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## Evolutionary Integration

An experience of our evolutionary selves

*by Jean Houston*

One of the articles in [The Way Of Learning \(IC#6\)](#)

Summer 1984, Page 8

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THE SCENE IS LATE SPRING on the lawn of the campus of the University of California at Santa Barbara. Along surrounding pathways students on roller skates and bicycles jolt to a sudden stop and stare dumbfounded at the scene on the lawn. There before them is a wriggling sea of bodies - 350 teachers, professors, physicians, psychiatrists, priests, nuns, social workers, and other members of the professional establishment - crawling over and under each other in a state of active reptilian regression. The students who happen by do not laugh. Instead their eyes grow wider as, at a sudden signal, they witness the bodies of their elders leap into the air and cavort and crash around like a huge band of eccentric lumbering lemurs. Tentatively one of the students approaches me and asks, "Uh...would you mind telling me...uh...what's going on here?"

"Not at all," say I. "This is an exercise in prolepsis - in order to go forward we must recover the past."

"Oh,uh...sure....," says the student. And with one last baffled look over his shoulder, leaps on his skateboard and pushes himself away.

What were we doing on the lawn that day in May? We were attempting to put together what Nature had left asunder - the developmental stages of the brain from fish to human. We were attempting to harvest *who we were* in evolution in order that we could become *who we might be* as we continue to evolve.

I have developed a series of exercises which allow one to recapitulate both the evolutionary sequence of the brain and behavior as well as the corresponding developmental movements of the first three years of life. Some 10,000 participants in my seminars have now gone through the prolepsis experience and reported results of varying success including improved body image and integration, the remediation of severe psychophysical dysfunctions, positive behavioral changes, the acquiring of hitherto latent skills and capacities, and the disinhibition of "physical", "mental" and "emotional" blocks. Many participants speak of feeling themselves to be part of the emerging evolutionary process, able to go forward now that they feel themselves to be more deeply connected with their past. They express themselves as experiencing their spiritual dimension as incorporated in a material that has now become luminous and their physical selves as being the embodiment of their spiritual evolution.

The exercise proceeds as follows:

The guide asks the participants to remove shoes, glasses, belts, jewelry, and other things that they may be wearing that would inhibit free movement or prove dangerous to others should collisions occur. The guide also advises them to try to get as deeply as possible into the consciousness of each stage of evolutionary development (fish, amphibian, reptile, etc.) and avoid making anachronistic comments such as "Excuse me" when, as amphibians or reptiles, they are crawling over and under each other. Only the briefest and most general descriptions are given for each stage so the participant is free to discover whatever movements s/he feels are appropriate to that stage. For example, in the amphibian and reptilian stage there is considerable movement of the tongue, as well as occasional pushing of the body up and down. As one gets more and more into the movements it is often found that this in turn stimulates more complex and precisely authentic movements. It seems as if the brain is releasing its stored phylogenetic memory of these stages into the body system.

As this is a long exercise, participants may get tired. The point is not to exhaust oneself, but rather to stay focused on the movements and experiences of each stage. Therefore it is advisable at the point of any fatigue to stop and continue the movement internally in one's muscular and visual imagination (in one's kinesthetic body). This is not a stage in which one just rests and lets one's mind wander, and it is therefore critical to stay focused on the evolutionary stage being explored. As soon as one is able, the physical movement should be continued.

The exercise involves three parts:

- 1) an active enactment of nine stages of evolutionary development,
- 2) a conversational reflection on these stages shared with another participant in order to bring left hemispheric processing of the physical-emotive experience, and

3) a shorter re-enactment of the evolutionary stages from the perspective of what has gone before as well as an attempt to integrate the stages to accomplish deeper biological connections in brain, body and behavior between these different structural phases of evolutionary development.

The guide gives the following instructions for the nine stages of the first part:

**The Fish** Lie flat on your stomach, your arms at either side, and gently roll from side to side. Make sure that your body rolls as a single unit, torso and lower body not differentiated from each other. This is the stage of the fish and corresponds to the rolling stage of early infancy. Know that by doing this movement you are activating the fish structures of the brain (allow five minutes).

**The Amphibian** You are now evolving into an amphibian. Begin now crawling along on your forearms dragging your tail (lower body) along, in so doing allowing the amphibian structures of your brain to be activated. If you should find yourself crawling over or under others, know this to be a normal part of amphibian life and continue to pull yourself along. This stage and movement correspond to the period in which the infant is beginning to pull itself along on its forearms.

