learn further in this approach continues to deepen.



Too long I have searched for solutions, not just outside of me, but outside of what texts like the Itihasa purana, Yoga sutra, Upanishads have to offer. Conscious parenting, unconditional parenting, authentic parenting etc. are wonderful adjectives of a manifestation, but the question of the internal process remains.

And this is where I find that the process of yoga has become my anchor. The way ahead, the path, and the direction to continue has become not only clear but well-established for me.

2. The re-affirmaton for doing programs on the theme of parenthood. There is an urgent need to create communities/spaces where parents can come to reflect and share in a meditative, reflective and transformative way.



We need spaces where solutions are not offered by experts, where one begins to see who I

am in this role as a parent and then begins to identify solutions for oneself.

Too often skills, suggestions and advice to parents is based on externalities without considering the entire internal milieu of a person (hetu-phala-ashraya-alambana is a phrase that comes to mind from the yoga sutra – I could say a lot more, but that will be for another post).

3. The story of Dhritarashtra-Gandhari-Duryodhana was not picked up by any group. It seems to me to reflect something about us as a collective in today's world.



To be in the position of a Dhritarashtra and Gandhari would mean that we need to encounter the part of us that has been blinded or has failed as parents in our role and responsibility, and that is certainly not very easy to do.

It would mean that we own up to our compulsions and desires and see how we have transferred it to the next generation. It is a tall order indeed!

The Underlying Questions of Our Age

- What are my blindspots as a parent, as a child?
- In doing whatever I am doing as a parent, am I passing on my wishes and desires to my

child and hoping that my child strives and lives up to those?
- In doing what I am doing as a son or daughter, am I caught in and living my parents' dreams, wishes and desires?

Our children will be bearing the burden of all our fears, desires, compulsions especially at the environmental and ecological plane. Do we have the wherewithal to step into this scene, listen to it and change the course of the events, everyday, every moment? There is no place for blame either if we want to take responsibility for all that has been done from the previous generation. As children of our parents, we must own up to our responsibility and decision to be in this world at this moment in the life of this universe. Will we continue to be Duryodhana, or change the course of action?

I am convinced that this cannot be done without yoga (as a philosophy, practice and process). I am not suggesting this as a pill for solving all problems, but rather that taking this step and staying on this enquiry requires tremendous sraddha, virya and smrti (again from the yoga sutra) for which one needs to be guided/energized by and established in some philosophy, process and practice that is integrated (at multiple levels), and at the moment I know of nothing else other than yoga that would enable us to do so.

If you are ready to take responsibility, own up, and take a step on this path, join us at the next Parenting Inside Out, one of the programs offered by Ritambhara. If you would like to help organise such a program for your community, contact us at ashram@ritambhara.org.