

Rightful Self-Satisfaction

John Nash

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From Desire to Altruism

A baby is the epitome of self-centeredness, capable of displaying rage if its physical needs, particularly for food, are not promptly met. As the infant develops, emotional desires are added to the primal physical needs. But the child is trained to be more patient and to recognize that satisfying its desires may be delayed or may be impossible, despite caregivers' best efforts. The child is taught a sense of proportion, that desires may have to be balanced against other important considerations. Training becomes more effective as mental faculties develop. Tantrums in toy stores show that training efforts may not entirely be successful, even late in childhood. Nevertheless, our culture stresses the importance of controlling desire, and by the time people reach adulthood they are more or less able and willing to put other people's needs or circumstances before their own self-interest.

The progression from selfishness toward altruism is mirrored in the development of many species of animals. Some adult animals can exhibit highly altruistic behavior, particularly if an offspring's needs are at stake. It can also be seen in the evolution of the human race. Nobody would dispute that self-centeredness, disregard for others, possessiveness, greed, and the pursuit of individual power persist in modern society. But even a casual study of history shows that these vices were more prevalent in times past. Gone are the days when a monarch could live in splendor, while a starving populace pressed at the palace gates. Interestingly, such selfishness was not necessarily individualized. Largesse was often shared within some exclusive group—family, clan, tribe, or caste—even when it was denied to outsiders. Group consciousness has deep roots in history.

Even more evident has been a progressive change in attitudes. The notion of serving one's country, political faction, or cause—even at the risk of sacrificing life, limb, or family—has a long tradition. More recently, people have accepted other service-related challenges. President Kennedy admonished us to “(A)sk not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”¹ Two months later he broadened the charge by establishing the Peace Corps. Vast numbers of people now give to charity. The need for government social programs and foreign aid is taken for granted, even though the scope and preferred mode of delivery remain politically vexing questions. The mass media, expressing the moral norms of society, condemn self-interest in public figures.

The growth of altruism and philanthropy during the Piscean Age was not unexpected because of the 6th ray energy that swept the planet. At the dawn of the age, the Christ taught that we should love our neighbor as ourselves, and he went on to answer the question “Who is my neighbor?”² A succession of spiritual teachers reinforced the message, and the ideals of charity, benevolence, service, and sacrifice—however imperfectly they may have been internalized and practiced—are now part of our cultural heritage. Twenty-five hundred years from the Buddha's last incarnation and two thousand years from the Christ's, these ideals are finally taking root.

Self-Denial

Throughout much of the age, Piscean idealism focused not on altruism but on self-denial and asceticism. Hindu holy men donned loin cloths and lived from the begging bowl. Buddhists sought to “kill out desire.” Tibetan monks sat naked on the ice. Hermits went into the wilderness. Flagellants beat themselves. Monastics took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The faithful fasted, did penance, and bought indulgences. People were born in impurity, sinned, and deserved Hell. Plotinus, according to his biographer Porphyry, was ashamed of having a body.³ Paul of Tarsus, Augustine of Hippo, and Albertus Magnus promoted sexual guilt. Only the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception and the Virgin Birth allowed Mary to bear Jesus uncontaminated by Original Sin and its close correlate, conjugal pleasure. The Puritans rejected Mary but extended Augustinian guilt to all types of personal pleasure, including the real or imagined pleasures of others.

Spiritual practices throughout much of the Piscean Age targeted the physical and astral vehicles. They were a strange throwback to Lemurian and Atlantean times and may have marked a rebirth of large numbers of souls from those epochs, accompanying the 6th ray’s return to manifestation. Thousands of years into the Aryan epoch, people were still fighting battles to subdue physical and emotional appetites that began much earlier in human history. Aspirants engaged in these practices not to overcome self-centeredness but to establish a right relationship with God. The practices did little to open people’s hearts to others; violence to the self can hardly be expected to promote love. Rather, they were undertaken as a brutal means to individual salvation. The Piscean spiritual practices were entirely consistent with the 6th ray energies that promoted individual idealism, coupled with a strong sense of duality. Above all, they drew their power from that great 6th ray symbol, the crucifixion.

