OPENING TO THE INNER CHILD
RECOVERING AUTHENTIC PERSONALITY

by

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INTRODUCTION

Twenty years ago there was comparatively little talk of child abuse, virtually no awareness of addictions beyond drugs and alcohol, and very limited knowledge of the "inner child." Today the mistreatment of children is known to be rampant, and can be recognized in many normal families; there is an explosion of knowledge about addictions besides alcohol and drugs, such as sex, food, work, and love addictions; and the inner child is the popular subject of a vast body of self-help literature. What do all these trends indicate?

One central thing these changes show is that as a society we are becoming increasingly empathic to childhood experience—both that of actual "outer children" as well as our "inner children." On one hand, the deeper connection to outer children has led to much more stringent laws in the area of child neglect and abuse; to increased concern for the infant before, during, and after birth; and to a growing children's rights movement. On the other hand, the connection to the inner child has fueled what has been called the "Recovery Movement"—the tremendous proliferation of self-help groups, courses, and literature for many types of life problems conditioned by psychological wounding suffered in childhood.

It seems significant that the empathic connection with outer children has gone hand-in-hand with an empathic connection to inner children. Indeed, this appears to be a spontaneous collective transformation in consciousness, a transformation of ourselves as human beings which could not have been orchestrated by any one person or group. What we have here is not at bottom a passing fad, not the greedy hype of a self-help industry, but a natural evolution of our consciousness as a society.

Furthermore, this same increasing empathy has allowed a better understanding of our more general vulnerabilities as human beings, an increased awareness of what is hurtful to our deepest sense of self and world. What ten years ago might have been passed off as "boys will be boys" is now revealed as sexual harassment. What earlier might have been seen as a "strong sex drive" deserving accommodation, is now seen as a sexual addiction deserving treatment. What before might have been accepted as a "mean boss" is now seen as workplace abuse. And much of what in an earlier time was considered "human progress" is now revealed as oppression of native peoples, the extinction of species, and the destruction of our natural envi-

ronment. These changing attitudes indicate an increased empathy for the fragility of human life, and a concomitant awareness of what constitutes mistreatment of ourselves and the world.

However, as any collective transformation, this evolution of empathy will exhibit what Pierre Teilhard de Chardin called "groping"—the forward thrust of evolution will attempt many different avenues as it moves forward in time, some successful and some not. Thus failed experiments, extremes, and mistakes are to be expected. However, this growing empathic ability seems fundamentally an evolutionary shift leading towards not only the deeper healing of the individual, but towards the healing of the human condition itself. It marks a more profound uncovering of our core self, our essential humanness, and a healing of self and world. This is the context for inner child work in psychosynthesis.

The Inner Child and Psychosynthesis

The earliest work within psychosynthesis which addressed the inner child seems to have been the "Nurturing the Child Within" workshops offered in the mid-1970s at the Psychosynthesis Institute in Palo Alto, and at Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, by Betsie Carter, John Firman, Matthew Haar, and Lenore Lefer (cf. Psychosynthesis Institute News Calendars). A core of this approach was the compassionate and gentle reaching to the inner child largely via Carter's technique called affectionately, "Bear Therapy," because teddy bears were often used in the workshops.

Turning to the literature, psychosynthesis therapists Judith Abbot and Claire Boskin (1985) elaborated their approach to the development of inner child workshops, which again was based on a caring, gentle, empathic reaching to the child within. Following the work of Abbot and Boskin, Ken Manning (1985) then wrote his master's thesis on the application of psychosynthesis to exploring and healing the inner child. Also, psychosynthesis therapists Therese A. Caveney (1985) and Victoria Tackett (1988) have written about the application of psychosynthesis inner child work to therapy with survivors of childhood abuse.

We currently understand this empathic reaching to inner child as synonymous with realizing the authentic, whole expression of one's essential nature or "I-amness." If this authentic self-expression finds support and nurture in one's life, **authentic personality** (Firman & Russell, 1994) is formed—one's attitudes, behavior, and life itself become an expression of one's true nature. So inner child is not one "ego state" or **subpersonality** (Assagioli, 1965) among others, but the true "heart" or "core" of the personality, having a fundamental impact on one's life as a whole.

It follows from this that the wounding of inner child by abuse and neglect, for example, is something which also affects one's life as a whole; here trauma is not limited to one aspect of the personality, but damages the very heart of the personality. Such wounding causes a global shift from authentic, spontaneous expression of self—authentic personality—towards a compensating, defensive focus on survival in an unhealthy environment, forming over time what we have called **survival personality** (Op. cit.). So inner child, whether healthy or wounded, profoundly affects the overall expression of ourselves in the world.

In addition, the term "inner child" points to a fundamental quality of authentic personality—experiencing oneself "as a child" in relationship to **Transpersonal Self** or **Self** (Assagioli, 1965, 1973). In psychosynthesis, Self is seen as the deeper Ground of Being from which personal being flows. Thus human being is essentially dependent, deriving from Self, and from this dependence emerges the individuality and uniqueness of personal identity. The paradox is that out of this childlike dependence on Self arises our individuality, personal power, and solidarity with others and world (the **dependent-independent paradox**, see Firman, 1991).

Authentic personality is therefore not "childish" or "immature," but "as a child" vis-à-vis deeper Self. Authentic personality does not operate as an isolated, self-sufficient, closed system, but is ever in responsive, vulnerable, and intimate communion with a deeper source of being, Self. This is perhaps one of the reasons the Bible describes Jesus saying one should be as a "small child" in order to receive the Kingdom of God. Again, "inner child" represents this transpersonal openness, an essential characteristic of authentic personality.

If we were continuously aware of this dependent, childlike

relationship to deepest Self, it seems we would live lives of integrity, meaning, and purpose, while at the same time respecting our transpersonal connection to other people and all of life. In short, we would be walking the path of **Self-realization** (Assagioli, 1965, 1973), living in ongoing communion with Self.

Of course most of us are not living in such continuous union with Self. The tragedy is that authentic personality invariably has been wounded since our earliest days. This has caused this inner "childlikeness" to go into hiding, to become split off from our usual day-to-day awareness. And it is often only through our difficulties and crises—the breakdown of our normal functioning—that we begin to glimpse the wounding beneath our normality. This is what eventually may lead a person to begin a search for that lost authenticity through such things as therapy, self-help groups, or a spiritual practice. In recognizing and accepting this wounding to inner child, it is possible to heal the break between the child and oneself, and thereby rekindle the dormant ember of authentic personality.

This monograph, the third in the Psychosynthesis Palo Alto series, attempts to outline the loss and recovery of inner child and authentic personality from the point of view of psychosynthesis, that approach to the whole person conceived in 1910 by the Italian psychiatrist Roberto Assagioli (1888-1974). This monograph also draws upon the work we have been doing over the past six years both in our private psychotherapy practices and in public and professional workshops.

Of course there is far more to working with inner child than can be covered in this short monograph. Interested readers are referred to the bibliography; to courses and workshops in their area; to the many self-help groups throughout the world; to therapists trained in this approach; and to the recovery and psychology sections of their local bookstores.

Some of the concepts in this monograph are treated in an early draft of our book, *Healing the Human Spirit*, forthcoming from the State University of New York Press as, *Healing the Primal Wound*. The interested reader is referred to this book for a more in-depth treatment of the material presented here, and for a more comprehensive discussion of how these ideas fit within psychosynthesis thought. Lastly, note that the first appearance of psychosynthesis technical terms within the monograph are printed in bold type, indicating that these terms are elaborated elsewhere in the literature.

OPENING TO THE INNER CHILD
RECOVERING AUTHENTIC PERSONALITY

You would probably not be reading this monograph unless you sensed—however vaguely—some better way of living your life. Usually people do not come to explore their depths until their current way of living has in some way been found lacking. Perhaps they are struggling with recovery from an addiction or having difficulty in relationships, or perhaps they have glimpsed a new way of being which seems much more free, creative, and expansive. Whatever the reason, many today are being drawn to take a long close look at their inner depths in order to heal their wounds, find their true selves, and engage the world from their authenticity.

