

Formation of Character

Who am I?

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Has your character become ingrained into your identity? If not, a person becomes detached from their inner guiding forces, resulting in a tangled external façade reflects the inner turmoil that's tearing around inside.

PART I: IDENTITY AND EXPERIENCE

Answering the question: "WHO AM I?" is one of the core-questions of one's very existence because one's identity has massive impacts on one's fate. This question is central to the formation of one's identity and one's perception of self-worth in their world. (And while vital and pivotal to human existence, it is not addressed adequately by our educational system) The answers follow four typical paths based deeply on how each individual answers the question: WHO AM I?

1. **MY DESTINY:**

- I aim at becoming the highest and best vision of my Soul that reflects my personal purpose, mission, and vision for creating a better world.
- My Ego supports and aligns with the guidance of the Soul.
- **I am the future vision of my highest possibility** and I am the values that support that vision.

2. **MY STRUGGLE:**

- I am the inner struggle between my Soul and Ego.
- Inherent conflict between the four drives compels me to endure an inner battle, which is the source and the angst I reflect in my life.
- **I am my angst, my pain;** my inner turmoil is what matters most.

3. **MY WANDERINGS:**

- I am my meaninglessness;
- I am pulled in many directions, confused, conflicted, unsure, often taking the safe route to reduce pain and ameliorate fear, thus I am everything and nothing;
- **I am a jumbled confusion** masked in material meanings of life. (in other words, I really don't know who I am and really don't care or I have given up caring or caring was so painful that I just don't want to face that hurt any more.)

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- 4. **MY EXPERIENCE:**
 - I am what I have experienced in life – good or bad. Whatever has been my history is the permanent map for my future – my past gloom will be my future doom.
 - Thus my past will mean I become victimized by whatever past pain, hurt, guilt, and disappointment has brought me.
 - **I am a projection of my Ego's interpretation of the past;** success, failure, incompetent, powerful, etc are all the words of the Ego defining my dealing with the challenges I have faced.
- 5. **MY SEXUALITY:**
 - I am defined by my sexual preference, my passions, my partners, my plumbing.
 - My sexual identity will define how I think, feel, and relate to others
- 6. **MY SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS:**
 - My social media “friends” define who I am and what I should be to be “liked.”
 - The people I surround myself with define and guide my thinking, my deepest beliefs, my responses to the world around me, and the things I value most.
 - Without my “friends” I would be isolated and rejected.

Let's look at the typical answers to the question WHO AM I? (try this at a social gathering and see what you get for answers) when one defines their essence from the perspective of my “Experience”:

Experience – 40 years solving computer problems....
History – come from family migrating from Poland....
Success – started 3 highly profitable businesses....
Affiliation – member of black knights gang in
Highlight Event – survivor of concentration camp....
Education – graduated cum laude from....
Military – served 20 years in Marine Corps....
Neighborhood – Floridian from Miami....
Profession – doctor, lawyer, hairdresser....
Survival – cancer survivor of 5 years....
Age – 72 years old and retired....
Role or Profession – mother, doctor, plumber....
Religion – Christian, Jew, Atheist
Status – homeowner with condo in....
Sex – male, female, hetero/homo....
Physical – weightlifter, sexy....
Sensitivity – tough, gentle....
Interests – car collector, skier....
Marital Status – married, single, divorced....
Nationality or Ethnicity – African-American...
Employment Status – employed, between jobs...
Financial condition – rich, poor, up-and-coming....
Pride – inducted into the Hall of Fame....
Goals – to become a millionaire by the age of.....
Social Status – leader of my team....
Illusion – successfully accomplished
Victimization – my father raped me when I was
Struggle – I've never been able to...Etc, etc...

What's notable about these common responses is they have nothing to do at all with the most important trait of personal identity – CHARACTER.

Most of these answers come from the one's ego, which needs to impress and protect. (BTW, I don't think the ego is bad or demonic, especially when guided by one's soul).

When Identity and Experience become intertwined, one can never separate what's happening in their daily life with who they believe they actually are. Thus, if their experience is happy or positive, it is reflected in their attitude (which is okay if everything is going well). But the consequences are severe should they experience a "bad" day, which results in a "bad" attitude, which in turn creates more bad experiences, and ultimately a depressed or morose or angry identity.

The Resilient person does not attach an adversity experience to their identity. This detachment enables them to bounce back, not weighed down by historic baggage of past experience.

The real potential is not just to bounce, but to use the adversity experience as propulsion to a higher level.

In other words, let the adversity become a transformational experience -- to be born again at a higher level.

