

Self-Entrapment: Is there a way out?

Ramesh Richard PhD, ThD

www.rameshrichard.com ©



A major news item was recently playing on global media. Six coal miners had become entrapped 2,000 feet below the earth. Rescuers drilled holes for both ventilation and nourishment. They lowered cameras and microphones inside to see and hear anything happening in the mine. Unfortunately, there was very little response. When three rescuers were killed while attempting to rescue the six entrapped miners, the company

called off the rescue operations. The rescue effort itself had become deadly. Later, much later, when rescue efforts were no longer possible, they renewed recovery efforts of the human remains. Independent reports say that each year about 20,000 miners are killed, trapped under the earth in coal mines.

Trapped?

When you read or hear the word “trapped” what comes to mind? “Trapped” is used, for example, of mice being trapped. Or in medicine of a trapped nerve or lung. It is used in golf of miscalculating and landing in a trap. “Entrapment” in legal terminology refers to somebody ensnaring you when you were unwilling—and you can use such entrapment attempts as part of your defense. It is also used in physics of self-trapped white optical beams.

Usually the word “trapped” carries negative connotations—like being trapped in a bad job. When you walk away from the job, you feel relieved. Or when you’re trapped in a bad marriage, and you want to be released. You may have heard of the man who said, “I can’t seem to please my wife. She wants the perfect husband. I don’t know any perfect man, except my wife’s first husband!”

There is also such a thing as “self-entrapment.” What if you created your own trap and fell into it? I heard about a bus driver in northwestern Poland who sent 38,000 text messages in order to win a jackpot contest. It cost the company \$34,000, and the prize was \$36,000. Plus, he was really only allowed \$5 a month for his company phone allowance! He had trapped himself—“self-entrapment.” I heard he lost his job.

What do you think of a magician who spends years perfecting a trap from which he would be uniquely qualified to escape at the final moment, but then dies in his trap? He had only one chance to escape.

Evidence of Self-Entrapment

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Evidence of Self-Entrapment

I want to spiritually examine human self-entrapment. Each one of us is self-entrapped. Here’s some anecdotal evidence.

1. If you have a conscience that constantly gnaws at you and annoys you, you are experiencing self-entrapment. A man wrote a note to his government, “I owe you so much in taxes. Here’s half

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the amount. If my conscience continues to bother me, I'll send you the rest of the money next month!"

2. If you attempt to rationalize wrong behavior, this is evidence of your self-entrapment. A kid used to pray each day that God would give him a bike. When he realized God didn't operate that way, he went ahead and stole a bike and then asked for God's forgiveness! He was following Stuart's Law of Retroaction: "It is easier to get forgiveness than permission." In many countries of the world, people and police use that tactic, until they come to a law of court which is just. And then they are stuck.

3. What about the search for forgiveness worldwide? Every human being is looking for forgiveness. I know a part of the world which is dynamically creative and efficient in terms of economic prowess. Each New Year's Day, people practice a ritual of flying a kite with all sins and habits that they would like to eliminate written on the kite. They also write out their desires for a new start in life. Then as the kite flies out of sight, they cut off the string, hoping that the kite will never come back. That pursuit of forgiveness reveals awareness of self-entrapment in wrongdoing and guilt.

I would like you to do a private search of your memory—the memory of your life. Google your heart. I want you to type the following into the search engine of your mind: [your name] = guilty. In my case, it's "Ramesh = guilty." Of course, my find is extremely private. I don't want you to be probing my pages, and I've password-protected it with a strong, alphanumeric password. Go ahead and type in that equation, your name = guilty. Count the number of pages that come up in your memory. A dozen pages? Thousands of results? Hundreds of thousands of results of guilty actions, guilty attitudes, guilty behaviors? Now take a peak at these private pages. Notice that some of them are relevant, even recent. You've become self-entrapped in your sin and guilt. You need to be rescued from your self-entrapment before you become a permanent casualty.

Would you like a fresh start in life? A new beginning? A clean slate? Would you like a second chance, a third chance, a millionth chance where you get full, free forgiveness forever and effective immediately? I want to present to you news of a rescue: a perfect rescue that will immediately liberate you and permanently free you from your own self-entrapment.

A Parable

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Let's look at self-entrapment through a story of three men who grew up together. They went through early years, childhood, high school, and college together and then went their own ways.

