

#PHILOSOPHY

There Is No "Self"

"Why are you unhappy? Because 99.9 percent of everything you think, and of everything you do, is for yourself - and there isn't one."



The brain-powered individual, which is variously called the self, the ego, the mind, or "me," lies at the center of Western thought. In the worldview of the West, we herald the greatest thinkers as world-changers. There is no more concise example of this than philosopher René Descartes' famous statement, "Cogito, ergo sum," or, "I think, therefore I am." But who is this? Let's take a closer look at the thinker, or the "me," we all take for granted.

Western view: The self is a pilot

This "I" is for most of us the first thing that pops into our minds when we think about who we are. The "I" represents the idea of our individual self, the one that sits between the ears and behind the eyes and is "piloting" the body. The "pilot" is in charge, it doesn't change very much, and it feels to us like the thing that brings our thoughts and feelings to life. It observes, makes decisions, and carries out actions - just like the pilot of an airplane.

This I/ego is what we think of as our true selves, and this individual self is the experimenter and the controller of things like thoughts, feelings, and actions. The pilot self feels like it is running the show. It is stable and continuous. It is also in control of our physical body, for example, this self understands that it is "my body." But unlike our physical body, it does not perceive itself as changing, ending (except, perhaps for atheists, in bodily death), or being influenced by anything other than itself.

Eastern view: The self is an illusion

Now let's turn to the East. Buddhism, Taoism, the Advaita Vedanta school of Hinduism, and other schools of Eastern thought have quite a different take on the self, the ego, or "me." They say that this idea of "me" is a fiction, although a very convincing one. Buddhism has a word for this concept - anatta, which is often translated as "no self" - which is one of the most fundamental tenets of Buddhism, if not the most important.

This idea sounds radical, even nonsensical, to those who are trained in Western traditions. It seems to contradict our everyday experience,

indeed our whole sense of being. But in Buddhism and other schools of Eastern thought, the concept of the self is seen as the result of the thinking mind. The thinking mind reinvents the self from moment to moment such that it in no way resembles the stable coherent self most believe it to be.

Put another way, it is the process of thinking that creates the self, rather than there being a self-having any independent existence separate from thought. The self is more like a verb than a noun. To take it a step further, the implication is that without thought, the self does not, in fact, exist. In the same way that walking only exists while one is walking, the self only exists while there are thoughts about it. As a neuro-psychologist, I can say that in my view, science is just now catching up with what



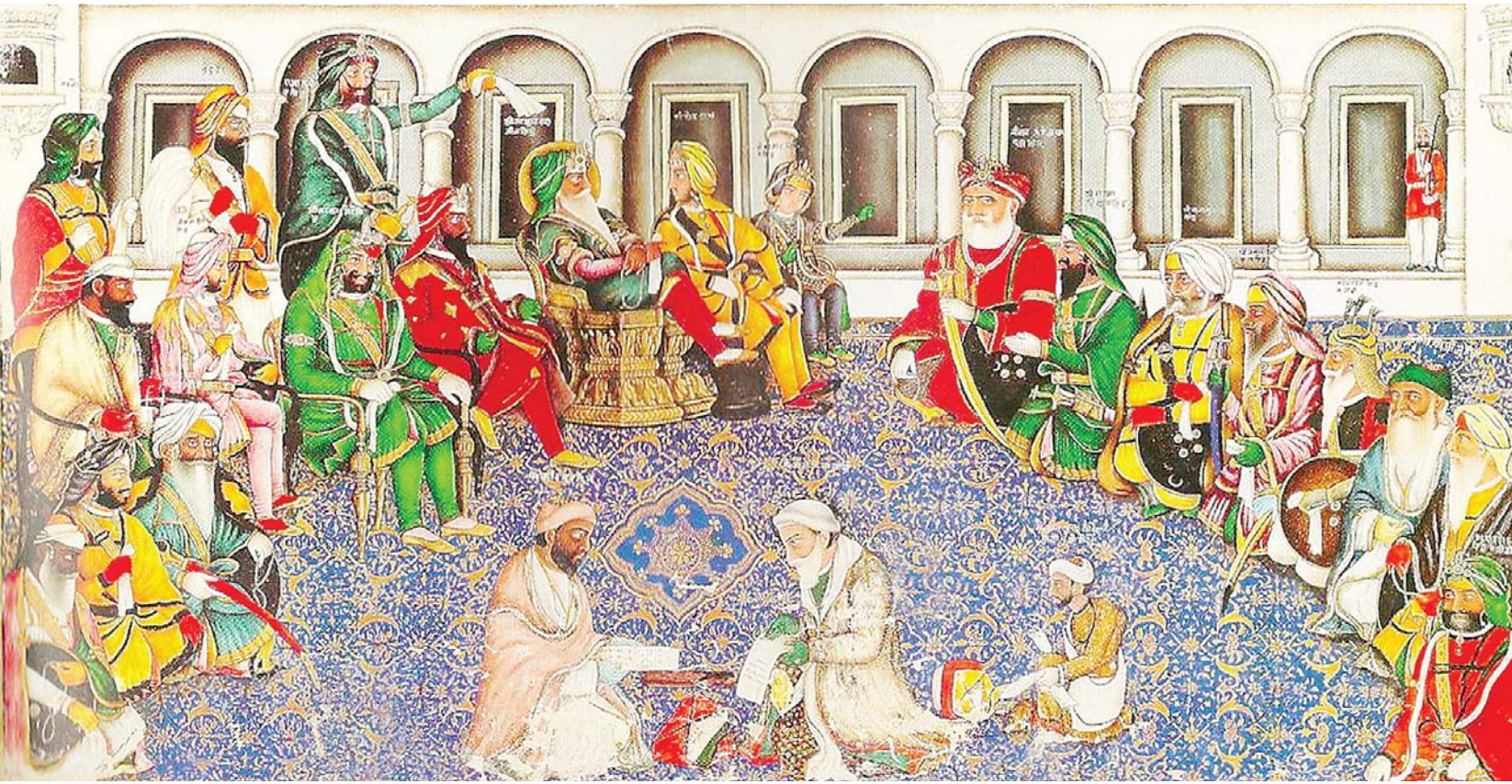
Buddhist, Taoist, and Advaita Vedanta Hinduism have been teaching for over 2,500 years.

