

BODY or SOUL

A question of consciousness

Roger Cole explores the vital difference between soul and body

As a doctor, I had been practising regular meditation for eight years, since the time of my Kubler-Ross experience in 1984. The workshop with Kubler-Ross had changed me.

The most remarkable thing was the loss of anger. My temper had *s u b s i d e d* completely. I felt inwardly calm. For instance, consider the odd-sock syndrome. You get up for work. You're in a hurry. You open the drawer and there they are two socks, a red one and a blue one! You know that you put both pairs in the laundry basket but somehow, somewhere they have gone forever. No amount of searching could solve the mystery. In the old days I could 'hit the roof' over such a tiny inconvenience. It was like having a powder keg inside. One minute cool, calm and collected, the next, an exploding incendiary device!

A f t e r Kubler-Ross these eruptions ceased completely. "A red and a blue sock," I'd now go, "Excellent, we'll start a new fashion!" And you know what? No one would notice. Even in a meeting where you cross first one leg, then the next, no one notices. First they see a red sock then they see a blue sock but they don't notice. So why get angry?

I said the most remarkable thing was this loss of anger. What was remarkable about it was the fact that it wasn't the expression of anger itself that freed me from it, it was the expression of repressed grief. In letting go of sorrow I was liberated from anger. Never again would I throw golf clubs around (often

further than I hit the ball, I might add!). Nor would I rant and rave on the tennis court. In fact my competitive edge and the need to impress others began to fade. The high achiever in me was dying

Such experience from my own life has helped me to understand others. If someone is angry, I understand that they have experienced a loss of some sort. Whether in this life or from the deeper past, there have been experiences of sorrow. Experiences so painful, that they are repressed as the festering seeds of negative attitudes and emotions; seeds that germinate destructive words and actions. Anger emerges and, in a strange way, it 'protects' the individual from the vulnerability of experiencing sorrow. There is a kind of 'safety' within it. It overcomes fear and exposure, acting like a shield. Eventually a habit is formed where anger is used in situations or circumstances where an individual is trying to keep his or her world constant, safe and under control. And it is extended or projected outwards, at times, to 'protect' others.

Once I began to grasp this I found I could forgive and tolerate more easily. What is there to forgive, when you know that someone acted against you under the influence of grief? To say, "I

will never forgive him/her for that," is to remain angry yourself. You hold on to your sorrow in this way. It seems justified but actually the lack of forgiveness holds you into a relationship with that person and situation. And you will never be free until you let it go.



For me, forgiveness and tolerance emerged by understanding others through self-awareness. As it did so, I found myself more comfortable with people's emotions, especially with grief, loss and separation. As the individual journeys the spiritual path, a need arises to break from the identity of the body. By this, I mean to break from body-consciousness, to find the true, authentic self, the soul and to rediscover the original qualities and nature that were inherent to the soul at the time of its purest expression. That time being before coming into the cycle of birth and death; before experiencing attachment, separation and loss; before anger; before love and contentment became dependent on the external world. To entertain this further, I will retreat away from the concept of having a soul or spirit that lives on after death. Instead I will emphasise that, in

essence, the true identity actually is the soul and the body, with its identity and relationships, is but a temporary vehicle for self. To consider, "I have a soul," also contains the statement: "... but I am a body." To say, "I am a soul," is an accurate expression of identity, which contains the statement: "... and I have a body." A further reality of such awareness is the non-existence of death. As a soul, how can I die? I can enter or leave a body in 'birth' or 'death' but my subtle form of light cannot be extinguished. This is a matter of consciousness. As a body I live in the mortal coil. As soul I am eternal, fearless. These are very deep aspects of faith. In the last article June's mother died with full acceptance, exposing the spiritual beauty of a soul unencumbered. She gave us an example of our potential and mirrored our true nature. We will now consider the implications this has for true and false identity.

