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The ego-inflation in the New Age and self-help environment

The "positive" aspect of a spiritual crisis is the most self-deceptive, because it usually ends up in ego-inflation and total lack of self-realization (read more about spiritual crises in my article **Spiritual crises as the cause of paranormal phenomena**).

Self-help gurus, and New Age devotees, can be breathtaking in their combination of self-confidence and absurdity, where they with no hesitation are bullying highly educated and/or experienced experts. They don't care whether it is scientists, philosophers, or mystics, what they care about is whether such persons dare to be critical towards the ideology of the self-help industry (see my articles **Management theory and the self-help industry** and **Six common traits of New Age that distort spirituality**).

The reason is that the subjectivism and relativism in these environments (as well as in many other areas), eliminate critical thinking (discrimination), and thereby makes you vulnerable for magical thinking and ego-inflation.

Through this we have reached the highest level of postmodern development for better or for worse. The same fully individualized core of personality, which makes us able to step out of the past's fixed and subconscious attachment, has itself become our main interest, center for our identity in a degree, that almost all our awareness are directed inwards in a global seen exceptional narcissism.

Individually we have created a large scale self-image, which in a quite high degree is based on assumptions/ideas. This self-image we almost continuously defend, by filtrating the impressions we receive from the world. We want to be in peace with our self-images, and quite convenient we therefore have created a cultural pluralism (=culture relativism), which forbid actual value judgment. I have my truth, and you have yours. Respect! Self-accept! I am Okay, you're Okay! It all run together in a fear of hierarchies, or a fear that someone might know something better than yourself, and where it is political incorrect to claim that something is higher than something else. "You judge", is the same as "you condemn."

Within the New Age and self-help environment this has opened the doors for people claiming just about anything about themselves and spirituality, without having any knowledge or experiences. At the same time the enormous alternative grey market of private educations offer people educations, where they in one or two weekends can get themselves a certification in just about anything within spirituality. If you think that the only thing left is a weekend education to enlightened master, then I can tell you that it already exists in the Indian Oneness movement, where you can get enlightened in 21 days, and get a certificate. If you then ask, that no serious person would buy this, then I can tell you that the famous American success guru Tony Robbins is one of main figures behind, and that thousands of people follow it, hereunder a large group of celebrities. I will return to this in the end of this article.

For a couple of years ago I had to spend some days with a meditation teacher in Los Angeles. He had a certificate and quite a large group of followers. To my astonishment I discovered that he actually didn't had any meditation-practice. He wasn't meditating in the mornings, afternoons, evenings, or any other time. At one time he showed me that he could sit in the lotus position, and that I didn't understood meditation, and wouldn't do any progress, because I wasn't sitting in this position when I was meditating. It was impossible to lead a normal dialogue with him, he was the teacher and couldn't be adjusted. There wasn't any sign of experiences in what he told, or any interest in spirituality at all. The only thing he was interested in was his business as meditation teacher.

It is clear that the many people within New Age and self-help who have been caught up in this, will spoil their spiritual practice, if they actually have any – it will leave the rails, and end up blind. But worst of all, they will lead other people on the wrong track as well.

The great Tibetan meditation-master Sogyal Rinpoche says in his book *The Tibetan book of Living and Dying*:

”The most important is to avoid to get caught in the ”shopping mentality”, I see everywhere in the West: to ”go shopping” from master to master, from teaching to teaching, without any continuity or ongoing practice. Almost all masters in all traditions agree, that the essential is to master one path to truth, and this you do by following this path to the end with heart and mind, at the same time as you relate open and respectful towards others and others' insights.”

Ego-inflation happens when the ego has embezzled itself energy, which rightly belongs to the collective time. The collective time manifests itself in a widely and indefinite area, for example could a broad spectrum of common human activities and organizations be called manifestations of the collective time: parties, state formations,

wars, work communities, concerts, clans, tribes and sects, mass psychological phenomena, religious parishioners, fashion streams, group souls, etc.

When the ego is getting inflated there comes a feeling of, that the “old” ego has been altered, even disappeared. This feeling is sensed a being good, positive, yes it can even be a peak experience. The illusion is that the ego hasn't disappeared, but instead has been inflated. Therefore the dark side of the ego, the whole complex of thought distortions, also has been inflated.

