

**Glenn Livingston, Ph.D.
And Howie Jacobson, Ph.D.
Eastern Versus Western Philosophy**

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Dr. Glenn: Hey, this is the very good Dr. Glenn Livingston and I'm here with Dr. Howard Jacobson of PlantYourself.com, I'm from NeverBingeAgain.com. How are you Howie?

Howie: I'm doing good. I'm looking forward to our chat today.

Dr. Glenn: I'm really looking forward to our chat because you sent me an interesting article and you are always my provocateur giving me things to think about and challenges in the Never Binge Again philosophy and I want to now let you summarize the article and then I'll try to summarize my response so we can have a discussion, okay?

Howie: Beautiful. So the article is by Mark Manson, who wrote a book called The Subtle Art of Not Giving an F*, and mostly I love his writing. And I pretty much agree with everything he's written, but this one stopped me

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GLENN LIVINGSTON Ph.D.



because I found myself not agreeing with it. I found that very interesting because maybe I'm wrong. Let's hold open that possibility. So the article, it's in MarkManson.net and then the continuing URL is stop trying to change yourself with dashes between all the words, and so we'll probably be able to just put a link to it. So he says, "Basically, you can't change yourself so don't even try." The self-help seminars and infomercials and all these courses tell you you can change yourself, but you can't. What he says is the idea of you of having an identity is just a made up arbitrary construct. And so, instead of changing yourself, like I'm going to change my identity, I'm going to become the sort of person who, he says, "Just go do something." So instead of saying, "I have to become the kind of person who goes to the gym or the kind of person who takes care of himself," he says, "Just go to the gym. Just start taking care of yourself." Just do an action as opposed to aspiring to an identity because identities are just made up and they're going to entrap you and they're not real anyway. And by trying to become an identity, you're probably going to fail and then you're going to give up, so instead, just do stuff. Does that seem like a comprehensive enough and fair enough --

Dr. Glenn: Yeah.

Howie: Yeah?

Dr. Glenn: Yeah. Don't strive towards being a particular kind of person because you will fail, then you'll beat yourself up and you'll become worse.

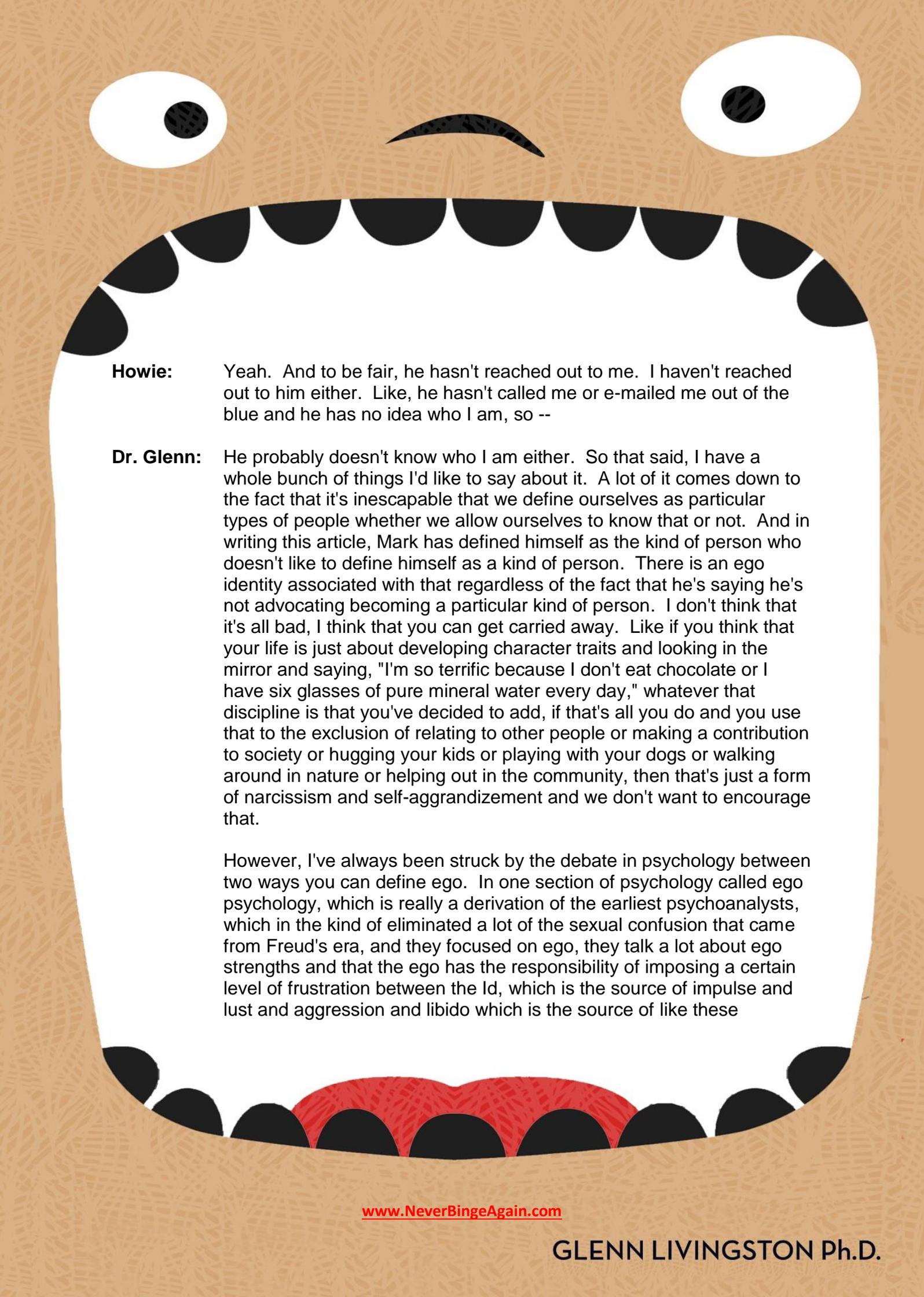
Howie: Yeah. So I'll give people a couple of paragraphs which kind of bring them up to where we are. He says, "We don't know what change is because we don't know what the hell we are. If I wake up tomorrow and do the exact opposite of everything I do today, am I a changed



