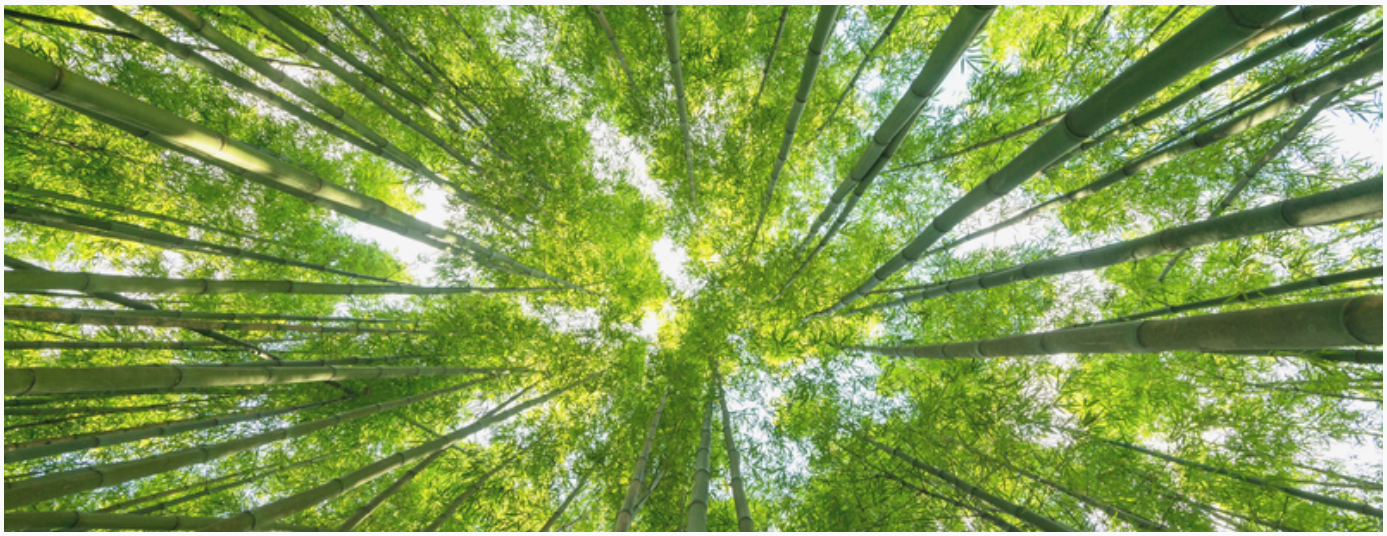
ISSUE NO. 3

THE SELF-LED PATH

True North Counseling & Wellness, LLC



Connecting to Self

Self energy can feel elusive. Subtle. Nothing more than a tiny spark of light, a candle flame in a pitch dark room.

Or it may flood through us in moments of beauty. In a crisis when we're suddenly calm. Or in the ordinary bustle of daily life when we put a hand on our hearts and call it forward.

This issue of The Self-Led Path is an invitation to look for Self. Together we'll explore how to begin cultivating a Self-to-Part connection, even in the midst of mundane chaos, and how to recognize Self in moments of creativity, beauty and community.

I'm so glad you're here.

Let's begin.

Vanessa Leon-Gonzalez, LCSW

WHAT'S NEW

WOMEN'S IFS GROUP

Virtual | 8 weeks
$50 per session
Insurance may be accepted
Enrolling for January

Schedule a consultation to see if it's a good fit!

IFS INTENSIVES

For Individuals and Couples

MEDITATIONS & COURSES

The Inner Home Journey

Inner Home: Untangling Your Inner World With IFS

Free YouTube Meditations

How a Self-to-Part Relationship Changes Everything

It's edging towards 6:00 pm. Have you gotten even a tiny bit closer to feeling on top of it all? Certainly not! Empty bellies growl as you scramble in the kitchen. The kids are battling. The dog scratches plaintively at the door. Your spouse is telling you about their boss, who they despise. Just as you separate the squabblers, let the dog out and tell your spouse you want to hear all about it, just later, please, later… you realize the rice is burning. You throw it in the sink, fill it with water and call up the Uber Eats app with resignation.

