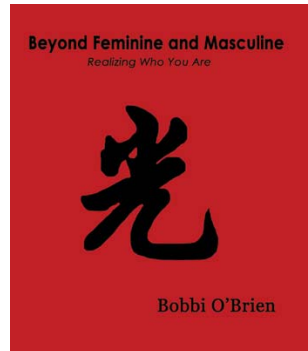


Beyond Feminine and Masculine

Realizing Who You Are



Bobbi O'Brien

Know the masculine,
keep to the feminine.

Know the active,
keep to the receptive.

-Tao Te Ching

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There is a light that shines beyond all things on earth,
beyond us all, beyond the heavens,
beyond the highest heavens.
This is the light that shines in our heart.

-The Chandogya Upanishad

Introduction

Self and story go together

When I was a young girl, my dad thought the devil followed him around everywhere he went. At Sunday Mass, he'd actually see the devil crawling on the Stations of the Cross. On the way home from Mass, the devil would be standing there blocking the road; and we'd have to back up fast to get away. I never saw the devil myself, but I saw the terror on my dad's face, and I felt it in my own body. All the while, my mother sat in the front seat of the car with a cigarette in one hand and a rosary in the other, praying to the Blessed Virgin Mary to deliver us from evil.

When I was fourteen years old, my mother almost died. She hemorrhaged on the delivery table giving birth to her sixth child. She said she went to heaven and talked to the Blessed Virgin Mary. She asked Mary if she could please come back and raise her kids. She woke up on the delivery table. The doctors then gave her the wrong kind of blood, and she almost died again. Months earlier, I had overheard my grandmother tell my mother she was going to die for sure with this baby because she had almost died with the last one. My family was already in trouble; sometimes we didn't have anything to eat or any money. I thought things would just get worse if Mom died.

As a good Catholic did back then, I went to confession and talked to the priest about how my dad was acting. The priest was quiet for a long time, and then he said, "It 's God's will that His children multiply and that the Father be obeyed." He said I should pray for guidance. My mother already had that covered; she prayed day and night. She is the only person I've ever known who smoked, ate, and prayed at the same time. She went through two packs of Pall Malls a day and five novenas. Mom's near death made my Dad wild and even crazier; he thought that the pope and the doctors were plotting against him. He started building a perpetual motion

machine that he said was going to make us all rich, and then we could “get the hell away from these ‘sonsa bitches’!”

When I was fifteen years old, my dad got into a fight with his mother in the kitchen. She’d asked him if he was crazy. So, he put her against a wall and started choking her. My mom grabbed a huge iron skillet and hit him in the head with it. They took him to the Veteran’s Hospital, where they diagnosed him as paranoid schizophrenic and gave him nine shock treatments. He said the treatments lifted him a foot off the table and made him foam at the mouth. When he “got better,” we went to see him at the VA. He came running across the lawn, threw his arms around my neck, and whispered, “You have to save me - you are the only one who can.” I took this very seriously and for seven years threw myself into the abyss of his sickness. It didn’t help.

By this time I had figured out that the priests and the doctors didn’t know what they were doing any more than my Dad did. Everybody—priests, doctors, grown-ups—was making it up as they went along, just like him. When Dad eventually came home, he said he was never going back to the hospital. He never mentioned the devil again, but I know he still saw him sometimes because I’d see the terror on his face. Dad didn’t make up the story about the devil. We were both told that story during our religious training. As a little kid I was terrified as much by the story of the devil and burning in hell for all eternity as my Dad was.

My Dad was very intelligent, but the stories he believed made his illness worse. He had a great sense of humor and an insatiable curiosity about the universe. He didn’t watch football. He thought it was too rough. Instead he read *Popular sMechanic* and taught me a lot of weird science. We’d watch *Twilight Zone* and *Outer Limits*. We’d listen to Bob Newhart’s *The Buttoned Down Mind* and stuff by Jonathan Winters. We’d watch Laurel and Hardy and laugh so hard we’d get tears in our eyes. When he talked about electro-magnetism and how everything in the universe is connected to everything else, that story seemed true.