If you should get tired, then stop and continue the movement kinesthetically until you are rested enough to continue it physically. Let your mind be open to the brain's remembrance of amphibian life and experience (five minutes).

**The Reptile** Becoming reptiles, you will experience now much greater use and coordination of the legs with your arms, still for the most part crawling on the belly but land-bound now and with a greater capacity for locomotion as arms and legs carry you more easily from one place to another. Know that as you make these movements, you are activating the reptilian structures of your brain as well as those parts that have to do with the infant's movements when it starts to crawl on its belly with greater coordination of arms and legs. Let there rise in you memories and experiences of reptilian life. If you get tired, continue the movement in the kinesthetic body for a while before performing it again in the physical body (five minutes).

**The Early Mammal** The reptile evolves into an early mammal capable of moving on all fours. This corresponds to the stage of the infant when it gets off its belly and walks on all fours. At this stage the early mammal discovers its capacity to make sounds. Find out now what life is like as an early mammal. Remember that by making these movements you are activating the old mammalian structures in your brain (five minutes).

**The Early Monkey** Somewhere during the course of evolution these early mammals evolved into early little monkeys, and that is what you will do now. Make the movements and the sounds of the early little monkeys and discover what it is to live in the bodies of these creatures. This corresponds

in the infant's life to the period in which it stands up from time to time as well as gains greater rapidity and facility of movement.

Know that as you do this you are activating the brain memory and structures relating to the early monkey. Live now the movements and experiences of the early little monkey (five minutes).

**The Higher Monkey** The early little monkeys evolved into the higher monkeys, corresponding to the great apes and gorillas. Let yourself become now a higher monkey making the appropriate movements and gestures. This is thought to relate to the child's acquiring greater strength and surety of movement and the ability to swing from side to side.

Let memories and brain structures corresponding to this period of evolution be activated as you live out now the movements and experiences of the higher monkey (five minutes).

**The Early Human** You are now becoming the early human being, both remembering that they were probably not as grim as the pictures you may have seen, and were involved in a great deal of ingenious discovery and tool-making. Their jaws were thrust forward, their bodies more ape-like than ours, but they were filled with a questing curiosity and an intelligence that drove them to move away from animal life into a whole new experience of being alive in the world. This stage corresponds to roughly the 28th to the 36th months of the child's life.

As you experience the early human, both male and female, let your mind be filled with the experiences of the reality that they may have encountered and the struggle they may have known. Know that in doing this the brain is being stimulated to remember the early stages of our lives as human beings (five minutes).

**The Human Being** Gradually the early human evolves into the human being. You have ten minutes of clock time to experience this physical and social evolution, exploring the various stages of speech and development, tool-making, hunting, agriculture, building, exploration, religious development, political development, civilization, industrialization, until you arrive at the present era. Try to go through as many of these as you can and in your enactment of the evolutionary journey recalling in both your body and mind as many of these stages as possible. This corresponds to the development of the child from three years to maturity (ten minutes).

Now you have arrived at the present state of civilization. Explore for the next few minutes what it is like to be a modern human being (three minutes).

**The Extended Human Being** Become now the next stage in human evolution - the extended, evolved human being. Discover with movement, body, voice, sound, gesture, contact, communion, what this stage might be like. You may explore this both separately and together; whatever emerges from your exploration is appropriate. If you wish to dance, sing, make

music, or be alone, that is fine. But allow yourself a range of exploration into the nature and being-ness of the possible human (seven to ten minutes).

## **SHARING**

At the end of this first part, the guide directs the participants to join with the person nearest them and lie down on the floor, heads together, for the reflective part of this exercise. S/he says to them: Speaking together now, back and forth between you, say to each other, "Tell me what you remember about being a fish." Beginning with "I am fish..." let the memories and images pour out from each of you in dialogue. Do not worry where they come from. Just let these images and memories rise spontaneously, and communicate them to your partner as freely as you can. You may speak together in an interchange, or let one speak her/his memories followed by the other (four minutes).

This sharing continues in a series of four minute segments with the guide prompting the participants to remember each of the stages they have just been through.

## **INTEGRATION**

The guide will now say:

We will now very quickly re-enact the evolutionary stages, this time attempting to integrate each stage with the other, so putting together what evolution left asunder and making connections in our brain-mind- bodies of these previously not very well connected stages of our evolutionary development. Begin now, please, by lying on your stomach and making the rolling movements of the fish (one minute).

