

# The Strongman of the Ego

By

**Rav Levi bar Ido / B'nai Avraham**

**Mat. 12:29** *Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house and spoil his goods, unless first he binds the strong one, and then he will plunder his house.*

Before we are born each individual is like a strand in a Divine tapestry similar to a curtain of souls. The thread of our soul is interwoven with the threads of the All. After we descend from the One, we are born into separation and duality.<sup>1</sup> This descent and the separation from the curtain of souls is a painful tearing of the fabric of our existence.

Before the human soul descends into this world, we know everything there is to know; all the worlds, our reason for existence, our future, and our connection to All That Is. At birth into this physical world, an angel comes and touches our lips and all that is forgotten. Because our soul now has a body, we focus our energies on survival, safety, and mastering our environment. We have a very faint memory of what we once knew. We sense deep within that “something” we had has been “lost”. What could be missing? Where do we begin to look for it? The memory of our original state of Oneness lingers buried deep within. It is hidden, yet active and influences our lives.

We search during our whole life to find that Pearl of Great Price that lies buried in the field. The journey takes us down many roads and a variety of experiences. Two of the biggest thieves that wait to jump us on the way to Tzion are our ego's fear and delusion due to our subjective perception of reality. As we journey further on our pilgrimage, and time passes, everything that has happened to us in the past and all that will happen to us in the future plays a role in shaping our worldview and perspectives. Life seems empty and without any meaning. Many will never develop spiritually and face a life of despair, physical illness, and mental suffering. However, we are always interwoven with the Eternal One.

- **Mat 13:44-46** *Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which when a man has found it, he hides it, and for the joy of it goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it*

On our journey toward spiritual growth and an awakening of our *Neshamah* (Higher Soul), one of the most important tasks is to return our ego to its rightful place as a guardian rather than a guard. In order to gain access to the higher worlds, it is essential that the ego take its proper place as a servant, and not the master.

- **Rom 6:16** *Do you not know that to whom you yield yourselves as slaves for obedience, you are slaves to him whom you obey; whether it is of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Even a school age child feels the separation and loneliness of being different from others because of the influence of the external pressures of life. Many children then withdraw from the outer world into an inner fortress.

## The Ego

The word ego means the “I” .The Ego is the fundamental part of the *nefesh* or the animal soul.<sup>2</sup> The ego is concerned with physical pleasures, self preservation, worldly success, and position. It is the *Yesod* or Foundation of the Tree of Life in a human being. It is the awareness of the external world by the five senses, and also operates through the imagination.

Because the ego is rooted in our sense of separation and apart from rest of the world, its nature is one of duality and opposition. It is the part of us that battles to sustain the delusion that we are a self-contained being, separate from each other and Elohim. It becomes the despotic strongman protecting us from pain, inner wisdom, and hiding our true nature.

Once its kingdom is established, the ego retains a strong hold on us throughout our life, always resisting any attempt to end its kingship. It lashes out whenever its view of reality is challenged .This is especially true at any attempt to grow spiritually because the ego knows that every step on the path towards Elohim will mean a reduction of its power. Whenever we resist the call of our *Neshamah* (the Higher Soul), it is the pull of the ego that is the real cause.

The ego loves to be stroked by the accolades of the crowd, fears criticism, takes pride in its ownership, and is attached to worldly wealth and possessions. It weaves a web of delusions that is so tightly woven that no Light can shine through. It becomes our inner terrorist constantly sabotaging any efforts of liberation and freedom from its power and control. It throws stumbling blocks in the path to hinder any spiritual development. Some of the road blocks are guilt, a feeling of unworthiness, a false worldview, and great anxiety that if we grow spiritually, we will lose all our worldly pleasures.<sup>3</sup>

When we speak of eliminating the barriers of ego, we refer to eliminating arrogance and selfishness. These traits are a direct expression of the universal principle of "evil" as the Torah defines it. "Evil" is the illusion of separation and independence from YHWH, and while there are infinite variations of its expression, generally, the distortion which is called "evil" is the sense, often subtle, of personal sovereignty. Thus the ego's influence is epitomized by arrogance and selfishness.

