

Self-Empowerment

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The newsletter dedicated to nurturing personal development

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PLAYING “EGO SAYS”

Have you ever played “Simon Says”? In that game everybody stands in rows ready to follow the leader’s instructions. The trick of the game is that everyone does whatever the leader instructs, as long as it is preceded by the words “Simon Says.” It might sound something like this: “Simon Says, ‘hop on your right foot and clap your hands.’” “Simon Says, ‘stop clapping.’ (pause) ‘Stop hopping.’” Anyone who stops hopping is a loser, since *Simon didn’t say* “stop hopping.” The last person to correctly do only what “Simon Says” is the winner.

It occurs to me there’s an aspect to this game that may not be readily obvious. It would seem that the leader is Simon. But upon consideration, the leader cannot be Simon but is somehow merely Simon’s messenger. If the leader gives a command, it is not to be followed or you will lose. But, if the leader gives instructions that come from *Simon* (whoever he is), it is up to you to obey. The leader somehow decides which commands are Simon’s and which are merely his own. It would appear he is a channel of two voices, his own and Simon’s.

And what about us, the participants in the game – so eager to follow directions that we sometimes lose track of who is giving the commands, the one we see or the channeled spirit of Simon....?

Is this sounding silly? It is just a game, right?

GOOD VOICE vs. BAD VOICE

It has been suggested by spiritual leaders that there are two voices to choose from when we give expression to the thoughts we have. In this world of duality it would appear that there is a good voice and a bad voice, one of virtue and one of sin. The guidance of one voice leads to joy and freedom while there is another voice that guides us to pain and separation.

I remember cartoons from my younger days that would depict a character with an angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other shoulder. The angel and the devil would give conflicting advice into each ear, and the main character had to decide which one to heed. That’s a funny image of a dynamic that seems to be going on for us, right inside our own minds. And just

like the leader of the Simon Says game, we somehow must decide which voice to give expression to.

Should I eat that yummy ice cream that sings its Siren Song to me, or do I stick to my diet so my pants won’t feel so tight? Shall I tell that creep what I think of him, or should I cool off and consider a better way to handle this situation?

Unfortunately the cute little angel and devil cartoon characters are not clearly visible on our shoulders. How can I know if I am legitimate in my claim that the devil made me do it. Ha! Some selections may be more obvious than others, depending on your points of reference and level of consciousness. In order to differentiate between the good voice and the bad voice, it takes self-awareness and an understanding of what those voices represent.

“SPIRIT SAYS” vs. “EGO SAYS”

Eckhart Tolle, spiritual guide and author, writes about the voice of the ego in his latest book *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose*. He writes:

Most people are so completely identified with the voice in the head—the incessant stream of involuntary and compulsive thinking and the emotions that accompany it—that we may describe them as being possessed by their mind. As long as you are completely unaware of this, you take the thinker to be who you are. This is the egoic mind. We call it egoic because there is a sense of self, or I (ego), in every thought—every memory, every interpretation, opinion, viewpoint, reaction, emotion. This is unconsciousness, spiritually speaking. Your thinking, the content of your mind, is of course conditioned by the past: your upbringing, culture, family background, and so on. The central core of all your mind activity consists of certain repetitive and persistent thoughts, emotions, and reactive patterns that you identify with most strongly. This entity is the ego itself.

The ego, although not really a devil, has the devilish quality of being a set of beliefs that keep us separate from everyone and every thing. By its very nature, our egos are bundles of thoughts and memories that make up a story of a separate “me” to be differentiated from you and others. The boundary of my

body, the feelings that I have, the definitions that I hold, the meanings that come forth from my experiences as I have learned to understand them – these and all my many identifications with my name, age, relationships, job, race, religion, social class, politics, preferences, grievances, wounds, possessions, and concepts of myself as good, bad, fat, thin, smart, ignorant, generous, stingy, funny, dull, etc. – lead to a concept of myself that keeps me on a roller coaster of highs and lows. Even when I attain some of the “good” things, I am always in danger of losing them, eventually. The voice in my head can make a good case for never really relaxing, being ever-vigilant for ways to “hold on.”

Additionally, the voice of the ego is constantly comparing and judging, attacking and condemning, weighing and measuring, highlighting fears to be avoided and defenses needed to survive.

