

## *The Observing Self*

The observing self is not a thought or a feeling. Rather, it's a viewpoint from which you can observe thoughts and feelings. In some ways, a better term for it is "pure awareness" because that's all it is: awareness.

Whatever you are thinking, whatever you are feeling, whatever you're sensing, whatever you're doing, this part of you is always there, aware of it. You know what you're thinking or feeling only because this part of you is aware of your thoughts and feelings. Without this observing self, you have no capacity for self-awareness.

Now consider this: Your thoughts and images change continuously. (How many have passed through your head in the past hour?) Sometimes they're pleasant, sometimes painful, sometimes helpful, sometimes a hindrance. But one thing's for sure: they keep changing. The same is true for your feelings and sensations. Sometimes you feel sad, sometimes you feel happy. Sometimes calm, sometimes angry. Sometimes healthy, sometimes sick. (How many different sensations and feelings have you experienced in the past hour?)

## *Qualities of the Observing Self*

The observing self can't be judged as good or bad, right or wrong, because all it does is observe. If you do "the wrong thing" or a "bad thing," the observing self is not in any way responsible; it merely notices what you've done and helps make you aware of it (thereby enabling you to learn from it). Moreover, the observing self will never judge you because judgments are thoughts and the observing self cannot think. It notices thoughts, but it cannot generate them.

The observing self sees things as they are, without judging, criticizing, or doing any of the other thinking processes that set us up for a struggle with reality. Therefore, it gives acceptance in its truest, purest form.

The observing self can't be improved on in any way. It is always there, working perfectly and seamlessly. All you need do is access it.

## *You're Not Who You Think You Are*

The observing self can't be harmed, either. If your body is physically damaged through illness, aging, or injury, the observing self notices that damage: And if pain arises, the observing self notices that pain. And if bad thoughts or memories happen as a result, the observing self notices those, too. But neither the physical damage nor the painful feelings nor any of the bad thoughts or memories can harm that part of you that observes them.

In summary:

- The observing self is there from birth to death and is unchanging.
- It observes everything you do but never judges you.
- It cannot be hurt or damaged in any way.
- It is always there, even if we forget about it or know nothing of it.
- It is the source of true acceptance.
- It is not a "thing." It is not made of physical matter, and has no physical properties. You cannot measure it or quantify it or extract it or examine it. You can only know it through direct experience.
- It cannot be improved on in any way; therefore, it is perfect.

When you look at the summary above, you can see some parallels between ACT and various religions or spiritual traditions. But ACT places no religious beliefs on this observing self. You are free to conceptualize it as you wish and call it what you will.

You can think of the observing self as being like the sky, while thoughts and feelings are like the weather—constantly changing. And no matter how bad the weather, no matter how violent the thunderstorm, no matter how turbulent the wind, rain, and hail, the sky always has room for it and cannot be hurt or harmed by it in any way. Even hurricanes and tsunamis, which may wreak havoc upon the land, are unable to hurt or harm the sky. And, of course, as time passes, the weather will change, while, out beyond the weather patterns, the sky remains as pure and clear as ever.