

The Spiritual Practice of Detachment, Sacrifice, Letting Go, Renunciation, Dying to Self, Surrender

*"I would become one of them that hope on Christ,
that the Voice may prove true which said to me,
"Die that thou mayest live." Acts of John 76, ANT p.247*

These are all terms that refer to the spiritual practice of recognizing the motives of fear that govern behavior at the level of ego functioning. When we make decisions about how to act in the world out of ego, we are essentially making decisions out of fears arising from false beliefs that we are not really good, worthy, valid or lovable unless we act in socially prescribed ways. This is created by the socialization process which is about learning survival skills in manifest form. These fears give rise to the need to prove in various ways that we are good and lovable based on the mistaken notion that this was ever in question. Recognizing these fears and needs that result in tension and compulsive behaviors is the first step in learning to relax our tight hold on fear and need. This does not necessarily mean a change in behavior - although it may do. More importantly it means learning to do what we do in a peaceful and creative state rather than a tense and driven state. A carriage that is being drawn by two wild, unruly horses called fear and need is out of control and needs a coach person to rein them in and tame them.

The first step in learning to tame the horses is to notice them, to pay attention to dual thoughts, creating fear, shame and anger, leading to needs and then reactive behavior - whether this is internal paralysis or external raging against the world. This requires that we have a certain degree of detachment - some part of us - the coach driver, must stand back and be the observer of the function of the ego and reign it in. The observer clearly cannot be that which is observed - some sense of detachment from our own suffering allows us to take the second step.

The second step is to merely relax and let go of the fears and thoughts creating them. In so doing we slowly start "dying to ego self," renouncing false beliefs about ourselves, letting go of power and control in our lives and finding inner peace.

Although ego is a function of the physical body - i.e. intellect and dual thoughts are a function of the physical brain resulting in emotions that are clearly manifestations of energy in the body and that thoughts and feelings lead to actions and behavior, dying to self does not mean whipping, castigating, berating, judging denying and punishing the body. It means paying attention and accepting what we notice with compassion, wisdom, some humor, kindness and firmness - the same principles required for successfully raising a child or training a puppy.

Instead of punishing "bad" behavior and praising "good behavior," what is required is inquiry into the motives for both, a movement inwards, a curiosity, an investigative mind, that recognizes what it finds with the fascination of a scientist, not the condemnation of the bounty hunter. By so doing a new realization occurs - that our true nature is not different to God's. Prior to this we identified ourselves as nothing more than the sum total of our thoughts, feelings, needs and behaviors - but now it becomes apparent to us that this is not our nature and we can start disidentifying ourselves from ego. The whole notion of dying to self can be summed up by saying,
"Pay attention and relax."

The consequence of doing so results in humans who still do and achieve in the world, but the doing and achieving becomes creative, is done in less time, with cooperation and harmony between

people working as one instead of against one another. Technical perfection in any area of endeavor becomes sublime expression. Opposites are united - justice becomes kind and merciful. Mercy is tempered by firmness. Hardwork is done calmly, Calmness is never slothful but attentive and awake. By giving up ego, we start living out of our soul. The soul takes charge of the ego instead of the ego running out of control, creating havoc in it's wake. © Lyndall Johnson 2003

What We See In Others Is Another Way Of Looking At Ourselves

Among those who stood at the edge of the conversations and listened to Jacob was a young woman with child. When Jacob's eyes met hers, she found herself asking a question.

"I'm about to give birth, Jacob," she said. "What can you tell me?"

"The birth of innocence is the door to experience," said Jacob.

"And experience?"

"Ah," said Jacob. "Experience is a mask we wear to hide our innocence."

"Maybe you are right, Jacob," said the young woman. "It's just that I see so much more strength in others than I see in myself."

"That is your innocence," said Jacob. "Experience will teach you that what we see in others is another way of looking at ourselves."

benShea, Noah. Jacob's Journey. Wisdom to Find the Way, Strength to Carry On.
Ballantine Books. 1991

Spiritual Practice of Focusing Inwards, not Outwards

Change the World by Changing me

"I was a revolutionary when I was young and all my prayer to God was, "Lord, give me the energy to change the world."

As I approached middle age and realized that half my life was gone without my changing a single soul, I changed my prayer to "Lord give me the grace to change all those who come in contact with me. Just my family and friends, and I shall be satisfied."

Now that I am an old man and my days are numbered, my one prayer is "Lord give me the grace to change myself." If I had prayed for this right from the start I should not have wasted my life."

~Sufi Bayazid