Looking at Root Problems

12 Irrational Ideas That Cause and Sustain Neurosis

Rational therapy holds that certain core irrational ideas, which have been clinically observed, are at the root of most neurotic disturbance. They are:

1. The idea that it is a dire necessity for adults to be loved by significant others for almost everything they do — instead of their concentrating on their own self-respect, on winning approval for practical purposes, and on loving rather than on being loved.

2. The idea that certain acts are awful or wicked, and that people who perform such acts should be severely damned — instead of the idea that certain acts are self-defeating or antisocial, and that people who perform such acts are behaving stupidly, ignorantly, or neurotically, and would be better helped to change. People's poor behaviors do not make them rotten individuals.

3. The idea that it is horrible when things are not the way we like them to be — instead of the idea that it is too bad, that we would better try to change or control bad conditions so that they become more satisfactory, and, if that is not possible, we had better temporarily accept and gracefully lump their existence.

4. The idea that human misery is invariably externally caused and is forced on us by outside people and events — instead of the idea that neurosis is largely caused by the view that we take of unfortunate conditions.

5. The idea that if something is or may be dangerous or fearsome we should be terribly upset and endlessly obsess about it — instead of the idea that one would better frankly face it and render it non-dangerous and, when that is not possible, accept the inevitable.

6. The idea that it is easier to avoid than to face life difficulties and self-responsibilities — instead of the idea that the so-called easy way is usually much harder in the long run.

7. The idea that we absolutely need something other or stronger or greater than yourself on which to rely — instead of the idea that it is better to take the risks of thinking and acting less dependently.

8. The idea that we should be thoroughly competent, intelligent, and achieving in all possible respects — instead of the idea that we would better do rather than always need to do well and accept ourself as a quite imperfect creature, who has general human limitations and specific fallibilities.

9. The idea that because something once strongly affected our life, it should indefinitely affect it — instead of the idea that we can learn from our past experiences but not be overly-attached to or prejudiced by them.

10. The idea that we must have certain and perfect control over things — instead of the idea that the world is full of probability and chance and that we can still enjoy life despite this.

11. The idea that human happiness can be achieved by inertia and inaction — instead of the idea that we tend to be happiest when we are vitally absorbed in creative pursuits, or when we are devoting ourselves to people or projects outside ourselves.

12. The idea that we have virtually no control over our emotions and that we cannot help feeling disturbed about things — instead of the idea that we have real control over our destructive emotions if we choose to work at changing the thinking which we often use to create them.