We should not evaluate these practices from a sense of separativeness or to highlight our own degree of enlightenment. Rather, we should rejoice that, because of our predecessors’ efforts, humanity as a whole has progressed to where it is now. The forms of yesterday begat and nurtured the consciousness of today. Nevertheless, we can see that the harsh spiritual practices were at variance with the compassion and nonviolence humanity embraced later in the Piscean Age. As the race has become more sensitive, the intentional use of violence for educational, “spiritual,” or any other legal purpose has diminished. The idea that we have to beat the lower self into submission, has now been discarded. The Earth, the body, and the personality are seen as good, not evil, and notions of harmlessness are applied to the self as well as to other people and the lower kingdoms. Self-centered desire can be overcome and altruism achieved without deprecating the personality. Sixth-ray dualism is being superseded by 7th ray integration.

Nevertheless, guilt continues to surround any kind of self-indulgence. God’s curse of Adam after the Fall, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,”⁴ was distilled into the Puritan work ethic. Life is hard, and success must be built on hard work, pain, and sacrifice. The universal mantra is “No pain, no gain.” Attempts to get rich quick, cut corners, or beat the system are suspect. Interestingly, the Puritan work ethic reached its peak in the United States which has a 6th ray personality. The pervasive guilt extends beyond the emphasis on work. Happiness is considered a rare luxury, the exception rather than the norm. Spiritual development requires long years of discipline. The spiritual path is steep and strewn with obstacles, and only the stout-hearted will succeed. The Hermit may be holding the lantern, but the pilgrims are clawing their way up the rock face below him. The 20th century’s growing sense of altruism and integration are overlaid on deep-seated patterns of guilt.

Love of Self

As the 6th ray receded, and 7th ray energies came into manifestation, a significant change occurred in attitudes toward self-denial. Writers from Adam Smith to Charles Darwin argued that mass—even blind—self-interest could produce far-reaching benefits for the group. Soon it became acceptable in philosophy and metaphysics to argue that self-interest was not all bad and, correspondingly, that the emphasis on self-denial might have been exaggerated.

The Tibetan teaches that “Self-depreciation is not necessarily a sign of spiritual growth.”⁵ Vegetarianism and celibacy are demanded only of those engaged in specialized work. “The belief that to be a disciple necessitates a celibate life and complete abstinence from all natural functions is neither correct nor desirable... There can be no sphere of human activity where man cannot act divinely and wherein all functions cannot be illumined by the light of pure reason and divine intelligence... (A) life that is not normally rounded out till all the functions of its nature...are exercised, is frustrated, inhibited, and abnormal.”⁶ Disciples should not be restricted to “the ancient disciplines” or taught “to lay emphasis on diet, celibacy, and times and seasons (that would) distract their attention away from the newer and sacred art of being and the wonder of living as a soul.”⁷ Discipline should be mental rather than physical. We do not need to choose between the lower and higher selves or between matter and Spirit, but must learn to integrate them. We can affirm, with Helena Blavatsky, that matter is Spirit at its lowest vibration, and Spirit is matter at its highest vibration. We neither glorify the lower self nor try to escape from it. We seek to fuse the personality vehicles, and then the personality and soul, into something more real and more *human* than the elements were before.

During the 48 years since Alice Bailey’s transition, other New Age teachers have gone further. They stress that abundance, health, and happiness are legitimate desires that do not require struggle or hardship. “God did not design pain and suffering... God’s Will is to light the world with peace, joy, health, and abundance.”⁸ These are part of the human birthright, to be had simply for the asking. “The abilities, strengths and variants that you may want to actualize are already latent... and at your disposal... (Y)ou actualize events from the present intersection of spirit and flesh, choosing them from probabilities according to your beliefs.”⁹ “You can learn to tap into... Higher Mind and draw to you unlimited health, abundance, new ideas, knowledge, and anything else you want... Affirm that what you want WILL happen, and trust that it will manifest for you at the perfect time and in the perfect way.”¹⁰ Not to have what you want is a sign of negative thinking or self-limitation: “If you have created a job, a relationship, or anything that is not bringing you joy, look inward and ask why... Often it is because you do not believe you deserve to have what you want. There is no such thing as ‘deserving’ on our plane.”¹¹ Food, clothing, and a beautiful home “are the accoutrements of self-love. When self-love is truly acknowledged you will not deny yourself any of these things. Self-love will open your hands to receive as well as to give.”¹² “Your Higher Self loves you and wants you to have every good thing you can allow into your life. Think how good it feels to give love to a small child or a favorite pet. They allow you to love them without feeling they must give you something in return.”¹³ We do not blame babies for their self-centeredness.

