

The Realization of Equality in the Home

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While the term "equality" is constantly used today, there seems to be little understanding of its full implications. Not only is this all important problem of equality very little understood, but also it is frequently misunderstood. It is obvious that most people find it difficult to understand just exactly what equality means.

When the term "equality" is used today people think of certain groups, such as the Negroes, who wish to achieve full citizenship. As far as individuals are concerned, one speaks mostly about equal opportunity. When Jefferson wrote "all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence, most people didn't know what it meant or how to accept it.

Actually, the problem of equality is much deeper than most people realize. It is more than a political idea. It is the essential problem of our time. It seems that the denial of equality is one of the chief reasons for lack of harmony, for maladjustment, for friction, and for war. Within the next few decades, this problem will have to be understood and the lessons which we can learn from this understanding must be applied if mankind is to survive.

What is equality? How can there possibly be such a thing as equality for all humans? Most people think that equality can only be regarded in general terms, failing to see how people can live together as equals. They are all different. In the minds of these people equality means **similarity**; however, similarity doesn't exist. Every individual is different; different assets, liabilities, intellectual capacities, talents, opportunities. How can they be equal to each other?

The term equality, in its development, has two meanings. In other languages there are two different words for the two meanings which the English word **equality** and the French term **egalite** imply. As commonly used, the word refers to equal rights. Each person has an equal right to have his needs fulfilled, to obtain an education, and to maintain health. In America today a forceful movement to recognize the needs of all people and their equal rights regardless of race, color or sex is evident. However, the crucial and most significant aspect of equality is not equal rights, but equal **value**. The term equality implies that each individual has equal value; however, it is easy to see why many cannot perceive this idea. Equal worth among all people is an astounding notion to many; however, this is the premise with which we are confronted. Equal worth is intrinsically linked with the concept of democracy. Only in the development of democracy could such a notion of equal value emerge.

Many people believe that democracy is merely a political system whereby people through official elections determine their own government. This is certainly a basic aspect of democracy; however, democracy is much more. Democracy gives the individual the equal right to vote and be elected, to be heard in the assembly, and to have his opinion counted. However, in order to do so he has to be recognized as a valued member of society, as a citizen. The term

democracy clearly indicates the origin of this concept stemming from the Greek word meaning the rule by the people.

Democratic government began about four or five hundred years B.C. replacing the rule by a few who were called oligarchs. The oligarchy of Athens gave way to democracy—rule by the people. It soon became clear to the Greeks that one could not give the citizens the power to rule themselves unless they also were given value as citizens—status. As a result, Greek philosophies emerged: outstanding among them were the so-called Stoics, who proclaimed the fundamental equality of man. Although a philosophical idea at first, it was soon put into practice. The Greek Stoics influenced Rome and the Roman Stoics were the first ones to apply this principle of equality by establishing all citizens equal before the law. Soon afterwards, this Greek ideal of equality affected a people who were at the time threatened by slavery or extinction. In their greatest despair, when their customs and beliefs were destroyed, the Hebrews developed the idea of practical equality for all. The early Christian communities attempted for the first time to do what we are trying to do today; to realize the consequences of the egalitarian principle for human relationships. They established their early communities on the basis of equality for every member of the congregation. For centuries, the peoples of this world failed to understand how these Christians could permit their women to participate in all affairs of life on the basis of strict equality. Nor could they understand the rigid sexual laws of the Church which meant that women no longer were obligated to tolerate abuse from men. Moreover, the restrictions imposed upon women applied to men as well. It was equality of women with men which led to basic changes in sexual practices and philosophies. This was the beginning of the Christian Era; however, the practice of equality didn't last long. The ancient culture of Christian equality collapsed. Among the various hypotheses to explain the collapse was the fact that the Romans and the Greeks considered slaves of unequal status. Plato even justified this by saying that a slave is not a human being; he is a thing—one can do with him whatever one wants. A human being with a sense of equality would never submit to slavery. In addition to the slaves all foreigners were denied equality. These inequalities helped to destroy the ancient culture. Society then fell into the autocratic form of feudalism of the middle ages. And throughout the following centuries, the light of equality kept in the Christian faith remained the last small remnant of this cultural epoch where men had developed democracy and equality. It was not until the Renaissance that these trends were taken up again and followed by a marked increasing of democracy and a growing degree of equality for all.