Ego-inflation is the cause of the sense of improvement, healing, or religious experiences people can have, when for example working with therapy, coaching, healing, clairvoyance, or when they have discovered a new ideology, religious or political. It is closely related to thought distortions such as *Subjective validation*, *Communal reinforcement*, *Groupthink*, *Illusion of control*, *Classical conditioning* and *placebo effects*. – see my book **A dictionary of thought distortions**.

There are three main forms of ego-inflation: intellectual, identifi- cal and euphorical inflation.

1) Intellectual ego-inflation

Intellectual ego-inflation is extremely widely spread, especially today where so much knowledge is made common, and where practically everybody goes through one or the other form of theoretical education, or at least get knowledge of it through the medias. Intellectual ego-inflation is in fact one of the fundamental hindrances for the opening in towards the source, a malfunction in the mind, which is the crucial cause of the ignorance, conflict and sufferings of Mans (see my article **The four philosophical hindrances and openings**).

Intellectual ego-inflation has to do with lack of rationality. You take your assumptions, conceptions and values as absolute truths (hereunder subjectivism and relativism), whereby you end up in a contradiction between your thoughts and lived life. It is actually a lack of ground connection.

In general, in intellectual circles, in cultural connections, and in the political life, they have always accepted intellectual ego-inflation – but as mentioned: it is one of the most crucial causes of all the conflict, war and violence, which the world is characterized by. People and their opinions and –isms, political directions etc., all of it is, as a rule, mainly an intellectual play characterized by a contradiction between thoughts and lived life. One is idealist, another realist, one is Marxist, atheist, another

Christian, charitable, but if you look these people after in their existence – in their lived life – then you soon discover the contradictions.

Kierkegaard called it “the litany madness”; people can repeat the right doctrines and principles by rote, but when it comes to reality, to their way of living, then you discover all the contradictions.

Within the alternative environment of New Age and the self-help industry, intellectual ego-inflation is, as mentioned, extremely widely spread, and when the game, as here, is about the development of Man, about the depths of the mind, about archetypical powers, about the source of life, then intellectual ego-inflation can be a hazardous play. When the intellectual knowledge begins to approach religious areas, wisdom of life, therapy, meditation, spirit, then the ego can misjudge itself by being intoxicated by its intellectual understanding of deep phenomena. It is easy to understand the profound in an intellectual way. Everybody can say: “meditation is to become silent, without thoughts, without words, images”, but try to be silent, try to be awake without thoughts.

It is a widely spread misunderstanding in the meditation-circles of New Age and self-help, that meditation consists in being completely without thinking (time after time I have been criticized for that I emphasize the significance of philosophy in the meditationprocess). An enlightened master has admittedly no need of thinking, of philosophy, because he is in a condition of being (though he always uses a philosophical kind of counseling – see my article **Philosophical counseling as an alternative to psychotherapy**). But a person, who then just repeat this (“I have no need of thinking, of philosophy, because I am in a condition of being”), *without* being enlightened, has a seriously problem with ego-inflation.

Socrates was fully aware of the problem in this, when he consistently called himself philosopher (a lover of wisdom, one who seeks wisdom, but who has not yet found it) – and *not* a sage (guru/enlightened master). It namely gives ground connection. All people, who are not enlightened, are in need of thinking, of contemplation, of reflection – of *philosophy*.

Many people caught up in intellectual ego-inflation (and the other two types as well) commit the thought distortion called Non-dual bias. Non-dual bias arises when you describe something as non-dual, while forgetting that you can't describe anything without implying the negation of it.

The only thing that can be said to be non-dual is the wholeness. According to the Taoistic teaching of Yin and Yang there isn't anything beyond the world. You can't

see the world from outside. You are in the world and you can only describe something from its opposition. What is the good? This you understand if you know what the evil is. You can't say anything about the world as a whole, because you can't put the wholeness in opposition to anything. The wholeness is therefore the indescribable (Tao).

