

THE MASS IMAGE OF SELF-IMPORTANCE

Greetings, my friends. God bless all of you, God bless this hour.

We have often discussed inferiority feelings and their true origin. This is an important trend in human nature and needs further understanding in your work of self-finding. I think you understand clearly by now that the real reasons for inferiority feelings are hidden. Subconsciously you do register your imperfections and inadequacies and, although you do not want to face them and come to terms with them, your knowledge of them persists. You cannot eradicate that. So you seek relief from this unpleasant feeling. You believe, mistakenly, that this can be accomplished by receiving attention, admiration, and approval. Many of you have found out by now that no matter how much approval you receive, the relief is, at best, a very temporary one.

In this connection, I would like to discuss a particular mass image about the self. This mass image exists at all times, regardless of civilization, geography, historical period, or environment. There are other mass images bound to certain times and civilizations. Those which are universal and encompass all humanity are a product of a particular blend of human imperfection and humanity's desire to reach perfection.

Such a universal mass image is the following: "If I receive attention or approval or admiration, all my worth is established not only in the eyes of the world but in my own eyes. If I cannot get it, then I am inferior." Needless to say that this is a wrong conclusion and not a conscious thought, but an unconscious emotional attitude. None of you will fail to verify this emotion within yourself.

Since this is an image, it is illusory. The purpose of this work is to free you of the illusory. For no illusion can bring you harmony, peace, and freedom. All that is illusory is bound to create problems for you. The particular illusion of this image has many repercussions and creates a chain reaction of harmful results for yourself as well as for others around you.

At this point, I might emphasize once again -- so as to avoid all possible misunderstanding -- that the remedy is not in defiance and rebellion against your dependence on other's opinions of you. Unconsciously, you rebel just as frequently as you plead for admiration and approval. Both exist simultaneously in many a soul. Both are equally harmful and are the result of the same unhealthy basic misconception.

Let us go back to this particular mass image. We, in our world, can hear your souls shrieking for attention. The earth sphere produces this loud noise for us. When we approach your plane, all souls send forth this loud calling and clamoring, inaudible to your ears. But you can imagine how

noisy it is for us. The voice of the soul is a loud one. All emotions produce sounds, but the loud voice claiming self-importance does not produce a very harmonious sound.

The outer manifestation of this mass image varies according to temperament and individual characteristics; according to other trends, healthy or sick, which determine the strength and manner of the manifestation; and according to environment and education. All this together determines just how noticeable, how strong, how obvious the cry for approval is and in what area the need of self-importance exists. If the demand for approval is obvious to other human beings, it does not necessarily mean that such a person is spiritually less developed than another in whom the same trend is more hidden and more subtle. Rather, it is a question of the degree of suppression.

By working on this particular trend, all of you will eventually find that part in you that demands to be elevated to first place, that desires to be special. It is not sufficient to call it pride. You will have to go further than that. Why do you feel a need for pride? Because of the wrong conclusion of the image I have just explained. It leads you to believe that when you are extra-special in the eyes of the world, your inferiority feelings will vanish; that when others agree with what you do, believe, and think, you gain in worth in your own eyes. Of course, you do not think all this consciously. But if you analyze the meaning of your emotions, this is what they amount to. Thus, you use pride as a defensive measure, as a means to an end. This is why the realization that pride exists in you never really helps to eliminate it.

You may not have been aware of your pride before, but after some efforts on this path you discover, perhaps with a shock, that you, too, possess pride. But no matter how often you then tell yourself, "This is pride, I must not be proud," it does not help. You have to go to the next stage of self-understanding by realizing why. You will have to understand fully that you unconsciously believe that your pride serves to gain something for you or to save you from some imagined disaster. When you discover the error of this assumption, you can then get rid of the pride, the vanity, the self-importance: you comprehend that there is no need for it.

In order to grasp all this, it is essential that you become fully aware that the part of your personality where you harbor this wrong conclusion indeed exists. You have to get so far that you actually hear the inner voice shrieking for and demanding approval. You have to observe the occasions when this voice speaks up louder than usual. You have to question emotions that you have never questioned before. What is their meaning and what is the desire behind them? Only when you find the answer will you be aware of the mass image of self-importance in your own soul.

