

IDENTITY TRAINING II

Chapter Four

Sub-Plots, Acts, and Spoken Lines

The word *script* is commonly used to cover anything and everything that a person acknowledges as coming from childhood. “Oh, that’s my script,” the person says as they mention a particular behavior they know derived from a parent, for instance. “My dad didn’t believe in doctors, and I don’t believe in doctors: that’s my script.” Well, that would be a small–very small–sub-plot.

Let’s define Script again: two ricochets and one adaptation. The Script is the main series of mesmerized transactions a person gets into that stops intimacy like a steel wall. A Script typically includes three roles, and the actor or actress is actually capable of playing all three. In other words, sometimes the person, unbeknownst to their conscious mind, plays the Hated Role as well as the Favored Role and the Banal Role. Others are cast accordingly. (I may, for instance, be the bossy father with my wife, the scared wife with my boss, and the adapted child with my friends. I know and practice all three roles, although I do them serially with different people.)

This becomes clear when we use video recordings. The person blanches while looking at the re-run and hesitatingly says something like, “I hate to admit it, but that was a carbon copy of my father, down to the smallest detail. I didn’t know that I ever acted like that! Gosh, I’m sorry.” There is no need to be sorry if one is in the process of cleaning out the old Ricochets.

This chapter will cover main areas where there are subplots, acts, and even spoken lines. The last, by the way, is very spooky. It is phenomenal to visit your old home after a decade and discover others speaking in the same way that you do (which you erroneously thought came from your own particular experience) and expressing the same biases. While that is amazing, it is difficult to document because it is so person-specific. Self-aware people will know what we are talking about here. These areas may cooperate with Script but may also be separate learnings from the original family that may or may not limit freedom.

I.

How-To's

The range of these learnings covers the entirety of human experience. Illustrations can be taken at random: Sleeping, brushing teeth, when and what one has for breakfast. What is the ritual about reading the newspaper? How to talk to one another and what to say. How to approach the activities of the day.

To simplify, we will illustrate by focusing on kitchen procedures. One family only believes in warming prepared instant items. In another, they do things with the best implements, use fresh ingredients, and work from original recipes. The second family is of French origin, laughs a lot as they prepare meals, and makes everything exquisitely. Their kitchen is a classroom where grandmama, grandpapa, father, and mother teach the younger people how to sharpen knives, cut meat and vegetables, prepare fruits, measure ingredients, create gravies and creams, schedule the order by which things are done, and finally set the table and eat with grace and gusto.

That example, (which made us hungry and got us wishing for a French family!), is but one example of the school that is each family. How-tos are daily fare. Children are eager students who are learning about the world and survival. They look, listen, and gear their bodies according to the models given to them.

Is this Script? Only if you use the term loosely. To be sure, the person is imprinted with mechanical items of the day. Of course it is true that we all follow countless patterns that we learned as children. That is simply the way humans are. We observe; we mimic; we incorporate; we live our lives. However, we prefer that this not be called Script. Seldom would any of these items be the cause of destroying autonomy or the chance for human closeness. Of course, as the Philistines learned from Samson who was armed only with the jawbone of an ass, "Anything can be used for anything." A person can take a routine learned in one household as the occasion for denigrating a partner according to an old Script theme: "You cook and eat like a goat. My family knew how to do things! I cannot abide living with a barbarian." And so the music plays, the movie runs. Anything can be used for anything.

II.

When-To's

Each family has timing patterns. When do you wake up, eat, wash clothes, go to work, shop, go to church, play, exercise, and all the rest? Once again, the options are enormous.

We will take one, but a quite serious one: When do you die? In one interesting case, a fifty-eight-year-old man confessed to a friend, "I know that it is absolutely ridiculous. He was not my real father, because my mother married him when I was four. My original father lived to be seventy-eight. But I attached to my adopted father. I know that it is crazy, but I keep thinking I will die when he did, at age fifty-nine. There are no genes and no reason whatsoever. But I seem to be haunted by it. I can't get it out of my mind. I have been going around and saying what amounts to good-byes to all my family and friends."

Is that Script? We prefer to call it a chosen sub-plot. As the man knew, there is no physical reason whatsoever for him to fantasize along those lines. After all, his real father lived nineteen years longer, and his mother lived into her late eighties. "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves," said Mark Antony in Shakespeare's play, *Julius Caesar*. Grown-ups learn to decide for themselves on matters such as this and to discern what parts of their mind still need something from the departed. Further, they need to learn a new way to honor someone who was caring rather than die a sympathetic death much too soon.

