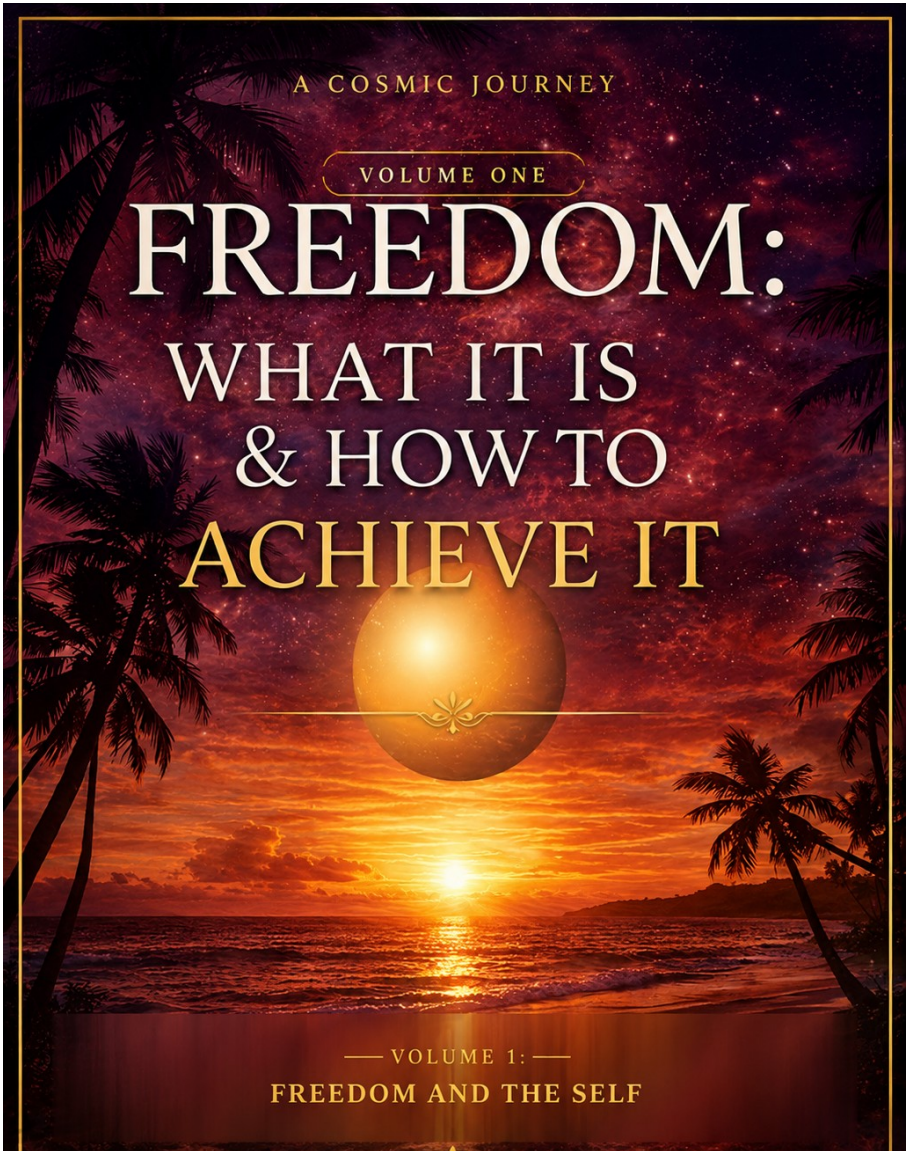




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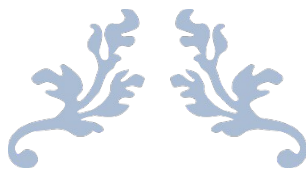
Chapter 3

The ‘Self’ in Self-Process

If everything in the cosmos is in constant flux, what is this self that feels so stable and continuous? This chapter looks for an answer through the cosmic ideation of Yogacara Buddhism, the self of William James, the experiencing and narrative selves of modern psychology, and finally the question: is there a real self?

It is one of five chapters offered free in the Psychology of the Self series at acosmicjourney.com.

Reference numbers in the text point to the notes at the end of the complete book.



Chapter 3

The 'Self' in Self-Process

We move now from the cosmic level of a collective, ever-evolving process to the individual experiential level within this cosmos, but as we do so we are faced with a bit of an anomaly. For here the constant change and flux within a cosmic process seem to slow down, and we are left with individual selves whose main quality is one of stability, of a continuous stream of time and a stable core of character that survives the changes 'life' throws our way.

How can this kind of *sentient experiential stability* be had from within a 'self' embedded within a set of ever-fluxing conscious processes taking place within an ever-changing cosmic theatre of consciousness? What is this unit of awareness that sees itself as a separate self within a sea of selves, with its own unique individuality, *an individuality based on its own unique experience in relation to the constant change surrounding it*? Who and what is this unitary awareness who finds its identity in singularity and stability, yet yearns toward the mystery in change and chance found in the complex processes of transformation constantly evolving around it? It is a self who yearns to express its own innate urge toward creative 'newness' of character in response to the surrounding newness of other selves, a newness *found within the constant change* omnipresent in this physical world. Yet, it is also a self who seeks freedom from the restraints of surrounding selves who also want to be free to extend themselves perpetually.

This is a self whose wonder and awe of the mystery surrounding it in this world is an expression of its urge toward freedom, toward becoming one with something greater than one feels to be. It is a self that finds self-actualization through its experiences with love, beauty, freedom, autonomy and wonder to name a few of its many modes of experience.

From a *process* point of view, this ‘self’ might be broadly defined and perceived as a fluxing concentration of conscious, dynamic energy finding human expression through beliefs, and mental and emotional processes. Yet, is there actually something stable, a fundamental ‘grounding’ offering an enduring core around which change and transformation take place within this ‘dynamic energy structure’? Or is the ‘self’ not so much a state as a process whose only constant is change and transformation? And is it this process of self-actualization through constant change that defines the ‘self’?

For something so obviously and forever present within each of us the ‘self’ is inordinately hard to isolate and define. What is self-evident is that the self at its most basic is an awareness of being, an awareness of personal existence found and focused within the center of each passing moment. As Buddhist theosophist Annie Besant so eloquently states, the self is:

‘that conscious, feeling, ever-existing One, that in each of us knows himself as existing...both proof and disproof found themselves on “I am”, the unanalysable (sic) Feeling of mere Existence of which nothing can be predicated but increase and diminution’.^{lxii}

In defining the ‘self’ we must begin with two self-evident facts; 1) we exist, and we are aware of that existence, and 2) we, as aware beings have a different experience every moment, and our realities change in response to that experience, thus we are continuously going through some process of change, of ‘increase or diminution’ (i.e., through pleasure/increase or pain/diminution on physical, emotional, mental or spiritual levels within personal or social domains). We as awareness *experience* this change. Since there is experience, there must be a subject that experiences and an object that is experienced, a perceiver and the perceived. There must be both perceiver and perceived because without one, the other cannot exist.