The techniques described by these writers demonstrate the growing influence in human affairs of the 7th ray of ceremonial magic. In place of manual toil there is creative imagination. The teachings communicate a very different message from those of past centuries. Compassion, gentleness, and self-love take the place of harsh discipline and self-denial. There is a greater sense of connectedness between the personality and soul and the needs of each. The lower self, including the physical body, is no longer viewed as evil but as an integral part of the human entity. It is not “this bag of bones,” “Brother Ass,” or the “Eve that brought about the Fall,” but the temple of the indwelling divinity. The change in attitude toward spiritual development

mirrors a similar change in the way we rear children. “Spare the rod and spoil the child” is now rejected in favor of kindness, respect, and sensitivity. Whether it has worked with all children is debatable, and critics yearn for a return to the firm discipline of yesterday. But it has certainly protected the sensitive child from the brutality and terror of school—and sometimes home—life that are indelibly etched into the memories of many older people. Perhaps a compassionate approach can succeed in spiritual development too.

However, two objections need to be addressed. The first, with respect to the desire for material goods, centers on the notion of a finite world economy. If I acquire more—good food, a larger home, a more expensive automobile, state-of-the-art electronic products, and so forth—someone else will inevitably have less. Natural resources are limited and must be shared by a rapidly growing world population. We are players in a zero-sum game. Accordingly it is my responsibility to reduce consumption to the minimum needed for survival—even though virtually everybody in the developed world today is consuming more than his or her fair share of resources. On the other hand, many New Age teachers argue that universal bounty is unlimited and that limitation is self-imposed. I can have anything I want, and in no way does it reduce what is left for others.

The second objection raises questions of a finite *personal* economy. Will the acquisition of things for myself distract me from group concerns and service? This objection applies not only to material goods but also to emotional and mental pursuits. If I buy an expensive musical instrument or CD collection, engage in an expensive hobby, or go on vacation, am I squandering money that could buy food for children in 3rd world countries? If I devote several years to an education, am I wasting time that could better be spent working in a soup kitchen? Is attachment inevitable, and will it impair my ability to make choices for the common good? Is visualizing a better personal reality a wasteful use of mental energy? Is there an irreconcilable conflict between self-indulgence and spiritual development? The recent New Age teachers argue that there is not, that creating what one wants can actually promote spiritual progress. “Even fulfilling material desires can create spiritual growth. Behind the desire for a new home or car is the desire to grow, expressed in a familiar form... (However) as you gain mastery over manifesting your material desires, you will come to realize that (they) have little value unless they serve your higher purpose. You will reach a point where you have an increasingly strong desire to be you Higher Self.”¹⁴

Need for Balance

The main issue is the legitimacy of self-love and rightful self-satisfaction. Is self-love simply an excuse for selfishness, self-centeredness or “softness,” or can it be a natural and right response to the divinity of the self? Must the goal of altruism be sought through rigorous self-denial, or can it be achieved more gently through a gradual shift of values?

There are no easy answers to these questions. We recognize that, as we develop spiritually, possessions and lifestyle quality will mean less and less. Eventually, our focus will be entirely on the group good. On the other hand, few people today would argue that we should immediately become beggars; the dependence on others would be criticized, and certainly the lifestyle would limit the types of discipleship work we could take on. We must remain “in the world” even if we are not “of it.” Our dharma may be to work and live to the full the life of our civilization and culture.

The life of the disciple requires balance. Asceticism and self-centered greed form a pair of opposites, and we seek a middle ground between them. Many people prefer to err on the side of self-denial, rather than face reproach for self-indulgence. Piscean guilt still exerts considerable influence. But the Christ taught that we must love our neighbors as ourselves, which suggests

that we should love ourselves *at least as much* as our neighbor. Indeed, it is hard to be loving and compassionate to others unless we first learn to love and have compassion for ourselves. Some measure of self-indulgence may be beneficial and necessary, like food and recreation. As the Tibetan remarks, it can produce a well-rounded individual.

Until the process of personality-soul integration is well advanced, suppressing the desires of the lower self causes pain and suffering. When integration is complete, the desires will have fallen below the threshold of awareness, and there will be no need to suppress them. The question is how best to move toward full integration. Fanatical asceticism may give the aspirant a temporary “high,” but the longer-term result is likely to be disillusionment, resentment and depression. It may also do lasting damage to the physical and emotional vehicles. A kinder, gentler approach that focuses on alignment and integration may allow desire to be transmuted naturally.

On the other hand, in promoting the use of affirmation and visualization to create personal prosperity, some recent New Age teachers may have gone too far. Segments of the literature (not those cited in this article) recommend such methods as preparing posters in which images of Jesus are pasted next to pictures of the late-model automobile we want to manifest. The materialism is crude and vulgar, and these methods pervert 7th ray white magic.