Knowing the answer to "Who am I?" is essential if you are to trust yourself, and to be trusted by others. A strong, integrated character is more important than intelligence and smartness, for character is the foundation of wisdom and the path to the soul.

In the larger view, I really don't much care for people who are intelligent but lack character, for they can never be wise nor soulful, which means they lack a well-developed conscience, and thus cannot be in my inner circle of friends.

*"You'll never decide what you want
until you've decided who you are."*

- Noel Coward

*"As Soon As You Trust Yourself,
You Will Know How To Live."*

- Johann Von Goethe

Trusting oneself means alignment of personal values into an integral whole – otherwise known as "integrity," with clarity of direction – otherwise known as "mission & purpose."

PART II: CHARACTER-BASED IDENTITY

How do people who've had that kind of transformational experience view the world? Every once in a while, you meet a totally unique person who answers the question, "WHO AM I?" very soulfully. They define themselves from a different place, from which character has defined and developed their identity. Typically, these people will be disarmingly humble (soulful) in answering the question:

Vision – the possibility that....
Values – the most important values are....
Destiny – God put me on this earth to....
Purpose – devotion to this noble cause....
Commitment – dedication to solving....
Learning – from my failures I now see....
Quest – seeking the understanding of....
Giving – serving those who....
Impact – making a measurable difference by....
Integrity – dedication to walking the talk....
Conscience – it's just the right thing to do

Relationships – aim to be the best friend anyone....

These people's character is sourced not from their ego, but from their soul. They define success much like what the great sports coach John Wooden advocated:

Success is peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming.

It is in this shift from ego and self-interest to soul and embracing the greater good, that character is formed.

Thus the formation of character involves an "identity shift," without which a human being is merely a pawn in the hands of a crafty and potentially omnipotent culture.

"Character becomes Destiny"

– Heraclitus, Greek 500BC

The ideal of character should never be diminished or dismissed.

It is the hallowed core of humanity, of dignity, of reason, of purpose, and of a trusted life lived to its fullest.

Martin Luther King's 1963 speech is one of the most moving and energizing pieces of literature ever delivered to an audience that was hanging on his every word:

I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood.

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I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by **the content of their character**.*

I have a dream thatwhen we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! free at last!"

* I fear that this last point about *character* has been lost, and has little meaning to our society today. Of all the MLK's points, this one makes the biggest difference for future generations

PART III: LOVE OF WORK, DEVOTION, & COMMITMENT

In the building of character, one's work and one's experience can be creatively transformed into art and then magnified into action, if our hearts and minds are conduits of a much greater and mightier purpose -- if we see ourselves as benefactors of a conscience ordained by divine order; in this way we meld love into work as we express our character -- thus manifesting our identity with our destiny.

The Love and Art of Work

Mastery of the art melding identity with work is an art that is actually not about work itself.

Work can be transformed into art, and magnified into action, if our hearts and minds are conduits of a much greater and mightier purpose -- if we see ourselves as benefactors of the flow of the two divine energies -- love and creation -- and channel these energies through us into the building of our world. Kahlil Gibran probably understood this phenomenon best as he observed in *The Prophet*:

*When you work you are a flute through
Whose heart the whispering of the hours turns to music.*

*When you work you fulfill a part of earth's furthest dream
Assigned to you when that dream was born,
And in keeping yourself with labour you are in truth loving life. And to love life
through labour is to be intimate
With life's inner most secret.*

*All work is empty save when there is Love;
And when you work with love
You bind yourself to yourself,
And to one another, and to God.*

*And what is it to work with love?
It is to weave the cloth with threads drawn from your heart;
It is to build a house with affection;
It is to sow seeds with tenderness
And reap the harvest with joy;
It is to change all things you fashion
With a breath of your own spirit,*

Work is love made visible.

*And if you cannot work with love but only
With distaste, it is better that you should leave your work
For if you grudge the crushing of grapes,
Your grudge distills a poison in the wine.*

*And if you sing though as Angels, and Love not the singing,
You muffle man's ears to the
Voices of the day and the voices of the night.*

St. Francis of Assisi explained this divine process as creative energy:

*The person who works with their hands is simply a laborer;
the person with their hands and minds a craftsman; and
with their hands, mind, and heart, a true artist.*

The laborer and the craftsman “work hard,” the artists “works in wonder.” Our lives and our work can be a sacred art, one for which we need to take the time and to make the effort to become masters. Aristotle commented that:

The aim of true art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance.

In other words, life itself can be -- and the building of character is -- a sacred art.

We mold and shape and design the moments which collectively represent our day, tuning our perceptions and awareness to see and hear what others do not, then amplify and configure these small signals into a larger tapestry of meaning, upon which we become empowered to create action.

