

Just For You

Do you know?

Do you know yourself?

I know your problem.

Today, teenagers and young adults go through life with three or four different faces and personalities, depending on who they are with. Like chameleons, they skillfully alter themselves in order to adapt to their high pressure environments and the various demands that originate from their bosses, parents, spouses, family and friends. Life has become a masquerade for them, and over time external layers which were initially invented as a coping mechanism, compelling them to have different hearts, minds, soul and even goals in order to accommodate whoever they are with, develop.

Are you the same person with your family, your friends and others? Or do you develop alter egos, meek in front of parents, easygoing amongst friends, rigid with family, charming with your colleagues; and living behind conflicting facades in order to achieve what you think you need: to accommodate everyone, to satisfy everybody, to blend in, or even just to escape you own reality? If you act with a different personality before different groups, and ask these various groups to come together to describe you, will they give a consistent coherent picture of who you are, or will their reports be contradictory?

All these layers of make believe and being phony, will develop habits of living an illusion. In the end, such people disintegrate internally and are in constant inner conflict, because all the various personalities and faces are not reconcilable. Like a lens that is constantly shattered and reglued, each cracked facet, even when joined together, unifies to a very fragile and dysfunctional whole.

How many faces do you have? Are you forced to be different people all in one, revealing or suppressing different aspects of yourself depending on who you are interacting with and who you are trying to impress? Can you really be three or four different persons within one body and soul, and be true to who you are and who you were meant to be?

Are you a lost soul?

With a lost heart?

And a lost mind?

Have you lost time?

Lost lost lost ...

Busy busy busy...

But you are going nowhere!

What do you hope to achieve when living life as a pretender? Scoring well in examinations? Landing a good job? Making a man or a woman happy? To be popular? Entering into a fantasy relationship where you are living in a dreamland (actually I call it, the "la-la land", the never ending story)?

Can you be who you truly are if you are constantly pretending to be someone that you are not?

After acting out these multiple roles, diminishing who you really are, obscuring your true goal in life, and causing you a lot of sadness, loneliness and inner misery, what is the next step? What is it that you are so desperately seeking to make you feel fulfilled and happy, and why? Is it love that you are seeking? A physical relationship? Are you searching for a companion, and if so, what kind, and why? Apply the same question to your job, lifestyle, and all the decisions that you make in life in order to seek this fulfillment.

Or, is it inner peace and tranquility that you are secretly yearning for? Are you on the quest of true happiness? Again, you have to ask yourself: what are you searching for, and what is its value to you? If

you do not know, the cycle of make-believe and pretence will continue, and you will keep hunting for various safety valves whenever you are on the verge of breaking down under the weight of so many conflicting personalities. It can be a vacation, pretty clothes, jewellery, piece of music, a nice evening out, or a fancy dinner. But when it is over, you are still like a hamster running on a wheel, exhausted, without a real personality, and going nowhere.

"Nobody understands me. I'm looking for someone to understand me."

Do you feel misunderstood, wanting, hoping and wishing for others to understand you? Or do you wish to understand who you truly are, under all these layers that you have created?

Are you free to make your own decisions, think for yourself, and do what is the best for yourself? Do you have a stable and clear vision and set of principles that you are living with?

I have come across wonderful people in my life, with beautiful souls and hearts, who are highly intelligent and well meaning. However, they are living in an illusion, composed of lies and complex make-believe to protect themselves from family battles, social misunderstandings or complicated situations ... the reasons are endless. What is the result? They become deceivers to others, play-acting to be who they are not, faking emotions they do not feel; and living life as an imaginary personality to the point that they end up lying to themselves and repressing many aspects of who they really are.

WHERE ARE YOU?

WHO ARE YOU?

ARE YOU THERE?

I have encountered numerous wonderful people who are wearing themselves out, trying to indulge everyone; and searching for or defining their own identities through professional growth and career, or setting out their roles in life relative to the expectation of others rather than what they want for themselves. They lose themselves in the process.

In my younger days, a wise man advised me that it is all right to lose everything but not lose yourself. When you have lost yourself, you have lost everything; even if you own everything else in the world. Conversely, if you gain yourself, it is much better for you, even if you have lost everything else.

There is a very important point to be made here. What would the outcome be if, in your whirlwind of pleasing others, your illusory identity becomes a habit which ultimately diminishes, strangles and smothers your own personality? You will become blind and unable to breathe because you have always been doing things at the direction of others but which are not necessarily beneficial to you. You will be fractured and fragile.

If you are sucked into the vortex of other people's expectations and issues, will you know what to do for yourself? Will you know how to make the correct decisions for your own well being instead of the benefit of others even if it destroys you?