III.

What-To's

You cannot get away from the reality that children actually look to their parents for clues on what to do in life. They are so impressionable. If mom admires her brother who was so good with mathematics, it is no small wonder that little Joey begins to study so that he can do well in figures. If dad always wanted to find a woman who was capable and took care of herself, it is no mystery why little Lori becomes adamant about liberation and is totally self-supporting. The themes are endless.

Let's take a very simple example: how much to weigh. We're talking body fat here. If your dad prided himself on being "whip-cord lean" and disdained people who had "yellow greasy fat globules right under their skin," it is doubtful that you would ever take sweets seriously. If, however, your father termed you his "partner who loved sweets as much as I do," it is likely that you would have difficulty going past the candy store without stopping.

"What-to's" should mostly be seen as instruction in what to do in life. Vocations are often decided upon quite young. Are you viewed as "a people person" or "good with your hands"? Did you receive presuppositional input on whether you should work in business, in theater, in accounting, in law, in medicine, or in education? It is even possible that you were given instructions on how not to work and be dependent upon others.

Is this Scripting? Well, yes and no. Yes, in the sense that human freedom has limitation structures. No, if you think of Script as this seminar has explained it. However, as has been said frequently, each of these items can be used in a Script manner to block deep relationships. As the most creative of the animals, humans are rather inspired in their ways to avoid human closeness--which has to be one of the nuttiest events in Nature, by the way. No need to deep-sea dive to see this quaint phenomenon. Just knock on any door.

IV.

Where-To's

Where should you live? Are you a snow skier or a water skier? Do you like to live in the sun or in places with bracing, crisp winters? Do you get to live out your life in a city or in the country? Is it important to you to have excellent restaurants where you can vary your cuisine daily, or is it okay for you to live in an isolated place where corned beef means feeding cows? Were you proud to be called a native Texan as a child, so much so that the thought of living in Oklahoma would feel like a betrayal?

We think of a client who was depressed. Looking at his life, you would tend to think that he had everything: excellent values, a loving wife, four fine children, all the financial advantages--in fact, everything most people dream about. In the background of the sessions,

however, was a yearning to live near the Atlantic Ocean. He had grown up with it as a child in Baltimore and had a sense of loss similar to the amputation of a limb. He needed to see it. He liked sunrises and walking on the beach. When he was living in the Midwest, it was as if a sailor were land-bound. (See the beginning pages of *Moby Dick* for similar example in how Ishmael felt.) A major part of the client's therapy was moving to Massachusetts. He is quite happy there now.

Are you a river person, one who likes sunsets, a man or woman who likes trees or the desert? All of these stem mainly from the way we were raised. Are the "where-to's" Script? Again, it depends upon how you define the term. It is not what we have in mind. When we say Script, we are talking about two Ricochets and an Adaptation that haunt the unconscious and lead to a person unwittingly losing important relationships.

V.

Why-To's

One reason church is so important for many young people is that they are learning value structures. They want to know the reasons behind things and why they should or should not follow certain roads in life. If it is explained that a life of feelings and values provides more out of life than a quick fix on drugs or alcohol, then a person begins to understand that life is more than instant pleasure.

Values fall into line here. Why should one respect all people? Why should one respect women and men? Why is money important, sex a matter of real love, power a matter of aiding others and not magnifying the self? Why is it critical to live a life of love? Why is faith important? Why is one to be honest concerning science?

The "why-to's" are also a vast topic. They begin in childhood and influence the range of human action. They form the background philosophy of life, and it is critical for the free human to think through these items. Why should one live? What is worth doing? Why should one "make a contribution?" What is life about? Who are all those people out there and what should I do in response to them? Reasons, beliefs, attitudes, and commitments all begin their formation in the original home.

Some may call these Script because they are almost ‘written in stone’ and people do follow them rather blindly. The task of the mature human is to figure out such matters in the privacy of their heart and mind. What do I believe? Why do I do what I do? These are questions, not only of merit, but of necessity if one is to be free.

VI.

Who With?

