

Lama Yeshe said that we need a healthy ego in order to practice dharma. He told us to grow our healthy mind; our greatest obstacle was the self-pity mind, the "I'm no good" mind. Why is this so? Well, I think like this: Have you noticed that, even after years of practice, sometimes, we react automatically and uncontrollably to personal and impersonal events. These reactions come out of us so fast there is no time for awareness to intercede and override. These reactions are often coming from what Jungians label "the shadow". The shadow is the part of us that we do not accept, that is not compatible with who we think we are, the shadow is the parts of ourselves that we don't want to know about. The shadow is caused by our response to painful experiences in the past that we don't include in our conscious awareness. They are responses we buried because we needed to forget those memories. However, When psychological stimuli occur that are similar to past traumatic experiences that we have buried, that same traumatic response happens automatically. These are called "triggers".

Sadly, we are often never even aware of how we behaved. These shadow reactions are the ones that become non-virtuous behavior. The foundation of dharma practice is lessening non-virtue and increasing virtue. When our non-virtuous actions occur without our awareness or our ability to control them, then we are still slaves to our non-virtues and cannot create the cause to benefit others or enlightenment. No matter how much study or meditation we do, they cannot be released or purified because we cannot access them with our conscious mind easily. If we want to practice dharma, and especially if we want to be teachers, we must be examples of virtuous behavior. So the shadow has to be taken to the light where it can be healed, loved, returned to conscious awareness and let go. This is the value of western psychology.

Lama Yeshe highly valued the work of Dora Kalf. Lama also told us that the sign of progress in dharma is how flexible is our ego. How easy is it to let go of our expectations and desires? How easy is it for us to let go and let the other person get what they want instead of what you want? Are we in touch with our own needs and take care of them so that we are able to take care of others?

Healthy Ego and Neurotic Ego

from: Shadow Dance By David Ricco

Healthy Ego

Observes

Assesses

Acts in accord with assessments
knowledge into

Learns from mistakes

Makes amends for mistakes

Lives in the present

Neurotic Ego

Denies or dissects

Judges and blames

Does not easily learn or put
practice

Repeats old mistakes

Denies responsibility or puts it on
others

Lives in past or future

Makes choices that further life goals

Is free from compulsions

Is not moved or stopped by fear or clinging

Lives in accord with deepest needs values and wishes

Can relate, make and keep commitments and show intimacy

Will address, process and resolve issues

Has mastery in the world

Is self-motivated and charged with initiative

Invents creative solutions in the moment

Has lively energy with serenity

Makes choices that cause pain and are self-defeating

Is compulsive and obsessive

Is caught in fear and clinging

Accedes to the demands of others

Is unable to commit, stymied by fears of abandonment or engulfment

Refuses to see, work through, or be accountable for problems

Is victimized by circumstances

Is driven by forces outside or impulses within

Resorts to self-defeating or inherited habits

Has nervous energy with anxiety

"As I let go of having to"

Get my way

Be noticed and appreciated by everyone appreciation

Insist my misdeeds be overlooked

Insist I not be shown to be wrong

Be devastated if I lose face from

Make demands on others

Win, be loved, be respected and be given preference

"I become more able to"

Cooperate with others

Ask for, give and receive

Apologize and make amends

Do my best and still be open to feedback

Admit and error and protect myself being shamed

Ask for what I want and be able to accept no for an answer

Do my best, ask for rightful credit and let go

Have to get back at others

Have a sense of justice that asks for redress or amends without the need to punish

My summary: Neurotic ego
Inflexible, closed response to life experience
Fear based

Healthy Ego
Flexible, open response to life's, experience,
open-hearted attitude, aware of impermanence, able to let go and be happy when expectations are not met; courageous