

THE FOUR SPLITS

1 : the first split is between my self and other selves – ego Vs. other

For some reason, our mental ego takes control by splitting from reality in at least four basic ways. Only through some experience of loss, death, and suffering are these four splits ordinarily overcome. (Deep journeys of prayer can also accomplish the same.) The first split is between my self and other selves. The first lie is separateness, and we tend to be totally convinced of it, although family loves and bonds, and marriage itself, try to overcome it. In the first half of life (and for many in the second half also) we spend most of our time accentuating and accessorizing our separate self. I'm better than you, I'm smarter than you, I'm better looking than you, I'm healthier than you, I'm whatever. It's all about you after this unfortunate split. We choose to over-identify with our separate self and most of our thoughts and actions are self-referential. The modern word we use for this is ego.

2 : the second split is between our bodies from our minds

In the second split we separate our bodies from our minds. The mind is given preeminence in almost all people. The mind starts steering, judging, analyzing, fixing, controlling, and trying to dominate body and soul. Most people think they are their thinking! René Descartes was only being honest when he said "I think, therefore I am"! That's what contemplation can help you resolve. It allows you to find the deeper self—prior to thinking about it, prior to the judgments you make and the preferences you have, and your endless mental commentary on everything.

It really doesn't matter what you think about things, believe it or not. This is a revolutionary and humiliating breakthrough for most people. What matters is WHAT IS. People with mental illness or Alzheimer's are clearly people who deserve reverence because they are made in the image of God and yet their mind is debilitated. That should be telling us that you are not your mind. Your mind doesn't make you human. You are something bigger than your thinking. Some do not overcome this split till the very last hours of their life.

3 : the third split is between life from death

In the third split, we separate life from death, and we think they are two separate realities. In fact, they are two sides of one coin. God must surely understand that humans see things "die" and

seemingly disappear, starting with the first death of our pet, our grandparents, and perhaps even parents. It sure looks like either-or. The brilliant Ken Wilber says that "the fact that life and death are 'not two' is extremely difficult to grasp, not because it is so complex, but because it is so simple." And the equally brilliant Kathleen Dowling Singh, who has given her life to hospice work, says that "We miss the unity of life and death at the very point where our ordinary mind begins to think about it."

4 : the fourth split is the acceptable self from the unacceptable self

The fourth split is the split of the acceptable self from the unacceptable self. We use the terms "persona" for our presented and preferred self-image, and "shadow" is our denied and rejected self-image. What humans usually do is identify with an idealized image of ourselves. What's going to work in my group? What's going to sell in America and in my culture? We identify with whatever our group says is admirable and superior. What all enlightened ones do is to overcome the four splits, very often in reverse order. Normally we have to face and even accept our shadow self first, then our split into our mind and out of our body, thirdly our denial of death and fear of life, and lastly our very autonomy as a separate human being. Our separateness and our superiority is slowly dissolved as we walk toward what seems like our death. We slowly learn to question what Steven Levine called "the imaginary loss of an imaginary self." Some might call it "faith."

5 : Non-Dual Consciousness

Once you overcome the other three splits, the first and primary split—overcoming the separation of self from nonself—becomes much easier, although the autonomous self is usually the last to die. When Jesus commands us to love our enemy and to love our neighbor, he's training us to overcome this split. What you do to another, you do to yourself, and you do to God, Jesus says. He speaks as if there is a real moral equivalence between the self, the other, the Christ, and the God-self. Really quite amazing, you must admit. In various ways, he says "what you do to one, you do to the other." This is totally clear in Jesus' teaching, but only the non-dual mind is able to see this—or live this.

It is done step by step. Little by little you have to overcome each of these splits. And then you are ready to die! The final splitting called death is almost the natural next step.

Adapted from an unpublished talk in Assisi, Italy, May 2012, by Richard Rohr.