

The Ego-Body Illusion

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⁶⁹ ALL things work together for good. There are NO exceptions except in the ego's judgment. Control is a central factor in what the ego permits into consciousness, and one to which it devotes its maximum vigilance. This is NOT the way a balanced mind holds together. ITS control is unconscious. The ego is further off balance by keeping its primary motivation UN-conscious, and raising control rather than sensible judgment to predominance. It has every reason to do this, according to the thought-system which both gave rise to the ego and which the ego serves. Sane judgment would inevitably judge AGAINST the ego, and MUST be obliterated by the ego in the interest of its self-preservation.

⁷⁰ A crucial source of the ego's off-balance state is its lack of discrimination between impulses from God and from the body. Any thought-system which makes THIS confusion MUST be insane. Yet this demented state is ESSENTIAL to the ego, which judges ONLY in terms of threat or non-threat TO ITSELF. In one sense, the ego's fear of the idea of God is at least logical, because this idea DOES dispel it. Fear of dissolution from the higher source, then, makes SOME sense in ego terms. But fear of the body, with which the ego identifies so closely, is more blatantly senseless.

⁷¹ The body is the ego's home by its own election. It is the only identification with which it feels safe, because the body's vulnerability is its own best argument that you CANNOT be of God. This is the belief that it sponsors eagerly. Yet the ego hates the body, because it does not accept the idea that the body is good enough as its home. Here is where the mind becomes actually dazed. Being told by the ego that it is really part of the body, and that the body is its protector, it is also constantly informed that the body can NOT protect it. This, of course, is not only true, but perfectly obvious.

⁷² Therefore, the mind asks, "Where can I go for protection?", to which the ego replies, "Turn to me." The mind, and not without cause, reminds the ego that it has itself insisted that it IS identified with the body, so there is no point in turning to it for protection. The ego has no real answer to this because there ISN'T any. But it DOES have a typical solution. It obliterates the question from the mind's awareness. Once unconscious, it can and does produce uneasiness, but it cannot be answered because it cannot be asked. This is the question which MUST be asked: "Where am I to go for protection?" Only an insane mind FAILS to ask it. Even the insane ask it unconsciously, but it requires real sanity to ask it consciously. If you will remember your dream about the recorder, which was remarkably accurate in some ways because it came partly from ego-repressed knowledge, the real problem was correctly stated as "What is the question?" because, as you very well knew, the answer COULD be found if the question were recognized. If you remember, there were a number of solutions you attempted, all ego-based, not because you thought they would really work, but because the question ITSELF was obscure.

73 When the Bible says "Seek and ye shall find," it does NOT mean that you should seek blindly and desperately for something you wouldn't recognize. Meaningful seeking is consciously undertaken, consciously organized, and consciously directed. Bill's chief contribution to your joint venture is his insistence that the goal be formulated clearly, and KEPT IN MIND. You, Helen, are not good at doing this. You still search for many gods simultaneously, and this goal confusion, given a strong will, MUST produce chaotic behavior. Bill's behavior is not chaotic, because he is not so much goal-divided as not goal-ORIENTED. Where Helen has over-invested in many goals, Bill has under-invested in ALL goals. He has the advantage of POTENTIALLY greater freedom from distractibility, but he does not care enough to use it. Helen has the advantage of great effort, but she keeps losing sight of the goal. Bill has very intelligently suggested that you both should set yourself the goal of really studying for this course. There can be no doubt of the wisdom of this decision, for any student who wants to pass it. But, knowing your individual weaknesses as learners and being a teacher with some experience, I must remind you that learning and wanting to learn are inseparable. All learners learn best when they believe that what they are trying to learn is of value to them. But values in this world are hierarchical, and not everything you may WANT to learn has lasting value.

74 Indeed, many of the things you want to learn are chosen BECAUSE their value will not last. The ego thinks it is an advantage not to commit itself to ANYTHING that is eternal, because the eternal MUST come from God. Eternalness is the one function that the ego has tried to develop, but has systematically failed. It may surprise you to learn that had the ego willed to do so, it COULD have made the eternal, because, as a product of the mind, it IS endowed with the power of its own creator. But the DECISION to do this, rather than the ABILITY to do it, is what the ego cannot tolerate. That is because the decision, from which the ability would naturally develop, would necessarily involve true perception, a state of clarity which the ego, fearful of being judged truly, MUST avoid.

75 The results of this dilemma are peculiar, but no more so than the dilemma itself. The ego has reacted characteristically here as elsewhere, because mental illness, which is ALWAYS a form of ego-involvement, is not a problem of reliability as much as of validity. The ego compromises with the issue of the eternal, just as it does with all issues that touch on the real question in ANY way. By compromising in connection with all TANGENTIAL questions, it hopes to hide the REAL question and keep it OUT OF MIND. Its characteristic "business" with non-essentials is precisely for that purpose.

76 Consider the alchemist's age-old attempts to turn base metal into gold. The one question which the alchemist did not permit himself to ask was "What For?" He COULD not ask this, because it would immediately become apparent that there was no sense in his efforts, even if he succeeded. The ego has also countenanced some strange compromises with the idea of the eternal, making odd attempts to relate the concept to the unimportant in an effort to satisfy the mind without jeopardizing itself. Thus, it has permitted many good minds to devote themselves to perpetual MOTION, but NOT to perpetual THOUGHTS.

77 Ideational preoccupations with conceptual problems set up to be incapable of solution are another favorite ego device for impeding the strong-willed from real progress in learning. The problems of squaring the circle, and carrying pi to infinity are good examples. A more recent ego-attempt is particularly noteworthy. The idea of preserving the body by suspension, thus giving it the kind of limited immortality which the ego can tolerate, is among its more recent appeals to the mind. It is noticeable that in all these diversionary tactics, the ONE question which is NEVER asked by those who pursue them is "What for?"

78 This is the question which YOU must learn to ask in connection with everything your mind wills to undertake. What is your purpose? Whatever it is, you cannot doubt that it will channelize your efforts automatically. When you make a decision of purpose, then, you HAVE made a decision about future effort, a decision which will remain in effect UNLESS you change the DECISION.

79 Psychologists are in a good position to realize that the ego is capable of making and accepting as real some very distorted associations which are not true. The confusion of sex with aggression, and resulting behavior which is the same for BOTH, is a good example. This is understandable to the psychologist, and does not produce surprise. The lack of surprise, however, is NOT a sign of understanding. It is a symptom of the psychologist's ability to accept as reasonable a compromise which is clearly senseless, to attribute it to the mental illness of the patient rather than his own, and to limit his questions about both the patient AND himself to the trivial.

80 These relatively minor confusions of the ego are not among its more profound mis-associations, although they DO reflect them. Your own egos have been blocking the more important questions which your minds should ask. You do NOT understand a patient while you yourselves are willing to limit the questions you raise about HIS mind, because you are also accepting these limits for YOURS. This makes you unable to heal him AND yourselves. Be ALWAYS unwilling to adapt to ANY situation in which miracle-mindedness is unthinkable. That state in ITSELF is enough to demonstrate that perception is wrong.