My mother taught me about religion: she really bought into it. She told me to believe in the Blessed Virgin Mary, Jesus, and the mystery of the Holy Trinity. She taught me to obey the nuns and the priests the way she did. It turns out that my mother’s near death experience with the BVM is pretty common, but no one knows why. She told me the story about her near death experience when I was only fifteen years old. I remember being terrified that she was going crazy too. It made my mother even more devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In fourth grade I started school at the Basilica of Saint Mary. In the church, the Blessed Virgin Mary stood on top of the sacristy with her hands outstretched like she was holding up the whole world. I really liked her. She seemed powerful without being threatening. I liked to go there sometimes when the church was quiet and just hang out; it seemed sacred to me. The feeling of benevolent, loving presence that the Blessed Virgin Mary represented is what helped me to become my own “good enough mother” in later life. My mother taught me that.

Self and story are inseparable, and as children, we believe the stories we are told. My mom told me stories about religion, and my dad told me stories about science. Between the two of them, I was a very conflicted kid. It seemed to me they were both a little bit right. I began a lifelong search for truth and healthier stories.

Why we believe what we believe

After many years I became a psychologist because I found that the only real transformation is in the individual. During my studies, I discovered that humans are pattern makers and story tellers. It's how our brains work. We make meaningful patterns, images, and stories from the sensory information received by our nervous system and then construct a sense of self and a world story. We learn how to do this by listening and watching our attachment figures, mostly our parents. It is our attachment figures that show us how to perceive the world and understand the sensations coming into our bodies. These learned patterns of meaning are what help us make sense of the world, tell us who we are, what we must do. We live our lives based on stories, beliefs, and assumptions that can't be proved.

When I was younger, I was ashamed of my family because I thought we were the only family with problems. As I got older and spent time in other households, I saw dads getting drunk and beating up their wives and acting crazy like my dad. Sometimes it was the mom that acted crazy. One of our neighbors thought she was a butterfly and would float down the alley at night flapping her arms. I'm not sure if that made me feel better, but I started seeing a pattern that later in life became too evident to ignore. I began to study psychology because I wanted to understand my dad. I also wanted to understand why people think, feel, and behave the way they do.

I found that we all hold up our world with our stories. In high school, a friend of mine had a family that

was as poor as mine and whose stepfather drank too much. Rebecca's first memory was of her mother telling

her that her real father had died and that now they were poor, but that it was a temporary situation. Rebecca was to work hard and prepare herself for when her "ship came in." She was told that money and success are all that matters. In later life, Rebecca became successful, not because her ship came in, but because she *thought* it would-she created her own success. This is the power that stories have to frame who we are and what we think we are capable of doing in the world. Our stories form expectations about the future based on past experiences and our learned belief system.

The pathology of normalcy

You have to be very careful when you are dealing with someone's stories and sense of reality. I spent many hours listening to the stories of my clients and helping them reframe their lives with healthier stories. We would unpack their stories and look for false assumptions and beliefs, things that no longer worked or never really worked at all. This has to be a gentle process because self and world are embedded in these stories. I found a similar pattern in all of the stories I heard and began to search for cultural stories and beliefs that make us sick.

I've discovered that the stories we tell ourselves can blur our vision, keep our perspective small, and limit our sense of who we are and where we belong in the universe. Our stories can prevent us from realizing our intentions without our even being aware of it because our program keeps us reacting to the present based on the past. We form expectations about the future based on the stories we believe.

