

The Role of the Ego on the Spiritual Journey

In order to understand the role of the ego on the spiritual journey, it is first necessary to define what is meant by ego. The ego is the most fundamental, most separately defined, most restricted and constricted expression of identity. It is the function of the psyche involved in preserving and protecting life in a human body. The function of the mind that is in the service of survival is the capacity to discriminate safe from unsafe resulting in the experience of fear which motivates behaviors designed to preserve the integrity of a separate, individual sense of self as a physical body. It is the most basic and limited expression of the trinity - body, dualistic thinking, emotion. A more expansive expression and experience is when we live in Higher Mind (Unitive thought or Wisdom), Higher emotion (joy, wonder, compassion) which are not determined by the experience of the fear body, but a function of soul. The highest trinity is Spirit (no body), Love and Truth.

The development of ego starts with the beginning of having a body. Attention is focused on survival and all that might threaten survival, belonging and all that might threaten belonging to a group, and being loved, which ultimately means safety too. Most human behavior is a reflection of attention focused on this function of thinking and feeling, which is the condition of suffering.

Why then are we incarnated into a body if it means so much suffering and so much difficulty in preserving the safety and integrity of the body?

Before having a body there was no awareness of oneself as oneself. There was no self of which to be aware. You were at-one with the vast undifferentiated consciousness of God. As the Zen koan says, "Does a fish know it swims in water?"

How then does one become aware of oneself as oneself. Awareness arises in consciousness through experiencing something other than what one naturally is and that experience is called life incarnate, life in form, life manifested or creation. Of all the species, man alone has the capacity to become fully aware of his/her condition of being in a body. At first this experience demands all of one's attention. As a result, very soon the human child is aware of itself as all that by which its attention is captured in its experience of life.

Attention becomes firmly identified with thoughts, feelings and body. The first identity - the Adam. A complex set of beliefs about self, start forming from "I am safe when ... and I am not safe if" to - "I am good when and I am bad if..." to "I am loveable when.... I am unacceptable if ..." This complexity of beliefs/feelings about selfhood develop into what is known as the personality or ego and regulates all behavior. It is essential to the development of awareness of selfhood. By adulthood nearly all attention is focused on the idea of a very separate, unique and individual self. However, this self is fear and shame based and very proud of it's individuality and separateness and has little or no awareness of it's true nature and essence - which is the life force or soul that informs this separate bodily vehicle.

This separate, individual, fear and shame- based identity also starts having problems in life. No matter how successful and high achieving a person is at this level of development, he or she has a nagging sense of anxiety (fear) and depression (shame) which is defended against. The defenses themselves - while they work to fool us for a while, eventually start working against us.

Attempting to defensively control ourselves so as not to feel fear or control others so they do not activate fear results in all kinds of problems from disease to divorce. The question arises, "Is this all there is to life?" A longing for more asserts itself - more peace, more love, more light, more truth, more joy. We hear the call back home to the place that we came from - the place of ultimate bliss. Suffering and longing start us on the

inner journey to awareness of who we really are - as contrasted to the first half of life when we are embarked on an outer journey to discovering a condition of selfhood that is not who we really are. The very beliefs that helped us form a sense of identify have to now be examined and discarded. What can never be discarded is that which has been gained through the process. Awareness of self. Identity as a fear-based creature is slowly discarded for the dawning awareness of ourselves as loving beings of light, separate and yet paradoxically at-one with all creation and at-One with the Light from which we came. A second identity is revealed to us - Christ consciousness.

Life itself is the way to this realization and revelation. Life is the process by which we become fully divine and fully human, instead of just unaware creatures. Life and the development of ego is the means to reaching our fullest potential. As such ego is a dual symbol -both of dark and light, separation and union - the means of descent as well as ascent.

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