

PRACTICE:

This section contains three exercises: “The Observer and the Consciousness of ‘I,’” the “Identification Exercise” and “Keeping a Psychological Journal.” The first two are practical means for working with the concepts of identification, and are designed to help you discover and experience your true personal identity. Both of these exercises have a series of steps to complete. One way you can work with them is to read one step at a time, complete that step, and then read and complete each succeeding step until you have finished. Or you may want to read the exercise through a few times, and then do the whole thing from memory. If you have the opportunity, the easiest method may be to have another person read the exercise to you slowly, step by step, as you do it. Or you can tape-record yourself reading the exercise, and then play it back as you do it. In this case, be sure to leave long enough pauses for you to actually do what is called for.

The exercise, “The Observer and the Consciousness of ‘I,’ has proven basic for most people in evoking the experience of self-identification. It is generally recommended that it be done first. This exercise evokes the experience of “I-consciousness” through the intermediate step of taking the attitude of the *observer*. The second exercise, “Identification,” is somewhat more advanced. It evokes and intensifies the experience of self-identification through affirmation: in it one *affirms* that one *is* the self. In order to do so most effectively, one must have already had some experience of self-identification, or at least be willing to accept it as a possibility. It is for this reason that people often find the “Identification” exercise most valuable after they have worked for a while with the “Observer” exercise. But some may prefer to work with the “Identification” exercise right away.

It is vital to the effectiveness of both these exercises to complete each in one time period rather than doing it piecemeal. Stopping in the middle of an exercise interferes with the momentum, interrupts the awareness and the realizations that can emerge. However, in the “Observer” exercise, Stage I and Stage II can be treated as two successive but distinct exercises that can be done at different times. When doing them – in fact when doing most of the exercises – it is useful to establish a steady routine. This means, whenever possible, practicing them everyday, in the same quiet place, and preferably at about the same time. A routine of this kind builds up a continuing pattern of experience where insights from one day can more easily evoke and feed successive ones.

The third technique, “Keeping a Psychological Journal,” is a guide to an ongoing program of writing about the important aspects of one’s inner life. Keeping such a journal of personal reflections and experiences is a valuable activity, one which can yield significant long-term benefits. It allows us to get the very most out of the exercises -- and indeed out of all the inner work we may be doing. The psychological journal enables us to reflect more deeply on our life experiences, and over time, provides an increasingly rich locus for the consideration and refinement of our process of growth.

The experience of individual identity, or “self-identification” is accessible to different people in different degrees. Some people report that they have had an active

sense of their “I-consciousness” all their lives, and are surprised to learn that many have not. For other people, this experience has been more transient, something they have not been able to hold. And still others are tentative at first, finding the concepts and the exercises new to them. These differences are related to a person’s psychological type, his or her past experience, level of integration, environment, and a variety of other factors.

Interesting also is the fact that although the facility in achieving the experience of individual identity differs greatly among different people, once it *is* achieved, it is almost invariably described as “familiar.” One often hears an exclamation like, “Oh yes, it’s me!” But while the experience of self-identity is simple and familiar, it is often elusive. If this is so for you, using the exercises should help you, over time, to sharpen and maintain that experience at will. If on the other hand, self-identification comes easily for you, the practice will provide useful guidance on how to apply it most effectively in your life.

The intentional, deliberate act of self-identification can be a powerful tool – indeed the most powerful tool – to consciously direct and accelerate our growth.

The Observer And the Consciousness of “I” A Psychosynthesis Exercise

Many people have been able to find within themselves the center of identity which is uniquely them. As the article “Identity and Personal Freedom” has shown, Lisa, Natalie, Mike and the others were able to *disidentify* from the various contents of their consciousness – such as feelings, thoughts, sensations, and images. With practice they were able, as well, to disidentify from their subpersonalities – some troublesome, some useful – and to find the awareness of *self*, the inner still point that they experienced as truly themselves.

Now it should be said at the outset that, in a certain sense, all of us have already had this experience of self or “I.” It is nothing new. But what we normally experience is a *mixture*, in varying proportions, of our sense of “I” with the myriad contents of our consciousness. So we confuse one with the other; we mistakenly perceive our “I” to be the same as the contents of our consciousness. What *is* new to many people is to experience “I-consciousness” in a relatively pure form, and to be able to evoke that experience at will.