I found that new stories have the power to reframe reality and open us to new possibilities. To expand our ideas about what is possible, we must not ignore or repress our old stories because that will sabotage our efforts to think positively and realize our full potential as human beings. In therapy, my goal is to help my clients deconstruct their stories. This way they can gain freedom from the limited and destructive aspects of their program, both familial and cultural, that are causing them suffering and preventing psychological growth

I think our culture is in chaos because our stories no longer have any meaning or real purpose for most people. This creates cognitive dissonance-a conflict in thinking. As soon as people find out I am a psychologist, they want to know why everyone is acting so crazy. I'm not the only one who sees the problem.

About this book

As part of the therapeutic process, I often recommend books about psychological growth and spiritual development to my clients; many would complain that they could not get through them. When reading a book about mindfulness meditation, one woman said, "This book is so dry a buzzard couldn't swallow it."

There are a lot of books about self-help, psychological theory, and spiritual development, yet I can't find any that show how the process works in real life. Because I believe that the most important revolution is the evolution of consciousness, and people need down-to-earth examples of the realization process, I decided to write a book about it myself. I've tried to keep the psychological jargon down and give clear and plain examples from books, films, my own stories, and the stories of my clients. I hope this makes the book more readable and understandable. I had a teacher who said that if you can't explain it in simple terms, you don't understand it yourself. To avoid possible confusion, I've used definitions at the beginning of each chapter and restated the main ideas at the end of each chapter. I've tried to use simple terms wherever possible that illustrate the ideas, and I've included humor because I think it is the best defense against narcissism.

I've made myself vulnerable in the hope that you will find the courage to do the same. To be vulnerable is to be open to experience; unity is impossible without it. Working with my clients has made me see how important we are to each other. Often they've said exactly what I needed to hear at that moment. It has been a humbling experience to realize how much I needed them - the gift of their being - for my own growth. Their struggles have been a great inspiration to me. I would often say to my clients, as the Zen monk said to his dying master, "Thank you for your great effort."

2

The Hero Myth - How we evolve

Better is one's own dharma imperfectly performed
than the dharma of another performed to perfection.

- Bhagavad Gita

Definitions:

- ❖ Dharma – suchness, spirit, character
- ❖ Identification – the sense of self achieved through programming and introjection
- ❖ Introjection – taking into the sense of self a part of someone else and making it part of your self
- ❖ Cultural conditioning – the socialization process, learning how to perceive the world, becoming the culturally defined self, becoming programmed
- ❖ Pathologizing – using patterns of thought and action that make us and keep us unhealthy
- ❖ Dialectical reasoning – reasoning using continual synthesis of all known aspects
- ❖ Realizing – accomplishment, production, creation, knowing, understanding

Groundhog Day: evolving through the stages of self

To help my clients understand the realizing process and to give them a down-to-earth vision image of the evolution of the Realizing Self, I recommend that they see the film *Groundhog Day*. It is an excellent example because it shows the main character, Phil, played by Bill Murray, evolving through the four main stages of the sense of self and growing to the Realizing Self.

Self and story go together

Joseph Campbell describes the hero myth as having three stages:

- 1 The hero finds himself in an unknown, unnatural region.
- 2 The hero grows through a series of lessons that awaken new aspects of self.
- 3 The hero gives his new insights and gifts to the larger community.

Phil, our hero, finds himself in an unnatural region doomed to repeat the same day, Groundhog Day, over and over. He never finds out why this is happening; he knows only that each day unfolds exactly the same as the one before; nothing changes, and only he is aware of this. (One insightful client said, "If I don't change my point of view, every day is the same for me too.") We watch Phil struggle through a series of lessons that progressively teach higher levels of understanding and ability until he reaches the Realizing Self. We need to understand something about these stages in order to recognize them as they occur in the film.

The stages of the self are

- 1 The Impulsive Self
- 2 The Opportunistic Self
- 3 The Socialized Self
- 4 The Realizing Self.

The sense of self and worldview cannot be separated. How we see the world is how we see the self, and vice versa. But to truly understand the sense of self, we must also understand how the self unfolds, with both cognitive and moral components.

