

What is Self? By Loch Kelly, M.Div, LCSW

The IFS model presents a path toward becoming more whole and authentic. The centerpiece of the IFS model is the Self. In addition to liberating parts from their extreme roles and helping them harmonize with one another, the goal of IFS Therapy is to develop Self Leadership. While other psychotherapies may recognize natural multiplicity of parts, IFS is unique in trusting that every person has at their essence an undamaged fount of healing resources called the Self. Only a limited level of psychological healing and growth can happen without the restoration of Self-leadership. Uniquely, the client's Self is their primary healing agent so IFS therapy is collaborative and highly respectful of the client's resources.

- Everyone has a Self and everyone is essentially Self whether we know it or not. Knowing and living from Self is what is called Self-realization, awakening or being Self led. Self is the "I am" prior to and beyond "I am this or I am that." Self is equally available to everyone as both who we have always been and the loving presence we have been looking for. Discovering the fullness of Self is described by many people as "returning Home."
- Self is not created, developed or conditioned. Self just is. Self is **not**: a part, your ego or observing ego, a hypnotic or altered state, an image or your imagination, an archetype or separate soul, a guide or inner voice, subtle energy or a core state, an entity or the person your age today, a meditator or mindful witness.
- Self is not a part but is within all parts. Parts can learn to know Self and see from Self. Though parts will initially protect what they believe, all parts long for Self and they are all ultimately happy to unburden, feel compassion from Self and be Self led. Realizing Self, and welcoming all parts, can be considered "the ultimate medicine" because it relieves the root of suffering, which is, paradoxically, caused by not experiencing and living from the Self that we are.
- Self is our natural foundation which is always here but can feel hidden or gone when blended with parts. Manager parts do not grow up to be the Self. Parts have Self within and can have different degrees of Self Energy but whether they are Self Led is what makes all the difference. In Self Leadership we can speak for parts rather than from parts. When blending happens it *feels* like Self is gone or has left your body but Self is like the open sky, our view can be covered by clouds but the sky is always behind and even within the cloud.
- Self can be differentiated from parts through the process of unblending. It is important to feel what it is like to become blended and be blended. When you are blended not only do you believe you are that part but that part believes it is you. Unblending is a process of dis-identifying with your parts and identifying with Self, your magnificent essence. Unblending begins by helping parts trust that it is safe for them to relax. It is

important to show respect to the blended parts. We can unblend by asking the part for more space between Self and that part. It is most helpful to the clients process for the therapist to be Self led.

- Frequently parts are stuck in the past, unaware of Self's healing resources and leadership potential. Parts want relief from their own extreme positions in order to trust in Self Leadership. From a part you can try to be more compassionate but you may end up in the opposite polarized part. So instead, you can learn to shift into Self in the midst of your day, which is already compassionate.
- Naturally arising healing qualities of Self can be brought to your troubling inner voices, compulsive distractions, and feelings of vulnerability, inadequacy, and overwhelm. These parts of the psyche can unburden when approached from the Self, with its natural respect, patience, and compassion. Self loves and offers protection to all parts of us.
- Many people who have longed and strived to know Self have missed it, not because they lacked desire or commitment, but because they didn't know where to look or what to look with. One reason we can't find Self, see it, or understand it is because Self is not an "it." Self is not an object or thing that can be seen, heard, touched, smelled, tasted or known by thought. It isn't an emotion, image, belief, thought, sensation, or even energy. Trying to know Self with thought is like using our eyes to try to hear music.
- Self can know itself palpable using an awareness-based knowing. Awareness based knowing is the non-conceptual invisible intelligence that is prior to energy and thought, beyond thought, what thought and energy are made of and can use thought as a tool from Self.
- Self has been the most revered human dimension in most cultures and contemplative traditions throughout history. Self is described as a connection to something greater than me and also being who I am. Self has been called Being, true nature, nature of mind, sacred heart, unity consciousness, no-self, unchanging essence, open-hearted awareness and ordinary mind. Self has often associated with religious traditions and called "spiritual." However, Self can be simply understood as the subtlest essential foundation of our human consciousness, which we all share, regardless of beliefs. Neuroscience has begun to report the positive results of shifting into and remaining as Self. Self can be considered part of our common human being lineage.
- Self is not found only inside or outside but is simultaneously experienced as unity, emptiness, particularity and connectedness. Self is spacious and pervasive, loving and loved, transcendent and embodied. When in Self and asked, "Where are you aware from?" Many people paradoxically say, "I'm aware from everywhere, nowhere in particular, and very much here." This is described as feeling grounded, safe and a new normal.

