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Taming the Beast: Pathological Narcissism and the Quality of Life

By Sam Vaknin

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Question:

You seem to be very sceptical that someone with a Narcissistic Personality Disorder can be treated successfully.

Answer:

The Narcissistic Personality Disorder has been recognised as a distinct mental health diagnosis a little more than two decades ago. There are few who can honestly claim expertise or even in-depth understanding of this complex condition.

No one knows whether therapy works. What is known is that therapists find narcissists repulsive, overbearing and unnerving. It is also known that narcissists try to co-opt, idolize, or humiliate the therapist.

But what if the narcissist really wants to improve? Even if complete healing is out of the question – behaviour modification is not.

To a narcissist, I would recommend a functional approach, along the following lines:

Know and accept thyself. This is who you are. You have good traits and bad traits and you are a narcissist. These are facts. Narcissism is an adaptive mechanism. It is dysfunctional now, but, once, it saved you from a lot more dysfunction or even non-function. Make a list: what does it mean to be a narcissist in your specific case? What are your typical behaviour patterns? Which types of conduct do you find to be counterproductive, irritating, self-defeating or self-destructive? Which are productive, constructive and should be enhanced despite their pathological origin?

Decide to suppress the first type of behaviours and to promote the second. Construct lists of self-punishments, negative feedback and negative reinforcements. Impose them upon yourself when you have behaved negatively. Make a list of prizes, little indulgences, positive feedbacks and positive

reinforcements. Use them to reward yourself when you adopted a behaviour of the second kind. Keep doing this with the express intent of conditioning yourself. Be objective, predictable and just in the administration of both punishments and awards, positive and negative reinforcements and feedback. Learn to trust your "inner court". Constrain the sadistic, immature and ideal parts of your personality by applying a uniform codex, a set of immutable and invariably applied rules.

Once sufficiently conditioned, monitor yourself incessantly. Narcissism is sneaky and it possesses all your resources because it is you. Your disorder is intelligent because you are. Beware and never lose control. With time this onerous regime will become a second habit and supplant the narcissistic (pathological) superstructure.

You might have noticed that all the above can be amply summed by suggesting to you to become your

own parent. This is what parents do and the process is called "education" or "socialisation". Re-parent yourself. Be your own parent. If therapy is helpful or needed, go ahead.

The heart of the beast is the inability of the narcissist to distinguish true from false, appearances from reality, posing from being, Narcissistic Supply from genuine relationships, and compulsive drives from true interests and avocations. Narcissism is about deceit. It blurs the distinction between authentic actions, true motives, real desires, and original emotions - and their malignant forms.

Narcissists are no longer capable of knowing themselves. Terrified by their internal apparitions, paralysed by their lack of authenticity, suppressed by the weight of their repressed emotions - they occupy a hall of mirrors. Edvard Munch-like, their elongated figures stare at them, on the verge of the scream, yet somehow, soundless.

The narcissist's childlike, curious, vibrant, and optimistic True Self is dead. His False Self is, well, false. How can anyone on a permanent diet of echoes and reflections ever acquaint himself with reality? How can the narcissist ever love - he, whose essence is to devour meaningful others?

The answer is: discipline, decisiveness, clear targets, conditioning, justice. The narcissist is the product of unjust, capricious and cruel treatment. He is the finished product off a production line of self-recrimination, guilt and fear. He needs to take the antidote to counter the narcissistic poison. Unfortunately, there is no drug which can ameliorate pathological narcissism.

Confronting one's parents about one's childhood is a good idea if the narcissist feels that he can take it and cope with new and painful truths. But the narcissist must be careful. He is playing with fire. Still, if he feels confident that he can withstand anything revealed to him in such a confrontation, it is a good and wise move in the right direction.

My advice to the narcissist would then be: dedicate a lot of time to rehearsing this critical encounter and define well what is it exactly that you want to achieve. Do not turn this reunion into a monodrama, group therapy, or trial. Get some answers and get at the truth. Don't try to prove anything, to vindicate, to take revenge, to win the argument, or to exculpate. Talk to them, heart to heart, as you would with yourself. Do not try to sound professional, mature, intelligent, knowledgeable and distanced. There is no "problem to solve" - just a condition to adjust yourself to.

