

BEYOND EGO: ECKHART TOLLE'S VISION

A Sermon by Rev. Dr. Ed Piper

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This past week a small group of us previewed a documentary titled “The Power of Good,” which was brought to our attention by Blake Clark. It tells the incredible true story of an English stockbroker named Nicholas Winton, who **single-handedly** arranged for the rescue of more than 600 Jewish children from Czechoslovakia just before World War II and the Holocaust. All the more remarkable is the fact that his heroic efforts remained a secret for nearly fifty years, when his wife discovered a scrapbook in their attic that listed the names of the rescued children and the families who agreed to accept them into their homes. During the scenes showing the reunion of this modest and now very elderly gentleman with the grateful people who owe their very survival to him, there wasn't a dry eye in the room. We all agreed that we want members of our Fellowship to have the same opportunity.

What a welcome contrast this story offers in comparison to all the stories we have been hearing recently about the greed and self-indulgence of American businessmen **and** consumers, who demonstrate little concern about the **disconnect** between their personal gratification and the hardships being suffered by so many of their fellow citizens. Almost overnight, the Great American Dream morphed into the great American nightmare. With the near-collapse of the financial industry, we seem to have reached a new low in the excesses of unregulated free-market capitalism. A recent TV news show featured interviews with people representing several different levels of the housing market crisis, including a woman who obtained a \$300,000 mortgage without documented income, a mortgage loan officer, and a corporate official. **None** of them accepted personal responsibility for what has happened, and pointed the finger of blame at someone else.

You might think that **me-first materialism** has finally reached bankruptcy, but we have

already seen how pigs line up at the trough to take advantage of federal bailout money. What is wrong with this picture? Just about everything. At the root of me-first materialism there is a deeper moral and spiritual malaise: **our obsession with the individual ego**—its endless demands for self-gratification, its constant internal criticisms of failure, and its frequent insensitivity to the needs of others. The ego represents both the greatest triumph of Western civilization and its greatest liability. It has been responsible for some of the most dramatic achievements of humanity (e.g., scientific and medical breakthroughs) and some of our greatest tragedies (e.g., Hitler’s personal vision of Aryan superiority). What has made us wonderful has also made us terrible.

Eastern traditions offer an alternative view, in which the individual ego is immersed in a wider consciousness. Attempts to incorporate this worldview date back to Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Transcendentalists. Emerson wrote: “Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.” [from *Nature*, quoted in William Lach (ed.), *A Green Sound*, p. 10]

Since Emerson’s time more than 150 years ago, several writers and spiritual leaders have carried a similar “beyond-ego” message to Americans. The most recent champion of Eastern wisdom is **Eckhart Tolle**. He was born in Germany but lived in Spain during his teenage years, where he did not attend any formal school. After moving to England, Tolle graduated from the University of London and entered, but did not complete, a doctoral program at Cambridge University. At the age of 29, after suffering long periods of suicidal depression, he experienced what he calls an “inner transformation.” His book *The Power of Now*, has been translated into more than thirty languages, and his career received an enormous boost from Oprah Winfrey. Since 1996 he has lived in Vancouver, British Columbia. [Wikipedia] I want to thank Jannie Osborn for calling my attention to his work.

Eckhart Tolle's ideas are a synthesis of several different spiritual traditions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Taoism, and mystical Islam. His central message is clear: **the human ego-centered mind is the major obstacle to spiritual enlightenment.** In *The Power of Now*, Tolle says, "Identification with your mind creates an opaque screen of concepts, labels, images, words, judgments, and definitions that blocks all true relationship. It comes between you and yourself, between you and your fellow man and women, between you and nature, between you and God. It is this screen of thought that creates the illusion of separateness, the illusion that there is you *and* a totally separate 'other.' You then forget that, underneath the level of physical appearances and separate forms, you are one with all that *is.*" [pp. 12-13]

