

Chapter 1

Who Are You?

Imagine that you see hundreds of people all around you as you walk down the street. There are men and women, children and older people; some of them even have dogs. Although it seems like any other day, you notice something very strange. Every man is like every other man, every woman is like every other woman, and all the children are the same. They have the same hair, eyes, skin, lips, height, weight and shoe size. They are wearing the same clothes. Even the dogs are all identical. It looks like you have fallen into a world of clones. You stop for a moment and you talk to a few of them. You find out that each one of them likes the same food, the same baseball team, the same music, the same books, the same type of car, the same everything. How can all of these people be the same?

A world like that would not be fun. Life would become a real bore. Just think about it: one of the things which makes life interesting is the fact that we are all so very different. Do you think that after searching every corner of the world you might find another you, someone identical to you in every way? No matter how far and wide you searched, you would come home disappointed, because no one is just like you. You are unique.

So, who is the unique you?



Being the Same versus Being Different

You have this idea of yourself, like a person that you pretend you're not because you don't want to look like a loser in front of your friends at

school. You think if you showed them they'd be like, you are so weird. But then sometimes it just comes out, and you don't care. You're like, hey this is me, and that's the time that you have the most fun and you feel like you're real.

Pedro, 15


Everyone is different. You already know that. You can look around at your family, your friends, people you know in school to see that no two people are the same. So why do you think so many people try so hard to be like other people?

Think about the latest trends at school. How is everyone dressing? Are students at your school wearing their pants down below their waist, or five sizes too big, or two sizes too small? Are the girls getting perms this year, or are they straightening their hair? How about the boys? Which tennis shoes are in? It is a strange thing, but it is true: lots of people (including many adults) are trying to be someone they are not. They are trying to be just like everybody else.

Why do so many people try to be just like everyone else? People are trying to find their identity, or who they are. They are afraid to let their true colors (their real character) show. They are afraid of being different. Who is more interesting to you: the person who dresses and acts like everyone else, making sure not to slip up, or the person who is more free-spirited, and acts differently, not really caring about what other people think? Which kind of person are you more like?

Going on a Vacation

Let's take a little paper, pencil and mind vacation. We are going to a land called *You*. In this land, you can learn something new about yourself. Try answering these questions:

- 
- ⌚ If you had unlimited time in your life, what would you spend your time doing?
 - ⌚ You win an award at school and the principal asks your mom or your dad (or someone very close to you) to give a speech about the *True You*. What would you want that person to say?
 - ⌚ Who do you most admire? What traits does this person have that you would like to develop yourself?
 - ⌚ List five adjectives that best describe you (cheerful, quiet,

energetic, dramatic, responsible, disciplined, adventurous, charming, lazy, content, thoughtful... whatever words best describe you).

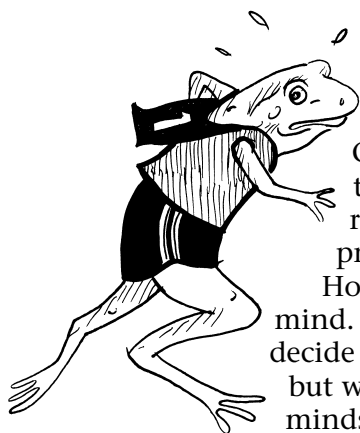


- Ⓢ Imagine that you are going to be isolated on an island for the rest of your life. You would have food, shelter and water. You may choose five people or things to take with you. Whom or what would you take?
- Ⓢ Who do you think is the greatest person who ever lived? If you could ask that person one question, what would it be?
- Ⓢ All people have at least one really special talent. What are your talents (writing, speaking, listening, music, sports, building things, looking at things creatively, clear thinking, working at things steadily, or something else...)?
- Ⓢ Make a list of at least five things you really love to do.
- Ⓢ When you are 30, your friends and family throw a surprise birthday party for you. All of your best friends and family are there. Who would those people be, and what are you doing at that time in your life?
- Ⓢ What is your Ideal Future Job (you may have more than one), and why does this job seem so fantastic to you?
- Ⓢ Do you see yourself married in the future? If so, what kind of a person would you like to marry? What kind of a husband or wife do you want to be for your future spouse? Do you think you would like to stay at home with your children when they are young? How do you think you will make decisions as a couple, as opposed to how you make all of your own decisions?

Like it or not, you have just described yourself! Now, you can, if you want, fold your paper up into a tiny little square and shove it into the depths of your backpack never to see the light of day again! Or you can look at your answers and think about who you really are... what are your talents, your loves and your dreams? You may have some similar answers to your friends, but we bet none of them will be exactly the same!

The Connection: Inside and Out

So, who are you? Are you only what people see on the outside or is the real you what goes on inside? How are the two related? In many ways how you behave, your facial expressions and what you say and do reveal your character. It is your mind that determines what you say and how you act.



If you watched an athlete win a marathon, would you imagine that he was an ordinary person who just got out of bed that morning and ran the race? The first marathon was run by a Greek messenger. He was running to Athens to tell the people that they had won a war. After he ran 26 miles, he collapsed and died. He was not prepared to run so far so fast.

How do you become an athlete? It all begins in your mind. If you want to run a marathon you first have to decide to do it. Many people decide to run a marathon, but when they realize how hard it is, they change their minds. Those who choose to go ahead with it decide to train. The training will take months of running, weight training and discipline.

All of your training begins within you. First you determine to train, and then you follow through on what you have decided. The outside you (the part that everyone else can see) is like a mirror of the inside you (the part that only you can know about), and the two work together to make you who you are.