Several important theorists have illuminated these components and how they are related. Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist, and his wife, Valentine Chatenay, found that cognitive ability unfolds in stages as the brain/body matures, and that individuals explain self and world differently depending on level of cognitive development. Lawrence Kohlberg built on the work of Piaget and Chatenay and showed how moral development can reach higher stages only as cognitive development matures because higher moral development requires the ability to apply abstract, universal principles.

The four cognitive stages (Piaget and Chatenay)

1 Sensor motor: 0-24 months

The child is symbiotically fused with the mother. Begins to develop a sense of self around the physical body at about eighteen months.

2 Pre-operational: 24 months-6 years

The self is identified with the body and controlled by urges and impulses. Cannot take perspective of another.

3 Concrete Operational: 7-11 years

The self is now able to take the perspective or point of view of another and therefore the sense of self is able to identify with roles and rules of the culture.

4 Formal Operational: 12 -15 years

The self is capable of abstract thought, of seeing many possibilities, of systematic problem-solving, of thinking about thinking (meta-cognition), and of taking perspectives. The sense of self widens.

The six stages of moral development (Kohlberg)

Lawrence Kohlberg posits three moral development levels, each of which has two stages. The first five moral stages proceed in sequence based on Piaget-Chatenay's cognitive stages 2, 3, and 4 as "initiators" of each moral level. (There can be no moral development until the sense of self is established, beginning at Piaget's Stage 2.) The sixth moral stage does not correspond to anything in Piaget's work - it is based on Kohlberg's own

research. Each of Kohlberg's stages is considered to be more adequate in responding to moral questions than its predecessor.

Level A – Pre-conventional

Morality is based on avoiding punishment: the power and authority of, and obedience to, others: Possible at the pre-operational cognitive stage (ages 2-6). Characteristic of the "impulsive self."

Stage 1A. Punishment-obedience. Consequence determines what is good; getting caught is bad.

Stage 2A. Self-interest. Tit for tat, you do for me, I do for you.

Level B - Conventional

Morality based on conformity and loyalty to the group's roles and rules. Attainment of this level depends upon arrival at the concrete operational level of cognitive development (ages 7-11). Typifies school children, adolescents, and many adults. Characteristic of the "opportunistic self."

Stage 3B. Good boy/nice girl. Good is what pleases or helps others; morality as approval from others.

Stage 4B. Law and order. Duty, respect for authority figures, and social order.

Level C – Post-conventional

Morality is value oriented at this level; values go beyond the group or the culture and include all of humanity. This is the "socialized self." The socialized self internalizes the cultural values and sees the common good as important. The formal operational reasoning that enables this level is possible by age twelve to fifteen.

Stage 5C. The social contract. It is utilitarian, seeing usefulness of restricting behavior for the common good and society's needs. Moral development must evolve to at least this stage before we can become motivated by universal principles. This stage of the socialized self represents the beginning of being needs and enlightened self-interest, on the way to the "Realizing Self." If the "hero's" intellect and values have not developed to this stage, all attempts at realizing will have a narcissistic element.

Stage 6C. Principled conscience. Universal ethical principles are self-chosen, recognizing justice and equality for all human beings, reciprocity: Coincides with Kant's categorical imperative: "Act only according to that which you can will to become a universal law." Morality is based on the realization of the law of interconnectivity. We could call this sixth stage "post-formal operational." The cognitive development that makes this stage possible may be reached by age twenty-five. However, fewer than 2 percent of the population achieve the moral development of the Realizing Self, even though the potential is there.

Most adults have gone beyond the moral level of 1A and 2A, but unfortunately, many have not evolved to the stage of the social contract. Some have even regressed to the impulsive, pre-conventional view of self and world. Note that Stages 3B and 4B represent important values. Many people lament the loss of social stigma for rude behavior. The approval of others and respect for authority seem to be unimportant to many people, and so disrespectful, undignified behavior such as road rage is the order of the day. However, since both of these stages are based on externally derived values (approval and authority), they do not, in my opinion, represent true morality, because they are based only on avoidance of punishment or reward-seeking.

