

Just Who Do You

by Harry Palmer

Occasionally an idiomatic expression passes into the language that reflects a much higher perception of truth than common usage would imply.

“Just who do you think you are?” is an example.

The presumed intention of the speaker is to communicate to someone that they have somehow become confused and aren't who they think they are. “Just who do you think you are?” It is not so much a question as it is a statement. It is often followed by an unkindly appraisal such as, “I'll tell you who you are...”

Abusive intent aside, the speaker has at least a dim comprehension that identity has more to do with thoughts and ideas than with events or physical appearances. And in that respect, he or she has communicated an important truth.

There are at least two categories of identity. The first is the deliberate identity, which exists exactly as one creates it and for only as long as one continues to create it. This is the role. The second is the persistent identity, which exists with only slight modification exactly as it was created at some past moment in time. It continues to persist seemingly independent of one's volitional control. This is the self.

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Whether a persistent reactive self or a deliberately practiced role, the identity serves to filter, stimulate and interpret the experiences of life. It judges what is right or wrong, what

is good or bad, what comprises satisfaction or suffering. It (the identity) decides what meaning to place upon others' actions and life's events. It determines what, if any, the emotional response to stimuli will be. It determines what impressions are called real and what impressions are called illusion. It determines what can be perceived and what remains invisible. It determines the possible. It determines achievement. It determines the structure of the physical body and the degree of ease or dis-ease.

The deliberate role-identity is the total of thoughts, memories and imaginings that beings create in any “now” moment of time. It's like a snapshot of a mental fingerprint. Beings need to create these identities only when, or if, they wish to be identified. The identity created may be exactly like one in some past moment, giving the impression of continuity of identity and allowing recognition and prediction by other beings. Or an entirely new identity may be created from their thoughts, memories and imaginings of a new moment, thus sending the message that these beings have changed—which is likely to elicit the response: “Just who do you think you are!” This is really another way of saying: “Will you please go back to creating yourself the way I was creating you?”

The persistent self-identity is also a snapshot of a mental fingerprint, but it seems etched in steel and, at least prior to Avatar, unchangeable.

When people are in good shape, free of persistent identities and outside the sphere where they need to present a role, they are remarkably happy, naturally non-descript and interested in life. Things are the way they are. Nothing is compulsively asserted or resisted.

Think You Are?

This is innocence, selflessness, bliss.

To a far greater extent than common knowledge would lead anyone to believe, people's happiness, health and success are not determined by the thoughts, ideas and imaginings they have of themselves, but are determined by the ability to change these things. When you put these thoughts, ideas and imaginings under a being's deliberate control with a technology like Avatar, miracles of life start to occur.

The persistent identity-self is the source of a person's unwelcome experiences. It is always the interpretation of an experience that determines whether a person will welcome or resist it, and the interpretation is determined by the identity that filters the impressions of the event. The same experience may be welcomed by a being in one identity and resisted by the same being in a different identity. Have you ever come to like something you once detested?

Before Avatar appeared on the scene, there was a great variance from person to person and from technique to technique as to how much, if any, the persistent identity-self could be modified. Many systems of self-development, religion and therapy understood the stakes: change the persistent identity and the person's life will change. Some systems worked on occasion; some systems only made matters worse by implanting a new persistent identity-self over the old. Sometimes there were pretended modifications. Socially, for approval or advantage, a person would pretend to assign new interpretations to experiences, but privately nothing really changed.

There is a folksy expression that goes like this: "You can put a saddle on a cow, but don't try to ride 'em in the Kentucky Derby."

In truth, one has to get past one's persistent identity-selves before deliberate identities can be created. How difficult this job is depends upon just two things: one, how much one's persistent identity-self will permit or entertain the possibility of change; two, how well one can weather-without-changing other people's assertion of: "Just who do you think you are?"

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An identity is an unusual structure in that it can be modified successfully only by its builder. No amount of hammering or persuasion by another will produce any lasting result. You have to have the cooperation of the builder. This becomes quite a trick when the builder is convinced that he or she is really the suffering tenant of a wrong construction over which he or she has no control. Every effort to forcibly insist that the tenant is really the builder only adds to the misery.

But there is a way out: teach the tenant how to build! That is the entry point. Those are the lessons taught in Section II of the Avatar course. They are really very successful.