The ego’s defense system is designed to convince us that any deviation from the “ordinary” and “accepted” places us in serious jeopardy. As an idol it strives to maintain the status quo. Our ego cause us great suffering by refusing to change and holding tight to things as they are. The ego fears that at any moment all our achievements and wealth can be taken away by others and even worse-YHWH. The ego lives in a constant state of terror and fear, accounting for most of our emotional struggles.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ya’akov and Esav are archetypal images, and the ego identifies with either the one loved by YHWH-Ya’akov, or the one hated -Esav. They represent the objects of the love and wrath of YHWH, with the ego standing between them. This is also the symbol of the Messiah suspended in agony between two thieves or two irreconcilable opposites. The archetypal symbols of the Messiah and anti-Messiah are within each of us.

<sup>3</sup> Even at an early age, the ego begins to project the obstruction onto something or someone external and blames parents, Elohim, economic situations, the marriage partner, the boss for the problems encountered in life. Adam blamed Chawah for his fall, and so man blames external forces for his failings rather than taking responsibility for his behavior.

## The Ego's Defense System

Although defense mechanisms serve a useful protective function, they usually involve some measure of self-deception and reality distortion, and may seriously interfere with the effective resolution of the actual problem. Ego defense-mechanisms are considered to be maladaptive when they become the predominant means of coping with stressors. Ego-defense mechanisms are learned during early childhood. They are developed to deal with inner hurt, pain, anger, anxiety, sadness and self-devaluation. They operate on automatic and habitual levels.

- **Denial of Reality:** Protecting self from unpleasant reality by refusal to perceive it or face it.
- **Fantasy:** Gratifying frustrated desires by imaginary achievements.
- **Repression:** Preventing painful or dangerous thoughts from entering consciousness.
- **Rationalization:** Attempting to prove that one's behavior is 'rational' and justifiable and thus worthy of self and social approval.
- **Projection:** Placing blame for difficulties upon others or attributing one's own unethical desires to others.
- **Reaction Formation:** Preventing dangerous desires from being expressed by adopting exaggerated opposed attitudes and types of behavior and using them as 'barriers'.
- **Displacement:** Discharging pent-up feelings, usually hostility, on objects less dangerous than those which initially aroused the emotion.
- **Emotional Insulation:** Reducing ego involvement and withdrawing into passivity to protect self from hurt.
- **Intellectualization:** Cutting off affective charge from hurtful situations or separating incompatible attitudes by logic-tight compartments.
- **Undoing:** Atoning for and thus counteracting immoral desires or acts.
- **Regression:** Retreating to earlier developmental level involving less mature responses and usually a lower level of aspiration.
- **Identification:** Increasing feelings of worth by identifying self with person or institution of illustrious standing.
- **Introjection:** Incorporating external values and standards into ego structure so individual is not at their mercy as external threats.
- **Compensation:** Covering up weakness by emphasizing desirable trait or making up for frustration in one area by over-gratification in another.

## Transformation not Destruction

- ***Rom 12:2*** *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, in order to prove by you what is that good and pleasing and perfect will of Elohim.*

The ego fears annihilation. But, our spiritual goal is not to destroy the ego. If the struggle to “destroy” the ego, the animal soul is increased! The result is behavior contrary to that which we desire. If we try to annihilate the ego, it will lash out like a wounded animal, seeking ways to harm others and ourselves. The ego must be transformed rather than destroyed. We must move slowly and deliberately in the spiritual process or our spiritual life will be on a foundation of sand without any root that will not stand firmly when temptations and trials come our way. The appropriate place to begin this transformation process is with an objective, rather than subjective, examination of every thought, word, and action.<sup>4</sup> It is through a renewed mind that we can begin to transform the ego and begin to act according to the Torah and think scripturally. Slowly we begin to chip away at the foundation of the ego strongholds that keep our *Neshamah* from awakening. The *Neshamah* is clothed by the *Nefesh*, and the *Nefesh* is clothed by thought, words, and deeds.

### **Teshuvah and the Ego**

- **2Co 7:10** *For the grief according to Elohim works repentance to salvation, not to be regretted, but the grief of the world works out death.*

Our ego maintains its control over us by guilt. This emotion exists alongside the behavior that causes it. Feelings of guilt give us permission not to change, just so long as we suffer enough emotionally and punish ourselves for the behavior. Also, if we change our behavior because of guilt, then the change is not from the heart, but done grudgingly and our connection to the bad behavior is not severed. Guilt is a selfish emotion because it causes us to think only of ourselves and focus upon “me” rather than others. Guilt can actually turn into self-loathing or self-destruction. Guilt and self-hatred serves no purpose because no one can act righteously at all times and never sin. A cycle of guilt and self-recrimination stalls our spiritual growth by making us feel unworthy. *Teshuvah* opens the door for stopping the cycle as it reminds us of our self-worth and value as part of creation.