That is Tolle's diagnosis. What is his cure? "All that is required to become free of the ego is to be aware of it, since awareness and ego are incompatible. Awareness is the power that is concealed within the present moment. This is why we may also call it Presence. The ultimate purpose of human existence, which is to say, your purpose, is to bring that power into this world. And this is also why becoming free of the ego cannot be made into a goal to be attained at some point in the future. Only Presence can free you of the ego, and you can only be present Now, not yesterday or tomorrow. Only Presence can undo the past in you and thus transform your state of consciousness." [*A New Earth*, p.78]

Eckhart Tolle, like other spiritual teachers grounded in Eastern wisdom, advocates focusing entirely on the **present moment** in order to liberate our consciousness from our enslavement to the past or the future. "There are three ways in which consciousness can flow into what you do and thus through you into this world, three modalities in which you can align your life with the creative power of the universe. . . . The modalities of awakened doing are **acceptance, enjoyment, and enthusiasm.** Each one represents a certain vibrational frequency of consciousness. You need to be vigilant to make sure that one of them operates whenever you are engaged in doing anything at all—from the most simple task to the most complex. If you are not in the state of either acceptance, enjoyment, or enthusiasm, look closely and you will find that you are creating suffering for yourself or others." [*A New Earth*, p. 295]

"**Acceptance** means: For now, this is what this situation, this moment, requires me to do, and so I do it willingly. . . . Performing an action in the state of acceptance means you are at peace while you do it. . . . If you can neither enjoy or bring acceptance to what you do—stop. Otherwise, you are not taking responsibility for the only thing you can really take responsibility for, which also happens to be one thing that really matters: your state of consciousness. And if you are not taking responsibility for your state of consciousness, you are not taking responsibility for life. . . . **Enjoyment** is the second modality of awakened doing. On the new earth, enjoyment will replace wanting as the motivating power behind people's actions. Wanting arises from the ego's delusion that you are a separate fragment that is disconnected from the power that lies behind all creation. Through enjoyment, you link into that universal creative power itself. When you make the present moment, instead of past and future, the focal point of your life, your ability to enjoy what you do—and with it the quality of your life—increases dramatically. . . .

"**Enthusiasm** means there is deep enjoyment in what you do plus the added element of a goal or a vision that you work toward. . . . Unlike egoistic wanting, which creates opposition in direct proportion to the intensity of its wanting, enthusiasm never opposes. It is non-confrontational. Its activity does not create winners and losers. It is based on inclusion, not exclusion, of others. It does not need to use and manipulate people, because it is the power of creation itself and does not need to take energy from some secondary source. The ego's wanting always tries to take from something or someone; enthusiasm gives out of its own abundance. When enthusiasm encounters obstacles in the form of adverse situations or uncooperative people, it never attacks but walks around them or by yielding or embracing turns the opposing energy into a helpful one, the foe into a friend.

"Enthusiasm and the ego cannot coexist," Tolle says. "One implies the absence of the other. Enthusiasm knows where it is going, but at the same time, it is deeply at one with the present moment, the source of its aliveness, its joy, and its power. Enthusiasm 'wants' nothing

because it lacks nothing. It is at one with life and no matter how dynamic the enthusiasm-inspired activities are, you don't lose yourself in them. And there remains always a still but intensely alive space at the center of the wheel, a core of peace in the midst of activity that is both the source of all and untouched by all. " [A *New Earth*, pp. 295-304]

That is Eckhart Tolle's vision. His vision challenges much of what we have learned growing up in our culture—a culture that revolves around the sacredness of the individual ego. "In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes a prediction that to this day few people have understood. He says, 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.' In modern versions of the Bible, 'meek' is translated as humble. Who are the meek or the humble, and what does it mean that they shall inherit the earth? The meek are the egoless. . . . They embody the awakened consciousness that is changing all aspects of life on our planet, including nature, because life on earth is inseparable from the human consciousness that perceives and interacts with it. That is the sense in which the meek will inherit the earth. A new species is arising on the planet. It is arising now, and you are it!" [A *New Earth*, p. 309]

DISCUSSION

HYMN # 128 "For All That Is Our Life"

CLOSING WORDS # 701 (by Sara Moores Campbell)