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## **Self-realization in Business: Ibsen's Peer Gynt**

In this paper we will take Henrik Ibsen's dramatic poem *Peer Gynt* as a point of departure to discuss what does self-realization mean in business. Does it mean to realize one's faculties in a virtue ethics sense, performing excellent actions? Or does it mean to use one's faculties to gain power, prestige and money? We will take excerpts from the poem to illustrate some of its implications for modern-day business leadership. We believe that Ibsen's poem gives interesting clues that illuminate important aspects of human condition in general and in business in particular.

We will argue that the concept of the self is of vital interest. Especially we will explore Ibsen's concept of the self, and try to interpret some of Ibsen's most enigmatic sentences like "To be oneself, the self must die". It is often interpreted as a Christian life-norm. Does it mean to sacrifice oneself for the common good? But comparing this concept of the self with Buddhism, we also find support for denying of one's self. The problem for Peer Gynt is that he has never been himself in the true sense. Throughout his life he has lived out his lower self. He was a "troll", i.e. lived in a greedy, selfish way.

We will see Peer Gynt as a businessman at an age about 60, who reflects on his life, and then discovers that his life-journey was without purpose and meaning. Finally he begins to pose existential questions like: What does it mean to be oneself? Who have I been in all my life? We will discuss the implications of one's search for experiences to find one's true and whole self. One of the aims of the paper is to stimulate business leaders to raise questions about their identity and purpose.

## 1 The Story

Henrik Ibsen created the figure of Peer Gynt in 1867. Could we interpret Peer Gynt as a prototype of a modern businessman who used his time, energy and talents in a global world with one main purpose - to make his life into an adventure trying to exploit as many opportunities as possible, earning as much money as possible, to become rich and powerful? And when his journey is almost finished he starts to reflect on his life probably to find peace and calm in his mind. And finally the quest for meaning become so strong that he wonders whether his drive for money and power was a worthy project?

Some of the interpretations of Peer Gynt are that all his life is about a search for identity – a search to find his true and whole self along his journey in the world. One of Peer's characteristics was that he was never willing to commit himself to anybody, thus he avoided responsibility of all kind. Let's take a closer look at this figure to understand the paradox of self-realization.

Peer Gynt was the son of the once highly regarded Jon Gynt who spent all his money on feasting and living lavishly, until there was nothing left; thus, Jon had to go from his farm as a wandering salesman, leaving his wife and son behind in debt. Åse, the mother, wished to raise her son to wield and restore the lost fortune of his father, but Peer is soon to be considered useless for practical tasks.

As the play opens, Peer's mother scorns him for his vivid imagination, and taunts him because he spoiled his chances with Ingrid, the daughter of the richest farmer. Peer responds, and goes straight to the wedding because he might get a chance with the bride anyway. At the wedding Peer meets a family of newcomers from another valley. He instantly notices Solveig, and wants her for a dance. She refuses because of Peer's bad reputation has preceded him. She leaves him, and Peer starts drinking. When he hears that the bride has locked herself up, he runs away with the bride, and spends the night with her in the mountains.

As Peer wanders the mountains, his mother, Solveig and her father search for him. Meanwhile, Peer strays alone in the mountains. He meets three amorous dairymaids who are waiting to be courted by trolls. He gets dead drunk with them and spends the next day alone with a severe hangover. He comes across a woman clad in green who turns out to be the

daughter of the troll mountain king. Together they ride into the mountain hall, and the troll king gives Peer the choice of becoming a troll if Peer is to marry his daughter. Peer withdraws in the end. He is then confronted with the fact that the green-clad woman is with child. Peer claims that he hasn't even touched her, but the wise troll-king replies that he begot the child in his head, as he desired his daughter.

Crucial is the question asked by the troll-king: What is the difference between troll and man? The answer is: "Man, be thyself", "Troll, to thyself be – enough". Egoism is a typical troll-trait. As time passes Peer is always claiming to be himself. Once he meets Bøyg, a creature who has no real description. On the question "who are you?" The Bøyg answers: "myself". In time, Peer also takes the Bøyg's leading line as a motto: "Go around". The rest of his life, he "beats around the bush" rather than facing himself or the truth.