I believe this failure to develop happens because our old cultural myths are so pathologizing (especially to the psychosexual line of development) that many of us are stuck at a low level of cognitive and moral development. There is a scene in the movie, *Oh Brother Where Art Thou*, in which George Clooney's character says, "I thought I would lead since I am the only one capable of abstract thought." If we are to become self-realizing, conscious choosers, we must be capable of abstract (formal operational and post-formal operational) thought.

The following table summarizes the correspondences of the four self-stages with cognitive and moral development.

The four stages of self

<u>Self</u>	<u>Cognitive Development</u>	<u>Moral Development</u>
Impulsive	pre-operational (age 2-6)	reward/punishment (pre-conventional)
Opportunistic	concrete operational (age 7-11)	approval/law and order (conventional)
Socialized	formal-operational (age 12+)	social contract (post-conventional)
Realizing	post formal-operational (25+)	universal principles (post-conventional)

Love myself? I don't even like myself

Now that we have some idea of the four stages and their corresponding levels of cognitive and moral development, we can return to the hero myth and our hero, Phil.

Phil Connor is a weatherman who is stuck in a time warp, repeating Groundhog Day, the darkest, coldest part of winter, over and over again in a town he hates. (In Nordic myths hell is ice cold.) Every morning he wakes up at 6:00 a. m. to Sonny and Cher singing "I Got You Babe" on the radio. He is convinced there is something wrong with his brain, and he has his head examined, but finds nothing is wrong. At first he is annoyed, then terrified.

On the first Groundhog Day, he is sent to Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, to report on whether or not the groundhog sees his shadow. If he does, this means six more weeks of winter. Some of the townspeople make a big joke of the fact that the groundhog's name is Phil also. They ask Phil Connor if he is there to find his shadow. On this first day, we see that he is a smartass. He mocks the entire event, refers to the townspeople as stupid hicks, and ridicules everyone he meets. His speech summing up the event is petty and cruel. His treatment of others is rude, condescending, and insulting. He is unconsciously casting his Shadow (the unaccepted parts of himself) onto the world around him. The cameraman, Larry, calls him a prima donna. Phil's only interest outside of himself is his attraction to Rita, the producer of the TV show. He is a good example of the narcissist. Phil is pleasure-driven and egocentric, incapable of seeing others as equal to himself. He is object-directed and sees others as objects of usefulness to be manipulated for his own gain. He has no problem dominating people whom

he perceives as “less” than him. His behavior is only civil enough to get what he wants.

One day, he is drinking at a bowling alley with two guys named Gus and Ralph. He asks them, “What would you do if you were stuck in the same place and each day was the same and nothing you did meant anything?” Ralph says, “That pretty much sums it up for me.” They all get drunk. Later, Phil asks, “What would you do if there were no tomorrow?” Gus says, “That would mean there is no consequence, we could do what we want.” Phil realizes that’s true. He says, “It’s always the same thing: Clean up your room. Stand up straight. Pick up your feet. Be nice to your sister. Take it like a man. Well, I’m not going to live by their rules anymore. You make choices and you live with them.” When he realizes there will be no punishment for anything he does, he immediately begins to speed, gets chased by the cops, and faces down a train on the railroad tracks. The cops finally catch him and when the cop comes to his window, Phil rolls it down and orders three cheeseburgers, two large fries, two chocolate malts and a coke. He gets thrown in jail. The next morning he wakes up in bed at 6:00 a. m. to Sonny and Cher singing, “I Got You Babe,” and he knows he can do whatever he wants.

