

Consider the poem and the image in the previous lesson.

Can you see it reflecting the Golden Buddha story and can you then take it internally and see this within yourself? What are the patches of gold leaf you are most attached to? What is hidden deep inside the cave that is not yet covered with gold leaf? Do you dare to go deeper into the cave and discover the naked, vulnerable and hidden aspects of yourself?

Defenses are behaviors that are both instinctual and learnt. In childhood these behaviors protected us from overwhelming psychic fear and shame that were emotional states experienced when our physical safety or identity as innately good and loving were threatened.

The threat to our psychic and physical integrity comes when we are abused - emotionally, intellectually, physically or sexually. Another way of saying this is that when our basic soul needs for safety, love and affection, attention, value and esteem, belonging etc. are not met we are filled with terror and shame and develop tactics to avoid the emotion and the stimulus for the feelings. Defenses then can be defined as any behavior that develops in an attempt to protect us from the feelings of **fear and shame** - in their generalized form they are called anxiety and depression.

At the most basic level, this is instinctual, as with animals - we go into an immediate fight, flight, freeze response, depending on the situation and innate inclination.

It is also learnt - we watch the parents responses to threat, realistic or not and learn the tactics of protection from them. The human is capable, unlike animals to be very creative with expressions of fight, flight and freeze, due to the intellect serving to assist in the task of protection.

Some of these behaviors are more adaptive than others and some are more socially sanctioned than others, but all behavior rooted in unaware childhood fears and needs are maladaptive to some extent in adulthood.

While these tactics served a function in childhood - to protect us from overwhelming feelings, - in adulthood they sabotage our lives. The extent to which we do not get aware of our defensive and protective way of living in the world based on fear and shame from our childhood is the extent to which we will live restricted, anxious and depressed adult lives. The very tactics that seemed to protect us in childhood will turn against us and destroy us. Think for a moment of one common defense - mom would give you a treat when you hurt yourself or felt bad as a kid. While this helped deny/soothe the feeling in the moment, what does it result in in adulthood?

This simple example gives us a clue as to the solution to defensive functioning in adulthood. Firstly, it is important to know the difference between a realistic, life threatening situation and adult situations that are not life-threatening or psychically threatening. We fuse the memory with the current situation and react like the children we were in terms of defensiveness. Secondly, trust that you can feel your feelings and not be psychically overwhelmed by the pain of them and in fact, by feeling them, can gain insight into how they started and the patterns of dysfunction in your life. And with this awareness you can change anything, learn self-assertive and expressive ways of dealing with situations and live a life free of fear and shame.

Exercises:

Can you think of situations in your childhood in which you were frightened or shamed?

What need was not met for you?

What did you learn to believe as a result of the experience about yourself - and others?

What confusion about blame and responsibility arises in you?

What did you learn to do in response to these feelings and subsequent beliefs about yourself and others?

Can you categorize your behaviors according to fight/flight/freeze?

Are you still responding in this way to similar situations?

How is this behavior helpful/not helpful to you now?
How do the defenses become self-fulfilling prophecies?

“Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart. Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens.”
Carl Gustav Jung

"I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become." ~Carl Jung

Defenses are those mechanisms of body and mind that can protect the organism for threat and harm, if not actually, *then in perception*. The current situation might look like the past experience, but the past experience is fusing with the current situation. This can be very confusing unless you recognize what is happening.

The younger the age of the soul, and the more severe the threat, the more dramatic the defense. Remember that every defense is really an internal dynamic you have with yourself that is then acted out in your life with others as well.

- Consider what emotions you have not wanted to feel in your everyday life.
- Consider the ways in which you try to flee your internal state of fear and shame:
- Do you literally leave the site of what might trigger internal shame by withdrawal and isolation from others? How do you internally withdraw and isolate from your young self?
- Do you manage and control others that might trigger internal fear and shame? How do you do this? Is this actually the same way in which you manage your young self?
- Do you deny, repress, distract, separate from, distance, dissociate?
- Do you attack, judge, criticize others that might trigger these internal feelings? Do you attack, judge and criticize yourself for having feelings.

Find three ways in which you defend against the inner experience of suffering and see where in your body you can feel this block. Listen to the words you use. If you dissociate, chances are you have encapsulated experience somewhere in your body, like a bubble of pain – or you habitually leave your body in perception. Is your dissociation down or up? If you repress – you have pushed the suffering down and put a horizontal barrier in your body. If you are self critical, you have silenced your soul who is hiding out somewhere.

See if you can draw a picture of the relationship dynamic (**Wave**) you have with your wounded self and although it is now harmful to you, remember it has served a purpose of protection and survival – so don't knock it. Just see it and shift to a loving relationship with yourself.

See if you can visualize the static barriers/chasms (**Particle**) between you and your young self? Colors, textures, consistency, solidity of the defenses.

Live and Be the Love inherent in it all (**Infinite**) and learn to live from this awareness instead of being stuck in a wave/particle perception and reality. In other words accept the suffering, the defenses, the relationship you have had with yourself and **SHIFT** to Loving acceptance of it all.

Remember, the Shift in the world, starts with the shift in you.

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“The process of dissociation is an elegant mechanism built into the human psychological system as a form of escape from (sometimes literally) going crazy. The problem with checking out so thoroughly is that it can leave us feeling dead inside, with little or no ability to feel our feelings in our bodies. The process of repair demands a re-association with the body, a commitment to dive into the body and feel today what we couldn’t feel yesterday because it was too dangerous.”

~ Alexandra Katehakis