There is no "self-centre" in the brain

The great success story of neuroscience has been in mapping the brain. We can point to the language centre, the face processing centre, and the centre for understanding the emotions of others. Practically every function of the mind has been mapped to the brain with one important exception: the self. Perhaps this is because these other functions are stable and consistent, whereas the story of the self is hopelessly inventive with far less stability than is assumed.

While various neuroscientists have made the claim that the self resides in this or that neural location, there is no real agreement among the scientific community about where to find it - not even whether it might be in the left or the right side of the brain. Perhaps the reason we can't find the self in the brain is because it isn't there.

Before there was Partition, before there were riots and mass exodus. Before there was religious nationalism, the division of Punjabis into multiple airtight traditions. Before there were contemporary incarnations of Mughal armies and the Guru's forces, fighting a perennial battle, correcting historical injustices. Before Lahore became a Muslim city, the city of Sufi saints, and Amritsar, the city of Gurus, there was Mian Mir and Guru Arjan.



Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Darbar in Lahore.

Lahore was born in Amritsar... (...2)

Haroon Khalid

Lahore today is still an important city, perhaps more important than it has ever been, but it is not the Lahore of the past. Its contemporary geography and location are an awkward testimony to its changed status. A city that once looked in both directions, has today its back towards the east, and looks desperately towards the west, towards Islamabad, Kabul and beyond in search of a new identity, in search of a new incarnation.

The story of Amritsar is not much different. It was wedded to Lahore at its birth, tied a knot with the city that spanned over several centuries. It was a marriage that was sanctified by Valmiki, as Ramayana his witness, by the shabd of the Gurus and the blessings of Sufi saints like Mian Mir. It was a marriage of interdependence, of convenience and even complementary traits. It was a marriage in which Lahore took on certain roles and Amritsar others. Thus, in 1739, when a young Ranjit Singh took over Lahore, he effectively became the ruler of Punjab, with Lahore the political symbol in his control. But, without the blessings of Amritsar, the spiritual symbol, he could not yet call himself Maharaja. The capture of one was incomplete without control over the other. Lahore held the past, while Amritsar was the future. Lahore was regal, while Amritsar sacred. If Lahore was miri, then Amritsar was piri. The two were not distinct entities, but one. They were an extension of each other, incomplete without the other. Like an archetypical marriage, they were two bodies and one soul.

The divorce was sudden, ending

#HISTORY

The gradual dependence that had developed over (almost) 400 years of marriage. It was an immediate severing of relationship, a violent rupture of all connections. Memories of Lahore, however, continue to haunt Amritsar. It is a relationship the city today searches for, sometimes with Delhi and at other times with Chandigarh. It is that primary relationship that impacts its subsequent relationships. The memory of the divorce lurks within its subconscious, hampering it from fully realising itself, from fully expressing itself.