person or am I simply the same person who decided to try something different? And more importantly, who effing cares? I don't and neither should you." Here's the problem with using the word "change". It gets your identity involved. And when you get your identity involved, you'd become really emotionally attached to imaginary things. You throw fits and beat yourself up and blame others and decide that you are in fact a worthless piece of -- who has no hope in this world. It's one thing to say, "I want to start going to the gym each week." It's another to say, "It's time I finally change and become the type of person who goes to the gym each week."

So, the first statement is simple. You want to go to the gym, so you go or not. The second statement implies that to go to the gym, you must completely reinvent yourself and that raises the emotional stakes massively. If you succeed, spoiler, you won't. You'll gain this blissful feeling of being a new person, which will last until the next time you feel crappy and want to change again. If you fail, you'll chastise yourself for your irredeemable slough. And so that's the point at which I said I want to send this to Glenn because Glenn is all about the way you change is to aspire to an identity. I am the sort of person who, I'm not the sort of person who. And I'm like, oh, Mark Manson versus Glenn Livingston? Let's see them fight it out.

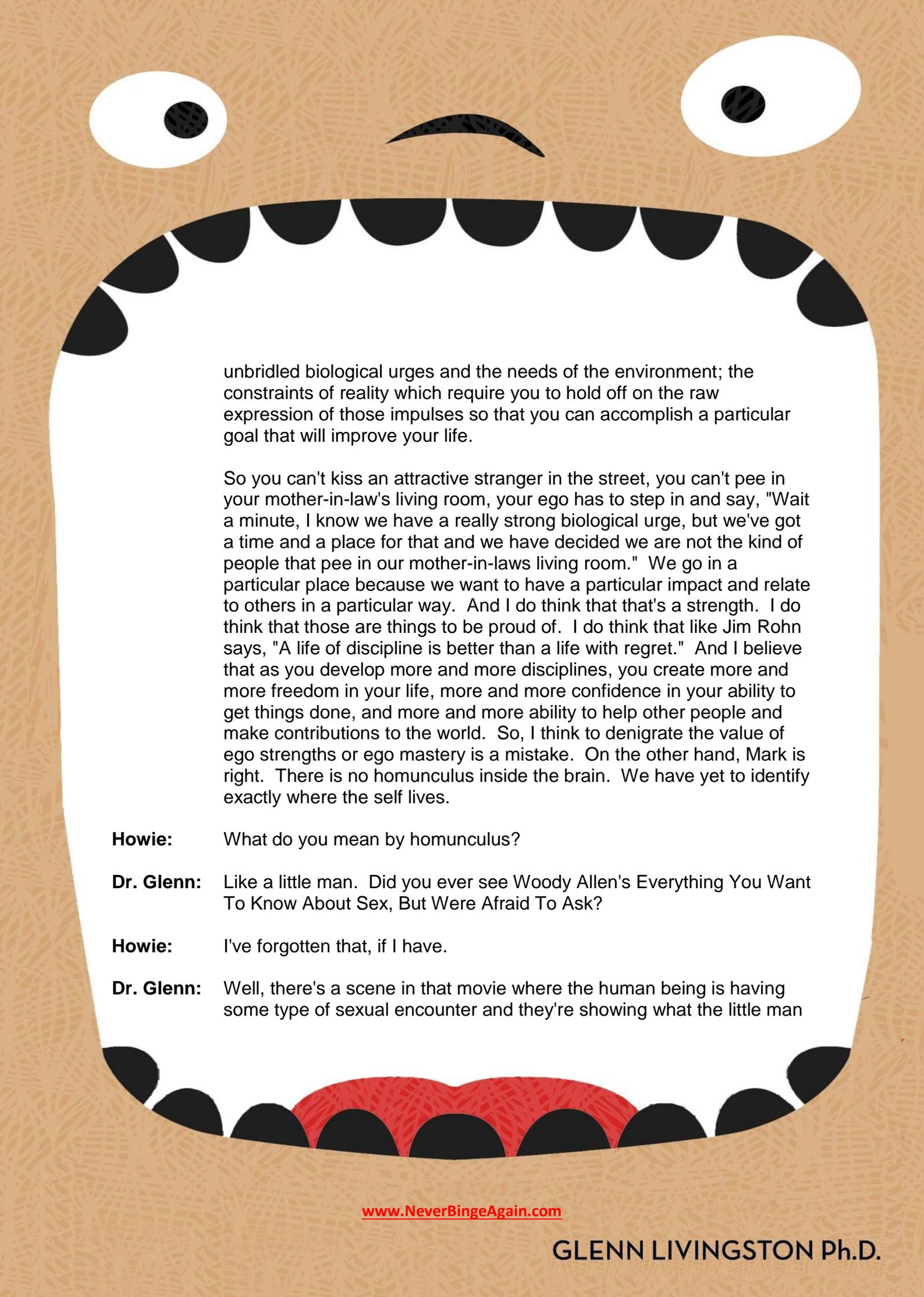