We must cherish deep wisdom and pass it on to others as our gift, as an act of our love, our caring, and our commitment to our larger purpose.

However, love and creativity alone are not enough; no work of art can be created without two other key ingredients: devotion and commitment.

Commitment

It's been said: commitment is what transforms a promise into reality; it is the words that speak boldly of our intentions, and the actions which speak louder than the words; it is making the time when there is none, coming through time after time after time, year after year after year.

Commitment is the daily triumph of integrity over skepticism, of vision over fear.

Commitment gives us the discipline to attain a mastery of our lives, of our own personal duty to build our character.

Devotion

Never should devotion and commitment be confused with “working hard.” Devotion is sourced from the soul; a love and dedication for something higher than ourselves, an ideal, a beauty, a goodness that transcends the mundane. St. Francis knew:

“It is in forgetting oneself that one is found.”

The devoted person sees themselves not as the cause of anything, but as an instrument or vehicle or conduit through which some greater power can be exerted to achieve a greater purpose. Devotion gives us the zen-like presence to be “in the moment,” never to be enslaved by our discipline, but to be set free by discipline.

Devotion allows the master to see past the dogma and prescriptions of the discipline, to touch the hearts and souls of the group, to transcend the dictums and feel the pain, to touch the heart, to manifest the vision of those who seek guidance.

Thus the master is never above and never below, but always by one's side.

In building our personal character, we mold and shape and design the moments which collectively represent our day.

We, as humans, are endowed with a gift to tune our perceptions and awareness to see and hear what others do not, then amplify and configure these small signals into a larger tapestry of meaning, upon which we can be empowered to create daily action demonstrating our devotion, our caring, and our commitment to our larger purpose.

That is the formation of character, identity, and ultimately, destiny.

Reverence

Those who show reverence for the right things – truth, divine inspiration, love of one’s family, friends, and community – are spiritually centered, reluctant to pass judgement indiscriminately, willing to listen, ask probing questions that reveal inner meanings, and respect every human for their inner soul.

Self Confidence

So much is made today about creating self-confidence in today’s youth, who are so consumed with identity, acceptance by their peers, and pressure from social media. Much of the effort to build self-confidence is misdirected.

Let’s look at the word *confidence*.¹ It means *trust* and *resilience*. A person who wants self confidence must trust themselves, bringing their diverse interests and desires together, into an aligned, unified inner integrity -- into a strong set of core values.

All-too-often efforts to build self-confidence are terribly misguided. Some kids are given an exorbitant amount of praise and positive reinforcement, often to the point of delusion. Some are rewarded with trophies just for participating in something, regardless of their contribution. Others attempt to defeat self-loathing by fostering self-love, to the edge of narcissism.

Great people never want undeserved acclaim, and never think of loving themselves. Their emphasis is on *personal integrity*, *service to others*, and *what’s in the interest of the greater good*. In other words, self-confidence means to *trust yourself* – your values, your intentions, your integrity to do the right thing, your own sense of purpose and mission, and your inner character to stand strong under pressure and adversity.

A better way to build confidence is to build one’s own sense of trust and the discipline to be a pillar of strength. (see Rudyard Kipling’s Poem “If”). Here are a few questions to ask:

How committed am I to doing the right thing, regardless of who likes me?

When I’m wrong, am I willing to apologize and take corrective action?

Do I find peace, seek harmony, and build unity in the caldron of turmoil?

How willing am I to tell the truth, even if it makes me look bad?

How disciplined am I to travel the high road?

Am I willing to inspire, enthuse, and set a positive example?

Am I a person dedicated to good deeds, not just words?

Do I have the courage to intercede when a wrong is being done?

Am I willing to temper my adept knowledge with real wisdom?

Am I committed to being true to my word?

Am I willing to be humble in the face of glory?

Am I dedicated to a personal mission that builds a better world?

Am I willing to serve my fellow man honorably?

Is my soul and conscience my guiding spirit in my life?

¹ From the Latin *con* (to join, unite, bring together align) and *fidere* (faith, trust, fidelity, loyalty)

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Can I do the right thing without being arrogant or self-righteous?

Am I dedicated to bringing out the best in others?

Can I be skeptical enough to learn, but not succumb to cynicism?

Can I be knowledgeable without being too smart?

Can I apply the Golden Rule to all my interactions in life?

Do I give devotion and respect to a higher, soulful authority?

Peacemaking

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall inherit the earth.

But also ...

Cursed are the peacemakers,
for they will-likely be shot by both sides.