

Self-identification can be compared to being on top of a *belvedere* — an Italian word meaning that point on high ground which gives us a panoramic view of the landscape below—because from the vantage point of the self we can obtain an overall view of the ever-changing contents of our personality. The first four steps of the following exercise are designed to lead us to the *belvedere* position of our inner space. The fifth step, which follows naturally from the others, is planned to yield the experience of the self as pure consciousness.

SELF-IDENTIFICATION

1. Become aware of your *body*.
For some time, just notice in a neutral way—and without trying to change them—all the physical sensations you can be conscious of. Be aware, for example, of the contact of your body with the chair you are sitting on, of your feet with the ground, of your clothes with your skin.
Be aware of your breathing.
When you feel you have explored your physical sensations long enough, leave them and go on to the next step.
2. Become aware of your *feelings*.
What feeling are you experiencing right now?
And which are the principal feelings you experience recurrently in your life? Consider both the apparently positive and negative ones: love and irritation, jealousy and tenderness, depression and elation....
Do not judge. Just view your usual feelings with the objective attitude of a scientific investigator taking an inventory.
When you are satisfied, shift your attention from this area and proceed to the next step.
3. Turn your attention to your *desires*.
Adopting the same impartial attitude as before, review the main desires which take turns in motivating your life. Often you may well be identified with one or the other of these but now you simply consider them, side by side.
Finally, leave your desires and continue with the next step.
4. Observe the world of your *thoughts*.
As soon as a thought emerges, watch it until another one takes its place, then another one, and so on. If you think you are not having

any thoughts, realize that this too is a thought. Watch your stream of consciousness as it flows by: memories, opinions, nonsense, arguments, images.

Do this for a couple of minutes, then dismiss this realm as well from your observation.

5. *The observer*—the one who has been watching your sensations, feelings, desires, and thoughts—is not the same as the object it observes. *Who* is it that has been observing all these realms? It is your *self*. The self is not an image or a thought; it is that essence which has been observing all these realms and yet is distinct from all of them. And you are that being. Say inwardly: "I am the *self*, a center of pure consciousness."

Seek to realize this for about 1.00 minutes.*

The self is the most fundamental psychological experience we can have: crystal clear, limpid consciousness. And yet this experience doesn't usually come spontaneously, and eliciting it by means of this exercise may take some time. We should remember, too, that the self is not some state located out there, which we must look for and strive hard to reach. On the contrary, we already *are* the self all the time. Moreover, the experience of the self does not mean blotting out all other contents of consciousness. Feelings and thoughts may still be coming and going—but now they are in the background of our awareness, which is becoming aware of itself.

Finally, the self is not a reality to be experienced only with closed eyes. It is a realization that can be retained in the midst of daily life. While the self is by definition pure inner silence, it does not necessarily take us away from our everyday moods and activities; on the contrary, it can increasingly manifest an effective presence and self-reliance, as the following story illustrates.

An airplane never used and full of spider webs; a heap of ruins; a wrecked ship; a lifeless puppet. These images appear to Lia at different times when I ask her to close her eyes and give free reign to the spontaneous flow of her imagery. And they all obviously show how she feels about

*In Assagioli's original version of this exercise, a radical formula is used for all levels:

"I have a body, but I am not my body."

"I have feelings, but I am not my feelings."

"I have desires, but I am not my desires."

"I have a mind, but I am not my mind."

You are not only led to create a psychic distance between yourself and what you observe, but you are also asked to affirm this distinction by voicing the corresponding statements. While some people find this wording particularly effective for dis-identifying, others prefer to perform this exercise without any particular formula.