Why did this democratic evolution begin? We know today that our civilization traced to eight thousand years ago replaced the homogeneous egalitarian primitive society and created a caste and class society where man dominated man so that harmony and peace among men was impossible. It was Adler who formulated the law of social living—the ironclad logic of social living—which realized that harmony between people is only possible if they respect each other as equals. If anyone sets himself up as superior, his superiority is limited, unstable, and before long, his power will be replaced by another power. The emergence of democracy is the expression of mankind's search for harmony, for peace on earth and for the end of friction and warfare where one

abuses the other, overpowers him, and takes advantage of him. The development of democracy is mankind's attempt to again re-establish a homogeneous stable human society. This process of democratization, by which people gained more and more freedom to decide for themselves, freed themselves from kings and tyrants, coincided with the process of increasing equality for all. However, it is interesting to note that political democracy is not necessarily parallel to social democracy. This is the core of the lesson we must learn. We cannot be satisfied with mere political democracy allowing the right to vote and to be elected. We must recognize that we have to strive for a new form of human relationships whereby we replace traditional forms of dominance and submission, superiority and inferiority, with this new relationship of equality.

Interesting observations can be made when political development is compared with social development. One of the oldest and finest political systems is to be found in Switzerland. But social democracy and social equality are utterly unknown there. For example, women have no right to vote. It is amazing to find that in many civilized nations today there is an actual belief that women are too emotional to be permitted to take part in politics. They are told by their husband what to do, and in these cultures the father is boss. This is political democracy without social equality. Comparing Denmark and Sweden we find that both countries have a well-functioning political democracy. They have rather similar economic and political conditions; however, one marked difference prevails. In Denmark although the father is benevolent, he is still boss. In Sweden the women no longer submit to being dominated by their husbands. They demand equality—and get it. We can see that whenever Father loses his power over Mother, both parents lose their power over the children. In a democratic society, nobody has the power to dominate anybody else.

We find today, that wherever there has been a dominant and superior group, its position is questioned more and more. We have reached a stage where everybody—adult and child, white and negro, management and labor—has the same feeling of equality which is expressed by a determination for self-decision. Self-determination has become the right of individuals as equal citizens. The exercise of this right is more pronounced in America and Israel. In most European countries there still prevails a strong and autocratic family hierarchy; the difference this makes in group relationships can clearly be seen. Since this domination is against the logic of social living, one assumes that its termination would bring about peace and harmony. But the opposite is true. We are going through a period where the democracy and equality which we have achieved creates tremendous new problems for which we are unprepared.

We have no tradition for living with each other as equals. Our tradition only helps us to dominate each other. Today all traditional methods of dealing with human problems have become obsolete. As a consequence of this democratic evolution, we find even more hostility, more fighting, and more disharmony. Why? There has always been a war between the sexes with men dominating women. There has always been a war between the generations with adults dominating children. Although children and women have always rebelled, they did not do it openly. Society was equated with authority and saw to it that rebels conformed. As the power of authorities diminished, the rebellion of the underdog came into the open. Today nobody wants to be dominated. If he

senses someone overpowering him, he begins to dominate. As we become more equal to each other, it becomes more difficult to live and to deal with each other. Perhaps this can best be seen in the struggle of the negroes. As long as the negroes accepted the idea of their position in the South, there was no violence or problems. They stayed in their place, accepting an inferior position and not doing anyone harm. As they became aware of their equality as human beings and American citizens, they no longer wanted to be treated as inferiors with partial citizenship. And so the conflict began. It was the same story with women. As long as they were dominated, they accepted their lot and granted men the right to dominate. Oddly enough, we find that in Europe, Switzerland, and South America, there are many women who say, "But we shouldn't be like men. It is not feminine. Women have different functions. They should be soft and submissive." They accept this as their fate because they don't *feel* equal.

