

## You and me

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The French linguist, Emile Benveniste (1902-1976), a specialist in word meanings and best known for his works on Indo-European languages, thinks that only the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> persons are “real persons,” while the 3<sup>rd</sup> is not a “person,” not a real one anyway.

On the idea of self, the renowned English paediatrician and psychoanalyst, Donald W Winnicott (1896-1971), famous for his works in the field of object relations theory and developmental psychology, defines the “self” as different from the “I,” that for him, “the self, which is not me, is the person within me.”

Winnicott also speaks of the “true self” and the “false self,” mostly with regard to child development. The true self is a sort of private reality we keep to ourself; the false self is our need and habit of adapting to external “objects,” in the sense of experiences.

## Great ideas

I’m neither interpreting any of these great ideas not even presenting them for further analysis. These ideas have connected with my understanding of early Buddhist psychology, and they serve as convenient points of departure for me to express some interesting vision I have of practical, living Buddhist experience. This will help us, hopefully, to better understand the Buddha’s teaching on our mind and its development.

Let us begin with the idea that there are only the first 2 persons, no 3<sup>rd</sup> one. This fascinating idea means that all that is “real”—what we can count as worthwhile “experience” can only effectively and “really” (not virtually) happen when we are in full dialogue. There is neither dialogue nor experience with an absent “third.” The 3<sup>rd</sup> “person” often turns out to be some wrong view.

## Minds communicating

Since it is our **minds** communicating, we need not concern ourself with body language or the dynamics of, say, a counselling session. We are simply communicating **ideas**, useful and helpful ideas that are able to better our lives, or at least change our wrong views about things.

Now we can ask: Who is reading this? When we are fully attending to this reading, there is a “self” involved—that is, the process of “reading.” But as we read mindfully (our mind is fully with the reading), then, we are likely to understand and appreciate what is written here or whatever we are reading that is worthwhile.

As we read, if it is worthwhile, we will undergo some kind of subtle changes, maybe dramatic ones, like some experience of jubilation or even enlightenment. Yet, this is only our “false self” adapting to this **external** stimulus, this piece that I have written. It is a false self so long as we are merely accepting what is going on here. But the learning or change begins here.

## The false self

Now, if we have no idea what we are reading (yet) or, for any reason, feel that this writing is not worth reading at all, then, that is your “**disavowed self**” at work. We have gained nothing; I have lost nothing. Not a very helpful situation!

The same thing happens when we listen to some talk by a famous guru, or a popular speaker or some holy man. Our **false self** adjusts itself to the notions: “This is a famous guru!” “This is a popular speaker!” “This is a holy man!” and so on. For this reason, we can spend our whole life listening to such persons: all that we do is that we keep adjusting our self to these external objects. We go away no different as before, and **time** is running out for us.

## The true self

Where does the **true self** come in? It begins with our remembering what is worthwhile. Because we are attentive and communicating, we do not even need to think of ourselves as the “1<sup>st</sup> person” and the other as the “2<sup>nd</sup> person.” There is only **communication**, and this is all that is necessary.

Our self does not adjust itself to something external. It **becomes** what we are reading or listening. This is the case when we are fully focused on studying a sutta or sitting in meditation. We lose the notions of **self** and **other**: there is just this knowing and seeing. We are not adapting to something **outside**, but there is a certain “levelling” of the mind, the mind finds itself rightly **within** us.

## Free this moment

This is what sutta study or proper meditation does to us. The mind reaches a mental harmony that is at first joyful, and then peacefully happy. This is what true Dhamma learning does. There is nothing to **know**; but all to **be**. We become what the sutta is teaching; we are the meditation. No I, no you; definitely no it or they. There is just this moment.

Of course, before this can happen, we must know what a sutta is: it links us back directly to the Buddha, not to some strange being or bizarre statement, nice to say, but completely useless. We live the full state, not boast about some empty statement.

It's like listening to the Buddha's living voice, like travelling back in time to sit right before the Buddha. This is what happens when “I” (the 1<sup>st</sup> person) embraces the sutta (the 2<sup>nd</sup> person), nothing in between. Then, there is neither person nor sutta. Awakening has begun.

R628 Inspiration 385  
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