However, in order to approach the depths within, one must confront a guardian standing at the gates of the inner world. This guardian is not a dragon or an ogre, but a very simple idea. This idea is that our lives take place along a time-line which began at some point in the past and which extends away from the point of origin into the future:

| Infancy | Childhood | Adolescence | Adulthood |
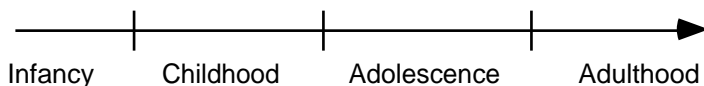
This pervasive mental set places infancy and childhood "far, far away" from adulthood—at the extreme other end of this long line moving us inexorably further and further away from early life. Human growth seems here a matter of leaving those early years behind, of "growing up" and not being so "childish," "immature," or "infantile."

This model of course has its place—it does represent that we no longer look like infants, that we have learned to walk and talk, and that we have adult responsibilities in our lives. However, this model is only one way of looking at our development, and leaves out crucial aspects of human experience. Under the sway of this model, childhood seems a vague, shadowy land of half-remembered moments and elusive feelings—it is "far away." We may only glimpse this misty, forgotten time when looking at an old picture album or talking nostalgia with family and friends.

However, since the entire history of Western depth psychology shows us that childhood is in fact not "far, far away" but

utterly present in the moment, there must be another model of human development as well; there must be a model which includes the past in the present. Such a model is implicit in any depth psychotherapy, and was voiced by Roberto Assagioli in this way:

> But "outgrowing" does not mean "losing." You can and should keep the child in yourself—not killing the child. You see, the child remains, the adolescent remains, and so on. Outgrowing does not mean eliminating. Of course that is the ideal process, but we are too stupid and try to kill or repress the past ages. There is the notion that one has to kill the child in order to become mature, or to repress the previous stages. (Assagioli, 1973c, edited from audio tape)

Assagioli maintained that each developmental age was not left behind, but formed an aspect of the whole personality in a process he called the **psychosynthesis of the ages** (Assagioli, 1973b). Based upon a sketch John Firman made during the above conversation with Assagioli, this process might be diagrammed in this way:
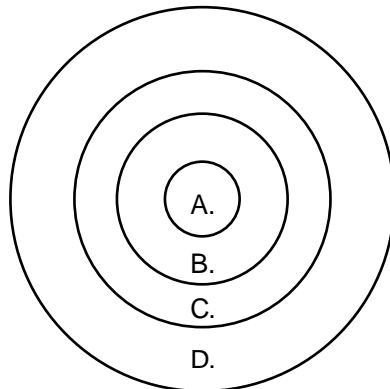
A. Infant
B. Child
C. Adolescent
D. Adult

In this developmental model, infancy and childhood are not distant, but at our center, similar to the annual rings of a tree. For example, right at this moment there might be a six-year-old looking out on my world, saying, "Stop writing! What if people don't like what you say? They might be mean to you." The feelings accompanying this inner voice are vulnerability and fear; the world seems a place populated by large, unpredictable adults who can easily hurt me.

There might be an adolescent too: "What do you care what people think? Make as much noise as you like. Don't let them tell you what to do." Here the feelings are angry and defiant; the world seems an oppressive place against which I must rebel in order to exist. And so on.

The point is that the concentric-ring model allows us to become more conscious of our inner world. These major sectors of ourselves are not people we have been, but people we are; they do not live in a long-lost time, but in the immediate present. Of course, the linear time-line model is often favored by the adult—it is a way of pushing the awkward feelings and thoughts of the infant, child, and adolescent into the background. Adhering to that model, I will assume such "immature" thoughts and feelings have been left behind, and it may even be an affront to my self-image to realize they exist within me virtually unchanged by the passage of time—but that is just the adult being the adult. Again, the insight held by the ring model is that all are present, all can be engaged, and all have something to offer our lives.

We might then visualize the growing personality as expanding harmoniously outward through the various life stages, accumulating the human potential unfolding at each stage (the number of stages and their labels are arbitrary in the diagram). Here blossoms the awareness of an enduring, cohesive, initiating selfhood through an ongoing inclusion all the multiple perspectives and abilities of the different ages. But where does this sense of personal selfhood come from? How exactly does it develop?

AUTHENTIC PERSONALITY

The unfoldment of the personality through developmental stages is of course a matter both of genetic endowment and so-

cial interaction—a matter of both "nature and nurture." Our focus here, however, is upon the nurture side of this relationship. Here what is crucial in development is that one is recognized, acknowledged, and understood. That is, one needs to be seen as the unique, individual self one is, rather than being seen as something to meet the needs of others. I must be seen as "me" by my parents, and not, for example, as "the one who will grow up and make us proud," or, "the one who will save our marriage." Only if I am seen as uniquely "me"—and not simply an object of someone else's desires, fantasies, and plans—can I have a sense of myself as a unique person living my own life.

The British pediatrician and psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott (1987, 1988), among others, called this type of empathic relating, "mirroring." Mirroring occurs as the mother (or caregiver) can look at the infant and recognize the unique, individual human being who exists before her. As the infant experiences his or her self reflected in the other's gaze, the infant is able to realize that she or he *is* indeed a unique, individual human being. In Winnicott's words, "When I look I am seen, so I exist" (Ibid., p. 134). This type of empathic attunement with the child, generalized to the whole early nurturing environment—called a "holding environment"—provides for the development of what Winnicott calls a "continuity of being" and a blossoming of the "true self" of the child.

The American analyst and founder of self psychology, Heinz Kohut (1971, 1977, 1984), recognized this type of relating as an empathic responsiveness to the child on the part of the caregivers. Empathy allows the understanding of another from the other's point of view, a seeing into the other's world of experience ("vicarious introspection"). If parents relate to the child in this attuned way, the child is able to develop a sense of self which has "cohesion in space" and "continuity in time." Where Winnicott speaks of a true self, Kohut posits a deep "nuclear self" which will unfold its unique destiny ("nuclear program") in response to empathic attunement from the nurturing other.

So it is via a mirroring or empathic connection to others that we develop an awareness of ourselves as whole, volitional, and continuous through time—what in psychosynthesis can be called **authentic personality**. This mirroring process might be diagrammed crudely like this:
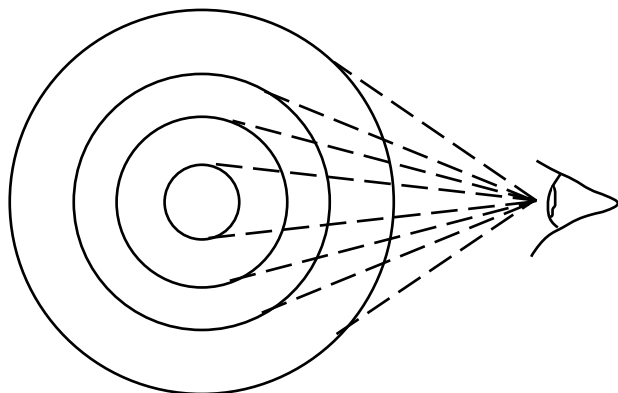
The rings here are the same as in the earlier diagram, representing the many developmental ages which form the personality. The seeing eye represents all those people and situations by which we are seen for who we truly are: perhaps parents and family early in life; then particular school teachers and peers; and then the friends, colleagues, mentors, and spouses of adulthood.

If at each stage of life we receive this mirroring, we are able to recognize, accept, and include the unfolding aspects of ourselves at that stage. For example, if our developing independence, or sexuality, or cognitive abilities are mirrored, we will be able to recognize these as valid aspects of our identity: "I am my own person," "I am a sexual person," "I am a thinker"—in other words, these unfolding developmental abilities become expressions of one's authentic existence, one's true "I-amness."

Through this mirroring we can actualize all the richness of our unfolding human potential in an ongoing way; the developmental stages form the "rings" of one's personality, each subsequent age of life enduring as an important part of the larger whole. This development is "authentic" in that the blossoming personality is a true expression of who I really am. It is as if the mirroring other is a gentle wind fanning the spark of "I," allowing "I" to glow and come to life, fully expressing that unique individuality through the unfolding developmental stages.

