

The Eight Stations of ISE Year 1: The Personal Spiritual Journey: Your Unique Self

Station 1: Personal Story-Personality, Separate Self

There are two steps in the station that we have called Personal Story. Step One: The Direct and Unflinching Recognition of What Is: There is a moment when we get over the fantasy of our idealized life. There comes a time, when, in order to grow, we actually start recognizing the story of our life for what it is. We look at the facts of our life in a straightforward and honest way, and tell it for the first time like we actually experienced it. We see that something is tugging us towards the direct experience of how we have lived— asking us to acknowledge the very detail of it—the ups and downs, ins and outs, the pleasures and the pain. And in doing so, in claiming our life as it is, we start to feel something deeply right about it and about us.

Step Two: Making Subject Object: Then something amazing, something startling happens. Just as we get settled in the story of who we are, we see that we have started telling a story. The entire narrative that we have formulated, the one that we have become so accustomed to, so comfortable with, slips from our subjective experience and becomes an object—a story—an artifact. Remember Dr. Robert Kegan's line: "The subject of one level of development becomes the object of the subject of the next level of development." It happens when the subject of the story of our life becomes the object of the story of our life.

Many teachers like to say, "You are not your story." It turns out they are right—partially. Beware of parts that pretend to be wholes. A deeper look into our story leads us to uncover deeper patterns of belief that bind us to the story and to our conceptions of a "self" which is, from one perspective, completely false.

Station 2: Observing Ego-False Self

In this station our ability to see the inner structure of our personality as other than our core identity comes online. This is an essential step in the transformation and evolution of our identity. In this station we are able to more fully deploy what Freud called our Observing Ego. As we separate and look at the story of our life as an object, the contours and patterns of how we tell it begin to become clear to us. Certain core beliefs start to stand out—certain views about who we are become apparent. We see that we have a particular way of fixing our attention, of stabilizing ourselves with a familiar and deeply held belief, and as it turns out, it is not exactly correct.

The processes at this stage of the journey are based on the pioneering work of Oscar Ichazo. Ichazo's work reveals how the fixation of attention, which creates a false sense of self, is the very mechanism which prevents us from uncovering our deeper nature.

Ichazo talked about two major fixations of attention. First is your false complex of 1st-, 2nd- and 3rd- person sentences. These are simple beliefs about who you are, which are negative by nature, organized around a lack, and ultimately untrue. The second obstacle is your Enneagram fixation, a larger pattern of perceived meaning which shapes and determines your experience of yourself and reality. Each of us employ these patterns to help us navigate and secure our daily world. Moving beyond them is the next critical step in our evolution.

Station 3: Classical Enlightenment-True Self

In this station we make the momentous freeing leap from the personal to the transpersonal. We are ready and even yearning to evolve beyond our separate self-ego. We are no longer able to adhere to an identification with self that is painfully limited. We realize that we are more than our skin-encapsulated ego. The space beyond the story, the awareness beyond the fixations of attention and the conceptions of self now becomes the foreground instead of the background. This is the classical stage of ego dissolution. Sometimes this dissolution occurs spontaneously, sometimes through overwhelming pain, sometimes extreme fatigue, and at other times, it emerges as the fruition of years of dedicated study and practice. The ego does not disappear even at the highest stages of development. What recedes is our exclusive identification with the separate self-ego.

This is not a one-time event, but a continual process of death and rebirth at each and every moment. As you begin to dislodge from your exclusive identification with the separate self, as you become dis-illusioned, you may be fearful or anxious, longing for the old solid ground of your narrow identity. At the same time, your growing sense is that you are part of an infinitely larger content, part of the “seamless coat of the universe.” You intuit and experience your identity with the divine ground of being, awakening from the self to the Self, and recognizing your own True Nature, here and now, always and forever.

Station 4: The New Enlightenment-Awakening Unique Self

Awakening to your Unique Self has been called “Pearl Beyond Price” by the Sufi adherents, or “Ani after Ayin” by Kabbalists. Unique Self is not just another subtle disguise of the ego.

While Unique Self begins to reveal itself already at the level of personality, it only comes to fully flower after freeing itself from the grasping of ego through genuine and repeated experiences of ego trance-ending.

We evolve to a stabilized state of being when the Awakened State becomes integrated as part of our ongoing awareness. We have moved from an experience of ourselves as a-part, to a felt experience of ourselves as an indivisible expression of the larger

oneness. At this stabilized and continually accessible state of awareness the sense of the whole softens and even momentarily overwhelms our sense of distinction. And then again, in a subtle shift of emphasis, we evolve to an even deeper depth of realization. At this state- stage we begin to see the part again. But from the place of vast awareness we realize that the part is not separate. We realize that we are not a separate part but rather a unique part of a larger whole.

Your awakening or enlightenment has a unique perspective that is held only by you. True Self plus Perspective = Unique Self. Your gifts flow from that perspective, gifts that are desired and needed by the rest of creation. You have innate contributions to make and a unique potential to realize. You have gifts to give. From the perspective of the Unique Self Teaching we might say that the obligation which wells up from your evolutionary realization is to give the gifts that are yours alone to give. Your Unique Gift creates in its wake your Unique Obligation. You are inextricable from the larger whole and at the same time, you are here to serve it. You not only have something to get from the world, you have something to give the world. Something that no one else can give the world but you. The experience of Unique Self changes your relationship to everything. Love, joy, sexuality, parenting, relationships, pleasure, meaning, purpose, challenge, and even loss are held in the trust that you are exactly who you need to be.