Later, your parts get to work on you.

You didn't listen to your spouse… one says in a harsh tone and tightens your chest. *What if they decide you don't care anymore?*

Just as you start to think of a response, it shifts.

You really should figure out why the kids are fighting so much… another whispers and now your stomach drops. I do have that book on sibling dynamics, you think, but another part chimes in.

Uber Eats?? The budget is out of control. How did you get so bad at money? You think of your father's bankruptcy which nearly broke him. I've got to tighten up, you think.

Finally, you shower and the chaotic swirl inside pauses. You extend the shower, knowing once you've dried off and slipped into bed, they will pounce.

Living with this daily storm feels overwhelming. Real problems do exist and many parts work overtime to help deal with this - but they might do it in a way that can feel harsh… critical… even cruel.

They might flood you with urgency, overwhelm or panic, shut you down or drive you to yell at the people you care about.

Ironically, these parts do this out of a desire to protect you. They want you to get through it, and most of all, to be safe.

Looking at them with the compassion of Self helps them to relax and decide - likely for the first time in your life - if they want to keep doing that job in that particular way.

How would it look for someone who's had some experience creating a connection between parts and their Self energy?

You didn't listen to your spouse… one says in a harsh tone and tightens your chest. *What if they decide you don't care anymore?*

You stiffen for a moment, then pause. Oh, you think. There's that part of me that really worries about losing them. I remember that therapy session where I met her - she's only five and so scared. She remembers mom and dad fighting. You close your eyes and put a hand on your chest. You envision a room warmly lit by a soft sun. You invite her and all your parts to come sit down and be comfortable.

Hi everyone, you say. It was a hard day. I know you're upset. I only have a minute but I want to send you all some love.

Some are small, scared children, some are tough teenagers.

Thank you all for keeping me safe, you say, and then enter back into life.

Suddenly, you can breathe again. You smile and head into the shower. The problems are still there, but something inside has softened. Your parts have been seen, heard and loved, and tonight, at least, they're resting too.

Protector parts do what they do out of love.
They want you to be safe more than anything else.
Self can witness their efforts with love.

Living From Self - Reflections from Vanessa

I recently joined a choir, on a whim. Blending into a community, my voice one of many, was appealing, suddenly. Even better, the one I found had no audition - what did I have to lose? I found as I settled into my alto section that the pieces were relatively difficult, and if I hadn't been able to read music notes, I might well have walked right out.

"Let's start with bar 16," the choir director said after our warm-up. I marveled at the stacks of music lines, especially the accompaniment part, which seemed impossibly complex.

"Altos, let's hear you first," she said, and I thought, well, it's all over, I'm not going to hit the note. Prickles of fear spiked up from my stomach, but I opened my mouth, just like all the other altos, and there we were, floating a unified B flat. I wasn't distracting the whole choir with an off-key screech. There was no record scratch quiet, and no one turned toward me with an exasperated huff. For a moment we hovered as one on the note and then let it fade, like a bubble popped in the air.

Our performance at the end of the term was in an immense church, cathedral-like with a lofty ceiling and majestic organ pipes stacked on the back wall. "Watch me," the choir director had told us in every rehearsal. She got more stern each time we buried ourselves in our choir books and failed to see her cues. Today we stood, all eyes on her. She swept us into the first piece with arcing arms and, as one, we flowed music into the space.

Standing on stage I heard myself, my surrounding altos, the bass voices behind me, and the sopranos off to the side occasionally lifting above us. I couldn't discern what we sounded like to the listeners in the pews.

But on the recording my family made for me, I heard a seamless meshing of voices that airily floated in the space, hanging with devastating beauty.