This leads us to a critical juncture: when one wants to cross over from this disguise of half truths and lies, to who he really is. The majority of teens and young adults adopt different camouflages to assimilate with the different styles of life, friends, age groups and cultures. This pushes them to live without a clear set of principles, personality or guidance. They destroy themselves as each phony outer layer, layer by layer, drowns them until there is nothing of them left. What is the value of a person living without a principle, where the person ultimately becomes a doormat, with no identity? How does this end? They become clowns, faceless, in elaborate costumes, but with tears running down their cheeks.

You want it to stop when the conflicting demands get too much to handle. You don't want to talk but you cannot deal with it anymore.

Time to Relax!

Life's reality is tough, and there will always be problems and demands from others. The truth is heavy, and the challenges are high. Now you are in the fork with two available paths. You can continue falling into this downward spiral, losing yourself every day, or you can make it stop and break out of this cycle.

If you want it to stop and find yourself, then you need to relax. Take a break from everyone, to give yourself the peace of mind and heart, to allow yourself to reflect and break away from your cyclone.

The first stage is to start a journey of self-discovery. Think of it as a journey of **snatching, rescuing, saving** and **guidance**. This is a voyage that no one can or will do for you. It is a path that you have to travel by yourself.

The starting point is to free yourself utterly and completely from every attachment that you have formed, and escape from everyone for some "alone time", with completely different companionship, or even no companion if no one is a suitable companion for your journey of iman.

One of my beloved sisters once kept crying and saying that she wished to relax. But what does relaxation really mean? The word "relax" varies from one person to the next. Some people sleep, listen to music, have a drink. Some people perform yoga or meditate. Some people go for a sauna or jacuzzi. Some people even commit suicide! However, these are not solutions, they are merely tools of escapism.

The ultimate relaxation is that which comes from within. For the achievers, the successful ones, relaxation is something they reward themselves with, when they have accomplished what they were aiming for. The farmer works relentlessly, and when the crops are harvested, he relaxes to prepare himself for the next season. It is the same with fishermen, athletes, business people and all the high fliers. They work hard and once they win: achieve the good catch, the gold medal or the profits, they relax to consolidate energy for the next round. Relaxing comes after achievement.

Now let us examine what relaxing means to the young people and the lost ones. They continue stubbornly and arrogantly on the same track, but they are running without focus or goal. They get tired and frustrated; and once burnt out, they cry out for relaxation. For them, relaxation is another form of "time out" to ready themselves for another rotation of a lunatic lifestyle, and they return to the same stressful cycle of wearing multiple faces. This is not relaxing, it is just a short term means of blocking out reality!

Similarly when a person cannot handle a situation, he goes to a bar, believing that he is relaxing when the truth is that he is merely avoiding responsibility for the time being. Similarly with drugs, music, clubbing, shopping and vacations – these are just temporary highs if one reverts to the same style of life after the experience. This is not relaxation!

High achievers take a break between one success to another to prepare themselves for the following sequence of what they have to attain. They relax with the intention of learning from the past, to analyse previous events, and to learn from their mistakes or wrong turns. Unwinding for them is a reflection, a way of harnessing strength and decreasing their weaknesses.

Let each of us examine ourselves.

Do you want to relax to grow?

Do you want to relax to gain vision?

To gather strength?

Do you want to relax to start a new chapter in life?

Do you want to relax to focus on your journey?

Do you want to relax to utilise your ability and your time to achieve a goal which can cause the success for you?

It is a very precarious point, for a lot of people have fallen into the trap of “relaxing” and emerging from it more pressured and exhausted than before. Please don’t take this wrongly. My intention is to make you alert, serious about the severity and importance of making a change with strength, power and determination. It is not to discourage. If you are seeking escape, and you wear three or four different faces, you do not want to capture reality and you have no value to yourself, you will never be able to relax.

You have to Disengage

In life, we will always be placed in different struggles and we go through things we like and dislike.

The first step is to let go of whatever is weighing you down to your environment. For example, a massage has prerequisites. You have to discard your everyday clothes, and wear whatever attire they provide you. Sometimes you are immersed in a bath or a steam room, and often the massage takes place in a darkened room. The main concept is to disengage you from the outside world.

Similarly, for yoga or meditation, you are placed in a secluded and tranquil environment, with no interruptions. Even mobile phones are banned. This is to help you to achieve the relaxation that can cause you to have clarity of vision, stability and balance, physically and emotionally.

There are plenty of similar examples, with one common element of understanding at the core. To achieve relaxation, you have to let go physically, emotionally and psychologically. You have to shed the outside world. For example, if you want to take a shower, you cannot do it with your dirty clothes on. You have to peel off the outer layer first.

