

SNR
(and the meaning of ego)
by Paul Constant

Following a recent presentation at a TAT Foundation event, in which I used the word "ego," someone asked for a clearer description of the role of ego in my own life. Afterward, the question inspired me to reflect a bit more on the definition....

While the word ego is often bandied about in spiritual teachings, it has numerous meanings and seems to describe a wide swath of human experience. Analogues might include small "s" self, mind, I, conditioning, and other combinations of human vagaries.



We would all be better served by using common terms when describing the stuff that reinforces our sense of separation from Reality (*what is*). For example, the collection of thoughts, feelings, beliefs, moods, etc. that arise and disappear in our field of observation would equate to "background noise." This noise may not *truly* separate us from Reality, but it consists of an inner world that is so captivating it deafens us to what is here *now*.

"Signal-to-noise ratio" (SNR) is often used in scientific circles to compare the level of a desired signal to the level of background noise. In this analogy, Reality would be likened to a signal that is always broadcasting at maximum strength, and by its nature is always within and around us. In his book [*Gates of the Mind*](#), Joseph Sadony called it the "Great Broadcaster of Life." It's always here—silent, impersonal, wide open, and accessible. But our background noise drastically interferes with the signal.

A very high noise level would characterize someone who is deeply asleep spiritually. That is, although the signal's strength remains constant, the inner noise level is so substantial that he or she seemingly remains disconnected from *what is*. With varying degrees of success, spiritual seekers have employed innumerable strategies over the centuries to lower their background noise: meditation, prayer, self-inquiry, *ad infinitum*. Unfortunately, these strategies can devolve into their own form of noise.

So, what's the good news? The background noise often becomes less captivating as we grow to see it as distinctly separate from something in us that observes noise. This observation process doesn't necessarily lead to immunity from noise. In fact, at first, it may feel as though the noise level has ratcheted up as we delve more deeply into an inquiry of who we are. We simply begin to observe more noise during the process of understanding what is observable. For those who are tenacious—or have a touch of good fortune—the noise eventually lightens up.

Becoming more attuned to the signal can allow it to work its magic in bringing about an alignment with Reality. At some point, it may be clear that all desires for perfection—and all lamentations about imperfection—require a healthy counter-dose of humility. In a strange twist, with less pushing away and less resistance to the noise, increasing clarity may ultimately lead to fully merging with the signal....