Of course, this is not a passive process in which we are empty holes being filled up by the empathic regard of others. This is a

relational process in which one learns to give and receive, to contact and withdraw, and even to influence the responses of the mirroring other (as when an infant's responses cause the caregivers to modify their behavior). Relationship is ever a dynamic and changing process influenced by all parties involved.

So mirroring or empathic attunement allows the flowering of I-amness throughout the life span, creating authentic personality. However, according to Assagioli (1965), the ultimate source of personal selfhood is a deeper **Transpersonal Self** or **Self**. He speaks of individual, personal "I" as a "reflection" or "projection" of deeper or transpersonal Self, and thus it is this I-Self connection which allows the experience of individuality and personal freedom. But how does this fit with the idea that personal being arises from relationships with empathic others?

It must be that these mirroring others, so obviously crucial to the blossoming of personal being, are facilitators of this I-Self connection; they are somehow conduits or channels for the being "flowing" from Self, as it were. In psychosynthesis terms, these empathically-attuned others would be called **external unifying centers**.
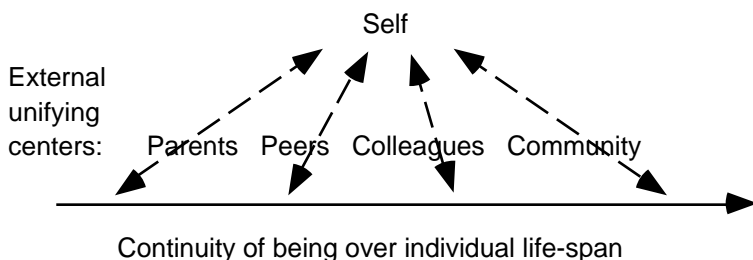
External and Internal Unifying Centers

In ideal human development then, the person would at each stage of life experience the primary I-Self connection facilitated by different empathically-attuned or mirroring others; each stage of growth would have attendant external unifying centers—external others who serve to act as the facilitating medium for the I-Self relationship. Such an external center comprises,

> ...an indirect but true link, a point of connection between the personal man and his higher Self, which is reflected and symbolized in that object... (Assagioli, 1965, p. 25)

The external unifying center is a "true link" or conduit for the I-Self connection. Thus the external unifying center of early childhood would be the matrix of empathic connections with the caregivers and the extended family system. This early hold-

ing environment would mediate the I-Self relationship, allow-
ing the experience of healthy personal selfhood, a sense that, "I
exist as a unique, worthy, and choosing person, just as I am."
Later, this I-consciousness might be facilitated by school teach-
ers, peers, and other validating, mirroring contexts such as so-
cial, cultural, and religious milieus. At each point in growth,
one would be realizing oneself through the different empathic
connections at that time in life:

Self

External
unifying
centers: Parents   Peers   Colleagues   Community

Continuity of being over individual life-span

   The external unifying centers listed in the above diagram
are only a few examples of many possible nurturing life con-
texts. No particular number or types of external unifying cen-
ters are being put forth here, and indeed, it may be that in ex-
ploring such centers one may continually discover new and
unique ones. Besides significant other people, external unify-
ing centers can be such things as pets and cherished objects;
natural environments; scientific and artistic disciplines; or po-
litical, business, and religious communities.
   The point for the current discussion is that there are a series
of relational systems—external unifying centers—which are
crucial to the development of human being. Each center in a
different way facilitates the I-Self relationship, supporting the
expression of authentic personality.
   Furthermore, as each stage of life is supported and held by
the appropriate, empathic, external unifying center, the active
interaction with that external unifying center conditions the
formation of an *inner* representation or *inner* model of that cen-
ter—what can be called an **internal unifying center** (Firman
& Russell, 1994). That is, the experience with the external cen-
ter would condition the development of an inner center capable
of serving many of the same functions fulfilled by the external

one. In psychoanalytic parlance, the internal unifying center might be called an "internalized object" or "object representation."

In Winnicott's terms, the development of such an inner center could be described as the outer holding environment conditioning the formation of a similar "internal environment" (Winnicott, 1987, p. 34). This same process also can be seen in Kohut's "transmuting internalization" (Kohut, 1971, p. 45).

The internal center may be experienced as actual inner images or figures, as when one inwardly "hears" the advice of a parent or mentor, or carries on an inner dialogue with a symbol of wisdom. But these internal centers also include the more general beliefs, values, and world-views developed in relationship to the external centers over one's lifetime.

Internal unifying centers thus constitute a context or matrix, an internal holding environment, within which one derives a sense of individual selfhood, personal meaning, and life direction. The internal unifying centers are, like the external centers, "indirect but true links" or points of connection between "I" and Self:

Self

Internal
unifying
centers: Beliefs   Goals   Values   World-view

Continuity of being over individual life-span
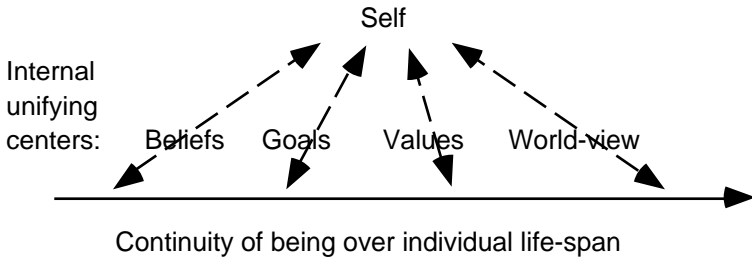
Note that Self is not to be equated with any particular internal (or external) unifying center. Self is distinct from them all, yet can express through them all. One can relate to Self via many different internal unifying centers: an image of one's loving grandparent, a spiritual teacher, or a mandala; a masculine or feminine God-image; a sense of responsibility, values, and conscience; or a philosophical stance towards the world. Self is not only distinct from the multiple internal unifying centers, but provides a continuity of being throughout all our inner experiences, from the peak of ecstasy to the abyss of despair. The I-Self relationship is "transcendent" of all particular inner contents, yet "immanent" within them all (cf. Firman, 1991).

But if the primary I-Self connection, facilitated by unifying centers, creates our experience of personal selfhood, what happens when the unifying centers fail? What happens if one's unifying centers are broken or violating? What happens when the unifying centers are damaged "links" to Self, preventing an intimate relationship with Self? Then the unifying center cannot fully mirror true I-amness, and instead of facilitating the experience of personal existence, creates the experience of personal nonexistence—not the experience of being, but of **nonbeing**.

THE WOUND OF NONBEING

As stated above, Winnicott's phrase, "When I look I am seen, so I exist," describes well the process in which mirroring facilitates the formation of authentic personality; here the empathic regard of the other allows a sense of personal being. Conversely, the phrase, "When I look I am *not* seen, so I do *not* exist," describes well how psychological wounding disrupts human development; here nonempathic regard creates the experience of personal nonbeing. Winnicott used the powerful term "annihilation" to refer to the experience of not being mirrored—one is torn from being and plunged towards nonbeing.

This non-mirroring is what self psychology calls "empathic failure" or "selfobject failure"—events, moments, interactions, etc., in which we were not treated as living conscious human beings, but as objects, as things. In Kohut's words, here we are faced with "the indifference of the nonhuman, the nonempathically responding world" (Kohut, 1984, p. 18).

In Martin Buber's (1958) terms, these failed relationships create not empathic "I-Thou" experiences, but cold, impersonal "I-It" experiences. In these moments the experience of personal being is broken, one's sense of self is wounded.

In psychosynthesis terms, such I-It experiences indicate a failure of the unifying center to facilitate an I-Self connection. Since personal being or "I" in effect flows from Self via the unifying centers, a broken unifying center will disrupt this "flow" and create the experience of not existing. Thus moments of non-mirroring or empathic failure face us with the unimaginable prospect of personal nonexistence, nothingness, nonbeing. Here

are some experiences which have been associated with nonbeing:

<div style="text-align:center">

Anxiety and disintegration
Feeling lost, trapped, or buried
A lack of meaning in self or world
Isolation, abandonment, banishment
Feeling overwhelmed, helpless, or hopeless
Emptiness or hollowness
Endless despair
Wanting to disappear or die
Shame and guilt
Overwhelming terror at the possible loss of other
A sense of inauthenticity or falseness
Low self esteem or worthlessness

</div>

Have you ever been ignored by someone you looked up to? Have you ever poured out your heart to someone and found that they have not been listening? Have your personal boundaries ever been disregarded or violated? There can be anger in these moments, true, but beneath this is a feeling of not being seen, recognized, and respected as a human being—the list above outlines where we may find ourselves at such times. All these experiences imply a profound threat to self, what may be called the threat of nonbeing.