To cite an example: Several years ago in South America a young boy came for help. Wanting to know his family constellation, I asked him, "Who is the oldest in your family?" Although he said that he was, I found out later that he had three older sisters. They, however, didn't count. He was the oldest child in the family. In this culture the older sisters had to submit to the dictates of the younger sibling, for the oldest son represented his father when he wasn't there. There they had no idea of equality. If this were tried in America today—to say to girls that they don't count and boys should boss them around—we would get a different reaction—because they *feel* equal and will not submit to this treatment of inequality. However, with all this, we see a strange situation within the family, school and community. We find that nobody is treated as an equal and somehow no one is quite sure if he is as good as the next individual. At the same time, I maintain that equality is not a dream, hope, or ideal. Rather, it is a reality. We have become equal to each other; however, if we continue not treating each other as equals serious trouble may ensue. Whenever an attempt to dominate persists we have a state of warfare between husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters, whites and negroes, labor and management, and members of all groups where there once existed a state of superiors over inferiors. The previously dominated, submissive group is no longer willing to be dominated; thus it clamors for its equal rights.

Our culture is going through a crisis because the traditional methods of dealing with each other are obsolete. Formerly, conflict was resolved by contest—the stronger one decided the issue. Today, none can win a conflict; thus we must learn to reach agreement. We must learn new methods of influencing each other. Until we have learned them, we will suffer tension and discord in our lives, schools, and communities.

In the past, the solution was much easier, although these problems with which we are confronted today existed centuries ago: the Hebrews had this experience. Moses led the children of Israel out of slavery into freedom, wandering through the wilderness for forty years until everyone had lived under slavery died. Only then could the Hebrews settle as free men in a free country. We are not so lucky; we cannot kill off all these people who are still laboring under slave mentality.

We are in a transitional era of tremendous confusion and as the old autocratic ideology dies slowly and the implications of democracy are not fully understood, we are unaware of what is right and what is wrong and don't know

what should be done. One can safely say that this problem will have to be solved within the next two generations. At present we are very much involved in the process of finding our way. Hitler and other dictators have shown us that nothing can be accomplished by turning the clock back. We are compelled to go through this process of democratization. The ills of democracy can only be cured by more democracy. Whatever difficulty we have in living together with each other as equals cannot be solved by reverting to the old power structure of dominance. We have to learn to live with each other as equals. This is a task which as individuals and as nations we must learn together. It is a task which all peoples of this era will have to face because while many strong autocratic ties still exist, the democratic process reaches everyone—young and old, man and woman, adult and child—old world and new. Soon the women of other countries will want to be like American children. All nations will go through the transition; therefore, it is time to realize that equality is more than ideal. We have to realize that it is imperative to learn to live with each other as equals. We also must consider ourselves as equal to anyone else—a concept not easily learned. One moment we feel superior and the next moment we feel inferior. This concern with status will continue to undermine the peace of mind for all if we continue to use the yardstick of being ahead for measuring status. Unless we come to the realization that we are good enough as we are, we will be unable to grow and to live in peace with others and with ourselves.

In this realization of equality we face the need to know how to disagree with a person without disrespecting him. We have to respect the dignity of everybody regardless of how and what he is. Of course, this is against our tradition, and against our present social philosophy.

More specifically, the idea of inequality comes from the society. Each society, each group, develops its own yardstick for measuring others to be superior or inferior. For some seven thousand years in our civilization, the only basis for superiority was birth. One was born high or one was born low. It made no difference what qualities one had; if he were a prince, he was treated with dignity, respect and reverence. If one were low-born, he couldn't demand respect. Only a few hundred years ago, one of the greatest musical geniuses of our whole culture, Bach, wrote the most humble submissive letters to his superiors of the Church because they criticized him for spending too much time writing music! Being a genius didn't give him status. He was a servant and forced to obey. The Prince (?) of Bradenburg wanted some concerts, so Bach obligingly sent him six concertos which were never played because they were not good enough. When he died, his manuscripts were used to pack groceries.