The Impulsive Self – I’m not going to live by their rules

As soon as Phil realizes there will be no consequence for his actions, he makes the choice to take what he wants regardless of the pain he causes to others. To the sociopath, the only behavior restraint is fear of punishment from an external source: what you do is only bad if you get caught. With all consequence removed, Phil proceeds to drink, eat, smoke, and engage in every fantasy he has. He robs a Brink’s truck, buys a new car with the money, and beds every woman around. He even dresses up like Clint Eastwood for the showing of *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly* and drives to the movie in a stolen Cadillac.

At this stage, the Impulsive Self, cognitive development is pre-operational: that of a two to six-year-old, and moral development is at the lowest level, centered on pleasure/pain and reward/punishment, very much like the actions of a rat in a maze.

One day in a cafe, Rita watches him smoke, eat, and pour coffee down his throat right from the pot. He tries to explain to her that he can do what he wants because every day is the same. He doesn’t even have to floss. She doesn’t believe him and quotes Sir Walter Scott: “The wretch, con-centered on self, shall go down unwept, un-honored and unsung.”

Phil replies: “Oh, I thought that was Willard Scott. I suppose you think I’m egocentric?” She says, “Egocentric is your defining characteristic.” Without any external authority to punish him and no internal moral development, he is a narcissistic sociopath, totally acting on whatever urge comes to his mind.

After a while, we don’t know how long, things get to be too predictable and boring. Without consequence, the main drive to growth is an unsatisfactory environment, and so Phil begins to long for a more satisfactory reward. That would be Rita. He has been successful in getting other women using his technique of learning about them and then pretending to know them the “next” day. He does this for his own pleasure, with no concern for the women. He decides to use this ploy to get Rita into bed. Now he consciously plays a role and pretends to follow her rules to get what he wants. He is object-directed and other-directed toward a specific other/object; not just any woman, but *this* woman. He uses planning, insight, and discrimination to achieve his goal.

The Opportunistic Self – playing a role to get what you want

This is the beginning of the Opportunistic Self. Phil is playing a role and following rules that are external to him to attain a specific reward, rather than acting on impulse. He now recognizes preferences and wants, not just needs. The focus is on the preferred reward rather than just avoiding punishment. The moral development is “tit for tat” (“I’ll give you what you want and you give me what I want,”) which is a step up from just taking what you want. (This level is very common in the world of business.) The cognitive development is concrete operational (you can take the perspective of another, see things the way they do), which appears between the ages of six to ten years. Phil is operating on the concrete world for a specific reason and he is now willing to alter his behavior to get the reward he seeks. This is the dangerous sociopath, capable of understanding the needs and wants of others and mimicking the required behavior but with no real bonding, no emotional concern for the other. Cognitive development is at age seven to eleven.

Phil asks Rita to describe her perfect guy. She says, “He is humble, intelligent, supportive, funny, romantic, courageous, kind, sensitive, gentle, not afraid to cry in front of me, plays an instrument, loves his mother, and is willing to change poopy diapers.” Phil says, “Does he have to use the word ‘poopy’?” Phil begins to act “as if” he has those qualities. Each day, he pretends to like what she likes so she will like him. This is not

real introjection of socialization, although it can appear to be; he is pretending to be good, not unlike a child in grade school. Still, he does like Rita in a way he did not care for the other women. The first time he saw Rita, he was attracted to her, and now he finds her to be the most attractive and the most desirable woman around. She possesses all of the feminine qualities that he has in his psyche, but has denied expression of. This is the basis of romantic love: finding union with the unexpressed and denied half of one's own self. Phil is identified with his needs and preferences and is willing to control his impulses to get what he wants. Rita represents Phil's repressed feminine side. She is kind, compassionate, gentle, and thoughtful; because of this she realizes that he is being false with her and rejects him no matter how well he plays the role. He begins to understand that playing at being what she wants is not going to work. In one scene she accuses him of loving only himself. He says, "Love myself? I don't even like myself." Self-centeredness actually comes from feeling empty; there is no self-love, only defensiveness and self-indulgence. Only when you love yourself are you able to truly love others.

