

## Week Beginning 25th January 2015

### Know Your Ego

Like many others, I suppose, I have always carried a great fear of public disgrace. . . Well, last week, a small version of it came suddenly into my life, like a freak wave behind an unsuspecting rower. . . Before a group of about thirty people, I was stripped of my public face, my dignity and self-respect. Even though this was in the context of a holistic and healing week, and even though everyone present was battling with their own demons, it was still a shock to the system. With the precision of a surgeon, and the finesse of a sculptor, my carefully crafted covers, masks and shells were ruthlessly removed to reveal a very wounded, unfinished and unprotected inner creature. . .

And now, a week later, after my own small taste of public exposure, I like to think that I reacted with dignity and courage. I tried to 'breathe in' to my confusion and hurt. . . To my credit, for instance, I did not lash back in anger: I did not sulk in silence: and I did not scheme about subtle ways of getting even later. I was very conscious that there was no malice intended, no personal vendetta, no desire to hurt. This was my teacher teaching me. And teachers, like angels, often come in disguise. Throughout the most intense part of the 'lesson,' which lasted two days, I had an overwhelming sense of being safe, of being held and protected by love. I knew there were faithful friends who truly wanted me to move along my chosen path, but who realised, too, that when the path entered the dark forest, I would become very frightened. They were the ones who held me.

I'm sure the whole incident marks a most important threshold in my breakthrough into a greater degree of authenticity and inner authority. What took a beating was my ego. The ego is the ambiguous, subtle, conscious self that can be a tyrant or a friend. Usually it is a tyrant, a garrulous, devious and false sense of self, a confusing and ensnaring charlatan-self, a most powerful imposter that usurps the reality of the true self. It is the cause of our suffering, our anxieties and fears. . .

During those days of painful purification I began to understand how all-embracing and far-reaching the control of the ego is in my life. . . After what seemed like a major set-back in my carefully crafted self-esteem, I now recognise the piercing of my armour that day, as a gift from the gods. How else would I ever know the right valley in which to till the soil, the appropriate well in which to unblock the source of living water, the one, bright field that held the treasure? There are no easily-obtained, ready-made maps with such addresses and directions. Only prayer and suffering can draw the soul to them. (Travelling Light pp 36- 39)

### Follow-up

If you would like to explore further, try this simple daily praxis:

Find a special, comfortable place for your sitting and praying. . . Gently distance yourself from the stream of thoughts and anxieties that are already trying to attract your attention. Notice the regular beating of your heart. Today, reflect on your feelings at times of criticism, disapproval or rejection. These are the moments when the ego and its tricks are evident. Notice the denial, the defence, the self-pity that immediately rush in. This, in fact, goes on all the time and makes our lives inauthentic and miserable. Notice, too, our reaction to praise, to winning, to being proved right. We are over the moon, so very happy. The ego is having a field-day in both instances. These examples mean that we are finding our identity only in our achievements, our possessions and the approval of others. It is to see our worth only through the eyes of others; to be overly dependent. There is no inner centre, no grounded self. . . . For the moment, just pay particular attention to self-importance of the ego on the stage of today's experiences, whether these be positive or negative. And don't forget to enjoy the show! (Travelling Light p 40)