When Peer is confronted by Helga, the sister of Solveig, who gives him food and regards from her sister, Peer replies by sending a silver button for Solveig to keep, and asks that she will not forget him. As an outlaw, Peer struggles to build his own cottage in the hills, and while he's doing this, Solveig turns up, insisting on living with him. Peer delights and welcomes her, but as she enters the cabin, an elderly woman in a green dress appears with a limping boy at her side. This is the green-clad woman from the mountain hall. She has in a way cursed him, and he has to remember her, and all his previous sins, when facing Solveig. This Peer cannot handle, and decides to leave, with the excuse: "I have got something heavy to fetch". He returns in time for his mother's death, and then sets off overseas.

Peer is away for many years, taking part in various occupations and playing various roles including that of a businessman engaged in enterprises on the coast of Morocco. He is a businessman with dirty money on his hands. He has been a missionary, a slave-trader, and many other things. His friends rob him, and leave him alone on the shore. Then he finds some stolen Bedouin gear, and in these clothes, he is hailed as a prophet by a local tribe. He tries to seduce Anitra, the chieftain's daughter, but she gets away, and leaves him. Then he decides to travel to Egypt. He addresses the Sphinx, believing him to be the Bøyg. He also encounters the keeper of the local madhouse. Peer comes to the madhouse, and understands that all the patients live in their own worlds, being themselves to a degree that no one cares for anyone else. In his youth, Peer had dreamt of becoming an emperor. In this place, he's finally hailed as one - the emperor of the "self".

On his way home as an old man, he is shipwrecked. Among those on board, he meets the Strange Passenger who wants to make use of Peer's corpse to find out where dreams have their seat. This passenger scares Peer out of his wits. He lands on shore bereft of all his possessions, a pitiful and grumpy old man. Back home in Norway, Peer Gynt attends a peasant funeral, and an auction, where he offers for sale everything from his earlier life. The auction takes place at the farm where the wedding once was held. Peer stumbles along, and is confronted with all that he didn't do, his unsung songs, his unmade works, his unwept tears, and his unasked questions.

His mother comes back and claims that her deathbed went awry. He didn't lead her to heaven with his ramblings. Peer escapes and is confronted with the Button-moulder, who maintains that Peer's soul must be melted down unless he can explain when and where in life he has been "himself". Peer protests saying that he has been only that, and nothing else. Then he meets the troll king, who states that he has been a troll, not a man, most of his life.

The Button-moulder comes along and says that Peer has to come up with something if he is not to be melted down. Peer looks for a priest to confess his sins, and a character named the Lean One turns up. He believes Peer cannot be accounted a real sinner who can be sent to hell. He has not done anything serious. Peer despairs in the end, understanding that his life is forfeit. The Button-moulder shows up and demands a list of sins, but Peer has none to give, unless Solveig can vouch for him. Then he breaks through to her, asking her for his sins. But she answers: "You have not sinned at all, my dearest boy". Peer does not understand - he believes himself lost. Then he asks her: "Where has Peer Gynt been since we last met? Where was I as the one I should have been, whole and true, with the mark of God on my brow?" She answers; "In my faith, in my hope, in my love". Peer screams and calls her mother, and hides himself in her lap. Solveig sings her lullaby for him, and we might presume he dies, although there is no sign that he does.

## **2 Is Peer Gynt a Liar?**

In the beginning of the play we meet Peer Gynt – a twenty-year-old man and his mother Aase.

AASE

Peer, you're a liar!

PEER

No, I'm not!

AASE

Then swear it's true – look in my eyes!

PEER

Why should I swear?

AASE

Just what I thought!

Nothing but lies-hot air and lies!

PEER

I tell you – every blessed word is true!

