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## *The Experience of Being Yourself*

The process of hospitality extends a particular invitation: “Welcome and make yourself at home so you may rest and be yourself.” In hospitality, you are offered space and time, a safe harbor, a sanctuary, a secure place, a home where you can find peace and at-homeness.

My intention, in this short essay, is to elucidate, through reflection, one aspect of the experience of hospitality by focusing on the phrase “being yourself.”

As you look to your everyday experience, you discover that you tend to take the experience of being yourself for granted. It is difficult to find helpful material on the *experience* of being yourself. You may discover a few references on *how to* be yourself, but the actual articulation of the *experience* of being yourself is unavailable.

What is being yourself all about? What does being yourself mean? What are the dimensions, qualities, and descriptors of being yourself?

In everyday life, people struggle to be themselves. We hear people saying that they went to a certain event and they felt they could not be themselves. We say that when we are with certain people, we just can’t be ourselves. At work, many people simply find themselves unable to be themselves. Others may say that they cannot “let their hair down,” that they need to be a certain way, need to be just so, that they are tense, hold back, or simply can’t relax.

Where do you find yourself able to be yourself? Many respond that it is

in situations where they feel safe, secure, comfortable, relaxed, and at home.

In everyday life experience, being yourself means that you are able to be true, real, authentic, genuine, and sincere. Whether it is a moment, a situation, an experience, a manner, or style, being yourself is being original, unique, individual, congenial, and confident with who you are. It has to do with depth, interiority, inwardness, self-possession, consciousness, and awareness. Being your true self means that you are consistent, coherent, and in harmony with your real self.

In being yourself, you are faithful, constant, persistent, willing, effective, and thus, loyal to who you are. Being natural, at ease, content, spontaneous, simple, and familiar are also parts of being yourself. It is a relaxed presence to reality.

To be yourself means that you allow yourself to unfold in that inner “something” that can free you to come to life as a unique person. In this state, you are comfortable letting down, surrendering, and allowing your complete individuality to arise easily and spontaneously. Here you are able to sing your song, dance your dance, and play your instrument.

From this stance of being yourself, you do not have to be cautious, careful, or self-conscious about who you are. Rather, you have the capacity to make choices. In being conscious and explicit in your choice making you become the origin, the crafter of your motives and initiatives. This means that you pay attention to the common ways of living as you try to be in accordance with your actual self, conforming to reality.

When you are living from your essential, true self, you are in possession of yourself. You feel competent, confident, self-reliant, and focused on taking up your reality in an open, single-minded, dedicated manner that is deliberate and intentional. The more you are able to patiently listen to, attend to, be present to, stay with, put a name to what you experience, you are assisted with being yourself and liking yourself.

In being self-possessed, you are able to stand alone, be upright, not self-conscious, less egotistical, with a healthy detachment that allows your life to flow, trust, and allow it all to happen. Being self-possessed allows more self-respect to unfold. You grow in appreciation of your true self and inner self. In respect, you bring to light the splendor of values hidden in yourself, in others, and in your surroundings. You are able to value yourself because you have been valued.

Being valued calls you to be yourself. In the process of being yourself, you continue to create and build a home in the world and feel at home in it. Having a stable and well-functioning ego, you are able to feel rooted, centered in your home, and this enables you to take up, take in, and live out your experience in a personal, unique, and original way.

From the perspective of being respectful toward yourself, you are able to detect the truth, beauty, and goodness of who you are. This is rooted in the spontaneous appreciation of your worth. Looking again, looking twice at yourself and others, paying benevolent attention to, and casting the good upon yourself and others make you more sensitive to any value in the other and yourself.

Self-respect cultivates personal dignity, a sense of natural pride in yourself. Being in harmony with yourself, feeling self-confident and competent, and having your feet planted firmly on the ground assist you with feeling contact with and being connected to your body's reality. Living in your body with dignity, you carry yourself, move and hold your body in such a manner that you feel that your being is good enough. Your bearing indicates that you are able to know your feelings in such a sensitive manner as to inspire and command respect. As your body is straight with your head held high, you are able to go slow, be stately, and have time to be and to feel. This dignified stance makes you fundamentally worthy of respect.

Other characteristics of being yourself and having a sense of self emerge

from a historical background of being loved, accepted, and approved. This affirmation enables you to be centered, grounded, and rooted where you are able to feel solid, secure, tranquil, balanced, connected, in contact with, and united with a sense of depth and inwardness. Comfortable with being who you are, you are able to surrender, have faith in, let go, and be open to simply being and living fully consciously in the present moment.

Being faithful to who you are, you are able to flow, to be free, to be playful with a child-like, innocent heart. In being yourself, you are free to be spontaneous, express yourself, to have pleasure and to be in harmony and at ease with what is around you. You feel an increased awareness, responsiveness, and sensitivity to your living; and this facilitates being more graceful, poised, dignified, graced, appreciative, patient, and self-possessed.

It must be established that being and becoming yourself is at first a struggle. In being yourself, you continue to establish the original connection with being alive, trying to find the truth of your being. In the struggle to be yourself, to be involved in full original living, you need to go back to your deepest origins and allow yourself to become your real, richly differentiated self. You need to align yourself with your process that emerges from your inside out. In doing this, you allow the unfolding of your original disposition that is already yours.