So what is the alternative to the voice of the ego? There is indeed another voice, but it is softer and more subtle than the compulsive tape loops of the egoic voice. Some call it their Higher Self, others know it as Guidance or Spirit or God. Some might just think of it as Intuition, Gut Knowing, or Universal Mind. It does not matter what you call it. It is that part of us that is the deeper Knower. It is the part of our minds that join with others at a heart level. It is the still small voice within.

For some people, this other voice is actually a clear conversational voice of guidance. For others it is more of an inner prompting or the recognition of guidance available in another form – like the words in a song, a suggestion of a friend, or some other way of attaining a deeper knowing.

I recently read an autobiographical article by Rev. Leo Booth, author, lecturer and addictions counselor. Leo shares that he always wondered why cartoon character Popeye would wait until the last minute to eat the spinach which would always instantly give him the strength to overcome the dire circumstance he would find himself in. “Why didn’t he reach for it earlier? Why did he wait until he was beaten up or nearly drowning in the ocean?” Leo goes on to say that spirituality is a little like the spinach – it’s always there but sometimes we don’t reach out for it until we’re really desperate.

I think I know why. The dynamic is captured well in Plato’s allegory of The Cave.

There are people imprisoned in a cave. They are chained so they cannot move or turn their heads, and can only see straight ahead to the back wall of the cave. With their backs toward the opening, they can only see shadows on the opposite wall. The shadows

they see are all they know, so it is their only reality. Any echoes from passers-by would seem to be from the moving shadows.

If a prisoner is then liberated, he suffers pains to stand up and move after being chained for so long. As he leaves the cave the glare of the sunlight outside is quite distressing to eyes not used to such brightness. Newly seen objects appear strange and perplexing. He must become accustomed to the sights of this upper world.

The freed prisoner, wanting to tell the others of his observations, goes back to the cave to share his new knowledge with those who are still in chains. They are so used to the shadows being their reality that they don’t want to hear what seems ridiculous to them, and threatening. They would think the freed man a mad man, an offender of truth who should be put to death.

In this allegory, Plato tried to explain what he understood from his mentor Socrates, who was executed by being forced to drink poison. They had the intuition of a greater reality beyond the sense data that we interpret as reality, but are merely shadows on the wall.

We are trained by our families, culture, etc. to stare at the shadows on the wall and call them reality. A few brave souls have ventured out of the cave. Will you feel threatened enough to kill the messengers or curious enough to check it out for yourself?

In this issue is an article by Dennis Gaither who leads “Freedom Through Forgiveness” workshops. Rev. Margo Ford shares more of her inspirational poetry with us. I recommend checking out the teleconference workshop series presented by DavidPaul and Candace Doyle, who have successfully taught many people to hear the voice of Spirit in a conversational two-way communication. And singer-songwriter Jody Kessler is coming back to South Jersey to inspire us through her music on April 28th.

There are so many wonderful people who can help us make the choice for the voice that leads to unity, peace, love and joy. I am grateful to them all, and to you dear reader for joining us in this journey.

Simon says, Have a delightful day. Ego says, What if I don’t? Spirit says, I am with you always, loving you, no matter what you think you are experiencing.

Blessings, Love and Hugs!

Your fellow traveler, *Rev Jill*



Thoughts and Words

My thoughts and my words
Are like seeds, for you see,
Whatever I plant
Is what grows within me.

The thoughts and the words
That I form through my mind
Have meaning and power
And produce their same kind.

I can choose what I wish
Be it sorrow or mirth
It begins within me
And it spreads through the Earth.

My choice each new day
Is to plant joyful seeds
And never give room
To thoughts that are “weeds.”

A seed creates wonder,
And reminds me to see
The tremendous potential
Residing in me.

Rev. Margo J. Ford

How a Spiritual Perspective Can Change Your Experience

By Dennis Gaither, M.D.

We live in a world seemingly determined by events around us and experienced through our senses. We see before us many separate objects and separate bodies with a mind or will of their own. Everything our senses tell us seems to remind us, to convince us, that we are alone and separate in a world of scarcity, competition and danger. A world in which what we have, what we have worked for, can be taken from us in an instant.

We try to buy some sense of security in this world in countless ways: relationships (or in the avoidance of them!), through our jobs and roles, through bank accounts and insurance policies. We try to protect ourselves from a perceived threatening world in many other ways. We seek safety in isolation, personal and national weapons, keeping our guard up, and joining with others in alliances against persons or groups.

