

Know Thy Self

A Guide to Recognizing the Essential Self

By Rawn Clark

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In Hermetics, like any other system of philosophy, we use a variety of terms which may or may not be used commonly, without really defining the specific meaning we wish to convey with their use. Most often, we intend to communicate something more with them than their common, every day definitions would imply and it is assumed that you either already know what distinguishes their use from the ordinary meaning or, will figure it out. One such term is “self” and although it is true that if you are seriously pursuing the work of Franz Bardon’s *Initiation Into Hermetics*, you will eventually be led to an understanding of its Hermetic use, it is nonetheless *very* advantageous if you have prior knowledge and can recognize the essential Self from the outset. Clarifying what is truly meant to be communicated by this seemingly simple word in the *Hermetic* context, will be the subject of all that follows and, as usual, this will be an experiential journey, not just an intellectual one. ☺

Self is a very complex, multi-layered combination of factors whose definition varies depending upon one’s perspective. Nonetheless, we can define an essential, or core Self (with a capital ‘S’), from which all of these layers spring and to which, all of the various factors cling. Simply put, the essential Self is the *intentional* aspect of our overall awareness which is capable of *objective* perception and expression.

The words *intentional* and *objective* are important here because the essential Self is *always* intentional and objective. It is this quality that distinguishes it from the other aspects of human consciousness which make up the overall awareness.

Our overall or mundane awareness is a mixture of *intentional* and *unintentional* factors. The intentional aspect can be equated with the “conscious mind” and the unintentional aspect, with the “subconscious mind”. However, I do not particularly like these terms for Hermetic use since they do not really speak, in any practical way, to the true differences and connections between these factors, so I will abandon them and stick to “intentional” and “unintentional”. ☺

It is the intentional awareness that looks at an object and perceives its details; it is the unintentional awareness that simultaneously perceives everything else in the field of peripheral vision (outside of the intentional focus) and, normally, the unintentional awareness is what places all of these perceptions into personal, emotional context. The intentional awareness thinks things through before speaking; the unintentional awareness colors all of those thoughts by relating them to memories and emotional attitudes. The intentional awareness is spontaneous and “in the moment”; the unintentional awareness is habitual and always seeks to relate the present moment to past moments.

Of course, the intentional awareness is capable of reshaping the contents of the unintentional awareness and of thus intentionalizing those contents. This is essentially the process of character transformation described in Steps One and Two of *Initiation Into Hermetics*. Once the transformation of the unintentional awareness's subjectifying content is complete, it can then be used *objectively* by the intentional awareness in perception and expression. In other words, it becomes a *tool* of the essential Self instead of something that *obscures* the essential Self.

From here on, we will concern ourselves primarily with the intentional aspect of awareness since this is our route to understanding the essential Self.

The intentional awareness has a twin nature. It is both a perceiver and an expresser, either sequentially or simultaneously. It perceives its external environment and/or itself, and it expresses itself by transforming itself and/or its environment.

Perception is Watery and Magnetic. The perceiver is affected by the perception and in some way transformed by the experience. When we perceive something, we experience the *objective* effects that the object of perception exerts upon our senses and simultaneously, we experience the reaction to those effects generated by the *subjectifying* aspects of awareness. Perception places the perceiver into context with the universe.

Perception is physically, astrally and mentally nourishing. It exercises and stimulates our senses and thus energizes our bodies. It broadens our range of experience and causes us to grow and evolve.

Expression, on the other hand, is Fiery and Electric. Expression seeks to change the Universe so that it comes into context with us or in some way reflects our essence. In expression, we release and externalize our inner content. We then learn and grow by evaluating the success or failure of our expression and thus the contextual appropriateness of our expression evolves.

Expression itself is physically, astrally and mentally depleting. It drains us of energy as we externalize our inner content. However, we gain considerable nourishment in the process of perceiving the results of our expression and reaping the benefits when our expression has been successful -- so much so that this can far outweigh any depletion.

As I noted earlier, perception and expression can occur separately or simultaneously. It can be said that the emotional reaction we generate in response to perception is an action of the expressive awareness; and similarly, that we cannot express without simultaneously perceiving the effects of our expression. Like Fire and Water, Electric and Magnetic -- perception and expression are sides of the same coin.

Perception and expression occurs either in a subjective mode or an objective mode or, most usually, as a combination of these two modes.

Subjective mode is Earthy. It is all about personal context. For example, when we smell an aroma, we immediately associate it with a memory and an emotional valuation (good/bad/indifferent) and thus *interpret* the aroma in the context of our heretofore accumulated personal experience.

Objective mode on the other hand, is Airy and is all about distancing oneself from personal contextualization. Objective mode perceives the aroma as what *it* is instead of as how we *feel* about it or what memories we may have that relate to it.

Another example is the sensation of cold. In subjective mode, we suffer and shiver and experience cold as a thing to be avoided. In objective mode, we note the perception of cold and its effects upon our body but without an emotional valuation of good or bad -- it simply *is* – and we don't suffer, even if we are shivering. ☺

In the context of the expressive awareness, subjective mode is very emotive and personal. Conversely, objective mode is very dispassionate and impersonal expression – one which reflects a broader context than the purely personal. An angry tirade is an example of subjective mode expression and the Step Two mental exercises from *Initiation Into Hermetics* (where you are isolating each sense, even from the emotions, and using them creatively) is an example of objective mode expression.

