

THE TRUE SELF

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The True Self

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Special Subjects

by

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* The True Self

The special subject for today consists of a collection of points suggested for interpretation. We might sum up the whole subject aimed at as that of the real Self, the true Self. This true Self is not the ego built up out of ideas, but it is what each person really is.

One point which comes under this consideration concerns the difficulties resulting from the failure of the ego in its identification with truth. Another point for consideration deals with the subject of universal being and its practical application. A third point concerns a passage from the **Axiom Book on the

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**AXIOMS: Book of Health
by George Edwin Burnell

renunciation of self. These three points we offer for consideration under the general heading of "The True Self."

Because it is always wise to aim at the highest, we establish our goal in the words of Saint Francis of Assisi, who said: "What I am before God, that I am." We need nothing more than this; we could leave the subject resting in these words if we were sure of ourselves as God knows us. If we could resign ourselves entirely to this perfection, that would be all that could be desired. But the difficulty is to know ourselves as God knows us.

No stretch of the imagination could conceive of the perfection God knows in each one of us. If we want an accurate definition for our real Self, we must seek it not in our own or our neighbor's idea of ourselves, but in God's knowledge of what we are—God knows us as our real Self. The great problem of the human I (the Latin word for "I" is "ego") is that we fail to know ourselves as God knows us. We think we know ourselves, but our knowledge is based not on truth but on ideas in our own

minds. These ideas are accumulated from many sources—what our family thinks about us, what our neighbors believe about us, what we have set up as our own thought image regarding ourselves; but what we really are is hidden so far underneath all these ideas that we have almost lost contact with reality itself.

The ego that most people think themselves to be is nothing but an image contrived in their own minds. God has made us to His image and likeness; so this mental self image, which we build up out of our own thinking, cannot be anything but a counterfeit. Our true Self proceeds from God's knowledge—as God knows us, so are we.

We say we know things that exist; that is, we believe things have to be in existence before we can know them. But God's knowledge is the source of existence; as God knows a thing, so it is. God's knowledge does not depend on objective articles, but every existent thing depends on God. As God knows it, so it is. He is the source of our being; therefore what God sees in us is the essence of our true being.

This "I" of human experience is a strange factor to deal with. There is in each of us a primitive element called "I-ness." Every person believes himself well acquainted with his own "I-ness," or ego; but strangely enough, what people usually think about themselves, what they call their "I," is likely to be a false image, often totally obscuring the true Self.

Religion is the one science which aims at the discovery of the true Self; but the difficulty presented in such an investigation is that the subject gets carried away on emotional tangents, and consequently the real Self is missed. We use the word "I" in the Axiom lessons as the baseline for inquiry into truth, because each person has an "I"; everyone has an equal starting point. The "I" in every person signifies his conscious existence. The ability to say "I" presupposes a rational consciousness. A little child, even before he begins to talk, has a definite sense of "I-ness." It is important, however, to distinguish between the "I" and consciousness. It seems as though "I" and consciousness are synonymous, for a person cannot

say "I" unless he is conscious; but it is equally true that when he says "I" he may not be even remotely conscious of his real Self. That is, you can say "I" and not mean at all your real Self; yet to speak the word "I" you need to be conscious. So it seems that difficulty exists between consciousness and the real Self.

Often people are carried away from truth by their sense of egoism, conceit, and presumption; they build up a counterfeit self that obscures what God knows in them. They build up a self out of their personal concepts, cultivating temperamental peculiarities and emotional dispositions that are entirely unrelated to the truth about themselves. People tend to identify themselves with so many things that are not actually so. Every day one hears the expression: "I am tired," "I am not feeling well," "I am unhappy," "I am angry," and so on and on; all these false ideas are attributed to oneself until the real Self is entirely obscured by what one is conscious of.

If, when you speak the word "I," you would always associate it with truth, your life would

be a successful and happy one. If everyone did this the world would seem quite a different place. Human relationships would be free from conflicts; there would be no clash of personalities, for all would find oneness of life in this consciousness of pure Being.

In the Axioms we reason the unity of being; there is distinction but no separation in truth. Every person who speaks the word "I" feels himself to be a particular individual; but actually the "I" is their agreeing point, for each person finds the "I" is himself. Disagreements and personal conflicts develop between the built-up egos in the world for it is there that likes and dislikes grow, that sensitive feelings thrive along with prejudices and stubborn opinions.

In the world it seems as though these separate "I's" set up wall-like barriers; each "I" in a family, a city, or a nation seeks selfishly for his own good, missing the great truth that no one can achieve good unless all the other "I's" do likewise. Everyone knows well the practical importance of the golden rule, yet how few

practise it! It is identification with the false self that produces unrest in the world; it is this built-up ego which is the seat of selfishness, and of sense gratification.