- Realizing and abiding as Self is a shift of the primary location of our identity from managing parts to Self. Self-Realization is not just intellectually believing or having an experience of Self but a direct knowing “this is essentially who I am and I can live from here.” Dick Schwartz said, “Realization happens when you realize that; You are the Self!” and Loa Tzu says, “Realization of one’s true nature is happiness.” Self-realization begins with the freedom from suffering about suffering. When you in Self, you know that there are no bad parts and that we are all connected.
- Simply begin to notice the differences when one of your parts or when your Self is in the lead. Who are your thoughts, feelings and parts appearing to? Where are you aware from? Who is listening and who is speaking? Feel what unblending is like and how the Self seems to appear when you ask a part for some space. Feel the shift of view from you to You.
- *Self* is innate and whole but has different dimensions like facets of a diamond. There are not separate Selves but Self appears as different expressions like water, when it is solid ice, fluid liquid, cloudy steam and invisible humidity. These dimensions are always here, however, when we are blended with a part we are not aware of Self and not aware from Self.

Here are different dimensions and expressions of *Self*: *Self-Essence*, *Self-Energy* and *Self-Leadership*:

- *Self Essence*, is invisible, intelligent, spacious and inherent awareness from which *Self Energy*’s natural qualities, such as the 8 c’s, arise as creative energetic expressions. *Self Leadership* is shifting the location of our identity from parts to open-hearted and accessing Self Energy in daily life to relate to our parts, other people and the world. Self Leadership becomes the conductor of an orchestra of parts. *Self is grounded in Self-Essence, relates through Self-Energy and acts from Self Leadership.*
- Self Essence is aware of, inherent within, and includes all these experiences, states and parts described above.
- Here are **11 i’s** of **Self Essence**: (from Loch) invisible, intelligent, innate, is, indestructible, infinite, immediate, illuminated, ineffable, intimate, impersonal, inspired, and inherent.
- Just as it is possible to distinguish and know parts clearly as managers, exiles, and protectors we can learn to know Self Essence. Self Essence has no shape, size, color or limited location. In seeing Self Essence there is nothing seen, no images, no sensations, no contents and no thoughts, just an alert present knowing awareness that is boundless and here. Self is knowing and knowable, invisible yet palpable. Neither our five senses,

our thinking mind, our ego managers, our will, our imagination, nor our attention can know Self directly. Just as the eye cannot hear sounds, thinking and attention cannot know awake awareness.

- *Self Essence* does not change or grow, it just is. Self Essence cannot be hurt or destroyed. Self Essence, called Pure Self, is the authentic fundamental nature of who you are, which is felt as an awake awareness. Awake awareness, called Turiya in Hinduism, Ein Sof in Kabbalah, and Rigpa in Tibetan Buddhism is intelligence prior to thought which is invisible yet palpable. Being Self-led is what African Americans call “having Soul.” Self Essence as an invisible intelligent awareness is our ground of Being.
- Here are the **8 C’s of Self Energy**: (from Dick) Calm, Curiosity, Compassion, Confidence, Courage, Clarity, Connectedness and Creativity.
- Self Essence is formless and then appears as energy with natural qualities and patterns. All parts have some degree of Self energy. It may initially be easier to feel Self Energy than Self Essence but in order to be more Self led it is important to feel Self Essence as the foundation as we walk, talk, work and relate.
- Self Essence, is like the quantum field, an invisible source, prior to energy, which Dan Siegel calls the “the near zero point and the plane of possibility.” Self Essence is prior to energy, as empty and knowing. Self Energy and its qualities are expressions of Self Essence that come into existence as both as waves and particles:
 - **Self**: Like the quantum field is invisible, inherent intelligence with potential for expression.
 - **Self Energy** as:
 - o Wave: Flowing boundless energy with relational qualities
 - o Particle: Active, compassionate embodied leadership
- Here are **5 “P’s” of Self Leadership**: (from Dick) Patience, Persistence, Perspective, Presence and Playfulness.
- In Self Leadership you can feel the spacious awareness of Self Essence, the full embodiment of Self Presence, and Self Energy’s dynamic aliveness and the compassionate relationship to all parts and people. From Self Leadership you can make choices while being free of the agendas of parts. Being in Self Leadership does not get rid of parts or reduce parts to a smoothie but it is more like a colorful fruit salad of parts
- Self Essence has no agenda, as it is unconditional accepting of what is. Self Energy and Self Leadership are the dynamic expressions of Self that have motivation, intention, purpose and direction toward wholeness and healing. Self has a purpose restoring balance and harmony in the system. Self’s purpose is love, connection and integration. Self flowers in each unique being as part of a whole community.

