

EGO AND EMOTION

Some people call love an emotion, but if love is described as an emotion that makes it a lesser kind of love, a love which entails things that give us satisfaction. This kind of love, this kind of emotion is deeply attached to our ego, to our sense of selfhood which is so powerful within the ego with its built-in range of attitudes. The ego is proud of the self, protective of the self, and in its own way develops a sense of honor for the self. This does not mean that things developed by the ego have any ultimate reality, they merely exist within the self. When the ego's pride is in pain it reacts emotionally. Since the ego is tied to self-love, to love of the things it considers important for itself, if it sees its pride, its arrogance or importance attacked in any way, it reacts, it reacts in two ways.

First, it feels pain, a pain similar to a knife wound. If our ego is sensitive, if we have not learned to withstand the pressure of daily existence, if we have had difficult experiences when we were younger, inadequate love and care, our ego might be starved for these lower emotions. An ego starved for these emotions can be a powerful agent searching for self-gratification, deeply in need of gratification. When these needs are unfulfilled in a basic way, it feels wounded, and when it is wounded it reacts like an animal. We should know this about ourselves, understand how and why we react when we feel someone has caused us pain, understand how and why we react in response to someone we think has attacked us, on whatever level.

We should also be aware of what we think of as an attack, aware of how sensitive we are, of what has made us so sensitive to a word, a look or to someone else's lack of concern for us. Why are we offended, what do we take for offense, and when we are

offended what is our reaction? If we feel some sort of pain, next we develop a system to alleviate it, to bind the wound, stitch it up, stop the metaphorical bleeding, the infection. If we are ever going to make progress on this path we must specifically understand the qualities we use when our ego is hurt. Resentment might bind the wounds of that ego, that pain, and then if we lessen the importance of the person who hurt us, if we diminish him, we lessen our own pain because he was not significant enough, not worthy enough to cause us pain, and now we can begin to heal.

We do not heal by examining the pain, we heal by demoting the critic, by reducing the importance of the person who caused us pain. But as our resentment builds we are in pain more easily, our view of humanity shrinks, love for our friends and companions shrinks, our ability to interact with anyone else shrinks unless they overwhelm us with praise. This process can begin when we are young if we do not receive enough attention, if we do not have enough love, a process which builds through our life unless we catch it. We are negative in many situations to lessen the impact of what we expect, we anticipate pain and negate the experience before it occurs, we negate the people occasioning the experience before it occurs. By diminishing everyone around us and promoting ourself, they have no emotional impact, they do not affect us, they are not worthy of affecting us, and we become cold, hard, like stone.

God sends people to this world who can bear the pain of the world, they bear it without complaint, without resentment, without a hateful reaction. These people are called saints, enlightened beings, friends of God. If we are in pain and fortunate enough to come before someone who takes on this pain, we can be relieved. We should know people who can bear the pain of the world, we should ourself become someone who can

bear this pain, have the ability to absorb it and deposit it in a place where it does not fester or put the world and its people in danger.

We should be able to understand the cause of this pain, understand how to defend ourselves from it, not react to it. It is easy enough to say detach yourself from the world, do not expect anything from the world, easy to say if you have no expectations you will not be disappointed. These are easy things to say, but we forget how tied we are to our ego, ignore that we have lost control of certain responses which can sneak up on us, catch us before we know it, and all our learned reactions are repeated as we feel cornered, waiting for attack.

We should know our own nature, study it carefully to see what we have learned to use as the remedy for pain. To be truly detached, to be free of this emotional self which is so overwrought and dramatic, so capable of overtaking us, we need the practice of prayer, the practice of negating the self on a regular basis. If we do not experience the negation of the self regularly, it is hard to avoid being overwhelmed by our emotional needs, our jealousy, our resentment, our self-glorification demanding all that.

Kings are no different from beggars in this way, everyone has that tendency. Those who have less of this are rare, those who have less of this can help us. We are not truly capable of giving until we overcome being negative and become positive instead. We must engage a genuine negation of the perceived self, a genuine negation of the egocentric self, of the base desires which function through that self. This can happen only by being aware of the self, by actively practicing its negation through different exercises of prayer.

The key to this understanding is that I do not exist. If I do not exist how can I hold all this garbage, if I do not exist how can I be offended, if I do not exist why do I need to protect myself, if I do not exist why do I need to roar in defense of my inner being, if I do not exist what is so important? The point is we have made that self, that ego, very large and we have to reduce it in size; this is what becoming small means. It means being able to disappear from everything reaching out for us. As we walk down the street and notice someone looking at us, we should not think it has relevance for us, we should not believe someone who cuts us off while we are driving is doing it deliberately, that anyone who honks his horn at us has some kind of relationship with us, they are people we have never met, never seen, yet we take their actions personally, seriously.

Our life is not personal in that way, it is not about ourself and them, it is about God and ourself. If we bring any other consideration into the equation we can end up with qualities which separate and destroy, we can end up in that egocentric situation which arises when we think we do not have the respect, love, admiration and homage our status deserves.

This is difficult because we are not willing to think of ourself as less than excellent, one aspect of our difficulty. May God help us understand what resentment is, may He help us understand what jealousy is. To understand His qualities we need to understand our own qualities. May He keep us from being confused, may we see the hidden evil qualities within ourself and tear them away, may He give us the strength to tear them away.