In this mass image there is you on one side, and the rest of the world is on the other. Many subtle emotions will, upon analysis, reveal to you that this is exactly what goes on in you. This realization is of great importance. But again, it is only a beginning of continuing search for further understanding and connections. You will see how this image brings you many conflicts and problems. As long as you do not know how harmful a condition is, you cannot have the necessary incentive to eliminate that condition. And as long as you are unaware that the condition even exists, how can you see its effects? First you have to become aware of this basic, universal condition in yourself, and then you have to connect with the effects of this condition with various conflicts. You will thereby come to see many of your problems in an entirely new light. You will realize that many of your difficulties need never exist if you were free of this particular misconception.

This mass image takes on many forms in your unconscious. Therefore, the outer manifestation varies too. People seek admiration in various ways. One person may believe that material wealth will gain him greater stature in the eyes of the world. With someone else, other values serve to gain that admiration and approval. I might say the majority of my friends fall into the latter category. With some people the means might be a particular accomplishment or talent. With others again, it may be good character, decency, loyalty, intelligence. With most the means to get approval and admiration is a composite of many attributes, supposed to serve the same end. There is even a category of people who use misfortune as a means to gain sympathy -- and, of course, sympathy stands for approval, too. Other sick currents also affect the image and twist it into a particular direction. The image says that without the approval of the world around you, you are lost. You believe you lose the firm ground under your feet, that your whole world stands or falls by what other people think of you.

Again, I ask you not to confuse the opposite manifestation with a healthy reaction. "I do not care what people say," is rebellion. And where there is rebellion, there is still bondage. The rebellion tries to break loose of the bondage, but it chooses the wrong way to go about it. You believe you rebel against a world that tries to force you into behavior patterns. But this, too, is an error. You actually rebel against your dependency on the world's opinion. Therefore, the remedy lies in your discovery why you are so bound; what misconception leads you to the bondage. Then, and then only, can you free yourself of the bondage and compulsion so that you need no longer rebel. Nor do you have to make painful efforts in an attempt to gain something that is not your salvation. Also, in such a dependency you often become untrue to yourself, and this, more than anything else, causes inferiority feelings. Often, you cannot both please the world and be true to your innermost self and to your own inner life plan. Nor can you please all people. But since you are so dependent on approval, whenever you have to take a stand that makes it impossible to be approved by all, your soul gets into a turmoil. These and many other conflicts arise out of the mass image of self-importance.

You can easily see that this mass illusion, existing in every human, may at times compel you to sell your soul. This may happen in many subtle ways, and I venture to say that there is hardly a person who has not done so at times. I can assure you that there is no exception among you here, or anywhere else, for that matter. But you have to find individually that part in you which is bound by the image. You will find at least some areas in you where the image exists -- no matter how subtly, how much hidden or covered up with worthy motives and plausible rationalizations. The subtler the form of manifestation, the more difficult it will be to find the affected part. But find it you will, for sure, if you really want to.

If you observe your reactions in your everyday life and analyze them honestly, you will come to the very point I am showing you: you will recognize the mass image with which you, too, are inflicted. In that part of your being you feel exactly the way I described. Try to put your feelings into precise words. That in itself will be a great relief for your soul. You can safely assume that you are not the only one with this image -- you share it with all other human beings.

Find your bondage to public opinion, no matter how subtle. Then find, further, why you need the dependency and pride, or rather, why you think you need it. Crystallize the wrong conclusion. Once you get that far, you will have begun to loosen a heavy chain that has held you prisoner of the world of illusion. Then you can begin the process of emerging free. This can be

done only by analyzing, by understanding your reactions. Always go behind the emotion you have just unearthed and clothe it in concise language. Ask yourself why, based on what reasoning, you hold the particular conviction you have just unearthed. Right or wrong, find out why you are convinced of it. If there were no conviction, you would not have held on to it for so long. You know that your unconscious reasons too, although its reasoning is often faulty. Now you have to become consciously aware of such reasoning processes. What is important is that you experience the existence of this image within you.

When you experience it, then the time is ripe for you to understand many of your conflicts that often involve actions and reactions on the part of the world that seem unjust and uncalled-for. I assure you, my friends, you can find this image behind every conflict, outer or inner. Sometimes the connection is indirect; at other times, very obvious. Your personal images are always connected with the universal mass image of self-importance.

I would now like to mention a very frequent occurrence that happens to practically everyone at least a few times in their lives, in one form or another. This occurrence is hardly ever understood, and the existence and influence of the mass image is rarely connected with it. And yet it is so vital, for only through such understanding can you find the solution. This example is not directed at anyone in particular. It applies to everyone at certain times, in connection with certain events.

