

SUBPERSONALITIES – THE PEACE TREATY (PART 3)

The subject of subpersonalities is a vast maze, awash with many theories and countless interpretations, some more user friendly and accessible than others. What has been offered in our trilogy is in part a synthesis of some of what has gone before, combined with the power of practice-based evidence. This is what we describe as experiential knowing.

Experiential knowing is the understanding that has been acquired through repeated exposure to, and experience of, a particular phenomenon. This kind of knowing offers a level of understanding and insight that goes beyond the limitations of concepts and theories.

We believe the clinical work that we have done in this area over the last four decades offers a level of insight and sophistication, which cannot be arrived at by research and theory alone. As a result, we have created something that offers a deeper understanding, and we believe a more straightforward system for emotional and psychological resolution.

Brief history

If we look at the history of subpersonalities, we can see it has travelled from the birth of psychology, starting with some of the founding fathers including, William Wundt, William James, Pierre Janet, Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud, and its journey has continued to the present time, with modern psychologists and psychotherapists, some of whom have developed the topic further. Those who have contributed to this conversation include, John Rowan, Ken Wilber, Clare W Graves, Roberto Assagioli, John Bradshaw, Richard C. Schwartz, Don Beck and Christopher Cowan to name a few. These therapists, commentators, philosophers and authors have contributed to the emergence of new theories, as well as different psychological language and terminology, which describe the complex world of subpersonalities.

For those interested in the modern evolution of the topic, you may want to take a look at Jungian analysis, psychosynthesis, Integral Therapy and Internal Family Systems (IFS) therapy. There is a rich vein of analysis, methodology and suggested ways of working already out in the public arena. Some of which, as stated, has been incorporated in our definition and descriptions. But there are elements we have not included because based on our clinical experience, we believe they unnecessarily complicate an already challenging subject.

As with all things Reach, we feel the need to acknowledge the ancient contributors, whose insights form the foundation of the modern interpretations, which in our view need to be recognised, because we are richer for them. When we forget where we've come from, we are more likely to lose ourselves.

The concept of a 'community of the self' (our terminology when speaking of subpersonalities), and the ideas concerning fragmentation and loss of self, followed by the possibility of reunion and integration of that community, can be found as far back as the Bhagavad Gita, and in other ancient mythological epics. In the Gita there are numerous references to the 'citizens of the soul', and the idea that there are many qualities, good and bad, vying for autonomy, expression, and power inside each one of us.

Another description also found in the Bhagavad Gita, and the larger work from which it is extracted (the Mahabharata), is the idea of the soul being a nation, with a diverse population, capable of a myriad of expressions and actions. Some of the members of this population are nurturing and protective, other parts are unkind and malicious, whilst others offer reason, calm, tolerance, and acceptance.

Although it could be argued that these references are allegorical and metaphorical, and therefore, should not be taken literally, one needs to remember that this was the language of the time. Storytelling and analogy were primary ways of expressing and passing on information and sharing insights, both in ancient and mediaeval times.

Other explorations of the ancient texts reveal the concept of subpersonalities flowing through the veins of the yogic tradition, and some references can be found in the Yoga Sutras by Patanjali. At the core of the yogic teachings is the idea of an internal battle (between vice and virtue), which requires introspection, self-mastery, and kind analysis, if one is to attain holism, bliss, and enlightenment.

Some other references to subpersonalities can be found in the work of Philo of Alexandria, Plato, Greek mythology and in the allegorical interpretations of the Old Testament.

What is interesting to note, when looking back at the ancient and original ideas, and some of the modern interpretations, is that the prospect of reunion and integration within the self is a goal worthy of pursuit; in most cases involving a higher self that can be salvaged from the grip of the subpersonalities. In fact, it is the higher self, that is striving to return to a position of optimal health and well-being... and we need to find ways to facilitate that.

Apperception

In psychology, apperception is described as the process by which new experience is assimilated and transformed by the individual's past experiences, forming a new perspective, based on those past biases. In short, it is to perceive new experience through the lens of past experience, which often leads to confirmation bias; a position where we gather evidence to support our pre-existing ideas. This helps to maintain the illusion we are right, even when we are wrong.

As children we are processing new experiences through the filters of the information already stored. This is how the subpersonalities once formed, continue to be nurtured and fed via the apperception network, which has been accurately described as a 'prism of bias'.