- *Self Leadership* feels grounded in *Self Essence*, relates to parts with *Self Energy* and looks out from eyes of the Heart mind toward people and the world with new motivation and vision for action from Self Leadership.
- Each dimension of Self has a different kind of light: Self Essence has transcendent *clear light of awareness*, Self Energy has *loving light of compassion*, and Self Leadership has the *light of wisdom* in action. When in Self, you have a glimpse of “enlightenment.”
- Self Leadership operates from our compassionate wise Heart Mind connected to the Self Essence and uses wifi to bring personal information and memory files down to from the office of our head to our new home in our Heart Space.
- Self Leadership replaces the current ego identity or system of managers with Self as the primary sense of who we are. Losing a sense of Self is often the feeling of being a contracted into a point of view, blended with a part that obscures Self and sits in seat of “I” feeling like who I am is located in that part.
- The biggest obstacle to realizing Self is blending with parts, particularly manager and Self-like parts which take themselves to be -- “me, myself and I”. This is why Buddhism begins with focusing on “no self” to step out of Self-like parts, ego-identification and the feeling of a small separate self-center. Who we are is not limited to a small sense of self -- even our best psychotherapist parts and smartest functional managers.
- Everyone has different doorways into Self and ways of knowing Self Energy and parts from Self. For some it is visual, others kinesthetic, some intuitive, others hear an still small voice, and for others it is a silent invisible direct knowing. When Self is experienced in a meditation or during a therapy session, Self is not what is seen as an image or character being viewed from outside. As Self, during our inner process, we are the interconnected invisible presence. But as Self, we can see, and feel like we are holding inner child.
- Self is not known as an object, but knows itself first as awake awareness which is known by awake awareness. Self Essence as awake awareness is more the context rather than the content. Awake awareness is unconditioned awareness that is not an energy but it is inherent within our conditioning. Self Essence can't be known by thought but is known directly by awareness. We can let parts know that they are safe to give us more space, or have awareness step back to discover Self Essence or turn awareness around and look with awareness to realize our primordial Self essence that is always here.
- When you check to see if Self is here. Who is looking to see? Only the Self, or Self within a part, can know the Self. Self is not a state appearing to you. So asking, “Is that part

aware of you?”, can be an amazing opportunity to know Self directly from the Self within the part.

- One way Self can be distinguished is by asking, “Are you aware from your head or from your heart.” Or asking, “Check and see if there is a Self to part relationship; how open is your heart toward that part?” The heart knowing from Self is not just from your physical heart, heart chakra or emotional heart but your natural open-hearted unconditional loving wise Heart Mind. This always already open-hearted awareness of Self is waiting patiently to be uncovered and lived from.
- Moving from part to Self, shifts our perspective from feeling located in a contracted blended center looking out from a point of view inside your body, usually from behind your eyes to viewing from spacious awake awareness which is simultaneously within, boundless and interconnected.
- When seeing from Self we have a sense of freedom and direct perception. Knowing Self Essence is like knowing you’re balancing on a bicycle or knowing you are floating in the water. It is like a continuous intuition that does not dwell on the past or future but feels all is well. Self Essence is often difficult to see because we see from Self. From Self Essence there is seeing of everything without the feeling of a particular location of a seer.
- Self Energy is what moves and relates from formless Self Essence to forms of parts and people. When you ask, “How do you feel toward that part?”, you are asking Self Essence to feel with Self Energy toward that part. When you ask, “Is that part aware of you? How does that part feel toward you?”, you are asking the Self with the part to turn around and experience Self Energy and Self Essence.
- Self Essence, is more the absence of parts, than the sum of the parts. Self Essence is the foundation as an invisible intelligent awareness. Because it is invisible, wordless and not a thing or an object, we can overlook it. Self is essentially the same within each of us and we each have particular parts and unique genetic temperaments that account for our differences.
- One of the most important things to become aware of is the difference between your Self-like “therapist part” and being with your client from Self Leadership. It may be easier initially to be aware of the Self-like parts in clients than feeling the distinction in you. Even the most compassionate manager that is psychologically mature, ethical and highly functional is a dry desert compared to the lush beauty and wisdom of Self Leadership.

Loch Kelly in dialogue with Dick Schwartz. For more information: Loch Kelly www.lochkelly.org