There are few people who have not experienced grief and disappointment because they felt betrayed. They have displayed utmost loyalty and decency. In spite of this, the betrayal took place. Moreover, as it is bound to happen, the offender in turn will claim to have been betrayed to justify himself. The one betrayed is accused of having done the very thing he has so painfully experienced as a victim. Therefore the hurt is double. The betrayal would not be half as difficult to bear if he were not, in addition, accused of having perpetrated a disloyal or dishonest act of some sort. The pain of the accusation is the more gnawing of the two. He searches within, but cannot find anything to blame himself for. Yet a deep uncertainty remains. Why?

You on this path who have benefited from many a spiritual truth and teaching through this channel or others, know that no mishap can ever occur that you have not caused in some way yourself. You know intellectually that this is true. You may even confirm it through personal experiences. Yet when certain events occur, you do not find the connection easily. The example cited may be one such occasion: you simply cannot find the point of connection between what happened and a cause in you. You know you have been betrayed and disappointed and on top of it you are accused of having done something that you did not do. In actual fact, you did nothing that you could be blamed for. Your actions were correct, your intentions were the best.

Now let me show you, my friends, how the particular mass image of self-importance, strengthened by various personal images, may be responsible for such an occurrence, which is especially painful since you do not see how you attracted it. This mass image makes you strive and fight to be in the first place, to be special, so that you can collect whatever your soul thinks it needs. In order to reach that special place, your actions would have to be anything but decent, loyal, or idealistic: they would have to be ruthless, selfish -- and would often have to betray the very thing or person you desire to be loyal to. To gain this special place of approval, you feel tempted to do the very thing you in fact abstain from.

Being a decent and honest individual, you do not give in to the temptation. You feel it vaguely, without real awareness of its significance and meaning. In fact, you are so afraid when you feel such a temptation and such emotions that you cover it up quickly. You do not want to acknowledge that it exists in you. Your conscience neither allows you to act in accordance with the temptation, nor does it allow you to become fully aware of it. In order to counterbalance the influence of the mass image of self-importance, you overcompensate by scrupulously proving the decent side in you, the side you intend to obey.

What is the result of this conflict? Due to the unconscious nature of the inner battle, the outer happening responds to your unconscious negative side and not to the positive side, even though the positive has won out in your outer actions. This is according to an unalterable law. I have often told you that. You have experienced it in some ways on your path of self-purification, but there are many areas left where you are as yet unable to apply this truth. If the battle you are fighting is not consciously understood in its full significance, outer events will follow in such a way as if the selfish side had won out. The outer result must respond to the impulse which is unconscious.

The more you advance on this path, the more you will see that you are not asked to accept anything I say as a dogmatic statement. You will experience the utter truth of these statements yourself. But you can do so only if you have the honesty to search for, verify, and acknowledge the negative side you so bravely battle against. This side will cause you trouble until you come face to face with it, acknowledge it, allow it to exist -- not by giving in to it or by not trying to change it after you have recognized its existence, but by seeing its reality at the point where you are. When you do that, you can take the next step by asking yourself why that negative tendency exists in you. Why does this temptation exist? You will invariably come up with the answer that you desire an elevated position in the eyes of the world in order to convince yourself that your inferiority feelings are unjustified. You believe, deep in your heart, that you need all this in order to survive -- not physically, but emotionally. And, to get it, it seems necessary to betray others, to be ruthless, disloyal, or selfish. But as long as your good intentions prevent you from even recognizing this temptation, the outer occurrence will, as I said, respond to the negative side, even though you have not given in to it. Not knowing this, it seems like an injustice to you. And it is actually the injustice that hurts you more than the disappointment in a particular person.

This may still seem unjust to you. You may think, "As long as I have not given in to the temptation, why do the consequences have to be as though I had actually committed the wrong act? Isn't the most important thing that my actions are right?" No, my friends. Feelings are actions too, although they do not manifest in the same way and with the same quick results as outer actions do. Nevertheless, every thought and attitude, whether conscious or unconscious, is a definite act. But the more unconscious it is, the greater the consequence and therefore the more puzzling the outcome.