Scottish Philosopher David Hume (1711-1776), one of the founders of the influential school of Empiricism^{lxiii} also emphasized the transient, ever-changing nature of the ‘self’ as something which, outside of pure experience, has no concrete existence except for existence itself.

But self or person is not any one impression, but that to which our several impressions and ideas are suppos'd to have a reference. If

any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same, thro' the whole course of our lives; since self is suppos'd to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable. Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other, and never all exist at the same time. It cannot, therefore, be from any of these impressions, or from any other, that the idea of self is deriv'd; and consequently there is no such idea.^{lxiv}

'There is no such idea' (as the self). If Besant and Hume are right, the self, to comprehend the reasoning behind its mere existence, must rely on a process of constant change couched within the passage of time as the only stability in its world. The urge to understand this mystifying enigma has led over the centuries to the development of many philosophies which attempt to explain how awareness and ever-changing experience can result in a perception of a continuous 'self' despite the apparent lack of one as Hume illustrates above.

Process Philosophy covers a number of differing theories of 'selfhood' from the East in Buddhism, Hinduism and Taoism and in the West, from a long list of well-known philosophers and scientists, including Heraclitus, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, Martin Heidegger, Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, Alfred North Whitehead, Samuel Alexander, George Herbert Mead, John Dewey, C.S. Peirce, William James, Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, Ilya Prigogine, to name a few.^{lxv} The connecting thread among these differing theorists and their theories is how a process rather than some stable core of being can result in the experience of a 'stable' self.

The appeal for using Process Philosophy to describe the 'self' experience lies in its methodology which attempts to use empirical, deductive methods as well as imaginative speculation and intuitive approaches in its analyses. Alfred North Whitehead describes the method allegorically as:

... the play of a free imagination controlled by the requirements of coherence and logic. The true method of discovery is like the flight of an aeroplane. It starts from the ground of particular observation;

it makes a flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization; and it again lands for renewed observation rendered acute by rational interpretation.^{lxvi}

The ‘true method of discovery then lies with the *authenticity of experience, an authenticity given validity by rational interpretation based upon coherence and logic yet given the freedom of imaginative generalization leading at times to intuitive insight*. Due to its ‘dual’ hard and soft analytical approach, it has been promoted as a possible bridge between the methodologies of the empirical sciences and the ‘softer’ sciences such as philosophy, religion and psychology. This ‘dual’ methodology allows for a more experientially robust explanation of the differing states of ‘selfhood’ and the relations between ‘self’ and its environment of other ‘selves’, relationships which, according to Process Philosophy help create the universe around us.

The intent here is not a comprehensive philosophical explanation of Process theory. A few short summaries of some of the more current and well-known Process theories from both East and West should suffice to create an understanding of how something as experientially ‘solid’ as the ‘self’ can be contained within an ever-fluxing, ever-changing *process* amid a universe of such processes.

The idea of cosmic and human evolution as a *process*, of the universe and life as something evolving rather than static is evident throughout the various theorists described above. However, the idea of *process* does not end there. The nature of the ‘self’, that *awareness of individuality* within each one of us also appears to be a result of related, ever-fluxing processes that somehow create the experience of a continuous, stable existence. To illustrate the nature of the process which may result in a ‘sense of self’ arising out of our human life experiences, experiences filled with emotion, thought and physical sensing, we first look at the Yogacara Buddhist theory of cosmological *Ideation*. This will be followed by an examination of Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) and his *Process Philosophy*, the ‘self’ of William James, and the ‘selves’ of Zen Buddhism and Gestalt Therapy. Each has slightly differing perspectives on the self as a process, which when viewed together may provide a holistic understanding of the set of self-perceptions most of us ground our self-realities within and upon, and how those realities lead to a sense of permanent, stable self-hood.

The Cosmic Ideation of Yogacara Buddhism

Yogacara gives us an insight into one possible ‘stable core’ resting at the foundation of the ‘self’ experience by stipulating that *consciousness is all that exists*. Consciousness, as perceived by Yogacara is infinitely capable, infinitely creative, infinitely sentient and *alive* in a way which transcends limitation. One expression of this omniscience is that consciousness can transform itself into various living constructions through the process of ideation^{lxvii}. Since the living constructions wrought from the ideation of consciousness are made of consciousness, they themselves are also of the same creative nature, a nature bounded only by the conditioning of their initial construction and the potential inherent within that conditioning.

The initial, unconditioned state of consciousness this creative process takes place within is of a pristine nature, a cosmically fundamental, crystal-clear, undisturbed, fathomless ‘absolute’ stream of consciousness (*Alaya Vijnana*). Yet inherent within this ever-flowing current of consciousness lies an ever-present creative will or willpower reflecting a perpetual tendency toward creativity. When the innate, undisturbed flow of consciousness is upset by this perpetual tendency toward creativity, an up-welling of inharmonious activity within the stream of consciousness occurs, resulting in infinite multi-dimensional ripples of discontinuity. ‘Its (stream of consciousness) universality is broken up into infinite ‘moments’ of consciousness’.^{lxviii}

Each of these moments of consciousness is simply a limited, separated bit of pure consciousness. As one pulse of creativity follows another within the stream of consciousness, ‘chains’ of moments of consciousness are created, each moment containing one specific reality of one individual entity. Each ‘chain’ in turn, is a series of moments of that individual entity which is perceived by that entity as continuous existence.

In this way, the creative willpower inherent in the undisturbed, fathomless ‘absolute’ stream of consciousness *is expressed and dissipated through its transformation into content (structure)*. The final stage of the pulse-like action of creative will is the negation or dissolution of will through the creation of that which has been willed. In other words, as that which was willed comes into

existence, the urge or will that have brought it into being is transferred to its creation, *which then has a creative impetus and will of its own.*

Energy comes straight out of consciousness. As a result of this inherited creative impetus and will, the energy within the turbulence begins to coalesce into structure through differing 'affinities of resonance' coming together to form increasingly complex structures. Through this process, whatever is created becomes a creative force itself, capable of evolving its own nature in response to its inherited inner creative impetus and 'outer' environmental forces. It is in this way that each 'willing' of consciousness is an ever-increasing explosion of creativity as that which is created expresses its own creativity and in so doing helps perpetuate, transform, qualify and structure the nature of the 'turbulence' within the flowing stream of consciousness.

It is in this way that the 'in-equilibrium' in the stream of consciousness takes the form of an infinite number of continuous chains of momentary, pulse-like turbulence. Each pulse in a chain represents one moment within a chain of moments in the life experience of one entity. Each entity is subject as self and object for other selves.

The quality of character and experience, i.e., how the stage is set for each succeeding momentary experience within each chain of moments, is determined by the character of all past moments within that chain (*dependent origination*). *Dependent origination* determines the *pulsation-like* character of the personal experiential process, a process that moment by moment comes into being, matures and expires to make way for the next pulse of 'being', the character and existence of which depends on the character and existence of the previous pulse of existence.

