

Know Yourself

Imagine you are looking in a mirror. Who and what do you see? Do you like this person looking back at you? Love them? Do you see their faults? Their strengths? What do you know about them? What do you deny about who you see? How well do you know this person? We spend our whole life occupying our bodies, but how much quality time do we actually spend getting intimately acquainted with who we are? And, why does it matter?

From the moment we are born we are shaped by our experiences, moulded by our parents and taught societal norms. We learn to cope, and those behaviours are often overused and kept beyond their use by date. By the time we are adults many of us are burdened with all sorts of behaviours that are so embedded that we think they are who we are. The normal response to pain is to erect protective armour, and over time this becomes thought of as our personality. Each layer thickens the barrier between what we present to the world and who we really are. We become so familiar with the armour that we fail to realise that what we are presenting is actually different from who we are.

The questions becomes 'What do you want to do about it?' and 'Why would I do anything about it?' become relevant. A significant consideration is that if you embark on a process of freeing your true and authentic self from underneath all the protections that you have in place, then you enter a lifelong endeavour you can never



How do I see myself?

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Abstract

Experiences shape us and they tend to bury our essence under protective behaviours. Rediscovering who we are requires us to connect with ourselves, including aspects we may not like or are afraid to display. It is worth the effort. This article identifies ways to get acquainted with yourself.

Keywords

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again escape. Once started the inner drive and desire for free and full expression of your essence grows and it demands freedom and will not stop fighting for its right. My process started when I felt so restricted by protections that it was remove them or perish. Like a cicada, there came a point where my inner being grew greater than the armour I placed around it. It was a painful, challenging and important process. I struggled to find my way through my labyrinth of darkness. For me this was a process of firstly recognising that I deserved to be loved, first and foremost by myself, and then learning to do so to some extent. I had a whole host of other things to learn along the way, but all were about liberating me a little more with each step.

Finding out who you are, who this person is that is in the mirror looking back at you, requires a lot of effort and commitment. It is so easy to disconnect from ourselves, to get busy with life and forget about living. It becomes easy to lose sight of our values, core beliefs, and principles as we get caught up in the rat race. It takes time and it takes patience and commitment to really be

with our self. Some don't do this because they've never realised there may be a benefit. They haven't missed what they haven't had. Others are too scared of what they will find, or of the empty space, not knowing how to fill it. And yet others make a complete meal of it, spending much of their life focused on themselves, and missing out on the richness of connecting with others. There is no right way to do it, to learn who we are or to be with ourselves in a manner that works. The thing is to find our way of being with ourselves in a manner that works for us.

One of the fears associated with the inner journey are the potential discoveries of things about ourselves that we do not like. The world of our Dark Shadow houses the dark, stealthy and unknown characters that wait for their moment to appear and interfere, or so it seems. They are the creatures of our dreams, especially our nightmares, of our unspoken, semi-conscious desires that shock us when they arise. As small children we learned what was not acceptable, and hid those behaviours, thoughts and feelings away. During puberty, more were added to the shadows. Every now and again they appear from the shadows, perhaps through our dreams, or during a crisis, or as a fleeting thought. The Dark shadow holds a lot of our energy and power, and while we often fear the characters that lurk there, they have much potency for us as we learn to release the strength they possess. One of my dark shadows is my Sniper. He shows up at times with brutal, direct and devastating argument that cuts through all the fluff and debate and gets to the underlying truth. He also doesn't care who he hurts, lacks empathy, and isolates himself. I have seen my Sniper take verbal shots at people, deliberately hurting and pushing them away, knowing exactly what to say to cause maximum impact. However he has also brought power when appropriately applied to focus on what really matters. The way in which we draw on and apply the energy of a dark shadow character can have significant positive or negative impact. Developing awareness of our dark shadow increases our ability to take conscious action and reduces the derailing effects of an unexpected character showing up.

We also have what is known as our Light Shadow. These are the aspects of ourselves that we did not feel safe to bring out. This is often where we find our creativity, spontaneity and innocence. One of my light shadow

characters is the Innocent, Enquiring Child. I struggled with my son when he incessantly asked questions as a little boy. I came to realise my difficulty related to this same part of me that I had disowned because I had not felt safe bringing this part of me out when I was a child. I was then able to soften toward my son, and more fully enjoy that aspect of him. As I healed my relationship with my inner child, my relationship with my son improved.

To become our true selves we need to liberate our dark and our light shadow in a way that is authentic and meaningful.

Feedback is another way to get to know ourselves. Caution needs to be applied to feedback as it is opinion about you, and not fact. However, there can be real value in noting what is received, particularly if the same feedback is received consistently from multiple people. I had a period of my life where I was told repeatedly that I was arrogant. This did not gel with my view of myself as being shy. I came to realise that I was perceived by others as aloof and disinterested. With this recognition I was able to identify protective behaviours that created this perception and reduce their impact. Feedback can broaden our understanding of how we are experienced by others. It may be difficult to receive, is not always valid, and does deserve gentle consideration. However, feedback is a doorway into who we are as seen by the outside world.

Life is a journey, and getting to know and be ourselves is as much a hero's journey on the inside as life ever can be on the outside. While getting acquainted with who we are and connecting with ourselves often carries fear, shame, sadness and anger, truly knowing and connecting with ourselves offers a richness of connection, expression and congruence that it is well worth the time, effort and pain. How about taking some time this evening to look at the person staring back at you in the mirror and check out how you are feeling toward yourself and if there's any room for greater love, acceptance and appreciation?

For more information related to themes in this article, refer to chapter 7 (Develop Self-Love) of: Harrison, S. G. (2012). [*Appreciate the Fog: Embrace Change with Power and Purpose*](#). Auckland, New Zealand: Xlibris Corporation.

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