

QUESTIONS ABOUT MYSELF

December 6, 2010

By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

My Big Fat Self: Me, Myself, and I

This is me doing an “Andy Rooney” or “George Carlin” type of monologue, just for fun. My serious friends can just skip this please.

I want to tell you about myself, but I don't want to offend you. I know that this whole 'self' thing is a sensitive issue and not always a popular topic, but I notice that myself seems to never be far from my thoughts. On the one hand I have been told not to be selfish, and at the same time, in another breath, I am told to be sure to always be myself. So which is it?

I know that I am not being a 'good' person if I think about myself too much, although it is myself that has to go to the grocery, fill up the car with gas, and sit in the dentist chair, certainly no one else. I have no one else that I know of. I admit that there is something about myself that wants (and usually gets) attention from me. I tend to refer to me quite often. Why are that and what is it that is so interesting or fascinating about myself? Other people don't tend to think so. How do you feel about yourself?

I take care of myself and regularly; most of us do. Then there is self-respect. And what about being self-conscious? Aren't most of us conscious of our self much of the time, at least enough to get things done? Otherwise how do we drive the car? But that is not being 'self-conscious' as in shy. Who then is it that is being self-conscious, certainly not myself? And what about self-control? What exactly is it that has to be controlled? Isn't that like herding a bunch of cats?

Let's face it: we all have a self; those of you who pretend you don't are just fooling yourselves. For myself (for 'my' self), I believe in giving myself what it needs to be happy and not feeling bad about it at that. I don't believe in making a big deal about myself, but neither do I like to draw attention by being either too self-effacing or appearing too self-absorbed. Somewhere in the middle works for me, a happy medium where the self is simply 'no big deal'. Is it ok for you not to like me because of myself. I would say yes, of course.

I admit that I have self-concerns. Don't you? And yes, most of the stories I have to tell or talk about are from my own experiences. Whose experience would you suggest? They belong to me, myself, and I, not to anyone else. Want to hear some? As my good friend Seth Bernard says “No one else has ever shown up to be me.”

What I can't understand is, aside from the conventional notion of the self, why am I so interested in myself? Is it self-preservation? We each have to keep our self from being run over by a car when we cross the street. Is that ok? And we have to feed and clothe ourselves. Where is the points beyond which we are not just taking normal care of ourselves, but are becoming too self-centered and how can we tell? Isn't that something someone else tells us? And who decides where that line is? Is it just something we know when we see it? I bet that's it.

And why is it boring if someone talks about him or herself too much? What if I like listening to Jack Kerouac or the Dalai Lama? Or what if I find yourself interesting, no matter how long you talk? And aren't we supposed to ask about someone else's self when we have a conversation,

like “How about yourself?” How much do I want to hear when I ask that? What is too much? Why is it considered rude to refer to myself too much? I mean: why is that? Is it because we all have a self, so why mention it? Is it OK then for me to talk about what is different or distinguishes myself from yourself, or is that boasting about myself? I find this confusing.

Even if you are being polite and seldom mention yourself, I know you have one. Why pretend otherwise? We all know that everybody has one and, if not actually fond of ourselves, at least we all go through the motions of servicing that self, you know: cleaning it, resting it, feeding it, taking it for a walk, etc. Why shouldn't we have a self that we like? What is wrong with that? Why shouldn't we like ourselves?

So I don't think the question is whether you have a self or not, but more about what or how you think about yourself. What 'do' you think about yourself and why should I care if you really love yourself? After all, it is 'your' self. What business is it of mine? Why should I object? Why is it considered impolite to refer to yourself? Who should I refer to?

When the Buddhists say the 'self' has no permanent existence, is this like what 'we' mean when somebody thinks nothing or very little of their self? If the self were a truly permanent thing, if it were 'truth' personified, would it be ok to really love myself then? Is this why we should not love ourselves, that it is not permanent? What about trusting yourself? Do you? Do you love yourself too or are you, like many people, not satisfied with yourself? If so, what are you doing about it?

If I congratulate myself, who is it that I am congratulating? More important, who is doing the congratulating? That is what I really want to know, because it can't be myself, or can it? Can the self congratulate itself? It would seem to be impossible. If so, who receives the congratulations and how? I would sure like to meet them.

Am I at peace with myself? I suppose I am. At least I have accepted myself or am by now used to myself. If I don't like or accept myself, just what is it that I don't accept? Is the self the same as the ego? Are these just two different words for the same thing? It sounds better to say I like myself than to say I like my ego, so I guess they are different.

What worries me is that there might be someone in there who is not me, whoever it is I am. I don't fully know who I am, but I know I don't want to be whoever it is that I dislike in myself. Is that possible? Again: if I don't like myself, who is it that is doing the disliking and why are they allowed to be so critical? Is that the real me or just myself being uncompassionate to myself. It is puzzling.

And it seems that wherever I go, I find myself. Doesn't that tell me something? I never leave home without it; therefore it must be an important part of me. Then who is the rest of me? Who is it that disapproves of myself, certainly not me? Who is ashamed of myself? Who keeps track of myself and which one of those two am I?

What about collecting myself, getting myself together, and re-inventing myself? Is the self a bunch of pieces and how and where do I collect them? And do I really ever know myself? Have I ever bothered to even look closely at myself or am I content to not know just as long as I can feel myself there? Is it that the self does not hold up to a close inspection or have I just never looked? Am I afraid to look? How would I go about it?

And which part of myself is the real me? When I was a kid, an important part of myself was a

new bike. Today it might be a new computer or the latest lens for my camera. The objects have changed but the sense of myself being there is still the same. There is a lot of old stuff in there; it is worse than my attic. And while I know there is all kinds of stuff in there, yet nothing I can see that makes for a center, a "me." Is there no center to the self or is it because when I look at myself, the center is doing the looking? Will I never find myself because it is myself that is doing the finding? Is it logically impossible to find yourself?

Or is the self like the back of my head, something I will never be able to see, except in a mirror, in which case the mirror might have to be you.

Now it's your turn: how about yourself?

P.S. If you made it this far, then you really are my friend.

[Photo by: Marie-Jeanne Iliescu]