This is the opening of Ibsen's drama, and here in the very beginning Ibsen strikes the tone. Peer Gynt lies – but he denies it. Is Peer Gynt a victim of self-deception because his distinctions between facts and fantasies are blurred? Or is Peer a conscious, cynical and a notorious liar about what he has done, and about himself? We will take a look at one of the many figures in the poem, the Bøyg as the illustration of always selecting the easiest path, to go around, not taking any confrontations with anybody along the crossroads of his life journey. Who is the Bøyg? One interpretation is that this is Peer's self, his cowardly self. This triggers the question. What are the implications of always to give in when meeting difficulties?

Later in the drama Ibsen digs deep into Peer Gynt's self-concept. When Peer Gynt has become an old man, he starts to reflect on his life. Has he made his life into something – or was his life an empty one? Who has he been? Has he been true to himself and realized his highest potential? Has he been a man who has accomplished something for the common good or had he been a troll – an ego tripper who always had followed his lower instincts in a relentless drive for money? What was Peer Gynt's contribution? Ibsen's play shows Peer Gynt's reflection on his self as a conversation with many persons that he happens to meet at different crossroads. Ibsen's person-gallery is extremely rich. We find persons that represent trolls, a loving woman, Solveig, and the Button-moulder whose role is to melt those souls that did not achieve what the Master intended with their life. Here we see how clearly Ibsen uses

paraphrases from the Bible to highlight the logic of the human drama. Ibsen draws on Peter's letter in the New Testament "You were chosen according to the purpose of God and Father". (Peter, 1,2)

### 3 The Gyntish Self

The self of Peer Gynt is an all desiring and never insatiated ego.

PEER

The Gyntish Self-it is the host  
of wishes, appetites, desires,-  
the Gyntish Self, it is the sea  
of fancies, exigencies, claims,  
all that, in short, makes my breast heave,  
and whereby I, as I, exist.  
But as our Lord requires the clay  
to constitute him God o' the world,  
so I, too, stand in need of gold,  
if I as Emperor would figure.

Peer Gynt's dream and life-project is to be Emperor as he confesses it to his travel companions.

MR. COTTON

Beyond all doubt, you have a goal;  
and that is-?

PEER

To be Emperor.

ALL FOUR

What?

PEER [nodding].

Emperor!

THE FOUR

Where?

PEER

O'er all the world.

MONSIEUR BALLON

But how, friend-?

PEER

By the might of gold!

That plan is not at all a new one;

it's been the soul of my career.

Even as a boy, I swept in dreams

far o'er the ocean on a cloud.

I soared with train and golden scabbard,-

and flopped down on all-fours again.

But still my goal, my friends, stood fast.-

There is a text, or else a saying,

somewhere, I don't remember where,

that if you gained the whole wide world,

but lost yourself, your gain were but

a garland on a cloven skull.

That is the text-or something like it;

and that remark is sober truth.

VON EBERKOPF

But what then is the Gyntish Self?

PEER

The world behind my forehead's arch,

in force of which I'm no one else

than I, no more than God's the Devil.

The Gyntish self is about a universal pursuit of money, material possessions and power. Aiming at realizing his self Peer Gynt becomes a global entrepreneur engaged in dirty businesses. He explains his trade activities to his travel companions in a rather cynical way.

MR. COTTON

What did you trade in?

PEER

I did most  
in Negro slaves for Carolina,  
and idol-images for China.

MONSIEUR BALLON

Fi donc!

TRUMPETERSTRALE

The devil, Uncle Gynt!

PEER

You think, no doubt, the business hovered  
on the outer verge of the allowable?  
Myself I felt the same thing keenly.  
It struck me even as odious.  
But, trust me, when you've once begun,  
it's hard to break away again.  
At any rate it's no light thing,  
in such a vast trade-enterprise,  
that keeps whole thousands in employ,  
to break off wholly, once for all.  
That "once for all" I can't abide,  
but own, upon the other side,  
that I have always felt respect  
for what are known as consequences;  
and that to overstep the bounds  
has ever somewhat daunted me.

(...)

What could I do? To stop the trade  
with China was impossible.  
A plan I hit on-opened straightway  
a new trade with the self-same land.  
I shipped off idols every spring,  
each autumn sent forth missionaries,  
supplying them with all they needed,  
as stockings, Bibles, rum, and rice-



MR. COTTON

Yes, at a profit?

