

ESSENCES

In the Beginning is the Question: Who Are You?

It seems a simple enough question, doesn't it? No doubt you've been asked this question a thousand times in your life, so you ought to be pretty good at answering it by now. Or are you? If you're like most of us, you probably respond to this question by giving your name. But, with all due respect to your family heritage, your name says very little about you, and nothing at all about the unique human being that *you* are becoming.

Who Are You?

Believe it or not, this simple little question is the beginning of the greatest adventure of your life. No matter what you decide to do with your life, no matter how "successful" you become, finally, inevitably, your thoughts will lead you back to this one question and demand an answer:

Who Are You?

The great adventure of self-discovery begins in adolescence, for it is in these transitional years that you begin to sort out, and shape, and take responsibility for your own personalities. It's during adolescence that you discover you have your own identities, your own tastes, value systems, goals, fears. It's during adolescence that you discover how you're different from your parents, older sisters, even friends. (Discovering who you *aren't* is a big part of this journey.) And with this discovery there comes the terrifying *and* wonderful realization that each of you, finally, stands on your own. Your life is yours to sculpt according to your own needs and dreams. It is your masterpiece. You are the artist.

Who Are You?

Make no mistake: there is no "right" answer to this question. At any given moment, you are many, many "people;" sometimes you've got it all together, and sometimes it probably feels like your pieces don't fit. And always, always there is change.

The adventure of self-discovery doesn't end when you finally figure out who you really are. It doesn't end, period. Someone wise once said, "There is no answer. Seek it lovingly."

Who Are You?

This is the beginning of our journey. This is the Call to Adventure.

One of the first things you'll probably realize as you take this question to heart is how difficult it is to describe yourself. Try this exercise: see if you can respond to this question ten times, *each time expressing something different about yourself.*

WHO ARE YOU? I am _____

WHO ARE YOU? I am _____

WHO ARE YOU? I am _____

WHO ARE YOU? I am _____

WHO ARE YOU? I am _____

WHO ARE YOU? I am _____

WHO ARE YOU? I am _____

WHO ARE YOU? I am _____

WHO ARE YOU? I am _____

WHO ARE YOU? I am _____

How'd you do? Do your descriptions do you justice? If someone who had never met you were to read this list, would she *know* you? Probably not. Simple descriptions never seem to capture the *essence* of who you are. They may say things *about* you, but rarely do they give a feeling *for* you.

Now try using a slightly different approach, this one borrowed from an ancient rite of passage which served to usher adolescents into adulthood. The ancients knew that, in order to reach maturity and be able to function fully as an adult, it was essential to know one's "place" in the grand scheme of things. By doing so, each individual was able to discover what made him or her unique—what strengths, gifts, and perspectives were different from everyone else's—and what made all of us the same. It was crucial, then, for an individual to discover his or her "essences," or "true nature." And the way the ancients went about distilling their essences was to discover their "likenesses" in nature: what animal am I like?

am I big and powerful like a bear? like an eagle, do I tend to keep a safe distance between me and others? do I “change colors” to blend into my surroundings like a chameleon? and so on. These images from nature became an individual’s personal symbols, and served to give everyone a deeper, richer sense of one’s unique personality.

See if you can distill your own “essences” below. We’ve updated the categories a bit, to better reflect the world we live in, but the principle of finding your “likenesses” is the same. Try not to think too hard about your answers; this exercise works best if you let your intuition lead the way (some of your essences may surprise even you!) Remember, the game isn’t asking for your *favorite*, but what truly reflects your personality.

1. If you were an animal, what creature seems to capture the essence of who you are *right now* (your essence may change tomorrow)?

2. A shop, or business of any kind (real or imagined)?

3. A means of transportation?

4. Something found around the house?

5. A time (think of time in any way you want: time of the day, the year, a time in history, a holiday, etc.)?

6. A place?

7. A machine?

8. A sound or noise?

9. Someone or something in a circus?

10. A treasure?