With perception, objective mode is the most nourishing since it entails no creative subjectification and thus no expenditure of energy. Furthermore, objective perception is a much more holistic experience and more growth ensues.

With expression, subjective mode is the more nourishing since it exercises and stimulates the self-contextualizing and self-affirming aspects of the personality. Subjective mode expression is ultimately more holistic than objective expression.

By nature, the intentional awareness primarily perceives and expresses by focusing itself, either upon the object of perception or the receptacle of expression. It is also capable of rejecting focus entirely and entering a non-focal state of pure BEing, akin to Bardon's Step One emptiness of mind, but we will not dwell on that possibility just yet since it has little to do with the initial recognition of essential Self.

The intentional awareness can expand and contract its focus. It can limit its field of perception or expression to a single infinitely finite point or it can expand its field to encompass infinity itself, all by act of will or intention. It can hold just a singular focus or it can expand to engage many focal points simultaneously. In this regard, the intentional awareness is very fluid and adaptive, capable of adopting any shape or size it wishes.

The intentional awareness can also move its self-aware focus from one place to another. For example, it can focus itself within your right big toe and then relocate its focus to your left thumb. Similarly, it can project its self-aware focus from its normal anchoring in your own physical body, into an external object or person. It can focus upon the

contemplation of one idea and then engage another idea in the next moment. All of these are aspects of its motive power to relocate its self-aware focus.

As I stated earlier, our normal, mundane awareness manifests as a combination of intentional and unintentional factors. However, western society is generally built around encouraging the unintentional and subjective factors of awareness and inhibiting the intentional and objective factors. A good example of this is the invasive presence of commercial advertisements which manipulate the unintentional (“subconscious”), subjectifying awareness into purchasing brand ‘X’ because it will make you feel good, sexy, happy, etc. Unfortunately, this sort of consumption-based manipulation is present in nearly all aspects of western culture – we see it in politics, in the educational system, in medicine, science and religion, and so on. In the face of such overwhelming and intrinsic manipulation, most become used to living in the unintentional-subjective mode and have little inkling of the immensely powerful intentional-objective awareness that slumbers within.

Once recognized though, the intentional-objective awareness of the essential Self begins to permeate the whole of one’s existence and little by little, becomes the true seat of mundane awareness. This unleashing of the intentional-objective powers of the essential Self is the major portion of the early work of Hermetic initiation. In the very first exercises of Step One, the intentional-objective awareness is focused inwardly, upon the mind, the character and the body. Although it is nowhere stated that the student is immediately exercising their essential Self in this perceptual process of self-examination and self-discovery, it still has the effect of rending the first veil and setting in motion a self-revelatory process.

In Step Two, the veil is further rent through combining the expressive, creative power of the intentional-objective awareness with its perceptual powers. With the mental exercises, the student uses their expressive intentional-objective power as they work creatively with each of their senses in isolation, while simultaneously using their perceptual intentional-objective powers to perceive and evaluate their sensory creations. With the astral exercises, the student employs their intentional-objective creative power in the transformation of their character, while simultaneously exercising their intentional-objective perceptual powers in monitoring of the character’s habitual nature. And finally, with the physical exercises, the student uses their expressive intentional-objective powers to create desired states within their physical body, while simultaneously strengthening their perceptual intentional-objective power to experience and verify those states. All in all, the work of Step Two begins to shift the seat of awareness away from the unintentional-subjective and leads it firmly toward taking root in the intentional-objective.

Step Three firmly sets the seat of awareness to intentional-objective mode by training the intentional-objective awareness how to work *with* the intentional-subjective awareness. This is seen in the finalization of the character transformation in which the unintentional content that rules the subjectifying awareness, has been objectively intentionalized. This transforms the subjectifying character into an *objectively-intentional* creature that *expresses* the essential Self. The Step Three mental, astral and physical exercises also

effect the same unification of the objective and subjective powers of the intentional awareness by working with multi-sensorial creations that evoke subjective responses amidst objective expression.

If the work of Step Three has not successfully and permanently shifted the seat of normal awareness to that of the intentional-objective awareness of the essential Self, then the work of Step Four will be nearly impossible to accomplish. This is most notable when it comes to the mental “transplantation of consciousness” because **only** the intentional-objective awareness is capable of transferring its self-awareness from one place to another. Likewise with the astral exercises – **only** the intentional objective awareness is capable of truly connecting with the elements sufficient for their accumulation and **only** the intentional-objective awareness is capable of shifting its focus from one internal body part to another. And as many have discovered in working with the physical exercises of Step Four, **only** the intentional-objective awareness of the essential Self is capable of successfully and wisely wielding the expressive powers of the Elements without causing self-harm.

When Franz Bardon wrote *Initiation Into Hermetics*, the world was just at the beginning of the “commercial age” which has so drastically inhibited easy access to the intentional-objective awareness within western society. In his time, I imagine that pursuing the work of the Steps would have fairly rapidly unveiled the nature of the essential Self to the student. Today however, the situation is somewhat different and many are having difficulty with this point. It is, as I stated at the outset, my hope that the series of meditations and exercises which follow will help lead all those who are pursuing the work of IH, very rapidly to the recognition of their essential Self and thus make their progress that much easier and secure. ☺