



Individual and Universal Ego

Talks with Babaji

When people talk about ego, they usually speak of it as an entity. Is it an entity or a process?

Ego is neither an entity nor a process. It is only a notion of I-amness which exists in the mind. The process of reducing the ego is for the mind and not for the ego itself, although we talk about the ego as separate. It never exists without the mind. If a person is senseless, the person doesn't know about his or her state. I-amness is dormant.

You said earlier that the reduction of ego is for the mind and not for the ego itself. Could you clarify what you mean by that?

Ego, the idea of I-am, is in the mind. It is rajas guna predominant, which is the energy of passion. Mind is rajas guna predominant. It develops greed, pride, attachment, fear, etc. The ego only owns all those things in the mind by saying "I am." When the mind is removed from worldly desires, then sattva guna gets stronger. In sattva guna, the ego can't express itself. If we want to understand the ego, then we have to look back. All our past pain and miseries are still there, whereas our good works are in a faint memory. It proves that expression of ego is more in tamas and rajas-based actions and thoughts.

I am interested in the idea of dharma as being our nature, that our nature as a human being is to say "I am."

"I am" is the nature of the mind. In that nature, two things are hidden: 1) bhoga (experience), 2) apavarga (liberation). In bhoga there are 2 stages: 1) dharmic experiences (virtuous experiences) and 2) adharmic (nonvirtuous experiences or vice). People experience all kinds of enjoyments by using evil means. A hunter finds joy in shooting an innocent deer.

Is it necessary to first have an ego in order to experience and then the feel of the ego sinking becomes the seed of your spiritual path or the foundation of one's liberation?

It's not our choice to have the ego or not. We are born with it. It is the nature of the mind to experience its individuality. All our desires, attachment, experiences in the world are due to the ego based in the mind. When all worldly experiences appear as pain, then the ego-based mind seeks for liberation. When we say liberation, we mean the experiencer within us, the ego of individuality (jiva), starts seeking for its own liberation from all the memories of past experiences.

Could it be said that any seeking is from the ego? The play of the ego, the desire for self improvement? Is it just the personality which seeks the truth; is that just an expression of the ego?

Yes. It's also an expression of ego but heading towards its own dissolution. The ego, ahamkara, means that which creates I-ness. It has no other meaning. It has no particular place in our body but it is rooted in all the activities of the mind, intellect, and senses. So we can't deal with the ego without using our mind.

How is the desire to self improve heading towards its own dissolution?

Go back to the past. You did good things and also bad things. Bad things are in your mind very clearly. Good things are almost forgotten. How? Because in bad things the ego expresses its presence strongly and in good things it can't. In good things the ego relates to the universal concept; in bad things only in terms of the individual. In self improvement, you try to live a virtuous life, and virtuous life removes egoic involvement in the world.

"We are already there; we just don't know it," the Buddhists say. Would you comment?

"We are already there." It means the divine energy is within each of us all the time. "We don't know it" means our ego of individuality is veiling that truth. As long as the notion of individuality is not removed, we are our ego. But it's a theory. The question is how? Doing our duty for others is one way. What happens? The ego is the concept of I-ness. It always thinks of self-interest. Self-interest needs two things: 1) desire, 2) attachment. How do we think we are? By our actions, thoughts and feelings which are only for our self-interest. If we change the angle of the mind, we are doing our duty for others without attachment: 1) my family, 2) my friends, 3) my job, 4) my property. If the attitude should be all for others, I am simply doing caretaker duty. When the mind takes that attitude, the ego loses its power.

You have said the ego gets subtler and subtler as you progress on the spiritual path. Does this happen through the practice of spiritual discipline?

By spiritual practice, by devotion, by study of scriptures, by the teachings of a sage, the ego becomes subtler. What is subtler ego? The gross ego is the ego of individuality which expresses itself in worldly desires and attachment. Subtler ego is when those desires and attachment get weaker and individual self-interests start disappearing. The mind identifies with the subtle ego by its own pure state.

How do you recognize the subtler aspect of ego, because it's so subtle?

By seeing the dispassion in the mind.

The term "universal ego," is that the Self or is that something different?

The Self unrelated to one's worldly existence. "I" - universal; "I am" - individual which is always involved with worldly objects.

How can one tell whether one is operating from universal ego or individual ego?

By watching our self interest "It's for me, it's not for me." This idea is in the individual ego.

Is it possible to live in the world without a sense of I?

If you mean "I am," then yes. It is a state of desirelessness. If you don't want anything and are contented within yourself, you will not feel "I am." The individuality transforms to universality.

What is higher ego as opposed to lower ego? Is there a freedom at either level?

Ego is English term for I-ness and I-amness. I-ness is higher ego. I-amness is the lower ego. "I am" relates to an object. "I" doesn't relate to anything. It is self-existing consciousness. So we use higher ego and lower ego. In Sanskrit it is atma and jiva. Jiva means one who is living in the body. Soul and oversoul is another term.

In the process of separating the ego, I find I close up in other ways. And separate myself from friendship and close down to love.

It doesn't separate anything if one understands the ego and its expression in so many various ways. You remain the same person but you don't feel the same way and the drama goes on. You own a house and a boy throws a rock and breaks the window glass. You curse the boy and throw a rock at him. Then you sell the house and then rent it. Again a boy comes and throws a rock and breaks the window glass. You see it and say, "oh, the owner will fix it." Only change was the sense of ownership changed.

So the shutting down is still part of the ego's involvement?

You are still living in the same house, but you sold the ownership. You became a tenant. In your mind you feel like a tenant but your outer functions in the house remain the same.

Regarding the appearance of the divine when self-interest is eliminated, is it a matter of understanding the boundaries of the Self or eliminating the Self entirely?

Appearance of the divine means Self-realization. What is that realization? I am not this mind-body complex. I am the Self, a divine spark existing in all beings. So I am universal.