

# Transcending The Self

Contributed by Steve Gillman  
Thursday, 11 June 2009

There is a lower "self" that we cling to at our peril.  
{mosbotwordcount}

Coming from a philosophical background which sees self interest as both natural and even the basis of morality, it was difficult for me to understand how transcending the "self" might actually be a good thing. For years I hesitated to even give any credence to the idea, and so I didn't explore it too deeply. It was only when I learned to understand the nature and limits of language and logic that I was able to take a second look at this and other ideas which seemingly contradicted what I saw as true.

I have to touch on "limits of language and logic" briefly to explain how I reconciled self interest with self transcendence or "getting past one's self". Words, you see, just don't work like numbers. If two represents this many asterisks; \*\*, three represents equals this many; \*\*\*, and five represents this many; \*\*\*\*\*, we can reliably say that two plus three equals five. But when we apply a similar logic to most words, the results are not nearly as reliable.

Say anything about love, for example, and it may be correct, incorrect or irrelevant depending on what you mean by the word. Love can mean to act in a loving way, to be attached to someone or something emotionally, to have a certain feeling, or could mean a strong degree of "like" among other possible meanings. If "two" and "three" had that many possible meanings, we couldn't trust mathematics, yet we pretend that we can arrive at the truth easily in other areas with a bit of logic applied to our words.

Once I really understood the limitations of words and logic, I was able to ask what a person meant by an idea. We learn more doing that than we do by simply noting that an idea contradicts our own logic, and so dismissing it out of hand or arguing against it. I have found that it is rare that a person is using their words to point to something that is entirely illusory.

So I came to ask what was meant by the "self" which could be transcended, and if in fact this goal might be something good and true. The self interest that I saw (and see) as morally good relates to a "self" which is the whole organism - body, mind and soul (if that is something more than a creation of mind). But the "self" referred to by the mystics, spiritual teachers and even enlightened athiests is something else.

They are talking about the "ego self" or the self created by our identification with the things of the world as well as the feelings and thoughts in our own bodies and minds. To transcend that self, remove its power or live from a higher perspective doesn't oppose the "self interest" that I posited as a moral value. In fact, though I did not see it for years, it is the way to that ultimate good.

One way to understand this is to use the terms, "false self" and "true self" ("lower self" and "higher self" is another way to express this). It is natural and good to want what is good for our true self, while we can see that there is a "false" or "lower" nature which often guides our choices. Living at that level is often referred to as "selfishness" which confuses the issue more, because although it often does refer to destructive thoughts and actions, it also suggests that any self interest may be morally suspect.

Transcending the self then, means living from something higher than the lower nature which pushes us to worry, to hate, to be greedy and to pursue objects of desire and appetites that do not actually benefit us physically or mentally in any meaningful sense. Ironically, to let go of the self is the most self-interested thing one can do, because it means reaffirming the higher or "true" self.

What is the true self? Is it a "divine spark"? Is it connected to all of humanity? Is it individual or are we only each manifestations of some larger "Self"? I'll let you know if I discover answers to any of these questions. What I do know, and what we can all see from personal experience (if we look), is that there is a lower "self" that we cling to at our peril. Seeing that is hopefully a step towards discovering something higher and truer.

Copyright Steve Gillman. See a review of my favorite Guy Finley CDs, and get the free Self Help Weekly Newsletter at:  
<http://www.selfimprovementnow.com/unstoppable.html>.