

Ego - The False Center

by Osho

The first thing to be understood is what ego is. A child is born. A child is born without any knowledge, any consciousness of his own self. And when a child is born the first thing he becomes aware of is not himself; the first thing he becomes aware of is the other. It is natural, because the eyes open outwards, the hands touch others, the ears listen to others, the tongue tastes food and the nose smells the outside. All these senses open outwards.

That is what birth means. Birth means coming into this world, the world of the outside. So when a child is born, he is born into this world. He opens his eyes, sees others. 'Other' means the thou. He becomes aware of the mother first. Then, by and by, he becomes aware of his own body. That too is the other, that too belongs to the world. He is hungry and he feels the body; his need is satisfied, he forgets the body.

This is how a child grows. First he becomes aware of you, thou, other, and then by and by, in contrast to you, thou, he becomes aware of himself.

This awareness is a reflected awareness. He is not aware of who he is. He is simply aware of the mother and what she thinks about him. If she smiles, if she appreciates the child, if she says, "You are beautiful," if she hugs and kisses him, the child feels good about himself. Now an ego is born. Through appreciation, love, care, he feels he is good, he feels he is valuable, he feels he has some significance.

A center is born.

But this center is a reflected center. It is not his real being. He does not know who he is; he simply knows what others think about him. And this is the ego: the reflection, what others think. If nobody thinks that he is of any use, nobody appreciates him, nobody smiles, then too an ego is born: an ill ego; sad, rejected, like a wound; feeling inferior, worthless. This too is the ego. This too is a reflection.

First the mother - and mother means the world in the beginning. Then others will join the mother, and the world goes on growing. And the more the world grows, the more complex the ego becomes, because many others' opinions are reflected.

The ego is an accumulated phenomenon, a by-product of living with others. If a child lives totally alone, he will never come to grow an ego. But that is not going to help. He will remain like an animal. That doesn't mean that he will come to know the real self, no.

The real can be known only through the false, so the ego is a must. One has to pass through it. It is a discipline. The real can be known only through the illusion. You cannot know the truth directly. First you have to know that which is not true. First you have to encounter the untrue. Through that encounter you become capable of knowing the truth. If you know the false as the false, truth will dawn upon you.

Ego is a need; it is a social need, it is a social by-product. The society means all that is around you - not you, but all that is around you. All, minus you, is the society. And everybody reflects. You will go to school and the teacher will reflect who you are. You will be in friendship with other children and they will reflect who you are. By and by, everybody is adding to your ego, and everybody is trying to modify it in such a way that you don't become a problem to the society.

They are not concerned with you.

They are concerned with the society.

Society is concerned with itself, and that's how it should be.

They are not concerned that you should become a self-knower. They are concerned that you should become an efficient part in the mechanism of the society. You should fit into the pattern. So they are trying to give you an ego that fits with the society. They teach you morality. Morality means giving you an ego which will fit with the society. If you are immoral, you will always be a misfit somewhere or other. That's why we put criminals in the prisons - not that they have done something wrong, not that by putting them in the prisons we are going to improve them, no. They simply don't fit. They are troublemakers. They have certain types of egos of which the society doesn't approve. If the society approves, everything is good.

One man kills somebody - he is a murderer.

And the same man in wartime kills thousands - he becomes a great hero. The society is not bothered by a murder, but the murder should be committed for the society - then it is okay. The society doesn't bother about morality.

Morality means only that you should fit with the society.

If the society is at war, then the morality changes.

If the society is at peace, then there is a different morality.

Morality is a social politics. It is diplomacy. And each child has to be brought up in such a way that he fits into the society, that's all. Because society is interested in efficient members. Society is not interested that you should attain to self-knowledge.

The society creates an ego because the ego can be controlled and manipulated. The self can never be controlled or manipulated. Nobody has ever heard of the society controlling a self - not possible. And the child needs a center; the child is completely unaware of his own center. The society gives him a center and the child is by and by convinced that this is his center, the ego that society gives. A child comes back to his home - if he has come first in his class, the whole family is happy. You hug and kiss him, and you take the child on your shoulders and dance and you say, "What a beautiful child! You are a pride to us." You are giving him an ego, a subtle ego. And if the child comes home dejected, unsuccessful, a failure - he couldn't pass, or he has just been on the back bench - then nobody appreciates him and the child feels rejected. He will try harder next time, because the center feels shaken.