The following exercise was designed to help you in this purpose. It uses the powerful tool of our imagination, as well as our ability to focus and heighten our awareness, to set the ground for the experience of “I.”

This exercise is presented in two distinct stages. This has been found useful to capture and enhance the often elusive experience of “I.” The first stage is the basic form. In it we take the attitude of observer, and become aware of specific sensations and images. We then reach towards the experience of *self*-awareness – distinct from any images, forms, qualities or other contents of consciousness progressively toward a

clearer, more intense and more stable self-awareness. Then, from the vantage point of this “I consciousness,” we turn our awareness toward our body, our feelings and our mind, and their relation to the “I” itself.

STAGE I

- 1.) Sit quietly and comfortably. Look around you and become aware of all that you see. *See* it in all its detail, as clearly and as vividly as possible. Take a few moments to do this.... Now close your eyes, and breathe in slowly. As you inhale, *take in this vivid, visual awareness*. Then exhale and, as you do so, ask yourself “**WHO IS AWARE?**”
- 2.) With your eyes closed, imagine that you are drawing a white circle with chalk on a blackboard. Look at the circle...be aware of it...(pause)...Then take a deep breath, and as you exhale, ask yourself “**WHO IS AWARE?**”
- 3.) Still with your eyes closed, imagine that you are drawing a white circle with chalk on A blackboard. Look at the circle...be aware of it...(pause)...Then take a deep breath, and as you exhale, ask yourself “**WHO IS AWARE?**”
- 4.) Now let the circle fade away and, breathing rhythmically in and out as you have been doing, stay with the awareness of *your self* as the one who is aware.... (pause)... Really experience *being* your self...Try to get as clear a sense as possible of this Experience. Take all the time you need to do this.

In this exercise the experience of self-identity is obtained through the intermediate step of taking the attitude of observer. This latter experience is essentially a simple one which many people have had spontaneously. Yet it often needs to be practiced, before it can be achieved *at will*. The following accounts underscore the simplicity and the familiarity of the observer experience, once it is clearly realized.

“Being the observer is nothing exotic – it is being in that place behind my eyes, either when I’m looking at something like a problem in logic, or calmly watching my child asleep: it is the experience of my own personal consciousness.

Another person says it this way: “It’s like looking at something in the world, but calmly, serenely, from the consciousness that is uniquely yours.”

It is clear from these quotations that it is but a step from being the observer to the awareness of *who* is doing the observing. Another person adds these thoughts: “There is a purity about the experience...not an ethical purity, but a purity of consciousness. For then I am not caught in feelings, thoughts, plans, desires, expectations – as I usually am. I observe, simply, and I am *me*. Much of my life used to be submerged in fears, worries and the expectations others had of me. But now that I know how to be the observer, close to my real self, it’s like being in a sunny clearing in the woods, without underbrush. I

used to be a troubled person – very emotional, anxious, fearful. But when I got it clearly, the experience of observer and then of my self, I took a deep breath and remembered: Yes, it's *me!* So it was familiar, even though I hadn't had it before.

These quotations not only express the simplicity and the familiarity of the experience, but also affirm the sense of liberation it brings.

After you have had enough experience with Stage I of this exercise to feel comfortable with it and confident that you can use it with some ease to achieve "I—consciousness," go on to the following.

STAGE II

- 1.) Again sit quietly and comfortably. Look around you and become aware of what you *see* in all its detail, as clearly and as vividly as possible. Now close your eyes, and breathe in slowly. As you inhale, *take in the awareness*. Then exhale and, as you do so, ask yourself "**WHO IS AWARE?**"
- 2.) With your eyes closed, become aware of what you *hear*. *Listen* to the sounds, or to the silence around you...(pause)... Now, take a deep breath, and as you exhale slowly, ask yourself "**WHO IS AWARE?**"
- 3.) Still with your eyes closed, imagine that once again you are drawing a white circle with chalk on a blackboard. Look at the circle...be aware of it...(pause)... Then take a deep breath, and as you exhale, ask yourself "**WHO IS AWARE?**"
- 4.) Let the circle fade away and, breathing rhythmically in and out, stay with the awareness of *your self* as the one who is aware. Really experience *being* your self. Take some time to do this.
- 5.) Now try to get as clear a sense as possible for what it is like to be your self...Try To become aware of the stability of the self, its permanency. Try to experience it as the stable state of consciousness that is always reliably there. You will find that while all else changes, it remains. It is available always, as a source of stability and of clear perception in the midst of change.
- 6.) With the awareness of being your unchanging self, turn your attention to your body...(pause)... Your body changes. The sensations of your body are different now than they were a few moments ago...and they will be different again a few moments from now. Your body itself is different now than it was when you were a child, and it keeps changing as you grow older. But your self does not change.
- 7.) Now, focus once again on the awareness of being your self, the one who is aware. And as that unchanging self, become aware of your feelings...(pause)... Your feelings also are changing all the time...even the depth with which you feel changes. But your self does not change.