PEER

Why, of course.

It prospered. Dauntlessly they toiled.

For every idol that was sold

they got a coolie well baptised,

so that the effect was neutralised.

The mission-field lay never fallow,

for still the idol-propaganda

the missionaries held in check.

MR. COTTON

Well, but the African commodities?

PEER

There, too, my ethics won the day.

I saw the traffic was a wrong one

for people of a certain age.

One may drop off before one dreams of it.

And then there were the thousand pitfalls

laid by the philanthropic camp;

besides, of course, the hostile cruisers,

and all the wind-and-weather risks.

All this together won the day.

I thought: Now, Peter, reef your sails;

see to it you amend your faults!

So in the South I bought some land,

and kept the last meat-importation,

which chanced to be a superfine one.

They throve so, grew so fat and sleek,

that 'twas a joy to me, and them too.

Yes, without boasting, I may say

I acted as a father to them,-

and found my profit in so doing.

I built them schools, too, so that virtue

might uniformly be maintained at  
 a certain general niveau,  
 and kept strict watch that never its  
 thermometer should sink below it.  
 Now, furthermore, from all this business  
 I've beat a definite retreat;-  
 I've sold the whole plantation, and  
 its tale of live-stock, hide and hair.  
 At parting, too, I served around,  
 to big and little, gratis grog,  
 so men and women all got drunk,  
 and widows got their snuff as well.  
 So that is why I trust,-provided  
 the saying is not idle breath:  
 Whoso does not do ill, does good,-  
 my former errors are forgotten,  
 and I, much more than most, can hold  
 my misdeeds balanced by my virtues.

Peer Gynt was a relentless egoist in doing business. He employed various *moral disengagement strategies*. These strategies are the psychosocial maneuvers by which moral self-sanctions become disengaged, giving free way to a variety of misbehaviors without carrying any moral concern. Self-sanctions can be disengaged by reconstructing the conduct, obscuring personal causal agency, misrepresenting or disregarding the injurious consequences of one's actions, and vilifying the recipients of maltreatment by blaming and devaluating them. (Bandura, Caprara, Zsolnai 2000).

Peer Gynt's case clearly illustrates the finding of contemporary moral psychology that the more a person is concerned with self-enhancement goals, the more he is inclined to resort to mechanisms that permit him to justify transgressions when his self-interest is at stake. (Caprara & Capanna 2006)

#### 4 What is self-realization?

What does it mean to realize one's self? A popular notion is that the businessman who has become wealthy and got much power and prestige has been realized himself. He is the modern hero in our society, and people admire him for his achievements. A different notion is the artist who through all his life has been faithful to his calling as an artist. He is working not just for the money, but to express something he believes is of vital importance. To realize himself, the artist might sacrifice affluence to follow his intuition that tells that he should do something noble.

There exists a classical notion of self-realization. It has a long-term perspective, as it points on the man who has obtained the good life (eudaimonia). In ancient Greek good life presupposes realizing one's virtues, which means developing one's best abilities - thereby flourishing as a human being within a community, a polis.

In psychological textbooks self realization is conceptualized as a hierarchal model in which it is important to satisfy several deep physical needs to climb up the steps of the hierarchy and finally be free, autonomous and realize one's full potential. At the top of the hierarchy the self realized person enjoys "peak experiences" – extraordinary self-transcendent movements that feel qualitatively different from ordinary life experiences (Maslow, 1964).

A refinement of these steps often shows that at the lowest level of the pyramid it is important to satisfy needs as safety, health, food, shelter, and the next level concern the personal attachment to other people, and the top level is the possibilities to achieve. This is in accord with Aristotle that the good life is about activities. Shakespeare writes that "Joy's soul lies in the doing" and the logic is that we get more pleasure from making progress toward our goals than we do from achieving them (Haidt 2006 pp 221).

These grand steps have some similarities with Kohlberg's levels of moral development – to act from recognition and fear, to act in accord with law and finally to be an autonomous person who do what is right according to abstract, rational and consistent thinking.