There was a time when anybody who was born low remained so regardless of what he did or what he achieved. As we became democratic and discredited nobility of birth, we changed the yardstick—to money. One's value depended upon his bank account. A university professor was not highly regarded because if he had any brains he would go into business and make money instead of wasting his time for so little gain. During the depression, thousands lost their money and their lives. Since that time the democratic realization has made tremendous progress. White supremacy fell by the wayside. The power of management to disregard labor could not be maintained. Being masculine lost its impact and women no longer obeyed. Women in America have more equality than they have

ever had in the history of mankind; however, people are not yet ready to give up the idea that there must be superiority and there must be inferiority. Thus, they are creating a new yardstick—intellectual and moral superiority. One with a Ph.D. is vastly superior to someone with less education. By contrast in early Rome only the Greek slaves were educated. The Romans didn't go to school to learn since no status was attached to education. Today we fail to recognize how we could regard everyone in this Christian spirit of respect for what he is—a human being. Even Jefferson had to retract the part of his statement that said that fundamental equality gave man inalienable rights to have accepted a statement that man is created equal. We have tremendous difficulty in understanding equality, to regard our fellow man all over the world as equal! As long as we have this difficulty we will have friction with each other; we will fight; we will have conflicts; we will never be able to live in peace with each other nor will we be able to fulfill ourselves.

Now. Let us look at the average home. It is quite obvious that there is neither the slightest degree of awareness of equality nor mutual respect. Men try to maintain some vestige of the old superiority. Father no longer knows best; Mother does. How have men coped with this problem? They let women dominate the home and they maintain for themselves the little islands of masculine endeavors where women are not yet fully accepted as equals such as business, politics, sports. They can also be subtle at home and maintain superiority over women. For example, a thirteen-year old boy dominated by his two sisters and mother had as one of his favorite pastimes kicking and slapping his sister when she did not do what he wanted. The more he was punished for slapping and kicking the more determined he was to continue. Finally I had a discussion with the father and it became apparent that both shared equal contempt for women. Only they both expressed it differently. The boy was aggressively brutal while the father protected the women by saying, "I have to protect my women against this brute." So, in their different ways they both treated women as if they were incapable of taking care of themselves. In addition, these two men convinced their women that they deserved this treatment; thus, they accepted it not knowing what to do. After counseling, they began to work out the problem. In this family there was an obvious but small degree of equality between the sexes in the family.

In many families the reverse takes place and men sometimes use jokes to salvage their own superiority without actually possessing it. There is a story of two friends who met and spoke of their marriages. One said, "Oh, we have a very nice relationship in our home. My wife settles all the minor problems and I decide all the major ones." The other asked, "What are the problems your wife decides?" "Oh, the wife decides how much money we spend, what school the children should go to, whether we should buy a house and where." "What decisions do you make?" "Oh, I decide what to do about Vietnam and what our foreign policy should be."

Fortunately this masculine superiority is fastly disappearing. Desiring to be equal, women do the same thing that Adler described with all people who are suffering from inferiority complex: they overcompensate. There was a time when women tried to be like men by imitating men's clothes, gestures and attitudes. This is no longer true. Why? Today women with any self-respect don't

care to be as good as a man—they want to be better! Today the woman knows the social graces; showing men what to do and how to behave. Not too long ago men showed the woman what to do. Today women have much more intellectual and artistic interest, particularly in the middle classes. They want to be informed and are interested in studying and education. Because men don't want to take the time and don't feel they can be equal to women, they are usually disinterested. Women manage the families. In America today we find a terrific desire on the part of women to be good. More and more children grow up with the conviction that women have to be good. Being a man means having to be bad. "If I wash myself, I am a sissy. If I study, I am a sissy. If I obey, I am a sissy. If I have any self-respect, I must be bad."

