



## Lesson 7

### Seeing Your Attachments

Generally speaking we have some level of attachment to most of the things that we keep in our life, and some of the things that we wish were not in our life. Attachment is an unconscious, naturally occurring process that we apply to the things in our life that have importance to us. They identify as us or become a priority. Like all things, it is neither good nor bad, it is just something that we do and usually without awareness. Unfortunately, it also colors our perspective and clouds our objectivity around many subjects. By using our awareness we can learn to look at things in our life that we are attached to and see how our life is affected by that attachment or the beliefs associated with the attachment. We can use our awareness in our attachments to some of the things, and we can take back the power and energy we have been feeding these hidden parasites.

We can have attachments to anything. It can be obvious or very subtle. It is often easy to see when the attachment is to another person, a lover, a hero, a co-worker, a friend, a teacher or anyone else. We can attach to an idea or ideal, like political parties, religious beliefs, sports teams, being green, being organic. We can even attach to any number of social issues, from abortion to gay rights to racial inequalities. We even attach to ourselves, or at least to the personas we have created for ourselves, the masks we wear in public. Some less obvious attachments may go unnoticed like attachment to Starbucks on your way to work, always wearing makeup or having a clean car. There are many degrees or levels of attachment, from mild interest to fanaticism.

**1. The Authentic Self** - When we first encounter something in life that hooks our attention, we decide if we want to invest our thoughts, time or energy into engaging with this thing that hooked our attention. If we decide that we do, we have no attachment, just the desire to experience. That is all that it is, an experience; we enjoy a moment in time without any real attachment. Then we move on to something else without a care or maybe even a second thought about it.

**2. The Ability to Detach** - If we decide that we liked the experience and we would like some more of it, we invest a little more of our self in this experience and become slightly attached. It does not change your life or your perspective. It becomes a small facet of your life, but it does not become a part of your persona. You can walk away from it and never return without any effect on you whatsoever.

**3. Preference** - If we continue to increase the focus of our thoughts or actions about it, our attachment steadily increases so that it comes up in our conversations and we contemplate when we may be involved with it again. It still does not really affect us in how we live our life, because we have not identified ourselves with it. It is still more of a casual association, and we can walk away without remorse or a sense of loss.

**4. Internalize** - When we begin to identify ourselves with it and become fully engaged with it as part of our life, we are hooked. It has become a part of our persona. We have begun to define a significant part of ourselves according to our relationship with it. We have emotional reactions to someone agreeing with us or opposing us with regards to whatever it is. We bring it into the other areas of our life that are completely unrelated. It is almost always a part of what we are doing.

**5. Definition of Identity** - If left unchecked, the attachment now seems to gain a life of its own. It becomes a major part of who we are. No aspect of our life is free from it. We begin debating and defending it against anyone who is opposed to it. If someone disagrees with us we judge them as wrong. Our self-importance begins to correlate to our attachment. Our attachment becomes so significant to us. It begins to blur together with our life to such a degree that we have trouble separating the two. Our life begins to revolve, more and more, around this one thing.

**6. Fanaticism** - At some point, we become consumed by it, and this monster of our own creation has almost completely devoured us. It has almost become the only thing that defines us. It is the focus of every aspect of our life, whether at work, with family, relaxing and even sleeping. Whatever we do it is now present and a part of us. There is no separation between it and our self-importance or our persona. If we are not experiencing it in this moment we are looking towards the next time we do, or talking about it, or planning our future experiences with it. We actively try to convert everyone we see into believing in this thing like we do. It becomes crucial that everyone agrees with us and understands how important it is. We demand validation for our attachment, which has become an obsession.

**7. Loss of Humanity** - Finally, this thing is now beyond obsession. Nothing else matters to us. We work, take care of our family, interact with life; we do whatever we need to do to survive. But, there is only one passion in our lives, only one thing that matters. Our friends and acquaintances are separated into those who agree with us and those who are against us. We are what we have attached to, there is no us outside of that. We have now even lost our humanity. We will fight for our attachment, even kill to defend it. Or, we will kill ourselves if we are forced to live without it. We can see this level of attachment everyday in the news in the examples of soccer fan riots after a game, terrorist attacks and suicide bombers, medical doctors who perform abortions being murdered, churches burned, racial killings, spiking of redwood trees, letters being sent to politicians containing dangerous chemicals like anthrax, or just some indiscriminate person who decides they are going to jump off of a bridge. At this level we are not respecting anyone's dream, not even our own. We are putting all of our attention, focusing all of our intent, on something outside of ourselves, that ultimately has nothing to do with us at all.

The important thing is to be aware of attachments in order to regain our power. Look back at the first three stages. At these levels, we always have a choice. We can choose to continue, or we can choose not to continue, but the choice is crucial. Sometimes we give into it, rooting for our home team or debating religion with our family. Sometimes we devote a portion of our life to a cause, a movement, or a belief without letting that overtake the rest of our life. As our attachment grows stronger and moves up the scale, our life becomes progressively more impacted by our attachments. Who I am becomes directly linked with what I know or what I believe. We give more and more power and control to our beliefs of what it is that we are attached to. It becomes the single focal point for our perception. We become unable to see our life through any other filter than our most powerful attachments. We finally lose all choice in our life because we have come to believe that something outside of us, is us, or even more important than us. The seven levels of attachment describe for us how attached we have become to the outcome, the performance, to what we want in life, or how attached we are to our own point of view.