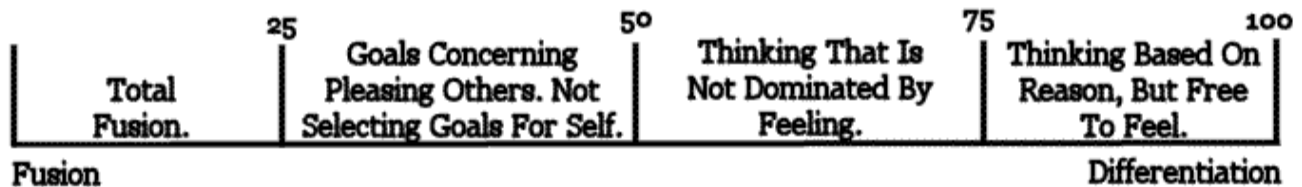


FUSION VS. DIFFERENTIATION

Many marriage problems today come because spouses have a difficult time separating their feelings and their thoughts. Because of this many times spouses act not on what they know but what they feel. Family therapist Murray Bowen proposed that people who have difficulty separating their emotions and feelings tend to unconsciously seek out and marry spouses that also have the same traits. He further suggested that this inability to separate emotions and thought (called fusion) is transgenerational; it is likely a trait that has been passed to us by our extended family. Therefore, problems occur in marriage when an individual is fused emotionally to their parents, their spouse and perhaps their children. Conversely, he termed the individual who is able to make a conscious choice to behave according to the direction of his thought *or* his feelings in a given situation as "differentiated". Differentiated people are able to make a conscious choice not necessarily fused to emotion.

For example the differentiated person can say "I am going to operate right now out of my thoughts, and what I am going to do is what I think I need to do." The differentiated person can also for example say, "I am going to do what I feel like doing even though I do not think this makes the best sense in the world—but it is what I feel like doing and I am going to go with my feelings."

The persons who have the greatest amount of fusion between the affective (feeling) function and the cognitive (thinking) function are the individuals who are the most dysfunctional. Not only do they have difficulty differentiating their own thoughts and feelings, but they also have trouble differentiating themselves from others (parents, spouse, child, extended family) and hence they fuse easily with the characteristic emotion that dominates the family.



Bowen proposed that in order for an individual to mature he has to be able to free himself of unresolved emotional attachments to the family of origin. Bowen proposed a "life force" that propels people to become separate from others. This force drives them to think and feel and act as an individual. However, he proposed a "2nd life force" that propels people to remain emotionally connected to the family. These two forces work against one another so that no one ever gets totally free from the emotional ties to the family of origin.

I believe these two forces are placed in us by God, and thru walking with Him we find the correct balance (although I do not believe God intended it to be an equal balance once we leave home and take a spouse). Consider Bowen's theory in light of these two scriptural principles.

Genesis 2:24—For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

Exodus 20:12—Honor your father and your mother...