

The Ego

by Art Ticknor

The final, most obstinate, and most wily of all obstructions to crossing the finish line to Nirvana is the ego.

The ego is not:

- Pride ("He's a proud fellow, struts around like a rooster").
- Selfishness ("She only thinks of herself").
- Narcissism ("He's in love with himself").
- Something to school, polish or perfect.
- Something to try to minimize or to kill off.

The ego is not a collection of our negative attributes. The ego does have a game it likes to play, though, splitting the personality patterns into two camps: the "good" ones that it identifies with (me, the saint, the angel) and the "bad" ones that it disowns (not me, the devil made me do it, the sinner).

The ego is a belief planted in us by what created us -- a belief that we're something (some thing).

The ego is the individuality-sense itself. It is the "I am" that identifies with certain forms, feelings and constructs:

- I am hungry.
- I am the guy in the mirror.
- I am the person who wakes in the morning and falls asleep at night.
- I am unhappy.
- I am the person who was born a certain number of years ago and will die at some uncertain time in the future.
- I am the person with this name and this set of personality traits and memories that make me unique.
- I am lovable.
- I am the individual body-mind that is separate from other body-minds and whose existence is threatened and subject to extinction.
- I am the spirit or soul that will survive the death of the body.

We view our life-experience through the sense-of-self. It is the innermost observer that we're identified with and is thus not something that comes into our view. So how can we observe it?

Richard Rose has the most practical, common-sense system for bringing this about that I've come across. The general outline is one of retreating from false identification (a process which Merrell-Wolff also touched on in his "Induction" talk). It's not a logical process that can be

conducted by analysis or argument, but a process of introspective observation. A sample progression might go something like this:

- I *have* a body -- which implies that it's not the innermost me.
- Similarly, I have thoughts and feelings -- admittedly more interior possessions than my shirt and shoes, but still not me.
- I can scrutinize the beliefs and convictions that run my life, thus putting them more consciously into my view, where I realize they, too, are possessions (or obsessions).
- I can view my decision-making process -- first indirectly, by looking at the results, and then directly -- seeing that this process is part of the mind's automatic machinery that functions regardless of whether I'm aware of watching it or not. I see that I'm not "the decider," and yet I insist that I'm the final arbiter.
- I can see that I'm not "the doer," since action results from thought, which has already happened when I become aware of it. Yet despite lack of control, I try to be in control. After all, what would happen if I just gave up?
- I can view and review my defensive reactions when I feel threatened -- anger, sarcasm, lashing out, withdrawal, arguing, feeling superior, feeling hurt, shocked, rejected, looking for comfort, replaying events in my imagination and having them come out differently, planning revenge, etc. These threats are afflictions to the individuality-sense and therefore clues to its existence and whereabouts.
- As Merrell-Wolff sums it up: "I'm not the mind, I'm not the feelings, I'm not the body -- that I see. But I surely *am*, I surely am an individual, apart from others."

This sense of being something apart is the ego. Eventually there is a direct seeing into what we're looking out from and a realization that the only observer is the Observatory.