

Nora Church Sermon  
March 9<sup>th</sup> 2008  
Rev. Ursula Clara Christ

## Ego vs. Self

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The story of two wolves.....

An elderly Cherokee Native American was teaching his grandchildren about life...

He said to them, "A fight is going on inside me, it is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves.

One wolf is evil -- he is fear, anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, competition, superiority, and ego.

The other is good---he is joy, peace, love, hope, sharing, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, friendship, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith.

This same fight is going on inside you, and inside every other person, too."

They thought about it for a minute and then one child asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?"

The old Cherokee simply replied: "The one you feed".

I would like for each person in this room to ask these questions right now. Which wolf do I most feed? Who am I creating with my person? Since I awoke this morning ... have I acted out of my ego or thru my Love?

What is Ego exactly?...When I was in my early 20's my life's plan as I was assured by my dreams and aspirations **at that** time was to be married, have around 4 children, live in a gigantic house, have designer furniture and cloths. Take a nice vacation every 6 months when I could get away from my high paying high powered job as a .. you name it. All the typical aspirations of a 20-something. This is a fine life for some but all told, I had to realize where **my** happiness was really going to be found. At the age of 24 I received my calling and a internal metamorphosis of my Self commenced. At this point in my life, practically none of those plans made the journey to reality for me. Why? I stripped the "need" of them away. Underneath these plans was revealed my ego's dread of success vs. failure & attachment vs. letting go. I no longer wish there to be room for that perspective in my life anymore.

There are so many definitions of what Ego is to people, but mainly ego is a part of our self, it helps determine and define our personalities while on this earth. Not our true personality, however, but the one that gives us reason to fear, loath, control, isolate and to feel insecurity, to hold back forgiveness & strike out with anger. Ego believes there is never enough, so it must hold on to and stake claim upon. It is like a Cocoon that we build up around ourselves for all the reasons I just mentioned. Ego is small, inflexible, and judgment-based, it holds truths about us that turn us away from each other and ourselves, providing yet more reason to distrust and isolate further. Most importantly, I believe, ego is something we are ready to leave behind.

Our judgment of people and of circumstances, the way we view situations and the attitude we maintain while engaging them is critical in the decision as to which wolf inside, you will feed. The power of the mind to overcome is immense. The power of our thoughts can be just as significant as the power of our actions. You can wake up in the morning to 8 inches of snow on the ground and immediately feel like the day will be worse for the wear because of (bad traffic)... or you can wake up and decide the beauty of the day will make the longer trek to work worthwhile. **It's a simple choice.** Don't we all know someone who could make an adventure from getting a flat tire on the highway? Practicing an attitude of non-judgment brings you **freedom to choose differently** in relation to formerly adverse circumstances. You begin to release the fear, frustration and anxiety that come along with attaching a negative adjective to trying situations. *You ever been waiting in line for something a while, you're doing okay until the guys next to you says "man, this stinks!" You reply "yeah waiting around like this is such a waste!" You were doing fine before, and now suddenly you find yourself agitated and angry* **because what you feed into increases.** See, you have the power to choose for yourself the attitude your person will assume. When life's problems occur, where do your thoughts and energy lead you? Are they ego based? Are you instead choosing your best Self at the worst of moments?

Declaring something as being either good or bad creates Strife within our **Self**. By Self, I mean here a higher esoteric (or inner) self. One that seeks the on-going improvement of its person and of all others. This form of higher self goes by several names some of which are, our Bodhichitta, our Christ or Krishna Consciousness, the Natural Self or God Self within. This higher self, is not invented by something from outside of us, we have always had it and we are uncovering it all the time. As I said, pronouncing something as being either good or bad creates Strife within our Self. Maintaining a peace-filled mind (or in difficult situations, at least a neutral mind) is not only important to the on-going nourishment of our Higher Self, it is imperative to staving off the effects ego creates around problems that we cannot avoid in life. Buddhists especially celebrate the fluidity that life has to offer. They seek to create a universe within themselves that is especially adept to change. Our egos cannot stand the thought of change and we do everything we can to stop or slow its effects. Problem is that **whatever we**

**fixate on we strengthen and we abide by.** We are addicted to unwillingness to change with time, and an unwillingness to let go and comply with life's metamorphosis. Change, however is our fundamental state and within the context of the higher Self, it is accepted and, once looked upon as a challenge, change is finally seen as **a tool for growth and renewal.** We begin to accept a part of ourselves that concentrates *not* on the small but on the broad, not on the reactive but on the responsive, on open-mindedness not the closed and on the limitless rather than the shrunken.

Author Willa Cather said, "There are only 2 or 3 human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before."

