

# **The Core Deficient Self and Relationship**

**By Scott Kiloby**

In realizing the non-dual nature of reality, and seeing all divisions between self and other as illusory and thought-created, one's work is done . . . or so the story goes. Theoretically, at least, any sense of ego is then seen for what it is, an illusory creation of thought. Any suffering, seeking, or conflict that arises in relationship is seen through as a product of identifying with that ego. One would experience directly non-dual recognition and never suffer in a personal story, never seek for love, attention, validation, or approval from others, and never find conflict of any kind in relationship. Such is the folklore of the ideal awakening,

In my years of meeting people in one-on-one sessions, including those who have had an initial awakening to non-dual awareness, I have found a tendency to rush to the conclusion that one is "awakened" because of some experience or even an ongoing sense of peace or freedom without the sense of an inherent separate self. But upon closer examination of my own life and the lives of so many—including non-dual teachers and therapists—I've found that ego is pretty stubborn. It tends to arise in subtle ways even after one has had a recognition that ego is illusory. And it often shows up through certain triggers in personal and familial relationships. Relationship is where ego remains a real blind spot.

If one remains open, there is no end to the depth of love, compassion, freedom, joy, peace and wisdom. But that's the key—openness! In encountering subtle pockets of leftover separation, one can deepen into realization, instead of rushing to claim complete enlightenment or liberation. Yes, presence is already here. That can be seen fairly easily, with the right pointers. That doesn't mean in all cases that one is automatically free of the sense of a separate ego.

We can say that ego is also already Oneness. This insight is very deep. But if we use that insight as a cover-up job for a sense of deficiency that we continue to carry with us, why lie to ourselves? Why not look at this deficiency with the eye of wisdom and discernment?

This article addresses one of the ways I have dealt with leftover conditioning in my work with others. It contains material from my book *Living Relationship* at [www.livingrealization.org](http://www.livingrealization.org) as well as additional information that speaks directly to how the deficient self arises including in those who have experienced the initial recognition of non-dual awareness. It provides a unique tool (the Boomerang Inquiry) for seeing through that deficient self in every relationship.

## **The Deficient Self – What Is It?**

Deficiency is the core story related to the self center (i.e., ego). Most people carry a deficiency story that strikes at the very heart of who they think they are. The sense of separation carries with it an emotional wound that arises along with a mental story of being deficient in some way. The deficient self comes in many forms: unlovable or unloved self, inadequate self, unworthy

self, imperfect self, invalidated self, abandoned self, weak or powerless self, fearful or unsafe self, or some other form of the story “I am not quite good enough yet.”

## **Relationship Is Truly a Mirror**

This core deficient self is often triggered in relationship. To get a sense of how much the deficiency story affects how you move and act in the world and in relationship, try this out: imagine yourself—the deficient self—sitting in the middle of a room, with all the people and other objects in your life placed around you in a circle. Go around the whole circle, looking at each object and person. As you look at each person or object, notice how he or she mirrors back to you that you are deficient in some way. This panoramic view of the people and objects in your life will help you see and name the particular deficient self that you take yourself to be. It will help illuminate the motives you carry for responding and acting as you do in your relationships with people and objects.

Relationship has this built-in mirroring effect. We grow up thinking that we are deficient. As we move through life, people and other objects appear to mirror back to us this core, deficient self. The mirroring effect in relationship is happening in every direction if you look. For example, the notion that there are others who are successful often mirrors back a deficient, “unsuccessful self.” When a loved one does not respond to you in the way you expected or when a romantic relationship ends, this often mirrors back an “unlovable self.” Attractive people mirror back an “unattractive self.” People who look important in the world mirror back an “unimportant self” or “unworthy self.” When someone judges or criticizes you, this may mirror back a self that is not good enough or that is wrong. When you are bothered by someone who appears arrogant or authoritative, this mirrors back a sense of self that is weak, powerless, unsafe, or small in comparison. Thoughts of a bleak financial future mirror that you are lacking, insecure, or under threat. Even future objectives like enlightenment, recovery and self-improvement may mirror a self that seems presently lacking or incomplete.

The deficiency story creates a tendency to seek outside ourselves, in objects and people, for what we think we lack within. We look for love, pleasure, attention, acknowledgement and approval. The story also creates the tendency to judge and criticize others in an attempt to equalize the imbalance and polarization we sometimes experience in relationship. It makes us want to be right at all costs because the prospect of being wrong brings the sense of deficiency to the surface. We may feel jealous and envious of others who seem to be better, lovable, perfect, powerful, richer, more attractive, more knowledgeable, or more spiritual.

The reverse is also true. When we falsely believe that we are overly important, powerful, or more valid or worthy than others, we look to others to support this false identity—to mirror it back. When we are deeply honest with ourselves, we come to see that the only reason we hold a belief in being better than others is because, at the core, we feel deficient. We hide the deficiency by overcompensating with the mind, creating a false sense of an important, powerful, valid, or worthy self to conceal that deficiency from ourselves and others. We look for others to buy into our illusion. You scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours. Look to me as superior and

I'll let you know that you are beneath me. All of this arises from a belief in inherent separation. And the deficiency story lies at the core of this belief.

