

**Exchange Personalities over Dinner**

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY \*\*

Over family dinner,  
 With your spouse and children,  
 Or your parents and siblings  
 Or even a group of your friends,  
 Swap personalities among yourselves.  
 Have everyone write their name down on a small piece  
 of paper,  
 And place all the names in a bowl.  
 Mix them up, and have everyone pick a name.  
 For five minutes, you will become that person completely,  
 Not as a caricature, but with totality.  
 Feel what it is like to have their body, their feelings,  
 their thoughts.  
 Relate to the others at the table authentically from this place.  
 If you get your own name, take on your own personality  
 As if for the first time.  
 After five minutes, you can switch,  
 Until you have all become everyone else at the table.

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A family can be a place of confinement or of liberation. Many of us have come to see the dynamics within the family as restrictive, habits of restraint handed down from one generation to the next, and so we come to see our kin as the opposite of freedom.

Fortunately, it does not take much to reverse that and allow those closest to us to become our allies in freedom.

Families become restrictive to the degree that everyone is allocated a strict role to which they must conform. “Go wash your hands.” “Why, Mummy?” “Because I say so.” She says it with tension in her voice, like she is about to burst. The teenage son rolls his eyes at the ceiling. The father glances at his BlackBerry, hoping it will not be noticed. Even our pets go on automatic pilot. Everyone ends up living in a small and well-defined box. A parent is expected to be responsible, serious, hardworking, and at times, dictatorial. The youngest child is cute, adoring, carefree, sometimes irresponsible. The oldest child is expected to be independent, a leader, and to sometimes reject authority.

These are all roles we perform, and they can easily be confused with who we really are. As soon as you slip out of the automation of the role, however, even for just a moment, there is an explosion of freedom and creativity that is suddenly available. The youngest child also has the seeds of parenthood: just see her with her dolls or a puppy. The mother carries with her still the seeds of carefree enjoyment: just look at her on the rare vacation without the kids.

It does not take much to reverse all that, to allow those closest to us to become our allies in freedom. Slip out of your tight role as you might pull a T-shirt over your head. Pass the roles around. You will expand beyond who you thought you were, and laugh out loud at the same time.