

The Explorer (Therapy 3)

Dale Easley's blog

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Last night's therapy session began with a look at the role of the church in the formation of parts of my personality. However, like often happens, the direction the session took was not one I could have predicted. As we talked, a part I called The Explorer emerged. He was in his mid-20s, just home from Kenya, and newly arrived in Wyoming. The particular point of frustration he reminded me of was when I was at the Baptist Student Union (BSU). I had worked for the Baptists while in Africa, and I tried to stay involved with them when returning to the US. My experience at the BSU was the final frustration that drove me from the church.

At the BSU, we often had guest speakers. After one that I didn't agree with, a BSU member came up to me and asked my opinion. I made the mistake of thinking he actually wanted to know. Partway through my answer, he said, "I feel like my mind is being poisoned," and turned and walked away. That was the last time I was in the BSU. Soon after, I stopped attending church (except for special occasions, such as weddings, Baptisms, etc.) I had tried for years to work within the structure of the church, and I finally gave up.

Through I broke with the church, I didn't stop exploring issues of spirituality. I read widely—Zen, Castaneda, Christian meditation, mindfulness, and, later, Catholicism. I also traveled whenever I got the chance—Mexico, the American Southwest, Jamaica, Haiti, Europe, and the Middle East. What the part I was growing to understand, The Explorer, wants is to explore ideas, relationships, and places, all without being confined by ideologies or conformity.

As I was trying to understand the role of the church in my life, it makes sense in hindsight that The Explorer would make itself known. The church of my youth was the opposite of The Explorer. The church taught that all the answers we needed were already written in the Bible, that this world matters mainly in getting "saved" for the next—a sort of Godly Sorting Hat where the saved, mainly Baptists, get to go to Heaven instead of Gryffindor. Week after week, sermons were dominated by the need to be saved, despite the overwhelming numbers in the pews who had been saved for years. Intellectual content was zero. Discussions of injustice, poverty, and racism—also zero. I do remember a bold sermon by a guest preacher where he interpreted the Good Samaritan in terms of race relations. However, it didn't affect our openness to African-Americans in the church. We had zero.

Obviously, The Explorer has carried a lot of frustration for a long time. However, I was a bit surprised to see that he didn't carry much anger. The Explorer seems to search for and find new things to explore, new ways around the boundaries he encounters. This part was one I felt really good about.

Unfortunately, The Explorer is closely linked to another part which takes the frustration and anger into itself. That part I haven't named yet, but it is tightly identified with it. Understanding that part is my next task.