

In the name of God, The Most Gracious, Most Merciful

EGO

By Lisa Spray

Recall that Moses said to his people, "O my people, you have wronged your souls by worshiping the calf. You shall repent to your Creator and kill your egos.

This is better for you, in the sight of your Creator." He: did redeem you, for He is the Redeemer, Most Merciful. (2:54)

What is this thing called 'ego' which God advises us to kill? We all have a feeling of what it is, but Western culture has confused the issue for us. The dictionary definition of ego is almost useless, perhaps even harmful:

- 1. The thinking, feeling and acting self that is conscious of itself and aware of its distinction from the selves of others and from the objects of its thought and other operations.*

That sounds harmless enough, doesn't it? But is it really? Inadvertently, even the dictionary speaks the truth. Why does God enjoin us from making distinction among the messengers? That very word implies that some are better than others, and thus should be followed in preference to others. But the messengers are just vehicles for God's guidance, and it is that guidance we must follow, not the individuals themselves. In the same way, making a distinction between ourselves and others implies that one or the other is inherently better. Yet we know that the only thing which distinguishes the people is righteousness (49:13). And even righteousness comes from God alone:

He is the source of righteousness; He is the source of forgiveness. (74:56)

Our ego directs us to make distinction among our *self* and others, making us better than them in our own eyes. It is also the piece that makes us feel that we have some power, control or influence over things. It is the piece that gives importance to our personal opinions, to our grudges, to our desires.

The ego is that piece which got us into trouble in the first place when we did not stand up for God's absolute power during the heavenly feud! It is because of it that we are going through this life- the make-up test.

The Quran gives us examples of the result of following our egos rather than killing them. It teaches us that it was ego which provoked Cain into murdering his brother Abel (5:30). Through the example of the governor's wife who had tempted Joseph it teaches us: *"The self is an advocate of vice."* (12:53). Following our ego puts us in danger of being covered by the following verse: *"Are those enlightened by their Lord the same as*

***those whose evil works are adorned in their eyes, and they follow their own opinions?"
(47:14)***

Finally, we are given the example of David whose repentance was reinforced with God's teaching to ***"...rule among the people equitably, and do not follow your personal opinion, lest it diverts you from the way of God."
(38:26)***

Humility is the antithesis of ego. Its importance is emphasized throughout the scriptures. (See also 17:37 and 25:63):

"You shall not treat the people with arrogance, nor shall you walk on earth proudly. God does not like the arrogant showoffs. Walk humbly and lower your voice -the ugliest voice is the donkey's voice."

(Luqmaan's advice to his son, 31:18-19)

***Man's pride causes his humiliation, but he who is humble of spirit obtains honor.
(Proverbs 29:23)***

God teaches us that the ego can become an idol: ***Have you seen the one whose god is his own ego? Are you going to be his advocate ? (25:43)***

How do we go about killing our egos? God gives us many means of working at this. For example, advice has been given to use criticism from someone else to kill the ego. Rather than trying to defend yourself, agree and thus diminish the ego. Even if it was not correct, you have used it constructively. ***(Easier said than done though!)***. Every time we make a mistake then repent and try to make amends, we are killing our ego. Every time we take ourselves to task for not being as eager to work righteousness, for not being straightforward, for backsliding, for failing into gossip or vain talk, we are killing our ego.

Sadly, the ego is like a hearty weed. Just when you think you have it licked, it sprouts right back up again. We must remember that God is the only one who really can do anything including killing our ego. However:

***God does not change the condition
of any people unless they themselves
make the decision to change. (13:11)***