Dr. Glenn: Well, I wish we had Mark on the call and then we could give him a fair shot. I often find that when you take an adversarial position to a smart person that you wind up painting an exaggerated picture of what that smart person is saying so that you can take it down, and I don't mean to do that. So Mark, if you're listening and you want to come on the podcast, you're more than welcome to airtime and we respect you, brother.



Howie: Yeah. And to be fair, he hasn't reached out to me. I haven't reached out to him either. Like, he hasn't called me or e-mailed me out of the blue and he has no idea who I am, so --

Dr. Glenn: He probably doesn't know who I am either. So that said, I have a whole bunch of things I'd like to say about it. A lot of it comes down to the fact that it's inescapable that we define ourselves as particular types of people whether we allow ourselves to know that or not. And in writing this article, Mark has defined himself as the kind of person who doesn't like to define himself as a kind of person. There is an ego identity associated with that regardless of the fact that he's saying he's not advocating becoming a particular kind of person. I don't think that it's all bad, I think that you can get carried away. Like if you think that your life is just about developing character traits and looking in the mirror and saying, "I'm so terrific because I don't eat chocolate or I have six glasses of pure mineral water every day," whatever that discipline is that you've decided to add, if that's all you do and you use that to the exclusion of relating to other people or making a contribution to society or hugging your kids or playing with your dogs or walking around in nature or helping out in the community, then that's just a form of narcissism and self-aggrandizement and we don't want to encourage that.