Ego is always shaken, always in search of food, that somebody should appreciate it. That's why you continuously ask for attention.

You get the idea of who you are from others.

It is not a direct experience.

It is from others that you get the idea of who you are. They shape your center. This center is false, because you carry your real center. That is nobody's business. Nobody shapes it.

You come with it.

You are born with it.

So you have two centers. One center you come with, which is given by existence itself. That is the self. And the other center, which is created by the society, is the ego. It is a false thing - and it is a very great trick. Through the ego the society is controlling you. You have to behave in a certain way, because only then does the society appreciate you. You have to walk in a certain way; you have to laugh in a certain way; you have to follow certain manners, a morality, a code. Only then will the society appreciate you, and if it doesn't, your ego will be shaken. And when the ego is shaken, you don't know where you are, who you are.

The others have given you the idea.

That idea is the ego.

Try to understand it as deeply as possible, because this has to be thrown. And unless you throw it you will never be able to attain to the self. Because you are addicted to the center, you cannot move, and you cannot look at the self.

And remember, there is going to be an interim period, an interval, when the ego will be shattered, when you will not know who you are, when you will not know where you are going, when all boundaries will melt.

You will simply be confused, a chaos.

Because of this chaos, you are afraid to lose the ego. But it has to be so. One has to pass through the chaos before one attains to the real center.

And if you are daring, the period will be small.

If you are afraid, and you again fall back to the ego, and you again start arranging it, then it can be very, very long; many lives can be wasted.

I have heard: One small child was visiting his grandparents. He was just four years old. In the night when the grandmother was putting him to sleep, he suddenly started crying and weeping and said, "I want to go home. I am afraid of darkness." But the grandmother said, "I know well that at home also you sleep in the dark; I have never seen a light on. So why are you afraid here?" The boy said, "Yes, that's right - but that is MY darkness." This darkness is completely unknown.

Even with darkness you feel, "This is MINE."

Outside - an unknown darkness.

With the ego you feel, "This is MY darkness."

It may be troublesome, maybe it creates many miseries, but still mine. Something to hold to, something to cling to, something underneath the feet; you are not in a vacuum, not in an emptiness.

You may be miserable, but at least you ARE. Even being miserable gives you a feeling of 'I am'.

Moving from it, fear takes over; you start feeling afraid of the unknown darkness and chaos - because society has managed to clear a small part of your being.

It is just like going to a forest. You make a little clearing, you clear a little ground; you make fencing, you make a small hut; you make a small garden, a lawn, and you are okay. Beyond your fence - the forest, the wild. Here everything is okay; you have planned everything. This is how it has happened.

Society has made a little clearing in your consciousness. It has cleaned just a little part completely, fenced it. Everything is okay there. That's what all your universities are doing. The whole culture and conditioning is just to clear a part so that you can feel at home there.

And then you become afraid.

Beyond the fence there is danger.

Beyond the fence you are, as within the fence you are - and your conscious mind is just one part, one-tenth of your whole being. Nine-tenths is waiting in the darkness. And in that nine-tenths, somewhere your real center is hidden.

One has to be daring, courageous.

One has to take a step into the unknown.

For a while all boundaries will be lost.

For a while you will feel dizzy.

For a while, you will feel very afraid and shaken, as if an earthquake has happened. But if you are courageous and you don't go backwards, if you don't fall back to the ego and you go on and on, there is a hidden center within you that you have been carrying for many lives.

That is your soul, the self.

Once you come near it, everything changes, everything settles again. But now this settling is not done by the society. Now everything becomes a cosmos, not a chaos; a new order arises.

But this is no longer the order of the society - it is the very order of existence itself.

It is what Buddha calls Dhamma, Lao Tzu calls Tao, Heraclitus calls Logos. It is not man-made. It is the VERY order of existence itself. Then everything is suddenly beautiful again, and for the first time really beautiful, because man-made things cannot be beautiful. At the most you can hide the ugliness of them, that's all. You can decorate them, but they can never be beautiful.

