

Self from the IFS Perspective

The idea in IFS is that we're going to be working with helping people unblend, as I talked about before, helping parts separate a little bit so that this healing wisdom of self or self-energy, as I like to call it, becomes a resource for people. If some of you are meditators, you might already have a concept of self. If you're students of religion, what we know is that most esoteric religions of the world have this similar concept, that there is a self, there is a healing energy, that we are whole, and that it exists in all of us.

Well, I could talk about the ... Is recognized by most esoteric religions which includes Catholicism, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism. You might have heard the terms Christ consciousness, you might have heard the term Buddha nature, and the mystical religions of the world also have this concept of self exists in everyone.

My husband is a yogi and I came across a quote the other day and I thought I would just read this because this is from the ancient texts of the Yoga Upanishad's and I thought this really describes what we're trying to convey here. You might even take a deep breath as you listen and this is what this says. This is an ancient, ancient ... Comes from an ancient, ancient text. "The self knows all, is not born, does not die, is not the effect of any cause, is eternal, self-existent, imperishable, ancient. It is subtler than the subtlest, greater than the greatest. They go beyond sorrow who behold the glory of the self through love, who knows the self, bodiless among the embodied, permanent among the impermanent, prevalent everywhere."

I really couldn't say it any better than that but I'm going to give you some of our definitions and how we make sense of self existing in everyone. Pam earlier talked about how Dick began to listen to his clients and they started to talk to him about different parts or different aspects of themselves. As he maintained his curiosity about this instead of wondering if he was talking to people with serious pathologies, he also started to hear, as people began to describe these different parts or aspects of themselves, that they also possess something else. When these parts began to unblend or separate, they started to notice that there was another energy that wasn't a part and they started to say to him, to Dick, "Well, this is actually my true self."

Again, Dick, in his infinite wisdom, instead of arguing with it, said, "Tell me more." That's a wonderful thing about this model of therapy actually is that when we get curious about what's going on with clients, we say, "Tell me more so that it becomes a collaborative process."

As Pam was talking about that we are born inherently with parts, we are also, in this theory, born with self. It's not extinguished by trauma so that even people that come into therapy have been brutally traumatized in their life, overtly or covertly, we believe when we're working in this methodology that we're going to help them begin to access this self, that it is not gone, it's only obscured. We also believe that self is not developed as a result of relationship. It is already inherently there. It becomes revealed and nurtured in relationship.

When I began to learn about this concept of self, and as Pam knows because she was one of the trainers in my very basic training, I had a very difficult time with this concept of self. I had parts of me that really pushed against it hard for some reasons that I won't mention here. Then when I began to

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experiment with this idea that I could help people in my office begin to unblend and start to develop these very intricate, beautiful, tender healing relationships with themselves, that's what started me believing that there is something to this idea. I also started paying attention to where in my life I could feel this separation between my parts and this idea of self or self-energy in me.

A great way or a way that I access my self-energy is in nature. If I am having a hard day, for instance, if I have parts of me that are struggling for any given reason, I live rurally, I can walk outside, I can make contact with the natural world and I can begin to feel that separation. I can start to feel the difference between the part that's struggling and the me-me that is open and available to myself. That's how my journey began, is experimenting with what places in my life was I able to feel that separation.

Not only was it in nature but it was also as I experienced my clients being facilitated in the unblending process and watching what happened to them and watching what happened to me as a result of being present to them is where my faith in this idea began to grow. Self in us connects to all other living things, in my opinion, and it is not only ... What's the word I'm looking for? It's not just about human beings. It's about all of life. In this model, the deep inner healing occurs in the presence of self or self-energy.

As I was saying earlier, we have a belief that we're all already whole, we're all already well, that we're not broken, that we may feel broken. We may feel like we're in parts, we may feel like we aren't enough, we may feel shame, we may have all of those feelings, but the belief is that underneath it all, we are already whole. We want to bring this already whole feeling, we want to bring this ability to compassionately witness ourselves to the parts of us that struggle. This is where the deep healing occurs in IFS.

As Dick began to listen to his clients talk about not only their parts but also this idea that as parts began to peel back, they notice that there was an energy that was not a part and they began to refer to this as my true self. As Dick listened more and more, he began to hear the qualities of this energy or this entity or this ability for people to unblend and separate and to tap into something much bigger, much wiser, and much more healing.

Some of those qualities you'll see on the left column of the slide, the 8 C's. We refer to this as the 8 C's: curiosity, calm or calmness, the ability to be courageous, to be compassionate, to have clarity, to be creative, and to be connected or have connectedness both internally and externally. These are the 8 C's of self. Over in the right hand column are some ways that I describe self if those C's don't land for everybody. One is presence, the ability to be really openhearted and present to whatever part you're working with internally or externally, whatever part. Being openhearted and really bringing conscious awareness to self.

If you look at the photograph here of this man, to me it just really speaks to that is clearly a person who is in touch with his openheartedness. As you're learning about self in relationship to your own parts, to other people's parts, we're going to invite you to pay attention, like I did in my daily life, about how you begin to access some of these qualities.

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What I have found when I'm training students, beginning students in IFS, is the concept of self or self-energy can be difficult without the experience. Although I might speak about it for a short amount of time, what I know is that as people begin to learn about the process of unblending and beginning to bring some curiosity or some of these 8 C's to their own parts, they begin to have an experience of what it's like to differentiate between a part and self-energy. This is not, again, as Pam and I have both said repeatedly, this is not about getting parts to go away. It's about helping parts separate in order to stay in relationship with this compassionate, curious, and clearer aspect of ourselves. In the next segment, I'm going to be leading a guided meditation as a way to help you begin to have an experience of what we're talking about.