So clear thinking, and therefore clear communication, involves, according to Taoism, an epistemological, a so-called gnoseological, dualism (Yin and Yang). Clear, or unambiguous, description, has the distinction between subject and object, image and reality, as a necessary precondition. We have to discriminate between subject and object, image and reality, in order to communicate unambiguous. And we have to discriminate between a long line of other oppositions as well: under one called Yin and Yang. And this discrimination is characterized by the knowledge that oppositions are complementary to each other, because they mutually exclude each other and at the same necessarily must supplement each other. If your thoughts slip out in one extreme you must remember the other extreme and bring it in. If you confuse oppositions, you must separate them (read more about complementarity in my article **Quantum mechanics and the philosophy of Niels Bohr**).

Unclear, or ambiguous, thinking, or communication, arises when you either are confusing the oppositions, or are thinking in one extreme of a pair of opposites. That is: dualistic unbalance, which creates thought distortions.

Clear thinking and communication therefore also involve critical thinking, where you try to spot thought distortions. Such a critical thinking must both be directed in towards the subject as well as out towards the object. And therefore clear thinking and communication are an ethical practice.

In meditation circles they often commit the Nondual bias by saying that meditation is to be completely without thoughts, because the enlightened consciousness (the wholeness) is without thoughts. This is without doubt a comforting thought for many people who might have had bad experiences within the area of thinking (for example education). They can then attack, for example critical thinkers, for being dual (that is: on a lower plane of consciousness), while themselves being nondual, and therefore on a higher level of consciousness. They just forget that they themselves are using thinking in order to communicate this, and that in a very unclear and ambiguous, even insulting way. In this way Nondual bias is used in combination with another thought distortion called *Truth by Authority* which I will return to. An actually enlightened master would never do this, because he knows he must think in order to communicate. And in this thinking he uses the complementarity principle, and the art of discrimination.

Therefore: always first look at how unambiguous/ambiguous so-called spiritual teachers, gurus, New Agers, and other people, etc., use their communication, before taking their claims seriously.

There are also many people caught in spiritual crises of different types, or clairvoyants, mediums channelers, etc., who experience non-ordinary phenomena, and where images and reality in their descriptions flow together in one big confusion. It can be very flattering to hear, and sound very “non-dual”, but in reality they express themselves, not only unclear and ambiguous, but directly obscure. So instead of taking them seriously, you should remember that obscurantism means hostility towards enlightenment, or simply: darkness. So who knows what it is that expresses itself through them (about spiritual crises, see my article **Spiritual crises as the cause of paranormal phenomena**).

You can also see the Nondual bias in action when New Agers claim that their techniques, systems, therapies, methods, etc., etc., are nondual, or holistic, which is another word for nondualism. Here it is also often used as attacks on critics. The most known example is the so-called “integral” method of Ken Wilber (see my article **A critique of Ken Wilber and his integral method**).

The Nondual bias is also active in philosophical theories of mind such as materialism and idealism.

An authentic spiritual practice can be said to contain three aspects:

- 1) Critical thinking (spotting thought distortions, created by dualistic unbalance. Both in yourself and in others – see my book **A dictionary of thought distortions**)
- 2) Investigating the shadow (ignorance, the unconscious, the painbody, the cause of suffering, your own dark side, the ego – see my articles **The emotional painbody and why psychotherapy can't heal it**, and **Suffering as an entrance to the Source**)
- 3) The spiritual practice (going beyond all ideas and images – see my article **Paranormal phenomena seen in connection with the spiritual practice**)

Intellectual the whole thing with development, with dream-understanding, with therapy and chakras, is very easy to understand. And very easy to tell others about – and get success on. There is incredible many in the world today, who speaks and talks about energy and chakras without ever really having had experiences with chakras

and energy. This is intellectual theft. It is self-deception, it is ego-inflation – and it will unavoidably lead to misguiding of others.