This way of imbibing and processing experience does not end at childhood; it continues throughout our lives. As a result, we see everything and everyone through the many veils of our thoughts, feelings, and patterns, which have been distorted by the emotional reactions we have accrued. In this way our subpersonalities become more powerful, each seeking the energy it needs to fulfil the purpose that has been assigned to it by the circumstances that brought it into being. This leads to us seeing the world not as it is, but as we are.

We need to understand the complexity of this story, in order to wake up from this dream-like state, this mirage that we think of as reality. Can it be called reality, whilst we are caught up in the lie that the subpersonalities are who we are? We need to move away from this illusion. The more that we do, the more we are able to see that we are the observer, the one that is able to see, describe and comment on the subpersonalities; we are the 'self behind the selves'. This is the one, when awake, that can become the architect of our liberation.

The observing self

Separating oneself from the subpersonalities, and realising that I am in fact the observer, has been described in some quarters as disidentification. Disidentification can only really occur when we deeply realise there is an observing self, which is separate and distinct from the community of subpersonalities.

This 'I' is what has been referred to by some as the soul (spirit), the highest self; that part of us that witnesses everything, the experiencer. It can also be described as the authentic self; and the subpersonalities are, by contrast, the acquired selves, which are formed at the time of trauma, hurt, loss, mixed messages and insufficient exposure to the three As (attention, affection and affirmation). The subpersonalities also grow out of conditionality. This is where we learn from our environment how to get our needs met and become maladapted in the process.

An important part of the transformational process is finding the highest value of each subpersonality, in order that a culture of cooperation can be established, where the virtues of the subpersonalities are brought to the fore. It is through this drive towards collaboration, that the subpersonalities can be integrated, and a state of harmony achieved, where self-interest and survival are replaced by integration and growth.

Disidentification is really about putting everything back in its proper place. We are not seeking to destroy anything, we are seeking reunion, this is why we refer to this phase as creating a peace treaty, because we want to re-establish the original state of authenticity that existed before the damage or trauma ensued. This leads to a state of peace and contentment.

In order to do this, we need to understand the true and original nature of the subpersonalities. Remember that they were created out of some form of turbulence, something that disrupted the equilibrium, creating uncertainty, and the first impulse was to protect us. However, when left unchecked to do their own thing, they become powerhouses, taking energy from the host. In this way they develop their own personalities and philosophies, and the authentic self is increasingly silenced. It's time to reinstate its voice.

The observing self holds the key to our liberation.

Subpersonalities and their virtues

Inner critic - kind judgement, introspective, courageous, solution-focused, uplifting, content

Chameleon – empathic, honest, integrity, self-respecting, self-assured, creative

Complainer – appreciative, personal responsibility, accepting, calm, kind judgement, wise

Manipulator – creative, altruistic, enabling, honest, integrity, tolerant

Martyr – self-sacrificing, altruistic, focused, calm, compassionate, determined

Attention seeker – self-loving, benevolent, selfless, empathic, self-aware, inclusive

Aggressor – diplomatic, calm, focussed, personal responsibility, accommodating, discerning

Coward – courageous, confident, honest, self-aware, inspirational, resourceful

Victim – heroic, affirming, powerful, solution-focused, cooperative, insightful

Defender – creative, accepting, resourceful, measured, loyal, determined

Procrastinator – courageous, decisive, creative, optimistic, clear thinking, wise

Competitor – cooperative, facilitator, honest, patient, nurturing, tolerant

Addict – healthily obsessed, focused, courageous, self-aware, calm, disciplined

Know it all – humble, discerning, wise, cooperative, inspirational, empathic

The child – strong, creative, resourceful, courageous, appreciative, adventurous

Cynic – trusting, kind judgement, optimistic, flexible, introspective, content

Overtrader – measured, disciplined, generous, self-aware, accommodating, self-respecting

Watcher – kind judgement, courageous, humble, cooperative, compassionate, self-assured

Rescuer – enabling, supportive, facilitator, trusting, heroic, courageous

Loner – confident, optimistic, introspective, insightful, courageous, benevolent

People pleaser – self-respecting, kind judgement, confident, courageous, honest, integrity

Caretaker – self-caring, enabling, supportive, nurturing, altruistic, compassionate

