

Ego and Self Knowledge at Loggerheads

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Both the words in the title are very significant. Ego means the proud self. Similarly self knowledge means knowledge about oneself. Sometimes back I made a statement about an absent member in a circle of friends. A friend in the group of my listeners felt that my statement is negative about the absent member. Then he also accused me that I have the 'habit' of making negative statements about others!

Listening to the friend about my statement and about his accusation of my 'habit', an old scene flashed into my mind. Some twenty five years back I was called to a meeting of a few people who had complaints against my writing and my policy as the editor of DOOT. An elderly wise counselor in the meeting advised me, "Fr. Varghese, let the person who accuses you continue to speak. You do not need to answer him on every point."

After the advice of the elderly wise person I remained silent because I respected the counselor. But inside me, I did not like his advice. For, in the presence of a few people the speaker was making false accusations against me. There were no truth in his useless accusations and I had adequate explanation to his accusation. So in that meeting I was on fire inside me. But this time when a friend said that I have the habit of making negative statements about others, the situation was the same. But I was the least perturbed by the friend's negative statement about me.

Both the time the ego in me was challenged. But when my ego was challenged the second time, my self knowledge or my understanding about myself was better equipped. I was conscious about my self knowledge which so to say told me that I need not enter into conflict challenging my accuser. I knew myself better that I felt there is no need neither to protect my ego nor to nourish my ego. When another person's ego challenges my ego, instead of challenging the ego of the others, I now try to understand his ego in a positive way. For, I believe in myself and I know who I am. My being what I am does not depend on another person. My ego does not need the approval of another. So against the accusation of myself by another person's ego I need not enter into conflict with his ego by accusing him and proving him wrong.

Now I am enlightened and self possessed to know that I do not need to dance to the tune of everyone else. I need not mould myself on the basis of what others think and say about me. My thoughts and actions need not depend on others and their opinions about me. My thoughts and actions are propelled by myself, by my inner self. My self knowledge is my guide. I do not need other's certificate for being what I am. I am led by my self knowledge. My self knowledge is my inspiration, my guiding force. In other words I am a free person.

My freedom does not mean that I am a lonely person, a lonely island. No, I am a social being like everyone else. In my social life also there is an ideal, a power a model which leads me. That model, that power says, "If anyone wants to come after me, he must forget self, carry his cross, and to follow me." (Mt 16, 24)

It is Jesus Christ who has called me to be his follower, to be his disciple. He calls me constantly

to sacrifice my selfish ego. I interpret his call “to deny oneself” as a call to sacrifice my prideful, selfish ego. This sacrificing of ego comes from my self knowledge. I am not sacrificing my selfish ego just for the sake of sacrificing; but I sacrifice my selfish ego so that I can better follow on the footsteps of Jesus as his disciple. This is my faith in my thoughts and actions. This faith gives me inner happiness and peace.

But I know that not all people have faith in Jesus like my faith. For instance, take the case of rationalists, agnostics and atheists. They are not led by faith like me. They are led by a power which I call the power of love for others. With love they help others even at the cost of themselves. As rationalists, non believers and agnostics, they may not know that God is present in them in their genuine love for others. For, God is love. God lives in everyone even those who deny him/her. This Divine power of love inspires them in their good deeds irrespective of their beliefs. But the indwelling ego of a believer or unbeliever can come on the way of good things in their thoughts and deeds. So every person need to get rid of selfish ego and replace it with enlightened self knowledge.

I believe that it is a life-long process of getting rid of selfish ego and cultivating enlightened self knowledge. A person is usually led to nourish ego and neglect to cultivate self knowledge. The ego makes a person self centred. So self worth of a person is not in himself/ herself but in his/her possessions, power, fame and in one’s own talents and skills. Ego-centred person wants everyone else appreciate and acclaim himself/herself. This is an unquenchable thirst of ego-centred person. So s/he is always engrossed in accumulating more and more wealth and possessions for him/her. They are never fully satisfied, never interiorly happy. Such people want ever more fame and power. They want to become the acclaimed envy of others.

On the contrary the persons with growing enlightened self knowledge are happy and content in what they are in themselves and not in their possession and prestige. So they are liberated with self knowledge that they can face any situation in confronting the self-seeking ego of others. For they are interiorly peaceful, happy and content.

The enlightened person with self knowledge can distinguish between the selfish ego and the enlightened self knowledge like milk is different from water. But a person with self knowledge is humble as s/he knows that water and milk cannot be easily separated when they are mixed. For a person is ever prone to make mistakes. So such person need to be constantly on guard himself/herself against one’s own selfish ego with one’s own interior strength or spiritual power.

We say, “The house of the proud is empty.” Pride is a form of selfish ego. Pride is such a thing that if you throw it out through the door it may come back to you through the window! There is no need to nourish selfish ego. It grows by itself. But the enlightened self knowledge needs to be continuously nourished. I have heard that butterflies need to spread their wings in the early morning sun. For, their scales are solar cells and they are charged with the rays of morning sun. So only after receiving power from the sun light they are able to fly. Similarly enlightened self knowledge needs to be nourished by divine light, celestial understanding. (लेखक साथे संपर्क:

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