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THE MEANING OF THE EGO AND ITS TRANSCENDENCE

Greetings. Blessed be all of you, my beloved friends. The force of love and truth, elicited by your seeking, is pouring forth to forge another link in the chain, to give you what you need at this juncture in your path.

The average state of the human mind is only a fragmented piece of total consciousness. In this fragmented state you are cut off from reality. You inevitably live in fear and limitation. Yet you believe that this is all there is to your life and you frantically clutch at this limited fragment. You resist the natural inner movement of the soul to go beyond, to expand this state, because the split-off ego-consciousness fears that doing so will annihilate you. You ardently protect this limited consciousness, yet this very limitation creates fear and suffering.

This is, broadly speaking, humanity's plight. It is your task, in the cycle of incarnations, to reintegrate this split-off ego-consciousness and to regain forever wider and deeper portions of your real self, your cosmic existence, with its infinite possibilities for experience, joy, and creation of the self.

Humanity believes that this split-off ego-consciousness is the real self. You identify with your brain, your outer intelligence, your will, your mind, all those faculties immediately available, not realizing that to whatever degree you now possess these, it was you who in the past made them available for yourself through a deliberate effort. For there was a state in which you possessed much less awareness, less power to create, less ability to experience joy. Your consciousness was much more limited and confined. You had to use whatever consciousness you had to enlarge your faculties and to avail yourself of dormant possibilities. This process must continue until there is no longer any split-off fragment and humanity has reached cosmic consciousness, which means that humanity itself has become one with ultimate reality. The process of self-enlargement, of making apparently foreign territory your own domain, constitutes the Pathwork -- any valid pathwork.

Ego means fragmentation. As I mentioned, it is the task of all beings who are caught in this fragmentation, and that means anyone in the cycle of being born and dying, to enlarge their field of operation, their perception, their awareness, and their power to create. The problem is that in the limited state of the separated ego, enlargement appears, contrary to reality, to be annihilation of your very existence, of your sense of self. To penetrate this illusion, you need all the force, commitment, goodwill and help available -- help that you must want and request.

This is truly humanity's search and struggle. Only as you venture forth step by step, overcoming the inherent resistance to transcend this separated state, do you find out gradually that there is another life beyond the ego state. You then find out that this other life is reality and that this reality is not to be feared. It is good; it is to be utterly trusted. It means that there is ongoing

life, self-awareness, and ever-increasing joy. You find out that the limited ego state you have so ardently protected is an illusion: the illusion of death and aloneness.

Awareness has to be fought for. It does not come easily, nor gratuitously. Remaining in the isolated ego state may appear safe and easy, but it leads to stagnation and death -- ever recurring death.

The ego uses any number of tricks in order to maintain its separated, limited state and to avoid moving beyond it. I would like to show them to you.

In the first place, the ego uses every conceivable negativity known to humanity; any fault; any violation of integrity, truth, love, and divine law. Since all these negativities can be summed up in the triad of pride, selfwill, and fear, I shall show how the ego uses these traits to avoid self-transcendence.

The ego fears losing its present state, meaning its self-awareness, so much that the fear displaces the instinct of self-preservation. The ego misuses this instinct to preserve its present awareness. Fear always distorts truth and reality. Thus the ego maintains itself with pride. It maintains its separateness by creating an artificial conflict between the self and others. It says, "I must prove to the world that I am admirable and better than others; I must outdo others; I must not be worse than others; my interests counteract those of others, and vice versa." All these attitudes are pridefully put in the service of maintaining the ego's separation. It is always "I versus you," and this inevitably creates a spirit of one-upmanship. Whether or not in your current incarnation your development happens to be ahead or behind another's, to use this as a wedge between your own ego and those of others, is completely missing the point. For, in principle, there is no difference. It does not even take very long on this path to find out that one's interests conflict with those of others only on the most superficial level. What is really right and good can be seen just beneath the surface. According to divine law this deeper good is right for all concerned. Therefore all comparing and competing to best others increases the separation and sharpens the illusion that this pitiful existence is all there is to life.

People's prevalent tendency to live for the sake of appearances, rather than for the sake of truth and of real feelings and interests, is also caused by pride. The illusion of separation is so strong at this point that it seems more important to people to create an impression than even to consider what a tragic, wasteful sacrifice you make to achieve an entirely imaginary gain.

All masks and defenses, pretenses and false shame of exposure, embarrassment about real feelings and one's inner reality regarding the spiritual self, belong in the category of pride; they are tricks of the ego to maintain its limited state.

Selfwill comprises stubbornness, resistance, spite, defiance, rigidity. All these attitudes connote a stiffening against change, against expanding into new spiritual territory. These traits express the attitude, "I will stay where and as I am." This ego-trick makes rigidity appear desirable and makes open, flexible movement appear threatening and/or humiliating. Pride and fear are necessarily coupled to selfwill, just as selfwill must be present where either of the other two dominates. Each of these attitudes harbors the other two as well.