However, I've always been struck by the debate in psychology between two ways you can define ego. In one section of psychology called ego psychology, which is really a derivation of the earliest psychoanalysts, which in the kind of eliminated a lot of the sexual confusion that came from Freud's era, and they focused on ego, they talk a lot about ego strengths and that the ego has the responsibility of imposing a certain level of frustration between the Id, which is the source of impulse and lust and aggression and libido which is the source of like these



unbridled biological urges and the needs of the environment; the constraints of reality which require you to hold off on the raw expression of those impulses so that you can accomplish a particular goal that will improve your life.

So you can't kiss an attractive stranger in the street, you can't pee in your mother-in-law's living room, your ego has to step in and say, "Wait a minute, I know we have a really strong biological urge, but we've got a time and a place for that and we have decided we are not the kind of people that pee in our mother-in-laws living room." We go in a particular place because we want to have a particular impact and relate to others in a particular way. And I do think that that's a strength. I do think that those are things to be proud of. I do think that like Jim Rohn says, "A life of discipline is better than a life with regret." And I believe that as you develop more and more disciplines, you create more and more freedom in your life, more and more confidence in your ability to get things done, and more and more ability to help other people and make contributions to the world. So, I think to denigrate the value of ego strengths or ego mastery is a mistake. On the other hand, Mark is right. There is no homunculus inside the brain. We have yet to identify exactly where the self lives.

Howie: What do you mean by homunculus?

Dr. Glenn: Like a little man. Did you ever see Woody Allen's Everything You Want To Know About Sex, But Were Afraid To Ask?

Howie: I've forgotten that, if I have.

Dr. Glenn: Well, there's a scene in that movie where the human being is having some type of sexual encounter and they're showing what the little man



on the brain is doing to manage everything that's just going along and is telling the heart to beat faster and there's no little man or little woman in there. There's no homunculus. We can't find the seed of identity. For all we know, it's something that permeates your being. For all we know, it could be something that comes from outside of ourselves. We don't know. We don't know where it comes from.

And so, it's true that to a certain degree, self is an illusion and there is a peace and a presence and a mindfulness that comes from acknowledging this constraint with humility that we're never going to find it. We're never going to find the homunculus. We're never going to isolate the pure source of where that little man comes from, where that sense that there actually is an I. And so, I don't think we want to throw out the baby with the bathwater, I think we want to understand that life is some mystery of the human condition we'll never understand and we can't control, we can't control, and we should be open to experience seeing a oneness with others in animals and creatures and everything else in the universe. And I don't mean to throw away all of eastern philosophy in one fell swoop, but that's the other form of ego. Like ego is that which prevents us from experiencing that connection. That oneness. There's a sense of separation and isolation that can endure if you don't allow yourself to experience that at times.

So I think there is a dual goal. I think we need to strive towards ego mastery, strive towards developing character, strive towards being a certain kind of person in the world and take pride in that and feel strong and proud and confident while simultaneously being the kind of person that can let go of knowing that we're a separate person at all.

I think that Mark's error in the statement that if you strive to become a certain kind of person, you will fail into even worse because you will



beat yourself up is not recognizing the primal part of the brain that's addicted and beats you up for the purpose of making it possible to indulge more in the addiction. If you want to go to the gym but you don't, you make a mistake. If you make a rule that says, "I'm the kind of person that goes to the gym five days a week," and you want to go four days one week, you're supposed to notice that. You're supposed to have mechanisms in place so that you notice that you missed your goal, but you're supposed to use that to readjust your aim and change the resources that you're bringing to the table, change the level of focus. Maybe you want to readjust the goal a little bit. You're not supposed to use that to beat yourself up and say that I never going to be able to do this, it's an unattainable goal and I'm pathetic, and therefore, I might as well not go at all. That's pig activity. That's the addictive brain saying you're never going to be able to do it at all so you might as well just stay home and binge. There's a secondary gain associated with that. There's toxic pleasure associated with that.

And that's why I say that you aim with perfection, but forgive yourself with dignity; commit with perfection, forgive yourself with dignity. I think that Mark's position is the result of his inability to recognize the need to forgive yourself with dignity. That's what I think this physician stems from.

Howie: What do you mean by toxic pleasure?