One married, did not have children, and became a child psychologist. Another stayed single and became a priest in his religion. The third one followed Socrates' advice. When he married and found he had a bad wife, he turned into a philosopher. Some thirty years after they separated, the three got together to reminisce about their early days. As they walked down their favorite childhood road, they came upon a sign that said, "Do not cross. Danger ahead. Abandoned coal mine." Somewhat taken aback at the warning sign—this was familiar childhood territory, after all, and the area could not drastically change in just thirty years—they decided to probe that hole which was familiar to them. They crossed the boundary and immediately fell deep into the hole. As they looked up the vertical shaft, they realized they were stuck, caught, entrapped. There was no way out. Nostalgia and curiosity had gotten them down there. What would get them out? Surprised and shocked, they slept through the night. No one came looking for them.

The next morning they began to discuss, plot, and scheme a way out of their entrapment. The psychologist said, "Let me help you." The priest said, "I think I have a way." And the philosopher said, "Maybe I could guide us out."

I'd like to call them the G-3 group—the psychologist, the priest, and the philosopher. Now I could have added a politician and a policeman to the group. I could have added a physicist and a physician to the group to make it a G-7, or even a G-7 billion, group. But for length's sake, I'll stick with the G-3, who can well represent the remaining nearly seven billion of us. The G-3 wanted to find a way out . . . for themselves and really for the rest of us.

1. The Psychologist—FEEL BETTER

The psychologist proclaimed, "I can help us feel better inside our self-entrapment." After all, cognitive psychology has been dealing with forgiveness and guilt for decades. Getting rid of guilt is in our interest and historically has been one of humanity's greatest desires. Guilt has about 175 symptoms and shows up in physical dysfunctions like sleep and sexual and food disorders. Guilt can be the cause of emotional dysfunctions, like that of self-hatred and self-loathing, or lead to relational dysfunctions in conflict and attempts to control others.

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Psychologists indeed help us feel better in the middle of self-entrapment. For example, they help us distinguish between false guilt and true guilt. False guilt is when somebody else lays a guilt trip on you. One psychologist advised, “When it is false, don’t take a trip where the guilt is. You can take shopping trips and business trips and vacation trips, but don’t take a trip where the guilt is!”

Psychologists can also assist with what is called horizontal forgiveness. They provide tactics and hopes by which a conflict can be resolved and relationships healed. Psychologists can certainly help you feel better inside your self-entrapment. What they cannot do is give you a way out and up the vertical shaft.

Did you hear about the suicidal man who went to an experimental psychologist? The expert ran a battery of psychological tests and assured him that everything was going to be all right. His friends asked the psychologist how he was so sure that everything would be okay. Well, the psychologist answered, “Nine of the ten people with this guilt-ridden, suicidal tendency will take their lives. He is the tenth person I have seen this week. The first nine took their lives, so he should be okay!”

Psychologists can help you feel better in your entrapment, but cannot give you a way out of self-entrapment. Let me ask you. Do you really want to just feel better inside your self-entrapment?

Have you heard of the distinction between a neurotic and a psychotic? A neurotic, because of anxiety and guilt and distress, builds castles in the air. A psychotic, because he’s lost touch with reality, lives in those air castles, and a psychologist collects rent from both. Do you simply want to feel better in your entrapment? Or would you like a way out? If you’d like a way out, keep reading.

2. The Priest—DO BETTER

We now move to the second in our G-3 group. The priest wants you to do better in your self-entrapment. If the psychologist focuses on your guilt, the priest has great interest in your conscience. Conscience is that internal monitor that alerts you before you engage in wrongdoing and corrects you while you’re in it—and even afterward. Through the years and habits, you have developed ways to contain the conscience that monitors you. You suppress your conscience so

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that you're not particularly alive to its voice anymore.

A clear conscience is a wonderful gift. I think it's the French who say, "There's no softer pillow than a clear conscience." The Chinese version of that thought goes, "A clear conscience fears no midnight knocking." The best one I heard about conscience quips, "You have a clear conscience? That's proof of a bad memory."

I want you to surf your conscience just like you googled your heart. What present attitudes, what present behaviors, what present actions consume you? What awareness of wrongdoing are you trying to reform, or redefine, or even rewrite so that your conscience won't bother you?