Secondarily, the natural response of consciousness to content within itself is the activity of *perception*. Thus, consciousness-as-will becomes consciousness-as-knowing that which has been willed. In other words, willing consciousness, once it is willed becomes multiple-knowing-consciousness, for now there is a multiplicity of content instead of the holistic oneness of the 'crystal-clear, fathomless, absolute stream of consciousness' (*above*). It is here that the idea of objectivity inserts itself, for consciousness

perceives its own content as being separate from itself, and in so doing, creates for itself, an objective world.^{lxix}

Since each chain of momentary ‘pulses’ of consciousness embodies the experience of one entity, the character, content and potential of any one momentary ‘pulse’ of consciousness is determined by the past experience and propensities of that entity. Each individual chain of consciousness is one of an infinite number of other chains all relationally embedded in the stream of consciousness; each surrounded by the creative ‘turbulence’ of countless other ‘chains’ of momentary pulses of consciousness’ (individual entities).

On the level of the human mind, *Yogacara* stipulates that beliefs create expectations and expectations guide the structuring of the form willing takes, thus what is willed is what the individual consciousness believes or is expecting its reality to be. As a result, it is the *willing* of the individual that *imprints upon its own consciousness* pulse by pulse, moment by moment the personal reality characterized by the beliefs of the individual.

The primary characteristic of ‘conditioned’ consciousness is it becomes, i.e., believes itself to be whatever it permeates. Thus, consciousness takes on the character of its vehicle, that which it resides within and experiences through. From the perspective of a human being, consciousness resides within the physical body and mind and is thus bound up within the human experience, a hypnotic state in which the awareness, having forgotten its origins believes itself to be that which it is experiencing.

The basic structure of a consciousness ‘transformed’ or ‘conditioned’ in this way is described by the *Yogacara* theory of the *Five Skandhas*. These *Skandhas* are five different, but related ‘modes’ or transformations of consciousness whose interactions produce a coherent, individualized sense of self. That is, the *Five Skandhas* are living transformations of consciousness posing as ‘actors’ in a dynamic ‘play’ upon the stage of consciousness that results in consciousness perceiving itself as having individualized ‘selfhood’. In this ‘play’ of consciousness the first four modes or transformations of *conditioned* consciousness play the roles of *form*, *sensation*, *perception*, and the *ego-self*. The fifth form of consciousness is an untransformed consciousness, yet one whose

awareness or perception is temporarily conditioned by the ‘play’ of the other modes of consciousness and ‘senses’ them as aspects of a holistic, separate ‘self’.

The basic nature of a *Skandha* is described as an *aggregate of existence*. ‘Aggregate’ refers both to an *experiential process*, and a ‘*bundle of fluxing attributes*’ embodying the meaning and nature within that experiential process.

The *experiential process* and ‘*bundles of fluxing attributes*’ within the first *Skandha*, that of *form* is comprised of physical structures including the human body, and the five sense organs and senses that ‘perceive’ form. One might say ‘form’ is not a process because physical structures seem so stable in our experience, yet form is impermanent, a set of energies constantly coalescing into crystallized structures, then slowly disintegrating back toward other forms or energy again. Since it is at no time stable, i.e., unchanging, it is in the Buddhist view impermanent, thus a process. As within any process, there is of course structure, but a dynamic ever-changing structure of evolving attributes.

The second *Skandha* or experiential process, *sensation*, embodies how we feel about what we perceive and our interactions with what we perceive, i.e., pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. This *Skandha* is associated with emotional experience.

The third process, *perception*, entails *identification* (or labeling), *conceptualization* and *mental categorization* of what is perceived by the first *Skandha*. Thus, *perception* finds its content in the first *Skandha* (form) and is influenced by the second *Skandha* (sensation) in terms of the level of *hedonic sensation* (pleasant/unpleasant, emotional) an object and its relations elicit in an individual.

The perceptions of the third *Skandha* then lead to and influence the fourth *Skandha* or experiential process, *mental formation*, a process within which ego is born and nurtured. It is the process of *mental formation* we usually identify with the concept of a ‘self’ (or the unique ‘me’ or ego self). This ‘me’ self is a set of beliefs embodied in mental ‘structures’ formed and perpetuated by volition, or personal willfulness toward specific attitudes, morality and habits, both negative and positive which arise from the seeds of *sensation* and consequent personal experience resulting from that experience, both present and past. Pride, desire, virtuousness, prejudice, and faith are examples of the fourth *mental formation* experiential process. It is the willfulness of the fourth *Skandha*

which creates the positive or negative *karma* (reservoir of past actions) we are constantly forming around ourselves, moment by moment which affects the quality of our experience, our present situation and behavioral tendencies. It is the fourth *Skandha* which perpetuates the cyclical process of the *Skandhas* one pulse after another, each initiated by and taking up the unfinished karmic propensities of the previous pulse of *Skandhas*.

Thus, the theory of the *Skandha process* describes the coming together of constantly fluxing sets of attributes to create a momentarily existent 'self', a singular 'I am' sense of self within the individual.^{lxx} Yet, the ongoing existence of the *Skandha process* is interdependent. If any one part (*Skandha*) of the process ceases to exist, the entire structure collapses and consciousness once again becomes undifferentiated. In this way the 'self' as a process of the *Five Skandhas* is totally complete within itself yet disappears if any one part disappears. They arise together, they depart together. They are 'grounded' in their own collective existence and nothing else.

Thus, an individual's 'sense of self' is a product of dynamic, ever-fluxing 'bundles of attributes' interacting in such a way as to produce a sense of both isolation and individuation, of subject and object, perceiver and perceived. These attributes are not permanent but engage in a process of constant change in response to 'environmental forces' (inner, psychological and outer, personal, social and cultural environs). The interaction between these attributes and their environment brings growing awareness and perception to the consciousness they reside within. Thus, these bundles of attributes and the experiential processes from which the attributes derive, can be viewed as a set of experiential tools by which consciousness 'hones' its ability to expand to progressively higher states of being and perception.^{lxxi}

In summary then, each 'chain' of momentary consciousness becomes embedded within its own separate, momentary physical reality to the extent that consciousness itself becomes hypnotized into believing itself to be that physical reality, a physical reality that is no more than a vehicle whose purpose is to experience a reality of limitation, separation and multiplicity. Thus consciousness, which always takes on the character of that which it permeates, creates a construction out of its own 'material' then resides within that construction and believes itself to be that

construction. The construction referred to here, is of course the physical reality and its experiences and the perceptions and interpretations of those experiences, i.e., the belief systems, emotions and cognitions, and consequent expectations arising from this physical experience. This creative activity goes through one complete cycle each moment. At the cessation of each cycle, we contribute moment by moment, our experiences and the enhanced awareness from those experiences back into the stream of consciousness within which we, and the whole process reside. The next moment within our conscious experience contains our previous momentary insights which act as stepping stones to even higher insights, which we then contribute once again to the stream of consciousness, a stream which all of us can tap into, on one level or another, to the extent of our perceptive abilities. We are all connected, we are all one and our separation is something we perpetuate, individually, moment by moment, within each moment by indulging in the play of creative evolution.

We find similar ideas concerning this ‘duality’ of consciousness and the creation of the ‘self’ in the theories of Whitehead and James which offer a slightly differing perspective on how the subjective and objective within each one of us comes into being and finds expression as a human ‘self’.

