

## **Part 1 - Life in a box: The hyper-vigilant “Self”.**

This is a two-part article describing the state of the human body when affected by traumatic events. By “traumatic events” I mean *everything*, from birth into the world, through to adult human and the sense of separation, to more acute forms of physical and psychological traumatic events that bring about situations either early in life or later on where this separated sense via aggressive contraction of the body energy is confirmed, forming a “me” that holds onto the past trauma.

Basically trauma response follows the natural expression of the personality but exaggerates this expression. Very broadly there are 2 natural states: the natural introvert and the natural extrovert that we can simply call yin and yang respectively. The following is a description of what happens to the natural introverted state when there is a traumatic experience and how this can end up with the “self” state of “life in a box”:

*“All of life passes by. There is a feeling that there is a definite inside and outside to “me”. I look at the world from in here, and I see you and the rest of the world out there. I’m “safe” in here, it feels like it anyway. Things can’t hurt me that much, I don’t worry or get to anxiousness from in here. I’m known for my observational skills and detachment. I can see the big picture, I don’t get caught up in personal perspectives because I can see things from a kind of cool clarity I don’t have to be angry, or upset, I don’t need to show emotion much because simply there isn’t very much I can feel. My skin gets cold, I tend to feel the cold quite a lot because I can sit for hours on end, I don’t need to do much, sometimes I don’t know if it’s hot or too cool. People say I’m always in my head, but it’s not that I’m particularly great at anything intellectually, I just tend to spend a lot of time in here working it all out. There is a world out there that is scary but in here it’s easier and so I edit what little I do feel so that my appearance is right for the world, but I don’t necessarily feel what they think I do. This works well for really long periods of time. I’ve been like this longer than I can remember. .It’s not good being like this, in fact it’s awful and the reason is that although I’m safe I can’t really feel very much. I want to be hugged, I want to be free of this and be like those people who are carefree and just do what they like. I feel constrained. When I do things it feel like I do things without passion, like I’m always looking at myself doing them, a constant vigilant observer watching and possibly judging my every move. I feel numb most of the time, like I can’t move freely, I’m in a straitjacket or a suit that’s a bit too tight; there’s no freedom. I can do so many things, many of them are things that people tell me are “hard” and “difficult” to do because of how emotional it might make them or even doing things that would make others shudder because they are afraid or too sensitive...I can get through anything, because I don’t feel any of it. Like a robotic person, I seem to be a hero for some but I have no idea why, there is just a feeling of brokenness within and invulnerable protection without. I need the warmth but more importantly I need to be able to feel the warmth. Why do I feel so low?”*

Here is my example of what the introverted by-nature expresses when he/she has been caught within a traumatic pattern. The process of what I call the “life in a box” state is like life in a glass box, it seems like it is safe but actually it's a very difficult place. Superficially it looks like a place of safety but actually it's a traumatically initiated state of contraction which forms several things: it forms a victimized state of being, an internalized state; it is also associated with depression and the illusion of “me” within and “you” without, a cold and deep re-enforcement of depression.

The nature of trauma when it affects the natural-introvert is the origin of the “self” within this type of person. The very first trauma is simply being in an arena as a child, where all the adults and the energetics of the mind-set around one are about “being separate” or being an “individual”. The infant, who is just moving into the state of becoming part of the human race about the age of 3, suddenly hits a wall of illusion/dis-ease which its brain can now resonate with, as it has gained in complexity since being younger when the child's brain is simple and closer to an animal state. But as time goes on there is a change into a situation of massive complexity that around the age of 3 begins to tune into the adult “mind”-field of “I am”. So for the natural introvert child this energy immediately creates a resonance of going into their shell, forming an energetic “shell” around themselves for protection by going inwards. This shell is the process of contraction that increases with age. Other traumas add to this, forming stronger and stronger contraction and a harder and harder shell. By adult life the person is “behind glass”. They might be thought of as autistic, the autistic child can be thought of as almost already behind glass from birth, and the trauma of birth has been cited by Michel Odent, (<http://www.wombecology.com/>), amongst others, as being a major contributing factor to autism in infants.

