

## Self-observation

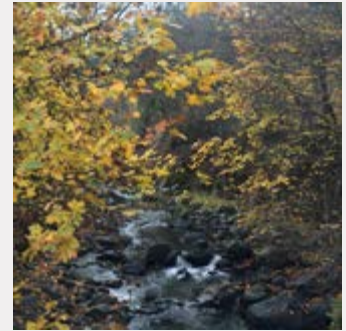
Let's start with the basic fact that most of us, most of the time, are not very aware.

This is why we find ourselves easily blind-sided, or caught in repeating patterns of thought and behavior.

My initial training was in the Gurdjieff tradition, and one of the most important aspects of the teaching was the need to realize how asleep we actually are. But knowing this intellectually does not help very much—we have to see the magnitude and extent of this within ourselves as an experiential reality. And, as Gurdjieff taught, one of the most essential tools for seeing how asleep we are, as well as helping us be more awake, is the practice of self-observation.

The practice of self-observation is intended to help close that gap between what's actually going on and what we're aware of. But it's important to note that self-observation is often misunderstood. It is not like introspection, where we can simply wander in the mazes of the mind. Nor is it the same as self-absorption. Self-absorption is self-preoccupation, where you're concerned about yourself, worried about yourself.

To understand the art of self-observation requires understanding a few basic points. First, the subject of self-observation is with the "what" of who you are—you're not concerned with the "why" of self-analysis. This starts with the objective observation of



### October Sesshin

Although the October sesshin is full, feel free to side sit whenever you can.

### December Sesshin

The sign-up date for the December Sesshin is October 9. If you can't attend the whole sesshin you can apply for the first or last three days. If you are coming from out of town, consider staying for the annual New Year's brunch on January 1, 2018.

## Announcements

### Sesshin Application

Click [here](#) to see this newsletter online.

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self-observation is  
always "now."*

thoughts, where we would notice our patterns of thinking, like planning, fantasizing, worrying, and so forth. But the subject of observation is equally on the physical body. Some specific areas for self-observation, which you may not ordinarily observe, are: bodily posture, gestures, movement, and facial expression.

Second, the time for self-observation is always “now.” Self-observation is not about free association, or memories of other experiences triggered by this moment. Nor is it recollection. It’s confined to what’s actually going on within the space of the present moment.

And third, the attitude is non-judgmental. Any “should” or “ought” will take us out of the mode of self-observation immediately. We have to remember to bring the attitude of kindness, or else the practice can become grim.

One of the primary benefits of practicing self-observation is that it fosters a more focused and powerful attentiveness within us. As Gurdjieff once said, “The chief feature of the ego is that when we’re caught in the ego we’re never here.” So self-observation is, in part, about strengthening the power of our attention in the present moment, so that we are, in fact, actually here.

As you practice self-observation, you might want to try, as I mentioned earlier, focusing on the following areas: posture, gestures, movement, and facial expression. For example, become aware of your facial expression right now. Don’t try to change it—just feel around the mouth. Notice any tightness. Feel around the eyes. Is there any contraction? Bring awareness to the forehead. Is there any tension? Notice if there is any surprise by what your facial expression actually feels like.

Why is observing these areas important? Remember that physical mannerisms and our habitual emotional attitudes are often closely intertwined, and as you observe yourself and see

the connections, it can be very helpful in avoiding the energy leaks that come from unconscious or mechanical behavior.

For example, if we observe that we're irritated, and then observe and feel the facial expression that goes along with our irritation, we may be able to more quickly step out of the patterns that drag us back to our familiar home of being a Me.

To experiment with this, when you catch yourself in the grip of an emotional reaction, such as irritation, anxiety, self-importance, or resistance—the instruction is to pause, and bring your attention to a specific bodily posture or gesture or facial expression involved in manifesting this emotion. Then deliberately relax this gesture or expression and see what happens next.

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Here's another interesting and useful practice: As you engage in normal tasks throughout the day, like walking, eating, working, and so on—self-observation can be enhanced by doing an accompanying "inner task."

For example, you can use your opposite hand to eat, or listen to the sound your work makes, or deliberately vary the tempo of whatever you're doing—going faster or slower—anything to get you out of your habitual patterns. This also may generate a more spacious and even playful kind of attention.

One of the troubles with us is that we're often busy trying to fix ourselves before we even know ourselves. It rarely strikes us that we don't need to be fixed. We really don't. This can be a great illumination. We simply need to observe ourselves—not fixing, not analyzing, not judging—just observing, and feeling. The point is: Let things change on their own. Let awareness heal.

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One other interesting practice from Gurdjieff, which may help you in observing yourself, is called: “Learning to bear the unpleasant manifestations of another.”

Most likely you know someone who really bugs you. It can be something they do, the way they speak, or anything that pushes your individual buttons and makes you irritated. The practice is to intentionally allow yourself to be in situations where your reactions will be triggered.

Then see if you can consciously observe your reaction, and—and this part is very important—feel it without feeding it. Ideally you would observe your facial expression and your posture, as well as your inner sensations. Most of our reactions have little to do with the other person anyway—they’re more about our own expectations, projections and conditioning. To be able to see this is the first step in becoming free.

Right now consider someone who might trigger you. And the next time you’re around this person, try to remember to work with this. This could be interesting and even fun.

Self-observation is an essential part of our practice, and part of our work is to refine and expand how we use it. This practice not only shows us how asleep we are; at the same time it is a means to actually be more awake.

*Ezra Bayda*