Our women are becoming so good that neither husbands nor children have a chance. When we examine how a mother rears her children we are greatly surprised to find that wanting to be a good mother or doing what a good mother should is a fundamental mistake. A **good** mother takes on responsibilities—for everything. She sees that the children are properly dressed and fed. They take all the responsibility. The consequence? The children have no need to assume responsibility. More and more we find that children think they have the right to do whatever they feel like doing. Mother has the responsibility to see to it that things don't get too far out of hand or become too dangerous. Until we are able to change the concept of our mothers as to what a good mother is, we will continue to ruin the children and women will experience the same distress that she previously felt in her relationship to men. While Mother tries to boss, demand, and force, she becomes the slave of child. The child learns how to cope with her, but she does not learn how to cope with the child.

Many homes are raising tyrants who demand and dominate, and do not see the need to assume responsibilities. Almost all children display some desire to show their independence, refusing to do what they should and defeating their parents. The sad part of it is that good children are often the girls—or boys who behave like girls. Children do not learn to want to be good because it is effective but rather they want to be better than the other children. Nowhere in the world do we find as great a display of inequality as exists between the children in one family. Constant fighting for superiority is intensified by adults. On what grounds? First, there is age. The one who is older has more rights and special privileges. Secondly, there is an emphasis on goodness and badness. The good one is superior getting nice treatment and glory. The bad one is scolded, punished, and pushed down. In some families, boys are still considered the superior sex.

Parents can neither imagine that each child of the family can have a different function nor that they can do different things without being compared as to who is superior and who is inferior. Instead, we promote competition in our families, particularly pitting the first child against the second. The results are that where one child succeeds the other gives up; where one fails, the other moves in. As a consequence we find that the first and second children in almost any family are fundamentally different in their capacities, interests, temperaments and characters. This occurs neither by nature, nor by heredity; but strictly by comparison via intensive competition as each child tries to find his place. Once the children have decided who will succeed in what, the parents

follow their lead and their decisions. Parents make the good child better and the bad child worse. In all this interaction, one can see this lack of respect—parents lack respect for the children and the children don't respect the parents. Each looks down upon the other. Disrespect is manifest by tone of voice, nagging, criticising, threatening, or by mushy admiration and patronizing. We either deprive the child of his self-respect by humiliating him or deprive him of his sense of strength by doing everything for him. Not only do we have to change the concept of what a good mother is, but also the concept of what a child is. We all suffer from a deep unrecognized prejudice against children not realizing the capacity of infants to size up situations or to manage situations and parents. Unfortunately we have many experts who fortify these wrong ideas about the child being a parasite or about the child being a biological weakling who needs the mother. These experts advise mothers to give more love, more aid, thereby, assuring enslavement to the children.

An outstanding example of a child's capacity to size up and manage parents is the normal child born to deaf-mute parents. The infant cries. The tears run down his cheeks, his face is all puckered up, his whole body shakes; however, he makes no sound. He recognizes that crying would be a waste of energy since his parents would not hear him. No child will waste his energies. No child will continue doing anything unless he succeeds in getting what he wants—attention, power, revenge, service. We have to recognize the power of our children. We have to recognize their ability to do things far beyond what we believe they can do. We are just beginning to see that we deliberately and systematically raise our children to be stupid because we waste their learning potential during the first six years of life. At that point they are sure they don't have to learn, and we **force** them to learn! Presently educational authorities are considering the advancement of the age level of reading for boys since many of them at age six don't show reading readiness! In other countries, all boys learn to read at the age of four. It will come as quite a shock to most people that present indications show that the proper age at which to learn to read and write is between 2½ and 3. We will need a completely new concept of children in order to recognize their ability. We have to realize that we are looking down on them and have raised them to be irresponsible because we didn't believe in their ability. All this is tied in with superior/inferior position which we all assume.