Moments like these can be devastating for adults, so imagine how much more devastating they are for the child who experiences such empathic failures as a small, vulnerable self. Instances of major failures in mirroring for a child will inflict psychological wounding to the child's deepest sense of identity; they are disruptions in the continuity of being, moments of nonbeing.

The events which create these wounding experiences may be either direct and overt, or indirect and covert. The overt type includes obvious violence, sexual abuse, or physical abandonment, but the covert category is perhaps even more pervasive. The more covert types include such things as emotional battering, psychological incest, and identity enmeshment; bigotry (sexism, racism, etc.); compulsions and addictions which remain unrecognized and untreated in the caregivers; or denial in the family system of any important aspect of human life (e.g., sexuality, spirituality, death).

Even the apparently healthy family can covertly inflict debilitating wounds in the children via the unconscious wounding of the caregivers. The caregiver's wounds constitute blind spots in the mirroring function which cannot but create areas of nonbeing in the child—"When I look I am not seen, so I do not exist." Here the adult's psychological blindness to certain sectors of human experience leave vacancies in the child—holes of nonbeing, so to speak—in the unfolding personality. In this way wounds can be inflicted by the very process of bonding to the wounded personality of the caregiver.

So our lives are filled with moments when significant others have treated us not as human beings but as objects, as "It"s rather than "Thou"s. These wounds might be imagined as dark cuts in the developing authentic personality, inflicted at different ages within us. Again drawing upon the ring model of the personality, these wounds may be pictured like this:
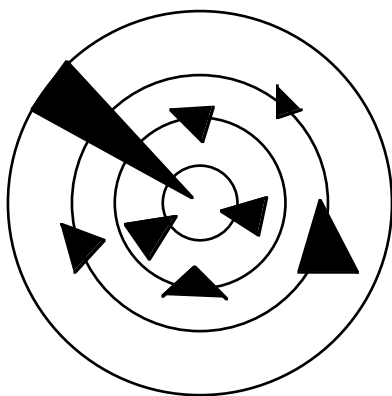
Here authentic personality, rather than expanding in an unbroken way through the stages of development, is seen riddled with nonbeing wounds suffered at different ages (represented by the dark triangles). These wounds are unbearable moments of isolation, fragmentation, and pain (see list) which are subsequently split off from awareness. Rather than experience that instance of nonbeing, we cut off that moment, that aspect of ourselves, and develop what Winnicott called a "false self." Instead of being who I am—which is unseen or violated by the environment—I will become what I must become in order to

survive. In psychosynthesis terms, this dynamic is seen as the transformation of authentic personality into **survival personality**.

Survival Personality

The hallmark of survival personality is survival in the face of nonbeing wounding. It represents the best one can do to find some sort of existence in spite of non-empathic or non-mirroring responses from the environment. The trouble is that as we become more and more identified with survival personality, we become less and less in touch with authentic personality. We quite literally forget who we truly are. Here is author Charles Whitfield, psychiatrist and theorist, describing this loss of authentic personality to survival personality ("co-dependent self," "false self"):

> When our alive True Self goes into hiding, in order to please its parent figures and to survive, a false, co-dependent self emerges to take its place. We thus lose our awareness of our True Self to such an extent that we actually lose awareness of its existence. We lose contact with who we really are. Gradually, we begin to think we *are* that false self—so that it becomes a habit, and finally an addiction. (Whitfield, 1991, p. 5)

It must be emphasized that since nonbeing wounding seems inevitable, survival personality (Whitfield's "false, co-dependent self") is the starting place for all of us to a greater or lesser extent. Survival personality is not merely a one-dimensional façade, an empty shell devoid of depth and richness. Indeed, this personality can often function well above the average level, commanding truly impressive talents and abilities. It has even been suggested that many, if not most, therapists may themselves be in the grips of survival personality or co-dependent self:

> I firmly believe, in fact—as many others have suggested (among them, Sharon Wegscheider-

Cruse, Jael Greenleaf, Charles Whitfield, to name a few)—that most mental health professionals are untreated co-dependents who are actively practicing their disease in their work in a way that helps neither them nor their clients. (Schaef, 1986, p. 4)

Whether we agree with the above statement or not, it does seem clear that a person can undergo a surprising amount of psychological and spiritual growth and yet remain well within the grips of survival personality. One can engage tremendous depths of past wounding, abreacting memories of childhood abuse (**lower unconscious**); or feel released from many different psychological patterns and subpersonalities (**middle unconscious**); or move into the heights of the sublime, enjoying the complete transcendence of ego in a union with the Divine (**higher unconscious**)—*and do all of this while leaving survival personality intact.* This is why, as Winnicott and others have seen, therapy can go on forever, never reaching the core personhood. This is why too, as spiritual and psychological communities have discovered, truly advanced leaders may yet be controlled by their psychological wounding.

Note that survival personality is not a subsystem within the personality, but represents a conditioning of the whole person. One cannot easily gain distance from, and reflect upon, (**disidentify** from) survival personality as one can from many other personality contents. Indeed, different subpersonalities and complexes are elements contained *within* the larger context of survival personality. One can therefore disidentify, become "centered," and mindfully observe the flow of inner processes, all while remaining well within the confines of this pervasive survival orientation.

One can live a great deal of one's life while identified with survival personality, especially if this mode is high-functioning and successful. However in many cases survival personality sooner or later does eventually begin to wear thin, to reveal the hidden chasm of nonbeing on which it is built. Just because nonbeing wounding is buried does not mean it is inactive. The pressure from such hidden wounds can and does eventually wreak havoc in our lives and in the world.

Addiction/Attachment

In order to maintain survival personality, we are increasingly driven to coping behaviors which serve to distract and defend us from the underlying nonbeing wounding. But because these behaviors merely hide rather than heal the wounding, the wounds and associated feelings remain. Thus the coping behaviors easily become out-of-control and destructive to self and others; there is literally no end to such driven motivation, because the root cause is never touched. In short, one here becomes attached or addicted. These attachments or addictions include such things as:

> Alcohol and drug abuse
> Compulsive exercise and dieting
> Attachment to power
> Envy, jealousy, and greed
> Preoccupation with fantasy, imagery, and mythology
> Sex, relationship, and romance addiction
> A driven search for spiritual experience or enlightenment
> Cold detachment or possessive clinging in relationships
> Defenses such as displacement, projection, denial, etc.
> Implosive withdrawal and passive aggression
> Obsession with, or avoidance of, stimulation
> The "people-who-love-too-much" syndromes
> Antisocial and isolating tendencies
> Codependency
> Compulsive overeating
> Bigotry, chauvinism, xenophobia
> Workaholism, Rageaholism
> Seeking revenge
> Needing always to be right
> Fanaticism
> Religious addiction

All of these focus on survival personality managing the surging threat of nonbeing wounding and its attendant feelings. Here one becomes trapped in addictions of behavior, thought, and identity in a vain effort to escape the hidden wounds from the past:

How would I feel if I did not seek comfort in
compulsive overeating?
I would feel lost, alone, abandoned (threat of
nonbeing).

How would I feel if I quit my all-consuming job?
I would feel empty, isolated, worthless (threat
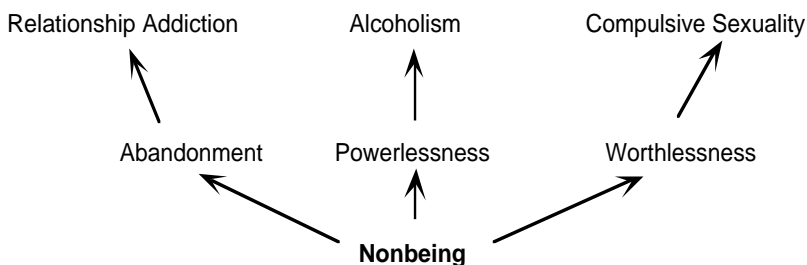of nonbeing).

