

What Is Ego?

When we use the word 'ego', we usually refer to someone puffed up with self-pride, struggling to protect, project or aggrandise his or her self-image. But that is just an extreme example. The OED definition, '*that which is symbolized by the pronoun I; the conscious thinking subject, as opposed to the non-ego or object*', is much closer to the way Rupert uses the word:

Ego means 'I,' and 'I' is Consciousness. ...

Ego is not an entity. It is an activity. It is an optional activity of identifying itself with a fragment that Consciousness is free to make or not, from moment to moment.

It is the activity of thinking and feeling that 'I', this Consciousness that is seeing and understanding these words, am only this body/mind and not anything else that 'I' perceive.

This thought and feeling arises *within* Consciousness and is an *expression* of Consciousness. It is the activity of Consciousness *pretending* to be a body and a mind, and then *forgetting* that it is pretending and, instead, actually *thinking* and *feeling* that it is a body and a mind.

The ego, as it is commonly conceived, is simply this habit of pretending and forgetting, perpetuated through inadvertence. ...

It is Consciousness pretending that its essential nature has the same characteristics as the body/mind in which it seems to appear, and which in fact appears in it.

Consciousness' liberation from its identity with a fragment consists initially, in most cases, of returning to knowing itself as this open, welcoming, witnessing space of Presence.

However, it is not enough to simply know that 'I am Consciousness,' because this formulation leaves out everything that we do not consider to be 'I' - that is, others and the world. In other words, it leaves open the possibility that Consciousness is personal and limited.

Consciousness has to go further and rediscover its absolute identity with *all* things. It has to discover that 'I am everything,' that *this* Consciousness here is identical with *that* Reality out there. In other words, it has to discover that it is impersonal and unlimited.

[Rupert Spira: *The Transparency of Things*, p44]

As Rupert explains, ego is not a mistake:

Awareness willingly limits itself – knowingly and willingly limits itself – in order to assume the form of the finite mind around whom the ego revolves, in order to bring manifestation into existence.

[12th September 2014, Video clip: [The Ego is not a mistake](#)]

It is through the activity of thinking that takes place in the finite mind, that the world comes into existence. The one seamless totality seems to split itself into two – a subject and an object. Non-duality takes on the appearance of duality – self and other:

There is no separate entity that experiences and there is no object, person, mind, body, world or other that is experienced.

The mind, body, world, people, places, objects and entities are all abstract conceptions that are superimposed by thinking onto experience itself.

There is only experiencing from moment to moment and this experiencing is one ever-present seamless whole.

From time to time this ever-present seamless totality, out of its infinite creativity and freedom, takes the shape of thinking, which goes something like this: "I, the seamless totality, am not the seamless totality. I am this little fragment, this little cluster of bodily sensations, and everything else that is not this fragment, is not me."

With this thought the apparently separate inside self and the apparently separate outside world, including all 'others', are simultaneously born.

From this moment onwards the world becomes the known, the experienced, and 'I', which has apparently contracted into a tiny location somewhere behind the eyes or in the chest area, becomes the knower, the experienter, the thinker, the feeler, the chooser, the doer.

The ever-present seamless intimacy of pure experiencing gives birth to two apparent things, a subject and an object. Experiencing seems to become the experienter and the experienced. However, this separation never actually takes place. It is a virtual birth.

If, as a result of this imaginary separation, objects are considered to be real, aware presence will be conceived as their witness. However, if we take our stand as this witness and go deeply into the experience of the apparent object, other or world, we do not find anything objective there. We find only knowing, only aware presence. That is, aware presence finds or knows itself.

As objects lose their apparent object-ness in clear seeing, so aware presence loses its apparent witness-ness and stands revealed as pure awareness alone, pure presence.

[Rupert Spira: *Presence Vol II: The Intimacy of All Experience* p32-33]

Once we have discovered our true nature of pure, unlimited Awareness, we are free to stand as that, and to allow the body/mind to go about its activities unconstrained by the demands of an illusory ego, a separate self which doesn't exist and never existed:

We can still function very well in the apparent world of time and space without the sense of being a separate entity.

In fact, free of the limited notions of being a separate entity, and the desires and fears that are required to maintain this position, life becomes free, alive and vibrant.

Experience is relieved of the demand to produce happiness for a non-existent entity and flowers as a result.

Relationships are relieved of the demand to produce love and love shines in them naturally as a result.

