

## ***Do I Hafta Grow UP?***

Instead of considering that question, many people react with something like this:

“I don't want to grow up!”

“Why not?”

“It's too hard to be grown up. It's all about following rules and being responsible, like paying bills and going to work and doing what someone else tells me to do.”

“What if that's all wrong? What you're describing is being a parent, not being grown up. Being a grownup really means that you don't have to do what someone else tells you to do—because you know what to do and don't have to be told anymore. That being grownup gives you all the freedom to go out in the world and have a life that doesn't have insecurities, codependencies, and vulnerability to the nastiness that goes on daily. Would you want to be a grown up then?”

“Well yeah! Of course. But that's not what being grownup really is. All the grownups I know are working drudge jobs and worrying about the economy, bills, and having enough to live on and struggling to get ahead. If they look like they've got it all together, when they let their hair down and tell it like it is, you find out their lives are just as much a facade as the rest of us. Being grown up sucks! To have fun you have to stop being grownup and go back to being a kid.”

“Again, what your are describing isn't being grownup. It's kids playing dress up. Just like we all did about five years old when we raided our parents closet to try on their clothes and makeup. That was lots of fun but we knew it was just play. Then we still had our parents around to supervise and keep us safe. Problem when we are still playing dress up is we continue to need parents to take care of us, despite the fact that we are adult size. Now we call them counselors, bosses, policemen, personal coaches, trainers, dieting experts, and talk show hosts.”

“What do you mean? Are you trying to tell me there aren't any real grownups around?”

“No. Actually there are some. About 14% of the population got to the stage of being grown up. Everyone else is still in the process of getting there. Like you, they didn't get there the first time. Or second and third.”

“Well, if that's the case, what's the big deal?”

“Since you asked, it takes lots of social institutions and career professionals to be substitute parents when we have a large population that won't grow up. There has to be a fast food industry and grocery isles full of prepared, packaged foods so we don't have to cook for ourselves, if don't want to. And layers of rules enforcers from crossing guards to sheriffs, police, and the justice system to keep us safe because we aren't doing that on our own. Then we have to have social service agencies to pick up the care taking because some of us are doing such a poor job of providing for ourselves. And regulatory agencies to try and keep those more powerful from taking everything for themselves. A large

percentage of the career choices available are parental replacements of one kind or another—either nurturing or controlling.”

“Isn't that just human nature? Aren't you describing everyone on the face of the Earth?”

“Not really. Sure, state of the art for advanced cultures has specialization so that we don't all have to do everything for ourselves. The difference is in what things we need, and how often what we say we need are just 'wants'. Kid thinking has the unique quality that at whatever age we actually function, the perspective is global. Which means that we understand the world with the available tools. For instance, when we are babies, we have just one option, and it's at survival level. We need to be fed, kept warm and safe or we die. Lots of adult-sized folks still look at the world that way and it can be even at the kill or be killed level.

“Then there are those who see everything as polar opposites: good/bad, right/wrong, mine/yours, and God or the Devil. Things are black or white and never the twain shall meet. There isn't much thinking or discussion going on with this perspective. It all comes down to categorizing everything into one label or another. If you think this isn't a prevailing perspective, consider that politically we cannot sustain more than a two-party system in this country. You're either a bleeding heart liberal, or a war mongering conservative. Now before you insist that all governments are like that or this is the best in the world, consider that most developed nations are not so limited.”

“Well, most of the people in the world are living close to starvation in undeveloped countries ruled by despots and war lords. We're a lot better off than them!”

“Economically, that's true. But, the problem remains that as long as our perspective is limited largely to but two options, our abilities to discern what other's are really like is non-existent. Just like when we were two years old (when 2 options were really the state of the art), it was impossible to understand what the older kids were doing. But instead of debating about the merits of life as a perpetual Peter Pan, let's consider what it's like to live as a real grownup.”

“OK”

“To be grownup, there are some qualifications: first we must have enough and be enough so that we can become autonomous, able to move about without needing constant care taking. We need to have real personal power to be able to say no to what we don't want and yes to what we do. Then we can get what we want and need without having to compete for more—no more than what really serves us. That way there will be more than plenty to go around. And the final qualification is about constructing a viable identity that includes who we are physically (race, gender, age, appearance); as humans among other humans of no greater or lesser value; and spiritually (because we didn't end up in this life by accident—there are unique reasons we are here and we need to get in touch with them).”

“Whoa there! Aren't you describing some sort of superman or Utopian dream state?”

“Not really. What I'm describing are the small percentage of folks who made it to the plateau we call 'grownup.' And to tell you a little secret, it's where we are all headed right here, right now. The big mess we see the majority of the population in has to do with the inherent imperative that's locked within every one of us to continue the challenges of growing up until we make it. We cannot not

continue and when we finally get there, life becomes so much easier, because the world is not meant to be a place for kids running around on their own. And especially not running things, as we see currently going on. It is our path and our destiny, provided we meet the challenges that are required in order to get there.

“When you remember that as children, our fondest wish was to be bigger and bigger until we were all grown up so we could go out and be somebody. Usually, we had specific ideas even when we were quite small about what our lives were going to be about. When we contrast those early dreams with what's going on in our lives right now, there are lots of disparities. Often, that's because we are still struggling with the challenges that plagued us when we were little.”

“You make it all sound so simple. Everything tied up in a neat package.”

“Actually, the universal design has an elegant simplicity to it. A progression from one stage to the next with very different challenges, a little like some of the video games that require learning specific skills that are needed for the next level. It's when we go on without mastering the foundational ones that we have difficulties like trying to learn algebra without having mastered simple math, or being a musician without reading music. Things become increasingly complex and much of the seriousness we have with modern life has to do with glaring deficiencies in our basic skill sets. Grownups actually have a lot of fun and can play with life in ways that kids are unable to do.”

“Hey! Are you just making all this up?”

“No. It's all in a book called ***Do I Hafta Grow UP? The Adult Guide to Unfinished Business of Childhood***. You can find out lots more and even take a couple of tests to get an idea just how much of a grownup you are at: <http://doihaftagrowup.com>.”

“How do you know that any of this is true?”

“For starters, I wrote the book. Most of it is consistent with classic psychosocial developmental research—in an expanded version, to be sure. But the key is that the material is backed by research from people who were involved in programs that allowed them to recapture missing elements of their early development. The results were phenomenal! Participants were uniformly transformed—free of insecurities, unhealthy attachments, addictions, developed real personal power and boundaries and ended up being able to run their lives without further assistance. For me, that constitutes proof that the model is accurate for humans, universally. At the least it provides rich insight into why we do what we do. ”

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