- 8.) Focus once again on being your self, the one who is aware. And as that unchanging self, become aware of your mind...Your thoughts change with great rapidity. They jump from one idea to another...and, as you grow, you use different ways of thinking. But your self, your true nature, does not change.
- 9.) Focus once again on being your self. Then become aware of your body, your feelings, and your mind. Be aware that you *have* these three aspects...they are *yours*...they are your valuable means of expression in the world, and you have the capacity to direct and regulate them at will. But they are not you. You are your self, the one who is aware...

Let us recall here that the core of this exercise is an experience which is very simple but which may be elusive at first for some people, and transient for many. It is typical of some personality types to achieve it easily, and for others to find it more difficult. So it is good to keep in mind that ease in assuming the attitude of observer, or in achieving self-identification is not necessarily, in itself, a mark of advanced development or character, nor is difficulty an indication that one is lagging behind. If you can do it right away, fine; and if you can't, keep practicing this and the next exercise, as well as following the complementary route of successive disidentifications. Though for some this may take time and patience, it is a noble route which many have walked toward the experience of self.

Other Applications

Taking the attitude of observer – the clear and stable vantage point from which to view your life and your surroundings – can be useful in many circumstances that occur in daily living.

It is helpful as the first step toward disidentifying, when appropriate, from whatever may be happening within you or around you. But, just as important, by actively cultivating the attitude of observer you can avoid being caught in unwanted identifications in the first place. With practice, the attitude of observer becomes a habitual “resting mode” which you can instantly recover whenever you choose, and the situation warrants. We can see an example of this in Jane’s account of her difficulties with the irritable airline clerk. By taking the attitude of observer, she caught herself just in the moment before she was about to identify with “Queen Jane” or “Baby Jane” and alienate the clerk past all help.

The attitude of observer is also useful to see the processes of our inner world with a clearer and truer understanding. For example, we can observe our subpersonalities without judging them and in this way discover as much as possible of their qualities and their interactions.

Groups

This exercise is effectively done in groups as well as individually. In a group setting, the leader reads the exercise aloud, while the others listen and follow the instructions given. It is suggested that after Stage I has been completed, the leader allow time for a general discussion. The group can then proceed to Stage II.

After both parts of the exercise have been completed, it is of real value to encourage group members to share what doing the exercise was like for them. During this discussion, it is particularly useful for the leader to ask those who are already experienced in achieving the attitude of observer and “I—consciousness” to tell the group how they *use* it, to talk about what practical part it plays in their lives.

Patterns To Guard Against

Images. Sometimes in doing the exercise, when the question “Who is aware?” is asked – and, in general, when attempting to turn our awareness toward the “I” – some **image** may spontaneously emerge. This can take many forms, such as a white dot, an eye or a symbolic figure who sits and watches, or even the image of yourself being aware. Such an image may at times be useful as an intermediate step toward our goal. But it is important to remember that any image – whatever it may be – is *not* the self, and should not be confused with pure, contentless, “I-consciousness.” Should such an image appear, observe it and ask yourself the further question: “*Who* is aware of that image?” This will help you to step back from the image and move toward the pure experience of the “I.” If another image appears, it too can be dealt with in the same fashion.

Superconscious Experiences. With this exercise or the next one, some people find themselves penetrating, to some extent, into what is called the superconscious or *transpersonal* realm. In its higher aspects, this can be a profound experience characterized by a sense of unity with all life, by love and peace and joy, by deep insight and clarity of vision, by a secure faith in the evolution towards the good, even by a sense of being somehow beyond the limitations of time and space. This is an uplifting and exceedingly valuable experience to each of us as individuals, and by extension to the whole human family.

