

From Psychology to the Listening Attention: The Path of Becoming

by Bob Fergeson

Can we get past the illusive psychology of the flight-or-fight syndrome and the resulting egocentric personality? *A discussion on how knowing yourself can lead to greater spiritual possibility. Through becoming objective to our own psychology or personality, we begin to take spiritual work personally, and thus Become.*

I've come to see two dominant types of personality, especially in those involved in spiritual seeking or self-definition. These two types, though polar opposites in character, spring from the same cause: our mis-identification with the ego as the real 'I' or Self. These two personalities are the twin modes of action formed from the ego's perceived threat of annihilation at the hands of the Not-self, the environment outside of the body. These types can be defined as the reaction patterns to each half of the fight-or-flight syndrome. What I define as the *sleepyhead* is the dreamer, the introvert, lost in their imaginations, the somnambulist type. The sleepyhead can be also defined by its opposite, the egocentric type or *knucklehead*. The sleepyhead flees, runs away and hides from the not-self while the knucklehead tries to control, project and manipulate the environment. Each is relatively unconscious of itself, and thus thinks its manner of dealing with the world is the right or correct way.

The egocentric or knucklehead likes to butt heads with and have control of everything. All has to be done outwardly through the ego to control and force conditions to being favorable to the ego. He stays in the right by learning to fight. The opposite reaction pattern is true of the somnambulistic or sleepyhead, who is lost in dreams and reverie. His reaction, instead of attacking the problem, is simply to ignore it through running away, hiding in dreams, and keeping the ego afloat by living in the imagination. This comes from the passive or flight reaction of the two different halves of the fight-or-flight syndrome.

Sleepyheads and their knucklehead opposites are simply two different unconscious response-patterns to the perceived threat to the individuality-sense by the world or not-self. We don't know we've fallen into identification with a mechanical pattern when we react as a sleepyhead. We may think we're even acting spiritually (being superior), in that *our* way is the *right* way. Through self-observation, we can come to see that it all stems from our past and whichever path, fight or flight, we happen to have fallen into.

Paradoxically, in trying to escape the threat of the world, we dive deeper into it by striving to become better and better sleepyheads and knuckleheads. That cannot cure us, since we are trying to solve the problem only on the level of the problem. Through psychology, analysis, and over-thinking, we plot to escape from our pattern, through our pattern, thus the pattern is never ending. The only cure, finally getting well, is in seeing ourselves as we really Are. We may become subtler in our self-delusion and think we're spiritual, but we still have not come to a true understanding. The cure begins when we get to the stage of raising mind, in learning how to stay in the moment: facing the present without self-identification with reaction, only.

We could not do this as children; we were helpless. But as adults, with the help of a spiritually oriented group, teachers and friends, we have the chance to act in self-knowledge and find our way back to innocence and silence. This is often only brought about through trauma, which clears the pattern, at least temporarily, enabling us to glimpse the world from a clear perspective. This can lead into the listening attention, to being able to stay in the moment, without being identified with the animal reaction-pattern.

One of the dangers facing the sleepyhead is that when he hears a talk on effortlessness, mindfulness meditation, or the various schools that say there is nothing to do as we are not the doer, it sounds great. He jumps on this subject of effortlessness because it fits his ego pattern. He thinks he understands what they're talking about. It's only until after he comes to know himself, through hard practice leading to a realization, that he comes to understand that he did not know what effortlessness really was, that he had no idea of the Void, true detachment, or of not being the doer. He didn't have the true sense of it. All he had was a pattern of blocking things out through distraction, imagination, fear, pride, and laziness, *being in the reverie of the sleepyhead*. He mistakes being *hypnotized*, by dreams, reverie and moods, for doing nothing or no-mind. Habitual reverie is usually a sign of this mistake. Some people, being in reverie much of the time, may get quite defensive when it's called to their attention. A period of time in a group that practices confrontation might do wonders for pointing this out, if they can stand the tension. Our society and home environment are our first teachers, forming the basic personality. Where did our basic reaction of either fight or flight come from? *It was a sane reaction to madness. We ran away from the moment because it was unacceptable. Thus, our innocence was lost, and we eventually became what we were running from.* The fearful or aggressive reaction to life and its tensions led to the destruction of innocence and removed the ability to stay in the present. Through cunning, we learned to escape the present, and eventually came to be asleep with our heads in the sand. All that we were left with is that very cunning, operating through fear or violence. Eventually, we became that which we despised.

A pivotal moment in my own loss of innocence came about at a young age one morning in my grandfather's backyard. I was playing with the gardener's son; we were fast becoming friends as the rapport deepened. I suggested that we should get together and spend the night at one of our houses and have dinner together. This was a relatively normal event at that age with other friends. He agreed, and we went to the gardener, his father, and proposed the idea. The look on his face when hearing of our idea is something I will never forget. Until that moment, I had not realized that he and his son were black, and that I was white. That he was the servant, and I, the grandson of his master. He told me in no uncertain terms that his son and I could never be friends. I then had a very clear moment of realization. I saw that the world of the gardener and my grandfather, and that of all adults, was insane. It was based on rules of behavior that were false and contrived, and yet somehow functional. I resolved then and there that I would never enter the adult state of mind. Decades later, I had the equally clear realization that this decision had somehow led me into the very state of mind I had sworn to avoid. I had become that which I despised: a fearful adult living in a false paradigm of isolation and ignorance.

