

The Incarnation Taboo

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How many of us remember the moods of our childhood – not just selected incidents, but the feeling we had, upon awakening in the morning, our perception of life, our dreams?

How many, fewer still, remember our infancy and its perceptions and dreams?

And fewer still, our first dreams.

Some of us have an intuition of our pre-birth state, our emergence from a deep unknown merged with dreams, and some of us may even have memories of what seem to be previous lives, vivid dreams of other times, other places, other faces, another world.

But each and all of us come into this life and land in the midst of a taboo that cuts us off from our own lives. Some of us escape it, others of us live it and end up enforcing and reinforcing it.

What is this taboo?

It is a primal logic that controls the two most basic faculties possessed by everyone: attention and intention. It is an action of self-limitation expressed in myriad ways throughout a lifetime.

It is The Incarnation Taboo.

Let us view this taboo and discover its surprisingly obvious secrets.

HUMANITY: THE LEARNING SPECIES

Unlike all other species on Earth, we humans are products of learning far more than of instinct. Learning is our means of incarnating more completely. Consider:

Our entire civilization, even those cultures considered most primitive, are edifices of artifice in which the natural order is not merely used, but transformed for use in uniquely human ways. We are, at the very least, tool-makers.

This is not to say that we humans are the only toolmakers, but that our lives are predominantly artificial, from language to technology. Culture is a structure of artifices, a system of problems and learned solutions.

Who, upon birth, has any idea of what great learnings lie before them?

Toilet training, language, acceptable social behaviors, then imaginative play and disciplined learning: rites of passage into a complex world derived from the interplay of human imagination and the natural world. At last, for many if not most, entrenchment and fixation in a class-and-role in the socio-econo-political order follows.

The fixation comes from both within and from without. It is created and maintained by the Incarnation Taboo. It is learned, then, commonly, adopted.

Because we humans are predominantly a learning (rather than instinctual) species, we tend to imbue our learnings with the same unquestioning force as the other species do their instincts. We protect and sustain ourselves via our learnings, as other species do via their instincts. One more thing: we protect our learnings, where other species have not even the slightest self-awareness of their instincts, and so do not protect them.

LEARNING IS BOTH THE ASSIMILATION OF EXPERIENCE AND A CREATIVE ACT

The first imperative of newborn human beings, after the instinct to suckle, is to learn, to absorb experience. The first need is contact. The first mood is fascination, then curiosity. Play follows, then imaginative play. Creativity begins, quickly going beyond rehearsal of instinctive behaviors.

The first agency of that learning is the family, soon followed by the social circle of friends, religious institutions, the mass-communications media, and formal education.

Children often have unusual experiences that do not fit the perceptual frameworks of adults. The dark of night often sets the stage for such experiences. Sometimes they are frightening, and adults seek to quell them and to reassure by saying, "It's just your imagination," or "It's only a dream." They discourage daydreaming and imagination. By so doing, they convey the idea that only the waking state, and their ideas of it (which differ wildly from person to person), is valid. The suppression of the deep psyche begins.

After a certain point, the imagination is systematically suppressed in favor of required learnings, entrenched imaginings (mass-entertainment, news and politics) and the tangible ways of life of the adult world. Thus, The Incarnation Taboo is taught and learned.

THE GREAT IMPULSE OF LIFE

The integration, absorption, or assimilation of experiences is the primary impulse of all of life.

What does the term, "The integration of experiences," mean? "Integration" means "wholeness" -- as in the putting together of ingredients in an organized way to make a functioning whole. Think of learning to cook or to build something useful. "To experience" is to perceive directly, through any mode of perception, e.g., mentally, you experience thoughts; emotionally, you experience emotions; physically, you experience sensations; intuitively, you experience impressions. Experiencing affects us. Think of tasting what you cook or using what you have built. Cooking and tasting, eating and absorbing. Using and enjoying. Integrating experience is absorbing it, as opposed to resisting it.

The whole world is a testimony to the integration of experience into functioning wholes: family relationships, societies, languages, systems of knowledge, inventions that work, laws of nature, ecosystems, planetary systems, galaxies, and on and on.

For a human being, to integrate an experience is to feel it freely and without compulsion and to experience it as a functional relationship. *It's the sense of being of one mind and in control of ones faculties.* Take a moment with that idea. . . .

One of the paradoxes of life is that resistance to the integration of experience is one of the experiences possible. In human beings, this paradox shows up as "the Incarnation Taboo," a kind of anti-embodiment sentiment found in many religions and spiritual practices, and also in the attitudes and ways of operating of persons and entire secular cultures.

