

# 3

## ARCHETYPAL PHASES

These phases are not only found in Western thinking, but appear to be an archetype common to many cultures.



### DEPENDENCY

The *dependent* phase lasts from birth to the early 20s.



### INDEPENDENCE

The *independent* phase lasts from our 20s to our 40s.



### INTERDEPENDENCE

The *interdependent* phase often kicks in at middle age, but can arrive much earlier.



## Phases of human development

No individual is born complete or fully developed. Throughout life we continue to learn and grow, although what we learn is often dictated by what stage of life we are at. This process can be seen as continuous, while at the same time moving through stages or phases. Although each individual life path is different, human life has certain common phases.

There have been many interpretations of these phases, and one can find many different models of human development in modern developmental psychology. These models go back to the theoretical foundations laid by Aristotle and other classical scholars, which were subsequently elaborated during the 18th century by Descartes and other Enlightenment philosophers. In the 20th century, Freud outlined five stages of psychosexual development and Rudolf Steiner described 10 stages of development throughout human life. Whatever model one chooses, however, it becomes clear that these are all variations of the archetypal model in terms of which human life is divided into three phases: Childhood, Adulthood and Old Age. In terms of our relationships with each other, these phases are characterised by three states of being: **Dependence, Independence and Interdependence.** These phases are not only found in Western thinking, but appear to be an archetype common to many cultures. For example, ancient Chinese teachings reflects similar phases, known as a time to learn, a time to fight and a time to grow wise.

In terms of the model, the dependent phase lasts from conception until we are able to make our own way in life – usually in our early 20s. The independent phase arises when, as young adults, we question or reject the ‘givens’ that we grew up with, strive to formulate our own ideas and become financially self-sufficient. This phase can last into the mid-40s. The interdependent phase arises when there is a mature recognition that to achieve life’s full potential we need to cooperate actively with other people in order to give back something to the world. This phase often kicks in at middle age, but can arrive much earlier.

## Ten phases of individual development

According to Bernard Lievegoed, the three major phases of life can further be divided into ten phases, each seven years long. The problem with Lievegoed’s formulation is that while everyone seems to agree on the existence of the three main phases, the age groups that apply to these stages may vary from one culture or society to another. For example, in countries where the average life expectancy is shorter due to the prevalence of infectious diseases, fewer people are likely to reach the age of 63 that, according to Steiner, signals the onset of the phase he called “Free Time”. Similarly, in societies such as our own, where, because of AIDS deaths or other factors, children find themselves with the responsibilities of caring for an entire household while still in their teens, the transition from childhood to adulthood may be accelerated, and very traumatic.

For this reason we have adapted Steiner’s model to make it more flexible, retaining his suggested ten phases without aligning them to specific age groups.

# Ten phases of development

## DEPENDENCY

### 1 THE PHASE OF IMITATION

- When a child is born it is completely dependent on its parents for basic human needs; food, shelter and warmth, as well as the emotional needs of love and trust.
- Children learn primarily through imitation and role modeling, therefore play is immensely important at an early age. It allows the infant an opportunity to mimic and copy the human behavior they see around them. Mother and father figures are the first models for children to learn the balance between masculine and feminine in each of them.
- Children learn to use language at an early age, building up sixty percent of their vocabulary in this period.
- Children have very fertile imaginations and in this period they cannot always distinguish between fantasy and reality.
- At this stage it is important that a child develops self confidence and a good concept of their self and their ability.



... from 0  
to ±20 years



### 2 TESTING AUTHORITY

- The world outside becomes increasingly important at this stage (for example, schools, teachers and friends, which the child will integrate into his/ her world view.
- Other role models besides the parents will emerge, such as teachers and friends.
- Children may start to contest authority, particularly of their parents. This too can be seen as a learning process.
- Children may start to articulate their thinking, particularly around issues like: good and evil, competition, beauty and ugliness, truth and untruth and fantasy and reality. They will often develop a sense of their own values in this period.
- At this stage children are often ready to take on some responsibility.



### 3 "WHO AM I?"

- Puberty can be seen as a time when a person searches for their own individuality and identity in the world, often defying and exploring the notions of authority in this search.
- It is a time for growth of sexual awareness and the questioning of sexuality. It is the onset of woman/manhood that is signified by physical changes such as menstruation in girls and the boys' voices cracking and getting deeper.
- Ideals and idols become important, such as pop singers and film stars. There is often a strong identification with a certain group or hero/heroine.
- It can be a period of intense emotions such as insecurity, loneliness, boredom and anger. These are sometimes related to the search 'for the meaning of life' that the young teenager may be going through.



# Ten phases of development (contd.)

## INDEPENDENCE

±18 to 45 years



4

### A TIME FOR CREATIVITY

- This can be seen as an explorative phase, when the young adult wants to have as many new experiences as possible. It is a search for sensations, experimentation with borders and limits, a time of wandering and traveling, but also of childbearing and raising. The young adult may change jobs, or even places they live in many times in this period.
- It is a time of increased independence, when one's own space and lifestyle choices become important, sometimes distancing the young adult from his/her family
- The notion and fear of conformity become prevalent in some cases, as the young adult wants to make a life for themselves that is different and exciting.



5

### "MY OWN PHILOSOPHY"

- This is a time when there is a tendency towards specialisation and a readiness to deepen understanding.
- As an adult there is more creative ability accessible to respond to different situations.
- It is a time when people may have found their place in the world and are using it to their advantage. A settling down phase.
- There are dangers to be faced here, such as becoming stuck in a certain routine and not accessing new creative energy.



6

### THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

- This period can be described as almost a "second puberty" that brings up a deep questioning of personal identity.
- It is a period where self doubt is common, as your assumptions of life are challenged by experience.
- The recognition that many things you wanted to do are not yet completed can be difficult to accept, along with the first signs of physical decline; the inevitability of getting older and the fact that you will die at some stage.
- It can be a painful and emotional period. Some people respond by indulging in escapist behavior such as: alcohol abuse, workaholism or expensive hobbies.



# Ten phases of development (contd.)

## INTERDEPENDENCE

±40 years to...

7

### THE PIONEERING STAGE

- Emergence from the crisis with new values and meaning can be an uplifting experience. At this point some people make radical life changes; new jobs or careers and approaching things with new attitudes.
- Moments in life are more appreciated through a new attitude.
- A new-found freedom may bring new interests and strengths.
- One may find an enhanced ability to bring “inner” and “outer” worlds together, while incorporating the views of others.
- A sense of real self knowledge is brought about by the experience of life.



8

### A TIME FOR WISDOM

- A tranquil time in which a new respect for nature is developed. It is a time when you may discover your own uniqueness.
- There is the danger of contemptuous talk and behaviour if a person has not come to grips with the slipping away of youth at this stage. A respect should develop for the task of youth in life.
- A sense of wisdom that is rooted in experience, self knowledge and knowledge of the world may develop
- An interest in long term development may arise.



9

### A TIME FOR REVIEW

- Issues that have not been fully dealt with earlier in life may come back with a vengeance.
- There may be the realisation that the work of life is not finished and there is little time to put things right.
- It is a time for dealing with the negatives of one's own personality.
- The fear of becoming too old to look after oneself; having to become dependent on others might be painful.
- A heightened awareness of death and coming to terms with it.



10

### FREE TIME

- In these late years time becomes “free” if we decide we are responsible and have the capacity to truly love. If not we will be needy but unable to give unconditional love.
- There is an important choice to be made; one can choose to hang onto things from the past or let go and gracefully give and accept love.
- The retrospective perception of life; one can appreciate that although people are imperfect, mostly they genuinely strive for something better. This is true respect for the individual.