The fish now becomes an amphibian and you begin to crawl on your forearms pulling your body along. This time, however, you are an amphibian with the fish stage both remembered and more deeply integrated into your being (one minute).

And now the amphibian evolves into a reptile and you are able to achieve a coordination of arms and legs. This reptilian stage, however, has the benefit of a better integration and connection of the earlier stages of the evolutionary process (one minute).

The reptile now becomes an early mammal and you begin to crawl on all fours, remembering, however, that this mammal now is one who has the benefit of a better integration and connectedness with the earlier stages of evolutionary development (one minute).

The early mammal now becomes an early little monkey, but one who feels its integration and continuity with the previous stages (one minute).

The early monkey now becomes a much more integrated and developmentally connected higher monkey (one minute).

The higher monkey now becomes the early human but one who is continuous with his/her developmental past (one minute).

The early human becomes the present modern human being. This time, however, you are a human being whose humanity encompasses a far better connectedness with the developmental stages of your evolutionary process, so that fish, amphibian, reptile, early mammal, early little monkey, higher monkey, and early human being are far more present and available to you than they ever were before. Also having just reflected with a partner on your experiences of these stages, you have a better understanding of the meaning and possibilities of these stages.

Be now the present stage of human development in the light of the recovery by your brain and body of these earlier stages of evolutionary development (three minutes).

And now you are becoming the extended evolved human being - the one who has the benefit of the full prolepsis and is the harvester and agent of the evolutionary process. Be now the emergent and evolved human being. Explore this stage in any way you wish - in song, in dance, in meditation, creativity and community. Be now the next stage of human development (ten minutes).

At the end of this process, the guide will call the participants together for a period of reflection and discussion of how they feel and where they have been. While most participants at this stage feel a sense of profound integration, freedom and disinhibition, almost invariably some will have felt themselves to have gotten stuck at one or another stage in the process while other stages would have been experienced as easy and even exhilarating. In our experience, these difficult stages are the very ones that need to be gone back to and reenacted, for they may refer to stages that were inhibited in the physical development of the participant during his or her own infancy.

## **METALEVELS**

After these discussions it is useful for the guide to initiate with the participants a series of reflections in which they are led to consider the possibility of acquiring the meta-level of each of the earlier stages. For example what is the genius or meta-level of the fish when acquired on the human level? Participants often respond that, by virtue of this exercise, they can now move in a more open environment as well as perceiving a fluidity of opportunity in the various environments in which they now operate.

The question as to the meta-level of the amphibian brings forth responses about gaining the ability to operate "amphibiously" in different contexts and through many different styles of behavior and modality.

The genius of the reptile brings forth the old survival mechanism raised to the level of "stick-to-it-ive-ness". "I feel much more capable of follow-

through, as a result of having gone through this stage of the exercise," said one participant. Another added, "It is as if I've now got a momentum going for me to accomplish both ordinary and extraordinary tasks, which I didn't have before. I feel that I don't have to automatically opt for laziness."

The meta-level of the early mammal produces responses having to do with greater abilities to socialize and be gregarious. Sexual behavior becomes operative at this stage, as does the tendency to nurture and care for infants as well as other creatures. Women participants especially refer to being able to see their nurturing roles extended to a much larger social base as a result of acquiring the meta-level of this stage.

The genius of the early monkey invariably evokes the sense of high play and curiosity, finding almost everything of interest.

The higher monkey gives as its meta-level a sense of power.

The genius of early man is felt as a cornucopia of resources ranging from the ability to acquire skills and crafts as well as the capacity to take risks and explore one's reality more widely.

The meta-level of the modern human involves the endeavor to think speculatively as well as concretely, and to join the vast resources of one's interior space to the creation of more complex and beautiful forms of manifestation in the external environment.

Finally, the achievement of the extended human is to have access to all of these earlier stages and to become a co-partner in the evolutionary process, able to see infinity in a grain of sand and eternity in an hour.

The experience here is often unitive, mystical and open to an extraordinary abundance of creative energy. In this stage one becomes the co-trustee of the emerging evolutionary process on personal, planetary and cosmic dimensions.

*Jean Houston is the Director of the Foundation for Mind Research and author of The Possible Human (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, 1982), a book of concepts and exercises (including the above) for extending your physical mental and creative abilities. This article is excerpted with permission, from a similar article in the Fall-Winter 1980 issue of Dromenon. After years of being at the forefront of personal development work, Jean is now shifting her attention to a new project called The Possible Society.*

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*Last Updated 29 June 2000.*

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