

2. VITALITY AND PERSONAL GROWTH

2.1 Knowledge of myself: How can you set goals, go about life, and have relationships if you don't know who you are or what you want? You really can't.

To not know yourself leads to confusion and wasting much time in hit and miss situations.

We tend to underestimate the importance of knowing ourselves. Many of us go through each day reacting to events and just getting by rather than making conscious choices based on who we are and what we want.

When we don't know where we are headed it's hard to set goals, get motivated and determine the best course of action. Before we can do any of these things we must establish who we are.

To know yourself:

- Be aware of your strengths, weaknesses, likes and dislikes
- Observe and be aware of your moods, reactions and responses to what is happening around you
- Become aware of how these moods and emotions affect your state of mind
- Examine how you interact with others
- Observe how your environment affects you

Knowing and understanding yourself better, in turn, leads to better decision making, setting and reaching appropriate goals and altogether living more productively.

There are many interesting personality tests and evaluations for self-discovery that can help you become more in tune to yourself and are fun to do.

Two powerful tools I found exceptionally helpful are the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and The Enneagram.

Not only do these tools help you understand yourself better and what drives some of your behaviors, they also help you understand and get along better with others.

As social psychologist Jonathan Haidt writes in his book *The Happiness Hypothesis*: "The mind is divided into parts that sometimes conflict. Like a rider on the back of an elephant, the conscious reasoning part of the mind has only limited control of what the elephant does."

The conscious mind, however, is a great explainer. It's irresistibly drawn into making sense of the world and everything in it, including itself. Unfortunately, it prefers deluded explanations that keep its view of the world intact to true ones that threaten to shatter it. (The most dramatic example of this comes from experiments in which neurosurgeons have stimulated the motor cortices of awake patients, causing them to move their hands. When asked why they moved their hands, patients typically give answers like, "I was waving at that nurse.")

Given our conscious mind's propensity to tell stories that make the world cohere even at the expense of the truth, as well as the fact that most of our behavior emerges from places in our minds unseen, it's little wonder we're so often wrong about why we *actually* do the things we do, and the type of people we *actually* are. Add our ego-driven need to appear to be all things virtuous and good into the mix and we find ourselves mixing a potent recipe for significant self-delusion.

Which isn't to say we can't see the truths about why we do the things we do—just that the truth is quite often less obvious than we might think—that we can be utterly certain we're right and still be completely wrong. That our "truth meter" can be easily misled when it comes to self-knowledge is quite unsettling to realize. But as we all have a visual blind spot of which we aren't aware until someone points it out, we have mental blind spots of which we aren't aware as well. Unlike being shown how objects can be made to disappear behind our visual blind spot, however, having truths pointed out to us that hide behind our mental blind spots isn't necessarily accompanied by a joyful sense of discovery.

Yet once we understand intellectually that we do have mental blind spots, we can leverage that understanding to become more accurate in our self-appraisals. One way to do this, once we fully recognize what unreliable storytellers we are, is to attempt to completely ignore what we *want* to be true about ourselves or the reasons for our actions and, like an unbiased researcher, imagine ourselves as disinterested third parties hypothesizing about ourselves from the only data such third parties would have available to them: our observable actions. For, in fact, people who know us reasonably well but who aren't bound by our biases may have, paradoxically, a clearer view of the truth about us than we do ourselves.

Which suggests an even better way to get an accurate view of ourselves may be, ironically, to ask other people. If genuine self-knowledge is what we're after, the best way to get it may be to summon up the courage to hear the truth and simply ask close friends and family members what we want to know. "Am I warm?" "Am I honest?" "Am I fun?" We may think we already know the answers to these questions, but sometimes we don't. Others, of course, may come at such an exercise with their own agendas and biases, but if you ask enough people such biases tend to cancel out. It then becomes a question—another one whose answer we may think we know but which we actually don't—of just how courageous we are.

2.2 Self-realization: Self-realization is an expression used in psychology, spirituality, and Eastern religions. In one overview, Mortimer Adler defines self-realization as freedom from external coercion, including cultural expectations, political and economic freedom, and the freedom from worldly attachments and desires etc. The Indian mystic Paramahansa Yogananda describes Self-realization as "the knowing—in body, mind and soul—that we are one with the omnipresence of God; that we do not have to pray that it come to us, that we are not merely near it at all times, but that God's omnipresence is our omnipresence; that we are just as much a part of Him now as we ever will be. All we have to do is improve our knowing".

The basic premise of self-realization is that there exists an authentic Self (or 'soul') which has to be discovered by psychological or spiritual self-striving. Self-realization can be a gradual or instantaneous phenomena depending on the school of thought but in all cases it involves extensive preparation of mind and emotions to recognize self-realization when it occurs.

Self-realization is a maturing of the ego or personality to accept its own evanescence and thus allow space for the true Self to reveal itself. The sun veiled by clouds is an apt metaphor for the Self's apparent absence in our everyday lives. The dissolution of the ego's obsessive, internal pre-occupations with its psychosomatic complexes frees the psyche's energy to directly experience reality of the world as it is, free of any assumptions.