The difference is just like the difference between a real flower and a plastic or paper flower. The ego is a plastic flower - dead. It just looks like a flower, it is not a flower. You cannot really call it a flower. Even linguistically to call it a flower is wrong, because a flower is something which flowers. And this plastic thing is just a thing, not a flowering. It is dead. There is no life in it.

You have a flowering center within. That's why Hindus call it a lotus - it is a flowering. They call it the one-thousand-petaled-lotus. One thousand means infinite petals. And it goes on flowering, it never stops, it never dies.

But you are satisfied with a plastic ego.

There are some reasons why you are satisfied. With a dead thing, there are many conveniences. One is that a dead thing never dies. It cannot - it was never alive. So you can have plastic flowers, they are good in a way. They are permanent; they are not eternal, but they are permanent.

The real flower outside in the garden is eternal, but not permanent. And the eternal has its own way of being eternal. The way of the eternal is to be born again and again and to die. Through death it refreshes itself, rejuvenates itself.

To us it appears that the flower has died - it never dies.

It simply changes bodies, so it is ever fresh.

It leaves the old body, it enters a new body. It flowers somewhere else; it goes on flowering.

But we cannot see the continuity because the continuity is invisible. We see only one flower, another flower; we never see the continuity.

It is the same flower which flowered yesterday.

It is the same sun, but in a different garb.

The ego has a certain quality - it is dead. It is a plastic thing. And it is very easy to get it, because others give it. You need not seek it, there is no search involved. That's why unless you become a seeker after the unknown, you have not yet become an individual. You are just a part of the crowd. You are just a mob.

When you don't have a real center, how can you be an individual?

The ego is not individual. Ego is a social phenomenon - it is society, it's not you. But it gives you a function in the society, a hierarchy in the society. And if you remain satisfied with it, you will miss the whole opportunity of finding the self.

And that's why you are so miserable.

With a plastic life, how can you be happy?

With a false life, how can you be ecstatic and blissful? And then this ego creates many miseries, millions of them.

You cannot see, because it is your own darkness. You are attuned to it.

Have you ever noticed that all types of miseries enter through the ego? It cannot make you blissful; it can only make you miserable.

Ego is hell.

Whenever you suffer, just try to watch and analyze, and you will find, somewhere the ego is the cause of it. And the ego goes on finding causes to suffer.

You are an egoist, as everyone is. Some are very gross, just on the surface, and they are not so difficult. Some are very subtle, deep down, and they are the real problems.

This ego comes continuously in conflict with others because every ego is so unconfident about itself. It has to be - it is a false thing. When you don't have anything in your hand and you just think that something is there, then there will be a problem.

If somebody says, "There is nothing," immediately the fight will start, because you also feel that there is nothing. The other makes you aware of the fact.

Ego is false, it is nothing.

That you also know.

How can you miss knowing it? It is impossible! A conscious being - how can he miss knowing that this ego is just false? And then others say that there is nothing - and whenever the others say that there is nothing they hit a wound, they say a truth - and nothing hits like the truth.

You have to defend, because if you don't defend, if you don't become defensive, then where will you be?

You will be lost.

The identity will be broken.

So you have to defend and fight - that is the clash.

A man who attains to the self is never in any clash. Others may come and clash with him, but he is never in clash with anybody.

It happened that one Zen master was passing through a street. A man came running and hit him hard. The master fell down. Then he got up and started to walk in the same direction in which he was going before, not even looking back.

A disciple was with the master. He was simply shocked. He said, "Who is this man? What is this? If one lives in such a way, then anybody can come and kill you. And you have not even looked at that person, who he is, and why he did it."

The master said, "That is his problem, not mine."

You can clash with an enlightened man, but that is your problem, not his. And if you are hurt in that clash, that too is your own problem. He cannot hurt you. And it is like knocking against a wall - you will be hurt, but the wall has not hurt you.

The ego is always looking for some trouble. Why? Because if nobody pays attention to you, the ego feels hungry.

It lives on attention.

