

Understanding our ever-changing selves

Mark Pavilons



Who am I?

On the surface, this seems to be the simplest of questions.

Really? I think it's the most difficult to answer.

When I introduce myself at functions and fundraisers, I offer my name and the fact I'm the editor of the King Weekly Sentinel. But that's not who I am. That's what I do.

A more appropriate introduction would be, 'hello, I'm Mark and I'm a compassionate deep thinker with certain academic skills, yet I suffer from a lack of self-esteem and I find I'm always searching for answers. I do my best and most of the time, I manage to keep my head above water. And you?'

Ya, a bit of a mouthful, I agree. And perhaps a bit too revealing.

I don't think we pay enough attention to our inner selves, and exactly who we are. Of course, our identity and definition of 'self' isn't permanent. Rather, it's constantly changing, evolving. Our 'self' is fluid and reacts to external experiences and environmental factors. You could say we change daily in response to the world around us.

'The ultimate mystery is one's own self,' Sammy Davis, Jr. once said. How true it is.

Is it too difficult to delve deep into the recesses of our minds?

'Every one rushes elsewhere and into the future, because no one wants to face one's own inner self,' said Michel de Montaigne.

Our 'self' is defined by features such as personality, skills and abilities, occupation and hobbies, as well as physical characteristics. For psychologists, these are assessed and applied to 'self-schemas,' which are ideas of oneself in a particular dimension. A collection of self-schemas make up one's overall self-concept.

Self-concept, strictly defined, is the totality of our beliefs, preferences, opinions and attitudes organized in a systematic manner, towards our personal existence. Simply put, it is how we think of ourselves and how we should think, behave and act out our various life roles.

Confused? To me, this sounds very methodical, logical and compartmentalized. But who thinks that way? We are emotional creatures with many flaws, so nothing in our lives is that orderly.

Each of us has different personality traits, abilities, preferences and idiosyncracies. We often don't really understand what's going on inside of us. And we generally don't spend a lot of time analyzing ourselves. That job is for our partners!

How many times have you been lost for an explanation as to why you did something? Sometimes, when my wife asks me why I did something and why I did it in a particular way, I shrug my shoulders. I act, based on all the information and personality traits I have at my disposal.

We may not be able to exactly explain why we think this way, or why we behave in that manner.

It's just who we are. But again, just who is that?

Humility, Charles Spurgeon once observed, 'is to make a right estimate of one's self.'

In my mind, I liken this whole thing to a juggler, tossing around a dozen or so balls in the air, each with its own characteristic - funny, intelligent, picky, critical, organized, silly ... They fly around somewhat willy nilly, while we, as the juggler, try desperately

to keep them in some sort of synchronicity. If we drop a ball here and there, our other traits will fill in the gap and we continue on. As we investigate who we are, we come up with descriptive qualities ??things we show to others.

And, it's not only subjective, it's all about perception. Our self-concept is a mental picture of who we are. We often concentrate on the good qualities ? ?I'm loyal, considerate??and ?pay attention to detail.?

These are all part of the really, really big puzzle known as ourselves.

My puzzle has more blue and white sky than it should. Mine has a few pieces missing. Others just don't fit, no matter which way you flip them around. A Reiki Master told me I have great love inside, as well as great sorrow. How's that for an inner conflict?

My wife often mentions that I?believe I?do nothing wrong. That's just silly. No one is perfect, and I am fully aware of my faults.

I?legitimize and rationalize the things I do, believing they are right and true. But again, it's totally subjective. Others may see it in a totally different light.

Some of us compare ourselves to our self-image which is nothing like reality.

Some believe the actual self is our soul, and our body is only a mechanism to experience the karma of life. Our soul/self is our incorporeal essence that includes all of our abilities ??reason, character, feeling, consciousness, memory, perception, thinking.

But again, a neurologist could likely point out each part of the brain, and the electric current responsible for each of these things.

With a poke here or a prod there, a surgeon can drastically alter who we are.

So are we spiritual, universally connected beings, or just a collection of pulses, signals and hydraulic fluids?

Maybe we're too close to the situation and we are unable to give an objective opinion. Perhaps we should be asking others:??what do I mean to you?? Maybe then we will get an idea of who we are.

We're like a really annoying sponge that bobs around every day, soaking up this attitude and that insight. We absorb information, make choices and form opinions. We laugh, cry, pout, churn and smile politely.

Maybe the best way to approach our inner selves is to think of baking that blue ribbon pie. Use the ingredients that add to the whole, and ignore those that just don't work. Try new methods. Fill our pie with the best stuffing possible, and share the love!

That, or, just eat it and move on!