It is easy to get caught up in our stories; our ego clings to them for identity. We strongly believe in our stories and how they define us as a person. We relate to each other based upon these stories. We can all look back at severe moments in our lives that have shaped who we see ourselves as...but how much do we dwell on them? Is it to a degree that we can't get past them? Do they limit us or our perspective of others? Do they hold us back from being the kind of person we would like to see ourselves as. Though we may fight it, the world will throw Woes our way. **We cannot change what has happened in our lives BUT we can change our mind about what has happened in our lives. We can stop feeding and start weeding our negative feelings that spring from our past.**

There is an old concept out there that is coming back and *changing* the way we see our world and each other. It is called...Being or staying Present. We are so rarely fully present. This is a concept that involves staying put mentally right in the moment of **now.** It lies in the theory that we are not our past because that is gone forever...we are not our future because it hasn't happened yet and therefore can't be depended upon. **All we have is today and in the right here right now, we are forever.** Most of the time we sit absorbed in events from the past or events coming up in the future, or events that will never take place at all. This is a need that many in the west have to self distract. This self distraction is like a primal restlessness we get from always trying to find ground to hold onto, we fear groundlessness, we fear the instability of life's unplanned circumstances, we don't want to be reminded that often times, we don't have any control. Ego's supreme hold on our ability to cope with life gives us no room for error. Ego can't be wrong; any loss of control causes us to feel threatened and more steadily insecure. When that happens, what then do many of us turn to in our Need for grounding (security)...we seek comfort in our addictions, in our attachments, in our prejudices, in our judgments, all used as a cocoon to help distance the fear of a fluid reality. I encourage you each to ask yourself, what you do in moments you feel anxious, depressed or angry? Where do you go to "escape"? (We all do it). The answer could be as seemingly harmless as Target or as destructive as

heroine. Ask yourself if you really need to escape or if you can sit, alone, staying present and focused on your **need** to escape in the first place. To find out why you have to find a way out.

Devoted Buddhists & Yogi's have long practiced the art of meditation in order to shed the needs of the ego and seek out the True Self. Doing so, they to come face to face with their *needs* as Human Beings, experiencing the emotional distress we all feel; and thru practice, train themselves to the art of **staying and trusting the present moment**. They don't carry themselves as people who train daily but their exercise is here (mind) and here (heart). They get in touch with themselves on a whole other level of Self. Meditation has been taught for millennia as a tool to see outside the ego's cocoon. We can all benefit from it. Here in the centered mind, one battles ego on the same ground it was created, from a fear of the One-mindedness within and fear of losing its identity as a single individual, separated from all others.

Albert Einstein wrote, "A human being is a part of the whole called by us "the universe" a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest- a kind of optical delusion of consciousness. The delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening the circle of understanding and compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

Sometimes the best way to care for ourselves is to care for others. Vice versa, sometimes the best way to care others is to care for ourselves. To me, both statements are true.

On the one hand...When we contrast the state of ego and the state of the Natural or Higher Self it becomes evident that some of our greatest leaders worked from an idea that what affects my neighbors affects us all. They lived from an area in their minds and hearts that did not separate them from humanity, but rather gave them an advantage into seeing in particular the lives of others considered less worthy or more needy by society. These people ( MLK, M. Theresa, The Buddha, Gandhi, Jesus to name just a popular few) cared for themselves by first holding high the hopes of human kind. All of them operated thru kindness and an ability to put themselves in the shoes of others, each practiced non-selective lovingness. In other words EVERYONE was worthy of their love and compassion, not just their own friends and family. I picture a race with the likes of people like these and I wonder who would even want to be 1<sup>st</sup> across the finish line. None so much wished for achievement but rather advancement for the underprivileged and just plain service to humanity. This is an example of people seeing and being beyond themselves. Recognize that we do not end at the bodies skin deep boundaries.

On the Other hand...We all care just as easily for others by working diligently for ourselves. Each of us has the ability to change the one person that we represent. My reason for making

this topic important in my life and to you here today is for this one statement... **I firmly believe that one will not find outside oneself what one cannot find within.** Inner peace begets outer peace, inner love begets outer love, and just the same inner problems beget outer problems. When you shine from the inside you are a beckon of light to many.

We as humans may share the same planet but we all seem to live in our own little separate universes inside our minds. However, we need to venture into our mind in order to change our perspective. I believe just as important as connecting with others is first to connect to your **Self**, questioning which wolf you most feed, most represent. The Higher self strives for flexible, like water it fits into any shape. This person is inquisitive, adaptable, humorous, tranquil and happy; all without the assurance of defining who they are, or who anyone else is. They become equality all because they understand how we are all connected, one mind, from one source.

The Microcosm is the Macrocosm.

In conclusion: Buddha said, " We are never separated from our enlightenment." I believe the Journey is not about seeking out, but about discovering what is already inherent in each of us. It's about peeling back the layers of ego that make us who we are....Or may I say, who we are not, the first key is **awareness**.

My Challenge to you.....**Be your Self**