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FORMS OF THE INCARNATION TABOO

"The Incarnation Taboo" seems, at first, to be an extremely vague term, and yet it is an extremely accurate one. It seems vague because it is so comprehensive. "Incarnation", in its more common usage, refers to the process of having been born and being bodily alive; in its fullest sense, the word refers to the total range of experience a living being is capable of experiencing. "Taboo" refers to a ban with consequences. The Incarnation Taboo is a ban on experiencing the total range of experiences and functions of which a living being is capable, and in a subtler form, the attitudes that "I am not the body", and "the body isn't important."

Let's take some obvious examples: sex and violence.

The cultural onus on pornography and prostitution and the daunting nature of strong sexual attractions point to how shocked people feel when confronted with the intense sensations of sexuality. The Incarnation Taboo seeks to reduce the intensity of these sensations, both individually and by law and custom.

Violent entertainment provides another example: People cringe at initial exposures to violence and then, as they become desensitized to the sensations, may seek repeated exposures, which they may consider pleasurable at the reduced level of intensity. At reduced levels of intensity, the feelings are "safe." In this case, The Incarnation Taboo often leads to a kind of psychological addiction to violence, as other entertainments seem insufficiently stimulating, even boring, hence the predominance of violence in our entertainment industry and news-entertainment media.

The Incarnation Taboo seeks to reduce the intensity of these sensations by desensitizing the individual. Even those who seek the adrenaline rush of extreme sports (which, like violent entertainment, is addictive) do so to reinforce their sense of invulnerability to danger. "I survived." The sense of danger is one of the wisdoms of the body by which life (incarnation) is protected. Desensitizing oneself to danger is one form of The Incarnation Taboo; one does not experience full incarnation if one does not experience mortality. Who wants to experience mortality? That's the Incarnation Taboo.

The fear of death is an odd form of The Incarnation Taboo, since it would seem to *preserve* life. Death is the ultimate intense experience. Unlike other experiences, it is extreme beyond understanding and irrevocable.

But there is a more common form of The Incarnation Taboo. It is the egoic self, "me". When the ego exercises The Incarnation Taboo, it seeks to avoid responsibility.

The attainment of adulthood, for so many, means not having to obey someone else, not having to learn, and not having to change attitudes to suit someone else. It is resistance to childhood. The Incarnation Taboo resists new experiences, new functions and new responsibilities. It resists change for "reasons."

But even more basic than this is The Incarnation Taboo against feeling bodily existence. The rationale for this form of the taboo is "pain." There, the justification for The Incarnation Taboo becomes absolutely reasonable.

Unfortunately and too often, people desensitize themselves to experience and then indulge in it, like eating without really tasting. They consume what, to the sensibilities, is unpalatable, in mass quantities. They desensitize themselves and consume. Think of Heavy Metal music; think of the role of alcohol in our society; think of the content of our entertainment media, pervaded by clichés of sex, violence, and heroic crisis; think of tobacco smoking -- all unpalatable upon first exposure. There is a lack of discrimination that accompanies our desensitized culture.

From looking at these examples, we can see that The Incarnation Taboo has a kind of purpose: to avoid experience.

The Incarnation Taboo subtly makes tolerable and therefore permits justification of mediocrity, poor health, incompetence, cruelty, stupidity, selfishness, prejudice, ignorance, and irresponsibility. It is the reason for the repression of children, women, entire social classes and ethnic groups, and also for chronic poverty, frustration and self-limitation. It is the reason criminal behavior is considered inevitable ("You can't change human nature" -- a particularly irresponsible form of The Incarnation Taboo).

Consider the common behavior of blaming people who tell the truth about something ("whistle blowers") for "making others look bad." Consider their fate. The same attitude underlies the resentment some people have for people who do their work "too well" and "make" their co-workers "look bad". Rather than correct a situation or improve themselves, such people seek to sabotage those who do function well. Such envious people would rather drag others down than raise themselves up. "Don't be too good," is a form of The Incarnation Taboo.

The "too good" syndrome has another form: ignoring opportunities that would end chronic problems. People sometimes prefer to have problems and complain about them than solve the problems and have to face changes that would result. The rationale sometimes used: "If it seems too good to be true, it probably is." Good news is suspect. Extremely good news lacks credibility: it is literally incredible. So people avoid even the good things they say they want.

Yet another form is the unwillingness or inability of people to exercise their own intelligence; many people would rather look for a stamp of approval from some authority than consider matters for themselves. With the abundance of incomplete information (broadcast news) and nonsensical communications (much entertainment and advertising) passed along by the mass-media, many people lack the perspective that distinguishes useful information from opinion or outright stupidity. The News is more entertainment than information and dulls the perceptual faculties.