The point is that the glass-box syndrome is a particular response to the environment that is expressed most usually in those whose nature is “yin”. The sensitivity is all on the inside, no-one sees this. They can be thought of as very strong characters, people that can weather any storm, thinkers or teachers, people who can “clearly see”. However very often these people are trapped behind glass, while internally boils an expression that can't get out and is too frightened to, so they are bound to this cold fate. This is a chronic pattern, outbursts are infrequent but when they occur can be explosive and seemingly “out of character” and afterwards can be frightening to the person as they feel so shocked by what is in there. Just like a snow-capped peak, the mountain looks so still and silent but within rages a burning fire. This is the stagnancy of expression within the contracted state, it clamps down and confines the natural energy and instincts of the body's nature. It seems so cold and lonely and isolated but within lies the energy. The light has simply been turned inwards.

About half the population suffer from this kind of pattern. While the above is a very exaggerated depiction of an expression it is fundamentally about a way of detachment at the extreme end of a spectrum of suffering. At the cold end the nature of the “self” ranges from detachment and dissociation and also to the autistic, Tourettes and in very extreme cases even to the psychopathic, all the way to the opposite heated “self” which are the manic and hyper-sensitive states. In this article we are at the end of the spectrum where life is “in a box” which is really a cooler state or it seems so on the outside. The body superficially literally cools down and this person may well have peripheral nerve damage or circulatory disorders and the psychology that goes along

with this. It is a very stagnated state and very often it is chronic. However it is important to be clear that we are talking about the nature of the “self” here, not the natural body and its expression, so while the body doesn’t necessarily get heavily affected by this state it very well can do, and in extreme cases of pathology the body will be completely blocked by the “me”. A person will have a tendency towards this due to being naturally introverted. There is nothing wrong with introversion or what we might call yin, which is simply softer and still by nature, but the introversion plus trauma results in the above state.

What the state expresses is a hyper-vigilant “self”, a “me” that is always on the look-out because “the world out there is dangerous and I’m going to hide within”. The hyper-vigilance can manifest as a highly intellectualized approach or being “good” at something that focuses all the attention. A person can become pathologically interested in something and there is definitely an obsessive-compulsive tendency with this person.

If we understand the nature of the pattern it also means we can see what will help or encourage a change in this. For this type of expression the key is to **explode** or **warm-up** the person from the **inside-out**. It is key to realise that nothing else works very well. When dealing with coldness as a dis-ease pattern, like climatic cold, the treatment of choice in ancient medicine is herbal medicine. The main principle of herbal medicine is based on the pungent flavour that warms the body up; of course you can do many things with herbs but the main principle of herbal decoction is *warming not cooling*. As a result to warm a person one needs to give them something that heats them from the inside or affects them from within.

What we are talking about here is to do with a state of the “self”, a cold-“self” or “me” state which will stagnate the body, possibly producing heat symptoms within the body and cold exterior. So it’s not so much about warming up the body but about warming-up the “self”... in fact this “self” will actually break down and burn up or simply thaw out its icy defensive system if it is heated up... but how on earth does this happen?

Very commonly the problem with this type of person is that “nothing works”, the hyper-vigilant “self” is on the look-out all the time so very little can get through, it is not a state of a great deal of strong tension but rather of a constant underlying tension and a very powerful defensive coolness that is protective against anything that might attack it by going inwards. Treatments that engage the thought will not be useful because no matter what the suggestion, it is blocked out by the “me” **involuntarily** and there is a brick wall that is defensive. The harder and more attacking the approach the less likely is it to be effective for this type. The parable of the wind and the sun is a useful one for understanding what is helpful here: the harder the wind blows the tighter wrapped a person will dress themselves but the warmth of the sun will mean they take off layers. However the problem is that even in the warmth this person has a difficulty. It can be a hot day where many people are opening up and feeling brighter, and yes it will raise the potential, but still there will be a feeling of trappedness even within the heat of summer; winter and autumn will affect the mood and those who get more depressed in these months will be amongst this group of people.