Road to Nowhere

The road leads nowhere, meandering non-committally. It's not meant to be travelled on, to be explored. It is not meant to connect one part

with another. It is meant to provide a semblance of connectivity, meant to fill up empty tracts of land. It is aimless, pointless, stranded like a branch of a family tree that has no progeny; that has no purpose.

One after another villages and hamlets emerge on both sides of the road. They are the children of distantly related family members with no children of their own. They are no longer part of the immediate family, no longer invited to its events. They are confined within their circles, isolated from the economic structures of the core. Their names represent their marginalised positions - Dera Chahal, Jhaman, Hair and Bedian, terms that have no resonance in contemporary Lahore, the Lahore of Islampura, Rehman Park, Model Town and Defence, a Lahore of postcolonial sensibilities, tinged with the flavour of Islamic nationalism.

I am travelling on Bedian Road, a road named after the village



Guru Ramdas.



Hazrat Mian Mir.

Bedian, which in turn was named after the Bedi descendants of Guru Nanak, who were allotted land in this village. It's only the name that survives, a name that once resonated with significance, a name that today represents nothing but outskirts of Lahore.

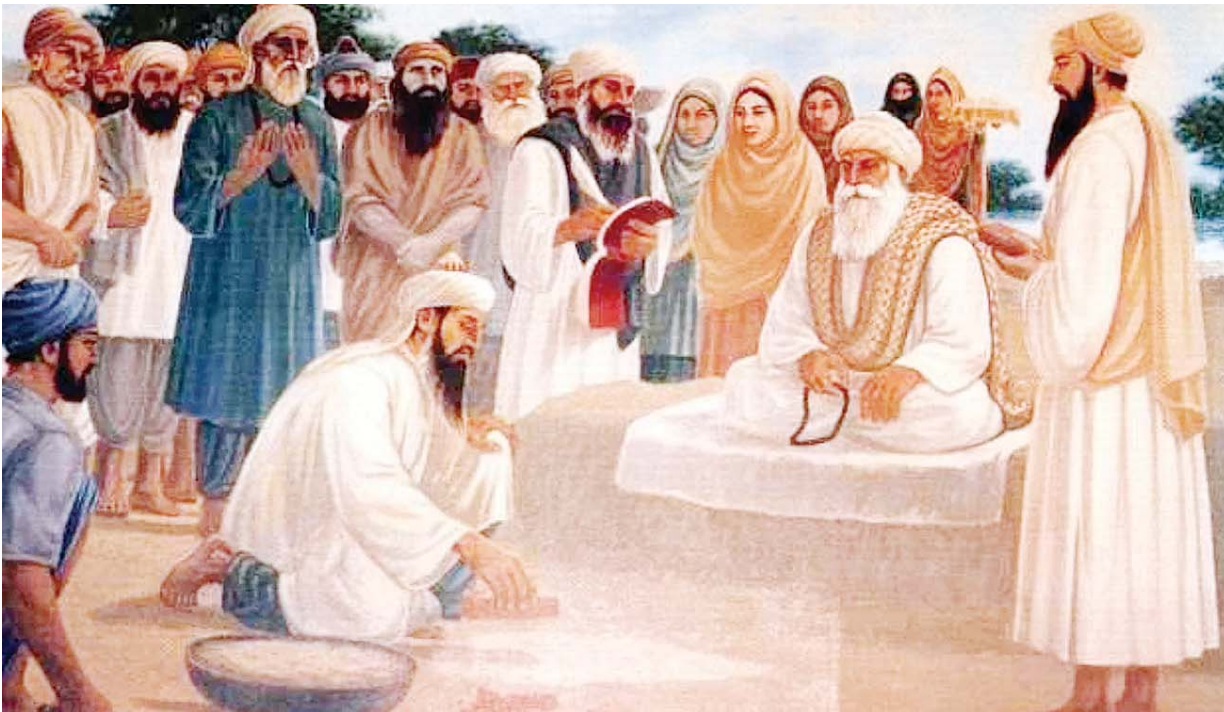
The road once connected Lahore with Amritsar, one of the many that linked them. Here the peripheries of the two centres interacted, creating villages and hamlets through this intercourse, these villages and hamlets bearing children of that relationship. Standing on a vacant ground, facing the historical village of Hair, now reduced to poverty and insignificance, is the remains of this unwanted child, the remains of a shrine that was constructed here by Prithi Chand, the eldest son of

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Nature Photography Day

The natural world is full of so much gorgeous beauty and wonder, and it is important for us to embrace it as much as possible. We can experience so much breath-taking scenery in nature. One of the best ways of being able to admire and experience the supreme magnificence of the natural world is to capture it on film. Get out of the house and capture the beauty of nature on your own camera. Even if it's just taking a walk with your smartphone, you're sure to find something snap-worthy.