An adequate foundation is the key to the effective and safe use of these higher states of consciousness. This foundation should include a certain measure of personality integration, and at least some facility in identifying with the “I.” If people get in touch with the superconscious dimension before having achieved a steady “I-consciousness,” they are frequently “drawn upward,” so to say, and are tempted to skip any further development of the “I-consciousness” itself. But “I-consciousness” is a step which should not be skipped. For there is an intimate relation between the “I,” or personal self, and the Transpersonal Self – which is at the apex of the transpersonal realm. The personal self is the anchor point for the downflow of transpersonal energies, and the integrated personality is the means through which these energies can be expressed in the world. So in doing this exercise and the one which follows, do not by-pass the experience of “I-consciousness.” If at some point in the exercise you find yourself moving into experiences of a transpersonal nature before you have been able to focus on, and experience your “I,” don’t hold yourself back – but afterwards, practice the exercise

again, making sure to deliberately focus on the “I” experience. Patience at this stage will be repaid by the development of a stable and effective individuality, capable of fully expressing one’s highest values.

Questions Frequently Asked

Sometimes I have trouble deciding whether to take the attitude of observer or to get really involved in what’s happening. It seems that both are important.

You’re right, both are important. But in most of our practical life situations, it isn’t a matter of deciding to do *either* one *or* the other. It is rather a matter of determining what *proportion* of each is appropriate at any given moment. Let us take the example of a therapist working with a client. When he is doing therapy, he must be involved to a certain extent with his client. Without this involvement there can be no empathy, and he cannot be in touch with what his client is experiencing. But, at the same time, he needs to take the attitude of observer to a certain extent, in order to be objective and to understand the patterns and processes behind what his client is experiencing. So in this case, as in most of our day-to-day experience, both observing and being involved are going on at the same time. And the proportion of each will change moment by moment, depending on what is happening within us and around us: on our needs, our perceptions, the demands of the environment and many other factors. The goal, then, is to become aware of this process, and to learn to choose consciously how much of each element is appropriate in the moment. But to do so, we must first have accessible the whole range between the two extremes. And for this, in turn, we must be able to be fully involved, or to fully take the attitude of observer, at will.

Interestingly enough, being able to take the attitude of observer at will increases one’s ability to more fully experience inner and outer events. Ordinarily, when we hold ourselves back from being fully involved in things, it is because we are afraid, consciously or unconsciously, that we could become overwhelmed by our involvement. But with a well-practiced ability to take the attitude of observer, the roots of this fear are cut. We develop an inner freedom to experience because we know we can distance ourselves from unwanted experiences whenever we desire.

IDENTIFICATION: A PSYCHOSYNTHESIS EXERCISE

The fundamental experience of self-consciousness, the discovery of the “I,” is implicit in our human consciousness. It is that which distinguishes our consciousness from that of the animals, which are conscious but not self-conscious. But generally this self-consciousness is “implicit” rather than explicit. It is experienced in a nebulous and distorted way because it is usually mixed with, and veiled by the *contents* of consciousness. This constant input of influences not only veils the clarity of consciousness – it also produces spurious identifications of the self with the *content* of consciousness, rather than with *consciousness itself*. If we are to make self-

consciousness explicit, clear and vivid, we must first *dis*identify ourselves from the contents of our consciousness.

More specifically, the habitual state for most of us is to be identified with that which has the greatest pull on our awareness: that which seems, at the time, to give us the greatest sense of aliveness, to be most real, or most intense.

This identification with a part of our selves can take many forms. Some people are identified with their bodies. They experience themselves, and often talk about themselves, mainly in terms of sensation: in other words they function as if they *were* their bodies. Others are identified with their feelings; they experience and describe their state of being in affective terms, and believe their feelings to be the central and most intimate part of themselves. Thoughts and sensations are perceived as more distant, perhaps somewhat separate. Those who are identified with their minds are likely to describe themselves with intellectual constructs, even when asked how they *feel*. They often consider feelings and sensations as peripheral, or are largely unaware of them. Many are identified with a role, such as “mother,” “student,” “businessman,” or a subpersonality, such as “seeker,” “victim,” “striver;” and they live, function and experience themselves accordingly.

