

Ruth King  
Week 2, *Embracing the Mad Mind*  
September 8, 2014  
“The Six Disguises of Mind”

Welcome back to Week Two of “Embracing the Mad Mind” with Tricycle Magazine. Last week I invited you to reflect on if you had one year to live, what would you do all the way down to one breath? I also asked that you set an intention for yourself as an anchor for this four-week course. And I invited you to reflect on your intention daily in your sitting practice. And this week what we’re going to do is we’re going to look at six disguises of the mad mind—six ways that we kind of show up in the world as thinking we’re protecting ourselves, but what we’re really doing is creating more madness. And before we can really embrace the mad mind, we need to be able to know what it looks like for us in our own unique experience. So that’s what we’ll be doing today, exploring these different faces.

Jack Kornfield says that your life looks like your mind and your mind looks like your life. So we’ll be looking at both our mind and our lives to see what that relationship is like. So what are these disguises? They’re habitual ways that we’ve been conditioned to respond to pain. The pain of disappointment, loss, hurts. All of the disappointments, all of the suffering in our lives. We’ve all been touched and conditioned into a certain shape and response to what life offers. And that’s what these disguises are really speaking to; they’re deep grooves in the heart and the mind and in the nervous system. They have a way of propping us up in the world so that we can hold it together, keep it together, and maintain as much control as we can.

And it’s what Thich Nhat Hanh refers to as habit energy. That’s what these disguises are about. What they really are about are disguises of suffering. They’re suffering. It’s dukkha—is what the Buddha refers to as dukkha. Which is the first noble truth. So the Buddha talks about two arrows, which is a good way to look at the connection between our disguises of the mad mind. The first arrow is the arrow we can’t avoid. It’s the arrow of pain and suffering that happens in our lives because we’re in these physical bodies. We get old. We’re hurt by what other people do. We experience losses and disappointments. We suffer physically in these bodies. So that’s the first arrow. It’s a given. It’s not like these things are going to go away.

The second arrow has to do with how we respond to the first arrow, so it has to do with our reactivity or our sensitivity to the pain and suffering that we’re experiencing. The second arrow is what we’re referring to here as our disguises, as the faces of the mad mind. So suffering is meant to be known, touched, and released, but with our disguises we hold onto them. So these disguises are things that cause us to hold tightly to our experiences, and we’re just in such a habit of doing that we don’t realize that we’re suffering. So I’m going to share these six

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faces or these six disguises and I’m going to invite you to notice which ones most resonate with you.

It’s important to think about these disguises as long-term patterns in your life—ways you’ve been habitually responding to what life offers. So they’re long-term patterns, not just something you do occasionally. Your knee-jerk reaction to when you’re disturbed, when you find yourself pierced by the first arrow. I’d like to discuss the characteristics of each of these disguises. I’d like to share the hindrances that are associated with these disguises. Hindrances are what hinders our access to wisdom. And I’d also like to discuss what we’re longing for—the longing that’s underneath these disguises.

As I’m talking about the disguises, I don’t want you to get caught up in being in a category or being sized up or in some tiny box. More I want you to think about these disguises as gateways to help you understand yourself and to have more intimacy with what disturbs you. So settle in now, and notice how you are feeling as I talk about these disguises. Because there’ll be things that you’re hearing and then there’ll be things that you’re feeling, and I’m inviting you to touch into both what I’m saying and how you’re touched by it. So take a moment now and settle in. As I’m speaking, you can have your eyes open or closed, whatever helps you be more present. So let me say first about these disguises that there’s six disguises and they’re in three categories. We have the aversive types, the greedy types and the delusional types. This corresponds with the three poisons in the Buddhist teachings. We have two aversive types, two greedy types, and two delusional types.

The aversive types are dominance and defiance disguises. The dominance disguise is the disguise where we feel a lot of control. We want control in our lives. We want to control things so that we’re never controlled. So we tend to be very critical, judgmental. There’s a cool tightness that we can have. We have a tendency to cut people off and be dismissive in our interactions. And there’s a tight anger and controlled anger that the dominance disguise tends to show in the world. And the hindrance that they’re living off the cushion and oftentimes on the cushion, is the hindrance of aversion, ill will and hatred. And they avoid intimacy through high control. And what they’re really longing for is, “How do I stay connected when I am hurt or disappointed by you?” So that’s the dominance disguise.

The second aversive disguise is defiance. The defiance disguise are those of us who are in a constant mental war zone, whether it’s verbal or silent. This is the person where they can walk in the room and you can feel them as a steeping, as a scalding teapot. And you just kind of want to get away because it’s a little scary to be around them. They can be belligerent, in your face, and it’s the disguise that

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we mostly associate with anger or madness. But it's just one of many faces. This is also a disguise that holds the hindrance of hatred, ill will and aversion. And the defiance disguise—the defiance disguise avoids intimacy through anger. And the question they're asking is, “How do I confront all the wrongs in life without suffering and causing suffering?” That's a question that the defiance disguise is asking. So those are the two aversive types, dominance and defiance.

Then we have the two greedy types, so to speak. We have the distraction disguise and we have the devotion disguise. The distraction disguise are those of us who are busy every minute of the day. We're even late to our meditation practice. You know, there's always something going on, acquiring, consuming, possessing. Knowing this, having that. And there's not one moment of time to just be with what you have. So there's not an experience of any of your acquisitions. The energy is more around the accumulation of them, and the being on the way to receive them. The hindrance that's happening often with the distraction disguise is the hindrance of sensual desire. Things I hear, that I love, I want more of them. Things that I taste, I want to eat more of it. Things that I smell, I want to have a bunch of it. So there's this being moved around and from one sensual desire to the next with the distraction disguise. And intimacy is avoided through business, through activity. And the question that's really being asked here is, “How do I allow myself to feel all that I embody? The good, the bad and the ugly. How do I be with all of that?”—that's the distraction disguise.

