

# SELF-DISCOVERY

Where and how do we find ourselves? There are seven directions to look: front, back, left, right, up, down, and inward:

- When we identify others as the source of our problems and wholeheartedly adopt (or reject) their standards, we have not learned to turn inward.
- When emotions are experienced as a vague sense of uneasiness, lethargy, or physical complaints instead of the full range of feelings that accompany life's joys and hardships, we have not learned to turn inward.
- When we avoid or dramatize anxiety instead of contemplating and internally transforming it into some constructive purpose, we have not learned to turn inward.

Mastering the seventh (inner) direction happens little by little through the formation of the self—the container of our separate, unique identity that can adapt to changing situations by expressing and realizing authentic wishes. Six or more items marked below suggests that an exquisite gyroscope lies within that can negotiate the terrain of life.

Adaptive Personalities <sup>1</sup>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Can experience a wide range of feelings with depth, vigor, and spontaneity.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have confidence to achieve goals, experience pleasure, and overcome obstacles.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Can take initiative to achieve goals and assert desires while tolerating related anxiety.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Can maintain commitments to relationships and goals in spite of setbacks.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have the self-esteem to recognize their skills, abilities, and limits.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have a continuous sense of their value that is unchanged by successes or failures.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Can flexibly change usual ways of thinking or acting to solve problems.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Can soothe themselves when rejection, criticism, or failure occurs.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Can manage their lives alone (for extended periods) when others aren't available.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have intimate relationships without fear of abandonment or suffocation.

<sup>1</sup> Criteria and descriptions of the “adaptive self” were adapted from information in *The Search for the Real Self* by James F. Masterson (The Free Press, 1988).

## THE ORIGINS OF THE SELF

When needs for support, independence, self-expression, and limits are met according to a person's inner timetable, he or she is able to manage the journey from total fusion with caretakers in infancy to the adaptive self of adulthood. This happens in stages:

- Toddlers begin the dance of balancing conflicting needs for independence and support. “Drunk” with their own power to move, taste, and explore, they still need to know there is someone bigger and stronger who can contain and support them.
- Preschoolers have internalized many contradictory images, are beginning to fuse them, and are starting to realize that the mother who scolds and the mother who hugs are one, and the self who cooperates and the self who disobeys are the same. As this consistency develops, young ones can identify with caretakers and control their own impulses.
- Later years are spent acquiring skills, discovering interests and talents, and exploring people and values that validate the true self. A pattern emerges from repeated refinement of goals that allows self-expression and achievement of meaning and purpose.