

Self-Talk and the Art of Plumbing

By Dennis Payton Knight

It looks simple, I told Myself, and Me agreed. I do a lot of that. Psychologists call it self-talk. Freud saw the psyche as a trio of Ego, Super-Ego, and Id. I see it in terms of Me, Myself and I. I do not know how my parts fit into Freud's categories, but have you ever noticed that id is the root word of idiot?

The subject of this self-talk was whether to purchase the crystal bathroom faucet knobs we found at my local hardware store. It would just take ten minutes with a screwdriver. Seventeen bucks for the pair is an investment, I told Me, but Myself said we could afford it and I didn't argue. We paid in cash, I declined the bag, and Me waived off the receipt. Myself forgot we went to the store for batteries, but that's another chapter.

I, or we, walked into my apartment, located the screwdriver and with it strode to the bathroom sink. Off came knob one, an aging and out-of-date, discolored plastic affair. Now, as with any task that comes in twos, we faced a decision much like the one we make when dressing, choosing between the sequences of sock-sock-shoe-shoe or sock-shoe-sock-shoe. In this case, Me, Myself and I all agreed our better plumbing instincts would be served by proceeding first through the complete installation of the hot water knob on the left side, and our newly gained expertise would then make quick work of the faucet on the right.

I had already removed the first handle, but found the new one did not fit, which triggered another bout of self-talk about whether I should admit defeat and just screw the cruddy old knob back on. The parts associated with Ego and Super-Ego said yes and yes. Give up and go to bed.

Mr. Id held out for another try, pointing to a simple stem with a set screw holding it on to the faucet. It seemed to be a sleeve to fit the old handle, but too large for the new one. Remove the accouterment and our new crystal knob could be screwed back in its place.

On the last lefty-loosey turn of the screwdriver, the sink erupted like a sheared fire hydrant, a geyser matched only by a raging torrent of self-talk. The blankety-blank stopcocks, I complained, under the blankety-blank sink are cemented open by forty-blankety-years of calcium buildup in this blankety old building. Myself and Me concurred.

I, or we, finally found the blown-out stem and got it back into place. The vital set screw was still missing, but we held the stem down with towels, cutting the flow to a trickle which we were able to direct back into the sink. We had it under control. That is, Me and Myself had it under control. Those two then decided I was the idiot Id, and saw to it that I called a plumber. And paid him.