By facing the negative side, you evidence the bravest emotion there is: that of self-honesty. Therefore, you do not have to be ashamed that this battle is going on in you. It is to your credit. But you will fight the battle much more effectively by allowing it to enter your conscious mind. You will then come to understand to a fuller degree all the laws of the soul, the laws of human relationship, and the laws of the universe. Then you will no longer feel that an injustice has been done to you and your hurt will be alleviated to a considerable degree. Also, there is a good chance

that no further betrayal and accusation will occur. Because once the negative side of your battle has become conscious, it will lose power.

But if such an outer event does recur, you will feel very differently about it. You will learn a lot from such an event and will be strengthened rather than weakened. You will feel something very constructive about it, and you may be able to turn the course of events in a positive direction.

When you experience the existence of this mass image in you -- not just intellectually but also emotionally -- and recognize the underlying erroneous concept that has thus far governed you, you will have made a major step forward in the direction of inner freedom.

The example I gave is just one of many possible ones. Believe me, my friends, whenever you experience something that hurts and that you do not understand, whenever you feel unjustly treated because you cannot find any wrongdoing on your part, search in this direction. Bring out the mass image of self-importance. You can only do so by feeling the need to be special, and understanding that you feel so not out of malice, not because you wish to belittle others -- who must automatically become smaller if you succeed in becoming bigger -- and not out of pride for the sake of pride, but out of the mistaken idea that being special means survival for you. When you recognize this trend, you will also free yourself from destructive self-accusations. You will simply know that you have harbored a wrong concept, and that your emotional survival does not depend on other people's opinion of you, but solely on your own opinion of yourself. The more you cater to the opinion of others, the less you think of yourself, deep in your soul. Hence a vicious circle, always built on a false premise, is activated within you.

Again, I say: all this cannot be understood on a purely intellectual level; it will benefit only those who develop the habit of questioning the significance of their various emotional reactions. Yet these words may leave valuable impressions in others too, and may come to fruition at a later time, when the path is voluntarily undertaken.

Before we turn to your questions, I would like to say a few words to some friends who have never found their way here and who have never had any personal contact with this group, but who read the lectures with interest. Attention has been brought to us that some of them try, on their own, to reach the depth of their souls by themselves, or with some friends. Their good intent is appreciated. But I should like to tell them that it is not really possible to succeed by oneself, or even with someone else who has not had personal experience in this particular method. The method of the work itself cannot be conveyed by the lectures. The lectures serve as general material, but they cannot give the method itself. You will do no harm in working by yourself, but you will not really get very far. I would therefore suggest to those friends, do not hesitate to get in touch with those members of this group who are qualified to help. If they are really interested in using this method, whether for others or for themselves, this will be necessary.

And now, my friends, let us turn to your questions. Do you have any questions about this lecture?

QUESTION: I cannot understand which alternative to take between being dependent on other people's opinion and leaning too much in the direction of catering for approval, or going to the opposite extreme. I cannot see how to compromise.

ANSWER: It is not a compromise. You have difficulty in finding the right middle way perhaps? [Yes.] Let me try to show you how this comes about in a very natural way.

You are not expected to decide what the right middle way is. You couldn't do that. The moment you would have to do that, there would already be something compulsive about it. There cannot be a choice for you, such as: "I go that far in this direction, and then I go this far in the other direction." This would be something forced and unnatural. The necessity for you to make a decision does not apply to weighing and measuring the right middle way. It applies much rather to your facing yourself honestly and entirely forgetting, for the time being, the question: "What am I supposed to do?"

I might say that this "What am I supposed to do?" stands in the way of arriving at recognitions. It prevents you from finding the truth about yourself. It blocks you. First, do not think about that at all. The outer action may not change at first, even after you have made your recognition. But your inner motives will change. In some cases, your outer actions will change automatically, but this will be fruitful only if it is a natural result of your inner growth. The first thing you should be concerned with is understanding yourself: your emotions, your motives, your desires and fears. All these can be brought to light in every incident that bothers you.

Once you have reached a certain point in self-recognition, you become aware of the false concepts you harbor unconsciously. Each time such a false concept is observed and therefore becomes more and more conscious, you will be less and less under bondage and compulsion. By understanding your wrong conclusion, you will become more aware of the right conclusion. If you go on that way, you will be increasingly able to observe your emotional reactions and you will understand them better. Then a point will come where you realize that your wrong concept is useless and harmful. When it comes, discard it -- not outwardly, but truly within yourself -- and you will be free. False concepts are always held on to in the mistaken assumption that they are useful or protective. Once you realize that this is not so, you will no longer hold on to them. You will then be able to say to yourself: "I no longer need approval so desperately that I sometimes violate myself, become untrue to myself, or else defy dependency by rebelling against it. I can now stand on my own feet. My inner life and value is not dependent on others. It depends on my own self-respect which I can further and live up to only by being fully aware of myself." Once you have gained this freedom, the right middle way will not be something you have to laboriously figure out; it will develop naturally without your even thinking about it. The right way will just be there because you no longer have to prove anything to anyone else or to yourself.

