

Knowing thyself

Why is it important to explore and understand your qualities, including your strongest points and weakest tendencies? Because you have to know where you're starting from.

Self-knowledge is like having the health benefit of knowing what kinds of foods work best in your body. After you discover that certain substances cause allergic reactions or create a bad mood, you can gain greater control over your physical and mental state by avoiding foods that will harm you. At the same time, you can work to strengthen your body so it will be healthy enough to properly digest more types of food.

It is the same on the spiritual path. You need to find out what motivates you and keeps you in a good, healthy, spiritual state. For some, this process may mean adding specific spiritual practices to your daily life (Part II of this book gives examples of spiritual practices for body, mind, and spirit)

Just as you may decide to stop eating greasy junk food or too many sweets to help your body stay in a good physical state, in the same way, you may decide to watch fewer violent movies or go to fewer wild parties to help keep your mind and heart in a good spiritual state.

Consider

Paying attention to your inner state and contemplating your history and personal nature help give you the resources to make better decisions about what works best for you.

Your nature is reflected in your world

Have you ever heard someone say, "Your actions speak louder than words," or "What you are is so loud that I can't hear what you are saying"? These statements are often used to insinuate that someone is acting in a way that is inconsistent with the image he's wishing to present through his words. Yet, these phrases also indicate an important and magical truth about human expression — what you are expresses through everything you do. Therefore, all you really need to do to discover more about who you are is to look at what you've chosen to surround yourself with and ask a few questions, such as:

- What is decorating the walls of your home, such as paintings, photos, or other collections? Is it family? Nature? Accomplishments? Souvenirs? Spiritual icons?
- Do the objects around you represent happy times or sad memories?
- What kind of clothes do you most like to wear — fancy or comfortable?
- What kind of friends do you have — supportive, trustworthy, distant, or close?
- What books do you like to read — mysteries, spiritual, dramas, or romance?

- What kind of television shows do you watch — reality, sitcoms, news, or soap operas?
- What kind of car do you drive — safe, large, small, impressive, or dependable?

Be Careful

Too much honesty about your mutual tendencies can sometimes be damaging to a friendship. Be honest but kind in your assessments of each other, and remember that the goal of this process is to explore honestly *and* with a focus on uplifting your self-images and expressions. As with every other powerful practice, the key is moderation.

Discovering your tendencies

To discover your personal tendencies, observe how you react and respond in certain situations. How do you handle stress? How about criticism? Do you do well or poorly with tight deadlines? How do you respond when you're waiting to hear if you got the job?

Take a look, also, at the little things, which are just as revealing of your nature. For example, if you have an iTunes or other program on your computer, phone, or mp3 player, do you prefer to program the exact order of songs? Do you let them just play in alphabetical order? Or, do you press shuffle and let the winds of fate be your DJ? Do you prefer having control, or do you thrive on the thrill of the unknown? How much and in what ways?

It's like getting to know other people, only better!

One of the most amazing and wondrous aspects of personal relationships is to experience a deep level of intimacy with another human being. There is something magical about discovering every look and thought of the one you love and sensing how to dance with that person as you move together through the waves and events of life.

Now here's the good news. You can actually find the same level of joy and intimacy within your own mind and heart. You can have the same level of enthusiasm in getting to know yourself as you have when you're getting to know someone else. The key to spiritual awareness is to really know and understand yourself — to love, respect, and honor yourself.

Forget what the spiritual correctness police might say if they think you're being too self-absorbed. The self-absorption you should avoid is the kind of limited self-identification that can make a person inconsiderate toward others. The journey of self-knowledge makes you more considerate of others, because you begin to sense the deep connection of all beings.

Spirituality in Action

You can find more to explore inside every aspect of how you relate to the world. The field for this research into your own nature is wide open and available any and every moment of the day. Here are a few more questions you can contemplate:

- If God promised you an unconditional “Yes” right now, what would you ask for? (Feel free to take some time to contemplate this question, because you never know who may be listening!)
- When someone says they have good news and bad news, which do you want to know first and why?
- When you are in hopeful situations, such as playing a slot machine, being up for a cool prize in a raffle, or awaiting news of a possible promotion, what psychological maneuvers do you use to try to bend the universal flow to your will? Do you feign detachment? Do you beg? Do you ask sweetly or try to make deals with God? Do you surrender by offering it all to God’s will? And if so, are you truly surrendered or offering to God’s will out of laziness or in hopes that this “surrender” will help you get what you want?
- How do you respond when windfalls of great fortune seem to shower down upon your head or alternatively when everything seems to be going wrong? What are your beliefs during these times? For example:
- During great times, do you feel concerned that the universe is going to balance things out by bringing some rough times?
- During bad luck times, do you feel that God must be angry about something you have done?

This exploration isn’t an exercise in making judgments against yourself; rather, it’s intended to help you become more self-aware. Just as you have to fully trust friends or a therapist to be able to truly confide in them, in the same way, you must be able to trust that your own love and respect for yourself won’t waver. This unwavering self-respect and self-love allows you to safely unravel tendencies that may clash with who you thought you were or wish to be.

Consider

Always be your own best friend.

A side trip into psychology

One of the most fascinating psychological topics I've encountered is that of *Multiple Personality Disorder*. MPD is a condition where extreme trauma has shaken a person's psyche, which then responds by separating into different personalities to block the experience and memory of this extreme physical or emotional pain. Once formed, these subpersonalities can sometimes continue to exist and grow almost as psychic tumors or separate entities living within the same body.

I first learned about this multiple personality condition when I was less than 10 years old. My parents were both psychology teachers who taught all the coolest aspects of psychology to their high-school classes, including attraction/aversion, behavioral psychology, extrasensory perception, and much more. Our bookshelves always had a steady stream of the hottest new psychology books of the 1970s, and I read a good number of them.

The most interesting topic for my young, developing mind was that of Multiple Personality Disorder. In these cases, it would appear that different people were sharing the very same body, either peacefully or not so peacefully. Some would have a wide array of personalities — including boys, teens, women, and men — yet all these very different “people” were actually facets of the same overall person.

Studies have shown that in some cases, different personalities within the same body have even had different allergic responses — such as common allergies to animals, pollens or foods — with some subpersonalities being very allergic to something and others who are expressing through the very same body, having no allergic reaction at all. Some subpersonalities have been shown to have different brainwave patterns, handwriting styles, gender identifications, left- and right-handedness, voice patterns, reactions to different medications, cysts and diseases that appear and disappear depending on the personality, and different levels of visual acuity. Some multiples even have to change to different prescription glasses, depending on who's steering the ship at any moment. It would be hard to find a more compelling demonstration of the amazing and flexible power of your mind and the fluid nature of personality!