The Process Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead

Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) worked in the fields of mathematics, logic, philosophy of science, philosophy of education and later, metaphysics, Whitehead’s *Process Philosophy* envisioned the *complexification* of life as something that occurs within and through a complex web of *self-organizing processes*. These *self-organizing processes* are ‘momentary events, called ‘*actual occasions* or *actual entities*, (and) are essentially self-determining, experiential, and internally related to each other’.^{lxxii} *Processes* includes every system of organization from the lowly quark, the atom and molecule up to ‘collections’ of particles that make up a human being and the mind itself, a *process* which acts as ‘conductor’ of the human experience. Because these *processes* are ‘self-determining and experiential’, one may assume the energy making up these processes is itself fundamentally alive and increasingly sentient as each energy-embodying *process* evolves to higher levels of complexity.

Thus, sentient life perceives all these *processes* which are linked together within a continuous, interrelated grid of *processes* as evolving beings (such as human beings), things, circumstances and events. The character of each *process* is defined not only by its own unique structural properties but also by the character of the set of *processes* it is embedded within and spatially, temporally related to. This leads to the possibility that the quantum level photon packets Persinger described above as carrying information may be the quantum level medium of communication within and between *processes*, *processes* embodying specific kinds of things and organisms.

Try to picture all the physical structures surrounding you, and you yourself as distinct flows of living, conscious energy embedded within a dynamic grid of flows of energy. Each 'flow' is structured into a *functional process*, surrounded by other functioning processes. The 'flow process' which embodies you, your physical body, mentality, emotionality and spirituality is an 'individual' process separate from, but dynamically interrelated to, and communicating with the other functioning 'processes' surrounding you. The other 'processes' surrounding you (as a sentient being) are perceived by you as other beings or things, animate or inanimate with which you are interacting in mutually creative ways.

Each *actual entity* in the form of a set of processes, is thus an integral part of a complex web of relationship and sets of relationships between processes. These complex webs of relationship define the qualities and character of the overall holistic grid of active, ever-changing functional, structured processes (*actual entities or individuals*). For the individual, each 'process link' in the grid of processes represent differing aspects of an individual's perceived reality, the 'objective' world and of the individual him or herself.^{lxxiii}

Each of these processes (as *actual entities*) is an embodiment and expression of living energy. Within the living energy is an innate creativity that expresses itself as an urge toward *novelty* and *uniqueness*. In their continual search for novelty and uniqueness, these *actual entities* are in constant states of flux forever changing in relation to changes in the living processes around them and in response to the innate urge toward creative response within each 'process' (thing, circumstance, individual).

For an individual sentient being this creative urge is expressed within a multilevel structural web of dynamic energy consisting of the individual psyche and the societal and cultural structures and processes surrounding the individual. Each of these dynamic structures surrounding the individual serve as extensions of the individual, because they are fields of expression and experience for the individual within an intimately connected collective of individuals.

Like the theory of *dependent origination* in Buddhism, *actual entities* are of a pulse-like momentary nature. Remember that *dependent origination* stipulates that all things, including states of consciousness, are momentary phenomena, constantly arising out of causes from the relational past and present, then perishing in turn to be the cause of the next momentarily arising phenomena.^{lxxiv} Thus, according to *dependent origination*, the individual self is a series of conscious moments, each arising out of past momentum within each individual life-force, then going through a *process* of qualification by present ‘reality’, then subsiding to make room for the next momentary ‘coming into being’ process.

This string of momentary ‘coming into being’ and ‘going out of being’ to make room for the next ‘coming into being’ is what gives humankind and each individual a sense of continuity and ‘solidness’ out of a fluxing, process of continual perceptual change taking place across *discrete*, unitary moments, from one moment to the next. In this respect, perceptual continuity *is a product* of each *momentary process* (as an individual existing *within this precise moment*) being *dependent upon what has arisen before and is currently arising* out of the temporal grid of continuously developing related processes in which it is presently embedded.

When viewed from the perspective of self-actualization, the *conscious creative urge lying innately* within all of Whitehead’s *self-organizing, living processes*, is part of a moment by discreet moment search for a creative synthesis of what *one is*, being transformed by the yearning for, and the creative inspiration of what *one can become in the next discreet moment*. This search for transformation is a search that occurs amid and is inspired by the ‘newness’ constantly occurring in one’s relational environment each moment because of all other ‘processes’ (*actual entities*) going through the same urge toward self-actualizing ‘newness’.

The entire process of self-actualization is one of constant flux of transient, momentary processes in the form of organic and inorganic, sentient and non-sentient (along a gradation of increasing sentience) creative urges toward a newness of self, a transformation toward something new, novel and different. However, just as the environment for each 'process/entity' inspires the creativity within that process/entity, each process is also *constrained by relationship* to the structured but constantly fluxing, intimately related processes making up its environment.^{lxxv}

Thus each 'process', as a '*phenomenon of being*' is on a journey of exploration via both, 1) its own creative urge toward transformation, and 2) its creative reaction to the newness constantly coming *into being* around it. But again, there are two forces in effect here. The first is the urge toward creative 'newness' which requires freedom of thought, will and action, the freedom to expand; the second is the restrictive nature of the surroundings of each actualizing process, the society, culture, physical and non-physical structures that help mold the creative urges toward similar, creatively related avenues of expression.

What all of this suggests is that who we are is better defined as a sequence of momentarily occurring processes than as something stable over time, and that each new occurring 'process' is an experience of looking for new expressions of identity for ourselves. These new expressions of ourselves lead to newer, more novel *experiences* and in that self-actualizing search through the constant flux and change of the creative environment around us, gravitating toward experiences that *feel better and more expansive*.

Within that expansion we find more *freedom* to expand further toward newer, more novel ways of being and experiencing. This is self-actualization as an adventure, a journey into a constantly renewing *unknown*, the contents of which we, ourselves, are constantly creating, individually and collectively, organic and inorganic, sentient and 'non-sentient', a non-sentence which is simply on the lower levels of the ever-expanding gradient of increasing sentience.

The Self of William James

We now move on to the philosopher and psychologist William James, who also describes the 'self' as a dynamic process, but one divided principally into only two major 'perspectives' of awareness or consciousness. James explains the 'self' as a unified experience where both subject and object are differing 'modes' of consciousness residing within the 'self' process. One 'mode' of consciousness acts as a reservoir of *experience* (object) and the other as awareness perceiving that experience (subject). Thus, the self is a constant flow of experience with the object side (empirical 'me') of consciousness reflecting a physically conditioned experience and the subject side of consciousness (pure ego or 'I') perceiving the experience contained in the object mode of consciousness. In short, the object side of consciousness takes the form of physical, social and 'spiritual' (of the mind) *processes* being perceived by the 'the pure ego, the 'I' within a 'I' - 'Me' duality, and the result of this dualistic process of merging the 'I' and 'me' is a developing sense of selfhood.