The second greedy type of these disguises is the devotion disguise. The devotion disguise is high on accommodating others, often at the expense of their own well-being. They are serving others with an agenda. The agenda is usually a secret. The cry that's underneath the accommodation is usually to be needed, to be included, and to be important. And even a deeper cry with the devotion disguise is that someone will notice and offer them the very care that they're offering others. So the hindrance that's happening here is around restlessness and worry, and the devotion disguise is avoiding intimacy with life by accommodating other people. The quest or the cry that they have is, “How do I care for others without betraying myself? How do I care without a desperate cry to be cared for?” So those are the two greedy types. Or what I call as flight types.

And then there are two delusional types or shrink types, and they are dependence and depression. And these are not used in the clinical sense. These are more energetic ways that we show up in the world. The dependence disguise lives in a ball of confusion, uncertainty and self-doubt. They are dependent often and long-term on the guidance and support of other people because the belief is that if they express an opposing view or have a strong opinion that they're going to lose the support and the care of their membership, of whatever group or affiliation or relationship that they would be in. So they hide a deep truth about their own desire or capability, because they don't want to risk the support that they get from

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others. So they show up in the hindrance of doubt in their relationships and in their life, questioning themselves. And they avoid intimacy through confusion. And the question that they’re asking is, “What truth about myself can I trust more when I’m angry and afraid?”—that’s the dependence disguise.

And then the last disguise that I’ll talk about today is the depression disguise. With the depression disguise, you often feel defeated by life’s hurts and disappointments. And you feel energetically collapsed and weighted down, withdrawn, and very tight emotionally, especially when it comes to conflict. You keep a really tight lid on conflict, which also keeps you at arms’ length in relationships. This hindrance here is around sloth and torpor. There is a lack of energy mentally and a lack of energy physically in your relational lives, and you avoid intimacy through withdrawal. The quest here, the question you’re asking, is, “Why do I sometimes feel isolated and lonely and that no one loves me?” but these quests of all these disguises are secrets. They’re kind of an undercover longing that’s not what people see. What people see is the second arrow, not the first one.

So I’d like to offer a reflection right now and just ask you to close your eyes and think for a moment of the six disguises that I described. Which one most directly do you identify with as a long-term pattern? The dominance, which is high control? Defiance—high anger? Distraction—high activity, busyness. Devotion—high service. Depression—low energy, withdrawal. Dependence—high doubt?

You can open your eyes now and maybe you know what your disguise is. Sometimes some of us think we’re all of these disguises. We tend to have one or two that really fits our life-long pattern of responding to difficulty. So I invite you to just think about your long-term pattern, and I think you might begin to glean that there’s some habitual ways you’ve been conditioned to respond to what disturbs you, so I’d like to offer a few home practices for you this week. I’d like for you to continue reflecting on your intention, because sometimes as you sit with your intention it gets a little clearer, so it’s okay to tweak it a little bit as you go along. I’d like for you to—throughout each day and in your sitting practice—I’d like for you to notice your disguise. Notice the play of your disguise. That’s second arrow.

And an example: I tend to wear the dominance disguise. So one of the ways I’m, you know, hooked on a regular basis is when I watch the news. When I watch the news I can go into righteous rage about what I see, how it is, how it should be. And before I know it I’m off and running with my righteous point of view. So that’s a place where I can begin to catch myself being caught in the disguise, and the minute I catch myself is a moment of mindfulness. That’s your homework

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assignment this week, to catch yourself and shift from being absorbed in the disguise to noticing that it’s happening. That’s a subtle shift and a profound one.

So we want to have you just back out of it and see what’s happening and make a notation of it. And it might be something like, “Ah, yeah, here you are. I see you. I see you. There you are, my little controlling one. You’re adorable. There you are.” And you want to just take a breath right there when you notice that disguise doing its little dance, doing its little habituation. And you might even take a breath and on your exhale say, “Welcome, I see you.”

That’s the first step. The second step is I’d like for you to then notice what’s happening in your body the moment you’re saying that. Notice if there is a subtle release that happens or notice if there’s a tightening that happens. But right here you’re turning your attention inward to see if you can feel the disguise. All of these disguises have roots in the body. All of our thoughts have roots in the body, our feelings have roots in the body. So I want you to turn your attention inward in these moments, in these mindful moments of madness, and see if there’s a way you can notice how the disguise is living in the body and what’s happening. Don’t make this a big effort, heavy-duty thing. Have it be a soft noting of what’s happening. “Ah, I see you,” and, “Ah, I feel you,” could be your approach.

But what we’re doing mostly is shifting from absorption into noticing and then allowing the experience to be there. Also it will be useful to—at the end of your sitting practice maybe at the end of the day—to just capture some notes in your journal; just write down some thoughts about what you’re starting to recognize as your play of disguises, as your faces of the mad mind. See if you can just start to capture some of the things you’re starting to not only see but know in your body around these disguises. And it’s important that you’re kind to yourself as you do this inquiry, that you’re not discovering your disguises and then adding a few more arrows. What you want to do is discover what’s happening with a kind witnessing that will help what you see be clearer and help you soften in the welcome of it. James Baldwin says that “love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within.” So that’s what we’re doing. We’re starting to remove, soften the mask, through our own kind witnessing. So enjoy your practice and I’ll see you next week.