To begin with, at the time of birth, the child is given a name and adopts a gender. Both are reinforced regularly, by loving parents, who wish that the newborn should come to know itself as they do: as a boy or girl; as a body. As the child grows in awareness he or she discovers the early trappings of body-consciousness. "You are Roger. These are your eyes. Here is your nose, your ears. These are your arms and your legs." Eyes, nose, ears, arms and legs. "Ah, so this is me! I know who I am. I'm a boy. And you know what ... girls are dumb!" Thus a child finds identity in its name and form. An identity that is already external to its soul or true self, and one that begins to separate and discriminate.

This is extended further as one begins to associate self with colour and culture. Black or white, European or Asian, French or German. As one does so, with increasing knowledge of the

world around, there are further grounds for separation of self from others and for forming affiliations to secure an identity of growing complexity. In this age, of the multicultural society, the fusion of race, religion and politics offers an opportunity for respect, equality and integration. It also means that children are confronted by apparent differences, relatively early in life when compared with my generation. This is where the attitudes and identity of the family unit, parents and culture play a significant part in moulding personal identity.

If cultural rivalry exists there is likely to be early conflict and pain, leading to anger and hatred; which can be extended from an individual confrontation to a cultural group as a whole. I was brought up in England at a time when there were relatively few coloured people in the society. In my final year of primary school, a black West Indian boy enrolled, from a new migrant family. We called him 'Bony', because he was skinny. He was the only black kid in the school. There was a group element in the school that gave Bony a hard time. "Bony is a nigger!" They chanted. Or they would 'take him off'. "Hey, nigger-boy. What you doin' there!" And worse. One child had even learnt the phrase ... "Black Bastard!" And he taught the others.

Bony cried a lot when he started school with us. But he had two saving graces. The first was a pleasant personality. So he made friends, with people who liked him for who he was. These children, by contrast, did not seem affected by the fact that he was coloured. They simply related to the nature of the individual, who resided in the form of a West Indian native.

The second was that he was good at soccer; actually, better than the rest of

us. Most of the antagonists in the school were soccer players. In fact soccer-player represented part of the extended (false) identity of those children. (Much of our school-yard rivalry was built around whether you supported Manchester United or Manchester City, which was generally inherited from your father.)



Gradually Bony's growing identity of soccer-player began to overcome the hurdle of being coloured. The original antagonists started to pick him first in their teams, as this would secure a fair chance of winning. In seeing him as more like themselves - as a soccer-player - that group now accepted him.

What we are seeing here are some effects of body-consciousness in ten year-olds. Already it has brought about separation and discrimination, and chaos to the playground. The antagonists probably had role models within their family circles that influenced their attitudes. Such attitudes, be they from family or

society, also fashion identity. They are passed on from parent to child. Their basis is multi-factorial, including culture, social class, religion and politics.

Some of the hostility toward Bony emanated from fear. The protagonists, confronted by their unfamiliarity, reacted with malevolence. Each felt more secure in this response, which warded off the uncertainty of how to deal with a coloured boy. With their affiliation as a group, a peer structure was formed that identified enmity to be acceptable under the circumstances. On the other hand, the schoolchildren who took to Bony responded more to his personality than appearance. In accepting him they were less discriminating of his colour. They were also extending identity values from their own household influences.

In the meantime, another division had taken place here. Those for Bony, and those against him. It was a clash of values ... a clash of identities. Sticking up for Bony was likely to lead to a fight, so we had a lot of fights going on at the time. Until the soccer-player finally emerged. Thank heavens he could play the game! Maybe in this, Bony has given us a clue to global co-operation. The need to discover a common and unifying identity.