> *We created a fleeting hour of beauty that had never existed in just that way before.*

The sound could not have been made by me alone. A melody once imagined by the composer became the song we sang. The organist's talented fingers followed us, the choir director harmonized us, and we created a fleeting hour of beauty that had never existed in just that way before.

As we sang the last piece - a majestic song played at the coronation of British monarchs, which kept ramping upward and upward into an ecstatic finale - a shiver ran through me.

I felt a complicated river of feelings - pride, joy, connectedness - flash flood through me. We had practiced for months to create something that existed only for those moments in the air. We bowed, together, and I felt at home.

Sharpening Skills

Finding the Glimmer

We often imagine that connecting with Self requires quiet, stillness, or a perfectly peaceful mind.

But Self energy can find us anywhere - in a moment of laughter, a beautiful piece of music, a deep breath, or a sudden feeling of tenderness toward ourselves.

This week, perhaps practice noticing those small moments.

When you experience even a flicker of calm, curiosity, compassion, or joy, pause for just a moment. Notice what it feels like in your body. Perhaps there's a softening in your chest, a sense of spaciousness, or a gentle warmth.

See if you can stay with that feeling for a few breaths, without needing to hold on to it or make it grow.

Simply notice. Allow. Appreciate.

Self-Inquiry

When do I naturally experience Self energy? What people, places, activities, or experiences seem to invite it forward?

What parts of me make it difficult to recognize or welcome Self energy? Are there parts that believe I must stay busy, vigilant, productive, or in control?

What might change in my daily life if I began noticing and appreciating even the smallest moments of Self-connection?

Self energy can find us anywhere



Go Deeper

THE INNER HOME JOURNEY

If you've been longing for a deeper relationship with yourself, The Inner Home Journey was created to guide you there.

This self-paced course includes 10 lessons, each paired with a guided meditation and reflective journaling prompts to help you gently explore your inner world through the lens of Internal Family Systems (IFS).

Rather than simply learning about parts, you'll begin experiencing them, cultivating curiosity, compassion, and greater access to your Self along the way.

Whether you're brand new to IFS or looking to deepen your personal practice, this course offers a structured path to help you feel more at home within yourself.

Learn more here

MEDITATIONS

If you're simply looking for a place to begin, I've created several free guided meditations. Whether you have five minutes or twenty, I hope these practices offer a gentle place to slow down, connect with yourself, and experience a little more calm and curiosity.

YouTube | Spotify | iTunes

SUBSTACK REFLECTIONS

If you enjoy these newsletter reflections, I'd love to stay connected between issues. On Substack I share stories from everyday life, reflections on IFS, and thoughts about living from Self. It's a quieter space to keep exploring together.

Read the reflections here

INSIGHT TIMER COURSE

If you're an Insight Timer user, you'll also find guided IFS offerings there.

These shorter courses and meditations are designed to support your practice wherever you are in your journey and can be a wonderful complement to therapy or personal reflection.

Learn more here

WOMEN'S IFS GROUP

Healing often happens in the presence of others. IFS groups offer a chance to explore your own inner system while learning alongside people who are walking a similar path. Many people find that witnessing someone else's work helps them understand themselves with greater compassion.

Now enrolling for January!
Insurance may be accepted.

Find out more here

INTENSIVES

IFS Intensives offer extended, focused time to explore your inner world and work through long-standing patterns with depth and intention. Whether you're navigating a specific challenge or seeking meaningful personal growth, intensives create space for lasting change.

Learn more here

Thank you for spending some time with me

Thank you for spending a little time with me in these pages.

One of the things I love most about sharing these reflections is the reminder that healing isn't confined to the therapy room. It happens in the ordinary moments of our lives - in the way we turn toward ourselves with kindness, discover unexpected joy, and find little glimpses of Self amid the busyness of being human.

I hope something here inspired you to pause, get curious, or notice a little more of the Self energy that's already within you.

Until next time, may you find moments of connection, compassion, and joy along the way.

With warmth,
Vanessa



Vanessa Leon-Gonzalez, LCSW