Before we proceed deeper into this subject, we should distinguish between egotism and the pure principle of egoism—the principle of identity, as we know it in the Aphorisms. The second great principle of creation is self-consciousness, called the principle of identity, or egoism. This ability to identify with truth is a great gift bestowed on human nature. This permits each one to identify with pure life—to identify with what is, with what God knows him to be. But man, experimenting with this great gift of identity, turned it away from truth and toward the world; thus a counterfeit image of the true Self was set up. Man, identifying himself with false circumstances and experiences, soon lost all acquaintance with himself as God knows him. The first step toward the real Self is to recognize and expose the sham self.

Man is constituted with certain inherent

principles of action; for example, unknowingly man is seeking God constantly. This is evident when one considers the operation of the faculties. It is the constitution of man's will to seek good; of his intellect, to seek truth.

According to Saint Thomas Aquinas truth and goodness are identical, because man's two greatest faculties must seek one and the same object. For if truth and good were not one and the same, man would destroy himself in just the proportion that his faculties achieved their end. It is an axiom that goodness is truth; therefore the will and intellect form a harmonious relationship. The intellect seeks truth, which is good; the will seeks good, which is true. This is man's constitutional nature. His will is drawn to good; his intellect is drawn to truth.

The difficulty develops when the counterfeit self dominates the faculties. For this false self seeks good in things that are unreal, not true, and looks for truth in conditions that are not good.

All this results when the false ego has be-

come the center of the faculties, and thus spreads its influence into affairs. The false ego seeks good in self-gratification; but because selfishness is not truth, happiness cannot be found in this way. Yet man is constituted to seek good; he cannot keep his will from desiring good. Absolute good draws the will as a magnet.

Man strives for the sake of what he considers good; his every effort is directed towards good; his whole experience is aimed at the happiness he hopes to acquire from good. Attainment of good is the motive force of human life. Now actually, God is the one absolute good; so, even when man thinks he is gratifying himself he is really seeking God, though he may not realize it. The very fact that man is never satisfied with finite good really proves this point.

There is an insatiable desire for God in the true Self. Trying to satisfy the false ego with temporal good is a hopeless task; it is like trying to feed a shadow on dreams. The stronger the false ego is, the more selfishness and greed

develop, the more the human race tends towards artificial monopolies; but, on the other hand, the closer one comes to his real Self the more he discovers that his own happiness, pleasure, and joy are bound up in universal good.

In the Axiom book one of the meditations for Tuesday is this sentence which was brought to me for interpretation:

*There is the perception of the nothingness of the self that is in the error of believing in the false; this is self-denial.

In other words, one must have the perception of the nothingness of the self which can have the error of believing in anything false. It is the false self that believes in the false; but to believe in the unreal is always an error. Therefore one must deny any self that can believe in anything that is false. This is the denial of that false ego caught in its own errors. Only the false ego can believe in a counterfeit image. So, to make a clean sweep it is necessary to deny any source of false beliefs, to deny the

*AXIOMS: Book of Health
by George Edwin Burnell, page 57

existence of any consciousness directed towards falsity, any potentiality to error. Thus all false identification is cleared away.

You cannot have a self that accepts falsity. What is it that has built up an obscuring mental wall before the real Self? It is the false ego assuming a great mass of errors regarding being. This meditation from the Axiom book makes a complete denial of any false self that could produce a counterfeit image. Since the counterfeit lives only on deception, when there is nothing to believe in it, the whole sham structure vanishes. So not only do you deny the counterfeit image, you also deny the possibility of anything which can believe in or be deceived by the counterfeit.

Analyze the intricate build-up of the sham ego: Each person collects his own dispositional peculiarities. He says: "I tire easily; I can't stand hot weather; children, radios, and dogs make me nervous." Someone said to me the other day: "If I am waked up in the night, I cannot go to sleep again." It certainly is not the real Self recounting such trivial problems.

The real Self is not disturbed by anything. It is the false ego that is neurotic, nervous, and easily upset, and, strange to say, proud of it—which is the worst peculiarity of all. How false is conceit! People are actually proud and boast of their delicate constitutions, of their inability to stand hard conditions. All of these errors are part of the counterfeit image—false identification of the great gift of self-consciousness. What blasphemy! In the Commandments the Lord expressly forbids the setting up of false gods; yet every day people worship a false image of themselves. The Lord blessed us with His own name, "I Am who Am"; yet people drag this holy and wonderful name in the mire of their own imagery. They take the name of the Lord in vain every day of their lives.

