



# The REAL YOU

Your words and deeds reveal everything about your inner world

BY LEONARD CARR

**WHEN YOU GET IN TOUCH WITH WHAT IT MEANS**

to be you, you will immediately notice that you contain within you an entire world. This world has, for example, a unique atmosphere that is created by your habits of thinking. It could be light or heavy, sunny or dark, rich or simple. The world is the one that you create with your thoughts that comment upon and narrate the on-going flow of your life. Your thoughts evoke emotional reactions that, in turn, evoke new thoughts in an on-going recursive process. Your thoughts are shaped by attitudes, values, and beliefs. You may experience your emotions first and then, through a process of exploration, use your thinking to make sense of your feelings. Your inner world is also experienced through physical sensations, gut reactions, and intuitions. It is also how you present yourself through your very way of being, your actions, and practices that make up your approach to life.

The themes and editorial rules that inform your approach to life have a history. Their history could be from your lifetime or from family and cultural inheritances. There is a myriad of stories behind your story. Some stories are known to you, others have been deliberately hidden, and others by accidents of history become concealed. Whether you know the stories behind your approach to life or not, they continue to live through you and shape your world. The dominant themes that underpin your story may be anything from prejudices or fears, to optimism, faith, and courage.

When you communicate by sharing your thoughts and experiences, what you are in fact doing is taking others on a guided tour of your world. Every observation you make reveals more about you than anything about that which you are describing. The more unguarded and casual the conversation, the more revealing it can be. This is because when people are speaking formally they are usually speaking with a specific purpose in mind and will therefore tailor their speech to suite that purpose. For example, if you are trying to impress people, or present a winning image or gain acceptance you will need to engage in some self-censoring to make sure that you do not betray your purpose. This type of speech is not candid or entirely sincere, if authentic at all. It therefore does not lead to a real connection or a meaningful relationship.

When just chatting or engaging in casual conversation with those to whom

you do not need to impress or represent a particular version of yourself, you tend to become more loose tongued or complacent in your speech. It is in moments of unselfconscious prattling, joking, bantering, or being playfully sarcastic that qualities like bitterness, prejudice, arrogance, spite, dishonesty, and vulgarity leak out. Unguarded speech almost inevitably leads to the parts of you that you, if you thought about it, would be least proud of leaking out. This type of speech reveals, for example, whether you are open or closed minded, rigid or flexible, caring or indifferent, adventurous or conservative. The most destructive manifestation of unbridled speech is gossip, revealing private information about others, especially that which is embarrassing or damaging to them, or impugning people's reputations. When you do this, what you reveal about yourself is your own inade-



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quacies, insecurities, schadenfreude, and any other reason that would make you feel the need to elevate yourself in the eyes of others by destroying someone else.

Many people confuse this type of speech with authentic communication. People who make that mistake also confuse tact and discretion with dishonesty or insincerity. What applies on a bodily level, however, has its counterpart in the psychological realm. Everybody considers it legitimate to only choose to show your body in a way that emphasises what is attractive and conceal what you are less comfortable for others to see. The same applies to what parts you consider more intimate and private and those that are public. If you think about it, you will come to realise that your inner world is in fact the most intimate to you. It should therefore seem obvious that you would only want to reveal parts of your inner world that represent you in the most dignified and noble way. Just as you do not expect anybody to believe that there are not parts of your body that you are not crazy about and, therefore, prefer to keep to yourself, the same applies to your inner emotional world.

This is not insincerity, but rather the prerogative of the person who is in touch with his sense of being created in the image of G-d. Authentic communication does not, in this context, mean “letting it all hang out”. Rather, what it implies is representing that which you most value and hold dear, and not what you would be embarrassed, guilty, or ashamed of revealing. Being a fully conscious person means being clear about the person that you wish to be, and developing your thinking, training your emotional reactions, aspirations, and motivations to reflect your most deeply held values and ideals. For example, if you want to be a person of integrity you need to learn how to think in intellectually honest ways, not

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give expression or power to feelings that stem from self-interest, and make it your goal to find the honourable path no matter the cost or discomfort.

To make this more concrete, imagine taking someone on a guided tour of your home. Depending on who your guest was, how close you feel to him, and how much you want to reveal, you would select where to take him, what parts of your life to invite him to share, what to allow him to see, and how much to tell him about whatever you are showing. Some people you would speak to at the garden gate, some at the front door, some you would allow into the entertainment areas and others into your study or even your bedroom. Some people you may even allow into your cupboards to look at or share private possessions or personal items. You would decide what you want each person to experience, and what impressions and feelings you wish him to leave with. You would be clear about what you would prefer him to think and say about the experience of being in your private space. Depending on the person and the relationship, you would also decide how attentive and responsive you would choose to be to the other person's needs, feelings, and curiosity. You may choose not to invite or let him in to places that he is curious about or keen to explore that you are not comfortable having him enter. In all these cases you are being sincere and authentic.

The difference is in how much you choose to privilege the person with, as shown by how much you choose to share with him about what is private, intimate, and sacred to you. The important message is that there are always many dimensions

and layers to your world. Being sensitive to what is sacred, intimate, and private means being attuned to the boundaries that distinguish the different layers and dimensions of your world. Being a self-aware person means knowing when, how, and with whom to share the many different aspects of your inner-world. It's useful in this context to make a distinction between familiarity and intimacy. Familiarity is where people drop their guards to the point where nothing is held back. All is revealed to be seen, entertained, or titillated by, commented upon, judged, ridiculed, scorned, laughed at, shared, and spread around. In this amoral approach, all information is treated as equal in value and seriousness. People's rights to privacy, dignity, and protection are flouted with impunity; and those who engage in such irresponsible callous speech practices don't win any respect or admiration for such behaviour. The results of the revelations made in this spirit are treated as inconsequential, no matter how destructive to those being spoken about or even to the speakers themselves. People engage in this type of speech because they mistakenly believe that the informality and generosity of their sharing will build closer bonds with others. The exact opposite is true.

While familiarity breeds contempt, modesty and containment build trust, admiration, respect, closeness, and, ultimately, intimacy. People easily become bored, complacent, and cynical about parts of a relationship that become mundane, every day, and taken for granted. They remain perpetually intrigued by the allure of the mysterious. When you are invited into something that is exclusive, shared only in special circumstances that you proved worthy to be invited into and will only be allowed in as far as the trust you have built will take you, then you are in the world of the sacred and the realm of true intimacy. ■

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