

CONSCIOUS THINKING

Letting go of ego



ERIC LE RESTE

In philosophy, 'ego' refers to the consciously thinking entity, or in other words, the self. In the study of Rajyoga, we understand 'ego' to mean the sense of self-esteem or self-importance which, if based on an attachment to a false identity, causes great sorrow and is one of the main forces of obstruction on a spiritual journey. It can be destructive and painful, so we take our time to convert this energy into the opposite. We spend time letting

go of the false identity, that of being the body, and nourishing our awareness of the real identity, that of being a spiritual consciousness, the soul.

Ego, based on the false identity of being the body, brings with it hidden, unseen pitfalls. The one thing we cannot see, on our physical body, is the face. It is invisible to the self and can only be seen in a mirror. In the same way, the expression of ego is often not realised by us - but is seen by everyone else. In identifying with just the body, we have a need to hold on to things that bolster the 'ego'. The word 'my' is used ad infinitum - my idea, my story, my talents and skills, my job, my position, my superior understanding, my suffering, my success, my failure. In holding on to these reinforcements, we will be challenged end-



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lessly. With that, other obstacles to spiritual growth, come into play. There will be anger when challenged, there will be a need to refine my physical appearance to

present myself in the best light, there will be greed in accumulating possessions or trappings of superiority, and there will be attachments to anyone who can

feed my ego.

There are five faces of ego: The ego of the body. When we are influenced by anything, we become attached and then dependent on it. In

the case of the body, it will bring vanity, narcissism, and pride; and when the body ages and becomes infirm, we feel lost and worthless.

The ego of the personality. If we have a personality, for example, of being entertaining and making others amused, we become attached to that facet, and become dependent on it in all social situations. When that is not recognised, we begin to doubt who we are or become angry. This applies to all aspects of our personalities on which we depend.

The ego of the intellect. This is very subtle and insidious. This dependence on our beliefs, ideas, and that our understanding is better than that of others, is complicated and hard to remove. It will manifest most obviously in argument and the proving of one's self to be right.

The ego of the role. This causes dependence on what we do and are recognised for, our skills and abilities; our position in society; and our achievements. This colours our attitude and behaviour in all our relationships.

The ego of possessions. These define us. The house we buy, the car we drive, the clothes we wear, and the jewellery we use. All of this dependency creates the false impression that our possessions make us somehow a better person.

So, how do we let go of the ego? If the key word to the false identity is attachment, then to let go we need detachment. Detachment is not a cold and distant stance on life, but a gentle stepping back from the false self, and quietly watching what I am thinking, how I am behaving and what I am saying. This stepping back a little,

allows me to experience my higher identity, that of being an eternal consciousness that has a higher personality of royalty, dignity, purity, and contentment, and I am able then to attach my intellect to God, the Supreme intellect and personality. It then becomes clear to me exactly what kind of a soul I want to be on earth, and that I am a caretaker and trustee of the body that I have.

When I become bodiless (detached from the ego of the body), I am able to become 'egoless', and then it is possible to become viceless and express only virtues in my relationships, and my life will have become truly valuable.

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BELIEFS

THE POWER OF ACCEPTING AND REJECTING



GOPI ELTON

In the study of Rajyoga, humility is seen as a state of self-respect. This may be a new concept for people who have previously thought that humility meant accepting everything and anything, whether it made them comfortable or not.

How can we define acceptance? Perhaps it is about being at peace with circumstances, people, and feelings, a place where we can be calm and not have unnecessary thoughts about it - "It is what it is," as they say, or if thinking of the past, "It was what it was." The

past itself cannot be changed. However, my beliefs about the past can be changed. There really is no need for judgments. Thinking, 'Why did that happen?' or 'It should have been like this' or 'Why were they like that and not like this?', only shows resistance to accepting the reality. We come to understand that it is simply a choice to accept, or equally reject, old, no-longer-necessary beliefs about a whole range of ideas, attitudes, and understandings. In reality, whatever we experience is all our own creation, and no-one else's 'fault'. Thoughts are very powerful. To change our beliefs or attitude, we need to change our thoughts, that is, our perception. In other words, to reframe what happened through a new lens.