I remember as a child playing a game in which the purpose was to see how long one could converse without using the word "I." Every time you spoke the word "I," you had to pay a forfeit. Unless you test yourself in some such way, you will never realize how constantly you use the word "I." It is almost impossible

to carry on a conversation without projecting yourself into it, without saying, "I think this," or, "That is my opinion," or, "I believe this way," or, "I feel this way." The trouble is, however, that when you speak of yourself as feeling this way or thinking that way, it is usually not at all what your real Self thinks or feels; more often it is the false ego's eccentricities that are being referred to.

Primary spiritual instruction begins by stripping off false identifications, wiping away the counterfeit image built up out of mental concepts. This is called renunciation, or self-denial. When the principle of identity has renounced all that it is not, it is faced with nothingness; for, being a principle of identity, it is only that with which it identifies itself. So when you have freed yourself from false identification, the inherent nature in the principle itself seeks its true identity. Truth is all there is; so the perception of the nothingness of the false self prepares the pure principle of identity for truth.

One great problem of the human "I" is the emotional pattern that plays across it. This is

often so disturbing that instruction, which could be most helpful, is not accepted. Personal feelings are a great obstacle to be overcome before one can sincerely seek truth. Pride is another tremendous dispositional barrier. To help a student to meet all these difficulties successfully, a wise teacher is very necessary; yet many times these very problems make a person believe that no teacher is necessary.

For example, take the case of a man who was given an Axiom book. He read it and enjoyed it; but his own disposition prevented him from profiting by it, for he took the message with pride instead of humility. Instead of going on with more instruction, he felt he had nothing more to learn. He argued that if he was truth, then he knew all there was to know; so why study? No teacher was any more truth than he was, so why submit to a teacher? Here is conceit, presumption, and boastfulness—all dispositions of a false ego—making an almost impenetrable barrier to instruction.

Tanquerey, in his book called "The Spiritual Life," says that he who sets himself up as his

own teacher becomes the disciple of a fool. How true this is! Even though the Self is pure intelligence, still a teacher is important to draw out what one knows. It can be only the false self that rejects instruction as unnecessary; the true Self loves instruction. There is within each person this divine Self which is pure intelligence; but it takes instruction to find it, and instruction can be attained only on the ground of humility.

No person can ever be conscious of divine intelligence who is not first humble; thus the perception of one's own nothingness is the threshold of illumination. Most important, the false self has to be perceived to be nothing, for this is the seat of all dispositional errors which hinder instruction; so this false ego must be perceived to be nothing before a person can become a candidate. Since accepting instruction is the primary exercise of humility, when a person sets himself up as his own teacher, presuming that he knows it all, he cuts himself off from any possibility of illumination.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the most perfect

example of humility. No person in all the world has ever equaled His humility. He had three kinds of knowledge: As the Word, He had beatific knowledge; because He was full of grace, He had infused knowledge; yet with all this, He did not despise empiric knowledge, for He learned from men.

One of the greatest examples of His humility took place during that period of His life when He remained in Nazareth with His Mother and Joseph and was subject to them. During that period He learned from Joseph to be a carpenter. He Who had all knowledge, Who was omniscience, Who was the Word of divine intelligence, was submissive to the routine of culture. He learned from man.

It is only when one has stripped off all false dispositions, personal whims and opinions, that the pure Self can be found. When this Reality of Being is discovered, all personal differences vanish, for the sense of oneness is consciously experienced.

Our Lord taught us this lesson of oneness. In the prayer which bears His name, He taught

us to speak not for ourselves alone, but for others as well. He wished us to realize that the "I" in us is all other "I's" as well. In the wonderful Lords Prayer we say, "*Our Father* who art in heaven;" we say, "Give *us our* daily bread"; and "deliver *us* from evil"; for no one alone could derive full benefit from this universal prayer. No one can separate his own good from the good of others, for all men are one in nature.

Children have a group consciousness. They see themselves and their families as a unit. It is not until they grow out of the innocence of infancy that their individual wants separate them from the other members of the family. When the child grows up, he feels more and more that he stands alone against an opposing world. Every thing and every person seems to have ideas and wishes different from his own. Now it is tragedy if a person stops here without recapturing that innocence of childhood; for unless one can be as a little child, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

Our Lord draws us back into that unit-con-

sciousness with His prayer: "*Our* Father who art in heaven . . . give *us* this day *our* daily bread . . . forgive *us our* trespasses . . . deliver *us* from evil"—all collective pronouns, for one cannot pray for himself and leave others out.

Man is a social creature. He cannot separate himself from his world; when he tries to isolate himself, it is his own misfortune. Man cannot live alone in the world; as he enriches himself, so does he enrich others; for no person can succeed or fail without affecting others.