Introspection, questioning one's higher purpose and striving towards self-awareness are often initiators towards the process of self-realization.

Eastern understanding

Hinduism

For the Hindu religion, self-realization (*atma-jnana*) is knowledge of the true self beyond both delusion and identification with material phenomena. It refers to self identification and not ego identification.

Advaita Vedanta

The branch of Advaita Vedanta is the one that has particularly developed this concept. According to Vedanta, God as Sat-Chit-Ananda is perfect existence, consciousness, bliss. Whereas the manifest universe which is a play of shakti or energy is temporal, the immutable principle or reality is beyond time. God is not exactly a being - in order for there to be being, there has to be non-being - and, it is said, that such dualism within the differentiated reality does not exist in that state.

It cannot be described, quantified, reasoned, or explained all of which exist on a differentiated basis only directly experienced as itself. Shakti or energy, as an abstraction, is eternal but its manifestations are continually changing. Therefore, in Hinduism, God is represented in both male and female form. The male as sat-chit-anand is immutable; the female shakti is temporal. While being omnipresent and immanent in reality, sat-chit-anand is formless. Shakti is manifested but, also, exists in an unexpressed form inside of sat-chit-anand. Therefore, even if the Universe ceases to exist at one point, it will eventually be reborn because Shakti in an immaterial form is also eternal. What motivates the action is described more poetically as a dance or a play

Ramana Maharshi

As taught by Ramana Maharshi, awareness or consciousness of "I am," plays a key role in achieving self-realization; tracing back to the source of awareness by asking oneself the question "Who am I?", the true self becomes obvious. Focussing attention on the qualified "I am" is a powerful means to achieving the end which is being one with the completely unqualified "I," the True Self which is experienced as Silence. Replacing the confused duality of Self and ego with the pristine non-dual experience of Self is the essence of Ramana's teaching.

True happiness is the manifested Self. It only seems like a result because it is not felt or known permanently before the ego is removed. As explained by Ramana Maharshi,

Happiness is inherent in man and is not due to external causes. One must realize himself in order to experience his unalloyed happiness. All spiritual scriptures are meant to make man retrace his steps to his original source.

Sahaja Yoga

The method of meditation Sahaja Yoga, created in 1970 by Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi, defines self-realization as a connection with yourself or the first encounter with reality.

Buddhism

Main article: Enlightenment in Buddhism

Since Buddhism denies the existence of a separate self, as explicated in the teachings of anatman and sunyata, self-realization is a *contradictio in terminis* for Buddhism. Though the tathagatagarbha-teachings seem to teach the existence of a separate self, they point to the inherent possibility of attaining awakening, not to the existence of a separate self. The dharmadhatu-teachings make this even more clear: reality is an undivided whole; awakening is the realization of this whole.

Sikhism

Sikhism propounds the philosophy of Self-realization. This is possible by "aatam-chennea" or "Aap Pashaanae", purifying the self from the false ego:

Western understanding

Merriam Webster's dictionary defines self-realization as: Fulfillment by oneself of the possibilities of one's character or personality.

In the western world "self-realization" has gained great popularity. Influential in this popularity were psycho-analysis, humanistic psychology, the growing acquaintance with eastern religions, and the growing popularity of western esotericism.

Psychoanalysis

Though Sigmund Freud was skeptical of religion and esotericism, his theories have had a lasting influence on western thought and self-understanding. His notion of repressed memories, though based on false assumptions, has become part of western mainstream thinking.

Freud's ideas were further developed by his students and neo-psycho-analysts. Especially Carl Jung, Erik Erikson and Winnicott have been important in the western understanding of the self. But also other alternatives have been developed.

Jung developed the notion of individuation, the lifelong process in which the center of psychological life shifts from the ego to the self.

Erikson described human development throughout the life-span in his theory of psychosocial development.

Winnicott developed the notion of the true self.

Roberto Assagioli developed his approach of Psychosynthesis, an original approach to psychology.

Humanistic psychology

Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, leaders in the Humanistic Psychology movement, developed the concept of self-actualization.

Based on Maslow, the most common meaning given to self-realization is that of psychological growth. It represents the awakening and manifestation of latent potentialities of the human being -for example, ethical, esthetic, and religious experiences and activities.

Maslow

Maslow defined self-actualization as: The impulse to convert oneself into what one is capable of being.

Eastern religions

While the western knowledge of eastern spirituality is still growing, the understanding of these traditions is biased by western concepts.

Aajit K. Das, in the International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, compared and contrasted Maslow and Rogers' concept of self-actualization with the concept of self-realization in Vedantic Hinduism and the two major schools of Buddhism, Theravada and Mahayana. The author concluded in this paper that the two concepts complement each other.

Western esotericism

Western esotericism integrates a broad variety of traditions. It views self-realization as the ultimate goal of a human being, attaining permanent happiness and complete independence and freedom from all worldly bondage. In this view, true happiness is the result of self-realization.