

THE EGO

By Gerry Pierse

The Genesis story tells us that God created us in his image and likeness.

1. Human beings were made with a *centre of organisation* similar to that of God.
2. We are the only creatures that can reflect on our own behavior, and determine what we do apart from what our instincts tell us to do. We are the only creatures that can say I AM – that have an ego.
3. Our ego, then, is the greatest gift given to us – it is what makes us like God.

Paradoxically, our ego can also put us in opposition to God.

1. Adam and Eve, who got this great gift of being like God, began to resist God and his central position.
2. Ego became E G O: EDGING GOD OUT. They wanted to be at the centre.
3. This is what happens to us too. When we're too successful and everything is going hunky-dory, we think we don't really need God at all. So we want to edge God out. This is basically what we used to call *original sin*.

God is our creator and we are His creatures – if we keep that balance right there's no problem.

1. Anyone that does not have a strong ego is useless – like a car without an engine.
2. But, if we are driven by our egos, we can be destructive – like a car without a steering wheel.
3. The job of life, then, is *not* to disown or suppress the ego. Rather, it is to harness and use it constructively.
4. If we let the ego take control, we hurt others and we do a lot of harm.
5. If we just observe it, we can grow.
6. Listen to the ego – it is your friend and tells you who you are.
For example, I have learned a lot about myself by listening to the times and places that I have felt inclined to lie. Why do I feel like lying here? Is my ego threatened? As I face the fear more and more, I get free from it and get to know myself better.

The ego is what makes divisions; the true Self unifies.

1. There is me (the ego), and other objects. It observes, fragments, compares, and measures everything in terms of *what is in it for me*. The ego makes us love things and use people.
2. Our ego makes us desire to be great and, if not transcended, will stop at nothing to achieve that greatness.
3. The ego makes us slaves to the opinions and approval of others. It makes us fear not having the right car, gadget, etc.
4. The ego loves shooting others down. It thinks, in some neurotic way, that it lifts itself up by putting others down. It makes us jealous and competitive. It makes us feel threatened by the success of others.
5. The true Self, on the other hand, is whole – it seeks to integrate, to be one with the other, to love without strings attached.
6. The true Self challenges us to love people and use things.

A meditation analogy: The story about an Indian king who was given a totally dutiful servant

1. The servant would perform, indeed anticipate, all of the king's wishes, and when not given a task would be restlessly demanding things to do.
2. At first the king was delighted. After some time, however, he found that providing chores for the servant was becoming more exhausting than the chores themselves.
3. Then he got an idea. He had the servant erect a forty foot pole in the garden and instructed him to climb up and down when there was nothing else to do. In this way the king got his freedom back.
4. This is what we do when we meditate – our spine is the pole standing up straight.
5. When we meditate – *maranatha, maranatha* – we sit there and go up and down that pole gently with our breathing. When we stay there we keep our ego disciplined during that time. Then afterwards we can call on it, when we want it, or we can put it going up and down the pole when we don't want it. We have control of the ego.

The purpose of meditation is to leave self behind which, paradoxically, leads us to fullness of life.

1. As we meditate, we become more aware of the ego. It is a subtle and all pervasive demon. It is active even during prayer.
2. John of the Cross says: "When you think that you are doing well, especially if you think that you are praying well, be very careful when you go before the Lord that you're not there to glorify yourself instead of glorifying the Lord".
3. Perhaps the greatest thing that Christian Meditation does for us is that it helps us to deal with the ego.
4. You may notice, for example, that you are getting angry. Anger is an ego energy that is needed in emergencies, but which can be destructive if not controlled. If you allow yourself to get angry, you're actually allowing another person to control your life.
5. Before this, anger was just a reaction. It happened to you. What was repressed just squirted out at an unexpected moment.
6. For the one who has been meditating, however, there is a moment of realisation. With this new awareness, you have a moment in which you can choose to give in to the anger or you can set it aside. You do not scold yourself. Just notice it. You can decide: "I'm not going to let that person or situation control my life." You can be mastered, or you can be master.
7. As you meditate, you find that you master the ego and come to a greater fullness of life.

Notes in outline produced by Alex Peck (aepeck77@yahoo.com.au); April 8, 2009.
Source: Fr. Gerry Pierse, "The Prayer That Jesus Taught", *Meditatio Talks 2006, Series A*
(<http://www.wccm.org/item.asp?recordid=meditatiolisten&pagestyle=default>)