The refusal to move may be evaluated on a more superficial level in terms of personal idiosyncrasies and neuroses, as spite against a specific person or people -- let us say parents or parent substitutes or general authority figures. Or there might be a spiteful attitude toward life itself. But on a deeper level the ego's trick is to remain isolated.

Under the category of fear belong all worries, anxieties, and apprehensions. The ego's trick is to make change appear threatening and life-annihilating. Worrying and anxiety also prevent you from attaining joyousness, peace, and freedom -- the cosmic reality that opens up when the present state is expanded.

Negative intentionality is also part of the ego's trickery to preserve your present limited state. Whatever the specific negative intention may be, it always indicates spite -- hence selfwill, which always blurs and falsifies reality, denying all desirable life experience.

Other ego tricks that serve to maintain its present "safe" position are: denying pleasure, bliss, joy, expansion, and creative movement into life. The fear of experiencing all these states is obviously also a trick of the ego. This is a well-known phenomenon applying to all human beings and is easy to observe. More such tricks of the ego are: inattentiveness, lack of concentration, abstractedness, absent-mindedness. These attitudes prevent the focusing necessary for the ego to transcend itself. To transcend its present limited state, the ego requires a good deal of one-pointed focusing, of being all there, as it were. Laziness, tiredness, and passivity are, too, tricks of the ego. They make movement impossible, undesirable, and exhausting. We shall come back to this later.

Fear of exposure and denial of real feelings not only stem from pride but also directly perpetuate isolation and are therefore used as ego tricks to deny oneness with others. Negative reactions to the negativity of others is another trick of the ego to maintain its isolation. The moment negativity appears, the energy system begins to function to deny the ego's expansion, which would effect self-transcendence. The ego denies the joyousness of true being by making something more of other people's behavior than necessary. It cuts off the vision of real life that exceeds the limited present state. Only the isolated ego-bound entity experiences the terror of finiteness. Distrust and suspiciousness are not only part of the general fear that makes the ego wish to remain immobile and resort to trickery in order to defy the natural movement toward the being's ultimate fate. While distrust caused by fear is the motivating force, the ego simultaneously uses the distrust as a trick to stop the movement toward union.

The ego assumes a preposterous and paradoxical position. It is intrinsically unhappy, precisely because of its finiteness, or what seems finite in its present limited state. It is self-evident that the ego can see only what is within its present scope of awareness. And what it sees is, to varying degrees, limited and falsified. Hence the ego sees and experiences only finiteness: the disconnected, meaningless universe in which it is senselessly suffering and powerless. This perception of life can alter only to the degree that the ego overcomes the temptation to stay put. But the paradoxical position of the ego is that it fights to remain in the very state that often makes your life unbearably lonely, fearful, and meaningless.

Unfathomable death is terrifying, and although it is possible to deny this terror, it cannot be dissolved as long as the ego remains within its present narrow confines. Sooner or later everyone is faced with this terrifying illusory end, both their own and others'. But even if this terror is not acute,

it remains a gnawing force in your soul, a force that must always exist until the ego gives up its resistance. In spite of the ego's extreme discomfort, it clings to that very condition, the very state that makes true vision beyond the imaginary line of demarcation between life and death impossible. This is the sickness of the ego state and the perversion of it -- to cling to the very thing it battles against.

All my friends can easily recognize themselves in this description, for the pathwork makes this incongruity very obvious. I believe it will greatly help you all to see your plight in this light and to know that this is a universal state which you are called upon to transcend. On this path you must be concerned with, and grope for an understanding of, how to transcend the ego, and what that really means.

Isolation and separateness are, without a doubt and without exception, tragic and ironic; tragic because unnecessary, and ironic because the ego clings to what it hates and what hurts it most. It lacks the discipline and the perseverance, the commitment and the faith to venture beyond its present scope of awareness. Suffering must exist as long as you cling to this state and indulge in it. As long as all the tricks of the ego are acted out, rationalized, denied, perpetuated and nurtured -- as is usually the case -- you cannot help but suffer.

You all know, my friends, and many of you have indeed experienced it, that every step forward on the path reveals new vistas that are very real, much more real than the previous state that you thought was the ultimate reality. Every step of the way this newly gained reality opens to a life wider and fuller for you. The result is more joy, more peace, more consciousness, more understanding of the beautiful deep meaning of life, more creativity and more intrinsic knowledge of life's eternality versus the illusion of death, the illusion of finiteness.