You may have heard of the woman who wanted to justify her eating habits and said, "I have a special preference in diet. I don't eat chicken because it's possible to get bird flu. I don't want to touch fish in case I get mercury poisoning. I don't like beef because of mad cow disease. I don't want pork because of trichinosis. I don't eat eggs because of salmonella poisoning. That's why I continue to eat only chocolate." Surf your conscience to try to see how you rationalize and justify and defend your present behaviors, habits, and choices.

The priest benefits us by identifying wrong horizontal and internal strategies that we use to handle a vertical and external problem. The problem lies in the priest promising much more than he can deliver. He wants you to get out of a vertical shaft, but you have to keep doing better down below while still stuck.

All of us know that it is not possible to get out of a hole by trying harder to dig deeper. How do you pull yourself up and out?

I have looked at the teachings of religions all over our world and in several cultures. They require you to follow the right path, right practices, right patterns, or right pillars. These are all prescriptions to get up the vertical shaft, even though you are really self-entrapped. In some parts of the world, they encourage you to physically go through the motion of symbolically washing your sins away by getting into a river. In other places, they recommend "the Macbeth effect," where you try to literally wash your hands off with perfume. And yet "all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this still hand." Type "forgiveness" on the Internet and you'll find forgiveness gels, for-

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giveness perfumes, forgiveness sanitizers, forgiveness pills, forgiveness soaps—all seeking to help you handle the problems of forgiveness and a bothersome conscience at a steep cost.

In yet other segments of the world that believe in a monotheistic God, they persuade you to confess your sins to a priest or make some sort of atonement either through money or sacrifices.

There are also some parts of the world where there is no such thing as a god. They hold to what may be called “non-theistic spirituality” where you want to compensate for your bad conscience over past behavior by doing good deeds in the present and the future. How do you really handle what has already happened in the past by doing right in the future?

I also know those who practice penance or take oaths of daytime speechlessness or ritual fasting during special seasons, but pick up extreme talking or eating once the sun goes down. All of these priestly options are attempting to help you (and themselves) climb up the vertical exit for rescue and liberation. Their intention of full and free forgiveness forever is good. We all want a forgiveness that will be in effect immediately.

Unfortunately, the strategies of the priest in getting you out of self-entrapment by doing better is part of the reason why some thinkers call religion a crutch, an opiate, a god-delusion. I sympathize with those pejoratives because you really can't climb up a deep, vertical shaft when you are self-entrapped.

Priests can help you do better. Psychologists can help you feel better, but are those platitudes and principles all you really want in your self-entrapment? Most people like you would really want a way out of the self-entrapment. If a way out is your ardent desire, I'd like to look at Mr. G-3, the philosopher.

3. The Philosopher—THINK BETTER

The philosopher rightly notes that feeling better and doing better will get you to a better place inside the hole, but thinking better is going to be the best of the options inside the hole. I kind of agree with this view of attempting to reinterpret reality itself.

Now just like there are bad priests and bad psychologists, there are bad philosophers as well.

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Somebody once said that in bad philosophy a blind man in a dark room is looking for a black cat that is not there. The priest helped the philosopher find the black cat that is not there! And the psychologist confirmed to both of them that they had indeed found the absent black cat. A bad philosopher can help you justify almost anything you want, only you'll fool yourself in the process. A woman wanted to sell her car with about 250,000 miles on it. Nobody was willing to buy a car with 400,000 kilometers. To help her out, her friend advised that she go to a particular mechanic to turn back the odometer. The story goes that having visited the mechanic who turned it back to 50,000 miles, she decided to keep the car because it was such a young car with only 50,000 miles (or 80,000 km) on it! That's bad philosophy engaging in sophisticated rationalization.

Good philosophy, however, will help you identify true forgiveness—not only to think better in your present situation of needing forgiveness, but thinking rightly about what forgiveness is. True forgiveness will be permanently liberating so that you'll be rescued from being spiritually stuck and eternally caught in your self-entrapment.