You need to be connected to your body and your personal unique makeup. Your glands, organs, and metabolism influence your mood, temperament, constitution, and feelings. The aliveness of your body is a function of its metabolism and motility. Your breathing greatly colors your felt level of aliveness, awareness, spontaneity, and health. The more you consciously inhabit and dwell in your body, the more alive you become. Aliveness is being full of a sense of being. As you take time out to breathe more deeply and fully, you reclaim, reconnect, and make more contact with your body. As you are closer to your body, you are able to recognize what you feel, want, and need. Grounded, stable, and coordinated, your body is able to be more aware of the limits of your innate, natural pace. Your body's

rhythm, intensity, pulls, and pressures inform you of the condition of your vital self, your unique fundamental makeup. Taking time out to breathe more deeply and feel, you are better able to be in touch with your bodily possibilities and limitations.

As you become more connected and aware of your bodily liveliness, you experience more energy, sensitivity, vibrancy, fullness, and pleasure. Your body may take on a glow, a radiance, a charm, and/or a refined naturalness of manner. Your sense of self deepens and expands as the aliveness in your body increases.

The more alive your body is, the more you are able to perceive reality. Being in contact with your body, you are able to vividly respond to yourself, others and the world around you. The aliveness of your body increases your capacity to feel and be aware. There is an intimate connection between breathing, moving, and feeling. The more you move, the more you deepen your breathing and, in turn, open up your access to your feelings. When you feel alive, vibrant, and good, you perceive the world more sharply and your expressions and responses are deeper and more spontaneous. As you feel and sense your body, you become more yourself.

Connected, related, attached, identified with, in touch with, belonging to your alive body, your true self emerges. Acceptance of and identification with your body and feelings fosters self-acceptance.

In this spirit of self-acceptance, you show yourself to be who you are. You accept what you are and who you are. Self-acceptance cultivates a comfort, an ease, a peace with who you are. You are able to take up yourself in a natural, effortless way. You do not have to direct energy willfully to be a certain way. You are free from care, labor, obligation, and constraint. You simply show up and be yourself.

This self-acceptance facilitates peace and comfort with your self. You have a sense of well-being along with ease. With the freedom from pressure,

strain, stiffness, constraint, and formality, you are able to accept yourself as you are. This assists you with being natural, spontaneous, content, tranquil, calm, serene, quiet, and restful.

Being yourself motivates you to be and become your real self. You are encouraged to rise up from your original source and allow others to love you. You feel a deep sense of complete acceptance. Through this love, you experience a sense of reception, acceptance, support, connection, and being raised up.

As you open yourself to and give yourself over to others, you receive them, admit them from the outside into the inside. In this reception, openness to your home, your inner self, you introduce them into this qualified area of intimate space. This reception requires a certain readiness for and disposition to make room for the other in yourself, to incorporate in yourself the other.

In welcoming the other into your space, your home, and yourself, you need to feel confident in being yourself, being in your own skin with self-reliance and autonomous conviction in yourself. In self-confidence, you are natural and lack fear. You find yourself centered and humble. From this humble perspective, you can be deliberate and realistic in appraising your assets, strengths, liabilities, and limitations. This allows you to assume more responsibility for yourself as you grow into your self-confidence. Your faith and trust in yourself is fostered by the other's welcome, warmth, care, protection, and discipline.

Being yourself is cultivated by having peace of mind. Only when you accept yourself as the limited, fragile creature that you are will you experience peace of mind. In this embracing of your distinct, unique limits of who you are, you will be free of any fear of life and grounded and rooted in your original source, the sense of the sacred that lies at the heart of all reality. From this still point, this inner contentment, you will experience a deep, settled calm that you can relax, rest, and feel satisfied as you simply allow your reality to happen and unfold.

Living with peace of mind opens up an access to a Presence. This appeal of this Presence invites you into a vulnerability, a permeability, an availability, a disposition to this Presence. Massaged by this Presence, you become receptive and acquire a readiness to respond to this sense of the Sacred, a genuine intimacy with this Presence.

In order to grow in relationship with this Presence it is important not to be focused on the future or bogged down by the past. You must be in the here and now. You need to be grounded in your body, the present and just *Be-ing*. Freed from the gravity of the past, you choose to live fully in the present moment with its meaning and pleasure of being part of the earth, nature, and being human. In recognizing and accepting your limits and who you are, you may experience an open-heartedness and the joy of being yourself.

From a Christian perspective, we are called to live in God's presence. God's presence is Presence itself. As you listen with your third ear, you hear in the stillness the call from your God to take up your gift and be yourself. As you give up your egoic self that you have created on your own, there seems to be more room to hear the voice of your deepest self that God calls you to be.

The Christian path invites you to find your true self, your most authentic self, and your daily reality. In your mundane activities of daily living, you are called to live in God's presence. In His presence, you are called to align yourself to His will for you. What matters is listening to the still small voice in the here and now that calls you to be yourself. As you continue to grow into being your genuine self, you hold yourself lightly, gently, and graciously.

The experience of being yourself is a process of being deeply and fully connected with your body and its vital dimension. It is an ongoing process of forming and shaping a stable and well-functioning ability to manage, control, make, design, plan, execute, achieve, and carry out your daily activities in an effortless and humble manner. Being yourself is living your life from your spirit

dimension, a place where you simply allow yourself to be who you are. Compassionately and tenderly, you hold yourself in the palms of your hands with awe, wonder, mystery, appreciation, acceptance, and gratitude.

Being yourself is a gift from all the people who have cultivated your self along the way, who have cared for you since the moment of your conception. The mystery of the unfolding of being able to be yourself calls forth in you a strong stirring that raises up your mind and heart to God proclaiming that the Good God is so very Good. He continues to call you to simply be yourself through the people, events, and things of your daily living.