

How to Practice: Tracing the Self

We started out this program by looking for the self in operation, looking at who is doing. Doing this kind of inquiry is difficult. Why? Because (as we are seeing in the program), the self lives in darkness: it is the unknown knower at the center of all knowing, the anonymous witness to all experience, the silent actor responsible for whatever we do.

Now, Love of Knowledge gives us the resource to do the inquiry that can let us call the self into question. But it is a process that requires some patience. We need to learn to look at the basic structures of our experience, looking where we did not even realize there was anything to look at. That is what we will be doing for quite some time.

While we are laying the foundation for this kind of inquiry, there is another way of looking, one that is more immediately available. It involves making ourselves familiar with the self in operation. For instance, at the beginning of the program, I invited you to investigate the self by challenging the typical “I want;” “I deserve;” etc. In other words, when the self says (When you say), “I want to take a break from work,” or “I want to have another beer,” try saying “NO!” The self will probably get upset, and that is the chance to see it in operation, and also to begin to question the authority of the self.

So what I would like us to do is practice looking at the self. Who is the one reading these words? Who is the one who has in mind the next thing you plan to do? Just ask these questions, without needing to have an answer. It is the act of looking that matters, because if you keep looking for the self, you will begin to see traces of its activity and its claims.

It is helpful to do this whenever you think of it, and it is also helpful to review your activities, perhaps at the end of the day. When you look back at the events of the day, the most helpful places to look will probably be the ones that involve emotional responses. When you felt upset at what someone said, who is the one that gets upset? When someone compliments you, and you are pleased, who is the one who is pleased? When you feel worried about finishing a job on time, who is worried? Again, the point is not to answer these questions (What answer can there be, other than, “I am the one who . . .”). The aim instead is to try to ‘sniff out’ the presence of the self, like a hunter who finds clues that a wild animal has been traveling nearby.

Keeping a Journal

For this purpose, I recommend that you keep a journal. I know that the discipline of a journal is difficult, but of course, that is just one phase of the practice: when the self says, “I’m too busy to do this,” or “It’s not interesting;” or “I don’t know what to do, and it makes me feel stupid,” these are all good material for the journal (True, it might get a little narrow to keep a journal about the problems you have keeping a journal, but I am pretty sure there will be more to it than that.)

Maybe other people who have experience with ‘journaling’ can make some suggestions in the discussion area on the website about the best ways to keep a journal. Here are my own suggestions:

- o pick a time each day to write in the journal. Probably the end of the day is best, but perhaps you want to do it after daily meditation (if that’s part of your routine), or after lunch, before you start back to work. You choose.
- o until it becomes a habit, remind yourself. If you keep a computer calendar, you could make it a recurring item on the calendar. (If you don’t have or use a computer calendar, there is a free application called Google Calendar that would work well; do a search for that phrase and follow instructions to set it up.
- o write on the computer, unless you really dislike doing that. That way you can easily post excerpts from your journal on the discussion page, which I encourage.
- o do it!

We’ll see how this works. One of the real advantages of this program is that we can support each other in a shared and ongoing process of inquiry. And even though a journal is a solitary kind of activity, knowing that others are doing it too is a support. Through the journal, and through sharing what we discover (or what we find frustrating, mysterious, etc.) we will be sharing in an exploration that seems to me very consistent with what TSK inquiry (CCI inquiry) is all about.