Add to this the weird phenomena within New Age and the self-help industry, where most of the followers take an education as therapist, coach, clairvoyant, even spiritual teacher, without having any experiences (there are not many people in New Age, which you could characterize as disciples, students). Furthermore there are the many New Age speculators, that constantly are speculating in creating new forms of therapies, techniques and systems, which are deeply filled with scientific, philosophical and spiritual distortions – precisely because of the lack of training (see my articles **Humanistic psychology, self-help and the danger of reducing religion to psychology**, **Six common traits of New Age which distort spirituality**, and **The devastating New Age turn within psychotherapy**).

Futhermore: a special danger in relation to the self-help industry is, that secularization here apparently has been removed. Personal development has directly been introduced on EU's project on lifelong learning and education. You therefore meet it everywhere in society: in schools, education, workplaces, etc. I seriously think this is a sign of the rising of a very dangerous ideology, which I have called **The Matrix Conspiracy**.

The tool to be used against intellectual ego-inflation is in other words rationality and critical thinking, therefore philosophical training, where you investigate the validity of your assumptions, conceptions and values, and seek after coherence between your thoughts and lived life.

2) Identifical ego-inflation

Identifical ego-inflation is of two kinds: 1) Identification with an outer power, which not belongs to the ego (an institution, a teacher, others' techniques, meditations-centres, one's role, etc.). 2) Identification with an inner power, which nor belongs to the ego (God, master, healing energy, the collective time, collective images, etc.).

The tool to be used against this form of ego-inflation is authentic spiritual practice; that is to say: where you understand the difference between the content of consciousness and the form of consciousness – that in neutrality to separate yourself from the content of consciousness, for thereby to direct yourself towards the form of consciousness; discrimination, which again is a central part of critical thinking (see my article **Paranormal phenomena seen in connection with spiritual practice**).

3) Euphorical ego-inflation

The euphorical ego-inflation is mainly due to up-streaming energy. There are then real transformation-processes in the chakra-system, and the transformed, or released, energy is rising upwards – it feels and is described this way, for then, in the consciousness, to bring about states of ecstasy, spiritual intoxication, exaltation, blissfulness. Oneness-consciousness as a spiritual *crisis* belongs to euphorical ego-inflation. Mystics in the West have called this euphorical ego-inflation “jubilatio”. It can escalate and completely take the ground connection away from a human being, so that you think, that you can fly, that you will be carried by angels. You fly in Sukavati, in Firdaus, in Paradise, in Elysium, as a balloon in the blue air.

The euphorical ego-inflation lies behind oneness-consciousness as spiritual crisis; that is to say: it is not a real experience of enlightenment, but precisely a crisis; rather than being a genuine mystical experience, it is a so-called peak experience.

It is without doubt the euphorical ego-inflation, which lies behind the so-called Deeksha phenomenon (transfer of enlightened energy or oneness-consciousness - see my article **The philosophy of Karen Blixen** about transmission of energy and consciousness).

The Deeksha phenomenon is today specially connected with the Oneness/Deeksha-movement, which is founded by Amma and Bhagavan, two Indian gurus, wife and husband, who claim they have created the entire Universe (and are the first 100% Avatars throughout history) and that mankind will get enlightenment only if we will co-operate with them.

This movement spreads as a lightning these days, with slogans as: “Become enlightened in 21 days!” (For a huge sum of money of course). Thousands of people walks around and are claiming they are enlightened, and themselves able to give the enlightenment forward to others. After you yourself have become “enlightened” you yourself are becoming an “Oneness blessing giver”, and ready to make money. You are even getting a certificate in this. Why on Earth waste time training yourself cognitional and ethical, when you after all just can have the enlightenment transferred by an Oneness blessing giver?

In parenthesis remarked, then many of these “enlightened” people never have experienced anything at all, but have become seduced into a web of lies, because the movement functions in that way, that you yourself shall get hold of new members by telling about how your life has been changed after you now have become enlightened – and you will after all prefer to keep a straight face to members you yourself have brought about. That is: they are also characterized by other forms of ego-inflation.

The spreading of the message is functioning in precisely the same multi-level-marketing-sales-networking-way as Large Group Awareness Training programs (LGAT), The Law of Attraction and so on – see my articles **Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) and Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT)** and **The New Thought movement and the law of attraction** - probably because of the involvement of the famous American success coach Tony Robbins, who has trained the movement's teachers in success coaching (read more about this in my article **A critique of the Indian Oneness movement and its use of Western success coaching**).