If you have a tendency to depend too much on other people's opinion, it is because you have to prove something to them. And if you rebel against this bondage and turn into the opposite extreme with a defiant "I don't care" attitude, then you prove something to yourself. Both extremes come from an attempt to prove something. When there is no longer a need in you to prove anything, the right middle way will be as natural as breathing. Do you think of having to breathe less or more in order to get the proper supply of oxygen into your lungs? No. You breathe automatically. It is a completely natural process. You have found the right middle way without having to deliberate and choose: not too much and not too little, just enough to give you what you need so as to maintain your health. The same applies to any soul process. Do you understand?

QUESTIONER: Well, to a certain extent. I wonder if all that applies intellectually as well as emotionally?

ANSWER: Very few people think in terms of this mass image intellectually, my dear. It is rarely on the surface, since all images are of an unconscious nature. You may ask anyone, at random, whether he believes in his intellect that his life and happiness depend on what other people think of him. Everyone prefers to be thought well of by others. That is natural. But the degree of dependency, its consequences, and the extent to which a person goes to meet the demands of the image is usually completely unconscious until a serious self-search is undertaken in this direction.

QUESTIONER: I feel consciously and very definitely that other people's opinions are very important.

ANSWER: I wonder whether you realize consciously to what degree this is important for you, and what this dependency causes you to do or to forsake. But the more conscious it is, the better for you in the sense of being able to think about it objectively.

QUESTIONER: I thought it is more difficult if a wrong conclusion goes so far that it is in the intellect as well as in the emotions?

ANSWER: On the contrary. Your intellect is more accessible to reasoning. Once you have understood, once intelligence is at work, a wrong concept can be corrected. But when one is consciously convinced of the right thing, it is often difficult to break through the separating wall between reason and emotion. The resistance to face the fact that one holds an opinion that does not correspond to one's conscious and reasonable thoughts is an obstacle. However, you do not have to struggle with it if you admit to yourself that your concept is wrong.

QUESTION: May I ask how this mass image affects the individual's God-image?

ANSWER: God-images have many forms. But whatever they may be, the connection between the mass image of self-importance and the God-image is this: it creates a further conflict in the psyche. The stronger the mass image of self-importance and the stronger the God-image, the more the personality will be disturbed, because two conflicting needs and compulsions work against one another and cause a short-circuit. In cases that are less crass, where one image is much stronger than the other, the conflict will exist, of course; it will create many disturbances, but each would be due to one particular wrong concept. But when the God-image and the mass image of self-importance work against one another, the person who has this conflict cannot handle life any more.

The existence of these two images together causes a vicious circle. One current is: "I need to be in first place, I need special consideration." Because of religious mass images about God, one feels all the more guilty and inferior. Guilt cannot remedy this situation. You can only do so if you understand the cause of it. The guiltier you feel, the less you dare to look into the cause, and the stronger you are compelled to wish a wrong attitude away, so to speak, by looking away from it.

Thus the following vicious circle is created: the guiltier you feel, the more you need approval in the belief that it will alleviate your feelings of guilt and inferiority. And the more you clamor for such approval, the guiltier you feel. This conflict arises out of two different directions: one

direction is the God-image, the other direction is the real self in you which registers and observes everything and tries to convey to you that you are mistaken, that this is the wrong way. But its voice is misunderstood and is identified as the voice of the God-image. Thus the contrary pull, which draws you away from the mass image of self-importance comes from two sides: the side of the real self and the illusory side, where the false God-image rules, do not coincide, they are not at peace with one another. Do you understand? [Yes.]

Receive our blessings. Accept from us the strength to look for that part in you that causes you so much trouble. It is the part in you where you separate yourself from your fellow human beings, out of wrong conclusions, because of imagined needs. Find it and your entire outlook will change. You will become objective, you will be in reality. The mere awareness of this part of your being, where you are caught in the mass image, will change your life.

Receive our love and blessings, each one of you. Continue on this path, grow in it, rejoice in it. Be in peace, be in God!

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