The self can be viewed as an object of thought or as the subject of thought. The former is the empirical self or "me," while the latter is the pure ego or "I." The dimensions of the empirical self ("me") include the "material" self (comprised of one's body and such extensions of it as one's clothing, immediate family, and home), the "social" self (or significant interpersonal relations), and the "spiritual" self (one's personality, character, and defining values). The pure ego ("I"), identifiable with the soul of traditional metaphysics, cannot be an object of science and should not be assumed to be a substance.^{lxxvi}

James goes on to say that what fills our awareness from the very beginning of life is a complex web of 'objects and relations' consciously and subconsciously 'discriminated'.

'Consciousness, from our natal day, is of a teeming multiplicity of objects and relations, and what we call simple sensations are results of discriminative attention, pushed often to a very high degree.'^{lxxvii}

By discriminated he refers to the process of various ‘objects and relations’ being chosen and separated from their sensory environment by our attention, our focus, then categorized into a ‘logical field of relations’ within our minds to answer the momentary needs and desires of our daily lives. This focused ‘reality’ constructed as a ‘logical field of relations’ fills our need to make sense of the world around us in such a way that the world becomes both logical and *predictable*, thus providing a sense of safety for us as we navigate through an incredibly complex world pursuing our dreams of what our life should and possibly could be.

To be discriminating requires the presence of *free will*. It is through free will the individual is able to guide the continuously momentary creation of a unique ‘self’ out of a set of processes taking place inside the conditioned consciousness of the individual.

For James then the self is the product of an unidentifiable ‘I’ or ‘pure ego’ interacting with and becoming filled with the ‘me’ side of self which contains material, social and spiritual levels of *experience*. Thus the ‘self’ is a dualistic *process* taking place between two modes of awareness, the ‘I’ of pure awareness, and the experiential ‘me’, the subject and the object, the perceiver and the perceived within an all-inclusive ‘self’. The experiential ‘me’ fills the ‘I’ with the content of experience, or conversely, the ‘I’ of pure consciousness constantly fills itself with the experiential ‘me’, but in a discriminating manner, a discrimination enabled by free will within the ‘I’ consciousness.

These two separate modes of conscious awareness operate in a mutually supportive, creative way to ‘coalesce’ each present momentary ‘self’ and all its sensory experience into a continuous, coherent ‘narrative’ with past momentary selves, thus creating a self-perceived continuity of experience.

From a personal perspective, this continuity creates within us the experience of a stable self-concept whom each of us think we are within any one present moment. The process of ‘discriminative attention’ continually defines who we are or think we are by focusing the ‘I’ awareness upon whatever is essential for the material, social, and spiritual purposes and welfare of the present ‘me’, i.e., for the continuation of what the present ‘I’ believes itself to be. This present momentary ‘self’ is also referred to as the *existential self*, the *self that exists right now*.^{lxxviii} This

emphasis on the immediacy of the self-experience is also reflected in Zen Buddhism.

The Self in Zen Buddhism

In Whitehead's 'Process' philosophy (described above), each 'actual entity', in a process he calls *concrescence* 'builds itself anew' each moment, creating from past nature and disposition and present circumstance a new entity that goes through the same process with each new, present moment. James as well, emphasizes this momentary renewal of self to reflect the ever-changing content of consciousness, thus the self. Zen Buddhism, which is focused primarily on human enlightenment, i.e., emancipation or freedom from suffering, also speaks of a process of momentary renewal of a chain of continuous experiences.

When one attains enlightenment in Zen Buddhism, at least two things are realized. First, one realizes that the deepest level of one's life -- what in Zen is called the 'true self' -- is always here-and-now. And second, one understands that this true self, even though here-and-now, is always changing.^{lxxix}

Zen then goes on to analyze this process of 'forever now' yet 'forever changing' awareness into a three-tiered structure of interrelated process modes, each mode embodying one stage of the overall experience. First, it posits *person* as the entire series of life experiences of an individual. Second, a *subject* is any one of those experiences (kind of a snapshot of any one historical moment of the person). Third, *self* is the 'subject' which is happening *right now*. Thus, for analysis, we divide the individual experience into 1) an individual's entire life experience (*person*), 2) life within any one moment within that life experience (*subject*), and 3) *self* as the *experiential moment* happening right now.^{lxxx}

This 'here and now self' is where all the action occurs. The many past 'subjects' within the 'person' simply act as reservoirs of experience from which the present self takes what seems to be relevant to the present experience and combines it with the present experience to create 'present reality'.

The 'self' then is an experience that exists only within the present moment. But within that 'moment' it is a process which brings together

into one coherent experience whatever is perceived at that instant plus the inclinations and qualities from past ‘momentary selves’ stored in the conscious or subconscious memory. Thus, the present experience is a product of the real present as seen through the qualifying lens of past experience. When the process of integration of present sensory input and past sensory input (memory) is complete, that present ‘self-moment’ ‘expires’ and becomes a past moment (subject) and a new present ‘self-moment’ *process* comes into being. Thus, a human life is a series of momentary ‘coalescing moments’ given the experience of continuity by memory, which by logical extrapolation suggests a future, for if time is linear and there is both past and present, there must also be a future. The sense of continuity or ‘continuous time’ comes from continuous, instantaneous experiences, each different from the past, each building upon cumulative past experience, a past still existing only within us.

But there is something either magical or amiss here. In the Zen process, and in all the theories on the ‘self’ process described thus far, there is an emphasis on ‘continuous, instantaneous experiences’, which is... illogical. *Instantaneous* suggests without time, yet *continuous* suggests a sequence of something; here, a sequence of ‘here and now selves’, of instantaneous selves. Yet, sequences can only occur in a linear structure of something tangible and both tangibility and linear structures take time, the same time that change requires, for time is simply a measure of the change occurring around and within us.

Thus, even though the ‘momentary self’ seems timeless, the entire process of ‘selfhood’ requires time, the time to experience a changing world both inner and outer.^{lxxxii} But ‘present reality’ is an instantaneous experience which passes into the next ‘present reality’ in a timeless manner, and time takes on tangibility only in relation to the memory of the experiences held within the ‘person’ and ‘past subject’ of the Zen ‘self’.

Each ‘present reality’ then, is an instantaneous melding of past experience and present perception into a ‘here and now self’, an instantaneous self-existing within an ever-elusive present moment which keeps slipping away as we try to grab hold of it; slipping away into the next moment of time which is slipping away even as it arrives.

In Chapter 15 of *The Principles of Psychology*, William James tackles the enigma of time by assuming our perception of a present seems to rest upon our looking at and being embedded within both past and future at the same time and presuming a present in our minds.

... the practically cognized present is no knife-edge, but a saddle-back, with a certain breadth of its own on which we sit perched, and from which we look in two directions into time..., but we seem to feel the interval of time as a whole, with its two ends embedded in it.^{lxxxii}

James then quotes E. Robert Kelly's *The Alternative: A Study in Psychology* (1882), in referring to the present moment as the *specious* moment, one that seems real, should logically be real but is not real.

