

Chapter 3. Ego and Soul

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up to the Lord.

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: It is fitting for us to give thanks. It is right and fitting, our joy and our salvation, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to you, almighty, everlasting God, through Christ our Lord.

Lectio

If the veil parts once and you know life is radically okay, then you are—to use the normal Christian language—a child of God. You are in union. There is nothing to prove. Nothing to attain. Everything is already there. It is simply a matter of recognizing and honoring and trusting. All spiritual disciplines exist to help you trust this personal experience of *yourself*, which is, not surprisingly, also an experience of God. . . . The great commandment is not “thou shalt be right.” The great commandment is to “be in love.” . . . All that is needed is *surrender* and *gratitude*. Our job is simply to thank God for being part of it all. (Rohr, *Everything Belongs*, pp. 88-89)

Questions on Chapter 3

1. “Try to realize that everything is right here, right now.” “To become more present we must reach into a deep inner spaciousness, then we can speak with more intelligence and clarity, with a little less ego, and with less of our agenda in the way.” How do you find this deep inner spaciousness?
2. “I need to recognize that I’m in a river that is bigger than I am. The foundation and the flow of that river is love. Life is not about me, it is about God, and God is about love.” What helps you to shift away from egoic thinking into this flow of love/life?
3. “What is this ‘I’ I’m trying to shore up and expand? Who is this self I take so seriously?” How do we learn what this “I” is, what it contains, what it ought to be?
4. “All that is needed is *surrender* and *gratitude*. Our job is simply to thank God for being part of it all” (p. 89). What exercises would you suggest to help us build an “attitude of gratitude” toward God and toward life?

Meditation: What can I give him?

What in the world can you give to God? Only your love. You hear that he has prepared a place for you. You see him in Jesus’ humility and service and suffering and resurrection. You taste him in the way that all things work together for your good. You respond with gratitude and love. What in the world can you give to God? Only your self, your will. God gives you a freedom to choose, an ability to decide what you will love and desire, to affect your affect. You can give it back.

Exercise: Gratitude

Perhaps you have spent two weeks (or several years) pondering the life of Christ, God’s work in the world. You have grown in knowledge of self and of God. You have finally surrendered yourself to God, giving up the sense that it’s within your power to make yourself perfect, instead loving and trusting God to make you perfect by whatever means necessary.

That letting go, that freedom, that trust in God for your salvation makes you immensely *grateful*. The exercise for this fortnight is gratitude. When you see a flower or a cloud, enjoy God’s work and be grateful. When you are anxious, trust God and be grateful that he is in control. When you are suffering, believe that all things work together for your good and be grateful. When others despise you or misuse you, forgive them and be grateful that God forgives you. Seek to be aware of God’s work and grateful for it at all times and in all places.

Rohr quotes

Deep inner spaciousness

1. If you are pushing yourself or others around, you have not yet found the secret of happiness. Know that things are OK as they are. The moment is as perfect as it can be. The saints called this the “sacrament of the present moment.” . . . When we are manipulating, changing, controlling, and fixing, we are not there yet. (p. 61)

The flow of the river is love

2. The true gift of religion is that it parts the veil, returns us to the garden and tells us our primal experience was trustworthy. It reassures us that we live in a benevolent universe, and it is on our side. The universe, it assures us, is radical grace. . . . Knowing this, we can relax and let go. “Be not afraid” is the most common single line in the bible. (p. 69)
3. The “fear” worldview and the “love” worldview do not know one another. What I’m calling the fear worldview is what John calls “the world.” It is “the system.” Our culture teaches us that everything out there is hostile. We have to compare, dominate, control, and insure. In brief, we have to be in charge. (69-70)
4. The ego is the dualist inside us. . . . It is the habit . . . of seeing ourselves over against someone else. That’s exactly what the ego wants to do. But the still center, my true self, does not need to oppose, differentiate, or compare itself. . . . To the extent that our soul is alive, we are satisfied with the “enoughness” of the present moment and are in touch with reality. (p. 72)

The ego and the inner journey

5. Instead of expanding or shoring up this fortress of “I”—the ego—which culture and often therapists try to help us to do, contemplation waits to discover what this “I” consists of. What is this “I” I’m trying to shore up and expand? Who is this self I take so seriously? To discover the answer, we have to wait and observe. That’s what happens in the early stages of contemplation. We wait in silence. In silence, all our usual patterns assault us. Our patterns of control, addiction, negativity, tension, anger, and fear assert themselves. That’s why most people give up rather quickly. When Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness, the first things that show up are the wild beasts. Contemplation is not first of all consoling. It’s only real. (p. 75)
6. The private self is clearly an illusion created by thinking. My life is not about *me*. I am about *life!* That’s why the Bible is a social history. We’re part of a much larger mystery. Don’t take this private thing so seriously. The primary philosophical and spiritual problem of the west is the lie of individualism. Individualism makes church almost impossible. It makes community almost impossible. It makes compassion almost impossible. . . . Life is not about me; it’s about God, and God is about love. (pp. 78-79)
7. For Jesus, prayer seems to be a matter of *waiting in love*. Returning to love. Trusting that love is the bottom stream of reality. That’s why prayer isn’t primarily words; it’s primarily a place, an attitude, a stance. (p. 81)

All that is needed

8. Good religion helps us to heal and “forgive,” as it were, these splits in ourselves, as does good therapy. But prayer is different from mere therapy. . . . *Prayer heals our split from life itself.* (p. 87)
9. To really experience the Absolute—that life is radically good, that life courses through me, and that this life is the presence of God—is to experience the essential pattern. . . . Suddenly it’s okay, despite the absurdity, the injustice, the pain. Life is now so spacious that they can even absorb contradictions. God is so great, so bottomless, so empty, that God can absorb even the contraries, even the collision of opposites. Thus salvation often feels like a kind of universal amnesty, a total forgiveness of ourselves and all other things. (pp. 87-88)
10. Prayer lives in pure, open moments of right here, right now. This is enough, this is fullness. If it is not right here, right now, it doesn’t exist. If we don’t see God now, would the eyes be prepared to see him later? The mystics say no. We will not recognize God later if we cannot recognize him now. It is a matter of seeing God now, through the shadow and the disguise. (p. 90)
11. Those who are totally converted come to every experience and ask not whether or not they liked it, but what does it have to teach them. “What’s the message in this for me? What’s the gift in this for me? How is God in this event? Where is God in this suffering?” . . . *Life itself is the best teacher of true prayer.* (p. 91)