

Why Hate is an Easy Weed to Grow

Welsh electrician [Royson Leonard recently colorized](#) images of World War II. The images are fascinating. What struck me most was Leonard's wise observation that "Hate is an easy weed to grow and can go unnoticed until it's too late and takes over. Be on guard as it can look like the best flower in the garden."

Leonard's gardening metaphor offers keen insights into the human condition. A gardener learns that an unobserved weed will absorb nutrients and water from the soil, leaving less for the flowers. In the early stages of a plant's life, it takes a practiced eye to know what is a weed and what isn't.

My wife's basil plants, for example, love heat, plenty of water, and mulch. She finds the right spot for them in the garden; she knows the plant well enough to root out the weeds and not the basil. Having removed what is false, basil is left.

We can say a primary rule of gardening is to recognize weeds. Can we also say it is important to recognize "weeds of hate" that grow in our thinking?

Are there harmful patterns of thoughts that you often entertain in your mind?

Consider this all too common scenario. You are commuting to work and [another driver cuts you off](#). A thought "weed" sprouts up in your mind: "How dare they!"

You are now at a crossroads. A twinge of annoyance can turn into a full-blown fury if it is not weeded out. "How dare they" becomes "I'll show them that no one cuts in front of me." If not weeded out, that thought grows into "I hate my commute. People are just terrible," which results in arriving at work stressed and snarly.

If you are willing to be an observer, pulling your dysfunctional thought weeds is no more difficult than pulling a weed from a garden. After all, the weed is all yours, homegrown, 100 percent created in your mind.

You can root out a tiny weed by simply observing your thought and not justifying it. "There I go again," you might say to yourself with a gentle laugh. Other, kinder thoughts then have space to flourish in your mind's garden.

Tennis great John McEnroe [recently revealed](#) his decades-old belief that the late Andy Warhol ruined his sex life. The varieties of bizarre grievances that can take root in our minds are only

limited by our imaginations.

In their book [The Anatomy of Peace](#), the Arbinger Institute contrasts two ways of being in the world. Our heart can be at war, or our heart can be at peace. With a heart at war we think of others as objects, obstacles in our way, vehicles to get what we want, or others are simply irrelevant to us. With a heart at peace, the thought arises, “Others are people: [with] hopes, needs, cares, and fears as real to us as [our] own.”

I’m not denying, nor is Arbinger, that people do unkind and even cruel things. I’m not arguing that the appropriate response is always to turn the other cheek; although, especially for the minor issues of life, often it is. Instead, I’m asking what are the consequences at home, at work, and in society when we choose to see others as objects?

Leonard’s point is that the weeds of hate can seem beautiful; humans have a proclivity to justify their thinking. Believing you are unlikely to ever meet the driver who cut you off, you might think there is no harm in blowing off a little steam after being provoked.

The examples are endless: Sunday’s televised baseball game is a big one and you want to watch it; you will make it up to your children next weekend. You don’t need to help a struggling colleague; after all, you’ve never liked him and everyone agrees his troubles are self-inflicted.

You might be thinking these are mundane examples that have nothing to do with hate. Indeed, I have selected the ordinary to make my point. Small weeds become big weeds and can self-seed to yield more weeds. If untended, you will quickly find that, despite good intentions, your garden is overcome by your neglect. Hate, like weeds, grows and multiplies, taking up as much space in your mind as you allow. Love rushes back in as soon as you remove the weeds.

We may think we are powerless to change the world, but are we mistaken? Is not the quality of our society no more than the total of the individual choices we make while going about our daily lives at home and at work?

Leonard observed, “Look at the pictures and remember what happened in Germany could happen again in any country in the world today if we are not careful...What I see in the pictures is the world gone mad and sadly war was the only cure.”

Personal acts of daily rooting out the tiny weeds of hate will make room for your life and the lives of others to flourish.

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[Image credit: American History X by New Line Cinema]