This perspective has us imbedded firmly in this world, which seems like our only “reality”. From this

perspective, our sufferings and our moments of pleasure seem to come from outside of ourselves. We identify ourselves as bodies, with all of the body’s limitations, including, inevitably, its death. We feel a need to protect the body’s vulnerability and take revenge on those other bodies that we feel have harmed us in some way.

We constantly – whether consciously or not – strive to define ourselves and others in terms of the body, by what it looks like or what it does. We use terms like beautiful or ugly, fat or slim, man or woman, successful or a failure, victim and rescuer, hero and villain. We categorize ourselves and others by job, gender, status, income, family situation, sexual orientation and countless other ways. All of these we use to define a self-concept for ourselves and others.

We defend our self concepts vigorously and constantly. There is no surer way to trigger anger or upset than to have our self concepts challenged or questioned. Even a self concept that obviously causes much pain, such as that of the victim, will be defended and held onto as if it were something essential to the person.

This thought system of separation we call the EGO. From within this thought system our prospects seem bleak indeed, a life of constant struggle, one problem after another. The best we can hope for is some compromise in which we limit our lives to manage our pain as well as possible and get what enjoyment we can. But even in our moments of pleasure there is always lurking within us the fear that it can be taken away in an instant.

According to *A Course in Miracles*, our tolerance for pain may be great, but it is not without limit and eventually each one of us realizes that “there must be a better way.”

This is a crucial step, because until we are *willing* to see that our suffering comes from within us through our thought system we will continue to play out our ego based self concepts, feel helpless, betrayed, angry and in pain. It is through our *willingness* for “a better way” and our *willingness* to take responsibility for our own experience that we can begin our Journey to true healing – a healing of the perception that we are beings separate unto ourselves.

If this ego perspective of the world is not all there is, then what else is there? And how can we see that world instead of this world that seems so real to us?

Whatever this other perspective is, it is not one that we can see with our eyes in the usual fashion. Traditional religions speak of a spiritual perspective, but often through the filter of the ego so that we are separated into believers and non-believers, saints and sinners, the “faithful” and the “infidel”. The ego

perspective of separation can use spirituality to divide and separate, justify crusades and holy wars, banishment, judgment, guilt and to sanctify sacrifice. This perspective may be useful at some stage of our spirit's journey, but it does not bring the deepest healing that we seek. For this we must move on to a deeper experience.

Beyond this world of form there is a world of spirit. It cannot be perceived with the senses, but it can be experienced when we are willing to question and let go of all that stands in the way of it. The defining emotional state of the world of form and separation is fear, while that of spirit is love. Our path of healing is one of letting go of all of our blocks to the awareness of love's presence. "Perfect love casts out fear". (From *A Course in Miracles*.)

As we are here today we are having an experience of being in this body, in this world. But we also have an experience of spirit, not at all confined to this body, this place, or this time. Our *awareness* may be limited only to our bodily experience, but we are having a spiritual experience nonetheless.

In a sense you could say that we are spiritual beings having a human experience. And there is in each of us a part of our mind that does remember our True Nature as spirit, our Oneness with all that is. It is called by many names, such as: Higher Power, Higher Self, Holy Spirit, Christ Consciousness, Buddha Nature, Atman. The words themselves are not important except as symbols that point toward an *experience* of oneness and love that does exist within each of us, no matter how deeply it can seem to be buried at times.

It is that experience that guides us along our path, helps us release our blocks to love's presence - our grievances, resentments, guilts, hurts and wounds, and our perceived need to be separate and special. We have all had glimpses of that experience. Special moments with a loved one or child, with nature, in prayer or meditation, with some sacred symbol (such as a cross, an altar, Star of David, a church, mosque, synagogue) or with sacred scripture that connects us with the sacred *in us*.

Through those glimpses, those instants of deeper awareness, we begin to see that we are part of a larger reality. We notice the contrast between the quiet inner peace of spirit and the noisy clamor of the ego world. And it awakens in us a deep, long hidden desire to return home, to reconnect with our true essence, our Source.

As we awaken the Journey home becomes more intentional, more directed to that one purpose. We find that we can use every situation we encounter as a way to realize our goal, to help us awaken from

the dream of sickness and separation. We become more willing to take responsibility for our ego thoughts, look honestly at them and their results, and realize we have another choice. We learn that we can offer them to our Higher Self perspective to be transformed and healed. This process of healing, we call forgiveness.