Why don't I leave this abusive relationship?
Because I would feel lost, abandoned, helpless
(threat of nonbeing).

What would happen if I didn't keep my house
so perfectly clean?
I would feel like a bad person, ashamed, worth-
less (threat of nonbeing).

So the tremendous power of these attachments derives largely
from the fact that they offer ways of avoiding the hidden threat
of nonbeing caused by nonempathic responsiveness from oth-
ers. These are not simply habits and tastes casually gathered
over the course of living; they are desperate strategies by which
one attempts to avoid nonbeing. This partially explains the per-
plexing tenacity of addictions even in the face of pain, illness,
and physical death itself. Using random examples, we can dia-
gram the relationship between nonbeing, the feelings associ-
ated with nonbeing, and attachments/addictions:

Relationship Addiction   Alcoholism   Compulsive Sexuality

Abandonment   Powerlessness   Worthlessness

Nonbeing

The arrows illustrate a movement away from nonbeing into
the relative safety of survival personality supported by the dif-

ferent addictive processes. In this example, the feelings of abandonment, powerlessness, and worthlessness embody the threat of nonbeing, forming the foundation of the addiction.

In the psychosynthesis literature, therapist Victoria Tackett has pointed to this wounding beneath addictions, writing, "To anesthetize these interpersonal wounds, we are rapidly becoming a nation of addicts" (Tackett, 1988, p. 15). Within the Recovery Movement, this same connection between wounding and addiction has been indicated by Charles Whitfield (1991). According to Whitfield, early wounding causes feelings like abandonment, shame, and emptiness which finally are expressed in such things as chemical dependence, eating disorders, and relationship addictions.

By the way, we are not implying here that all addictions can be eliminated simply by uncovering the hidden nonbeing feelings. Recovery from a major addiction is a lifelong process involving fundamental changes in attitude, identity, and life style. However, an important aspect of successful recovery often does involve learning to feel and work with these primal feelings—the forte of inner child work.

Although survival personality may allow the management of nonbeing wounding for a time, its protection will eventually falter. Then one is thrown into a crisis which may feel like the "end of the world"—one is brought to her or his knees by a major addiction, by a brush with personal mortality, by a destructive relationship, or perhaps by the loss of a job or loved one. Here survival personality destabilizes and one begins to feel the wounds which were present all along. Here, "hitting bottom," one has a chance to reach to the depths and reclaim one's authentic self-expression forsaken so long ago—what may be called now, inner child.

CONTACTING INNER CHILD

Inner child is not simply one part of the personality to be integrated into the whole. Rather, inner child is the foundation of one's authentic, whole expression of I-amness in the world. "Inner child" infuses all the past hidden ages which have made up one's life journey, so that inner-child work is in fact an ex-

ample of Assagioli's "psychosynthesis of the ages," a reaching to
the lost wholeness of one's being.

But since the true expression of ourselves has been broken
and wounded, as we reach to inner child we will find that our
authentic life story now includes the wounds from many ages of
life. It is of course true that in reaching to inner child we will
regain many lost gifts—new sources of spontaneity, wonder, and
creativity, for example—but we must also engage the anxiety,
isolation, and abandonment we suffered at various times in our
lives. That is all a part of our story, our path in life, our whole-
ness. We must find a willingness to enter into the world we
have left behind, the world in which inner child dwells even
now.

In other words, contacting inner child is a matter of mirror-
ing, of empathic attunement. *It was a disruption in mirroring
which caused the splitting off of inner child, and it is only mir-
roring which can heal the break with inner child.* This is the
most important point of this entire monograph and the central
organizing principle of inner child work. Both wounding and
healing are a matter of empathic connection; both wounding
and healing are a matter of relationship.

Simple but not Easy

This approach to healing may seem obvious, simple, and
humane, but it is precisely what all our survival tactics have
been designed to avoid. The whole *raison d'être* of survival per-
sonality is to function without feeling the nonbeing wound-
ing, and an empathic connection to inner child goes directly
against this prime motivation. So while this approach seems
simple and humane, it is in fact quite equivalent to facing one's
worse terrors. Let us see how far survival personality can go
while still preventing the surfacing of inner child.

If my life is being disrupted by emerging feelings from the
nonbeing wounding of inner child—anxiety, hopelessness, or
depression, for example—my survival personality will want to
get rid of these feelings so that my life can continue in the way
I see fit. The first thing I may do is blame the environment: "My
problem is really my parents, my job, my spouse, or my friends."

But perhaps after changing jobs, spouses, and friends several times, it may just dawn on me that the issue is not so much them as it is myself. (If such changes *do* in fact resolve the feelings, that is another issue of course.)

After this first line of defense fails, I might be moved to another course of action: "I must find the right medication, psychological technique, therapy, or spiritual practice which will get rid of these feelings and let me live my life in peace."

Here I may begin an exploration of various approaches to therapy, personal growth, or spirituality, in a search to resolve the emerging nonbeing feelings. An important part of this search may be my addressing addictions/attachments which are becoming increasingly destructive as the feelings emerge. All of these methods I discover may in fact help, providing self-knowledge, cathartic release of traumatic memories, recovery from addiction, some relief from medication, and even spiritual or "unitive" experiences. But throughout all of this, my survival personality may remain in command, and inner child may yet remain hidden. Why?

The reason is that if I am approaching the wounded inner child with the idea that I am going to fix, get rid of, or even heal him/her, I am setting up the same type of relationship which caused the wounding in the first place—a relationship in which the child is not treated as a "Thou," but as an object, as an "It." Inner child here becomes simply an obstacle blocking *my* way to the life *I* (survival personality) want to lead. There is still little vulnerability on my part, little patient listening to this inner voice, little willingness to change my life in order to touch and be touched by my authentic being. And without a non-judgmental, empathic, mirroring atmosphere, inner child simply will not emerge.

So the phrase, "healing the inner child," is misleading, while "healing my *relationship* with the inner child" is more accurate. I must be willing to let go of survival personality, face my worse fears, and gradually allow my inner child to live with me. It is not a matter of fixing a problem or curing a disease; nor a matter of having powerful cathartic experiences or attaining higher states of consciousness; it is a matter of actively making a place in my life for my child. Again: *empathic failure wounds us, and it is only empathic connection which can ultimately heal us.*

Let us now look at the three mutually-overlapping stages of this type of work with inner child. The first two stages—**recognition** and **acceptance**—are similar to the first two stages of subpersonality harmonization as outlined by James Vargiu (1974), while the third stage, **inclusion**, recognizes the ongoing relatedness one develops with the inner child.

RECOGNITION

Very seldom, it seems, does someone turn to inner child work except out of some dire situation in their lives. Survival personality is tremendously resilient, and can operate throughout a range extending from classical psychopathology, through high-functioning "self-actualization," to genuine spiritual or transpersonal states of consciousness. Most often one's foundations must be shaken, one must be crushed down by life, one must be plunged into the realization of personal vulnerability.

Early in the history of Alcoholics Anonymous, so the story goes, the alcoholics recovering in the fellowship would not accept a person as a "true alcoholic" unless that individual had lost everything: house, car, spouse, family, career. Not having lost all these things, one would not have "hit bottom" and so could not have found the willingness to completely surrender to something greater than ego—the first step in recovery (or on any spiritual path). Later in the history of A.A., they recognized "high bottoms" who had not lost everything, but who had met with such suffering that there was a sincere willingness to change.

Much the same can be said about inner child work. It seems unlikely that anyone who has not hit bottom—a "low bottom" or a "high bottom"—will be motivated to look at the dark forces which drive their lives. This is, after all, the gift and curse of survival personality: to carry on, to survive, to remain in control by ignoring or smoothing over personal vulnerability, wounding, and pain. We do this not only by addictions such as alcohol and drugs, but by a dizzying variety of other means as well (see the list above).