An interesting thing happened at a family reunion. Ten children, all past 25 now, returned home and were sitting discussing life in the living room. Three of the children were gay, and one of them said abruptly, “I think every member of the family is gay. I know that mom and dad, if you were to be honest, would have preferred to be gay. Don’t deny it; I know it is true.” Their opinion was supported by the other two gay members of the family.

One of the heterosexual brothers spoke up and said, “That you are gay is fine with me. If mom or dad were latent gay, I can live with that. That, however, is not my persuasion. I have no sense of that in my body, and I do happen to know my feelings. There is no scare in me on this topic. I know that I get sexually excited with women and not men.” Well, the conversation in the living room got heated at that point with each insisting upon their own viewpoint and convinced that the other was not honest. It was a tough family reunion.

Children can be affected much more easily. A boy can be told that he was “to be a girl but nature didn’t cooperate.” Sometimes the boy will internalize that. A girl can be told that the parents had wished for a boy and thus called her Wilhemena because they wanted a William. The girl will unconsciously begin to act more like a boy. Once again, the options around these issues are large because of the uniqueness of each family, each parent, and each child.

“Who with,” however, extends far beyond sexuality. There are given tendencies toward people around economic class, educational levels, social status, nationality, religion, and many other ways humans vilify or verify themselves. “A person of means” is not to go with someone “from the other side of the tracks.” One can be “slumming” or “gold-digging” depending on the

perspective of friends and original family. Does one exclude notions of class as did the father who married in the style of the movie *My Fair Lady*? Does one stick to “hillbillies” because of a fondness for *Hee Haw* and *The Grand Old Opry*?

A dairy farmer was talking with two interested parties at an antique store one spring day. He said that it was his anniversary, and he and his wife were taking the day off like they did every year. The men acknowledged that there was no more demanding job than that of the dairy farmer, and the man replied, “Yep, I told my three sons that if they wanted to go into the business, they had to go to the cattle auctions to find them a mate.” The men laughed and the dairy farmer realized he’d been misunderstood. “I mean that you have to find a wife who loves cows and farm life because that is all you get to do if you are going to go into my business. All three sons did what I suggested.”

Unwittingly and unconsciously, our parents affected us by example, by word, and by instruction. If they weren’t good at instruction, it makes little difference. In sharing their emotional attachments and fantasies, they gave loads of advice.

Entire Acts

Anyone who lives a long life and looks back upon it will realize that many entire episodes of their life transpired as a form of copying what former generations did. Maybe granddad took a tour of Canada on a train, and you dream of it until you do it many decades later just like he did. Maybe your father was a soldier in Guam and spun tales about survival and the cave structure of the island, and you can hardly rest until you vacation there and visit some of the caves. Perhaps your mother went on a sailboat along the northern shore of Lake Superior and visited the old villages, and you find yourself haunted with the desire to do the same thing. Perhaps your grandmother got her law degree from the University of Oregon, and you determine to follow in her footsteps.

It could be that your father was a master carpenter, and though you make your living on Wall Street, you find that you spend every spare moment making cabinetry that you could buy

much better and more cheaply. It is possible that your favorite memory is a day you spent flying kites with your mother, and you become a kite maker because of the joy you originally experienced. Perhaps your grandad and you had an old skiff, and you enjoyed fishing together, and now as you go out on the lake alone you fantasize about the times you used to have. Maybe you knit because those were the most precious times that you had with your grandmother.

Everyone has phases and times of their lives that duplicate some historical event and time. Our hobbies and interests are frequently molded along those lines. Are they in Script? Well, certainly they do have precedent in childhood. They become more Script-like when they are destructive and are a repetitive compulsion that harms your body or soul. “I race motorcycles and jump cars like my daddy did,” states the reckless adolescent who believes he is immortal.

Some people enact entire medical scenes like the ones they witnessed as children, breaking their bones in the same way, and turning against their own flesh with the anticipation that they will “die of ____ like my mom did.” “I smoke three packs a day just like my father before me. He died of emphysema, but at least he enjoyed himself while he was alive.” “My papa was a moonshiner. He made white lightning. I can down a six-pack from the beer hall six miles away on Friday night. Of course, I had an accident and almost died. But no matter, I’m a man like my dad was.”

All of us witness such repetitions and grieve at their potential for tragedy. When they destroy actual human freedom and ruin chances of being close, they cooperate with the other major factors of Script. A person must turn away then in order to find out who they really want to be and get on with.

Identity and Identity-in-Relationship. That is the subject of the coming session.