From these early beginnings of the body-conscious identity, a sense of individuality evolves and ego emerges. I am not referring here to the Ego of some spiritual philosophies, where it is used synonymously with the higher-self or soul. I am referring to self-centredness. With ego comes desire to have or to possess for self. And with desire comes an increasingly complex identity, bringing increasingly complex needs. Through adolescent and adult years there are new roles and responsibilities, including work-roles and relationships. These are

encompassed in an ever-expanding definition of self: student, electrician, homemaker, secretary, lawyer, builder, husband, wife, parent, uncle, grandmother. Interests and hobbies develop in accordance with special qualities or skills and the identity grows: golfer, gardener, hang-glider, artist, cook, soccer player. Attitudes deepen and cultural identity strengthens. Money, with the desire for material wealth and possessions, may dominate life. New 'icons' of identity proliferate. A house. A car. Furnishings, sports equipment, expensive clothes. The body, with its health and appearance, forms a major focus of concern for many. There seems an almost morbid fascination with having perfect looks or avoiding disease. You only have to browse through the magazines of any newsagent to confirm this - slimming diets, vitamin supplements, cosmetics, fashions and so on.

As the complexity of this ego-identity expands, so too does its dependencies! Whoever you are, there is a common desire for peace of mind, contentment and happiness. There is also a universal need to be loved. As the identity becomes progressively externalised, its well-being needs stable circumstances and relationships. To feel valued, we need to be effective within our roles and responsibilities. For security, we are dependent on income, material wealth and possessions. For love, we have dependency on relationships. And for well-being we need physical health and a good appearance. All of this represents an expansion of the physical identity. With there being so many variables, contentment in the individual is under the constant threat of change. As a result negative attributes emerge. To ward off insecurity, arrogance is born that one can maintain control over an external world of circumstances and relationships. Greed emerges in a lavish attempt for fulfilment through wealth, status or food. Attachment

offers comfort through possessiveness over people or objects. Lust develops for self-gratification or to satisfy strong and excessive desires.

In the preservation of a precarious identity, anger and blame are the last line of defense. They come into play when there is a threat to circumstances or relationships or when self-gratification is obstructed. As I have already mentioned, reacting angrily has been learnt from previous experiences of loss. In the context here, it is also being used as a prophylaxis against further loss to the individual. And it will materialize whenever loss manifests.

So this then is body-consciousness. Included in it are the negative attributes, or vices, that the individual employs to retain a sense of security. The five main ones are desire (lust), attachment, anger, greed and arrogance. In body-consciousness - or the deluded identity - an individual applies them to maintain control. This, in turn, will uphold internal peace and happiness, albeit temporarily. Within this is forgotten our true and original identity. That of the soul. Also forgotten is that peace and happiness are the natural attributes of this true identity. It is the soul that originally contained these qualities in their purest forms, when they were independent of external circumstances. It is the soul that lives, thinks, acts and experiences through the medium of the body, through the vehicle of the body and it is the soul that 'loses' itself into body-consciousness.

After my Kubler-Ross experience - my 'window' to the soul - I began to meditate in earnest. I began to make effort toward becoming, or being, soul-conscious. In the early days I was convinced that my soul was the pure part of me and that the negative traits

of my personality had nothing to do with it.

One day, a medical colleague, who practised Raja Yoga, told me that the soul becomes impure. This comment permeated my contemplations and I recalled my experience of soul-consciousness at the workshop. It followed catharsis and exoneration from the paraphernalia and complexity of personality. The experience 'crashed' through all my protective shields, exposing the inner, true self. In doing so, it had brought about an encounter with my true and original identity. I realised concurrently that not only was this my original nature but it was also the destination of growth: that as I was, then so I shall become.

Suddenly things began to make sense to me. The soul is the source of consciousness, however it is expressed. Under the influence of the body an illusion is created, and it is the soul that becomes body-conscious. Trapped in this delusion, layers of personality are lavished, like onion rings, on the soul until it is completely hidden and the diamond is flawed. Through the filters of a mistaken identity and acquired personality, it is the soul that gets angry or experiences jealousy or hatred. It is the soul that uses the body to attack another human being and it is the soul that experiences loss or sorrow. It is also the soul that longs to be peaceful again.

As I began to understand these things I knew my colleague's statement to be true. Originally pure, through body-consciousness, the soul becomes impure. And in the renewal of spiritual growth purity is returned.

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