*Teshuvah* is not about blame or self-abuse. It is an openhearted recognition of the effects of our negative thoughts, words, and actions. *Teshuvah* cause us to take responsibility for our sin and helps us to decide not to repeat them. This detaches us from our past and begins the healing process in the present. Real forgiveness of self and others releases energy for life and spiritual growth. It is only through self-forgiveness, and full acceptance of our own shortcomings, that we are able to have compassion for others.

The ego is the master liar and deceiver. It cultivates a false worldview focused on self and the false reality that our position, possessions, and success define who we are. We make ourselves an idol and bow down at before the deity of self, status, titles, mammon, and power. In order for our *Neshamah* to be awakened, we must be willing to abandon all false elohim that we worship and serve.

---

<sup>4</sup> The unconscious mind of man sees clearly even when the conscious reason is blind.

The ego also gives us the false view that to be “spiritual” means you have to live a life of asceticism and self-denial. The nature of the spiritual has nothing to do with these, for our body and worldly comforts are given to us from Elohim.

The ego is also an expert at manipulation and using fear as one of its effective tools. Once we become ensnared by fear, it is very difficult to free ourselves from that web of ego manipulation and control. Our fears can even cause physical sickness and pain. It requires great care to overcome these deep-seated fears. Fear manifests as hatred for others not like us, violence towards others<sup>5</sup>, irrational anger, conformity, forced behavior, and the shirking of responsibility.

The ego desires to have complete control and seeks to guide our lives and destiny. We can overcome its control by the revelation that no matter how hard we struggle, our spiritual progress is determined by our relationship to the Creator. The commitment to cleave to YHWH and the right attitude towards our thoughts, speech, and deeds, can transform the ego and free us from its tyranny. As the aspects of our ego transform, we will find ourselves being set free. The chains of negative thoughts, attachments, and delusions of our previous consciousness will fall away. It is not an experience of annihilation, but of revelation!<sup>6</sup>

### True Shalom

- ***Phi 3:4-15*** *Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other thinks that he has reason to trust in the flesh, I more. I was circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Yisrael, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews. As regards the Torah, I was a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the assembly; regarding the righteousness in the Torah, blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Messiah. But no, rather, I also count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Messiah Yahshua my Master, for whose sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them to be dung, so that I may win Messiah and be found in Him; not having my own righteousness, which is of the Torah, but through the faith of Messiah, the righteousness of Elohim by faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death; if by any means I might attain to the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I am pressing on, if I may lay hold of that for which I also was taken hold of by Yahshua the Messiah.. My brothers, I do not count myself to have taken possession, but one thing I do, forgetting the things behind and reaching forward to the things before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of Elohim in Messiah Yahshua. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, be of this mind. And if in anything you are otherwise minded, Elohim shall reveal even this to you.*

The result is that guilt will disappear, false opinions will cease to hold us captive, and fear will evaporate. We will come to an understanding that most suffering is self-inflicted, resulting from wanting what we cannot have and believing that we can be satisfied by what can never bring true satisfaction to our souls.

The source of all joy and fulfillment is the Creator. When we keep close to Him we become fulfilled and joyful. When we are distant from him we are removed from joy peace and fulfillment.

---

<sup>5</sup> We to project our unconscious tendencies onto others and specific groups of people. These projections cloud our view of our fellow men, spoils our objectivity, and destroys human relationships.

<sup>6</sup> Yeshayahu 2: The Day of YHWH can be understood to refer to an eschatological projection of the anticipated encounter of the ego with the activated Self. What is emphasized here in this passage is how all the inflated tendencies of the ego, any pretensions, anything of elevation or pride, will be destroyed in the process of that encounter. Such an encounter dissolves any tendency of the ego to identify with the Higher Self and to take on an authority not its own.

Because of this, it is important that we focus our mind on this understanding; the bigger our ego the greater our distance from YHWH. Our ego represents a consciousness that we are strong, powerful and more. And inherent in “ego consciousness” – whether consciously or subconsciously – is a lack of need for the Creators’ Light. There is almost no greater barrier between ourselves and Elohim than our ego. Understanding this we need to make it a constant and consciousness effort to diminish our ego. Reminding ourselves that the degree we diminish our ego we come closer to the Creator closer to joy, peace, and fulfillment.