This identification with only a *part* of our personality may be temporarily satisfactory, but it has serious drawbacks. It prevents us from realizing the experience of the “I,” the deep sense of identity, of *knowing* who we are. It excludes, or greatly decreases, the ability to identify with all the other parts of our personality, to enjoy them and utilize them to their full extent. Thus our “normal” expression in the world is limited at any one time to only a fraction of what it can be. And the conscious – or even unconscious – realization that we do not have access to much that is in us can cause frustration and painful feelings of inadequacy and failure.

Finally, a continuing identification with either a role or a predominant function leads often, and almost inevitably, to a precarious life situation resulting sooner or later in a sense of loss – even despair – such as in the case of an athlete who grows old and loses his physical strength; an actress whose beauty is fading; a mother whose children have grown up and left her; or a student who has to leave school and face a new set of responsibilities. Such situations can produce serious and often very painful crises. They can be considered as more or less partial psychological “deaths.” No frantic clinging to the waning old “identity” can avail. The true solution can only be a “rebirth,” that is embracing a new and broader identification. This sometimes involves the whole personality, and leads to an awakening or “birth” into a new and higher state of being.

The natural process of entering into more inclusive identifications often occurs without a clear understanding of its meaning, and so is achieved haltingly and with considerable difficulty. But a conscious, purposeful, willing cooperation with this process can greatly facilitate and hasten it.

This can be best achieved by a deliberate exercise of *disidentification* and *self-identification*. Through this willed act, we gain the *freedom* and the *power of choice* to be identified with, or disidentified from, any aspect of our personality, according to what seems most appropriate in each situation. Thus we can learn to master, direct and utilize all the elements of our personality, in an inclusive and harmonious synthesis.

This exercise is intended as a tool for achieving the consciousness of the self, and the ability to focus our attention sequentially on each of our main personality aspects, roles, subpersonalities, etc. We then can clearly examine their qualities while maintaining the attitude of observer, and recognizing that the *observer is not that which he observes*.

In the form which follows, the first phase of the exercise – *disidentification* – consists of three steps dealing with the physical, emotional and mental aspects of awareness. This leads to the *self-identification* phase. Once some experience is gained with it, the exercise can be expanded or modified according to need, as will be indicated further on.

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Sit in a comfortable position, relax your body, and take a few deep breaths. Then make the following affirmation, slowly and thoughtfully.

I have a body, but I am not my body. My body may find itself in different conditions of health or sickness, it may be rested or tired, but that has nothing to do with my self, my real “I.” I value my body as my precious instrument of experience and of action in the outer world, but it is only an instrument. I treat it well, I seek to keep it in good health, but it is not my self. I have a body, but I am not my body.

Now close your eyes, recall briefly the general substance of this affirmation, and then gradually focus your attention on the central concept: “**I have a body but I am not my body.**” Attempt, as much as you can, to realize this as an *experienced fact* in your consciousness. Then open your eyes and proceed the same way with each of the next two stages.

I have emotions, but I am not my emotions. My emotions are diversified, changing, sometimes contradictory. They may swing from love to hatred, from calm to anger, from joy to sorrow, and yet my essence – my true nature – does not change. “I” remain. Though a wave of emotion may temporarily submerge me, I know that it will pass in time; therefore I am not this emotion. Since I can observe and understand my emotions, and then gradually learn to direct, utilize, and integrate them harmoniously, it is clear that they are not my self. I have emotions, but I am not my emotions.

I have a mind but I am not my mind. My mind is a valuable tool of discovery and expression, but it is not the essence of my being. Its contents are constantly changing as it embraces new ideas, knowledge, and experience. Often it refuses to obey me! Therefore, it cannot be me, my self. It is an organ of knowledge of both

the outer and the inner worlds, but it is not my *self*. I *have* a mind, but I *am not* my mind.

Next comes the phase of *identification*. Affirm slowly and thoughtfully:

After disidentifying myself from the contents of consciousness, such as sensations, emotions, thoughts, I recognize and affirm that I am a center of pure self-consciousness, a center of will. As such, I am capable of observing, directing, and using all my psychological processes and my physical body.

Focus your attention on the fundamental realization: *I am a center of pure self-consciousness and of will*. Attempt, as much as you can, to realize this as an *experienced* fact in your awareness.