However, as survival personality begins to falter and fragment in the face of life's buffeting, one may become willing to

look. This willingness is the beginning of the recognition stage of inner child work. For some, this willingness is found only after a long hard battle with addictions and compulsions; for others, only after an extensive journey through many psychological and spiritual disciplines; for some, this willingness never seems to emerge at all.

Willingness is All

When there is willingness to see the truth of one's deepest inner experience, a myriad of different avenues to inner child may magically appear. One may gain insight from books and tapes; inner child workshops, self-help groups, or therapy; an increased awareness of one's vulnerability and hurt in relationships; spontaneously-emerging memories of childhood; being touched by a film or play dealing with one's lifelong issues; finding oneself deeply shaken by a natural disaster; or by revelations about childhood experience arising in conversations with parents, siblings, or relatives.

However, the inner child appears perhaps most directly in empathic, intimate relationships. Remember that the child has been wounded by faulty empathic connections with others. So where would one expect these wounds to surface? Precisely—in intimate, empathic connections with others.

An empathic relationship tends to surface all the many inner levels or inner "rings" of the personality; such a whole relationship is not limited to the adult levels, but invites all the many psychological ages into play. While this intimacy will entail the emergence of childlike wonder, spontaneity, and joy, it will also energize old wounds. In short, intimate empathic relationships will invariably surface earlier relational wounding.

It is common, for example, that two apparently well-adjusted people will get married and in a short time find themselves immersed in violent and painful feelings towards each other. Suddenly "small things" which never mattered before become hurtful and intolerable; the tones of voice, mannerisms, and habits of one person begin to disgust and anger the other; and they find themselves acting in strange and unusual ways, fighting over things which on the face of it are absurd.

But these are not "small things." They are only small be-
cause we do not recognize the deeper waters in which we are
now swimming. We are used to the adult surface of ourselves,
not to the child's world hidden in the depths. But within the
empathic resonance of intimate relationships, the hidden vul-
nerabilities and wounds of inner child surfaces (along with the
gifts and abilities). Within such intimate closeness, the com-
ment which at one time was a "harmless joke" is now a knife in
the heart of a child; the thoughtless criticism is no longer insig-
nificant but is felt as an assault on one's deepest self.

While all of this may be alarming and disconcerting, it is to
be expected—one cannot be truly intimate with another with-
out these hidden inner vulnerabilities emerging. (The root of
the word "intimacy" itself means "within.") The intimacy of
empathic relationship calls forth each person's wholeness—all
the "rings" of the personality are invited into the relationship.
Indeed, this is a fundamental dynamic in psychotherapy; therapy
establishes an empathic resonance within which relational
wounds may surface and be addressed ("transference" and "coun-
tertransference"). This often-painful emergence cannot be
avoided in true intimacy. It is only by forging a bond between
survival personalities—via mutual addictions, compulsive pat-
terns, and shared illusions—that a close relationship can avoid
the chaos and confusion triggered by empathic resonance.

From this point of view, the main task for an intimate couple
is to accept their wounds and create a safe, secure environment
for their inner children. Here one accepts that playful joking
may cause great pain to the child; or that silence between part-
ners may throw the other into a profound sense of abandon-
ment; or that normal sex may be felt as harsh and abusive due
to childhood wounding. Such common activities may need to be
modified or even forsaken for a time in order for authenticity to
grow in the relationship. The couple's challenge is to welcome
these wounded children; to create a safe atmosphere for them
to feel their feelings; to hear them and respect them; and through
this mirroring, allow them to find a home within the new rela-
tionship.

But that takes us beyond the acceptance stage into the next
stages of work with inner child. After hitting bottom and recog-
nizing the inner child, one can move into the second stage, the
stage of acceptance.

Acceptance

Acceptance speaks more directly to the need for the inner child to be heard and understood, to be mirrored. This often entails working with the parts of oneself (subpersonalities) which tend to criticize, discount, and belittle the child. For example, if I mutter angrily to myself, "You idiot," when I make a mistake, the inner child will feel this and withdraw. Or if I deny or make fun of my child's feelings of hurt, sadness, or joy, the child will not feel accepted and will remain hidden. Or if I find myself fed up with my vulnerability, and demand that I "stop whining and grow up," again the child will not reveal him/herself. This type of self-empathic failure might be diagrammed:
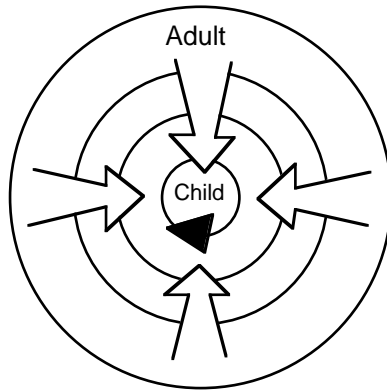
Adult

Child

Here the adult level—dominated by the survival orientation— is sending messages (arrows) designed to suppress the child. Whether through negative criticism, beliefs, or attitudes, the child is kept down, and more to the point, so too is the nonbeing wounding (dark triangle). As long as the inner atmosphere is polluted by these negative factors, the child and the nonbeing wounds will remain hidden. Here survival personality will remain in power, and one will continue to be susceptible to addictions, compulsions, and destructive interpersonal relationships.

In short, until I can honestly be with the child with no pressure to change, no shaming, and no hurtful criticism, there is no way I will ever connect to the freedom and spontaneity of

authentic personality—nor to the unfoldment offered by deeper Self (see Introduction).

Entering the Child's World

Perhaps the biggest challenge at the acceptance stage is to be with the actual direct experience of the child level within us. Ironically, this experience often eludes us not because it is far away from us, *but because it is so very close to us:*

> A man and woman were reading side-by-side in bed one evening, when the man reached over and began caressing the woman softly on the arm. Slightly irritated, she said, "Stop that," pushed his hand away, and continued reading. Inwardly the man felt hurt and angry, but said nothing. They continued reading as before, and an outside observer would have noted nothing remarkable in this small interaction.
>
> Nor did the woman notice anything until later, when she found him withdrawn and un-communicative. She asked him if anything was wrong, and he sullenly said, "No," and rolled over to go to sleep. The woman felt guilty, but had no clue as to what she might have done. They both lay there in silence, she feeling guilty, confused, and abandoned, he feeling hurt, angry, and vindictive.
>
> She finally broke the silence and vehemently demanded to know what was happening, and he angrily countered, "Nothing! Can't you just leave me alone and go to sleep?!" This then escalated into a long fight about everything in the world except the small, subtle, and now forgotten interchange which began the whole incident.

This is a good example of childhood wounds beginning to emerge within the empathic resonance of an intimate relation-

ship. Here the comment by the woman—"Stop that"—inadvertently touched upon a hidden vulnerability of the man's child. Unbeknownst to the man, there was an important aspect of his relationship to his mother in which he was rejected by her, and the child still was carrying this wound. Thus, the woman's action did not feel like a mild rebuff, but a devastating disparagement of himself as a person. He felt that his reaching out in love and openness had been met with cold, violent rejection. He felt unseen, shamed, and discounted—the nonbeing wounding he unknowingly had received from his mother.

Furthermore, his innocent caressing of the woman had pressed upon the vulnerability of the woman's own inner child. Her feelings flowed from wounds in her relationship to her father who in her childhood had been inappropriate with her sexually. Her rejection of the man's caresses was an unconscious reaction to her father's mistreatment of her, and the irritation in her voice was the visible tip of her rage towards him. So she too was reacting from her early wounding, and the stage was set for explosive conflict which had little to do with the observable triggering event. Each was in effect stepping on the hidden vulnerabilities of the other's inner child, and each was struggling in the dark to protect themselves from being re-traumatized.

But in these types of situations it is often difficult to accept the feelings of the child because these feelings can be extremely painful and overwhelming. These are not the feelings of two adults having a mild disagreement at bedtime; these are the feelings of two children living in a world of violation, abandonment, and despair. To directly engage this existential level of experience, much less accept it, is to leave the safe well-lit surface of the adult world and step into a dark, strange, and scary world.

