

Identifying a Part

Inner Work in Zen Practice
Peg Syverson

This exercise is intended to develop your capacity to recognize parts and to discover more about them.

In groups of three, sit close enough to hear and see each other. Decide who will be the first speaker. You will each have a chance to be a speaker and a listener.

The speaker will talk for about five minutes about a current issue or difficulty in his or her life. Listeners simply observe, listen, stay curious, and hold a compassionate space for the speaker.

See whether you can recognize a part speaking. Parts might be recognized by the listeners or the speaker. Work with the speaker to clarify the part or parts that showed up. Do this slowly, patiently, and attentively. There is no need to hurry. Both the listeners and the speaker are listening deeply to what is emerging.

1. How did the part “show up”? In the body? In a set of phrases, gestures, or tone of voice?
2. What can you discover about one part that showed up? Where does it usually live? How old is it? How does it feel in the body?
3. What does that part want to have happen? How does it think it is helping the person, or what job is it doing?
4. How does the speaker feel toward that part?
5. What burden is the part carrying, that it would prefer not to have to carry?
6. What is it afraid might happen if it were not carrying this burden or doing its job?
7. If it did not have to do this job, what would it prefer to do instead?

Thank the part for helping you understand it better, and reassure it that you have no intention of getting rid of it or “fixing it” or dismissing its concerns.

Homework (Bring this with you next time)

Sit in a quiet place, preferably a favorite place, or any place where you feel at ease. Become mindful, and then when you are ready, begin to map the parts you recognize in yourself, and where they are situated in relation to each other. You may use words, diagrams, images gathered from magazines or online. Don't worry about making it look good, and don't get too fancy. You are simply beginning to understand some of the parts and their relationships. This is both a visual and an embodied way of learning. Please don't worry about your artistic skills: you can use stick figures, rough sketching, or any means of creating your map. If you want to play, you can use color, clay, or any medium to develop it.