Dr. Glenn: Chocolate is toxic pleasure for me. It is so good. It was. I haven't had it for years. But when I had it, it was just so good. It was better than sex, it was better than fruits and vegetables, it was better than my work, it was better than kissing my wife at the time, it was better than seeing my niece and my nephew or my sister. It was just toxic in the impact that it had for me in the world because it was so good it drew



me away from everything else. It's like those rats in the Milner and Olds' studies where they put electric in their brain and they let themselves stimulate the pleasure center with a lever. All they could do was press that lever thousands of times a day 'cause it was so pleasurable. It hijacks your survival drive and everything in neurology says, "This is what we want to do to the exclusion of all else. It takes over your life."

Howie: Great. So then, how does failing give us toxic pleasure?

Dr. Glenn: The discipline. The effort to develop a character trait necessarily involves discipline. I will never eat chocolate Monday through Friday again requires discipline Monday through Friday. If I have a bite of chocolate on Thursday and my inner pig tells me that I'm pathetic, that I'm a compulsive overeater and that I might as well just give up and be a happy fat person and eat chocolate all the time, then I feel like a horrible person. I feel like a failure. But that is motivated or compensated for by the fact that I get to have as much chocolate as I want to, right? So the willingness to accept yourself as a failure is reinforced by the ability to eat all that chocolate. I'll never be that kind of person, so I might as well just eat whatever I want to.

Howie: So it seems like there is toxic of pleasure associated with whatever we're binging with. And when we experience a failure and it's coupled with that toxic pleasure, it's like a Pavlovian response so that now this failure becomes associated with chocolate so then now failure itself can start feeling pleasurable even if we're not getting the reward in that moment, that somehow the wallowing is now associated with happy juice?



Dr. Glenn: Yes. You could look at it like that. Like it's operant conditioning that there's an event which is the failure that's followed by a reward which is the chocolate, and therefore, the perception of yourself of a failure has become unintentionally reinforced. You could look at it like that. That's accurate.

Howie, there are things in this world that are too pleasurable. It's possible for things to be too pleasurable if evolution didn't prepare us to experience that pleasure and mediate it in such a way to balance our survival needs in reality. Like I always say, there weren't any chocolate bars in the savannah. There weren't electrodes being inserted in our brains. As we were evolving, you had to go out and find a mate or find blueberries or find something to eat in order for those chemicals to be secreted by your brain and now you don't.

Now, it's possible to walk out of the McDonald's and look across the street and there's another McDonald's on the other side of the street. Louis Black actually said he knew that the end of the world was coming when he walked out of a Starbucks and saw another Starbucks. What could the second Starbucks store owner been thinking? You know, a really great place for Starbucks would be right here 'cause that's what we need is another Starbucks.

Howie: Right. Or some other community was talking about like, there was a Starbucks inside a Starbucks.

Dr. Glenn: Did you ever see -- oh, what's that movie with Ben Malkovich and --

Howie: Being John Malkovich.



Dr. Glenn: Being John Malkovich, right. And in that movie, someone had discovered a portal into John Malkovich's brain where they could take him over and become him. At one point, John Malkovich found that portal and went into his own brain and it was pretty crazy.

Howie: Speaking of identity.

Dr. Glenn: Yes. If you want to go into the world where you have no idea who's who and whether there is an identity, that's that.

Howie: Right. So that's very helpful. The understanding of what the pig is trying to get us is using eastern philosophy, is wrapping itself in Buddha robes to get us from aspiring to be our best selves 'cause I wasn't thinking it out, I was just reading this article and thinking, no, actually, the search for identity, it's like trying to swing for the fences. For a baseball metaphor, it's like going for it and he's saying basically don't go for it. And so, if you swing for the fences and you strike out and you go, well, you know, I hit 715 home runs this year, so a bunch of strikeouts are still cool 'cause it's worth it as opposed to my ego is so fragile that any strikeouts are going to be soul-deadening, therefore, I won't have an identity. But if failure would make you miserable, then whose the you? There's still an identity there even if you're pretending there isn't.

Dr. Glenn: Yeah.

Howie: It's like, I'm a wealthy man, but I'm only going to bet five dollars and pretend I don't have the other 30 million.

Dr. Glenn: Right. There is another concept in ego psychology which I think reconciles these two. It's called regression in the service of the ego.