What is the answer to these dilemmas? In our Child Guidance Centers we are trying to show a whole generation of parents in a community how to understand children, how to guide them without fighting, how to regard children with respect and how to win respect from them. If we fight with children, we disregard respect for them because fighting means we are forcing our own wishes upon them. If we give in to them, we violate respect for ourselves because giving in means we allow the child to impose his wishes upon us. We have to teach parents how to become leaders instead of becoming bosses. We have to face the idea that we can't **make** children study and behave; however, we can stimulate them.

In my work in Israel I was able to devise a very definite criteria to distinguish autocratic from democratic leadership. (I did it under rather dramatic circumstances in the technical schools of the Air Force. I believe that in no other country in the world would one consider the possibility of taking a military

institution and trying to run it on democratic principles. In Israel they dared to do it.) Interestingly enough, we found out that most educators—parents, teachers, instructors—are neither autocratic nor democratic. They want to be democratic and don't know how so they become autocratic when things get out of hand. Then this power over others seems wrong and they again become soft. Laissez-fair and confusion results.

The differences between autocratic and democratic leadership is easy to distinguish. First, the relationship can be distinguished by the tone of voice. The autocrat is firm and sharp; the democrat is friendly and soft. The autocrat commands, "you do." The democrat stimulates from within—he invites. The approach then becomes obvious. While the autocrat imposes his ideas, the democrat sells his ideas. While the autocrat demands cooperation, the democrat wins cooperation. While the autocrat is the boss, the democrat is the leader. The autocrat tries to use his power; the democrat tries to influence. The autocrat dominates; the democrat guides. The autocrat criticizes; the democrat encourages. The autocrat finds faults; the democrat acknowledges achievements. The autocrat punishes when something goes wrong; the democrat helps. The autocrat tells one what to do, the democrat invites discussion. The distinction becomes clear as one listens to what goes on between mother and child.

We can help parents to see what they are doing and to see what else they could do. There are a number of very practical suggestions. Instead of treating each child according to his merits, which is traditional—one superior, one inferior: one good, one bad—we have to treat all the children of the family as a group saying, "You children have the responsibility to take care of each other." Instead of making man man's worst enemy in this competition between brother and brother, with each begrudging the advantage of the other, we must treat everyone as equals, acknowledging the right of each to make up his own mind, using influence rather than force to redirect his efforts. Then, perhaps, we can arrive at the Biblical ideal where brother can be his brother's keeper. We have to stop playing one child against the other. But most important: just as there can be no political democracy without meetings, decisions of the group, so there can be no democracy in the family without sitting down together and discussing problems. The family council is the only place where we can give each child in the family the same equal status as each parent. Here each may discuss what goes on and express his opinion. Children have the right to be heard—whatever they think—and to participate in the solution which the group as a whole can find. This is the kind of education we try to give in our Child Guidance Centers, and in our Study Groups. We try to help parents give up the traditional methods of dominating and then giving in and turn the democratic approach of mutual respect, firmness with domination, cooperation, participation and the stimulation toward contribution. We need a new deal for mankind, pertaining particularly to children. It seems to me that recognition of each individual's right to be respected is essential. This does not mean that we can approve of everything that everyone does. Many people do things we don't like. But it does mean that we must grant him his right to do what he does—to make the decisions he makes. We must also grant him the responsibility for his acts. We must not confuse the deed with the doer. The child can **do** something stupid, but **he** isn't stupid. He can **do** something bad, but **he** isn't bad. We have to learn to cope with

the issue. We don't have to submit to everything, we don't have to agree to everything. This doesn't mean we have to look down on the one who does what we think isn't right. Every individual has the right to make his own mistakes. We must gain a new concept of relationships in order to realize the full importance of a fundamental human equality. Should we not recognize it and not learn to live with each other as equals, we won't solve any one of our problems—in our families, in our schools, in our communities, within our nation, or with other nations.