Let us take a closer look at the concept of the “self”. What is the self? In ordinary speaking the self is the captain of the ship. It is an ability of the human being that enables us to reflect on what we have done – and on what we should have done. The self is the inner world given to every individual. The self is the reservoir of meaning for the person. No one has given a more living description of the possible struggle in oneself than Soren Kirkegaard who describes it as an inner conflict of fear and trembling. Another existentialist Sartre, uses terms like anguish, abandonment and despair referring to the experiences of one’s self.

In a modern view the self is a world of social comparisons, of simulations and consideration of our reputation. The self can be looked on in a restricted way as framed by William James’ definition: “My self is my body and my bank account”.

The self may also be seen in a much deeper and wider sense. We may speak about an extended self. Arne Næss believes that the self usually develops and grows with knowledge and age, thus becomes more extended and in the end may encompass all human beings, nature and the whole Earth. (Ims & Zsolnai, 2005)

Confronted with the Button-moulder Peer Gynt learns that he has never been himself.

#### THE BUTTON-MOULDER

Yourself you never have been at all;-  
then what does it matter, your dying right out?

#### PEER

Have I not been-? I could almost laugh!  
Peer Gynt, then, has been something else, I suppose!  
No, Button-moulder, you judge in the dark.  
If you could but look into my very reins,  
you'd find only Peer there, and Peer all through,-  
nothing else in the world, no, nor anything more.

Peer Gynt asks the Button-moulder what is it "being oneself".

## THE BUTTON-MOULDER

To be oneself, Peer Gynt, the self must die.  
 But on you that answer is doubtless lost;  
 and therefore we'll say: to stand forth everywhere  
 with Master's intention displayed like a signboard.

## PEER

But suppose a man never has come to know  
 what Master meant with him?

## THE BUTTON-MOULDER

He must divine it.

The usual interpretation of this is that the Button Moulder is representing the Christian life-norm and teaches Peer Gynt what it is to be oneself in a Christian sense. We find a direct link here to the Bible: "If anyone wants to come with me, he must forget himself. (...) For whoever wants to save his own life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt 16, 24-25)

How might we interpret the statement like this? What is the logic behind it? Does it mean to sacrifice one's self? To be true to your self one you have to offer something to God, to give up some desirable object or to suffer for the sake of something else? If so, what kind of sacrifice?

Let us search in the Christian tradition to see whether we find a key to interpret this kind of self-sacrifice. There is a lot of evidence that Ibsen read the Bible. He admitted that *the Bible was the only book he read while writing Peer Gynt* (1866 – 67 - published 14 now 1867) and Peer Gynt's forerunner and polar opposite, the priest Brand, who was the main figure in his work *Brand* which was published in March 1866. In the dramatic poem *Brand* we find more than 200 citations from the Bible, and in Peer Gynt there is more than 20. However, in Peer Gynt all the citations are formulated in a way that suits Peer extravagant and careless behavior. Ibsen wrote that while the priest Brand as shows himself from the best side, Peer Gynt shows himself from the worst sides. The almost 70 years old Ibsen gave a family Bible to his only son, Sigurd for his birthday. In play of Peer Gynt the church bells are used as a signal of Peer's awakening, and the end of the poem *Peer Gynt* appears in the time of

Pentecost. And close to the end we find one of the most remarkable passages of the poem where Peer Gynt asks:

“Where have I been myself, wholly and truly,  
Made manifest the sign of God above?”

Solveig answer:

“Here – in my faith, my hope, and in my love.”

In fact, *faith*, *hope*, and *love* are the three cardinal virtues in the Christian tradition. So it is good reasons to believe that Ibsen was strongly inspired by the Bible and the Christian tradition.

We find the theme of sacrifice as a core theme in the Bible. Let us take a closer look at some of the central texts in order to gain a better understanding of the “self must die” in the meaning of making a sacrifice.

In Genesis 1(4-5) we read:

“At harvest time Cain brought to the Lord a gift of his farm produce, and Abel brought the fatty cuts of meat from his best lambs, and presented them to the Lord. And the Lord accepted Abel’s offering, but not Cain’s.”