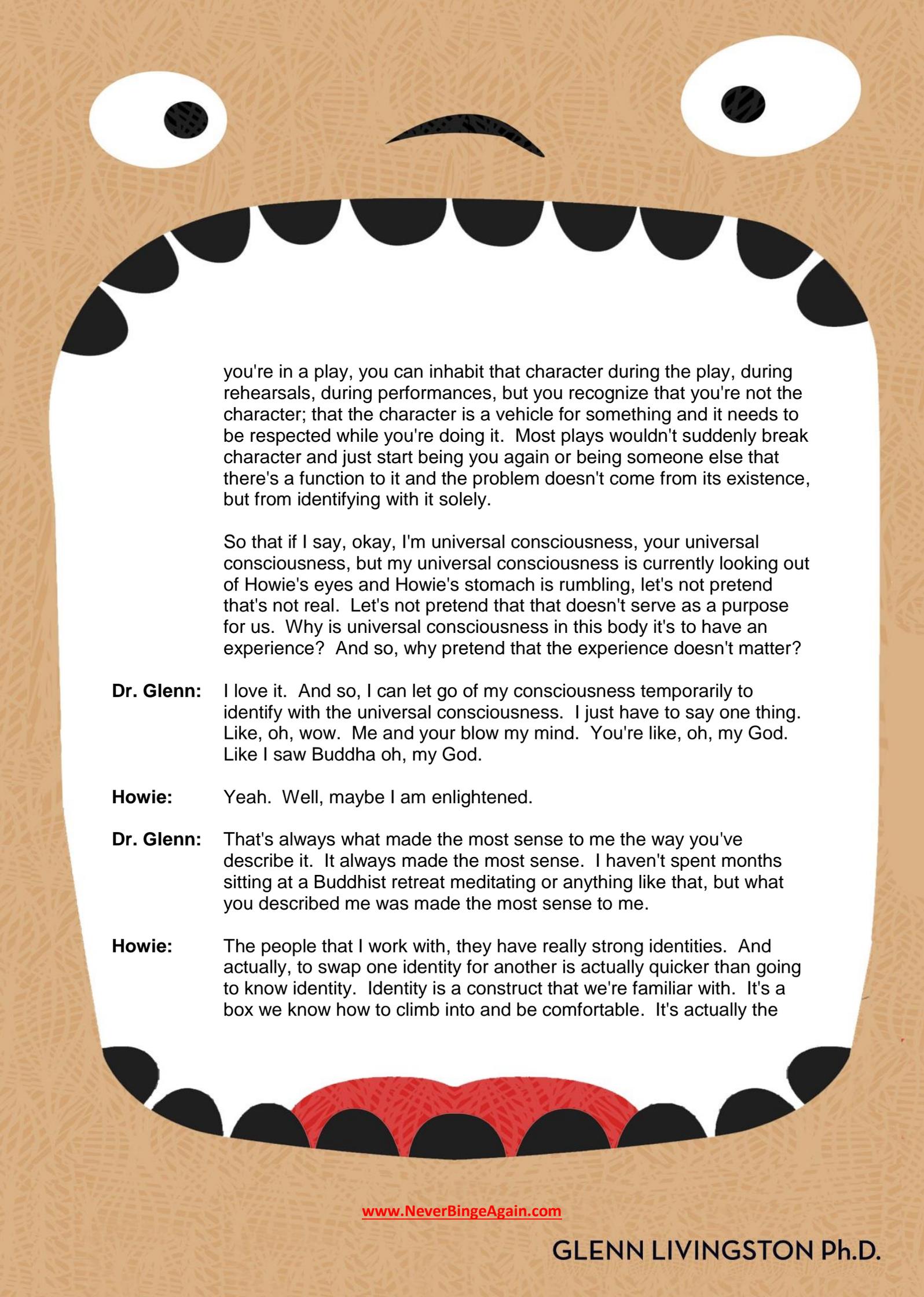
What that essentially says is that a healthy ego has the ability to let go of itself. But it doesn't completely let go of itself. There's always that part of it which can bring itself back. We all do this if we give ourselves the capacity to daydream during the day. Our normal ego function is involved in reconciling our desires with the constraints of reality. And in order to do that, it's constantly paying attention to reality, but we can let go of that reality testing. We can let go of that constant attention to what's happening around us to daydream, and that has an evolutionary function.

Obviously, we develop a capacity to daydream. We are looking at possibilities. We are fulfilling some of our wishes and desires without having to act upon them. We are thinking about the connections in our lives and how to repair or maintain or enhance them. Daydreaming serves a really important function and you have to let go of your ego in order to do it.