The influence of every person reaches far and wide. As a person discovers this universal consciousness—that his "I" is all other "I's"—the whole world takes on a new aspect, and the brotherhood of man begins to seem practical. The Lord used the family unit as the perfect pattern for human relationship, for He told us that we must love all mankind with a brotherly love. Not only did He tell us to love all men as brothers, but furthermore we must love them as ourselves; we must see ourselves in them.

That we might have this unit sense, this

gestalt spirit, He taught us to call God "Our Father." From this wonderful perception of the whole, each one of us draws unto himself a special greatness. But it is a greatness experienced only because of humility. The Lord gives us the pattern in His own humility. He shows us how the perception of nothingness exalts, for the discovery of the nothingness of ourselves does not destroy us; it is not self-annihilation, rather is it a humility that extends to us the greatness of truth.

In our humility we can be as God knows us. The Lord has given us this divine pattern of humble greatness—of allness and nothingness. This true humility is explained in the book called "The School of Jesus Christ." We must go to school to Him. He is our divine Master. How foolish we would be if we said, "I am as much truth as is Jesus Christ; so why should I be taught by Him?" Such pride would make us deny the oneness of truth. Let us never permit our false egos to make us disciples of fools; rather, as little children, may we seek in innocent humility the wisdom of the divine Master.

*Jesus Christ was humble in a degree only possible to a soul united in substance to Divinity, . . .

We discover our true Self on the ground of humility, for humility is the mystic well of the true Self. Humility seems to the false ego like humiliation, because it is contrary to pride. But profound humility, which is the perception of nothingness, is not humiliating; it is glorifying.

**Jesus Christ was humble in a degree only possible to a soul united in substance to Divinity, and dependent upon It in every free action, whether natural or supernatural. He never had a single thought nor a single feeling, nor did He ever perform a single human action by any other power than that of the Word which governed His humanity . . .

Jesus said, "I of myself can do nothing." He was not depreciating Himself, but rather was He announcing the true glory of the Father. Here He meant that "I" of His human nature. I of myself can do nothing; it is the Father within Me that doeth the works. At no time

*The School of Jesus Christ, by Pere Jean Nicolas Grou, page 195

**Ibid., page 195

did Jesus seek for any self-glorification. He had no presumption; He did not attribute any thought or feeling or action to anything other than that power of the Word within Him, for it was the Word which governed His humanity.

He never attributed nor ascribed anything to that sacred humanity as its own work. How indeed could He have done so? It was not a person; it had no Ego . . .

He was nothing but truth. This is true of us all; we can be nothing but truth. We cannot build up any life apart from truth. The only Self we can have, the only consciousness we can have, is truth.

. . . it was absorbed in the Ego of the Word, the finite in the infinite.

This kind of annihilation and its effects on the humility of Jesus Christ cannot be explained, nor even conceived. In Him this virtue was as indescribable as the union from whence it arose. Whenever He thought or spoke of Himself His thoughts and sayings placed the Word in the position of agent: the man in Him could not say I.

Here is the lesson we must learn. When we use the word "I," we too must not express

anything other than the word of truth. Let us not use the word "I" in regard to a counterfeit image, but only to name the true Self.

If we wish to ask whether God's gifts, the virtues and merits, were truly secure from all violence in a soul so aloof from itself, so bereft of self-ownership, we can turn to the words of St. Paul: "Christ did not please Himself." (Rom. xv,3) Notwithstanding the fulness, or rather on account of the fulness of the Godhead which dwelt in Him corporeally (Col. ii,9), as the same apostle says, He could not possibly feel either pride or self-love, because the Ego, which in the created being is the root of both, had no place in His human nature.

If we wish to have an example to go by, to guide us in the practice of this kind of humility—this kind of self-annihilation which does not destroy the true Self but only the false ego that believes in errors—let us remember and practise Christ's rule, which was that He did not try to please Himself. If we make it our practice not to try to please ourselves, how wonderful our lives will be! Let us seek the happiness of others, the wishes of others; let us expand our horizons. Even better than the

babyhood unit, is the adult universal. But there is a greater still, which is the perception of the Christ in Whom all mankind finds supreme perfection.

Such are the steps by which each person escapes from himself into the Christ. The escape seems to be into otherness; but as there is no otherness from truth, the more you escape into Christ, the more you find your Self; the more you do for others, that much more you do for our Lord, Who said: "Even though you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it unto Me."

O Divine Lord, help us to understand and practise the profound lessons and examples Thou hast given us.

May we take to heart Thy perfect pattern of all virtues, and let it govern our own behavior in the world.

Show us the way to our true Selves.
No longer let us think and act for

the false ego that has set itself
up in the place of what we really are.

Grant us the perception of the
nothingness of the self that is
in the error of believing in the false;
so that from this moment on,
each one of us may say:
"What I am before God, that I am."

GENEVIEVE BURNELL FORGEY.