...the part of time referred to by the datum (objects within experience, Author) is a very different thing from the conterminous of the past and future which philosophy denotes by the name Present. The present to which the datum refers is really a part of the past -- a recent past -- delusively given as being a time that intervenes between the past and the future... Let it be named the *specious* present, and let the past, that is given as being the past, be known as the obvious past... Time, then, considered relatively to human apprehension, consists of four parts, viz., the obvious past, the specious present, the real present, and the future. Omitting the specious present, it consists of three . . . nonentities -- the past, which does not exist, the future, which does not exist, and their conterminous, the present; the faculty from which it proceeds lies to us in the fiction of the specious present.^{lxxxiii}

The final sentence above, 'the faculty from which it proceeds lies to us in the fiction of the specious present' asserts that the present is a 'specious' creation of our own minds, a creation that validates our reality as we sit in the saddle of time looking forward and backward at the same 'time'.

Time is an essential aspect of self; space/time (for they are one according to Einstein) is the playground of eternal change from within which the 'self' experiences, grows and evolves. According to the reasoning given above, time, as a 'present moment' is something we

create ourselves on personal as well as cumulative levels of experience. It is an essential element of our psychology, one which allows our experience of space and movement to exist, one which validates the authenticity of our experience, yet at the same time it is a specious thing, one which logically, within the logic of our conditional experience must exist, yet does not, except for within our collective 'self' reality. The ambiguity of time however does give us more insight into the nature of the self, as a process occurring within a conditioned bit of consciousness within which the 'I' and 'Me' play a game of *experience* upon a platform upon which exists a *self-created* experiential playground called *space/time*.^{lxxxiv}

In truth, despite the insights of time given above, definitions of time dance around time, grasping for the ultimate in elusiveness, something always here, but never there when we look for it. Time is the ultimate mystery to physicists and philosophers alike. The only thing that is apparent is that time, whatever it is and wherever it comes from is the container of change; and just as time cannot stop, neither can change. Interestingly, if time stopped so would change, for if change stopped there would be no measure or awareness of the passage of time. And if time stopped, where could change take place? Change is the world we live in, everywhere and in every form, never-ending, never beginning.

'Wait!' you might say, 'Look around you; everything today is the same as yesterday, the buildings, the mountains, the trees, just as in my memory of them.'

But no, nothing is the same as an instant ago. Even though the structures around us and within us seem stable, everything is going through a *process of change*, of coming into being, actualizing toward maturity, and then declining and decaying toward obscurity. Some things are just changing faster than others. *Nothing is stable, change is absolute. And it is within this process of change the 'self' occurs, and that may be the essential clue to finding out who we really are and what the 'self' is.*

Change is the process in which we are all embedded and is crucial for self-actualization and for gaining insight into the nature of 'self'. The *contrasting realities* between successive experiential moments brought about by change are what create, and mold changing, developing

relationships between individuals and their environment, and helps highlight the meaning contained within that set of relationships within each moment.

Thus, within a self-actualizing process, *meaning* is gleaned *from the contrast* between succeeding relations within a sequence of relations going through constant transition and reorientation in the face of new experience and consequent realization. All of this happens within the perceptual light of consciousness and becomes for the ‘self’ food for further realization, self-actualization and the eternal reaching out for freedom from the restrictions caused by the conditioning of awareness through its experience on the physical plane of existence.

A Little Empirical Evidence of Self as Process

Whatever the quality and quantity of the division between the two selves posited by James and the Zen Process paradigms, there is neurological evidence for the idea of two spatially and functionally separate neurological ‘modes’ of consciousness that may represent first, an ‘I’ centered in the present moment, and secondly a ‘me’ awareness consisting of an ongoing ‘narrative’ combining present and past realities to form a ‘present’ reality for the ‘I’ to perceive as an individualized experience.

Since William James’ early conceptualization, the ‘self’ has been characterized as a source of permanence beneath the constantly shifting set of experiences that constitute conscious life. This permanence is often related to the construction of narratives that weave together the threads of temporally disparate experiences into a cohesive fabric. To account for this continuity, William James posited an explanatory ‘me’ to make sense of the ‘I’ acting in the present moment (James, 1890). Recently, progress has been made in characterizing the neural bases of the processes supporting William James’ ‘me’ in the form of ‘narrative’ self-reference... The results ‘of a study using ‘functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to examine monitoring of enduring traits (‘narrative’ focus, NF) or momentary experience (‘experiential’ focus, EF)... suggest a fundamental neural dissociation between two distinct forms of self-awareness that are habitually integrated but can be dissociated through attentional training: *the self across time and in the present*

moment' (italics are Author's)... (The) narrative self-reference stands in stark contrast to the immediate, agentic^{lxxxv} 'I' supporting the notion of momentary experience as an expression of selfhood.

lxxxvi

Thus, within both Eastern and Western psychological theories described above on the nature of the self, a dualistic 'self' arises; a 'self' with two separate foci or modes of consciousness which interact with each other in a constant process of relational transformation, and through this interaction create a 'sense' of self, a dynamic, ever-evolving self.

In addition, the neurological evidence supports the existence of these two distinct types of 'self' within an individual. First, an 'immediate, *existential*, agentic 'I' focused upon and existing within the present moment. Secondly, this existential 'I', which is constantly merging with a 'narrative 'me'', the 'me' fashioned out of the historical experience of the *existential* 'I'. Together, this existential 'I' and the narrative 'me' merge to create the present 'I' which fades away in the face of a new 'I' the instant this 'merging' is complete. These two differing perceptions of 'I' and 'me' consciousness create the sense of a continuous and stable 'self' within the individual.

The renowned psychologist Daniel Kahneman also suggests two modes to the self, the experiencing self and the remembering, thinking self, both of which have their own perspectives on time. The focus of the experiencing self is in the immediate present and is concerned only with the present experience. The remembering self is concerned with memories of the present experience and how and in what form those memories can be extrapolated into possible future scenarios.

In assessing the present experience, Kahneman's research shows that how any experience ends has a greater impact on memory than the experience as a whole. How an experience ends determines the remembering self's judgement of the experience, and that judgement determines the remembering self's decisions on the hedonic quality of future possibilities, of how desirable some future possibility is. This in turn effects the decision-making process occurring within the present, i.e., of the experiencing self. It is in this way that the remembering self

dominates and guides the experience, thus the direction of life of the experiencing self.

This dynamic process/structure suggests that Kahneman considers the remembering self and the experiencing self to be inseparable, However, if we assume the remembering self to be analogous to the ‘narrative self’ described above, it should be possible to isolate the two experiences, the remembering and the experiencing by focusing purely upon the present within a ‘mindful’ meditative state, a state that allows one to focus only on the present to the exclusion of past tendencies born of previous experience. Both Gestalt Therapy and Zen Buddhism support this possibility.

Gestalt Therapy’s ‘Existential self’ and Zen’s ‘True Self’

Gestalt Therapy^{lxxxvii} from the Western psychological tradition (not to be confused with Gestalt psychology) also posits the self as a combination of ‘I’ and ‘me’, the subject and object, the ‘now’ self and ‘historical’ self, making up the human experience. Yet, Gestalt Therapy goes on to split the ‘I’ and ‘Me’ aspects of ‘self’ into possible stand-alone states of consciousness, one of which reflects the Enlightened state described in *Zen Buddhism*. Gestalt Therapy asserts that the ‘existential self’, i.e., the ‘I’ or ‘right now self’, can actually have two separate and distinctly different experiences, one with or one without the personal, historical narrative, the narrative self which gives an individual the perception of a ‘self’ embedded in a history of experience, a history which qualifies and conditions present perceptions and experience.

