



THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

"The False Self in Action, Part 2"

Excerpted from

The Spiritual Journey Part 2, The Human Condition

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[Evolutionary Model and Existential Model Chart appears on page 2 of transcript.]

This superego of ours, which is characteristic of the Mythic Membership kind of consciousness, of course, is obviously working in society as well as in us. Society is just the accumulation of people. Now that many people have moved into the low egoic period of rational human life, they constantly are also falling back into the Mythic Membership. They're not fully established at this level. We see this on the level of nations. National negotiations are still based on, as far as I can see, on the rules of the sandbox; that is to say, a youngster who has found out how nice it is to be in charge of his sandbox. Another guy gets the same idea, so he tries to get in it. So, there's a little confrontation. And one says, "Get out of my sandbox," and the other says, "I'm coming into your sandbox." "No, you aren't." "Yes, I am." Then, it gets louder. "No, you aren't." "Yes, I am!" And then finally, they come to blows and whoever is stronger pushes the other guy out, and since that's so much fun, he goes on to another sandbox, and that's even more fun, until finally, he has a whole – What do you call those things? -- "aligned" group of sandboxes to back up his tyranny! Well, is that the human way to solve international difficulties? Obviously, it's childish. Imagine with all this weaponry – it's not the sandbox anymore. They don't seem to have discovered that it's not a question of taking a BB gun to get the other guy out. You've got enough stuff to kill yourselves as well as him, and everybody else. The human family has got to grow up or it's going to destroy itself. These are not toys anymore! But the emotional place from which these negotiations are coming seems to be the kind of reactions that are suitable for the sandbox, but not beyond. So, instead of cooperation between nations, which is the human way of doing things, negotiating, we see still this power politics, this exploitation, this "my country, right or wrong"; my ideology is better than your ideology – all of which is strictly Mythic Membership stuff and is destroying the world. And until we've moved into the sense of belonging to the human family, not just our nation, we haven't really entered into full Mental Egoic consciousness. That alone is rational and personal, fully personal, at least.

EVOLUTIONARY MODEL Chain of Being Evolution of the Human Family Soma	EXISTENTIAL MODEL Energy Centers And Individual Human Development Sarx
4. Mental Egoic Rational Person-hood, Full Self-Reflective Self-Consciousness, Industrial/Technological Culture, Nation-Co-operation	4. Age of Reason <i>Co-opted by the energy centers. Hence their programs are:-</i> a) justified, b) rationalized, c) glorified,
3. Mythic Membership Verbal, Socialization, Farming Culture, City-State/Nation/Race,	3. Group Over-identification Uncritical acceptance of :- a) parental, education, b) ethical, training influences, c) religious, cultural conditioning,
2. Typhon Magical, Emotional exchange, Hunting culture - clan, Formation of Body Self,	<i>Hence, preconceived ideas and pre-packaged values.</i> 2a. Power Center Power and control, 2b. Sensation Center Affection and esteem, Sexual energy/pleasure,
1. Uroboric Immersed in nature, food, shelter, matter Immediate fulfillment of needs.	1. Security Center Survival and security.

It's also apparent in the level of religious life. For instance, here is how the child at that level, through group over-identification, having unquestioningly absorbed the values of parents along with the neurotic guilt feelings that go with them, will say, "My daddy is better than your daddy." "Our athletes are better than your athletes in our school." "The Russians are not as good at skiing as our skiers." "Our ministers are better than your ministers." "Our priests are better than your priests." "My religion is better than your religion." Now they may be better, for all I know. The point is, that's not where the judgment is coming from. The judgment is coming from our need to belong to the society that is unsurpassed because that backs up our need for survival and security, esteem/affection, or power and control. We want to belong to the winning team, not because we love the winning team, or still less the losing team, but because we love ourselves in a distorted way, not truly.

So that true love removes doors, windows, barriers, territories. At least, it moves in that direction. It may not be able to do so because it has to wait for other people to grow up too. But it's inclined to negotiate to the nth degree. And while it's obvious that the nations are trying to negotiate, as long as they're heavily committed to their ideology, to their territorial rights, and all these things, they are proportionately not committed to the human family and that's the object of concern for someone in Mental Egoic consciousness. And the world is becoming one family, whether we like it

or not, through mass media communications, and through interaction on every level except spirituality – the one level that would unite the human family where it is truly one, and which could then endure the diversity and respect the diversity and pluralism of different cultures, ethnic groups.

This is not to say that the Mythic Membership level of consciousness is not good. We should have a loyalty to our family, and country, and teachers, and whatever good we have received from them, but this loyalty is not an absolute. But it's a loyalty, if it's enlightened by the Mental Egoic consciousness, that can also recognize in order to change the limitations in our own organization, whatever these are, if we're qualified to make a judgment about them. Hence, the Mental Egoic level presupposes personal responsibility for our group, insofar as we can influence it for good and have some qualifications, especially in union with other reasonable and rational people, that some improvement might be done.

There are structures of government that belong to the Mythic Membership level and they are mostly a monarchical, dictatorial form or a heavy authoritarian form of government. The Mental Egoic, since it involves personal responsibility for our group, for the future, for human history, is inclined towards a more participatory government, democracy, not necessarily a final opinion chosen by the majority since that also can be a form of tyranny, but rather a participatory form of government in which a broad constituency of capable people are consulted so that the final judgment of the body or the person who is appointed to make the final decision is enlightened by all the facts, and in our time the facts are more and more complex. Hence, the experts that need to be consulted and the time taken before a final judgment is made on things has to be more comprehensive.

The thing, perhaps, that destroys relations between peoples, just as it destroys it between us and God, is the passion of fear; that is, to be afraid of God, to be afraid of other people, because that's what makes us defensive. In the case of God, we stay away from him; in case of other people, we try to control them, keep them within the limits that enable us not to feel the uneasiness that comes from fear. Fear, remember, is that emotion which is an emergency appetite, which perceives an evil as an impending disaster that hasn't quite arrived.

The "fear of God" is not the emotion of fear. It's rather respect, reverence, awe for God's transcendence, and trust in his immanence, both of which seem like opposites, but which are put together through the experience of transcendence; namely, through deep prayer, in other words, through contemplation. Contemplation is what re-roots us in reality, in the universe, without losing our identity.

Let me give you this example of what the fear of God is, because I think it might be helpful since we probably have some wrong images of what it is from our early Mythic Membership instruction in early childhood. Let's pretend that a child at Christmas time is coming to see the toys at some big department store -- Bloomingdale's in New York, where the whole floor is nothing but toys; it covers a whole block, let us say. This little fellow with his mother, holding her hand, emerges from the elevator into this world of toys. Well, his eyes just get bigger and bigger. He looks in this direction and in that direction. Everywhere he looks is everything his little heart ever desired: skis, T-bears, doll houses, sleds, Santa Claus, trains, computers, everything a child could possibly desire. And it wants to go in every direction at once, and it's just overwhelmed because it can't move, because you can't go in every direction at once. And it's just so thrilled with everything that it doesn't know where to start. And it wants to take it all home and enjoy it and it doesn't want to have to make a choice.

This is what the fear of God is. It means that we feel ourselves invited into this mystery that contains everything our heart could possibly desire; and it's the fascination of mystery, not the fear of mystery, that attracts us (as well as that little child). We want to rush into everything we can know, feel, understand, or be conscious of, of this mystery that opens endlessly from our perspective in every direction. Now that is what the fear of God is. That is the right relationship with God, which is the right translation of that technical term which is to trust the Mystery and to be fascinated by it and thus to pursue it on every level of our being with the confidence, sure confidence, that whatever we receive is going to be infinitely beyond anything that we could possibly imagine with our limited experience.

Is there anything we can do to hasten in ordinary daily life the unloading of those unconscious programs which have us, more or less, into routines that we can't seem to get out of? In other words, some kind of practice for daily life will reinforce the dis-identifying process that is going on in our contemplative prayer by the two daily periods in which we deliberately do not think our ordinary thoughts. We already saw that we can deliberately try to dismantle whatever is our principal emotional program for happiness by noticing it in our daily life as the upsetting emotion that manifests its presence when it's frustrated.

AN ACTIVE PRAYER SENTENCE

Here's another method that is becoming somewhat popular among lay folks who are practicing Centering Prayer. And this consists in choosing an active prayer sentence, perhaps one chosen from Scripture. And this practice really comes from the early Desert Fathers. They used to say a prayer like this from the Psalms, usually, or the Gospel, and one of their favorite ones has been enshrined in the Roman Catholic Office of Daily Prayer on behalf of the people of God. It's: "Oh, God, come to my assistance," or "Oh, Lord, make haste to help me," or "Our help is in the name of the Lord," or "How sweet it is for brothers and sisters to dwell together in unity and peace!" Well, there's a whole series of them that one might choose. And, again, like choosing the sacred word of one or two syllables for prayer, you might think of choosing a sentence of maybe eight to twelve syllables or something like that. And the reason for choosing a longer one for daily life is because in daily life you are usually thinking in sentences. So, this would correspond to another sentence which you

gradually work into your subconscious by saying it again and again when you're not doing something else. For instance, most of us spend about two hours a day getting ready to do something else or doing nothing. So, for instance, while you're in the shower – that's not too engrossing an occupation – or, doing the dishes, or driving the car, or walking to work, or waiting for a bus, or waiting for the operator to get your number on the long distance telephone thing, or any number of things, like going to bed. If you said the same phrase again and again, and used the same one because it's easier then to work it into the subconscious. This is what happens after about six months or one year. You really have to do it a lot, I admit. So, for some people, there might not be appeal to that practice. The purpose of it is to erase the old tapes in the subconscious.

Now what do I mean by that? If you've noticed that whenever you're upset by your emotional programs, or challenged, not only does the frustrating emotion arise (here we are: envy, anger, lust, overweening desire for sensible, mental, or spiritual satisfaction, greed, in other words, or apathy, anger, grief, any one of them). Well, when they arise, immediately the imagination provides a commentary, just as it did in the example I gave of my praying in the church and beginning to get envious. What were the thoughts that I had: "How does he rate? Here I am on my knees. He's sitting down." This is what I mean by the commentary. Whenever one of these programs are frustrated, the commentary always arises with the emotion. And so, if we had another phrase, a sentence, worked into the unconscious which is about as long as the unconscious, it has the effect of a cassette-tape eraser. It erases the old tape and, thus, it reduces the force with which the emotional turmoil begins. Because if there's no commentary, then the emotion can be handled by reason and judgment. In other words, if you get in there fast enough, the process of getting into emotional turmoil through feeling and commentary doesn't take place, and that gives you a neutral zone in which you can decide what to do without being compulsively pushed into an emotional reaction, and then the binge, when you get caught by the hunters, roasted and eaten by the emotions!

Let me just emphasize that with this example. Here's a good soul who works in some office, a gentleman. We'll call him Mr. X. Now Mr. X has been sold out recently on the spiritual journey, but he's been in it long enough for the dust of his original conversion and freedom experience to settle. He's now experiencing someone in the office whom he can't stand. Their chemistry doesn't agree. Again, it's someone who has the genius of bringing out the worst in him. He's struggling, somewhat like I was, with all kinds of resolutions and means to try to love this person. Finally, after a retreat like this, he goes home, and he's absolutely determined, firmed up, inspired, thrilled by the conferences -- he's never going to get angry at this person again. We'll call the person Mr. Y, okay.

Mr. X comes to the office with this huge, big determination. And he finds that Mr. Y has left his dirty golf socks right on his desk. "Fine, no problem. I love the guy!" A few hours later he's just completed a very important letter, typing. Mr. Y spills his coffee all over the letter. It has to be done over. At lunchtime Mr. Y goes out and stays out for an hour and a half (the usual lunch break is a half an hour). In the middle of the afternoon, he comes rushing in and demands of Mr. X that he does some extra work for him because he's been tied up at lunch. Now each time this happens, Mr. X rises to the occasion and resists the uprising feeling of indignation. The memory, remember, is like a vast computer, only much more complex and sophisticated. And, as you know, in some computers, once you have a program firmly in place, as our brain has these firmly in place, and you say you want to erase it, the computer is graciously programmed to say, "Do you really want to erase that program?" Now, in Mr. X's computer, because of his great resolution, the computer, the memory bank, has printed this question: "Do you really want your program of complete indignation?" Each time this untoward experience recurs during the day and the question arises, "Do you really want your rage program?" And he says heroically, "No, I don't want it!" Now an hour before the end of work, Mr. Y rushes in again and he says, "I have to leave for the beach right away. I'll see you over the weekend, next weekend. I'll see you next Monday." Okay, so he rushes out without even saying, "Thank you," and leaves our friend to have to stay two hours later to finish his essential work, as well as his own. Well now, the computer raises the question again, "Do you want your rage program?" And, at this point, our friend's resources, his reservoir of peace built up from the morning's Centering Prayer – and unfortunately, he didn't get his afternoon one in – so, the reservoir is kind of At this point there's nothing left – no interior resources – and when he sees those words, it's like a flashing light. The question is, "Do you want your rage program?" The answer is, "Yes, I want the whole program!" And so, the computer begins to give him the print out and out it comes: all the insults he's ever had in his whole life all the disagreeable people he's ever met, all the anger and the revenge feelings all perfectly programmed and listed with a bottom line, including the resolutions to kill people, and so on. Here he is, just at the mercy of this print out which goes on for the next two hours. Finally, he gets out of the office, goes home. His face is like the wrath of God; his family can't talk to him; he can't eat; he goes to his room; he can't go to sleep; the day is ruined. It's just a disaster. What was wrong?

When he finally wakes up and the liver has finally filtered out all his adrenaline and so on, and he returns to a normal mentality, chemically, he says to himself, "O, my God, after that long retreat, what did I do wrong?" Nothing. He did the best he can. Try again tomorrow. Don't let it bother him. He's on the journey. But the point is that his resolution is not enough to cure the problem right away. It's going to take time, a long time. And you're going to have to deal with the computerized program with its print outs that are thoroughly established in the unconscious, even when you're trying to lead a religious or a spiritual life. That's why we need some measure to work the peace or the reservoir of silence into daily life, and the active prayer word is one way of doing so.

To get back to this active prayer word, here is a final story that will, I hope, express it. This lady was driving down the road. There was a boy on a bicycle over here. A man behind her, anxious to get to the train, evidently, was right behind her and he was trying to get past her. He didn't see the child on the bicycle, and so he didn't understand why this lady was nudging the center of the road. So, he kept hammering on the horn, "Get over there. Get over there!" Well, he didn't have an active prayer word; so, when she didn't get over, up came the whole program and the print out started coming out. He gave into his rage. He zoomed around her. And, as he passed, he rolled down the window, and shouted some obscene words at her and then spat right in her face, ruining her lovely spring hat. And then he zoomed off down the road.

Well, you can imagine what went on in her interior, as the hurt feelings began to arise, "How can anybody be so cruel? Didn't he see the boy on the bicycle? How can God allow this?" Then, all of a sudden, up came the active prayer word: "Oh, how sweet and pleasant it is for brothers and sisters to live in perfect unity!" And it's not the content that did it, but that phrase erased those other tapes that were negative. Into that space, that neutral zone, rushed the Spirit of God and said, "Love the guy." And with that, she felt this enormous peace surging up from deep within her. She forgave him from the bottom of her heart, and she drove off down the road as if she had just received a bouquet of roses. And she never thought about it again that day. That is freedom! And it's to get to that place of neutrality where we can decide what to do that all these practices are ordered. Try one!