The purpose of the exercise is to achieve a specific state of consciousness. So once that purpose is grasped, much of the procedural detail can be dispensed with. Whenever it feels right, you can therefore simplify the exercise by going swiftly and dynamically through each of the stages of disidentification, using only the central affirmation, and concentrating, at each stage, on its *experiential* realization.

I have a body, but I *am not* my body – I *have* emotions, but I *am not* my emotions – I *have* a mind, but I *am not* my mind.

You may find it valuable at this point to make a deeper consideration of the stage of self-identification along the following lines:

What remains after having disidentified myself from my body, my sensations, my feelings, my mind? Who am I then? I am the permanent factor in the ever-varying flow of my personal life. I am that which has a sense of being, of permanence, of inner balance. I am a center of identity and pure self-consciousness. *I affirm my identity as this center.*

(pause)

I recognize and affirm that as this center I have not only self-consciousness, but also creative, dynamic power. I recognize that as this center, I can learn to observe, direct, and harmonize all the psychological processes and the physical body. I will to achieve a constant awareness of this fact in the midst of my everyday life, and to use it to give increasing meaning and direction to my life.

Later, as the ability to experience this *state of consciousness* is increased, the identification stage can also be abridged, using the central affirmation.

I am a center of identity, self-consciousness and will.

The goal is to gain enough facility with the exercise so that you can go through each stage of disidentification and achieve the “I-consciousness” swiftly and dynamically, and then maintain it for as long as you choose. You can then – *at will* and at any moment – disidentify from any overpowering emotion, annoying thought,

inappropriate role, etc. and taking the attitude of observer, gain a clearer understanding of the situation, its meaning, its causes, and the most effective way to deal with it.

To reach this goal, it has been found most effective to practice the exercise daily, preferably during the first hours of the day. Whenever possible, it is to be done shortly after waking up, considering it as a symbolic *second awakening*. It is also of great value to repeat it in its brief form several times during the day, as a means to remain in touch with your “I-consciousness.”

Variations

The exercise may be modified appropriately, according to your own purpose and existential needs. In addition to disidentifying from the three fundamental personality functions (physical, emotional and mental) you can also disidentify from other functions such as desires, impulses and imagination, or from subpersonalities and roles, or even material possessions. Some examples follow:

I have desires, but I am not my desires. Desires are aroused by drives, physical and emotional, and by many other influences. They are often changeable and contradictory, with alternations of attraction and repulsion; therefore they are not my self. I have desires, but I am not my desires.

I engage in various activities and play many roles in life. I willingly play them as well as possible, be it the role of son or father, wife or husband, teacher or student, artist or executive. But these are roles, important but partial roles, which I, myself, am playing. I choose to play, and can observe myself playing. Therefore I am not any of them. I am my self, and I am not only the actor but the director of the acting.

Other Applications

The exercise, up to this point, has been presented as a means to disidentify from various aspects and functions *in general*, from emotions in general, roles in general, subpersonalities in general, and so on. But it can be used to disidentify from *specific* elements, such as from one kind of emotion (e.g. fear), or from a particular subpersonality. For example, a person identified with a “Victim” subpersonality can supplement – or even, for a period, replace – the general disidentification with a more specific one, such as:

I have a Victim subpersonality, but I am not this Victim. The Victim feels persecuted and interprets reality in this light. The Victim also has sensitivity and depth of feeling. I am aware that there are both limitations and promise in this subpersonality, but it is not me. I have a Victim, but I am not this Victim.

Again, as you become able to realize this as an *experienced* fact in your awareness, you can drop the long form. Affirm, simply and dynamically:

I have a Victim, but I am not this Victim.

Concentrate on the experiential realization that this is so.

This leads to a most useful goal: the ability to disidentify from the specific element at will and *in the moment*, as the situation demands. With practice, it then becomes possible, for example, to disidentify from the Victim, to *know* that one is not the Victim, in the very midst of the kind of situation that the Victim subpersonality had always found most threatening.

This form of the exercise can be adapted to fit whatever subpersonality or other element you are presently working with.