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Perhaps the phrase that expresses The Incarnation Taboo is, "Don't mess with me" – or "Don't tell me what to do."

So, what is the opposite of The Incarnation Taboo?

It is conscious incarnation.

CONSCIOUS INCARNATION

There is a peculiar assumption that nearly everyone has, an opinion that some uphold with a great deal of energy, that because one is born, one is fully incarnated (just as, "because one is an adult, one is mature"). Maybe in the abstract, but not really.

Obvious when considered: perception is learned. Think of the wine epicure who can distinguish flavors missed by the casual wine drinker; think of the color sense of the interior decorator, the sense of form of the graphic designer, the ability to remember faces, the ability of an infant to remember her or his mother's face, the nuances of perception that appear as our vocabulary increases -- all perceptual abilities that are learned. In fact, the growth of any skill depends upon a growing ability to distinguish actions that lead to the desired result from actions that do not.

These distinctions create a more vivid sense of life. The actions that become possible on the basis of these distinctions create more flexibility and control in life.

Now, what is incarnation but the ability to sense and participate in life?

Since these abilities can grow, I ask you to consider that perhaps incarnation grows (and also can decrease gradually, as well as suddenly in death).

At this juncture in the discussion, perhaps we are encountering the Incarnation Taboo, itself: the willingness or unwillingness to experience something new. The unwillingness is The Incarnation Taboo, in action. In some, it is a kind of inertia; and in others, it is an active resistance.

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The development of the abilities to sense and participate in life has been the task of a single process that has fallen into disfavor, in these times: education -- and with good reason: public education has been co-opted by The Incarnation Taboo. Today's basic education is predominantly mental; it does not develop sensory-awareness (perceptiveness) except in service to what is already known; imagination is somehow required or hoped for, but rarely skillfully cultivated; emotional sensibility (discrimination) is totally overlooked (consider the customs of alcohol use on university campuses and hazing on military academy campuses); and wise control of ones own physical processes, unaddressed (consider the quality of university and hospital food). Think of the cutting of funds for courses in the arts. Think of the outcry against sex-education.

As a long-term result of The Incarnation Taboo, we have an unhealthy, crime-burdened, politically disenfranchised society in which people age poorly and in which mental rules (letter of the law) thwart justice (the spirit of the law) to protect established money-and-power interests, or in which court-trials place legalities above reason and sensibility. Think of wasteful military spending and ridiculous court-trial outcomes publicized in the news.

Where people fail to learn, they fail in their ability (and willingness) to assume responsibilities; instead, they want others to assume those responsibilities. Such is the hope of children, of apathetic voters, of the clients of lawyers, of many patients of

doctors, and of all who wish to remain dependent and to learn the minimum needed to get by. It is the hazard of all political and legal systems. The Incarnation Taboo leads to chronic immaturity.

THE PITFALL OF THE LEARNING SPECIES

There is an oddity to the human species. Because we are learning-driven, we tend to hold onto old viewpoints as if our survival depends upon it, which it does. However, holding onto old viewpoints when conditions change places us at an adaptive disadvantage and hampers our civilization. This is a kind of failure to eliminate the “waste” of life; obsolete ideas and responses pile up in the individual, complicating their life and those of others. Life becomes a backlog of resisted changes; people fall behind the times, fail to correct their mistakes, or simply fail to mature.

There is a more basic form of the Incarnation Taboo, having to do with awareness of our own ways of operating, mentally, emotionally, and physically. For the most part, people do not inspect their own habitual ways of operating, nor do they want others to do so. People tend to live out, without question, what they have inherited from family, society, the mass-communications media, and the educational institutions, and much of this inheritance consists of ways of feeling one way and acting another, referred to as “manners” and “necessary compromises”. In general, to question the beliefs and assumptions underlying people’s ways of operating provokes resistance; people don’t like being questioned into greater awareness – again, the Incarnation Taboo, in action.

Many humans, we being “the learning species,” are in a particular fix: we mistake conditioned knowledge for instincts; we live what we have learned without question until a crisis befalls us.

When animals act instinctively, they do so automatically and without question. They react, applying no intelligence to their reaction.

When humans act instinctively, there is no problem, as we have few instincts and those are benign; but people who confuse conditioned learning with unquestionable instinct act irrationally and tend to uphold arbitrary, fixed beliefs inherited from family, society, and the mass-communications media – again, without question, often, militantly. Consider the historic Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the antagonism of the Catholic Church to the discoveries of Galileo; consider the emergence of the Nazi party, homophobia and the religious extreme-Right.