The story is often buried so deeply in our psyche that we cannot see it operating in its subtle forms, in the way we think, feel, act, and move in relationship and in the world. Non-dual teachers and realized beings are not necessarily immune to the reach of the deficient self. Some of the abuses in spirituality such as sex abuse, greed, conflict among teachers and traditions, and the seeking of attention and a mass of followers for personal gratification can be attributed to a sense of deficiency still lingering around in the teacher/realized being, stubbornly unseen or ignored if it is seen. Regardless of who we think we are—a teacher, a T.V. salesman, a janitor, or a jock—the deficient self can rear its head in our relationships with other people, money, fame, work, addictive substances, and just about any other object you can name.

When we remain unaware of how the deficiency story is being mirrored back to us in relationship and how we are acting out these polarized views of self and other, we experience continued suffering, seeking, and conflict.

### **The Boomerang Inquiry in Relationship**

The good news is that we can change our attitude about this mirroring effect. We don't have to view relationship as a sticky problem in our lives or something to avoid. We can use it as a tool for seeing through the belief in a separate, deficient self. Everyone and everything becomes our teacher, quite literally.

In Living Relationship, we use the Boomerang Inquiry to illuminate the deficient self and see through it when it pops up in relationship.

Here is how it works:

1. Whenever you are triggered in relationship, ask yourself what this person or object is mirroring back to you about a deficient self center.
2. Give the deficient self center a specific name (e.g., unlovable self, unfulfilled self, lacking self, incomplete self, broken self, unsuccessful self, invalid self).
3. Once you name that deficient self, try to find it.

The Inquiry invites you to actually find the deficient self in your direct experience—in the thoughts, emotions, and sensations that appear and disappear to awareness. When you are already resting naturally in awareness, throughout the day, you are in the perfect position to just notice what emotional energies arise related to certain stories you tell yourself or certain relationships in which you are involved. The body contains its own wisdom, so to speak. The deficiency story shows up in the body like a wound of pain, contraction, guilt, shame, anger, sadness, or fear.

In the moment you feel triggered, the first thing to do is stop! Then look directly at the thought you are emphasizing. The thought may be “I’m not good enough” or “I am jealous” or “This person is just dead wrong.” As you are looking at the thought, ask yourself: “Is this thought, by itself, the deficient self?” If not, just let the thought fall away naturally.

If that thought feels like the deficient self, it just means that there is some emotion or sensation arising along with the thought. The thought feels stuck to the emotion or sensation. I call this “the Velcro Effect.” Bring direct, bare attention into the body and notice the emotion or sensation. Just sit in the thought-free experience of letting that emotion or sensation be exactly as it is, without labeling it. If a label arises, such as “fear” or “contraction,” notice that those are thoughts and, for each one, ask: “Is this thought the deficient self?” Once you are experiencing energy in the body without labels, ask yourself: “Is this energy, by itself, the deficient self?” If you can see that it is just nameless energy and not the deficient self, just rest as awareness, letting the energy move through and then dissipate back into awareness. This undoes the Velcro Effect. But if the energy feels like the deficient self, it just means that some thought (e.g., words or mental pictures) are subtly coming through to give a sense of identification with that energy. That’s the Velcro Effect again (i.e., bodily energy stuck to thoughts). Look directly at those words or that mental picture and ask: “Is this the deficient self?” If the answer is “no,” relax again, letting the bodily energy move through and dissipate, without any labels or stories on it. That undoes the Velcro Effect every time.

As you move back and forth between thoughts and the emotions/sensations that arise and paint the picture of a deficient self, the thoughts start to feel less and less stuck to the emotions/sensations. The deficient self begins to appear emptier, less solid, less separate, and less objective. In between your questions, just rest as awareness, really relaxing into the direct experience of finding no self in any of the thoughts, emotions, or sensations that arise and fall. Once you see that no thought, emotion, or sensation is the self, it no longer matters whether these things arise. Any appearance can come and go, yet the deficient self is unfindable. Rest in the unfindability of that self, letting anything and everything arise and fall freely.

Suffering, seeking, and conflict in relationship show up from unconsciously believing that these appearances form a separate object—me, the deficient person. In using this tool when you are triggered, it may surprise you how much the deficient self is rearing its head in relationship in many subtle ways. But in seeing through it in each of those scenarios, it becomes naturally easier to move, act, and respond in relationship more selflessly and confidently, with a clear mind and an open, fearless heart. Love, compassion, clarity, wisdom and peace show up automatically—even more deeply than before, when you thought you were already awakened.

If you find yourself now believing that you are fully awakened, this is fine and perhaps conventionally accurate. But notice how that identity itself often comes from a story of

deficiency. What is the gut honest reason for calling yourself awakened? When we are deeply honest, we come to see that the reason we hold a belief in being an inherent awakened self is because the deficiency story is still operating. We hide the deficiency by overcompensating with the mind, creating a false sense of an “awakened” self to conceal that deficiency from ourselves and others.

Leave no stone unturned. Look for the awakened self and the unawakened self. Try to find them in your direct experience. They are as unfindable as any other version of self.

I have used the Boomerang Inquiry with many people throughout the years, with tremendous success. I’ve used it in almost every scenario you can imagine: those who find themselves in conflict a lot; those seeking love and validation from others; those who often compare themselves to others and come up short; those who are constantly trying to make peace or be nice so that others will like them; those who are constantly helping others in order to seek love and validation, those who use the intellect as a way to protect themselves from real intimacy; and even spiritual teachers who feel addicted to gaining followers. Long-held, deeply rooted stories from childhood start being seen as empty the moment they arise. Relationships harmonize themselves automatically with the use of this inquiry.