To support this assertion, Gestalt Therapy stresses that there are two differing ‘foci’ for the self, allowing the present moment to be filled with *either* ‘subjective perception’, a present subjective ‘moment’ whose perceptions are colored and distorted by past experience, or an ‘objective perception’ which sees only what is really here right now, a focus undistorted by past experience and the reactions and beliefs born of past experience.^{lxxxviii}

In this undistorted state, present ‘sensory’ input is not integrated with past (memory) sensory inputs but stands by itself, complete within each moment, embedded within and relating to only that which exists right now, unaltered by past experience. These two different foci create

radically different present realities and experiences, thus differing perceptions of the nature of the present 'existential' self, and of an individual's perception of the relational nature of 'self' and 'other' within this present moment'.

In other words, we can have a 'self' consisting of the present moment combined with the narrative of past experience, (the narrative that gives us a sense of continuity and personal history in life), or we can have a self *without* the narrative, simply by focusing on, and living in the present moment. Living in the present moment enables an individual to gain insight into the difference between subjective and objective realities by perceiving the situation as it actually is unaltered by beliefs and expectations born of past experience. This does not suggest the individual is unaware of past experience, but that their focus is trained to the extent that the perceptive faculties of consciousness may reside *totally* within the present conscious moment unaffected by past inclinations.

For Gestalt Therapy, freedom from this illusory 'narrative' reality is an act of self-actualization which occurs through progressively deeper insights into the difference between subjective and objective realities. These deeper insights come about through studying the nature of awareness (within oneself) and how to be aware of only awareness as it goes through the process of perception moment by moment.

The result is an ability to discriminate between the *objective reality* within each moment and the reality seen through the lens of egoistical needs and fears. The ability to see and reside within an objective reality helps individuals guide their lives and relationships more realistically, leading to deeper understanding of their real needs and success in achieving those needs, particularly in the domain of relationship. This success results in a deep sense of well-being and clarity, a state of consciousness that enhances the ability to perceive others as they truly are, which in turn leads to compassion and more open relationships.

Zen Buddhism describes this 'objectively perceptive' self as a state of enlightenment which occurs anew within each moment. Zen conceives the true self as that self that exists only within this present instant, but also accents the fact that the 'self' is forever changing. As a result, it is impossible to define the self in absolutist terms, because there is no stable

core of self, only a constant flux of attributes perceived as the self within any one moment.

When one attains enlightenment in Zen Buddhism, at least two things are realized. First, one realizes that the deepest level of one's life -- what in Zen is called the "true self" -- *is always here-and-now*. And second, one understands that this true self, even though here-and-now, *is always changing...*, the reality of this self is uncovered in an intuitive and nondiscursive^{lxxxix} way... This realization marks the beginning of a new way of experiencing based on the reality of the self. Inasmuch as the self is always here-and-now, one lives fully and creatively in the present. Inasmuch as it is always changing, one realizes the impossibility of clinging to any particular moment of the self's existence. In a certain sense, *the self is a groundless ground*. It is a ground because it is the point of departure for all activity in the world, and it is groundless because it is never the same at any two instants. *One cannot cling to one's self; one can only be one's self at each moment.*^{xc} (Italics are the Author's).

Thus, our individual 'self' seems to have two differing possible realities. The first, and more common is a 'self' embedded in a personal history which 'impacts' upon the experience of the present moment, skewing the perception of the present sensory input to include expectations born out of previous experience. The second is that of a self that forms its moment-by-moment reality *without* the expectations coming out of past experience, a self whose experience derives only from present sensory input from the present moment, unqualified by past experience.

When seen through the perspective of James's 'dual self' described above, this 'present self' may also be divided into 'I-subject' and 'me-object' selves, but the objects the 'I' sees are unadulterated by the individual's historical narrative, i.e., the expectations born of previous experience.

That is not to say (once again) that this second self is unaware of previous experience, but that its present *focus* is totally upon the present moment, uninhibited by fears, expectations, attributes and attitudes resulting from previous experience. *Detaching* oneself from habituations born of past experience and living a more *precise*, 'focused within the

present' experience enables a more optimal self-actualization and rewarding, moment by moment, life experience.

'Precise' here does not mean regimented but sensing and responding to one's relational environment in more *immediate, lucid ways, clearly perceiving and spontaneously* reacting to only what is here and now. This method of interacting with one's environment is much freer and more expansive than reacting within the constraints of one's past conditioning, making possible a spontaneity that leaves one open to and aware of the full creative potential of each moment. This is highly important because the potential within each moment exists only within that moment and is gone as that moment passes on to the next moment with its own, new potential.

This is where freedom comes into play. The 'unattachment' to previous conditioning is the freedom that allows one to respond to the potential and possibility within each 'new' precise moment spontaneously, allowing one to take full advantage of the potential of that moment before it passes, along with its possibilities into the next moment with new and different potential and possibilities.

An immediate and spontaneous state of awareness supersedes, thus neutralizes the egocentric needs and tendencies contained in the 'narrative' historically-created sense of self. *It is these needs and tendencies that inhibit unrestrained connection to others.* Thus, an immediate and spontaneous state of awareness allows expansion of oneself without restraining the expansion of others, because the fears and expectations which usually lie as obstructions between people do not exist within this more immediate, open state of awareness.

Certainly, there may sometimes be conflict between differing individuals' streams of experience (individual inclinations) flowing in inharmonious directions, thus coming into conflict, for ego will continue to raise its head in fear or arrogance on occasion. Yet, with practice toward immediate and spontaneous states of awareness, an awareness open to variations in realities and the constancy of change, an awareness unencumbered by egotistical resistances, the two formerly inharmonious streams of behavior and thought of two or more individuals may reside beside each other in nonintrusive ways and perhaps even creative ways.

This residing beside each other in an autonomous, nonintrusive way may lead toward a sharing of realities as both learn from the other in non-egotistical ways, like two currents of water flowing beside each other, sometimes sharing the water around them, but remaining individually coherent streams. At times there will be turbulence as the character of one stream mixes with the other, leading to expanded identities and wisdom, each from the other. In this way, new streams of consciousness, new realities, and new experiential realizations will be added to their respective senses of self. Thus, this mode of discriminating openness still allows each to continue to be free, totally free in the presence of others, while inculcating new realities with the uniqueness of one's own reality and state of consciousness.

One of the more important words in the paragraph above is *discriminating*. In the act of connecting to another, discrimination embodies a process of intelligently, impartially and compassionately determining how one may balance the needs of the self with the needs of another, when the needs of both may come into conflict. It is a process permeated with a sense of 'selflessness', a sense of compassionately and intelligently giving while also taking into consideration, in a compassionate and parsimonious manner, the needs of the self. This moment-by-moment effort toward *balance* requires a *constantly* discriminating intelligence made possible through an awareness focused completely upon the present reality, unimpeded by inclinations, fears and desires from past experience.