So how does one get an effect into the psychology from within the body? How does one bypass the hyper-vigilance of the “self” to break it open from within? There are a few things that change this pattern. The cold-“self” person might meet someone who has a very over-heated and expressive personality, which can then break through and warm the person up if there is a feeling of a “falling-in-loveness” which can be a total break-through of the “self” out of its box. Sometimes music or something that is in a vibration pattern that is not cognitive can affect the body inside and this too can bypass the thinking and effect a change. In a healing session if a person truly deeply falls into a relaxation and lets go then again this can happen, but this remember is very rare. It is rare for this person to be able to fall-in-love, to feel music or to relax so deeply, these again are quite external. All these things require something of the “self” that it is ready to take on the heat of the energy coming towards it. The stronger the heating quality of the energy the more likely it is for there to be a letting go, but it is rare and difficult.

There are very few things that can “help” this type of expression or can even a moment change the mind-set that is rigid, as it is cold and frozen. However in ancient times this process was deeply understood. Herbs were given that altered the “self” and that could thaw it, they had the ability to show the taker something totally different from what they had experienced. These drugs are the psycho-active drugs of herbs like Ayahuasca and Peyote which are specifically used to break open the “self” from the **inside-out** just like one would do if one were taking medicine to warm up the body. The psycho-active herbs are used to warm up the “self”, to break it open into light, this is their fundamental purpose. Originally these drugs were used when a member of a tribe started to introvert themselves and separate off from the group. This was realized to be a dis-ease of the “self” and so these drugs were used with a Shaman who acted like a Doula, or simply a facilitator for the drug to be used in a calm and warm environment where it felt safe. The herb would be allowed to clear the body of this type of illness. For many this utterly changed the life-in-a-box strategy, they found a freedom from the “known” of the box which is frightening but only initially and with several processes gradually the thickness of the separation of “me” breaks down.

While the absolute breakdown of “me” is something that doesn’t necessarily come from taking hallucinogens, this isn’t the point. What we are talking about is harshness of a pathological state. When people are deeply “behind glass” it is useful to break this down to the level of cling-film, as this simply makes life easier with less constant tension. There is no telling when the bubble of “me” might pop but the psycho-active substances completely bypass the “me”, there is no engagement with this “self” and as a result it is something that has profound potential to break open the “me” or to soften it up in these type of cold-“self” situations.

Meditation approaches are often thought of as being the way to “do” something about a problem. However the hyper-vigilant “self” can practise very vigorously, often for goals and ambitions and ideals but with no feeling, just robotically. There is no “passion” in these things because there is no real feeling for them that comes from the heart. This is the difficulty. When the heart is closed and the spirit is dulled then there is a clouding-up of the senses and so a person can seem “brilliant” at doing something and yet internally be very different. This happens with so many healers and doctors and with many people involved in professions where there is an actual requirement

for lack of feeling or to perform something perfectly, very many of the Zen arts also come under this category including meditation. A person can be as calm as still ice-water, this calmness does not truly break open but is forever cool and calm and internal, like a crouching tiger, with hidden dragon!

The cold expression needs the sexuality and openness of fire, needs the human touch, the connection with the warmth. Very often therefore one can see why this cool and depressed expression can be associated with both men and women. While the coolness of the expression is very typical of a yin, its hardness is a masculine expression, and so for balance there needs to be a yang but feminine expression. The herb ayahuasca is described in exactly these terms, it is very female and associated with death but is also the bringer of visions and so associated with the yang. In fact the story of ayahuasca in Peruvian and Brazilian mythology is such that the herbs that make up the ayahuasca tea are a synergy of the female's softness but with the bright visions of the yang quality also.

There is no doubt that these are not the only ways that the "life in a box" pattern breaks down, it does so as it simply runs out of energy and passes away just before death of the body. It is important to go back to the natural world and re-connect to its clarity via plants like Ayahuasca in the particular situations for which it was known to be useful. In the West we have only just touched upon the realization that this is an important reconnection that has nothing to do with "work done", there is no process here that is about working yourself out or being able to overcome patterns. It is actually a realization that this traumatic condition can be released from within, not by "me" doing something but actually the reverse, by there being nothing for me to "do" and the herb shows this clearly. The ideologies behind meditation are useful for another very different expression of traumatic dis-ease process and these are associated with the situation of hyper-sensitivity and the next article "life on the edge". The cool-self is the expression of deep self-discipline and self-control whereas the energy of the over-heated "self" we will look at next is uncontrollable energy, the expression of fire.

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