More generally, try to take life and yourself much less seriously. Being immersed in one's self and in one's mental health condition is never the recipe to full functionality, let alone happiness. The world is an absurd place. It is indeed a theatre to be enjoyed. It is full of colours and smells and sounds to be treasured and cherished. It is varied and it accommodates and tolerates everyone and everything, even narcissists.

You, the narcissist, should try to see the positive aspects of your disorder. In Chinese, the ideogram for "crisis" includes a part that stands for "opportunity". Why don't you transform the curse that is your life into a blessing? Why don't you tell the world your story, teach people in your condition and their victims how to avoid the pitfalls, how to cope with the damage? Why don't you do all this in a more institutionalised manner?

For instance, you can start a discussion group or put up a Web site on the internet. You can establish a "narcissists anonymous" in some community shelter. You can open a correspondence network, a help centre for men in your condition, for women abused by narcissists ... the possibilities are endless. And it will instil in you a regained sense of self-worth, give you a purpose, endow you with self-confidence

and reassurance. It is only by helping others that we help ourselves. This is, of course, a suggestion - not a prescription. But it demonstrates the ways in which you can derive power from adversity.

It is easy for the narcissist to think about Pathological Narcissism as the source of all that is evil and wrong in his life. Narcissism is a catchphrase, a conceptual scapegoat, an evil seed. It conveniently encapsulates the predicament of the narcissist. It introduces logic and causal relations into his baffled, tumultuous world. But this is a trap.

The human psyche is too complex and the brain too plastic to be captured by a single, all-encompassing label, however all-pervasive the disorder is. The road to self-help and self-betterment passes through numerous junctions and stations. Except for pathological narcissism, there are many other elements in the complex dynamics that is the soul of the narcissist. The narcissist should take responsibility for his life and not relegate it to some hitherto rather obscure psychodynamic concept. This is the first and most important step towards healing.

Sam Vaknin is the author of *Malignant Self Love – Narcissism Revisited* and *After the Rain – How the West Lost the East*. He is a columnist for *Central Europe Review*, *United Press International (UPI)* and *eBookWeb* and the editor of mental health and Central East Europe categories in *The Open Directory*, *Suite101* and *searcheurope.com*. Visit Sam's Web site at <http://samvak.tripod.com>

Beauty And The Beast Tickets – A Timeless Classic Continues

By Jay Nault

Beauty and the Beast tickets have been available on Broadway since 1994, and as of this writing the production is one of the longest-running plays in history. The show has remained a big attraction for several reasons, including the fact that the production itself is renowned for its quality. However, the story itself is also a romantic and timeless classic, and thespians of all ages have enjoyed the drama

as it has unfolded before them.

About the Story

The story begins when an unattractive old woman wanders into a prince's castle looking for shelter. The prince is not friendly, and refuses the woman's request, mostly because she is ugly. It turns out that she is an enchantress, and she places a spell on the prince by turning him into a horrible beast. She gives the beast a rose, and explains that he must learn to love someone and accept her love in return before the last petal falls off the rose or he will remain a beast forever.

The prince is furious, and his encounter with a local villager who is lost displays his bitterness. Maurice, an inventor, is on a journey to promote his latest product, but he gets lost and is chased by wolves on his way, and finds his way into the castle. The beast is angry at the intrusion and keeps him as a prisoner.

Meanwhile, Belle, the "Beauty" of the story, is worried that her father is in trouble and sets out to look for him. At the same time, she is avoiding a marriage proposal from a local tavern owner. Belle eventually finds her father and convinces the beast to keep her as his prisoner if he sets her father free. The beast agrees to this offer, and Maurice returns to his village.

Over time, Belle and the beast become attached, and love is ultimately in the air. Belle sees that her father has encountered trouble back in the village through the beast's magic mirror, and the beast allows her to leave to help him.

The plot starts to become quite intense at this point, and just in case you haven't seen how this classic story unfolds, we're not going to spoil it for you. Instead, you should secure Beauty and the Beast tickets for yourself, as you'll never forget the themes of love, acceptance and fantasy that are on display with every performance.

Beauty and the Beast will remain a classic as long as there is a stage to tell the story, and it was nominated for nine Tony Awards the year it was released. If you want to treat your family to a night filled with memories, Beauty and the Beast tickets will accomplish just that.

Written by Jay Nault, sponsored by

. StubHub sells Beauty and the Beast

tickets:

sports tickets, concert tickets, theater tickets and more to

just about any event in the world.



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