Furthermore, acceptance of the child's world can also mean a threat to one's adult identity and perhaps to the adult relationship itself. For these two people to admit the magnitude of their feelings means they may appear "overly sensitive" and even "childish"—not at all conforming to their image of themselves as mature adults, nor to the image each wishes to maintain in the eyes of the other. Owning the experiential world of the child here risks appearing weak, vulnerable, and depen-

dent, and so belies the notion that one is an adult, in-control and grown-up. And then arises the question: "Will my partner accept these feelings in me, or will this be the end of the relationship?"

As the child's world surfaces, we are challenged to move from a survival level to the level of authenticity, from the shallows to the depths of human being. No wonder we are "afraid of intimacy." Many choose conflict, violence, obsessive sexuality, and even termination of meaningful relationships rather than face this intimacy with self and other.

The Survival Contract

So acceptance of the child's world is no small matter. But there can be still another challenge in the acceptance stage, a challenge brought by the question: "How did my inner child come to have wounds such as abandonment, rejection, and loss in the first place?" This may threaten long-held images of our childhood, ourselves, and our families.

For example, if the man above enters therapy and begins exploring the raw experience of rejection, he might be shocked to realize just how rejecting his mother was of him as a small child (especially since she was outwardly loving and supportive). As he explores this rejection further, he may feel like he is betraying his mother, that he is going against a sacred taboo. This sense of betrayal or disloyalty, a common feeling in this process, arises because he is breaking the contract which founded his survival personality, a contract to see himself and his mother in a certain way in order to be accepted by her. To break this implicit contract, to speak about the dark side of the relationship, is for the child to face being ostracized by this important early caregiver—it is once more to be threatened with nonbeing.

Survival personality is based upon psychological contracts which require one to be a certain way in order to be accepted by the early caregivers. These contracts offer a security and belongingness, a sense of identity, a knowing who I am—and so an avoidance of nonbeing. But the price one pays for this secure identity is the disruption of authentic personality, a disowning

of the experience of the inner child. And if I begin now to listen to the child's actual experience, I may begin to uncover a whole experiential world which reveals my early life as far more destructive than I or anyone else had ever realized. This revelation will challenge my secure identity, bringing up again the ancient threat of nonbeing.

"But my family was fine. Sure, we weren't perfect, but all in all, I had a wonderful childhood." This may be absolutely true for aspects of one's childhood. This does not rule out, however, deep sectors of abandonment, depression, and pain; there seems to be no caregiver or other unifying center which can be empathically connected to the experience of the child in a complete and continuous way.

However, let us be absolutely clear here that accepting the full phenomenological world of the child *does not mean blaming one's caregivers for everything wrong in one's life.* True, this self-empathy may mean accepting deep rage vis-à-vis one's caregivers, or clearly seeing their dark side, but blaming has nothing to do with this. What matters here is honestly understanding and feeling one's wounds. Why? Besides the fact that hidden wounding produces destructive inauthentic lives, the reason is simply because this is our story. This is the path of our authentic personality in life. Here are our roots, an important aspect of our truth. Without the knowledge of our child's experience, we simply cannot know ourselves at depth, and will forever be living in some amount of illusion about who we are.

By the way, an awareness of the wounds of the child is not necessarily a matter of remembering the exact events which caused the wounding. Keep in mind the concentric-ring model of the personality—we do not have to go anywhere but into the depths of our here-and-now experience to recognize and accept the child. How do you feel when a police officer stops you? Your boss shouts at you? Your parents criticize you? Your loved one slights you? All these feelings of vulnerability press upon the child's wounds. One does not need to rack one's memory to discover the child. While the recovery of long-forgotten memories may occur as one relates honestly and respectfully to the child, this is not always necessary for healing one's relationship with the child. Again, the child is hidden not so much "in the past" as in the here and now, so near to us that we often do not notice.

In Therapy

In therapy, for clients to break the survival contract and accept the experience of the child usually depends upon therapists who have done these things in their own lives. Therapists who have wrestled with their own survival personality and faced their own wounding seem best equipped to mirror the wounding of another.

Therapists who are unaware of their own inner child, and controlled by their own survival personality and idealization of their caregivers, will find it difficult to connect empathically to the child of the client. In such cases, therapists may in all good faith attempt to help by moving the client *away from* the experience of the child. The client may for example be led to sympathize with problematic early caregivers at the expense of the child's experience, or subtly be pressured to forgive people who have wounded the child, or undergo techniques designed to fix the pain before truly understanding its depth and meaning (cf. Alice Miller, 1984).

Such approaches will however only smooth over the wounding. They prevent an empathic connection with the child, may cause re-traumatization, and will further entrench survival personality. So for therapist and client alike, acceptance of the child often poses the challenge of personal transformation.

In the acceptance stage then, the task is to open oneself to the phenomenological world of the child without allowing survival personality to cover this up. But let us acknowledge that accepting the child's true experience can be tremendously anxiety-provoking, and needs to proceed at its own natural pace. As we have seen, the entire process is hemmed in by the threat of nonbeing, and only gentleness, respect, and safety can support this uncovering and acceptance. *This is not something one can force.* Throughout this work, one is simply attempting to become more and more empathically attuned to the world of the child within, and one simply cannot establish an empathic relationship through pressure, clever techniques, or force.

Having hit bottom, recognized the child, and attained some amount of acceptance for the child, it becomes possible to include the child more fully in daily living. Accordingly, the last stage of relationship with inner child can be called "inclusion."

Inclusion

The last stage is the stage of inclusion, which can also be called the stage of "living with." The metaphor here is that you have found an abandoned child, adopted him or her, and have brought the child home to live with you. Perhaps this is more than a metaphor. Take a moment and imagine this. If you brought a child home, a child who would be with you every second of your day, what in your life would need to change?

Inclusion is an ongoing, daily process whereby one adopts the inner child and begins to live one's life in intimate relationship with him or her. Inclusion does not mean the child is "integrated" in the sense that the child becomes submerged within the larger personality; nor does it mean changing the child to suit the needs of survival personality; rather, it means making whatever life style, attitudinal, or career changes are needed to accommodate the child in one's life. Only by creating such a space in one's life will the child find a new unifying center, a new empathic holding environment, by which to heal and grow.

Evaluating Relationships

In bringing this child into one's life, it will often be necessary to evaluate how current personal and professional relationships affect the child. Do you have friends who criticize and belittle you "all in good fun"? Does your partner give you the message, in word or deed, that your vulnerability and sensitivity are not okay? Do your supervisors or co-workers set a nonempathic, even abusive, tone in the workplace? Such questions can point to ways in which your life needs to change in order for it to become safe for your new charge, the child.

An example of this type of change is the woman who, having had some amount of recovery and healing, began to realize how destructive her workplace was for her. Initially, identified with survival personality, she simply would not see the harassment, extraordinary pressure, and unfair workloads; to do so meant feeling the pain of it all and perhaps having to do something about the situation. So for awhile she had only brief moments in which she was aware of being used unfairly, and quickly reasserted the "Everything is okay" of the survival stance—her

survival-contract role in her family of origin.

As her awareness grew and she saw the situation more clearly, she attempted to remain connected to her inner child, giving the child what she needed off-hours so they could make it through another tortuous workday. However, the situation finally was revealed as intolerably unjust, and she began to challenge her employer's behavior and policies. Although she did make some changes in the situation, she ultimately chose to quit her job and found employment in a much healthier environment.

It is of course not always possible to alter one's situation as this woman was able to do. But even so, what would you do if you had a child with you in difficult relationships? You *do* have a child with you in those relationships! Are there ways you can find for the child—and thus the expression of authentic personality—to at least remain unharmed in your life?

And many relationships, of course, will easily change in order that the child may be included. Simple, direct statements and requests about one's needs will be honored by those who respect you, and your child will find safety within these relationships.

Note again that the emphasis here is not upon "shaping up" or "fixing" the child so the child will fit neatly into one's current relationships. The emphasis is upon changing one's relationships so that the child is welcomed, made safe, and thereby allowed to emerge, heal, and grow.

Taking Time

Having a new child means making parenting a priority. Spending time with the child is crucial if one expects to get to know this new addition to your life. Relationships only blossom with attention and care, so you both need time to sit down and communicate with each other.