Thus begins Phil's adolescent crisis. Like many teenagers, Phil sees his world as cold and gray; he sees that he is false, playing a role just like the other hypocrites. He kidnaps Phil the groundhog, his Shadow, and tries to kill them both in an attempt to end his misery. He drives off a cliff and the car bursts into flames. The next morning he wakes up to Sonny and Cher singing "I Got You Babe." After many failed attempts at suicide-stepping in front of a truck, jumping off a building, tossing a toaster in the bath tub (a great example of the neurotic doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results) - he realizes this won't work either. He says to Rita, "I am a god. I know everything that's going to happen. I am not THE God, I am A god." She thinks he is crazy, but his sadness affects her, and she agrees to spend the day with him. He takes her to his room and shows her how to toss cards into a hat. He is a master at this trick. She asks how long it takes to perfect it. He informs her it takes four hours of practice a day for six months. She asks "Is this what you do with eternity?"

She tells him that maybe his predicament is not a curse; maybe it is an opportunity for growth for its own sake. Her realization saves him. There is a strong correlation between willingness to change and change itself. The motive for change is now internally derived. He no longer wants to be false with her to take advantage of her since to him she represents all that is true and good. Now he loves her without needing to get what he wants.

The Socialized Self – connection and service to others

This is the Socialized Self and the beginning of the Realizing Self: growth for its own sake. This is the highest level of development for most people. Phil is now capable of taking many perspectives because he can operate on his own thoughts. This is formal operational thought; it appears usually between the ages of eleven to seventeen, if at all. The moral development is rational and conscientious. He can include the needs and preferences of others who are like him; the social contract is introjected. The social values are introjected when they are lived in a true way because one is identified with them. Phil is now less egocentric. (All growth involves giving up the egocentric position. In Zen they say you must empty the cup before you can fill it.) He chooses to limit some of his self-centered actions for the good of all, connection with and service to others (being needs) are important to him for the first time. Phil is ethnocentric because he can only identify with and value others like him. The socialization process is successful when the man wants to be what he must be according to his culture's needs. He is a good soldier, provider, and protector - whatever his culture demands. Phil is seeing and changing consciously, making conscious choices. He gives all of his money to a homeless man he had previously ignored. He brings coffee to Larry, the cameraman whom he had mocked earlier, because he thought he was better than Larry. He works at developing his talents. He learns to play the piano, ice sculpt, and enjoy poetry - all those things he pretended to like and acted "as if" he did like to get Rita. (This is the value of acting "as if"; often you learn something about what you want and value.) He is identified with social roles, ideals, and values.

He is content until he notices the suffering of others. True empathy is again possible at this level. The homeless man to whom he had given his money, dies. At this stage Phil believes in infinite possibilities. He believes that if he is good enough and smart enough, nothing bad can happen and that he can fix anything. Yet no matter what he does or how hard he tries, the homeless man dies. Over and over, day after day, he dies, and Phil suffers. Phil even becomes a doctor in order to save him. We see the anguish on Phil's face as he realizes he must give up this last vestige of magical thinking. His actions are not always effective. He is not omnipotent. He cannot defeat death. Finally, he learns to accept fate, the inevitable mystery of life as it is, not as he would have it be.

The Realizing Self – I couldn't imagine a better fate

The next morning he wakes to “I Got You Babe.” He goes to the groundhog ceremony where Phil sees his shadow. This time Phil Connor gives a different speech: “When Chekhov saw the long winter, he saw a winter bleak and dark and bereft of hope. Yet we know that winter is just another step in the cycle of life. But standing here among the people of Punxsutawney and basking in the warmth of their hearths and hearts, I couldn't imagine a better fate than a long and lustrous winter.”