Individuals who inspect their ways of operating may be called “introspective”; some people may criticize them as being “self-involved”. In general, they operate at a higher level of functioning than the usual individual. They integrate experience, rather than merely “survive” it. They are more fully incarnated.

Herein lies the secret of incarnation: it is the link between the ability to perceive clearly and the ability to act accordingly -- or the link between attention and intention. It is this link which is weakened in our society of news, entertainment, and nutrient-deficient foods. The Incarnation Taboo weakens the link between what we perceive and

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what we do about it; it is the breakdown of responsibility. Inured to dullness and mediocrity, people go on tolerating the day-to-day breakdowns of a society built upon the aberrations, idiosyncrasies and incompetencies that result from The Incarnation Taboo. This state of breakdown is not, by any means, absolute. But its extent is commonly acknowledged by the popular maxims that, "Twenty percent of the people do eighty percent of the work," and "The road to hell is paved with good intentions."

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CONSCIOUS BODILY INCARNATION

The physical body is our means of getting handle on life – and a way life can get a handle on us.

In human beings, the Incarnation Taboo shows up bodily as a nearly universal failure (at least in industrialized societies) to sense the physical body accurately and to move well. It has been my astonishing experience that about four out of five people who come to me in my clinical practice have trouble deciding which side is their right or their left, when asked to do a new movement.

Most people are unaware that their body-sense is as distorted as their posture; on one hand, they are concerned more with how they look than with how they feel, and on the other they fail to recognize that how they feel *is* how they look, if only they could see it. They have great gaps in their bodily awareness in which they do not feel much and areas of the body where they hold the muscular tensions and stresses they have accumulated from the insults and injuries of life. It is a kind of amnesia -- the disowning of the bodily self that goes with the mass of taboos against all kinds of experience, including those named above. People are often expected to ignore the pain and to function; that's one form of The Incarnation Taboo at this level.

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This bodily amnesia has everything to do with a person's ability to function in life. All of the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to which we are accustomed involve states of readiness to act in certain ways; such "readiness" is a state of heightened

tension in the musculature of the body. It creates common back trouble and headaches and the pains and stiffness of aging. It also clouds the mental processes.

Until a person fully incarnates, they cannot sense and release these tensions. The tensions accumulate. The price is poor aging.

As with all perception, the ability to perceive the physical body is learned. As with all education, there is a deliberate course that may be followed to incarnate more fully. Somatic education is the name of the process by which it occurs. Somatic education is a movement-and-feeling-based process that improves our quality of movement and our ability to sense our own movement. It involves improving our senses (the exercise of attention) and our control of movement (the exercise of intention). We humans are the “learning species”; we do not incarnate automatically; we must deliberately learn to do so.

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ATTENTION AND INTENTION: THE ESSENCE OF CONSCIOUS INCARNATION

We now reach the essence of conscious incarnation: directing attention and exercising intention. All life forms do so, but as said before, they do so primarily instinctually. Humans direct attention and exercise intention according to learned patterns of what is important. A further step, for humans, is to direct attention and exercise intention deliberately, beyond the repetitive patterns of habit. Such is learning and creativity -- and acting on purpose. Indeed, the act of learning is a purposeful act, since it involves developing new patterns of function that can be exercised at will.

The Incarnation Taboo prompts us to deny that we act on purpose in certain instances, since to acknowledge our purposeful acts makes us vulnerable to their consequences -- even if only to defend against them. The Integration Taboo impairs our willingness and ability to act on purpose, and therefore to have full power to direct our attention and to exercise our intention. The Incarnation Taboo weakens us. Understand?

THE CHOICE

The Incarnation Taboo affects us at every level of life. So we have a choice: succumb to The Incarnation Taboo and become desensitized, or become more sensitive (perceptive) and connect with others who are overcoming The Incarnation Taboo in themselves, who are waking up. Together, we can help each other get free of the Incarnation Taboo, create a more intelligent world, and more fully incarnate into a life worth experiencing.

The Incarnation Taboo is the first hurdle to the integration of experience. At first inherited automatically and unconsciously, it makes us not want to experience our own, present condition. Therefore, it is the primary experience we must integrate by recognizing it as our own, voluntary mood. Once we do that, the process of integrating experience is understood, and we can fulfill the purpose of life, which is to experience and absorb the total range of experiences and functions of which we are capable, the limits of which are forever unknown and expanded by life.

For many people, to live at their fullest potential seems like an attractive, even romantically appealing idea, or at least one that should be appealing. However, people may at the same time feel a kind of unwillingness to go through what it would take to live that way.

Some people may feel a kind of desire to be excused from what they may feel to be a sense of obligation to live at their highest potential. But you don't really want that.

Why?

Because you're here.

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