Mian Mir and Guru Arjan Dev.

house in Chuna Mandi where Guru Ram Das was born. It was here that a young Mian Mir, years away from becoming a Sufi saint, would attend the religio-philosophical discourse of Guru Ram Das, when the Guru came to Lahore from Ramdaspur. This was a time before the communalisation of identities, the partitioning of religious traditions, a time when it was the norm, and not an exception, to have Hindu, Sikh and Muslim devotees of the Guru. It was at these gatherings that a young Mian Mir met the young future Guru. They formed a connection that was to become a representative of the symbiotic relationship between Sikhism and Islam.

Upon becoming the Guru, despite the opposition of his elder brother, Guru Arjan continued the construction work at Ramdaspur, whose foundation had been laid by his father. He began the construction of Harmandir Sahib, the future Golden Temple, which was in time to become the most important Sikh gurdwara in the world. Before construction began for Harmandir Sahib, however, a message and a delegation were sent by Guru Arjan from Ramdaspur to Lahore (according to oral narratives of the descendants of Mian Mir residing in Lahore) to bring his friend Mian Mir to the city, to lay the first brick of the foundation of what was to become the identity of the city.

Mian Mir travelled in a palanquin sent by the Guru and laid the foundation of Harmandir Sahib, tying together the cities of Lahore and Amritsar in a lifelong relation. Years later, when on the orders of Emperor Jahangir, Guru Arjan was

being tortured in Lahore before his execution, Mian Mir reached out to him and asked for his permission to destroy the city of Lahore to stop this torture. He was willing to sacrifice his home, to destroy the city for his love of the Guru, but the Guru refrained him from doing so. After Guru Arjan's execution, Mian Mir maintained a cordial relationship with his son, the sixth Sikh Guru, Guru Hargobind. It is a rela-



Samadh of Prithi Chand on Bedian road.

tionship that continues to be remembered and celebrated by certain groups and communities.

Abandoned Traditions

I met Bhai Gulham Muhammad at his home in Lahore in February 2014. He passed away in April. His home was close to Data Darbar, the shrine of the patron saint of the city. The shrine is a thousand years old, as old as the known history of Lahore. Its existence and continued significance represent a continuation of a cultural and spiritual life of the city.

Residents of Lahore take pride in the city's historicity, its recent and ancient past. But is Lahore, in its contemporary incarnation, the same city that it was, that it has been for a thousand years? Lahore was never Bhai Gulham Hussain's city. His home was Amritsar. But the city changed in 1947. Just like Gulham Muhammad's family, the city too migrated to Lahore, leaving in its shadow a distant memory of what the city once had been. The city where Gulham Muhammad was travelling to was also not Lahore anymore, the glorious pride

words, they were reduced to odd jobs in Lahore. Only recently, with a growing interest in Sikh heritage in Pakistan, the family began performing kirtan again. However, this rediscovery of the profession is a far cry from what the situation had been prior to Partition. The odd jobs continued. In 2008, Bhai Gulham Muhammad was barred from performing kirtan at Harmandir Sahib, for he was not an Amritdhari Sikh. His family had performed kirtan for generations at the Harmandir Sahib, without ever being Amritdhari, but that was a different city, a different Amritsar.

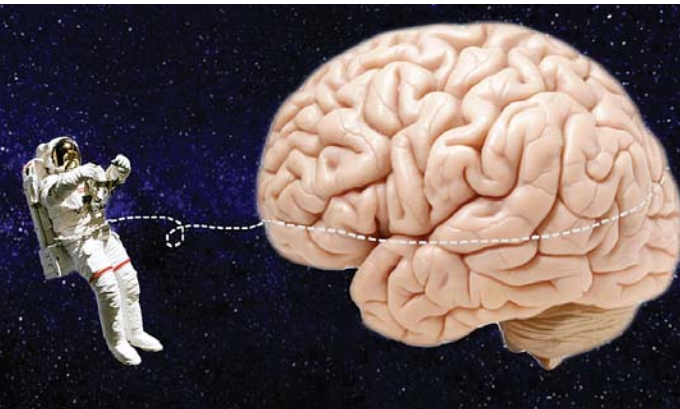
In the story of Gulham Muhammad is the story of Lahore and Amritsar. It is the story of what the cities were, the story of their relationship, the story of their intermarriage. It is the story of what the cities are, of their antagonism towards fluid identities, of their newly discovered loyalties. The death of Gulham Muhammad is the death of these two cities, of what they had been, of what they could have been.