This is why when people reach a level of severe stress or suffer anxiety attacks, doctors sometimes administer dosages of tranquilisers or relaxants to induce a deep sleep for a long period. This is the forced relaxation, to constrain the person, meaning to stop his brain from overloading itself and to allow the person to disassociate from the surroundings.

In chronic cases, where the intense situation is repeated over and over again and things get out of control, some people have to be institutionalised or placed in rehabilitation for months. They are put under expert supervision, which strictly monitors their diet and environment. A common feature of such centres is that any contact with the outside world, even visitors, is prohibited. This environment allows them to be free to find who they are and capture themselves.

Now let us examine something much higher. When the Creator prepared a man to be a Prophet or Messenger, He put them in a situation of ultimate seclusion, in a mountain, desert or some other isolated spot for some time. When they were spiritually ready, having cleansed themselves of their daily attachments and problems and connected their hearts to Him, He revealed His message and their mission to them.

Stripping away the Layers – Finding a Confidante

If you meet someone and he tells you that you might be very ill - a heart problem, or cancer, or you might lose a leg or arm, do you take it lightly, or you keep searching for the best doctor for a second opinion? Are you determined to find a doctor who can cure you in time before it is too late? What makes you look for the doctor in the first place? It is the belief you need to find a cure and be healthy as soon as possible in order to function properly in life.

Similarly, the first stage of healing and relaxing is to label your condition as urgent.

This brings us to the second element of escaping the cycle, which is to have the right tutor, mentor or doctor (we will refer to this person as your confidante), who will be close to you, examine the way you behave and talk. The confidante must be an impartial, wise and trusted person, with whom you are ready to share your innermost thoughts and problems: what is going on, what you are looking for, your weak points and your strengths. The right confidante can make you understand what the issue is and who you really are - something you sometimes cannot figure out by yourself. After that, he will prescribe the sequence of how to capture yourself, rebuild your strength, focus your resources, mobilise your ability and how rise above the conditions and the environment.

The more you are able to share with your confidante and open up with honesty, the more he can help you to really analyse and find yourself.

For instance, when you consult the doctor, either you know exactly what your problem is, or you describe your symptoms. He will prescribe the medication accordingly after he examines you and diagnoses the root of the problems. However, you have to reveal where the infection is, even if it is private or shameful, in order for him to help you. Similarly, in the journey of iman, if you know what your dilemma is and describe it accurately to the right confidante.

If you are not sure, you must, and I repeat you must, be transparent, straightforward and honest, and scrape the outer layers away and expose what is inside. Even if you can't do it before a confidante, do it before yourself. Don't be concerned about how ugly you think you are inside, because everything has a cure. Otherwise, no one can help you if you keep giving the different faces or suppress what is really going on. The more you reveal and admit your issues, even if only to yourself, the more you share and realise the truth of what is taking place. It is then that your confidante can prescribe the right healing for you, not for the masks that you show others. It is only then that you can help yourself.

However, if you consult a person who adopts the same attitude of pretending, deceiving and having many faces, you will never benefit from this consultation. Such a confidante will never give you the real cure.

If you are still in denial, playing the same game and hiding behind different personalities – you will never achieve relaxation or benefit yourself. Anything you do will provide a temporary relief, but you will go back to the same pattern. In medicine, when you provide the wrong symptoms, the doctor will give the wrong diagnosis. You will never be cured. It is similar for a journey of iman.

You might be wondering, not everyone has the luxury of having such a trusted or wise person in their lives. The answer is very simple.

If you do not find anyone, you have the best doctor available all the time. He will never leave you alone. The Creator, Allah SWT. He knows you, He knows everything inside out. He is willing to forgive you. He loves forgiving, He can cleanse you, He can decorate you with qualities you do not possess, elevate you, pick you up from the dirt and transform you into a dazzling star, to be special in His Kingdom. He can even choose you to work for Him. He doesn't care about your sins, if you are willing to acknowledge that He is forgiving and merciful. If you trust Him and believe in Him, no such thing is too big or too bad. A wise man mentioned that falling down, making mistakes or committing sins is not the problem. The real problem is to continue and to not want to stop it.

Now, if you are honest and can strip away the layers that you have created, if you understand that you have a problem and you need to unify all your separate and disjointed personalities into a healthy whole, then turn to Allah for help and guidance. Now you are in the right hand. The Hand of Allah SWT, for He will guard you, take care of you, give you light and wisdom and a new identity. He can give you the

happiness that others that you have been trying to impress cannot. He can show you the right road: being the real journey of success of this life and the hereafter.

All of the above, is called guidance. When Allah loves you, He guides you. When He guides you, He guides you to Himself, and by doing so, He allows you to know yourself. Now, you can capture yourself, you can recognise your weak points and strengths, you can read the signs, you can have a clear vision of where you are going. Now, you can make the right decisions to achieve your success in this life and in the hereafter.

Important note: all of the above needs your commitment to change. It will mean nothing if you do not come out of the shell of make believe and masquerades. Once and for all, you need to find the strength in yourself, value in yourself, understand yourself, love yourself, and only at this time, you can make decisions which are healthy for you, and you can prioritise and distinguish between the right and wrong companion and way of life. Now, you are on the road of success. It needs courage, honesty and sincerity to find and reveal the real you, and acknowledge the truth of yourself even if it may be ugly, just to obtain the right medication so that you can get back on the right track.

Six Simple Steps

Someone told me, this talk is very nice as a theory, but how do we implement it in practice, and what are the steps to come out of this situation?

IT IS AN OPENING FROM ALLAH. If you humble yourself enough and you want to break the cycle and come out of your multiple facades, I will give you the recipe:

Step 1: Get away from your current environment.

Step 2: Sever every attachment – be it job, career, your own love story. Give yourself a complete break - meaning no phone calls, communications or involvement in other people's lives for a period of time. Spend time with yourself, free from the emotional chains of others, and consider this period of seclusion as your special rehab time.

Step 3: Be sincere in your intention. Discover yourself, be brutally honest about who you have become, establish your relationship with your Creator and beg him to guide you and show you the way. Remember if you are in a state of blindness, you cannot really see clearly and you will never be able to make the right judgment.

If you achieve the above three steps, the Creator will give you a new vision, understanding and perspective. He will allow you to see flaws and goodness in a new light. Be completely ready to discover that most, if not all, of the time, the things that you believed were good for you are actually not, and the ones that you believed were not good for you are actually good for you.

A photographer told me that everything is about lighting. What does this mean? You can only see and understand things in life according to the amount of light you receive from the Creator. The more light illuminates you, the more you have vision and the farther and clearer you can see. On the other hand, if you are in darkness, far away from light; your vision is completely obscured and you cannot find your way. Your decision and approach to things will never be stable and now you are on a rollercoaster ride with Shaitan (the devil) and the wrong company, and you will destroy yourself. Exactly the way the sentence described, everything is about lighting. There are 30-40 verses in Qur'an about light; but all you need to do is to be in a dark and unfamiliar house. Try to move from room to room and see what will happen. Imagine now, you are moving in your life without light or guidance, or a map.

Step 4: Find someone you trust in his understanding of life and knowledge, and you are willing to share and open up and allow him to examine you, and be ready to listen to whatever he says, with an open heart. Implement his advice. Little by little, the fog in your life will be lifted, and sunrise, clarity and light will penetrate.

Step 5: I consider this the most critical point and I see many failing to achieve it. Once people develop a bad habit, it is very difficult to develop the strength to be able to overcome it. Look at alcoholics, smokers, drug users, or computer gamers. Once they become hooked, this compulsion becomes a weakness and they become slaves to their addiction. Similarly, you can also be addicted to your own ingrained habits: your way of doing things and interacting with people, or even the creation of your alter egos. To succeed and pass all of the above you have to be honest to your confidante, to yourself and most of all to your Creator. This is what Islam means by istiqama (steadfastness).

If you pass Step 5 with success, the rest is relatively easy. If you fail, you can do all the above, but deep inside you will regress to the same old pattern of behaviour, of splitting yourself into many facades, which is what happens to the majority.

Step 6: IMPORTANT NOTE: the secret advice of success. Get away completely from all the company you kept before the journey of discovering yourself. Give yourself an extra buffer because all of the above was a journey of discovering, developing, curing, and finding yourself. Now, you need the journey of strengthening before you immerse yourself back into your environment. If you reach this point with success, I promise you, in less than 2-3 months, everything in your life will change. This includes your vision and understanding, even about yourself.

You have to overcome emotional attachments of any previous relationships or any person or situation that adversely affects you. You can consider this phase as the intensive care unit dedicated for you, where you are susceptible to be re-infected. Therefore the environment has to be clean and uncontaminated, with no visitors, until you build the strength and emotional resistance to let your true self emerge, before you move to normality. Similarly, you have to go from steps 1-6, give yourself extra time and stabilise yourself before you can open any past topics or issues. This is mandatory, or otherwise you will be sucked into the same cycle that you were trying to escape and all your efforts will be undone.

Who then will be the loser, and who then will be successful?

Now you have to answer.

You choose.

Follow up until you are ok.

It is your life.