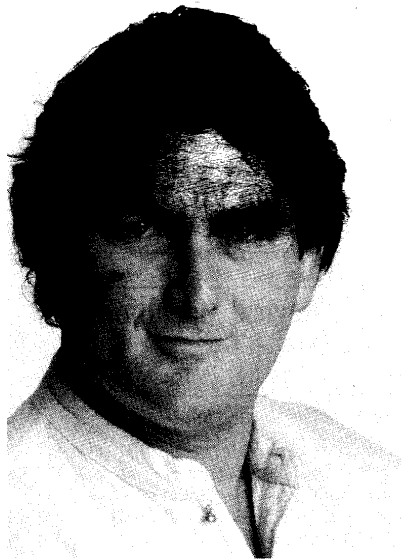


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Caring for the Child Within

The Possibility, the Theory and the Practice of Self-Parenting Skills

by Yehuda Tagar



Yehuda Tagar

**Counsellor, Expression
Therapist, Philophonetics-
Counselling Practitioner
and Trainer, and Director of
the Persophone College of
Philophonetics**

'If you will not become like children you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.'

Jesus Christ

Could it be that being a child is not just a phase of one's biography, but a layer of being, constantly there for the whole of one's life?

Could it be that being a parent is not only a position which an adult takes with regard to a child or an adolescent, but also with regard to oneself, to the child within?

If the above questions could be answered in the affirmative, then a third statement can naturally follow: one can parent oneself in the same way as one can parent others, and the responsibility for the healing of one's childhood experiences in adulthood, can be passed from the outer experts to the internal ones. People can grow to become their own parents, to pick it up from where their parents had left it, and to complete their inner stages of development.

Based on my experience of the past ten years as a counsellor, I strongly believe this to be true. We can parent ourselves, and our independence, well being, relationships and future development depend, in my view, on our ability to pick up the responsibility for self-parenting, and thus complete the process of our maturation into adulthood. I must also add the observation that most of us do not complete this phase until very late in life, with an enormous cost for the delay.

While I was preparing myself over many years of study, research and experimentation to become an adult educator, teacher and counsellor, I thought with naivety that, once prepared, I would be spending my working time mostly with adults. After an initial orientation period in my early days in counselling, it came home to me by degrees that this is not the case. I found myself spending most of my time in the presence of children and adolescents of all ages and positions in life, emerging periodically from the content of my clients, as the inner stories were told.

With depth psychology, starting in this century, we got used to the notion of 'going back' to early

memories. This is not exactly what I mean here. The 'inner children' are not back there in the memory, they are here, operating in the present. They never moved into the past. They are always here. Have you noticed them?

Have you noticed how periodically your own responses to people surprises you? How for no rational reason insecurity grips your heart for the most trivial reason; how anger knots your stomach in the most surprising way; and how you find yourself turning a stranger into a father figure in no time at all? How the presence of a passing woman resounds in the depth of your soul, triggering un-called-for responses? Have you ever watched yourself and your mature beloved partner turning without any warning into a couple of quarrelling children, speaking and acting in a way which to think of later is most embarrassing, with a disproportionately high cost for the 'folly'? Have you managed to recall how you repeat your parents in behaviour that makes you ashamed? Have you found yourself periodically becoming vague, closed off, paralysed, self-compromised, aggressive, numb, manipulative or needy, completely without an outer justification and completely in accordance to the way you used to cope with adversity in childhood? Most poignant of all, have you noticed how the presence of your own children stirs up within you unconscious memories; causes you to behave in ways which are regrettable, and for reasons which really lie in another age, mostly the same age as they are?

In short, have you noticed your inner children at their involuntary play, playing havoc in your inner and outer life? If you did, welcome to the club of the adults who have acknowledged the existence of their inner children.

Let me tell you the good news: they will never go away. They will always be

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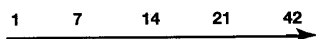
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there within you, seeking expression. Time will not change them; experience by itself will not change them; changing relationship will not change them. They are there to stay and to control your life until you will find a way to address them directly. They are always very prepared to be partnered again, in a better way; to be healed, to be released, to be reunited to the greater whole of you.

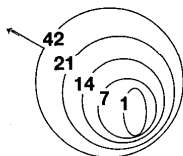
For inner children are not 'problems'. No child is. They are yourself on a deeper, much more real level of being, hardly accessible for daily life, but needed, so much needed for the very life and sustainability of daily life. The child is not just the infant, the un-experienced being. The child is the promise, the inner growing point, the ever-renewing bud of future worlds, the hope, the source of innocence, the inner connection to nature, to the inner dimension of the universe. The inner child is the key for the kingdom of intimacy of all ages. Block it – and you will be blocked and cut off for ever. Open up the doors of its prison – and the whole of you will be liberated. The child is the inner mentor of love.