So even if somebody is fighting and angry with you, that too is good because at least the attention is paid. If somebody loves, it is okay. If somebody is not loving you, then even anger will be good. At least the attention will come to you. But if nobody is paying any attention to you, nobody thinks that you are somebody important, significant, then how will you feed your ego?

Other's attention is needed.

In millions of ways you attract the attention of others; you dress in a certain way, you try to look beautiful, you behave, you become very polite, you change. When you feel what type of situation is there, you immediately change so that people pay attention to you.

This is a deep begging.

A real beggar is one who asks for and demands attention. And a real emperor is one who lives in himself; he has a center of his own, he doesn't depend on anybody else.

Buddha sitting under his bodhi tree...if the whole world suddenly disappears, will it make any difference to Buddha? -none. It will not make any difference at all. If the whole world disappears, it will not make any difference because he has attained to the center.

But you, if the wife escapes, divorces you, goes to somebody else, you are completely shattered - because she had been paying attention to you, caring, loving, moving around you, helping you to feel that you were somebody. Your whole empire is lost, you are simply shattered. You start thinking about suicide. Why? Why, if a wife leaves you, should you commit suicide? Why, if a husband leaves you, should you commit suicide? Because you don't have any center of your own. The wife was giving you the center; the husband was giving you the center.

This is how people exist. This is how people become dependent on others. It is a deep slavery. Ego HAS to be a slave. It depends on others. And only a person who has no ego is for the first time a master; he is no longer a slave. Try to understand this.

And start looking for the ego - not in others, that is not your business, but in yourself. Whenever you feel miserable, immediately close your eyes and try to find out from where the misery is coming and you will always find it is the false center which has clashed with someone.

You expected something, and it didn't happen.

You expected something, and just the contrary happened - your ego is shaken, you are in misery.

Just look, whenever you are miserable, try to find out why.

Causes are not outside you. The basic cause is within you - but you always look outside, you always ask:

Who is making me miserable?

Who is the cause of my anger?

Who is the cause of my anguish?

And if you look outside you will miss.

Just close the eyes and always look within.

The source of all misery, anger, anguish, is hidden in you, your ego.

And if you find the source, it will be easy to move beyond it. If you can see that it is your own ego that gives you trouble, you will prefer to drop it - because nobody can carry the source of misery if he understands it.

And remember, there is no need to drop the ego.

You cannot drop it.

If you try to drop it, you will attain to a certain subtle ego again which says, "I have become humble."

Don't try to be humble. That's again ego in hiding - but it's not dead.

Don't try to be humble.

Nobody can try humility, and nobody can create humility through any effort of his own - no. When the ego is no more, a humbleness comes to you. It is not a creation. It is a shadow of the real center.

And a really humble man is neither humble nor egoistic.

He is simply simple.

He's not even aware that he is humble.

If you are aware that you are humble, the ego is there.

Look at humble persons.... There are millions who think that they are very humble. They bow down very low, but watch them - they are the subtlest egoists. Now humility is their source of food. They say, "I am humble," and then they look at you and they wait for you to appreciate them.

"You are really humble," they would like you to say. "In fact, you are the most humble man in the world; nobody is as humble as you are." Then see the smile that comes on their faces.

What is ego? Ego is a hierarchy that says, "No one is like me." It can feed on humbleness - "Nobody is like me, I am the most humble man."

It happened once:

A fakir, a beggar, was praying in a mosque, just early in the morning when it was still dark. It was a certain religious day for Mohammedians, and he was praying, and he was saying, "I am nobody. I am the poorest of the poor, the greatest sinner of sinners."

Suddenly there was one more person who was praying. He was the emperor of that country, and he was not aware that there was somebody else there who was praying - it was dark, and the emperor was also saying:

"I am nobody. I am nothing. I am just empty, a beggar at our door." When he heard that somebody else was saying the same thing, he said, "Stop! Who is trying to overtake me? Who are you? How dare you say before the emperor that you are nobody when he is saying that he is nobody?"

This is how the ego goes. It is so subtle. Its ways are so subtle and cunning; you have to be very, very alert, only then will you see it. Don't try to be humble. Just try to see that all misery, all anguish comes through it.