Through a variety of different methods, you and your child can learn to communicate, and gradually you can gain an understanding of his or her needs. Does the child need time alone? More peace and safety during the day? Time to play? A teddy bear? The child's needs are usually quite easily satisfied within the course of normal living. Indeed, meeting the needs is not

nearly as hard as remembering to create the time and space to meet the needs.

For example, a man in psychotherapy made an agreement with his inner child to spend an hour hiking in the hills during the next week. At the next session, the client reported that the child had not been around all week, and that compulsive self-destructive behaviors were beginning to reassert themselves. As he explored this, it turned out that he had forgotten to spend that hour hiking. He had gotten caught up in a busy work week, the agreement had been forgotten, and so the child had withdrawn. Here was a small re-traumatization of the child, a self-neglect which echoed his own father's treatment of him in childhood; his father's workaholic survival personality, and now his own, prevented an empathic relationship with the child.

So the inclusion stage is an ongoing process. It is not one moment of insight, one breakthrough experience, or one important abreacted memory (although these may be valuable aspects of the process). Inclusion means *relationship*. It is a living with this newly-discovered, orphan child, and doing concrete things in one's life so that the child—with no pressure to change—is allowed to live securely with you in your life.

Note that this inclusion of the child entails your adopting a "good-enough" parenting stance. While the core of this stance is an empathic connection with the child, this does not mean the child is to control your life. As any parent, you have the responsibility not only to nurture and support, but to guide and direct. An empathic relationship here simply means that no matter how you choose to live your life, that you respect, hear, and include the child.

Healing Relationships

Throughout this ongoing inclusion, one will of course make mistakes, committing empathic failures under the sway of survival personality. An important point here is that these failures need to be mended. For example, the man who forgot to hike with the child needed to apologize to the child and do something else for the child in order to make up for the broken agreement. Empathic failures such as inner self-criticism, indulgence in petty rages, forgetting the child in excessive T.V. viewing or

newspaper reading, or exposing the child to abusive situations, all need to be owned and healed. As with any relationship, making amends forms a resilient foundation of respect, safety, and trust which allows one to navigate the mistakes which will surely occur over time.

Taking responsibility for survival personality can also include making amends for *interpersonal* pain which one inflicts. This can mean apologizing for moments in which one's criticism, revenge, or dark humor hurts other people. And as many have learned in Twelve-Step programs, this making of amends for the transgressions of survival personality can be taken into the past as well, with great healing effects. Members of these programs make a list of all they have harmed, become willing to make amends to them all, and make those amends except when to do so would cause further harm (Anonymous, 1985).

Such work is not about the past as much as it is about transforming the present. It helps establish an empathic holding environment around us, and allows us to become safe for other people's inner children as well. In this way, empathy and intimacy may begin to infuse many of our relationships, creating a unifying center by which the child may again live and breathe. Here the re-traumatization of the child is stopped, creating space for the unfoldment of authentic personality.

Furthermore, this empathic holding environment is not only for the child. As a parent to an inner child, you will need support as well; any parenting is a difficult, if rewarding, task. Indeed, your ability to "hold" your child depends on your being "held" by your own unifying center(s). Here is where one's spirituality, self-help group, therapist, friends, and family become crucial aspects of right relationship with the child.

It thus seems clear that working with authentic personality is not only an *intrapersonal* process, but a profoundly *interpersonal* one. We were wounded in interpersonal relationships, and we need to be healed in them as well. You and your child need the support of empathic others as you begin to heal your relationship. Whether friends, family, self-help groups, or therapy, there needs to be a healthy holding environment for healing to take place. Such new unifying centers facilitate the inclusion of the child in one's life, and eventually lead towards the formation of internal unifying centers which support the continuous and stable unfolding of authentic personality.

Social Justice

With the blossoming of authentic personality via the healing of inner and outer relationships, there is an increased empathic connection with oneself, other people, and the world at large. This can in turn lead to social action as one engages a world which is very often profoundly nonempathic to human vulnerability. Here we can see the deep and unbreakable connection between transformation of self and transformation of world—two levels of transformation which are often mistakenly seen as mutually-exclusive.

For example, in the above case in which the woman quit her job, we can note a natural progression from personal healing to social healing. She was led to act in ways which did not support the status quo, and which pushed for social transformation. She can be considered an active agent of social change, struggling with oppression in her own way.

Social action can also be more dramatic, as when people recognize and report sexual harassment around them; pursue legal action towards perpetrators of abuse; or work politically to pass legislation which protects the vulnerable among us—the young, the poor, the disabled, and the elderly, for example. Indeed, the very substance of inner child work seems to be the addressing of abuse and oppression perpetrated by social structures, beginning with the family. This empathic process of opening to inner child very often moves from healing the individual and family towards healing the wider society and the planet itself.

Such concern for the world can of course take the form of economic, religious, artistic, and political agendas beyond the single issue of children. The point is that a great deal of human suffering is not here blamed on the Divine, nature, or "the way things are," but largely upon human empathic failures and/or the structures which embody a lack of human empathy. And this is a focus about which we can do something. Here one can look deeply into the roots of the broken human condition, and begin to discern strategies for healing it.

So from opening to inner child and reestablishing authentic personality flows a larger concern for others and the world. If however, we refuse to recognize our wounds and our path of

healing, we will find it difficult to render true service to a wounded world. It appears that empathy for the other can only be founded on clear self-knowledge—on empathy for oneself. In this regard we can quote that well-known advocate for the inner child and true self, Alice Miller:

> As I have repeatedly stressed, the ability to perceive and understand someone else's suffering depends more than anything else on the degree to which one has experienced the suffering of one's own childhood. (Miller, 1984b, p. 211)

THE PATH OF AUTHENTICITY

As one's inner and outer relationships heal, authentic personality begins to unfold. As the blocks to these relationships are unearthed and addressed; as there is more empathic communion among all concerned; as there is an ongoing commitment to keeping these relationships alive in one's life; one begins to shift away from survival personality and towards authentic personality—into the expression of one's true nature, one's essential I-amness among other people and the world.

From the point of view of the individual, empathy is thus the force which "integrates" or "synthesizes" the personality; through self-empathy we can hold all the different parts of us, allowing a sense of inner multiplicity and unity at the same time. At a social level, empathic connection functions much the same way; this is the source of a solidarity with others and world which can honor both unity and differences.

It might even be said that living these inner and outer relationships amounts to one's life path, journey, or dharma—one's Self-realization. This journey begins as we grapple with the "egoism" of survival personality and see through the illusions by which we have been living. The journey proceeds into a letting go of addictions and attachments ("aversions and cravings") which were generated by the survival motivation, and towards an acceptance of the profound depths of human vulnerability hidden beneath them. From there, we move into a new rela-

tionship to ourselves, others, and the world which is grounded in a sense of the interconnection of all things. *In other words, the journey of inner child seems to be much the same as the spiritual journey outlined by religious traditions of all times and places.* In psychosynthesis terms, this is a healing of the primal break between "I" and Self, a communion of personal being with Universal Being.

Thus, grappling with one's compulsive behaviors and enthrallments, and then searching the depths for the child, can lead to wondrous and creative lives. It is not uncommon to hear someone say, "I am a grateful alcoholic," or, "I am glad to be an adult child of a dysfunctional family," or, "I thank the struggles I have had in my life." Such sentiments do not indicate an identity as a victim, a "poor-me" or blaming stance in life; nor do they entail a condoning of the brokenness of the world; rather, there is here an acknowledgment that suffering can be redeemed. Such statements say: "This is the road I have traveled to become who I am today, and I am grateful for the goodness I have found on the journey."

And this journey from survival to authenticity is not one we finally complete, finding ourselves eventually in a state of blissful perfection. Authenticity is not an enlightened state to be grasped, but a direction in which to face. We will always experience some mixture of survival and authentic personality in our lives; we shall always be human beings in an imperfect world. The point is that we can be human beings in recovery. We can be people who admit our brokenness, face in the direction of authenticity, and walk with others who are traveling this same path. It may even be that the distance we walk is unimportant, and that the real gifts are the fellow travelers we meet along the way.

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