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## The Way of Open Inquiry

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### E.1 Welcome to Mystery

**T**HE WAY of Open Inquiry offers a practical approach to religion that embraces mystery rather than rigid beliefs. It centers on one core skill: *unblending*. When we can unblend, we can connect with others and engage with the sacred without getting lost in fixed ideas or strong emotions.

### E.2 Parts and Self

#### E.2.1 What Are Parts?

We all have different aspects of our personality that psychologists call *parts*. You might have:

- A worried part that focuses on potential problems.
- An achieving part that drives you to succeed.
- A caring part that looks after others.
- A protective part that keeps you safe from harm.

These parts developed to help you navigate life. They each have their own feelings, beliefs, and ways of protecting you.

#### E.2.2 What Is Self?

Beyond your parts lies your core Self. This is the calm, curious, and compassionate center of who you are. When you're in Self, you feel:

- Natural curiosity about the world
- Genuine compassion for others
- Inner calm, even during challenges
- A sense of connection to something larger

## E.2.3 Blending vs. Unblending

**Blending** is when a part takes over your awareness. You temporarily become that part. For example:

- Your angry part takes over, and you feel, “I am furious.”
- Your sad part dominates, and you think, “I am devastated.”
- Your achieving part controls you, and you believe, “I must be perfect.”

**Unblending** means maintaining some distance from your parts. You recognize them without becoming them:

- “A part of me is angry.”
- “I have a part that feels devastated.”
- “My achieving part wants everything to be perfect.”

## E.3 Core Practices

### E.3.1 Daily Unblending Practice

Start each day with this simple exercise:

Morning Check-In (5 minutes)

1. Sit quietly and take three deep breaths.
2. Ask yourself: “What parts of me are active right now?”
3. Notice which parts need attention without trying to fix anything.
4. Thank each part for trying to help you.
5. Spend a moment in your calm Self before starting your day.

### E.3.2 Meditation with Parts Awareness

Traditional meditation often tries to push thoughts away. We take a different approach:

Modified Meditation (10-20 minutes)

1. Choose a focus point (breath, sound, or visual object).
2. When your attention wanders, pause before returning to your focus.
3. Notice which part pulled your attention away.
4. Write a brief note: “Worried part thinking about work” or “Excited part planning for the weekend.”

5. Thank that part and gently return to your focus.
6. After meditation, review your notes to see which parts need attention.

Instead of pushing away uncomfortable feelings during meditation, this approach welcomes them as messengers carrying important information. Parts learn how to cooperate with your request that they keep quiet for the duration of the session.

### **E.3.3 Sacred Dialogue**

Create regular conversations between your Self and your parts:

Weekly Parts Meeting (20-30 minutes)

1. Set aside uninterrupted time.
2. Ask each part that showed up during the week: “What do you want me to know?”
3. Listen without judgment or trying to fix anything before asking: “What do you need from me?”
4. Negotiate agreements that honor both the part’s concerns and your values.

### **E.3.4 Contemplative Questioning**

Use open-ended questions as a religious practice:

Daily Wonder Questions

- What is the nature of consciousness?
- How do I know what I know?
- What lies beyond my current understanding?
- How am I connected to everything around me?

Don’t seek final answers. Let these questions open your mind to mystery.

### **E.3.5 Community Practice**

IFS Healing Circles are group experiences that combine individual healing with community support. Based on the work of Chris Burris and his book “Creating Healing Circles,” these circles offer a powerful way to practice unblending in community.

Circle Structure

- Groups typically meet weekly or biweekly for 6-10 sessions.

- Each session lasts 1.5-2 hours.
- Groups are limited to 6-10 participants to maintain intimacy.
- Sessions include: opening ceremony, parts check-in, and group work.

### How Circles Work

- One person sits in the client seat for focused work.
- Other participants may represent specific parts of the client (*sculpting*) or hold compassionate space as witnesses.
- Everyone stays engaged in each other's healing process.
- The facilitator guides the process while staying in Self-energy.

### Benefits of Group IFS Work

- Reinforces that parts are important and deserving of time and energy.
- Parts feel less alone when seen by others with similar experiences.
- Seeing others work with their parts provides modeling and inspiration.
- Shared experiences build genuine community and belonging.
- Accountability to the group supports continued growth.