This is the *Realizing Self*. Cognitive development is global and dialectical. It includes everything that is there, denies nothing and arrives at truth by seeing and going beyond contradictions. This level appears around the age of twenty-five, if at all. Moral development is empathic and universal, is based on internally derived values, and includes universal justice and care for all. This is love: veritas, love of truth; and caritas, love of others. This level is very realistic and sees things undistorted by the wishes and wants of the egocentric self. (The egocentric response to reality is suffering.) The Realizing Self is also pragmatic and understands interconnectivity: everything I do to you, I do to myself. *The vast majority of people do not evolve to this stage.*

Rita now finds Phil simply irresistible. She invites him for coffee, but he says he needs to run some errands first. We see him running to catch a little boy falling from a tree. “You little brat,” he says, “you've never once thanked me. See you tomorrow - maybe.” (This life he can save.) He changes a flat tire for three ladies and saves a man from choking to death on a chunk of meat. He goes about every day doing what he can to help without expectation of reward. No one will ever know that he does this, yet he embraces a life of service to others for its own sake because he knows it is a good thing to do and because it pleases him.

Later, at a party, we find Phil playing piano, talking with others, and greatly enjoying himself. He displays all of the good qualities of each stage; he is playful and spontaneous as the Impulsive Self can be; insightful and discriminating as the Opportunistic Self can be; dutiful, respectful, sociable, and honorable as the Socialized Self can be. He is present, poised, and relaxed. He is grounded in his body and at home in the world. He now has integrity because he has no egocentric or hidden agenda. He is genuine, humble, loving, kind, funny, and creative. He is irresistible to everyone and to us because he is real. He is the Realizing Self. Rita buys him in a date auction with every dime she has. She sees that he has all of the qualities she finds so attractive, plus much

more. On the date, he does an ice sculpture of her face. "I could have done this with my eyes closed," he says. He sees her and knows her and himself so completely. All parts of himself are integrated, including his Shadow aspects and the feminine aspects of his psyche. He sees himself in her face. He tells her, "No matter what happens, I'm happy now because I love you." (He is capable of loving.) He has learned to appreciate and love this moment, now. The next morning he wakes up in bed with Rita. "This is different. Anything different is good." He no longer needs a predictable, controllable, and limiting environment in which to live. He is not driven by the patterns of the past or the worries of the future. The days can unfold again because he has "defragged" his program. He is no longer living in the past. He is present-centered, not reacting from his programmed fear, and so each moment can be enjoyed in all its beauty, complexity, and unpredictability. He has accepted himself and the mystery of life. Phil is an ordinary man doing ordinary things. What makes him extraordinary is his mindset. His compassion accepts things as they are, and his wisdom understands that he is a unique expression of a larger mystery; this grounds him in the universal principles. He knows his life is about him, but it isn't just about him. He has let go of his narcissism, and he is who he is. He is not perfect; perfection is a trap set by the programmed self, and it keeps us feeling inadequate no matter how hard we work. He is not going to be canonized anytime soon. Phil is content with himself while he continues to grow. He knows that his dharma, though imperfectly performed, is better than the dharma of another performed to perfection. He is a vision image of the Realizing Self. The goals of the Realizing Self are wholeness, harmony, autonomy, and unity with others. These are now Phil's goals.

Important Ideas:

- ❖ The four stages of self are explained.
- ❖ Three stages of myth: hero in unknown region encounters series of lessons that awakens new self; hero gives his insights and gifts to larger community.
- ❖ Stages of self: impulsive, opportunistic, socialized, and realizing.
- ❖ Four stages of self correspond to the stages of cognitive development.
- ❖ Four stages relate to the six stages of moral development.
- ❖ Cognitive development of the Impulsive Self is pre-operational; the moral development is centered on reward and punishment.
- ❖ Cognitive development of the Opportunistic Self is concrete operational; the moral development is based on approval and law and order.
- ❖ Cognitive development of the Socialized Self is formal operational; the moral development is based on law and order and the social contract in the later stages.
- ❖ Cognitive development of the Realizing Self is post-formal operational; moral development is based on empathy, universal principles, and the law of interconnectivity.

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