And when there is no engagement with the body, mind or world, the default position of Consciousness is not to shrink back into the isolated cell of a self-contracted entity, not to collapse back into a person.

It is to remain as it is, transparent, luminous Presence, open, empty, silent and available, ready to take its shape as the totality of experience at every moment.

[Rupert Spira: *The Transparency of Things*, p 47]

When we recognise extremes of ego manifesting in ourselves or in others, it is natural to feel and sometimes express a sense of sadness or outrage: 'This behaviour does not come from the love and intelligence that is inherent in our true nature: it comes only from untruth, from identification with what we are not'. We look at all the conflicts and problems in the world and wonder: 'Is it really

necessary for this identification with a separate self, an ego, to occur? It causes so much unhappiness. Could an enlightened parent bring up a child who never felt himself/herself to be an ego? What if the world contained only enlightened beings? ...' Here is Rupert's answer:

RS: Don't think of the ego as a mistake. Think of it as an elementary stage of evolution that in a healthy society and therefore in a healthy individual would be grown through in early adulthood. So don't make the ego a problem. See it more as a temporary limitation that is part of a natural evolution of a human being, that in a healthy society is grown beyond.

Q: OK. So if a person grows up let's say in a society with all awakened people would he still have to pass through the ego stage or does the society help him not to pass through the ego stage and to live freely.

RS: I suspect that almost all children, even those born to very sane parents and surrounded by enlightened friends, would have to go through that stage. Because as part of the process of separating yourself from your mother, the separate self tends to develop. An infant doesn't know the difference between its cheek and its mother's breast. When its cheek is against its mother's breast, it just experiences one sensation. It doesn't know that it's made out of two objects – cheek and breast. This is something it learns. So as part of the physical development which is necessary to separate from the mother, in almost all cases a sense of a separate self develops. I see it just as an evolutionary stage.

Fairly early on in life we have our first experience of suffering and this experience of suffering is the first hint we get as a child that you are not what you think you are. You are not the separate body-based individual that you think you are. So almost all of us have to suffer more than once to get that message. But ideally we shouldn't have to spend a whole life of suffering in order to get that message. You have your heart broken once or twice – it should be enough.

Q: It has been enough for me!

RS: Yes. Exactly. And you see in a healthy culture after our heart had been broken once or twice – we are 14, 16, 20 years old – a friend or a neighbour or an uncle would sit down with us and explain what had happened. That we had invested our happiness in an object or a relationship. So our friends would help us to make sense of the experience of suffering in an intelligent way. And to use the experience of suffering as an initiation into this quest for reality, for truth, for happiness.

But we don't have that guidance in our culture. That is why most of us go on again and again and again and again from object to object to object to relationship to substance to activity, the next relationship, merging with the object or the person briefly, as a result, experiencing the collapse of separation, feeling the ever-present happiness shining in our experience, misinterpreting the cause of that happiness, attributing it to the object or the other. And the next moment the suffering rises, off we go again – the next object, the next relationship, the next substance. This is why the poet Henry David Thoreau said 'most men lead lives of quiet desperation'. That is the lives of most people and we manage our desperation more or less well. The ones that manage it well look OK: the ones that don't – their suffering is more evident. But in almost everybody this wound lives in the heart and most people are seeking to relieve this wound of separation through objects, substances, activities. 95% of our thinking – our day-dreaming thinking that goes off into the future or the past – its sole purpose is simply to distract our attention away from the unbearable pain of separation.

So this is why thinking is the subtlest addiction. It's not illegal and it's not bad for your health, so it doesn't register in the NHS's list of common addictions. But it's an addiction. We are going for an object; thought is always going for an object. And if you ask yourself honestly 'why am I going towards that object, either in time or space, it is always because I want to merge with something or someone in order to be divested of the pain of separation. But it doesn't work. This merging with the object or the other, just brings temporary relief and at some stage we come to this unavoidable realisation: what I've been longing for all my life can never be delivered by an object, an activity, a relationship. So that realisation is the beginning of the end of the separate self.

[13th October 2013, Video clip: [Don't make the ego a problem](#)]

Sadhana

During the whole day do not refer to your "I" while thinking and acting, and keep this absence of reference to the I-image in your relations with others.

[Jean Klein: *The Book of Listening*]

Contemplation

The separate entity thrives on trying to make the mind peaceful, and in doing so only perpetuates the agitation that is at the heart of itself. Leave the mind to be as it is, and remain as you are.

[Rupert Spira]