Star – altruistic, cooperative, uplifting, generous, patient, inclusive

Controller – collaborative, diplomatic, patient, empathic, self-aware, respectful

Perfectionist – healthily obsessed, accepting, determined, optimistic, integrity, wise

Catastrophiser – creative, clear thinking, balanced, resourceful, accepting, accommodating

Judge – wise, humble, empathic, decisive, patient, kind judgement

Saboteur – solution-focused, optimistic, self-aware, tenacious, creative, compassionate

Diplomat – kind judgement, wise, insightful, inclusive, courageous, creative

Survivor – selfless, focused, creative, resourceful, tenacious, collaborative

This is not a definitive list of virtues, but it offers a very good foundation on which you can build and transform your fortunes.

Forming a peace treaty

Your journey through the maze of subpersonalities, is not simply an intellectual one. Of course, reading and analysing the information is crucial but what is also imperative is to connect and feel your way through this process.

When you've concluded your first draft and assessed your position (having consulted parts 1 and 2 of this trilogy), then sit quietly and reflectively, and assess how accurate your answers feel. You will often find that your first set of conclusions may need some tweaking or a more significant revision once you have accessed the feeling side of the process. There will be some trial and error and experimentation involved. You may find you need help with this process. Please don't be afraid to seek it out if that is the case.

Once you're happy with your journey, analysis, and conclusions it's time to create your peace treaty. This is made much easier when you understand the virtues of each subpersonality. It's through their virtues that a new conversation, based on love, can take place.

Use the list in this worksheet to help you to strike up a conversation with the different members of your community. This is where the art of persuasion begins. By this point you now understand each of your subpersonalities, and how they express themselves. You also better understand the relationships that they've formed with one another. Using the understanding you've now gained about the observer (the one looking in on all of this, the higher self, which is in fact you), it's time to become a broker for these conversations, and create that new culture of peace.

When establishing these conversations, you'll often find that the best starting point is where some common ground already exists between the subpersonalities. Their previous dysfunctional relationships can now be turned into virtuous ones through heartfelt communication. You can undertake this task in any way that feels right for you. Allow your

creative intelligence to guide you towards what feels most appropriate. Here is a template we have found to be very effective... you may find it useful.

Using the eye of your mind, gather all your primary subpersonalities and their main collaborators into a room where you (your higher/authentic self), give an impassioned speech highlighting the discoveries that have been made along the way, and how it's possible to create something new and more incredible out of the old. All that's needed is for each subpersonality to turn and face its virtue. It's time to realise that the old self-preserving and protective model, wastes time, energy, and resources, and has created a culture of vice, which has been very divisive.

The speech is a plea for each subpersonality to tap into the virtue inherent in their nature, and to use that energy as a force for good in the new regime. Visualising a scene like this is extremely helpful... and the more you revisit this kind of scene in your mind, the more powerful it will become.

You might choose at first to make this impassioned plea with the groupings that already exist within the community, talking to them about the virtues of reconciliation. Once you've created a feeling of cooperation and a desire for positive change in one group, you then move to the next group and repeat the process. At the end the community is brought together for a rousing, heartfelt and inspiring rally.

Alternatively, you may prefer visualising one-to-one conversations with the prime characters, where there is more of an in-depth dialogue of persuasion. In this way you can address any fears or concerns and offer more tailor-made promises. This approach often works better when one is met with strong attachment to the old regime, and so there's a resistance to change.

Whatever format you choose, it needs to be conducted with a focused mind, and sincerity. The more heartfelt these conversations are, the more likely it is that your subpersonalities will comply and become active in the transformation process. To complete this task, see all your subpersonalities sitting around the table of reconciliation. Your peace treaty has now been formed and it is passed around the table and each subpersonality signs on the dotted line. This is a document that binds each one forever to the promise of cooperation and peace.

Once you have formulated your peace treaty, you'll find it's to your advantage to write it down. You will need and want to come back to it regularly to remind yourself of what has been agreed. Don't only write it down, read it aloud, record it, and listen to it. If it appeals to you, create a vision board where you create a montage of images that reflect this new state of being. This is how your peace treaty comes to life.

The energy that was once moving away from authenticity and simply conforming to the demands and expectations of its environment, is now re-integrating, and becoming part of the authentic/higher self once more. Remember, it's by loving what you perceive to be ugly in you, that you make yourself beautiful.