This kind of receptive, discriminating awareness requires a total *openness* to the present and all its possibilities, an openness only possible through *freedom from the past*. Indeed, it is the *openness* that allows one to *see* all the possibilities within each moment; to become aware of their existence and how they relate to you or to another. It is constant *openness* of self that will enable the kind of lucid, compassionate discrimination leading toward a balanced relationship with another. This kind of awareness *can* become as habitual as the state of awareness most of us presently harbor, of being blinded to the free and open perception of the present by the turbulence of the past.

It is this kind of free, open awareness with which we must approach all human endeavors, from exploration of the universe around us to the complete, intimate melding with those we love and all relationships in between. It is a discriminating awareness requiring a refined, intelligently

discriminating focus upon the immediate needs and the balancing of those needs with all within our ecosphere, including ourselves. Thus, through cultivating the freedom within oneself by practicing a focused awareness of total openness within each present moment, an individual creates the inner foundation for creating outer freedom, for oneself and for others.

Given the above, it becomes rather obvious that learning to intelligently and consciously direct the focus of one's awareness within each present moment *upon that moment and what it contains* may have a deep impact on the depth and quality of experience for the self and the capabilities of the self in relation to others. If so, transitioning to a 'present' state of awareness is essential for a more efficient and rewarding process of self-actualization, self-other relations, the experience and exercise of freedom, and ultimately, human evolution. Since focus is of such importance, let us examine the self, awareness and focus a little more closely.

Self and the Focus of Awareness

How deeply does this objective perception resulting in a 'true self' as Gestalt Therapy and Zen Buddhism talk about, change the experience, thus the nature of the existential self, the *ever-now* self? According to Zen Buddhism, the 'self' is a process embedded in change, rather than a state, thus one must assume there to be no abiding, unmoving, unchanging core of attributes for the 'self'. Furthermore, the *focus* of an individual's awareness *guides the direction* of the 'self' process, and consequently, the *content* of the 'self' process, creating the moment-by-moment reality and experiential quality of the 'self', thus, of the experience of the self.

In other words, changing the focus of the 'self' process through changing the focus of the awareness perceiving the process, creates fundamental changes in the nature of 'self' resulting from this process, as it happens anew within each new moment.

Does duality, i.e., a 'dual self' made up of an 'I' and 'me' and the experience of duality disappear for the self when individual awareness is *objectively* focused upon only the here and now? And if so, what remains of the self and the 'self-experience', and what does this say about the real nature of the 'self'?

According to the theories of the ‘self’ described above, i.e., the Buddhist *Skandhas*, Whitehead’s *Process Philosophy*, James’ dualistic ‘self’ and both Eastern Zen Buddhism and Western Gestalt Therapy, the ‘self’ serves mostly as a *discriminator and organizer* of sensory input and the ‘self’s’ reaction to that input. One’s focus, guided by one’s perceived and/or habituated ‘needs’, determines what one’s awareness is filled with moment by moment. In other words, the focus of awareness discriminates from its sensory environment that which merits its attention. That which is discriminated as important to the individual becomes the ‘sensory input’ for that moment for the individual. ‘Importance’ of course is a product of how relevant it is to one’s current reality and the currently perceived needs of that reality based on past narrative or history.

One’s focus being guided by the past creates a thread of continuity in one’s perceived reality. It is this moment by moment creative process with each moment building upon the experience of the previous moment that builds the successive momentary realities which consciousness ‘perceives’ as continuous, holistic experiences, experiences from which the continuous sense of ‘self’ comes.^{xc1} Since both objective and subjective modes of consciousness reside within the same momentary pulse of consciousness, the self *creates the structure and content of each moment, thus the moment itself* out of itself, out of its beliefs about what it is and what it needs. Thus each moment is a living, evolving consciousness whose light of awareness shines forth as a individualized, unique ‘self’. To say the self is a process, to acknowledge it as a process, does not diminish the life within it; it simply shows how the life within each ‘moment’ is being qualified. The moment and its contents are real and conscious, and the quality of that content *qualifies* the life within itself.

‘Self’ then is a circular *process* of building each new momentary set of sensory input into a holistic ‘entity’, then believing it is that entity... which then begins to build a new ‘self’ based on the attributes of the previous momentary self and the next set of ‘present’ sensory input, a process grounded only in the present moment, the moment of the ‘self’. Thus the ‘self’ is forever present as a process which begins anew within each present moment and is never the same with each succeeding moment. The ‘self’ is thus self-perpetuating.

There are two implications to this. One, we cannot hang on to past perceptions of ‘self’ for the self that exists within each moment is subtly

transformed into something ever so *delicately new* by each new moment as it arises. Second, this *process-as-individual* awareness, (i.e., ever-unfolding new momentary states of awareness), in order to be *accurately aware* of itself, must be consciously and *intentionally open* to being different from the past self of the previous moment. Thus, one cannot hang on to the past if one expects to have an accurate perception of the current ever-changing self. Such a state of *acceptance* to the newness of self within each new moment opens one to all the potential and possibilities of the present moment, potential and possibilities that are used to help create and define the new self as they are ‘engaged’ in by the present awareness. One must view the self as a continuously new creation, a creation molded each moment by the willing consciousness that inhabits it, and then calls it ‘self’.

Thus, it is our constant, present *focus* that determines the direction of the transformation that is occurring from moment to moment within the process of change we perceive as ‘self’. Our conditioning guides that focus in habitual ways, but it is possible and desirable to go beyond our conditioning and reassert an *intelligent* control over our focus, thus our reality as it constantly renews itself. To have total control over our focus, of what we put our *attention* on, we thus have the ability determine the character of what we ‘take’ from all the possible resources of the next succeeding moment. Whatever we choose to focus on and take into ourselves creates our next succeeding momentary reality. If we *will* our focus in a certain direction, what is focused upon becomes our reality.

Thus, since we are capable of determining our present and future realities through the intelligent use of our focus, it behooves us to continuously look in new and intriguing directions, directions that may enhance expansion of both personal awareness and freedom. Yet, to focus our attention in new, challenging directions requires willpower, courage and a *free, open intelligence*, for it is only in consciously and intelligently willing our attention in new directions that we will be able to leave the self-limiting habituation of past ‘streams’ of reality behind and attain the perfect, spontaneous connection with the present moment.

So, is there a Real Self?

If we define 'real' as something enduring, something that does not transform into something else moment by moment, over time, then this suggests the 'self' characterized by constant change, with no *enduring*, i.e., stable and unchanging traits or attributes, is not *real*, but something temporary and transitory. If so, is there something within us and our experience that *is* real, that endures, unchanging over time?

The only things that do not change are the *existence* of experience, and the *awareness* of that experience which are mutually dependent, because without awareness there is no experience, and without experience, there is nothing to be aware of except awareness itself.^{xcii} So that leaves us with ever-changing, fluxing sets of evolving attributes, ever-changing experience and awareness of that experience, i.e., change and consciousness, *thus experience and the perception of that experience* is the only part of the 'self' that *is* real. The *content* of experience is purely transitory, ever changing, and ever-manifesting into something new, a process providing new experience and new expansion of knowledge, wisdom and focus for each individual consciousness.

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