

Volume 3, Issue 3

April, 2013



JOEL BRASS AND ASSOCIATES LTD.

The Growing Edge



Inner Child Work: A Road to Becoming a Healthy and Emotionally Mature Adult

“So, like a forgotten fire, a childhood can always flare up again within us.”
- Gaston Bachelard

It can be hard to be an adult. Even though our bodies have physically matured to their adult proportions; even though we may have reached the age of majority and can drive, vote and drink; and even though we may present ourselves as fully capable, self-assured directors of our own lives, there are times when all of us, in some deep place within, feel like a child or adolescent. Though we might try to rationalize or justify this invasion of foreign psychic material, we are nevertheless usually powerless at these times from turning into *adult children*, losing our ground as the emotionally balanced, interpersonally effective adult we would like to be.

The circumstances or people that trigger our being overtaken by a much younger or broken version of ourselves may vary considerably. It may occur in the middle of a visit with our family of origin. Or in the presence of an authority figure or someone to whom we feel sexually or romantically attracted. It might be that we are thrown back into our pasts by something as simple as a raised voice, a judgmental tone, an arched eyebrow or a facial smirk. We can be overthrown by something as ordinary as an unreturned phone call, a teasingly sarcastic comment about us overheard in passing, or being stood up for a lunch date.

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We know that these ruptures to our ordinary adult consciousness are occurring when we admit to ourselves (often only long after the inner drama has subsided) that *the reactions we displayed were way out of proportion to the event or person that seemed to trigger them.*

What I suggest is occurring in these circumstances is that facets of the leftover emotional pain from our childhood or adolescence are rising up to show themselves to us. Ranging in intensity and severity from irksome and humbling to self-destructive and toxic to others, these wounds and hurts of an earlier time can be projected onto the people and events of our present-day lives, turning them upside down in the process.

Let's look at some of the major "motion picture screens" upon which this buried film or template, comprised of the shadows from our past, are projected. These screens and the outlines of the shadows that sway upon them can be discerned in the baffling and frustrating questions that I hear every day in my counselling practice. They are posed by the intelligent and fundamentally decent people sitting before me, who, in spite of their best intentions, have become thwarted and undermined by their very own symptoms, patterns and behaviors.

1. **My Behaviors** – Why are my emotional reactions so charged to something that my parent, spouse, friend or boss just said or did? Why am I prone to frequent emotional outbursts? Why do I have such a strong need for money, position or power? Why am I so driven and restless? Why am I always so stressed? Why can't I just enjoy the moment more?
2. **My Relationships** – Why can't I fully trust another such that I can't be in a love relationship for very long, if at all? Why can I feel so independent and self-reliant when I am living on my own and yet become so needy, possessive and insecure when I am with a partner? Why do I pick people who I know will not meet my needs in the long run? Why am I so afraid of disapproval? Why is honest communication so difficult for me? Why is my self-esteem so shaky? Why does rejection tear me apart?
3. **My Symptoms** – Why do I sleep so poorly and hardly ever wake up refreshed and restored? Where does that pit of anxiety in my stomach come from? Why do I get so much neck and shoulder pain? Will these migraine headaches ever go away? Why do I experience mood swings and depressive episodes?
4. **My Addictions** – Why am I absolutely hooked on the Internet? Why do I eat when I'm not really hungry? Drink too much and too often? Work all the time? Rely on weed to chill out? Watch T.V. as much as I do? Use sex as a mood elevator?

It is my professional experience that the origins and causes of these chronic self-sabotaging and life diminishing issues and conditions are rarely understood or accurately explained by the present day adults who are their bearers. Nor can they heal themselves of them. That is why they are in my office to begin with. However, if they are willing to consider the possibility that they are carrying more emotional pain and fear than they have ever imagined or conceived of, and if they can learn to see their current unwanted experience through the eyes of a child consciousness within, *then perhaps for the first time they can make perfect emotional sense out of these previously baffling and frustrating symptoms, patterns and behaviors* and begin to heal them.

“Grown-ups never understand anything for themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them.”

– Antoine de Saint Exupery, *The Little Prince*

I assert that inside of each and every one of us there is a broken or adaptive inner child. This child is who we were in our formative years at our most vulnerable, impressionable, defenseless, and emotional. The unknown and unexamined wounds, hurts and disappointments from our childhood, adolescence and Family of Origin, including all manner of ways that we fear and brace ourselves against their recurrence with the people and circumstances in our lives today, overtake us like an occupying force in those times when we are an adult in name only. In those times when we lose our inner peace and power and instantaneously become a ball of reactive fear and emotion.

Put differently, these are the calls for help and compassionate and committed inner parenting rising up from the neglected and forgotten child or adolescent within us who still today is crying out for attention. And this time around it must be us, and not our biological mothers, fathers or caregivers, who respond and attend to this child’s feelings, needs and wants.

Inner Child Work, paradoxically the work of becoming an emotionally mature, healthy, consistently grounded and interpersonally effective adult is an extremely powerful method by which to experience this type of emotional and spiritual healing.

UPCOMING SEMINAR

Seminar: Relationships: The Work Of Love

Dates: Saturday / Sunday, May 25 & 26, 2013

Location: Pacific Mountain Centre, 3306 Dunbar St., Vancouver, BC

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“Each man’s life represents a road toward himself,
an attempt at such a road,
the intimation of a path.
No man has ever been entirely and completely himself.
Yet each one strives to become that –
One in an awkward, the other in an intelligent way,
each as best he can.
Each man carries the vestiges of his birth—
the slime and eggshells of his primeval past—
with him to the end of his days.
Some never become human,
remaining frog, lizard, ant.
Each represents a gamble on the part of nature
in creation of the human.
We all share the same origin, our mothers;
all of us come in at the same door.
But each of us – experiments of the depths—
strives toward his own destiny.
We can understand one another;
but each of us is able to interpret himself
to himself alone.”

Herman Hesse