But every one of these steps could have been won only by a tremendous amount of investment on your part. Whoever still wants indulgence and easy, cheap results can never, never attain this new state. You will look wistfully at the possibilities yet doubt that anything else could exist that would warrant the effort and the lowering of your pride. This doubt then becomes the excuse for the artificially maintained status quo. This is the sin against life, defeating life's natural movement toward evolution and unification.

Discipline, courage, humility, and the ability to commit yourself -- these are not attitudes you do not possess, my friends. Everyone of you possesses every conceivable attribute in the universe. The question is, do you wish to avail yourself of these potentials within you, or do you wish to claim that you do not possess them and that someone has to "give" them to you magically?

You often hold the misplaced and confused idea that self-discipline hampers your freedom, and, conversely, that a free person does not need self-discipline. Nothing could be further from the truth. Freedom, in its real sense, is unthinkable without discipline. And, conversely, the people who indulge themselves and who reject discipline are inevitably dependent, weak, powerless, and consequently afraid. They lack freedom. Freedom can be gained only to the degree one uses voluntary self-discipline -- uses it for one's own sake and not to appease and appear good in the eyes of others. The latter attitude often leads either to actual or imaginary discipline being imposed upon the person by others. When such imposition happens -- and this is of course undesirable -- it is always a result of the denial of voluntary self-discipline, which goes together with self-responsibility.

Every expansion must be fought for with self-discipline, by overcoming the embedded resistance against expansion. The discipline must be used for stringent recognition of the ego tricks and against giving in to them. This expansion is always a step beyond a known territory. The ego has evolved to its present state, which varies, of course, from person to person, as a result of what humanity has already achieved. The "territory" people have gained determines their degree of functioning, the scope of their experience and awareness.

When I speak of "territory," I mean a state of awareness, creative life force, and influx from the real world, all of which make experiencing life deeper and more meaningful. The word "territory" is thus not to be understood in a geographical sense, but in a total sense. The fences around this territory indicate the degree of the ego's self-transcendence.

Every incarnation, on whatever level, requires increasing the scope of one's "field of operation." To widen the fences around the fragmented ego, to bring in more reality from the world beyond the illusory confinement is the task. Indirectly, this applies to all levels. Even the most mundane, outer, physical and intellectual knowledge and skills to be acquired increase in some way your present ability to function and experience life, and thus indirectly contribute to the ultimate task of self-transcendence. The acquisition of new knowledge and skills also demands the cultivation of the attitudes necessary for self-transcendence. Every bit of new knowledge or a new skill yields, directly or indirectly, more spiritual power and awareness, more experience of joy and realization of your own adequacy and your potential.

To acquire new knowledge or skills, on whatever level, always means overcoming laziness. It means self-discipline: the more desirable a new aspect of life is, the more real and durable it is, the more you must invest in it. It means trial and error, and the ability to convert failure into success. It means perseverance, patience, faith. It means overcoming fear until the new thing becomes one's own natural possession, until it becomes part of the personality, second nature, so to speak.

The ego's task is always first to accept the difficulties, the hardships of the learning process. Only when the ego has learned the more mechanical aspects of this process can the influx of the spiritual self make the new acquisitions a spontaneous, living, effortless experience. Ego means effort; spiritual self means effortlessness. This desirable effortlessness is not given by magic, however, for this would mean that the ego is not being transcended but avoided. The ego must change its lazy, resistant attitudes in order to transcend itself to become able to unify with the cosmic, greater self. The ego must lay the arduous groundwork until the real self can come through. This can be noted in every activity or skill. First there is always effort. It becomes pleasurable only when it seems, and actually is, "happening through you."

If you are learning a manual task, the manual rules have to be learned until they become part of the ego; if a mental task, mental knowledge has first to be painstakingly acquired, often through quite mechanical processes. Then the new knowledge will become the person's own and the spirit can use this newly expanded vision, knowledge, skill, energy, and accomplishment to play creatively. An artist who wants to bypass the effortfulness of learning the ground rules can never unfold any creative ability, no matter how real it may initially be. These creative abilities will wither because that person wants to cheat life.

The spiritual path itself demonstrates the identical principles. As mentioned before, the ego must learn and adopt attitudes compatible with the universal, divine ones. This is, as you know, not easy. The inspiration of the spiritual self is blocked off to the degree the ego is blindly involved in its negativity, including laziness, pride, selfwill, fear, wish to cheat life, and escapist tendencies. But as these tendencies are honestly recognized and gradually given up, the influx of the world of eternal truth, love, and beauty becomes possible.

The arduous task of making the ego flexible always comes first: teaching it, bending, changing it; making it receptive and vibrant; letting new life energy and creativity flow through it by identifying and abandoning the ego's tricks. Whether it takes shape as new knowledge, new skills, or a new attitude toward life and the universe, this change always means a new territory has become your own.