Groups and Clients. The Identification exercise can be used very effectively in groups, educational settings (self-identification can usually be achieved only after about age 15 – although disidentification is possible earlier), or by a therapist with a client. The leader or guide begins by voicing the exercise as the group or client listens with eyes closed, reflecting on the significance of the words and attempting to grasp their meaning experientially. It is useful to follow this with a discussion of what was experienced. After this, the client or the individual group members can continue to practice the exercise at home. Any person who wishes to use the exercise with others is urged to practice it him or herself as well, in order to understand experientially the state of consciousness which the exercise evokes, and thus be best able to help others to achieve it also.

Patterns to Guard Against. In certain circumstances, knowing one has the ability to disidentify can encourage a tendency to suppress whatever we are disidentifying from. This happens most often when people have been caught for a long time in a particularly painful identification. In this case we are likely to develop an aversion for it, and naturally, once we have learned to disidentify from it, we may feel like pushing it away, hoping to “never have to deal with it again.” Here we risk pushing aspects of ourselves into our unconscious where they can play tricks on us without our knowing it. Furthermore, as explained in the theory paper, suppressing whole aspects of ourselves causes a loss of the potential energy and richness available to us. But it is relatively easy to counteract this tendency. Just as we have disidentified from the painful element, *we can also disidentify from our aversion toward it.* Then we can realize that, having mastered the technique of disidentification, we no longer need fear being trapped or hurt by it, and that there is no need to push it away. This frees us to focus on the positive aspects of that element – on how it can be good and useful once we have mastered it. So while disidentification can make suppression easier, *it can also be used to eliminate the need to suppress.*

We have frequently observed that although disidentification may occasionally cause suppression to increase at first, if it is practiced correctly, the tendency to suppress will soon decrease substantially – and much material previously repressed will gradually emerge and be integrated.

A special case of the tendency to suppression is the person with a pronounced, conscious and deliberate tendency to withdraw from the world, or from some aspect of the personality. For example, individuals with a “mystical” temperament are sometimes at odds with their body. Here the identification exercise as given might tend to increase

the split. To counteract this tendency, it has been found most useful to *reverse* the emphasis in the disidentification phase of the exercise, as in this example.

I am not a body, but I have a body. Even though my body is only an instrument, it is a precious instrument of experience and of action in the outer world. Therefore I treat it well, seek to keep it in good health and respect and value it. I am not my body, but I have a body.

This reversal of emphasis allows self-identification to be promoted but avoids promoting the disowning of a vital and useful personality element. On the contrary, it encourages the integration of the personality element itself. Similarly, in the identification phase of the exercise, the emphasis can be placed on the *directing* aspect of the self.

I recognize and affirm that I am a center of self-consciousness and will, capable of observing, directing and harmonizing all my psychological processes and my physical body. I will to achieve a constant awareness of this fact in the midst of my everyday life, and to use it to give increasing meaning and direction to my life.

Questions Frequently Asked

Isn't there a danger that in practicing disidentification we are running away from our problems and responsibilities rather than facing them squarely.

Yes, there is that danger. Any tool can be misused. But it should be stressed that disidentification is a natural human function. One observes it more and more among self-actualized people. The “running away” you speak of can be seen as a debased version of this natural process – a distorted and therefore harmful attempt to realize the freedom that comes from true disidentification. We run away from things for a tremendous variety of reasons: because we don't understand them, because we don't yet know how to handle them, because we fear being hurt, and so on. At the core of all these avoidances is our lack of a safe place from which to view our problems, our responsibilities – and our opportunities. When we can genuinely disidentify, then we no longer have to run away, because we know we can deal with things from above, from a centered place, from a position of power. So disidentification is, in fact, the responsible and creative alternative to avoidance.

I have been practicing the Identification exercise, and have not had any real problems with the disidentification part, but I can't find my “I” or seem to identify with it.

First, be sure that you're not trying to find something to fit *your image or idea* of what the “I” is like. This would be a sidetrack, because the “I” isn't like any *thing*. In general, people have found that the most effective way to learn to identify as their “I” is first to learn and practice taking the attitudes of observer and director. When you are skilled in doing this, it will be easier to then turn your awareness toward “the one who is aware.” As we have said earlier, this is a subtle process, and initially identification with the “I” may be a fleeting, evanescent thing. Patience and a detached or “sporting” attitude are often needed to achieve the goal. In time, the sense of having hold of the “I,” or more exactly of *being* it, will become stronger, and more easily available. At a certain stage of practice, achieving identification with the “I” becomes a state of consciousness that is instantly possible.