How does it work, this 'inner kindergarten'? How does it come into being, and how does it operate in the adult?

In order to understand the way in which inner layers of our biography are still operating within us, one needs to review the way we understand biography altogether. The conventional approach to biography is a linear one, assuming that every new phase of development supersedes the previous one and replaces it with the new. This approach could be called The Linear Time approach to biography:



Taking a more realistic approach to biography I suggest that we evolve more like the rings within the trunk of a tree; rings within rings, with all previous phases continually living within the new ones which surround them. This could be called The Simultaneous Time approach to biography:



Every adult carries within oneself the

traces and the echoes of previous ages at any given point in time. These dictate one's behaviour, re-actions, responses, access and blocks regarding one's inner resources and energies, one's relationships, wellbeing, and creativity, giving one a sense of direction and of meaning. The 'Inner-Children' within one's psyche are very often surrounded by defences which were instinctively erected in the face of early threats. These defences are still there, covering an inner part of ourselves, within which an untapped potential for growth is hidden.

All these inner layers are being intensely activated through interactions with other people, especially with intimate partners, and with our own children. Most of the difficulties people experience in personal relationships, parenting and teaching children are echoes of these inner dimensions of oneself.

We operate like a delicate, extremely complex system of resonances and echoes. Nothing in my life passes without leaving a trace in my inner resonance. It makes human life difficult to grasp and so very rich, full of inner hindrances which, with a tilt of attitude, can become potent raw material for creative transformation. For one of my numerous presentations for parents and teachers regarding the inner dimension of parenting, I wrote the following poem:

*Echoes
With every string that is plucked
All its like-strings are vibrating;
With every bell which tolls
All the like-bells do ring.
And all the grieves of my life
With each departure are tolling,
And all the hurts in my heart
With each new hurt resound.
And every welcoming hand
With my mother's love humming;
In every word of approval
Echoes my father's voice.*

A woman is constantly being frightened into paralysis when confronted with a group of men staring at her. This costed her dearly in her adult life. It is unwarranted and disturbing, persistent and out of control. A close look at this inner dynamic reveals that the above situation had become a trigger for the automatic activation of an early defence mechanism which was installed in place when she was sexually assaulted at the age of seven. By entering this inner dimension we joined the lit-

tle girl in her inner hiding place. We found her in a hidden corner of her house, isolated but safe, away from her body which was not in her control. So she survived, she automatically continues to survive, until, now as an adult, she makes a direct connection to the girl, in her own mode of communication, always locatable in some part of the body. The adult gives a protecting hand to the child, and they live together ever after.

The old defence mechanism became obsolete when better ones were put in place. The automatic reaction to men staring at her had disappeared. The world of adults and the world of the child have become reconciled through the only agent who would qualify for the reconciliation – oneself as both the adult and the child at the same time.

A man despairing to make a real connection to his nine-year-old son feels blocked and cut off from him, unavailable as the loving, close father he wishes to be to him. It breaks his heart; it is not in his control. A non-verbal conversation evolves between the mature man and his inner-child, the one who at nine years of age was completely cut off from his father who was not there in his life, and with the pain, hurt, anger and resentment still alive as they were then. The man finds a way to take care of, to father his inner-child. Soon after, his relationship to his son picks up, and they can start to relate to each other, closing the gap with love and warmth. The bridge is created inside first, then the bridging to the outside is made possible.

A woman is despairing over the loss of friendship with her 17-year-old daughter. They were very close before this age, and suddenly, without any explanation, they cannot relate, and she finds herself behaving in an angry and controlling way towards her daughter, in spite of her beliefs and standards. Her daughter rejects her and cuts off from her. She lists the range of behaviours and language displayed by her daughter. We leave it there for a while and I ask her to tell me about her life at age seventeen. 'Do not ask' she replies, then goes on to tell me about the irreconcilable conflicts between herself at seventeen and her migrant parents, arriving from a completely different culture, trying to impose their values and restrictions on her. She lists the range of behaviours and language she displayed at the time.

Suddenly it hits her that her daughter's behaviour is a close replica of her

own. The coin drops, the inner connection is made. We move on to enable her as a mature woman to 'parent' her inner-teenager differently, to show understanding and respect to her experiences and interests, to be for her inner young woman the mother that she never had. Most of that is done in movement, gesture, sensation, visualisation, acting out aspects of inner experience from that age physically and in space, allowing for a new perspective, for compassion, understanding and care. Self-parenting took place. A week later she reported on a drastic change in her relationship with her daughter. They found each other again with great joy and relief. The old, unconscious, angry defences from twenty years ago gave way to a new way of dealing with the teenage range of issues. Her daughter felt understood, accommodated and loved.