In my travels, I, like you, have come across luxury goods counterfeiters. You have been to the streets of Burma Bazaar in Chennai, South India, or to the multistory buildings in Beijing, China, or to the sidewalk vendors in Kinshasa, Congo, or heard the trench-coated fast-talkers in New York City, or seen the pavement dwellers in Jamaica. I am told that the largest luxury good counterfeit market in the world is in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The reality is, people want these counterfeited luxury goods in order to appear much more prosperous than they really are. In an image-conscious world, they actually pay premium price for counterfeit goods. What is worse and somewhat unimaginable is that the demand is so great and the people are willing to pay high prices for counterfeits. So the manufacturer-approved retail sellers themselves come from the main city, buy the closest copies of the original goods, take it back to the original stores, and sell them at higher prices as originals! It is now up to the discerning buyer who must know the original so well that he won't be cheated. Good philosophy will help you study real forgiveness, so you won't be cheated with false offers.

Think about counterfeiting life saving drugs, also practiced by unscrupulous merchandisers. Maybe pens, watches, and handbags can be counterfeited, but if a life saving drug were to be counterfeited, either without the lack of adequate active ingredients or false packaging, it's go-

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ing to provide false hope and prove deathly for the sick. What good philosophy does is to help you understand and apply some tests of when and whether forgiveness is really true—whether “forgiveness is simply on the label and not in the tablet.” There is a new technique called the Raman Spectroscopy after an Indian Tamil physicist, a Nobel Prize winner, which is able to use the continuum of the spectroscopic elements to find out if there is falsehood inside the packaging. Good philosophy will help you discover falsehood in the many offers of getting you out of self-entrapment.

Good philosophy will help you understand whether forgiveness is true by affirming three criteria.

1. Is the wrongdoing established? Is it really wrong? Was a rigid standard broken?
2. Is the wrongdoing in any way devalued or overlooked or excused? If that happens, guess what? The one doing the wrong is actually devalued, since he is not taken seriously by the offended party.
3. The third criterion of forgiveness in good philosophy is whether the moral standing of the one who made the standard is violated. Would the standard-maker be devalued for his standard or moral expectation without proper forgiveness?

If you take these three criteria into account, you are left with two extremes: (1) If you condone the wrongdoing, you devalue the wrongdoer. (2) But if you overlook the wrongdoing, you devalue the forgiver. So we need a resolution, a balance. A resolution and balance between the perfect standard of morality and justice firmly held by the offended party, and yet the perfect fulfillment and expression of love toward the offender. I am referring to God, the offended party, and you, the offender. Without this resolution, there is no way out of your self-entrapment in sin, wrongdoing, and guilt.

Nothing that you do, nothing that you feel, nothing that you think can actually help you get out of the deadly mine of spiritual self-entrapment. I'm really sorry, there is no way out.

Rescue Operation

I'm terribly sorry to tell you that there is no way out of your self-entrapment. But I'm terrifically happy to tell you that there is a way in. There is a way in so that there can be a way out.

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Some time ago I bought a six-year warranty for my car. It would cover way beyond the manufacturer's warranty, all kinds of wear and tear regardless of what happened for six more years. My idea was good. The warranty concept was right. However, I should have really bought a warranty for the warranty company! The warranty company went bankrupt. Similarly, when you hear about options of thinking better and feeling better and doing better in your self-entrapment, none of those provide the warranty needed in order to go up the vertical shaft. Their idea and concepts are good, only they themselves need to be warranted, guaranteed, and assured.

Therefore, we need a perfect approach out of the spiritual entrapment, up the vertical shaft. I just said there is no way out. However, I'm really, really happy to say that there is a way in so we can have a perfect way out.

When I use the word "perfect," I'm referring, of course, to God because there is nobody else who is perfect. God is One who cannot condone your sin, and neither can He compromise His standard. A boy once asked his father if he could write in the dark. The father said, "Why do you ask, son?" The boy replied, "I want you to sign my report card because I failed my math quiz." The father continued, "What was the quiz question?" The boy attempted to rationalize his failure: "Frankly, Father, I'm confused. On Monday she said, $1 + 7 = 8$. On Tuesday, she said $2 + 6$ and $3 + 5$ and $4 + 4$ equal 8. I'm really confused as to what the real answer is." You cannot pull that kind of a subtle trick on God because God cannot compromise His standard, and He knows everything, even in the dark. He knows your heart. Further, though you may be confused, He is not at a loss for the answer.

Instead of condoning your sin, God actually shows us the answer, the way out. Condemnation comes from our failures. Our shortcomings and wrongdoing have put us deep into a spiritual and moral self-entrapment. Further, God cannot compromise His standards. We have not only fallen, we are dead stuck. The only way we can be rescued is if God Himself finds a way out for us . . . and only if He wants to rescue us.