Just watch! No need to drop it.

You cannot drop it. Who will drop it? Then the DROPPER will become the ego. It always comes back. Whatsoever you do, stand out of it, and look and watch.

Whatsoever you do - humbleness, humility, simplicity - nothing will help. Only one thing is possible, and that is just to watch and see that it is the source of all misery. Don't say it. Don't repeat it - WATCH. Because if I say it is the source of all misery and you repeat it, then it is useless. YOU have to come to that understanding. Whenever you are miserable, just close the eyes and don't try to find some cause outside. Try to see from where this misery is coming.

It is your own ego.

If you continuously feel and understand, and the understanding that the ego is the cause becomes so deep-rooted, one day you will suddenly see that it has disappeared. Nobody drops it - nobody can drop it. You simply see; it has simply disappeared, because the very understanding that ego causes all misery becomes the dropping. THE VERY UNDERSTANDING IS THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE EGO.

And you are so clever in seeing the ego in others. Anybody can see someone else's ego. When it comes to your own, then the problem arises - because you don't know the territory, you have never traveled on it.

The whole path towards the divine, the ultimate, has to pass through this territory of the ego. The false has to be understood as false. The source of misery has to be understood as the source of misery - then it simply drops.

When you know it is poison, it drops. When you know it is fire, it drops. When you know this is the hell, it drops.

And then you never say, "I have dropped the ego." Then you simply laugh at the whole thing, the joke that you were the creator of all misery.

I was just looking at a few cartoons of Charlie Brown. In one cartoon he is playing with blocks, making a house out of children's blocks. He is sitting in the middle of the blocks building the walls.

Then a moment comes when he is enclosed; all around he has made a wall. Then he cries, "Help, help!"

He has done the whole thing! Now he is enclosed, imprisoned. This is childish, but this is all that you have done also. You have made a house all around yourself, and now you are crying, "Help, help!" And the misery becomes a millionfold - because there are helpers who are also in the same boat.

It happened that one very beautiful woman went to see her psychiatrist for the first time. The psychiatrist said, "Come closer please." When she came closer, he simply jumped and hugged and

kissed the woman. She was shocked. Then he said, "Now sit down. This takes care of my problem, now what is your problem?"

The problem becomes multifold, because there are helpers who are in the same boat. And they would like to help, because when you help somebody the ego feels very good, very, very good - because you are a great helper, a great guru, a master; you are helping so many people. The greater the crowd of your followers, the better you feel.

But you are in the same boat - you cannot help.

Rather, you will harm.

People who still have their own problems cannot be of much help. Only someone who has no problems of his own can help you. Only then is there the clarity to see, to see through you. A mind that has no problems of its own can see you, you become transparent.

A mind that has no problems of its own can see through itself; that's why it becomes capable of seeing through others.

In the West, there are many schools of psychoanalysis, many schools, and no help is reaching people, but rather, harm. Because the people who are helping others, or trying to help, or posing as helpers, are in the same boat.

...It is difficult to see one's own ego.

It is very easy to see other's egos. But that is not the point, you cannot help them.

Try to see your own ego.

Just watch it.

Don't be in a hurry to drop it, just watch it. The more you watch, the more capable you will become. Suddenly one day, you simply see that it has dropped. And when it drops by itself, only then does it drop. There is no other way. Prematurely you cannot drop it.

It drops just like a dead leaf.

The tree is not doing anything - just a breeze, a situation, and the dead leaf simply drops. The tree is not even aware that the dead leaf has dropped. It makes no noise, it makes no claim - nothing.

The dead leaf simply drops and shatters on the ground, just like that.

When you are mature through understanding, awareness, and you have felt totally that ego is the cause of all your misery, simply one day you see the dead leaf dropping.

It settles into the ground, dies of its own accord. You have not done anything so you cannot claim that you have dropped it. You see that it has simply disappeared, and then the real center arises.

And that real center is the soul, the self, the god, the truth, or whatsoever you want to call it.

It is nameless, so all names are good.

You can give it any name of your own liking.

From Beyond the Frontier of the Mind by Osho