Prior to the owning of one's inner parenting responsibility there are only two options for the treatment of these inner realities. They are being either repressed, pushed down below the floor of consciousness, cut off from life with all the inner cost to the quality of one's life which that entails; or they express themselves involuntary in reactions of all sorts, directed outwardly towards people and in situations which happen to trigger the inner pattern in question, taking place in the most inappropriate moments and situations, with enormous cost to one's relationship with the outer world. Now, having gone through the development of the inner capacity for self-parenting, there is a third option: inner communication with one's inner child; safe, controlled expression in one's best, consciously chosen time and space; an option of care and of healing.

The inner child is as much in need of being parented now as it was when it was an outer child. Nothing much has inwardly changed, except that now the only relevant adult to parent the inner child is oneself as an adult! Other adults will not have access to it. A new relationship must evolve between oneself as an adult and oneself as a child or an adolescent. A new connection can blossom between oneself and one's deepest inner resources, where once was a block, a black hole, a vacant cold space, a fright.

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Dynamics which once were taking place in our environment – now have sunk into the invisible inside of our subtle bodies, from where they arise, surprisingly, to take control of our lives and our interactions. They will not cease to do it until the inner needs for safety, warmth, care, love, attention, approval will be met by ourselves.

And it can quite easily be done, given the right tools and attitude. Every supportive meeting between me as an adult and me as a child will result in an increased measure of safety. I, who can protect and care for children out there, can also protect and care for the children in here, within myself. But it needs to be done, not just to be thought. But first one needs to communicate with these inner realities, and the inner children, even the inner adolescents, do not speak any English. They are not verbal, as experiences are not.

One must find a way to converse with them in their own modes of communication: Sensation, Visualisation, Movement, Gesture and Sounds.

These are the elements of the language of all inner experiences, Inner-child being one of the major ones. These elements are also the major tools of Philophonetics, which is the literacy of human experience. They can be taught, learnt; they can become basic skills of inner communication. But any method of human care and development which is based in the non-verbal as well as in the verbal dimension of communication can be helpful in this regard.

If, in reflecting on a moment in your day when yet again an automatic defence mechanism within yourself controlled your behaviour during the day that's just passed, you will discover where in your bodily sensation there still lives the echo of the threat, the discomfort, the contraction of that moment, place a caring hand on that location in your body, and the process of self-care, self-parenting of this inner need, inner child of yours will start straight away. Because, for some unknown reason it is that bodily part in which the resounding dynamic in your subtle body is focused. This is your opportunity to make a connection with yourself on that level. That is the starting point. Much more, of course, could be done for self-care

once the tools are acquired, and the tools can be acquired. But the fundamental attitude must be there first, the acceptance of the duty of self-care, the responsibility of self-parenting.

The task of developing the capacity for Self-Parenting could be described as follows:

The Motto of Self-Parenting

*My child was once in the hands of others
Adults who were my parents.
My child needed father and mother
As God in heaven promised me.*

*The adults around me did not qualify.
They were the best I could find.*

*Now I am adult too.
I might be better qualified for the job:
For the job of being, for my inner child,
The father and the mother whom God had
promised me.*

*But between me as the loving adult
And me as the child in need
There are the traces of the unqualified adults
Who were my parents once.*

*They, incapable of the love and the protection
Which I was and I still am in need of,
They are present there now as traces of
unsafety,
As traces of rejection and of fear.*

*These traces are mine now.
These things of darkness I must acknowledge
as mine.*

*Then I can confront them, tell them off, dissolve them,
And put in their place the best of my adulthood;
My Inner Mother and my Inner Father,
The best of the universe in me,
With them I am now qualified
To care for my inner child.
The people out there who were once my parents
I could meet them on equal terms*

(The term 'Parents' in this motto refers to the world of adults in general, not only to one's biological parents.)

Whenever you start to care, to have compassion for and interest in your inner being, the moment you take care of your inner child, children out there notice it, and they start to feel safe with you. Your children and your close partner are the first to benefit from you having become a self-caring adult. The rest of the community follows. But we must start the training in human care as our first responsibility and in our only safe training-ground; our own body, soul and spirit.

The initiation into true adulthood is not completed by moving away from our childhood, adolescence and youth. It involves incorporating all of these stages into a greater whole. It is not completed until we can come back from all the roads of external life and learn to access, to converse, to understand and to care for the child, the adolescent and the youth within. Then and only then are we fully qualified to responsibly care for the same in others.

And these days the initiator and the candidate for initiation is one and the same: oneself.

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