### Group Guidelines

- Maintain confidentiality about what is shared in a circle.
- Practice speaking for parts rather than as parts.
- Support others without trying to fix or advise.
- Rotate the client seat so that everyone receives focused attention.

This community practice provides a bridge between individual parts work and larger group religious practices.

## E.4 Advanced Practices: A Preview

Once you've mastered basic unblending skills, you can explore more challenging territories. This book covers several advanced areas that require solid preparation:

**Altered States of Consciousness:** Some practitioners use meditation or psychedelics to explore altered states. These experiences can deepen self-understanding and challenge limiting beliefs. But they

need careful preparation and internal agreement from all parts before proceeding.

**Spirit Guides:** You might develop connections with spirit guides or other non-physical entities. This work demands strong boundaries and the ability to stay grounded in your own authority.

**Community Practices:** Group ceremonies can create shared experiences that combine individual transcendence with community connection.

The key to all advanced work is developing unblending as the foundation. Without this skill, advanced practices can become dangerous or counterproductive.

## **E.5 Community Agreements**

### **E.5.1 Core Agreements**

#### Fundamental Principles

- Embrace questions over answers.
- Support individual exploration while maintaining group connection.
- Challenge beliefs gently and with curiosity.
- Maintain confidentiality regarding personal sharing.
- Address conflicts directly and compassionately.

#### Boundaries

- No mandatory beliefs or practices.
- No financial exploitation.
- No sexual relationships that exploit power dynamics.
- No isolation from outside support systems.
- No discouragement in receiving professional mental health care.

## **E.6 Avoiding Common Pitfalls**

### **E.6.1 Escapism**

Don't use religious practices to avoid difficult emotions:

#### Warning Signs

- Using meditation to escape problems.
- Claiming to be “above” ordinary human concerns.

- Telling oneself or others that their problems aren't real or important.
- Refusing help because you believe that prayer is enough.

### Healthy Alternative

- Use religious practices to develop the capacity to face difficulties.
- Recognize that growth often involves temporary discomfort.
- Stay grounded in practical concerns.
- Seek professional help when needed.

## **E.6.2 Belief Addiction**

Resist the temptation to turn insights into rigid beliefs:

### Warning Signs

- Insisting that others adopt your practices or beliefs.
- Using religious language to end rather than deepen discussions.
- Ranking the feeling of knowing above scientific or psychological explanations.

### Antidote

- Hold all insights lightly and provisionally.
- Stay curious about views that differ from yours.
- Regularly question your own assumptions.
- Value the process of inquiry over any particular conclusion.

## **E.7 Integration with Daily Life**

### **E.7.1 Decision Making**

Help parts unblend before making choices:

#### Decision Process

1. Identify which parts have opinions about the decision.
2. Listen to each part's concerns and desires.
3. Consider how each option aligns with your values.
4. Make decisions while honoring parts' needs.
5. Adjust course as new information emerges.

## **E.7.2 Work and Relationships**

Use parts awareness to improve professional and personal connections:

### **Relational Skills**

- Recognize when your parts are reacting to others' parts.
- Listen without rushing to fix.
- Help your parts to unblend before addressing conflicts.
- Speak for your parts rather than as them.

## **E.8 Conclusion**

The Way of Open Inquiry offers a path that honors both mystery and practical wisdom. This approach doesn't promise easy answers or quick fixes. Instead, it offers tools for navigating life's complexity with greater awareness, compassion, and curiosity. The goal isn't to eliminate our parts or transcend our humanity. It's to develop a healthier relationship with all aspects of ourselves while staying open to the wonder and mystery of existence.

Remember: this is a practice, not a destination. The Way of Open Inquiry has three defining qualities: it embraces questions over answers, treats all parts with respect, and stays open to mystery. Practice the Way, employing the same signature qualities. Instead of rigidly following instructions, stay curious about what works for you. Instead of criticizing yourself when parts take over, treat yourself with compassion. Instead of expecting specific experiences, remain open to whatever actually happens. Embody the Way—questioning, caring, and ready to be surprised by what unfolds.