

## “Is There A Cure For Egotism?”

It wasn't long after he got the diagnosis of MS that the man stopped returning phone calls from his best friend. When his life-long buddy finally managed to contact him, he asked what was going on. The estranged friend said matter of factly, “I'm busy at work and I'm really stressed out.” “Sorry to hear that,” his old friend replied. “Maybe you should take some R & R.” “I can't,” he answered. “I feel driven. I want to be successful. I want to build my legacy before I die.” Confused, the old friend replied, “But you are already successful! Maybe you should just let go and retire!” “I can't,” the self-made man replied. My identity is all wrapped up in my work.” Angry with the man who had forsaken him in order to make relationships with people who could help him attain his goals---and, saddened with the loss of the person who knew him best, he retorted, “Yes you can, you just don't want to!” After hanging up, they both wondered about the same thing. Was it possible for him to stop his pursuit of success and to let go of building his empire---even if he wanted to?

Egotism is a vain self absorption and practice of making personal welfare and interests a primary or sole concern, sometimes at the ruthless expense of others. It hits us the hardest during times of change (good and bad), normal aging, crises of identity formation, sickness and health, vulnerability and strength, transitions, suffering, and loss. Whenever we are in our ego-centered mode we feel like our glass is less than half full. During these fearful times we become addicted to acquiring power, seeking status and recognition, being wonderful and without flaw, being right and smarter, winning, becoming famous, and getting rich in order to build up our ego---that we might feel safe and secure. Egotism causes us to use rather than love others. Whatever the ego demands, the ego gets, no matter who gets hurt. Egotism diminishes our ability to be at one with, to give compassionate care, and to establish committed relationships with others. Probably the most problematic thing of all about egotism is that it views independence, self sufficiency, and self centeredness as normative for the human condition. The ethical

doctrine of egoism holds that the correct basis for morality is self-interest.

Fortunately, even though we often don't see our egotism as a problem that causes needless suffering, three of the major religions of the world teach that it does. Why? For the simple reason that the self serving dynamic of egotism is antithetical to the relational nature of the soul that blesses life. Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity teach that by paying attention to sacred principles of faith, intentionally developing one's spiritual life, and regularly practicing compassionate loving-kindness toward others ---that which is humanly impossible---getting over oneself---stepping outside of---being free of the cravings of the ego---is possible through Sacred Spiritual Power.

In our story from the Hebrew scriptures, King Ahab of Israel and his Sidonian wife, Jezebel, wanted what they had no right to demand. Then when he didn't get his way, the childish king threw a temper tantrum. Before long, the toxic nature of his greed turned him into a murderer who let his wife do the dirty deed so that he could appear innocent. In Jewish faith, covenantal relationship with God is both the prevention and cure for egotism. That relationship is best established through obedience to the Ten Commandments (love of God and love of neighbor). In Jewish piety, it is the best way to learn to step outside the concerns of self in a moral and ethical way.

Buddhist wisdom teaches that suffering occurs when we are unable to let go of the dictates of the ego. With our Buddhist friends we can let go through the practice of mindful meditation on wisdom sayings.

Shantideva

All the harm, fear, and suffering in the world are caused by attachment to the self: why should I hold on to this great demon?

Chogyam Trungpa

You are encouraged to say to your ego: 'You have created tremendous trouble for me, and I don't like you. I'm going to destroy you.'

Matthieu Ricard

We want the world to allow the unconditional fulfillment of all our aspirations, and since this does not happen, we fall prey to suffering. Our search for happiness is more often founded on our illusions than on reality. It is pointless to try to shape the world to fit our desires: we must transform our minds.

True freedom means freeing oneself from the dictates of the ego and its accompanying emotions.

Jack Kornfield

Without being aware of it, you take many things as being your identity: your body, your race, your beliefs, your thoughts.

The essence of Buddhism: 'No self, no problem.'

(From OFFERINGS: Buddhist Wisdom for every day by Danielle and Olivier Follmi in the section, Taking Root: the dictates of the ego)

In the gospel story, Jesus empowered the woman to step outside herself by touching her with forgiveness, acceptance, and loving kindness; by exposing the hidden ego motives of Simon the self righteous Pharisee; and by teaching that her gratitude and generous giving granted her identity as a child of God and included her in God's dream of happiness and well being for all people. In Christian thought, egotism can be cured through the grace received in a personal relationship with Christ and by becoming a faithful follower of Jesus. Wouldn't it have been awesome if, when the two old friends hung up the phone, they both could have remembered what Jesus said to the woman who showed him love: **Your faith has saved you, go in peace?**

Fill My Cup, Lord

Like the woman at the well I was seeking  
for things that could not satisfy;  
And then I heard my Savior speaking:  
'Draw from My well that never shall run dry.'

There are millions in this world who are craving  
The pleasures earthly things afford;  
But none can match the wondrous treasure  
That I find in Jesus Christ, my Lord.

So, my brother, if the things this world gave you  
Leave hungers that won't pass away,  
My blessed Lord will come and save you  
If you kneel to Him and humbly pray

Refrain

Fill my cup, Lord, I lift it up, Lord!  
Come and quench this thirsting of my soul;  
Bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more---  
Fill it up and make me whole!

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## 1 Kings 21:1-21a

Later the following events took place: Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreelite, beside the palace of King Ahab of Samfaria. And Ahab said to Naboth, "Give me your vineyard, so that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house; I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money." But Naboth said to Ahab, "The Lord forbid that I should give you my ancestral inheritance." Ahab went home resentful and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him; for he had said, "I will not give you my ancestral inheritance." He lay down on his bed, turned away his face, and would not eat. His wife Jezebel came to him and said, "Why are you so depressed that you will not eat?" He said to her, "Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, 'Give me your vineyard for money, or else, if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard for it'; but he answered, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'" "Do you now govern Israel? Get up, eat some food, and be cheerful, I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal; she sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who lived with Naboth in his city. She wrote in the letters, 'Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth at the head of the assembly; seat two scoundrels opposite him, and have them bring a charge against him, saying, "You have cursed God and the king.' Then take him out and stone him to death." The men of his city, the elders and the nobles who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them. Just as it was written in the letters that she had sent to them, they proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at the head of the assembly. The two scoundrels came in and sat opposite him; and the scoundrels brought a charge against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, "Naboth cursed God and the king." So they took him out of the city, and stoned him to death. Then they

sent to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned; he is dead." As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, "Go, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead." As soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab set out to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying: Go down to meet King Ahab of Israel, who rules in Samaria; he is now in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession. You shall say to him, "thus says the Lord. Have you killed and also taken possession?" You shall say to him, "Thus says the Lord; In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, dogs will also lick up your blood." Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" He answered, "I have found you. Because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord. I will bring disaster on you; I will consume you, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel . . .

Luke 7:36-8:3

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him---that she is a sinner." Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "speak." A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more? Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; thence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven. But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves. "Who is this who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities. Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and

Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.