



RETREAT “LIFTING THE VEIL OF MAYA”—PART 1

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Unmasking the tricks of the ego

Story of the sick woman

A woman felt isolated and deeply depressed because nobody in her family paid much attention to her. One day she had an accident and broke her hip. Her husband and their children came frequently to visit her in the hospital, bringing her gifts and lavishing much love and attention on her. She felt very well, very loved. But at the thought of going home, she feared that all would be as before. She unconsciously created a new belief, that in order to receive love, one needed to be sick. And shortly after returning at home, she came down with pneumonia, and then another disease, and so on for several years. Being so often sick, she finally went to see a psychotherapist. She disclosed to him that she had been very unhappy in her early marriage, until the day she fell from the ladder and broke her hip. She was finally able to see the pattern she had created for herself—all the diseases she had suffered from had been facilitated by her subconscious, in an act of self-sabotage.

***My subconscious keeps me sane, by harmonizing my outer experiences
with my most profound beliefs and convictions.***

The subconscious is never concerned about truth, health, or even life. Its sole purpose is to ensure an artificial emotional status quo; a balance between its external experiences and its internal beliefs. It constantly manipulates our lives in order to achieve this balance. The constant repetition of these beliefs, whether they are true or not, become our reality, even though they may be totally incorrect.

It is always possible to discard a belief system and replace it by a new one. Usually our beliefs and convictions come from outside (parents, school, athletes, movie and pop music stars, the media, etc.) and are not our own original beliefs.

Meditation and spiritual activities free us from negative thoughts and gradually purify the tendencies and beliefs stored in the subconscious.

It is important to make an inventory of and analyze our deepest beliefs, as they direct our destiny. According to the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (www.rebtnetwork.org/whatis.html), we hold many toxic beliefs:

LIST OF TYPICAL TOXIC BELIEFS

1. I have an extreme need to be loved and approved by all people who are significant to me.
2. I have to be competent and capable of achieving anything in all that I do in order to feel valuable.
3. It is awful and catastrophic when things do not go the way that I hope.
4. The unknown must create fear in me and is therefore awful.
5. It is easier to avoid rather than facing certain responsibilities and difficulties in life.
6. If something does not go as I had hoped, it is because of something or someone external, and I cannot do anything to change the situation.
7. My inner change depends on outer circumstances.
8. Happiness can only be obtained through leisure and recreation.

All of these beliefs are black-and-white, they do not allow any other colors. By analyzing our beliefs we can discover whether they are absolutist (dualists)—which means that they come from the ego, or beyond duality—which means that they come from the soul.

EXAMPLES OF COUNTERMEASURES FOR THESE TOXIC BELIEFS

1. “Diversity is great! It is important to be true to oneself with others.”
Or “All have something distinct to contribute.”
Or “I can express love and accept various forms of being acknowledged.”
2. “Taking the first step is very valuable and helps me be more integrated in what I do.”
3. “Problems or obstacles are opportunities to develop creativity and intelligence.”
Or “How valuable is trying to do what you want regardless of the outcome.”
4. “Courage is jumping into the abyss and building one’s wings while falling.”
Or “Jump first and know that the net will appear.”
Or “The spiritual life is like jumping out of an airplane without a parachute and realizing that there is no ground.” (Joel Goldstein)
Or “Fear is the engine that leads us to discover our internal world.”
5. “It is much easier to be true and responsible; it saves us from excuses and conflicts.”

Get the idea? Now go ahead and do the same for the 6th, 7th and 8th toxic beliefs listed above.

There are three principal ways to acquire a belief:

- Through a personal experience associated with a strong emotion
- Through an authority, real or perceived (parents, teachers, politicians, famous people...)
- Through an accidental discovery (overhearing a comment about us, etc.)

The daily repetition of any thought with an intense emotion/desire and visualization reinforces a belief.

It is never too late to change a habit

CLASSIC MANIPULATIONS OF THE EGO

In its positive aspect, the ego is the integrating force of the personality, giving us the ability to act adequately. The ego has a role of self-preservation through the use of generalizations. It allows us to retain what it is important in the conscious mind, and to store in the subconscious what is not important. According to the western psychological model, it is important to build a healthy, functional ego to adapt to our environment. Whereas according to the eastern spiritual model, the ego is that element of consciousness which takes credit for everything that happens. In Sanskrit it is called *ahamkara*, which literally means “I make” or “I do”.

The ego is a filter which decides what is good and what is bad; however these judgments are relative and differ from person to person. The ego creates generalizations or leaps of understanding between cause and effect. The problem is that the ego’s criteria for making these judgments and generalizations are highly subjective and unreliable; what seems to be useful in a certain culture may be utterly useless in another one. The biggest problem is the ego’s habit of taking a small piece of information and reaching a conclusion that has little to do with the original input. It functions on the basis of assumptions.

The ego is permanently trying to decide what is pleasure and what is pain. And this decision is not conscious; it is formed in the limbic system (reptilian brain), which works purely by instinct, reacting to strong emotions. This filter is based on experiences acquired very early in life, often in our pre-verbal infancy, and which will condition our entire adult life. Hence the importance of the tools of meditation and self-analysis to release these unconscious patterns.

The subconscious is the ego’s field of operation

SOME OF THE EGO’S TRICKS:

- Time pressure (we must take a decision now!!!)
- Limited quantities (there isn’t enough for all!)
- Perfectionism (everything must be in a certain way).
- Fear (if we do not take this decision, something bad is going to happen).
- Always seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. According to the yogic scriptures, the ordinary mind is like a drunken monkey jumping from a branch to branch in a giant mango tree, forever trying to pluck the juiciest and ripest mangoes (pleasure) while at the same time attempting to run away from the nasty bites of a swarm of angry bees (pain).
- The past-future duality (always regretting the past and fearing the future, and never being in the present).
- The “Baggage train” —how we hitch endless personal ambitions, fears and desires (the baggage wagons) to the original intention (the locomotive) which makes the whole train grind to a halt.

Trying to exhaust a desire is like trying to extinguish a fire with gas

THE THREE TYPES OF PLEASURES

1. Tamasic

Totally selfish, only thinks of his own pleasure or of his family/company/social group/nation, even at the expense of others, and with an element of cruelty.

2. Rajasic

Motivates us to do, to accomplish things, but it is an agitated energy, mixed with intolerance.

3. Sattvic

Always thinks about how to benefit mankind first. It is the energy of the sages, always acting for the good, even at the expense of their own comfort, health or even life.