

COMMUNITY OF THE SELF 1

The self is an amazing, wonderful and powerful life force. It is intricate, strong, delicate, complex and deep - an entity full of paradoxes. The self is like a huge maze, in which so many of us have now become lost, unable to find our way out. The self can also feel like a safe haven in one moment and then be such a harrowing and frightening place to be in the next. The dichotomy of the self has been the subject of so much investigation and exploration in philosophy, psychology, medicine, science and spirituality, and its mystery and complexity still largely defy definition and explanation.

One very useful way of understanding the different complexions and contradictions of the self is by relating to it as a community. A healthy fully functioning person is one whose community is working co-operatively, each member of that community actively participating in the creation and sustenance of balance, harmony, stability, peace of mind and happiness. The unhealthy states that we define as depression, nervous exhaustion, anxiety, panic, phobias, other forms of neurosis and psychoses are all examples of where there is a breakdown in the community of the self.

The members of the community are created out of our vast spectrum of feelings, our infinite number of thoughts, and the huge catalogue of experiences we gather as part of the human journey. It is out of the dynamics which take place between thoughts, feelings and life experience that what, in modern parlance, are known as sub-personalities emerge. Sub-personalities are essentially different aspects of one's personality that can be described as members of the community of the self - each sub-personality having a unique function, role and identity, which can both suffocate and stifle the whole personality or enlighten and liberate it.

Personal growth needs to take account of the community of the self because so much of what sabotages our growth comes from within. Far too often we look outside ourselves for the solution when the solution lies within. Firstly, we need to understand that there is a community and that for the most part that community is currently working against itself because there is not enough healthy internal dialogue taking place. Why is that? Essentially it is because the community of the self (nearly always in childhood/adolescence) is fragmented which leads to disassociation. Fragmentation can be caused by so many things, such as: tragedy and trauma, mixed messages, abuse, neglect and deprivation, lack of attention, affection and praise, instability, uncertainty, loss. In fact, all those things that breed fear, insecurity and prevent the development of a self that feels worthy and well balanced can be added to this list. Once fragmentation takes place, the sub-personalities are born and a culture of opposition, duality and disassociation begins.

Disassociation keeps the sub-personalities busy ensuring their own survival, the community spirit is broken, and the concept of co-operation and integration is no longer a part of the community's vocabulary. It is the competitiveness, separateness and conflict that emerge from the dis-unity of fragmentation that leads to emotional and psychological ill health. When we understand how dysfunction and damage starts, we can learn to mobilise our sub-personalities so that they can be instrumental in restoring emotional and psychological health. The first step in re-establishing a healthy dialogue within is to realise this community is not made up of natural enemies. The hostility, rivalry and self-preservation that now exist between the sub-personalities have evolved out of negative life experiences and this is not our natural state. The primary inclination of each member of the community is to work together. However, it is the reservoir of rejection, abandonment, loss, sadness and pain that prevents the community from fulfilling this goal. Only healthy internal dialogue will redress this imbalance. It is time for kindness, compassion and understanding. It is time to learn the intra-personal language, the language of healthy communication with oneself.