In a powerful, creative move which does not compromise His love for us, nor compromise His own justice, God provided a way out by sending His Son, His only Son, into our self-entrapment. God comes in so we can have a way out of our self-entrapment. He provides us the way of vertical

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rescue.

Even though we are self-entrapped in our situation, God is not self-entrapped in His situation. He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, not to condemn those who are self-entrapped, but to rescue them forever. The Lord Jesus said He came to make a payment, a ransom for everything that we owe God, for all that we can never pay back or ever cover. He came in order to give us forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness of sin and guilt and shame that is free, full, forever, effective immediately. He broke into the situation, and He gives us a break out of our self-entanglement. All He says to you is: "If you have entrapped yourself, you can entrust yourself to me. If you have entrapped yourself, you can entrust yourself to my rescue operation. I will give you a way out because I came in to make a way out for you."

Some time ago I heard a news headline on my radio: "Rescue Operations Over; Recovery Operations Begin." The news referred to a submarine accident in the northern seas of our world where, having lost contact with the mother ship, a submarine went down, lost power, and got stuck on a seabed 400 feet below. For a whole week the bureaucracy of the naval system could not get help to them. When they finally sent them some help, it wasn't any help at all. The rescue apparatus did not match the hatch of the submarine.

Three critical factors are present in all rescue operations: (1) rescue time, (2) rescue conditions, and (3) rescue plans.

Spiritually speaking, (1) rescue time is always now, right now. Since your spiritual situation is desperate, we need to find you rescue now. Actually, these sailors inside the submarine were thumping on the hull sending messages, desperately hoping for help. (2) Rescue conditions to rescue these entrapped sailors were not easy. Treacherous waves accompanied high velocity winds, and the power generators on the sunken submarine were shutting down. (3) Rescue plans unfortunately had not been devised for this disaster. Their navy was trying to improvise at the last moment.

Fortunately, however, for the global human situation, when we are self-entrapped, stuck on a seabed at an angle from which we cannot be rescued or redeemed, God knows and states that every person has this present moment as his rescue time. He wants to offer that rescue right now. Yes,

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rescue conditions are treacherous in that He pushed His Son all the way down through the vertical shaft separating God from humanity. His Son came into our situation, went the whole length of even personal death in order to rescue us. Yet He became the only person in all history to be raised from the dead in order to provide a way out for us. God's rescue plans for you were not suddenly improvised. They were written from all eternity. He knew that we will be caught dead in self-entrapment. So He made provisions ahead of time for anybody who would entrust himself or herself to the Lord Jesus as their only Savior, as their Rescuer, forever.

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. If you have entrapped yourself, God invites you to embrace His rescue operations: "Entrust yourself to my Son, and I will rescue you. I will give you life. I will forgive you forever—full, free, starting immediately." God did not send His Son into the world to condemn people forever in their self-entrapment, but that the world of human beings might be forever rescued from their self-entrapment. Those who believe in Him are not condemned. Those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. To believe in Jesus is to entrust yourself to Him as your only rescuer.

Have you entrapped yourself? Jesus says, "Entrust yourself to me." If you are desperate enough to be rescued; if you have tried everything to feel better, do better, and think better in your self-entrapment; if you do not want to merely discuss your entrapment with other self-entrapped human beings, but are willing to entrust yourself to the only Way out, I invite you in the core of your heart to say something like this as honestly as you can, "God, I've tried to do better, feel better, think better, but I want a perfect way out. I want to entrust myself to your Son, the Lord Jesus, as your rescue agent. I want to get out of my self-entrapment. Thank you for making a way in so I can make a way out through your Son, the Divine Rescuer. I accept His payment by death as the provision for my own fall. Since He is the only one who has raised Himself from the deathly human situation, I entrust my eternal rescue to the Divine Rescuer."

If you sense that wish in your heart, if you feel like you want to make that decision of entrustment to the Lord Jesus in your entrapment, I want you to let me know. Register on our Web site (www.rameshrichard.com), and we'll continue our dialogue. We will think through and work through the way of your rescue, ransom, redemption, and release from your self-entrapment. I

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look forward to hearing from you.