But at the same time, if you're driving and you're daydreaming and there is a car that cuts you off a little too close in the lane, you have the ability to come right back and pay closer attention to the driving. It's like that. There is a self even if we can't find it. There is the capacity to let go of the self even if we can't define exactly what that is. And I think the two philosophies are compatible. And I think that the way to really reconcile it is to recognize that you need to commit with perfection and forgive yourself with dignity.

Howie:

I've been also thinking about a positive disclaimer that I do not think I am enlightened. I can't be sure, but I do not think I am. But the readings I've done and the exploration I've done around this idea of like, becoming one with universal consciousness, it's not that you lose your ego. It's that you get to dis-identify with it in the same way that if



you're in a play, you can inhabit that character during the play, during rehearsals, during performances, but you recognize that you're not the character; that the character is a vehicle for something and it needs to be respected while you're doing it. Most plays wouldn't suddenly break character and just start being you again or being someone else that there's a function to it and the problem doesn't come from its existence, but from identifying with it solely.

So that if I say, okay, I'm universal consciousness, your universal consciousness, but my universal consciousness is currently looking out of Howie's eyes and Howie's stomach is rumbling, let's not pretend that's not real. Let's not pretend that that doesn't serve as a purpose for us. Why is universal consciousness in this body it's to have an experience? And so, why pretend that the experience doesn't matter?

Dr. Glenn: I love it. And so, I can let go of my consciousness temporarily to identify with the universal consciousness. I just have to say one thing. Like, oh, wow. Me and your blow my mind. You're like, oh, my God. Like I saw Buddha oh, my God.

Howie: Yeah. Well, maybe I am enlightened.

Dr. Glenn: That's always what made the most sense to me the way you've describe it. It always made the most sense. I haven't spent months sitting at a Buddhist retreat meditating or anything like that, but what you described me was made the most sense to me.

Howie: The people that I work with, they have really strong identities. And actually, to swap one identity for another is actually quicker than going to know identity. Identity is a construct that we're familiar with. It's a box we know how to climb into and be comfortable. It's actually the



opposite. If he says, "The easiest thing is to not have an identity and just do different stuff," to me, that's much harder than saying, "Okay, instead of identity X, I'm going to adopt identity Y because at least I know how identity works."

Dr. Glenn: And I think that the absence of identity leads you back to intuitive eating. And I think people should eat intuitively within their rules. But what we know about willpower is that it's very much worn down by the need to make decisions and identity of your character is a predefined way of making decisions a priority so that you're not constantly burdened by willpower taxing, decision-making throughout the day. So, I stand by all my conclusions and I wish that Mark were here to talk to us about it.

Howie: I can reach out to him. I said he's a big shot, so I don't know how much time he has for us, but --

Dr. Glenn: You know what, I have learned that you can reach out to big shots. We're big shots, right? You've written books with T. Colin Campbell and I've got 1,600 reviews on Amazon. We can reach out to him.

Howie: We're big shots.

Dr. Glenn: We are big shots.

Howie: If we had identities, we would be big shots. And if Mark doesn't have identity, then he's not. So --

Dr. Glenn: Sharon taught me that while we were married. I was really taken with Stephen Covey and she said, "Let's talk to him." And I said, "What?" I said, "Yes, let's talk to him." And she called a couple of times that she



spoke with the secretary and then we talked about what we might have to offer them and what they could have to offer us, and we talked to him into a trade. And before I knew it, I was on the phone with even Stephen Covey and I was consulting for him. So that stuff happens.

Howie: Cool. I'm going to send you a list of people that I want to talk to so we can --

Dr. Glenn: We could figure it out.

Howie: We could figure it out.

Dr. Glenn: Yeah. Absolutely. No, I've been holding back. I mean, I want to talk Oprah. I want to talk to Oprah about Never Binge Again and I wouldn't mind talking to Michelle Obama and some of the people that we're really involved in healthier eating. I've got a whole list of people I want to talk to, but I've been holding back until we're really ready. Anyway, is that all we want to say about this today?

Howie: I think so. I think that helps me.

Dr. Glenn: It helps me too. I love these conversations. We need to have more of them. We should just read a book that disagrees with us and then talk about it. That was fun.

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