

EVIDENCES OF CHILDHOOD IN ADULTS

Frank R. Morris

"In every garden weeds doth unfortunately appear." While that is no line from any poem I know, every gardener can identify with the sentiment. So, too, every therapeutic analyst is aware that nasty weedy childlike emergence's appear in the personalities of every client. In point of fact, ordinary laymen encounter these 'weeds,' mark them silently and, since they do not know what to do, continue right on along (sometimes until divorce is initiated.)

In this short paper I will avoid the deepest rooted 'weeds' like Narcissism and the Script, both of which are year round and daily destroy human freedom. Instead, I will concentrate on the 'pullable' weeds and offer light suggestions for gardeners of the soul.

1. WISH and REALITY Some individuals are haunted by "somewhere over the rainbow" thoughts where, on the morrow, they will be rich, famous, and acknowledged as a powerful personality. The old confrontation was to say "Put wish in one hand and spit in the other and see which one fills up first." That may work if said repeatedly as in "Wish and Spit" followed by a glare from a mom or dad. For the rest of us, it is clear that a person visualizes a rosy future as they drop dollars at a casino, lottery or daily ruminations. The problem is that the person is not squeezing the moment for the joy therein. Thus, one response is "So you are postponing your daily life as you wish for the pot at the end of the rainbow."

2. EASY SIMPLIFICATIONS. The practice of dividing matters into black/white, evil/good, and right/wrong categories is deep in the society. Fundamentalists may be defined as the masters of simplification. This brain problem leads to polarizations as either/or distinctions are made rapidly. There is little attempt to find the particle of truth in each position as individuals have different philosophies. Rather the quick fix is to say "He is evil; I'm good and, thereby, get a cheap self-righteousness. For 'weed pullers' the question is: "Is there a particle of truth in the other's position?"

3. AVOIDANCE of COMPLEXITY. As said above, the child mind rivets around simple polarities. It follows, then, that the attempt to introduce complexity usually fails to take. "Don't bother me with the facts" is the dominant attitude. To undermine that deep weed of truth avoidance the gardener must ask two questions: "Where do you get your information?" and "Are you willing to hear a different approach?"

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- 4. WHAT IF? “WHAT IF?”** is an easily seen dandelion in that a given childlike emergence comes forth. On occasion, this person fantasizes imaginary—even rather fantastic—constructions. “What if there are really lions under my bed?” the wide-eyed child asks a father. One good response is a smiling “Are you under the What If tree again?”
- 5. CAUSE/EFFECT.** This pattern is evidenced in two ways: a) Thinking that someone else is the blame for one’s behavior. (“She made me, (caused me) to” do such and such). b) A refusal to see that one’s own behavior triggered a negative result in one’s own life. The first is self evident and the second is often a result from unconscious dynamics-- simply the way the brain justifies itself. So, for the second, we might be a little understanding, but, for gardeners of the soul, there must be thoughtful interjections such as a cautious “Is it possible that you might have done something that triggered that response?”
- 6. PARENT WORDS.** Person frequently uses words like ‘should-have to-must’ in relations with others and in self talk. These words are birthed in a flash of scare and, while they may be used normally on occasion, continuous use shows the person to be a driven child who wants to drive others in the same fashion. How to confront? The phrase is “Should according to whom?”
- 7. HELPLESS WORDS.** The gardener notices a little child helplessness with a small voice and uttering phrases like “I just can’t do that.” The confrontation: “What makes that impossible for a grownup as powerful as you?”
- 8. FOLKS OUT YONDER.** Here the person projects a controlling parent on everyone and justifies lack of initiative by bleating that an indefinable ‘other’ makes new behavior inadmissible. The gardener: “Are you saying that EVERYONE is against you? If not, who specifically?”
- 9. THE SECRET BUT.** The weedy person automatically says “Yes, but...” after waiting impatiently and not really listening to what someone has said. This is a two year old weed where a person frighteningly insists upon separateness in order to hold on to identity. “Are you aware how often you say ‘Yes, but’ and the reason you do that? The reason I ask is that your face becomes immobile and you hold your breath while someone else speaks. Please tell me why you automatically say “Yes, but.” (Actually, the

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person will not know the original causation, but it will slow down the pace of this old module.)

10. COMPARISONS and SUPERLATIVES. This weed is marked by “er” and “est” words as the individual exudes words like “best, greatest, smartest coolest, biggest” etc. Narcissists frequently glory in this as they pump themselves up to the highest plane, said plane that looks down upon others. The patient gardener says “Best according to whom, smarter compared to whom” and so forth. “Are you aware of your constant use of superlatives?”

CONCLUSION: The above ten signs of continuing childhood thinking issues are to complement other articles on this web site that concentrate upon emotional remnants. Oftentimes, the evidences of continued childhood patterns are revealed in voice, behavior, rigidly insistent defense mechanisms (like rationalization or denial), and obsessive rituals like seductive cuteness and childlike gestures. The voice is frequently an obvious weedy sign in that it will have the tone and volume of a little child. A refusal to be responsible about money (ex. wild use of credit cards) is another indicator as the person, like a dependent child, expects a parental savior to come along and rescue.

FINAL ILLUSTRATION: I once had a 44 year old client who refused to grow up and take responsibility for his life. In religion, work, and relationships, he played Peter Pan. In religion, he was perfectly accepted in his simplicity fundamentalist community. As for financial survival, he lived on the edge, surviving mainly on Ramen noodles. In terms of relationships, he was good for short periods and then people just avoided him because he’d often be a mooch. After pacing his reality and seeing the hurt in his situation, I inquired why he refused to grow up. Here’s his answer: “When I was a little boy, I realized that old people die so I decided to never grow up.”

And, there you have it in a Nut shell.

* Please balance this article with an awareness of modularity. While there are weeds in every garden, be sure to notice the flowers also.