One of the most famous and the up roaring of the offers in the Bible are the ancestor Abraham, and his willingness to sacrifice his only son – Isaac. It is written in Genesis 22.

“Later on, God tested Abraham. “Abraham!” God called.

“Yes, Lord” he replied.

“Take with you your only son- yes Isaac whom you love so much- and go to the land o Moriah and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering.....”

22 (7)

Father, Isaac asked, “we have the wood and flint to make the fire, but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?”

Already here we see that a lamb – an innocent little animal – is taken for granted as the offer to Abraham’s God.

Then the main turn in the Bible is that Christ himself is seen as the Lord’s lamb. One main interpretation is that the Lord offers his only son by letting him suffer from the worst of all deaths – *to be crucified in order to save the World*. Because, Christ was himself aware of this turn of events, and in some sense we might say he was free to act otherwise, we might maintain that he in fact, sacrificed himself. This is in accordance with the apostle Paul’s message when he wrote (Ephesians 5.2): “Be full of love for others, following the example of Christ who loved you and *gave himself to God as a sacrifice to take away your sins*. And God was pleased.....”

But why make a sacrifice? Because Adam had broken God’s will in the Garden of Eden by eating of the tree of Conscience, giving knowledge of Good and Bad. Adam and Eve were then punished by being expelled by God (Genesis 2 and 3). Thus a sacrifice should be made to please God.

We find several persons in the play of Peer Gynt who were real and true selves by making a sacrifice. Solveig offered most of her life by waiting for Peer. The young farmer cut his own finger to avoid joining the army in order to take care of his family. This is beautifully expressed in the priest’s funeral:

“But there’s one thing that shines above the law,  
As truly as the bright tent of Glitretind

He was a poor patriot. To state  
And Church, an unproductive tree. But there  
On the brow of the hill, within the narrow  
Circle of family, where his work was done.  
There he was great, because he was himself.”

To make a sacrifice, one has to give away something that is precious, and any action is a choice. Peer's unwillingness to take a sacrifice is well stated in the poem. For example in the third act, when he watches the young farmer cut his finger off.

The whole finger off! And bleeds like an ox.-  
Now he has bound it up, and run off.

What spunk! An irreplaceable finger!  
Right off! And no one making him do it.  
Ah, now I remember! It's the only way  
To avoid being called up for the army.  
That's it. They were going to send him to war;  
And the boy, not surprisingly, objected.-  
But to hack it off – part with it for ever?:-  
To consider it, yes; wish it; even  
Prepare yourself for it; but to *do* it!  
No; that's something I can't understand.

Peer Gynt did never take any real choice of sacrifice. Whenever he met a choice situation, he went around the difficulties - the Boyg.

Peer was an expert in avoiding any existential choice, thus avoiding making a sacrifice. He thought that the world should give him an access to all the best things in life.

In the Buddhist perspective the sentence "to be oneself, the self must die" gives another meaning. Buddhists have a different view of self, the *no-self* ("annatta"), which means that there is no individuating core we can point to and say "Here I am!". *Anatta* specifies the absence of a supposedly permanent and unchanging self in any one of the psychophysical constituents of empirical existence. What is normally thought of as the "self" is an agglomeration of constantly changing physical and mental constituents, which give rise to unhappiness if clung to as though this temporary assemblage represented permanence. The anatta doctrine attempts to encourage people to detach themselves from the misplaced clinging to what is mistakenly regarded as self. One implication is that a person is not a fixed and separate entity.



What does it mean? We are informed by Peter Pruzan (2004) writing about spiritually based leadership that in the Eastern tradition selflessness and non-attachment are important concepts. There is a notion of detached involvement. The idea is that work can be transformed to selfless service freeing us from the personal desires and ambition, and implies an indifference to the outcomes. In this way work may give a sense of interconnectedness and imply a transcendence of the lower, ego dominated self. Pruzan writes that one's service is a sacrament of devotion to one's duty. This is clearly linked to the notion of the servant-leadership, which is the antithesis of the power-seeking manager who attempts to control others without sensitivity to their needs.

