

Don't Let the Ego Stop You

A Course In Miracles spends a lot of time instructing us to look at the ego and not to underestimate its viciousness. It tells us that illusions are as powerful in their effects as the truth. If you read with an open mind, what you learn about the ego can seem terrifying. As you watch your thoughts, you start seeing the ego everywhere.

On the other hand, ACIM also tells us not to be afraid. It says that the ego thoughts in our minds *want* us to be afraid of them; being afraid of the ego makes it seem natural. We are told that the ego's only power is the power we give to it; we are the source of all strength. The ego has no strength of its own.

One thing I've noticed in my practice of the Course is that I have become very aware of mixed motives, and, at times, that awareness has stopped me from acting. For instance, I facilitate a study group. I've noticed there can be a lot of ego gratification in doing something like that. People compliment you on how the meeting went or praise you for the clarity with which some ideas were presented. Your ego can get a buzz just from being "the leader." The same kind of thing occurs to me in putting out this newsletter.

When I notice the ego acting up, I think I should wait until my motives are pure before doing anything. But I have realized that I will never do anything if I do that! The ego *always* butts in. In this world, we rarely do *anything* with 100% pure motives. If we waited for the ego to disappear before we did anything, we'd be waiting forever. Acting despite ego thoughts is one of the primary ways we learn our lessons.

The Course teaches us that the ego always speaks first. The Holy Spirit then quietly answers. One of the big lessons to learn is not to be frightened off by the presence of ego thoughts in our minds. *Of course*, we have ego thoughts! If we didn't, we wouldn't be here learning these lessons.

In a recent workshop, Ken Wapnick stated: "A good Course in Miracles student has learned to be comfortable with his ego." That's the idea I'm talking about here. It sounds startling at first. Maybe even blasphemous. But in a sense, the right way to look at the ego is not with fear, disgust, or shock and horror but with a gentle smile.

The ego isn't dangerous. It's just silly.

I'm reminded continually of that scene in *The Wizard of Oz* when Dorothy and her friends finally appear before the wizard. They are in this great hall; there is this booming voice and flashes of light, and the wizard's power seems terrifying. Then Toto, the little dog, runs behind a curtain, and Dorothy starts to follow.

"Don't look behind the curtain!" the wizard's voice booms. "Don't look behind the curtain!" But Dorothy does and finds this little old man with a microphone and a light console controlling the whole show.

That's what the ego is doing all the time. It booms out in a terrifying voice, "Don't look behind the curtain!" Don't look at the ego. The implication is that if you do, you will see something terrible, and something terrible will happen to you. But when you look, you see this silly thought, this "tiny, mad idea" masquerading as something big and awful. It's just the ego! It's just this silly idea that we can be separate from God—that we can change what God created.

The most powerful defense against the ego is laughter.

When we let the presence of ego motives stop us from acting in love, we are making the ego real. We're saying, "Gee, I want to do this loving thing, I want to serve or give or tell someone I love them, but my motives are not pure. I have thoughts of a special relationship here; I am trying to get something in return. I don't dare act because I'm impure. I'm in danger from my ego." Nonsense! Those thoughts are not you. You can tell yourself, "These thoughts do not mean anything. It's just the ego—who cares?"

Only the love is real. *Love* is what you are. You are not the ego. All that ego stuff that comes up in every situation is just a big smoke screen. Trust that the love is what is real, and go for it, act, and let the love out. Mixed motives do not mean you are impure! You are always pure, and the ego cannot change that. If you notice the ego acting up in your mind, you can simply say, "This is not a part of what I want," and go ahead.

Don't expect the ego to vanish and give up without a fight. You've allowed the ego to run you for years (or lifetimes); it isn't going to wimp out and disappear overnight. But don't be afraid of it. When those nasty thoughts arise, you can look right at the ego and, as one person so succinctly put it, say, "Thank you for sharing," and just go on being who you really are.

Above all, don't let the ego convince you that because you have ego thoughts, you should feel guilty. The most egotistic thought pattern of all is self-judgment. Learning *not to judge your own ego* is one of the biggest lessons we are here to learn. The ego wants to think it is a big deal and wants you to think so too. The ego is no big deal! The ego is nothing to be guilty of.

When you start to see how clever and spiteful the ego is, you want it to go away. Of course, you do. When it does *not* go away, you think you are failing, or the Course is failing, or your practice of the Course is deficient in some way. Wrong! You don't make the ego go away by resisting it. You make it go away by ignoring it, by "overlooking" it. This means that you do not deny that the ego is there; it is. Rather, you overlook it by *looking over* it to what is beyond it, what lies behind its mask; the Christ in you, the love in you. "That is what is real; that is what I choose to be."

Inner peace can never be experienced if you perceive yourself as a being in conflict. How can peace and conflict co-exist? You are not a being in conflict, with a good part and a bad part, the Christ nature and the ego nature battling it out. That's how it seems to us a lot of the time, but that is a false picture. That is the picture that the ego would like you to

believe if it can't convince you that you and the ego are identical.

You have only one nature, and that is Love. You remain as God created you. Ego thoughts have not changed you, have not given you some kind of fatal infection. The ego is dangerous only if you *think* it is. You are just as God created you, pure, innocent, and loving. You've been trying to become perfect, trying to make yourself a better person, trying to become more loving, and all the while, *you are what you have been looking for.*

Don't believe the lie of the ego that says otherwise. It jumps up in your mind saying, "Look, here I am. I'm the ego. You have an ego. Look at all these impure thoughts in your mind; you must be a terrible person. If I am here, you must have a long way to go."

You can answer the ego with words like these: "You're just a dream. Go away. You are not me. I am the innocent Son of God."

Perhaps it would be helpful to realize that the ego thoughts in your mind are just calls for love, calls for help. If everything is either an expression of love or a call for help, as the Text teaches on pages 200, 201, and 227, then if an "unloving" thought arises in your mind, it must be a call for help.

To return to my personal example, if in facilitating a study group I notice that I am trying to get approval from people so I can feel good about myself, I first of all don't let myself feel guilty about it. I think, "Well, OK, that's the ego's way of seeing it. Of course that's there. But what it really means is that I want to join with these people. I want to exchange love with them. I want to feel loved, and the ego thinks that has to come from outside me, from these other people; really, all I need to do is to open myself to the love of God."

By watching how the ego acts up, I can learn a lot about myself and the ways I am still seeking outside myself instead of realizing God's presence within. I can use the ego's attack as fuel for my own growth. Instead of being stopped by the ego, I can forgive my own ego and, in so doing, allow the Holy Spirit to undo it.