Tony Robbins has often been connected with NLP, and LGAT. He is probably the most successful “graduate” of NLP. He started his own empire after transforming from a self-described “fat slob” to a firewalker to (in his own words) “the nation’s foremost authority on the psychology of peak performance and personal, professional and organizational turnaround.”

Robbins says: “I built my fortune by modeling the success of others...Now **you** can copy **my** mindset and make **your** millions!” Tony Robbins is himself apparently a designated Oneness blessing giver, and oneness blessing is apparently a regular part of his seminars today.

The mystics (for example Meister Eckhart, Tauler, Seuse) discriminated between “jubilatio” and “inflammatio”, the ecstasy and the inflammation. And the euphorical inflammation is dangerous, very dangerous (see my articles **The awakening of kundalini**, **Spiritual crises as the cause of paranormal phenomena**, and **A critique of the Indian Oneness movement and its use of Western success coaching**).

The tools to be used against this ego-inflation is partially ground connection (Hara, earth bound work, preferably with other people, for example as a social- and healthcare worker), partially again realization work, discrimination, humble separation of the ego and the spirit, between the ego and the rising, bubbling, jubilant delight. Moreover ethical practice, training of compassion, for example Tonglen practice (in my book **Meditation as an Art of Life – a basic reader**, I have described both the Hara practice and the Tonglen practice in the supporting exercises The Hara-meditation and the Heart-meditation).

One of the deep reasons why they in monasteries anywhere in the world are letting the monks and nuns work with dirt, cleaning, cooking, taking care of sick people and

dying, was in order to, that they never should lose reality and the ground connection of sight.

People who are being caught by ego-inflation, begin, as a rule, to act like kings and queens, they shall not anything practical do, they shall not be adjusted, they fly.

To all three kinds of ego-inflation there are in other words some philosophical principles and supporting exercises you ought to hold on to. And generally it is good to have knowledge about the thought distortion called *Truth by Authority*.

There are today a vast amount of non-enlightened New Age/self-help gurus (in science of religion they actually have no numbers of this enormous market). They might very well have strange paranormal abilities, it doesn't matter in this question – who get authority by claiming, that their teaching, either is coming from a state of enlightenment, is being channeled from some kind of divine source, or are coming from clairvoyant abilities (see my articles **Paranormal phenomena seen in connection with channeling**, and **Paranormal phenomena seen in connection with clairvoyance**).

If such teachers put their teaching forward in this way, you can be hundred percent sure, that this teacher has a problem with ego-inflation (if he is not directly a fraud - and then there are thousands of within New Age). Why? Because no real enlightened master would argue in this way. True enlightened masters, or sober spiritual teachers, speak from their own source, and are always characterized by humility. Just look at Dalai Lama, who incessantly claims, that he hasn't reached the full Rigpa, and that he is just a beginner. True enlightened masters, as well as sober spiritual teachers, are also always philosophers, who are giving reasons and presenting arguments to support conclusions.

Truth by Authority is about taking statements to be true simply because an alleged authority (experts, teachers, states of enlightenment, divine sources, paranormal abilities, etc.) on the matter has said/justified that they are true. A level of critical thinking is always appropriate, because the statement may be based on different kinds of thought distortions, for example the Non-dual bias (again: see my book **A dictionary of thought distortions**).

People, who in their arguments/teachings, again and again, have to defer to some authority (experts, teachers, states of enlightenment, divine sources, paranormal abilities) in order to justify their arguments/teachings, are hundred percent on the wrong track, even if they should have some paranormal abilities. Again it is interesting to see, that true enlightened masters, as well as sober spiritual teachers,

never do this. And interesting, that probably most of the many people, who have made a business on being clairvoyants/mediums/channelers etc., will fall for *Truth by Authority*.

In my article **The emotional painbody and why psychotherapy can't heal it** you can read about how ego-inflation, "positive" feelings, and the seven deadly sins, are connected with the emotional painbody.

All articles and books referred to are available in free PDF Versions. Links can be found on my blog: www.MortenTolboll.blogspot.com

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