

The Art of Being Yourself: The Paradoxical Path to the True Self

By Ken Wilson, June 21-22 2007

A Brief Philosophical Rabbit Trail: The Modern Debate About the Self's Existence

From the earliest encounter with Jesus, the earliest disciples understood that in finding him, they were finding their truest self.

If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?
(Luke.9:23-25)

[Context: this discourse on finding our true self is in the middle of a chapter devoted to the revealing of Jesus' true self: as messiah to be crucified; and as a figure of dazzling light on the Mount of Transfiguration.]

"Whoever wants to be a follower of mine must deny herself/himself"

Deny: Gk., *areneomai*, to say no in answer to a question; to refuse in relation to a claim or a demand.

- + As two years olds, we begin to use, "I" and "me" appropriately.
- + We also encounter a parent's firm no; which we learn to tell ourselves.
- + This process is part of establishing boundaries for the self.
- + Without the capacity to say "No" to the self, the self loses its borders.

Denying self is not the same as "de-selfing."

- + de-selfing: ignoring the demands of self as irrelevant, not worth considering
- + denying self: hearing the demands of self, and when necessary for the sake of a higher good, turning to the self to say, "Demand respectfully denied."

"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

- + Losing something good is sometimes the only way to gain something better.
- + Example: Tiger Woods willing to lose the best golf swing in the world for a better one.

"whoever loses his life for my sake will save it"

- + discipleship is not losing your life for nothing, or for no one.
- + it is losing one's life for the sake of the beloved

"What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?"

+ consumer culture as a way of life doesn't satisfy

+ we are looking to accumulate things; we are looking for something worth giving ourselves to

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The Jesus we have received has only been received by anybody, because somebody was willing to take this literally when it was literally required.

"If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. "

Not all of us will pay the ultimate price. Most of us won't. But we are all called to the willingness. We express that willingness daily.

+ The self makes legitimate demands all the time.

+ For the sake of the beloved, these demands must sometimes be denied

The Existential Crisis Provoked by Jesus of Nazareth

+ not: "I'm a sinner, please forgive me"

+ instead: losing our life for his sake to gain the true self

For Reflection:

1. How badly do I want the true self?
2. When was the last time I turned to the self out of respect for the self, and denied one of it's legitimate demands, for the sake of the beloved, who is the revealer and safe-keeper of my true self?