In our confusion and pain we have all said and done unloving things. This does not change the essence of who we are, but it does greatly affect how we feel about ourselves. Our attack thoughts and actions *do* affect us. They lead us to feel anxious, depressed, guilty, exhausted, alone, separate and physically ill. Through the defense mechanism of dissociation we do not connect the cause of our symptoms with its effects. The belief in guilt in our minds is mostly kept unconscious and projected on to other persons or situations. *This keeps the sense of guilt out of our awareness, but does not protect us from its effects.* On the contrary, by keeping the guilt unconscious we guarantee that it will continue to produce effects in the form of physical and emotional symptoms. Undoing the unconscious guilt in our minds by first bringing it into our awareness, releasing the emotional energy of it and then being willing to allow a new understanding from our Higher Self perspective is an essential part of real healing.

With each forgiveness we experience a sense of peace, of healing. We see that forgiveness is really not something we are doing for someone else, but something that heals us, brings us peace and frees us from our own limited perceptions. As we forgive others, we free ourselves. As we see the innocence in others, we see it in ourselves. As we extend the Peace of God to others, we experience it for ourselves. As we offer healing, we receive it.

As we learn to see this world through the eyes of spirit, we recognize that we are all on a Journey together, despite the many forms this may take in each individual. As we forgive we feel less angry, fearful and alone. Instead we see the love, peace and joy that we extend out into the world reflected back to us. We feel more complete within ourselves, more at peace and less in need. We recognize that our real home lies within us and that it can never be taken away.

Dennis Gaither works as a psychiatrist in Washington and leads "Freedom Through Forgiveness" workshops. His background includes A Course in Miracles, Hakomi, medicine, psychiatry, meditation and deep personal spiritual work. He is being ordained as an Interfaith Minister by Pathways of Light. PathwaysOfLight.com

A Course in Miracles study groups

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SPRING FUNDRAISER

Each Spring I remind my readers that it is time for the financial support of this newsletter. Readers are encouraged to send a voluntary contribution to help cover the cost of publication.

This is a golden opportunity to say “yes” to the cycle of Giving and Receiving. Take a minute to write a check payable to “**Agape Interfaith Ministries**” or feel free to send a book or two of postage stamps, which also give great support.

Your help truly does make a difference. Whether you send \$5 *or more*, every bit of support makes this sharing of inspiration possible. **Thank you for your support!**

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Self-Empowerment is a quarterly newsletter dedicated to nurturing personal development. In its 13th year of publication, the mission of *Self-Empowerment* is to encourage, support and inspire a deepening conscious relationship with Divinity for the greater experience of wholeness, abundance, love and peace. **Blessings to you!**

Have you ever wanted to hear the Holy Spirit as a distinct and conversational Voice within you?



DavidPaul and Candace Doyle, authors of *The Journey That Never Was: A Guide to hearing God's Voice regardless of one's faith, religion, or personal beliefs*, are a husband and wife team who each hear the Holy Spirit as a distinct and conversational Voice. Through their workshops, the Doyles have already empowered many people to hear God's Voice with the specificity and clarity they truly longed for.

Now you can do it, too! And from the comfort of your own home. The Doyles' workshop is now offered as a 6-week course over the telephone (or internet, if you prefer). Learn how to receive guidance and support in all areas of your life by following the simple steps learned through the telecourse offered by DavidPaul and Candace. The next class begins on March 13, 2006 (for 6 Monday evenings).

Visit the www.AgapeInterfaith.org "Spirit Speaks" page for more information, or call DavidPaul and Candace at 541-488-0426. They are happy to answer your questions.

~

Daily Word

God inspires me with a wellspring of divine ideas.

Through intuition, I am making insightful, perceptive discoveries.

Before making a decision, I may first gather all the facts and data available. The price and features of a car or a house or a can of beans make a difference in my daily life, and my personal desires matter also. However, I have another vital resource of information: spiritual intuition.

Before coming to a conclusion, I take a few moments to release my thoughts and feelings and go within. Here I meditate on the choices available to me, and I listen for the inspiration that comes from God.

What a joy it is to discover that spiritual intuition is revealing a way that had never before occurred to me! I am not surprised, however, at such a discovery. I have tapped into a spiritual wisdom that is always a part of me and ready to lead me.

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