And beautifully enough, you are able to allow others to be fully who they are as unique, as complete, as whole and specific. This is one of the litmus tests of whether you are in Unique Self or ego. If you are in Unique Self you are able to joyously recognize and affirm the Unique Self of others without feeling like they are taking something that is yours.

And who you need to be is growing, is evolving, is changing. Unique self evolves through stages of development. Unique Self is determined to unfold, well-poised to learn and cultivate qualities and assets which allow you to give your gifts even more completely.

To be a lover is to see with God's eyes. You have eyes to see the Unique Self of your beloved and the true nature of all that is. To love God is to let God see with your eyes. You evolve your faculty of perception beyond ego to Unique Self. You clarify your unique perspective on all that is. God sees uniquely through your eyes. You empower God with vision.

Unique Self is both personal and trans-personal. And its specific challenge is to manifest in this lifetime, under these circumstances, bringing the love, the wisdom, and compassion of realization into the everyday challenges we face in our time and place.

The Unique Self may express itself in the 10th Oxherding Picture – The Return to the Marketplace. It is living your dharma, finding your voice, and responding to your unique call to service.

Station 5: Your Unique Shadow

It appears that in the post- enlightenment experience, that there are still layers to be shed. It is astonishing when we start to recognize that through a mechanism which remains largely unknown to us, we still have managed to push unwanted aspects of identity outside of our sense of Unique Self.

Even when we are most expansive, most identified with all that is, small pockets of identity are kept out of our awareness, even though they are experienced quite directly by everyone around us. But because they are shadow elements, we simply can't see them directly, even though recognizing them would free up energy and allow fuller expression of our Uniqueness.

Learning to recognize and do shadow work is one of the challenges of the full journey of Unique Self. Shadow however is more than that. In Unique Self teaching we have realized that Shadow is not generic. Shadow is intensely personal. This is a critical evolutionary unfolding of our understanding of shadow.

Your personal shadow is your Unique Shadow—that is, the DNA pattern of your Unique Self is the same DNA pattern of your Unique Shadow, a double helix of light and dark coiled into the patterns of becoming. Your Unique Shadow is your dis-owned Unique Self, the unavoidable result of a life yet unlived.

The way to identify and reclaim the dis-owned part of your Unique Self is by following your Unique Shadow back to your Unique Light. Remember William Blake's teaching on wisdom and folly: "If the fool would follow his folly he would become wise." In precisely the same way, you can follow the path of your Unique Shadow back to your Unique Self.

When you take the unique light of your story, and you place it into darkness, does it lose its unique quality? Of course not. The unique quality is distorted, it's hidden, it's unlived—but it remains present. If you take the DNA print of your unique perspective and dunk it into the darkness, does it lose its fingerprint quality? Of course not. The shadow is unique because it represents your unlived life, and your unlived life is unique to you. For that very reason we can follow our Unique Shadows back to our Unique Self, learning almost as much about ourselves through the darkness as we do through the light.

Station 6: Your Integral Uniqueness

Integral Theory provides an elegant map for experiencing Unique Self through the dimensions of AQAL. The AQAL map serves as "Integral pointing out instructions" for Unique Self. These reference points of awareness - quadrants, levels, lines, states, and types - give us a powerful lens to look at the precise characteristics of our unique perspective. For example, each one of us is more habituated to seeing the world from the orientation of one of the four quadrants. Bringing this tendency to light can only

support our ability to locate, galvanize, and develop the strength of this perspective, while using it in the service of the whole. At the same time, we can learn to see the characteristics of others around us - their strengths and weaknesses - through this same lens. We can work to evolve through different lines of development, learn to speak and appreciate the language of different levels, cultivate different state experiences such as love or compassion, or utilize the difference in type sensibilities. In this way, our journey now becomes profoundly creative and we enjoy the intense pleasure of this growth and change.

Station 7: Your Unique Gift

The Unique perspective gives birth to the Unique Gift. Every human being has a particular set of gifts that they can offer in the world. The nature of the gift, like the perspective held by every human being, is utterly unique.

The ability to offer this gift freely in the world depends on our ability to free ourselves of limiting and false notions of who we are, and identify with our larger service. Some of our gifts are modest, private and intimate—some are larger than life and have dramatic impact in the public sphere. However, every Unique Gift arises and may be offered in all four quadrants. From a non-dual perspective, your unique gift creates your unique obligation. In the language of one teacher of Unique Self, Man's deed is God's need. God needs your service. God, in the first second and third person, needs your service. To live your Unique Self and offer your Unique Gifts is to align yourself with the evolutionary impulse and fulfill your evolutionary obligation.

Station 8: Your Unique Vow

The Bodhisattva is one who, in the Buddhist tradition, seeks buddhahood through practicing virtue. He or she postpones his or her full awakening until all other beings are awakened. The determining factor in his or her action is compassion, by highest insight and wisdom. The realization of Unique Self may be regarded as Bodhisattva activity —the manifestation of wisdom, guidance, support, and compassion for the awakening of others in self, culture and nature. This is an invitation for practitioners of Unique Self to deepen their commitment to realize and manifest their gifts. The Unique Self Bodhisattva vow may be understood as an expression of evolutionary joy and responsibility, even as it is a recognition of integral evolutionary obligation.

A fuller version of the eight stations is slated to appear in a forthcoming book, *The New Enlightenment, Awakening Your Unique Self* by Marc Gafni.