Nevertheless, many New Age teachings are of a high order and promote discipleship and world service in essentially the same terms used by the Tibetan. Their contribution, which may well represent new revelation, has been to increase awareness of the role that self-love can play in spiritual development. Although the degree of innate divinity clearly is higher in the soul, the lower self is divine too. Spirituality is not necessarily promoted by denying personality-level impulses that do not harm other people or the environment.

The issue of a finite planetary economy remains to be resolved, and the corresponding limits of harmlessness are still being formulated. But to create music, for example, may be sufficiently beneficial to the individual that the cost in terms of reduced charitable contributions and “service time” may be excusable. The Tibetan encourages participation in the arts or other types of creative work to ensure a smooth transfer of energy from the sacral center to the heart center.¹⁵ And the Christ pointed out “For ye have the poor always with you.”¹⁶ The music may benefit the planet, even if it is performed in private.

Disciples who are effective in service are likely to be effective also in other areas of human activity, including the acquisition of wealth and position. The acquisition of wealth is particularly easy in the United States with its 2nd ray soul. Effectiveness in everyday life is a measure of disciples’ service potential. When the Masters need to fill responsible ashramic positions, it is reasonable to suppose that they sometimes look for individuals who have run businesses, nonprofit institutions, or professional practices. They would scarcely hire a flagellant. Administration, leadership and ownership are important skills in the New Group of World Servers. Before we can give we must *have*, whether we are talking about material possessions, skills, or enlightenment.

Moderate self-indulgence is not, in itself, an obstacle to spiritual development. So long as the individual maintains a mental focus and works to build the antahkarana, soul guidance will steer him or her away from unhealthy attachment and self-centeredness. The things of this world will be viewed in a proper perspective, and our priorities will gradually shift toward higher values. Indeed, recognizing such a shift is an important aspect of sacrifice, correctly interpreted. Under soul guidance, generosity to the self can provide good practice in being generous to others. Loving ourselves raises the standard that the Christ set for us in loving our neighbor.

As group consciousness becomes more firmly rooted, the distinction between self-interest and group-interest may become blurred, as it was in some of the exclusive family and tribal societies

of the past. Will self-interest, which in more recent times has been strongly individualized, expand once again on a higher turn of the spiral? Assuming that group-centeredness becomes the norm in the Aquarian Age, what final form will it take and what intermediate forms will we experience?

It would be easy to say that, in order to develop spiritually, we must conquer “selfishness” and cultivate “selflessness.” However, our understanding of these terms is quite limited. Group consciousness is still in its infancy, and our grasp of the self and its divinity is undeveloped. At the present stage of human evolution, learning to love may be more important than denying ourselves. As we move into the Aquarian Age, we are also learning to use energy that may or may not be finite and subject to scientific conservation laws. But in either case, priorities need to be set in using the energies at our disposal. We seek guidance on how best to use our creative skills—how to prepare ourselves to become co-creators with Those whom we aspire to serve. We are beginning to experience “the sacred art of being and the wonder of living as a soul.”

¹ John F. Kennedy. *Inaugural Address*. January 20, 1961.

² *Luke 10*, 29 (KJV)

³ Uta R. Heinemann. *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven*. Penguin, 1990, p. 16.

⁴ *Genesis 3*, 19 (KJV)

⁵ Alice Bailey. *Discipleship in the New Age*, Vol. 1. Lucis, 1944, p. 599.

⁶ Alice Bailey. *Esoteric Psychology*, Vol. 1. Lucis Trust, 1936, pp. 304-305.

⁷ Alice Bailey, *Treatise on White Magic*. Lucis Trust, 1934, p. 420.

⁸ Pat Rodegast and Judith Stanton. *Emmanuel's Book*, Vol. 1. Bantam, 1987, p. 122.

⁹ Jane Roberts. *The Nature of Personal Reality*. Prentice Hall, 1974, pp. 338-339, 344.

¹⁰ Sanaya Roman. *Spiritual Growth*. Kramer, 1989, pp. 28, 36.

¹¹ Sanaya Roman. *Living With Joy*. Kramer, 1985, p. 19.

¹² *Emmanuel's Book*, Vol. 1, p. 128.

¹³ *Spiritual Growth*, p. 98.

¹⁴ *Spiritual Growth*, p. 108.

¹⁵ *Treatise on White Magic*, p. 198.

¹⁶ *Matthew 26*, 11. (KJV).