Pruzan stresses that self-realization is “the direct experience of the *Self* or the *atma*. It involves to develop knowledge of one's true self - realizing the essence of one's being. “The spark of the divine purpose to life”. The paradox is clear. Self-realization can only be achieved if “the person whose ego has been tamed/ignored and who is truly selfless and does not seek rewards for his deeds. The selfless leader who is not attached to the fruits of his actions does not only achieve spiritual growth, peace of mind and freedom from fear. He also becomes an exemplar for his employees and his surroundings...” (Pruzan 2004. p 25).

Who am I? “The answer is not provided by our name or physical form, but by our essence... the *atma*, the higher consciousness and conscience, the true, divine *Self*”. The key concept is *unity*, who refers to the oneness or identity with the creation and the source of creation, and expresses the belief that we are all interrelated at a deep existential level...” This belief strongly contradicts to the Western dualistic view, which focuses on individuals and their individual success. (Pruzan 2006 p 26)

## **5 Man versus Troll**

The DOVRE-MASTER proclaims

The humans say, “Man, be thyself”,

But ...the Trolls say,

“Troll, to thyself be – enough”.

For the trolls the Norwegian expression used by Ibsen is “Troll, vær deg selv – nok”. One possible interpretation of “enough” is that you should be generous and kind to your individual self, in order to serve your lower self. Literally the human and trolls mottos are “ Be yourself” versus “Be yourself - enough”. They are cryptic and mysterious even in Norwegian. The translators fear that the literal translation would be too murky for an English speaking audience. That penetrating word “enough” alarms you, but it must be in your coat of arms.

The king of the trolls claims that Peer Gynt was a troll in most of his life. But Peer Gynt vehemently denies this.

PEER

I am not a troll –  
I had been in strong opposition to trolls all my life.

DOVRE-MASTER

No that is not true.  
Our slogan was emblazed on your heart.  
And since then your whole life has not been  
Anything but a tribute to our doctrine.  
You’ve kept it secret, but you’ve been a troll –  
the phrase I taught you was the very pole  
You claimed yourself to make yourself a millionaire.  
But the troll credo was what you professed

PEER

A mountain troll! Me?  
Self-obsessed?

DOVRE-MASTER:

You’re the illustration of being  
Troll

In other plays by Ibsen we may get an idea about the author's perspective on self-realization. In the *Doll House* Nora is achieving self - realization by making an immense sacrifice for being a mother - turning her back on her husband and children.

In the last act of *Peer Gynt* Peer shows genuineness in responding to Solveig's waiting for him. Here Peer is capable of a kind of directness and honesty and finally accepts his destiny.

But Peer was never able to find genuineness in business. After all, Peer could probably not realize himself in business. Peer was a poet-like dreamer and his best abilities were expressed in storytelling. But he never dared to follow the artistic path. He did not dare to choose to become a poet. Ibsen himself had deep experiences of making a sacrifice by being an author. He was a poor man in monetary terms until he became forty years old. *Peer Gynt* took the easiest path, the path that made him an international magnate, a *self made man* who looked upon business as an *amoral* activity. Peer enjoyed a kind of success in business through an unscrupulous pursuit of self-interests. Because he never was truly and wholly himself in business, he continued his endless journey in his search for happiness in life. Peer ended up as an old and lonely man, who finally acknowledged the sad truth about himself after a disastrous search after his identity.

*Peer Gynt's* tragedy can be illuminated by the main teaching of Buddhism, which points out that even if one attains what he or she desires, greater desires always emerge. The ego mindset cannot be fulfilled and its greed for more satisfaction and recognition becomes the source of its own destruction. (Ims & Zsolnai, 2005)

In business terms we may ask what it means to be a Troll. It can be identified with the *uncritical pursuit of profit*, the "enrich yourself" mentality, which is so well-known in today's business world. The businessman who is a servant of his lower self can destroy nature, people, and future generations but certainly he will *destroy his own self*. Being truly and wholly human and realizing your own self requires *genuine selflessness* that is, denying the instincts of your lower self and serving purposes higher than you.

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