Concluded
rajeshsharma1049@gmail.com

#BRAIN-RESET

A Long Space Trip

As we enter a new era in space travel, researchers were interested in how the human brain reacts to traveling outside Earth's gravity. They studied brain scans of 30 astronauts from before and after space travel. Their findings revealed that the brain's ventricles expand significantly in those who completed longer missions of at least six months, and that less than three years may not provide enough time for the ventricles to fully recover.



requent space travellers should wait three years after a longer mission to allow the physiological changes in their brains to reset, a new study suggests. As we enter a new era in space travel, researchers were interested in how the human brain reacts to traveling outside Earth's gravity.

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Ventricles are cavities in the brain filled with cerebrospinal fluid, which provides protection, nourishment, and waste removal to the brain. Mechanisms in the human body effectively distribute fluids throughout the body, but in the presence of gravity, the fluid shifts upward, pushing the brain higher within the skull and causing the ventricles to expand.

"We found that the more time people spent in space, the larger their ventricles became," says Rachael Seidler, a professor of applied physiology and kinesiology at the University of Florida and an author of the study. "Many astronauts travel to space more than one time, and our study shows it takes about three years between flights for the ventricles to fully recover."

Based on studies so far, ventricular expansion is the most enduring change seen in

the brain resulting from spaceflight, says Seidler, a member of the Norman Fixel Institute for Neurological Diseases.

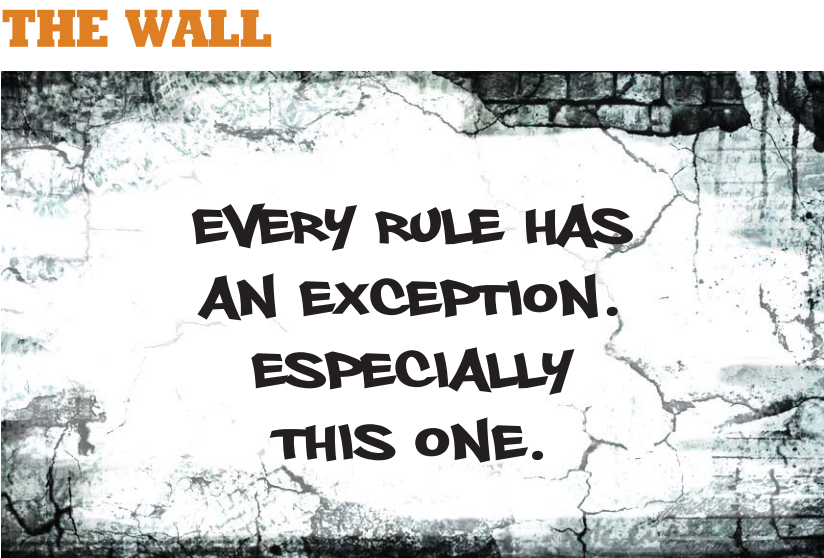
"We don't yet know for sure what the long-term consequences of this is on the health and behavioural health of space travellers," she says, "so allowing the brain time to recover seems like a good idea."

Of the 30 astronauts studied, eight travelled on two-week missions, 18 were on six-month missions, and four were in space for approximately one year. The ventricular enlargement tapered off after six months, the study's authors report.

"The biggest jump comes when you go from two weeks to six months in space," Seidler says. "There is no measurable change in the ventricles' volume after only two weeks."

With increased interest in space tourism in recent years, this is good news, as shorter space junkets appear to cause little physiological changes to the brain, she says. While researchers cannot yet study astronauts who have been in space much longer than a year, Seidler says it's also good news that the expansion of the brain's ventricles levels off after about six months.

"We were happy to see that the changes don't increase exponentially, considering we will eventually have people in space for longer periods," she says. The results of the study, which was funded by NASA, could affect future decision-making regarding crew travel and mission planning, Seidler says.



BABY BLUES



ZITS



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman