

Highlights from Pathwork Lecture #199: *The Meaning of the Ego and Its Transcendence*

The paradox of the ego is that it believes its safety lies in a limited state of contraction, stagnation, isolation and separateness – so it fights to remain there, in the very state that makes life unbearably lonely, fearful, and meaningless.

In this limited state, the ego maintains the illusion that expansion and movement are life threatening and mean annihilation of our very self. To penetrate this illusion, we need all the force, commitment, goodwill and help available – help we must want and request.

This is our search and struggle – overcoming the inherent resistance to transcending the limitations of the ego state and discovering that life beyond this state is not to be feared; it is good and is to be utterly trusted.

Awareness of life beyond this limited state does not come easily. The ego uses every conceivable negativity known to humanity – any fault; any violation of integrity, truth, love, and the divine. These negativities can be summed up in the triad of *pride, self-will* and *fear*.

We maintain our limited ego state with pride by creating artificial conflicts between ourselves and others with an attitude of “I versus you” which inevitably creates a spirit of one-upmanship. Pride includes our tendency to live for the sake of appearance – masks, defenses, pretenses, false shame of exposure, and embarrassment about real feelings and our inner spiritual self.

Self-will comprises stubbornness, resistance, spite, defiance, and rigidity. With these traits we express the attitude, “I will stay where and as I am.” Rigidity feels desirable, making open, flexible movement appear threatening and/or humiliating.

Under the category of fear belong all worries, anxieties and apprehensions. Change appears threatening and life-annihilating. Distrust and suspiciousness defy the natural movement toward unity.

Other ego tricks used to maintain an illusion of safety include inattentiveness, lack of concentration, abstractedness, absent-mindedness, laziness, tiredness and passivity. These attitudes prevent the focusing necessary for ego transcendence, and make movement undesirable and exhausting.

This is a universal state which we are called upon to transcend. We must find within us the discipline, perseverance, patience, commitment, courage, humility and faith to venture beyond this limited state. Every one of us possesses these attributes already. Will we avail ourselves of the potentials within us, or will wait to be ‘magically’ transformed.

Our task is to accept the difficulties and hardships of the learning process. It always seems frightening at first to challenge the ego’s illusory belief that a limited state of contraction and stagnation is easy and relaxing. True restfulness is always alive and moving.

Life is movement. Spiritual movement is effortless. However, our initial attempts to reorient the ego will be temporarily effortful because to go from stasis to motion on any level requires accepting a temporary effort with self-discipline, faith, courage and humility until the effort becomes effortless. You then move within the rhythm of your own life stream.