

Self-Liberating Infant?

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Self-liberation is a process of human development, where one liberates oneself from dependencies of any sort toward freedom. While this concept is generally implied to an adult, it is worth to observe, how self-liberation applies to a child's development. The author of *Parenting For Everyone*, Simon Soloveychik, states that each child obtains freedom by his or her own efforts, and this process starts as early as birth. Why do parents need to know about this? The answer is simple. From the first breath the process of self-liberation of a child is not just taking place, it is a vital aspect of a child's need for security, which many parents overlook.

Parents see a newborn as a vulnerable, defenseless human being, who is very dependent on adults. How can he or she self-liberate? The infant hasn't yet had developed consciousness to realize the liberation; however, Mother Nature gives the child instincts. They push the child to struggle muscles toward new experiences, to reach the source of nourishment, and to explore the world. By learning to hold his head up, to crawl, to stand the baby liberates himself from his helplessness and weakness, he self-liberates toward new spaces and new sights. Parents may put a hand on his back or to support his feet, but who does the movements? The baby does, all by himself. Isn't it self-liberation?

There is also an invisible aspect of a child's liberation. A baby learns about the world by exploring it. He touches, grabs, pushes, and pulls everything on his way. He doesn't only learn about the things, he discovers that each thing has a certain adult's approval to touch, or disapproval. Thus, he learns that the world he was born to is an interesting game. The game he plays has certain rules. Being a few months old an infant accepts those rules, as they are supposed to be, by default. For example, a mother accompanies the child in his investigation of the household. She talks to him and in her voice he senses her approval. Once he



reaches father's book, she disapproves, and she says "No-no." If he insists, her voice is stricter and she may take the book away, or distract the child. He remembers the experience, and because there are plenty of other things to play with, he accepts some limits. If there is any resistance, or indignation, then it is because the parents miss the moment to introduce the child with the rules and claim them too late.

Perhaps, it is a natural instinct. Animals, too, have to follow certain rules, such as living in a hierarchy. In the life of a little child the

availability of a caring authority is the foundation of his need for security. The authority figure in his life does not just protect him from dangers, but also teaches him about those dangers, so the child could safely navigate himself in this world. If there is no authority, the child's life is chaos, uncertainty, and a mess. Such child is overwhelmed by the options and seeks for order. The peace at home, and the order at home, brings the child a sense of security, a sense of being liberated from the chaos and uncertainty.

This type of self-liberation is often overlooked by parents. When they think the time has come to set rules for a child it is almost always too late. The child gets used to the unclear parental instructions and the chaos at home. He acts out wildly, and fairly enough, he gets indignant, when he is taught about the limits and discipline. If, in addition, the child senses sounds of disappointment in mother's voice and hears unpleasant, scolding words directed at him he starts suffering the encroachment upon his dignity. When the child's sense of his value decreases, he does not get the security he needs for a normal development.

That is why it is important to understand the role of self-liberation in human life starting from infancy. A child, being once helpless, self-liberates himself from weakness toward independence, toward freedom. The process continues throughout his childhood and even further. The parents' duty in this process is to help the child to make it as natural as possible, so that the need for further development prevails the need for security.

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