Your Heart

If you look inside yourself, you might find there is part of you that can tell the most about you. People call it different things: your soul, your mind, your inner self, your psyche or your spirit, just to name a few. What we are talking about is the invisible self that makes you unique and special. We'll call that part your heart.

You are not a robot, a computer or a machine. You are a human being. You are the only living being that can actually think about yourself (as far as we know—we're going to leave out the possibility of aliens from space for now). Gorillas and dolphins may be intelligent and even sensitive, but we don't see evidence that they think about the happiness and suffering of other gorillas and dolphins across the world. It also doesn't seem that they

think about their own feelings or what they want to do with their lives in the future. But you are able to think about yourself and others, and to make choices about the way you act, and the things you say.

Why is your heart so important? Perhaps you remember the fairy tale *Snow White*. The wicked Queen was very beautiful to look at, but she was cruel and empty inside. She wasn't able to love other people. All she cared about was the way she looked. She was even willing to kill her own stepdaughter because she envied her beauty.

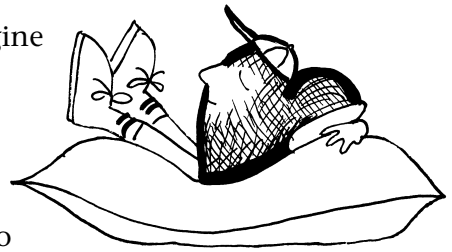
Heart determines our ability to love and to understand others. That is why it is the most important inner part of us.

The best person I ever met was this funny guy. He seemed like just any normal guy but he wasn't. He was so nice—not nice like soft and mushy. If you needed something he would help. If you were upset he would just dump everything and tell you a dumb joke until you laughed. I never met anyone like that before. It made me think that I could do better—like with my friends and stuff.

Ollie, 14

Heart Maintenance

If your heart is so important, then you might wonder how to take care of it. If a car's oil isn't changed every few thousand miles, the engine might burn up. If you play the piano but never get it tuned, it won't sound too good after a while. Although a car and a piano aren't exactly the same as your heart, you can see that almost everything around you needs some regular maintenance in order to stay in good condition.



How do you take care of your heart? Do you listen to your favorite music? Maybe you go for long walks with someone close to you or by yourself. Maybe you feel the best when you help other people who need you. There are many different ways to take care of your heart. Different people have different styles. Some people like to sit by themselves and think, or sit near a stream or in a tree. Others like to talk to their friends or go to the movies. The key is to realize that you need to take care of your heart. When you start to feel out of step, down, or a bit out of it, take a

minute to ask yourself what would fill you up. No matter what it is, give it a try and see how you feel. You may also find that different activities work for you at different times, depending on what is going on in your life.

Here are some possibilities:

- ☉ Taking a walk with someone you're close to,
- ☉ Listening to music that makes you feel calm inside,
- ☉ Swimming, running or some other activity that gives you time to think,
- ☉ Talking to someone you feel good being around,
- ☉ Going to the library to read or to look through books,
- ☉ Writing your ideas and private thoughts in a journal,
- ☉ Going to an art museum to look at paintings,
- ☉ Going on a retreat to your favorite place in the natural world (like a lake, a stream, a beautiful park, or just your favorite tree in your neighborhood),
- ☉ Doing something to serve other people (like volunteer work, or helping someone in your family),
- ☉ Going somewhere that you can be alone (even if it is just your room),
- ☉ Doing something that you are good at and enjoy (like painting, writing, paper folding or whatever it may be).

The True You

When you are able to discover who you are, and you live by what is important to you, you will be able to find happiness. As

Buddha would say, the cart follows the ox. In other words, when you follow a path that leads you in a positive

direction, you will naturally feel contented. This certainly is not to say that you won't experience difficulties or that following a noble path is simple. But in the end, that path is the most rewarding.

It is also important to keep in mind that there is a big difference between being yourself and being



your true self. If you are just being yourself and your friend makes you mad, you might scream and yell at your friend, saying terrible things, just to express yourself. If you are being your true self, however, you might try to express yourself just as clearly without tearing your friend to shreds. There is a big difference between being yourself (saying and doing whatever you feel), and learning to be your true self (saying and doing what you feel in a decent way).

Journal

(Get a cool notebook to write down your ideas when you see this word.)

Why do you think that many people try hard to be just like other people? People want to wear the same style clothes, haircuts, and watch the same movies. Why do people often have a hard time being their true selves?



To Do

1. If you had to describe yourself as being like an animal which would you choose? Some people are more like bears—big and warm hearted, but when they are angry, watch out! Others are more like birds—light and chipper, able to fly from one thing to the other. What animal are you like? Do this activity with a friend, each of you describing which animal you think the other is more like. Do you agree with your friend? If not, do you think that maybe you see yourself differently from how other people see you?
2. Write a letter to an imaginary person. Tell that person one or two things that most people don't know about you (for example, you speak another language, or your favorite thing to do is cook). Don't sign your letter. Pass your letter to one person who has been chosen to read. See how long it takes you to figure out who has written each letter.
3. You will need a partner for this one, and it is all the better if it is someone you barely know. You have two minutes to tell them what you would especially like them to know about you and your life: past, present, hopes, plans, family, etc. After you both have a turn, join another pair and



introduce your partner, telling them what you have learned about them. Once every one of the four people in your new group has a chance to introduce their partner, introduce your partner to the whole class.



Key Ideas

- @ You are one of a kind. No one else is just like you.
- @ Although your hobbies, talents and interests are important, you could take all of these things away and you would still be you. Your inner character is what makes you the person you are.

**Nobody has a better vision
of who you are than yourself.**

Sheryl Crow