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FAMILY COUNSELING
INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING

We Are Many People

When people look at me they see a sixty-year-old man and that is whom they relate to. But last year I was a 59-year-old man and that man is still part of me. And the year before that I was a 58-year-old man and that man is still part of me. Earlier in my life I was a 30 year old man and before that I was a 20 year old and before that I was an unhappy 15 year old and before that I was 13 and 12 and 11 and 10 and so on. All of those people are still part of me but one cannot see all those people when one looks at me. People only see the 60-year-old adult that stands before them. A person has to get to know me quite well before they could learn about all the people that I've been and, in some ways, still am. This is true of all of us.

In a very real sense of the word, we are all composites of all the actual people that we've ever been. That can be quite confusing to people who only know about the person they have come to know in their time together. Unless they think to ask about the other person's past life and past experiences, someone may not know another person as well they think they do. Sometimes another's behavior may surprise you because it may not be consistent with the way you see that person. But the behavior can be quite consistent with an earlier version of that person and current events may have triggered an association that evoked the earlier person. The easiest parallel I can draw for that is the Posttraumatic Stress Syndrome.

As long as current events continue to relate principally to the current adult person, there may be no surprises. However, certain situations tend to evoke earlier versions of the person. These situations can include marriage and parenthood. Being a spouse and being a parent tend to touch us in the deepest parts of our core. Therefore, those situations have a greater likelihood of triggering responses from earlier versions of us.

As time goes on and we grow and mature, we add new layers to ourselves. These new layers are increasingly sophisticated and (hopefully) increasingly loving and kind. New acquaintances and strangers only scratch the surface of who we are and we generally relate to them from our newest most mature layers of ourselves. Our children and our loved ones touch us in our core, at our deepest layers and we are more likely to react from a deeper, less mature layer of ourselves.