

## One of me must know better

By Ruth Ostrow

"HELLO, hello. Will my higher self please reveal itself to me?" I implore, sitting on the floor waiting.

There are mad things I have done. Channelling myself is the maddest. But I've had a hard decision to make the past few weeks and despite the thinking, thinking, the endless lists of pros and cons, I'm no clearer on what to do.

We all have them, the vexing decisions that continually dog our lives. And although I've plumbed the rubble of my tortured mind, no answer is to be found in sane, rational thought. So I've gone New Age instead.

In New Age circles they believe the "higher self" has the answers. Some call it God or the soul, located deep in our psyches. Jungians call it the unconscious mind, which links to the mystical, the spiritual and our inner muse.

The woman I'm working with today sees it as the real me. The me at the core of the various mes. So, like a psychic channelling entities from beyond the grave, I'll go into a trance to access my "true self" in the hope that the higher me will tell the lower me what the real me thinks we should do.

Here I sit, on a pillow, with my legs crossed, feeling like an existential Neil Diamond song: "I am I said, to no one there, and no one heard at all, not even the chair."

So far, I've sat on various pillows around the room, talking to the many parts of myself, the creative child, the archetypal parent and others, all competing to have their way.

Now I'm sitting on the centrifugal pillow, in the middle of the room, waiting for the higher me to start speaking words of wisdom: "Let it be..."

Although I laugh as I write this, the technique - which I'm told is a loose blend of transactional analysis and a Jungian technique called voice dialogue, which gets the various parts of self to reveal themselves and be heard, before the Witness or Aware Ego makes the final decision - has been effective in helping many people I know make serious decisions.

And although it's said that talking to oneself is the first sign of madness, psychologists understand that we all have competing parts of ourselves pulling in different directions.

Once you actually dissect yourself and listen, you can hear a child's voice wanting to play and have more time for itself, you can hear the inner authority figure bullying you into carrying more responsibility, there's an adult trying to calm everybody down and accommodate competing forces.

And ultimately there is the higher self, floating above it all. A sort of spiritual wise one, the narrator, who seems to be watching it all from on high, smiling. Therapists use different techniques to access it. Philosopher and author Edward de Bono is famous for his cry to lateral thinking in problem solving and for

prompting the donning of different coloured hats to identify the various voices inside our heads - for instance, the black hat is the voice of caution, the red hat is intuition and creativity.

One therapist I know gets her clients to write answers to their dilemmas using the opposite hand to the one they normally use.

Based on US research around left-right brain functions, it is believed that this simple shift in habit can help the brain bypass its usual circuitry and connect to a different part of the cerebral cortex, thus providing a more inspired form of problem solving.

And for something a little different, I have often relied on the excellent work of American symbolist Dr James Wanless, who created the Jungian-based Voyager Deck of tarot cards.

In his system, which he teaches to corporate clients, one draws cards not necessarily as a divinatory tool but as a key to unlock the secrets of the unconscious, higher mind.

In other words, the symbol of a mountain might prompt one person to feel buried alive and warn them not to proceed with a purchase. The next person will see a mountain of money and go ahead. The answer is in the eye of the beholder, but through rationalising the symbol's meaning, the higher self is activated.

Wanless says you can get the same answer by, say, looking at the pictures in a women's magazine, simply by letting the archetypal images trigger an intuitive response.

So if the higher me doesn't show soon, the lower me will take us off to the hairdresser to peruse her schlock magazine collection instead. Which could prove an interesting new excuse for those caught reading embarrassing material: "I wasn't looking at the dirty picture. I was just trying to unlock my unconscious mind." Yeah sure!

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