Rejection may sound negative, but actually it does not need to be. We can reject an



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old, outdated way of thinking about ourselves, a situation, or a person, and then have the space to accept a new way of seeing what the self, the situation, or person is, or could become. Equally, we do not need to accept everything that comes our way.

But when we blame other people or situations, we put ourselves in a subordinate position; one where we can feel victimised, and we have no sense of control. When someone is verbally rude to us, for example, or criticises us, then our sense of self-esteem can get distorted and we may become confused. There are questions we can consider when this happens.

- Do I accept it?
- Is it true?
- Should I ignore it, or say something?
- Why are they so rude?
- Why me?

• Why don't they stop?/ change?/go away?/ find someone else?

• What is the message for me in this?

So, we may accept or reject their criticism. If we are still getting drawn to it hours later or the next day, then we can understand that we are still confused and upset. Then what is needed is powerful good wishes for the one who criticised us.

If it is difficult to do, then we know that we have not yet forgiven the person. With humility, though, we can send good wishes, and we will find that there is improvement in the relationship, just through the management of our thoughts.

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HARMONY

THE RIGHT KIND OF HAPPINESS



B.K. DR. SAVITA

Happiness can be of many kinds, such as that experienced when someone praises us or when we achieve something we wanted, or when we eat good food, listen to our favourite music or see something beautiful. Such experiences may surely make us happy, but for how long? The taste of good food may linger for a while after the meal, and the joy of being appreciated may vanish the moment we hear a critical remark about ourselves.

Such experiences are short-lived and, therefore, cannot be the basis of a constant feeling of happiness, which is more stable and lasting than exuberance or an emotional high. Lasting happiness is a state of being in which we feel secure, content, and in harmony with the self, others, and na-

ture. A person in such a state is also more likely than not to help others achieve happiness, in whatever way he can.

This state can also be described as bliss, which dictionaries define as perfect happiness, or as a state of spiritual blessedness.

How can we achieve this state? There are people who lead blissful lives and describe themselves as very happy. Their material circumstances may be ordinary, but they are content with what they have and enjoy life. Such people are usually active and have loving and supportive relationships in their family or community, and they live by certain values. One quality common to such people is a positive attitude, which enables them to remain optimistic and to take problems in their stride.

Experts have found that happiness depends on individual factors such as personality, income, health, and the freedom to make life choices. They say it also depends on social determinants such as the degree of trust in the community, and on political factors such as the rule of law. But these elements are sometimes in competition: for example, the



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pursuit of wealth may lead to loss of health, or involve limits to freedom. All these factors are no doubt important, but they are good only to the degree that they contribute to our happiness.

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elements are present, we are likely to make the right choices and act in ways that ensure our happiness and that of others.

Conversely, in the absence of these ingredients, we may act selfishly to achieve individual happiness at the cost of others. In the process, we may alien-

ate people, lose friends, and even make enemies. In addition, someone seen as selfish receives little goodwill or cooperation from others. If we create an unsympathetic environment around ourselves in this way, we are not likely to remain happy for long, no matter how many personal goals we manage to achieve.

The greatest happiness of the greatest number is said to be one measure by which we can know whether what we are doing is right or wrong. To be able to discern what is best for everyone, including myself, in a given situation, the mind needs to be free from the influence of ego and desires. Then the decisions taken will ensure everyone's happiness.

Performing the balancing act of ensuring individual and collective happiness is the way to earn the good wishes, or blessings, of others, which, besides being a reward in itself, enriches our feeling of contentment and enables us to experience bliss, the ultimate happiness.

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A THOUGHT FOR TODAY

In major cities around the world, tall architectural structures stand as notable landmarks. In times past, these buildings were churches, temples and mosques. Now, they are office buildings. Regardless of their intention, these impressive structures draw our gaze upwards, following the peak of the building to the sky beyond. Pyramids are said to represent rays of light descending from the heavens, a pathway between the physical and spiritual worlds. Looking up, I am reminded of places and things beyond the material world. Today let me look up in wonder.