People truly wither away when they remain in the narrow confines of their present state because they feel it is safe and they think they have eliminated the need for effort and investment. They do not permit life to regenerate them. Regeneration can happen only where inner movement exists. It always seems frightening at first to go beyond the ego's present confines. The new territory is foreign, unknown. People want to avoid the unknown, and they would rather cower in fear of it than have the courage to learn about it and make it their own. To make the unknown known, outside as well as inside, is the beauty of the spiritual path.

The ego is under the illusion that to stay in the stagnant, narrow confines of the already known territory -- for regardless of how much wider it may be compared to the territory of others, it is still narrower as compared to one's potential -- is easy and relaxing. To pull yourself up by your bootstraps and move beyond seems terribly tiresome. This feeling is illusory because the stagnant state is really a contraction, and contraction is by no means relaxing and restful, although it may seem so to the confused mind. True restfulness is always alive and effortlessly moving. This is impossible in a state of contraction. You can verify this by looking around you. The people who do the least are always the most tired. And the people who do most are always most energized and relaxed -- provided their activity does not serve as an escape from the self.

Harmonious movement is not tiring or exhausting, although you may experience such symptoms at first, because to go from stasis to motion on any level first requires accepting a temporary effort with self-discipline, faith, courage, and humility until the effort becomes effortless. Spiritual movement is effortless. By spiritual movement I mean the movement of ultimate reality, of the totally unified entity. The stagnation is really very effortful, because it requires an enormous and often unconscious effort in order to sustain the resistance against the soul's natural inclination to follow its destiny. This unconscious effort then manifests as tiredness, exhaustion, weakness, which furnish the excuse to remain still longer in the status quo. The ego uses the results of its own errors as tricks.

All life is movement, and movement is not effortful when the entity is in harmony with life. But movement seems temporarily effortful until this harmony has been established by reorienting the ego. You then move within the rhythm of your own life stream. When you can feel the rhythm of your life stream, you have already acquired a certain amount of self-awareness and you are already within the expansive movement.

Those who are on paths such as yours will find that some parts of them are already joining the cosmic movement; other parts still resist and stagnate. Your moving parts are the aware parts. These parts are capable of recognizing the significance of the resistance. These parts can meditate on seeking a deeper understanding of your task in life; on the meaning of your life in the light of this lecture. You will find greater motivation to request guidance so that your stagnating parts will yield to the moving parts. Little by little you will energize the contracted consciousness that has separated itself from the whole.

When I speak of ego, I do not wish to imply that it should be totally negated, denied, and insulted. The ego is part of divine consciousness and holds all aspects of the greater self from which it has separated itself, even if they are distorted and misused. The basic energy and consciousness of the ego is made of the same substance with which you ultimately reunite.

The ego must be healthy in order to venture beyond its present confines, to transcend itself, and learn and own as yet unknown spiritual territory. It needs to expand its knowledge, experience, and creative potential. In order to do this, the ego must adopt attitudes compatible with its original nature. All the tricks of the ego, all the negativity and evil that are embedded only in the ego, have to be recognized with a very incisive, sharp self-honesty for what they are. Denial, rationalization, and projection must be given up. The searchlight must be ruthlessly turned on the little self. Only when you use your ego consciousness to put the strong light of truth on other areas of your ego consciousness can you adopt healthy, truthful attitudes. Only a healthy ego can transcend itself and unify with the naturally healthy divine consciousness.

The weak, sick, distorted ego very often wants to give itself up simply because it cannot bear itself any longer. It adopts various forms of escape, such as drugs or other means of false transcendence. But such ego transcendence is highly dangerous and is just a variation of insanity. For insanity itself is the attempt of the ego to lose or transcend itself because it can no longer bear itself. In all these false and dangerous attempts, the entity always seeks to avoid effort, pain, inconvenience, and those aspects of life with which it does not agree or which it does not understand. It seeks to cheat, using shortcuts, which can never work and which exact a very high price. Consequently, the entity may hold on even tighter to the immobile, rigid state, perhaps for many incarnations, thus making healthy ego transcendence as impossible as the false kind.

You can succeed only by using the healthy part of the ego to shed light on the sick part; to use the honest part of the ego to shed light on the dishonest part. Then ego transcendence takes place in the safest possible way. Then you acquire new territory: a territory that was at first frighteningly foreign, unknown, and apparently dark but will become familiar and light. With this new safety, a sense of eternity is created in the self. The deepest feelings, knowledge, and experiences of life's continuum will grow and automatically eliminate an enormous amount of pain and fear. But this growth cannot come cheaply. It requires full investment and commitment on your part. And whoever does this genuinely must reap the fruits in a most concrete way.

The greater your efforts become, the more of a spiritual force you lawfully elicit and make your own. Every step of truth and goodwill activates automatically and inexorably the power and creative spiritual force within and around you.

Blessings and love for all of you, my dearest ones.

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