This second realization and the circumstances that precipitated it, lead me to the further realization that there was a way out of the action-reaction trap. I began to see that there was a third possibility, above and beyond that of child and adult. I had taken a small but sure step

within. The subjective world of mindless action-reaction was replaced with a compassionate intelligence that had no interest in the ego games of the sleepyhead-knucklehead dichotomy.

We can't receive from the Higher or Inner Self if we are mechanical and asleep, emotionally and mentally, projecting an unreal "self" of unconscious psychology. To make contact with something Higher, we must find ourselves as observers rather than pattern-projectors. Raising mind, through focused attention in the present, leading to the listening attention, is a way to wake up for sleepyheads. Learning to listen, to have a passive but attentive reaction, can help knuckleheads to become objective. This listening attention, alertness without past or future worries, gives both types the possibility of receiving from the Inner Self. A rigid pattern-reaction solely based on the past is devoid of real intelligence, much less Being.

Being aware of who you really are in the moment, or the listening attention, is a wonderful paradox in that it's how we may stop the ceaseless mind chatter of the internal dialogue. Instead of stopping the mind chatter by force, by thinking other thoughts through an act of will, all we do is simply listen. You may find that there's something within that wishes to start conveying information, to tell you something that maybe you need to pay attention to. This quiet inner voice, our conscience, can only be heard when the mind is relatively quiet. Then, you can start seeing what your real problems are, why you're running from the present, and perhaps thus discover your deeper motivations, freeing your attention from the self-survival obsessions long enough to take a deeper look within. While you're in that state of listening, you can turn the attention inward and look within at what you're looking out of, and perhaps come to a startling discovery.

We're not going to make contact with the Inner Self, the source of wisdom, and find inner peace and stability, without setting up the right conditions. Now these right conditions are not as much an effort or trying to control something as much as a returning to what we might call innocence. We need to have a quiet mind, a stillness in the animal body. Overwhelming desires and obsessions must be faced and dealt with, cleared out of the picture. This doesn't mean we fight or control them, or run away and ignore them, as much as become aware of them and see the difference between them and us. Then we can come to the point of focused attention in the moment, and possibly, the listening attention.

The daily remembering and clear admission of our internal angst is key to the eventual ability to face the moment. It gives us energy and incentive to separate from being identified with the psychological manifestations of personality in the drama of the sleepyhead-knucklehead, and how this misidentification traps our attention in the illusions of the mind. Once relaxed, we can jump straight into the still, aware silence: the listening attention. In other words, we go straight from personality right back up to what we really Are. We go from being a very complicated psychology, to being a very simple two-way seeing. We learn how to listen, to just look at the facts always in front of our vision, while simultaneously looking back at what we really Are. Psychological work is used only to show us that we don't have a quiet mind, no freedom of attention, and thus cannot tell the real from the false. Once we realize that having a quiet mind is something you simply find, it's always there just under the surface, you no longer have to think about it, put effort into it, build it up. It's a retreat from complicated error and projection back to the simple truth of ourselves as aware capacity, indescribable and real.

After we come to the psychological realization and self-admission that we're misidentified spiritually, that we have become our own enemy, even that which we despise, we can come back from psychological theory and find what we need to do; to take action rather than talk and analyze. We must say to ourselves: "now that I realize I do not know the truth, I also realize this way that I am does not work, that it has not brought me happiness or peace, power or fulfillment; *that there has to be some other way.*" Then we can begin to look within, and find what we really are through the listening attention. We see the value in being able to receive perceptions without the filter of our errant psychology. We no longer take our sense of "I" from the active personality-self, the psychological part we play as sleepyheads and knuckleheads. This sense of "I" has moved within, into our very *seeing*. We now take our lead, or our feeling of who we are, from farther within, rather than from a changing reaction-pattern to the world without. Now, "looking back at what we are looking out of" has a chance of becoming something more than clever words.

The point of all of this is not to make ourselves into more efficient persons, with better, more flexible personalities, though this may be the case. The point is to separate our inherent, basic awareness from the world of action or mind. Awareness and action are not mutually destructive. They can co-exist without interference. The problem is in the placement of our sense of "I." When the sense of "I" is lured into identification with the ever-changing picture show of action in the mind, the movement hypnotizes it and we are lost, separated from our Source in motionless aware silence. Through self-knowledge leading to pure observation, we can return to our true Home in simple awareness, no longer lost in the drama of movement in mind. Paradoxically, the play may continue, with the outer man remaining fixed in his pattern, whether a sleepyhead or not, but he will no longer be us.