

Resistance by the ego

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We have seen how Evagrius' demons all stem from our fear, our fear of not surviving, in fact, our fear of death. The moment we start to meditate the *'ego'*, our King and Queen of survival, goes into action. It does not like us entering the level of silence, where we will meet the *'self'*, the Christ within, as we will be out of its total control. It is the survival expert, the guard of our conscious being, and wants to keep us in its own sphere of influence. It is like an over-protective parent, wanting to keep the child safe and close by, not allowing it to develop and learn independently. But to grow we need to leave our parents' home and make our own home. In the same way insisting on going into the silence and going under the waves of thoughts is initially like a painful leaving home, only to find the peace and joy of arriving at your *true* home, *our true self in Christ*. The reason the *'ego'* plays these games and strongly resists the pull to silence is that it fears change; change implies different survival tactics. The *'ego'* has spent the whole of our childhood perfecting our responses to our environment to secure our continued existence and is quite happy for us to continue this way. But we have seen how most of our habitual responses are now out of date.

When we try to take the plunge into silence, the 'ego' will emphasise and increase *awareness of thoughts* as a barrier to going deeper. Their mad dance is meant to drive us to distraction, and to despair, so that we assume meditation is not for us. And yet, if we persevere, gaps will appear between our thoughts – doors to enter the silence. Even the peace and silence we then reach becomes a way in for the 'ego' to tempt us by encouraging us to let go of the mantra. We may convince ourselves that the mantra disturbs the peace and that we should let go of it after we enter a light pleasant trance, the '*pernicious peace*'. We then tend to our journey. Thus the 'ego' has once more hindered our progress.

But if we manage to hold onto the mantra, the 'ego' may whisper to us: *Isn't this boring, just repeating a word? Don't just sit there, do something!* It wants us to go off and forget this journey in frenetic activity, amusement and work. Yet meditation is a counter-cultural discipline that asks us to do the opposite: *Don't just do something, sit there.* We are encouraged to stay faithful to one thing only.

If we are still meditating but finding it difficult, the 'ego' might try a different approach, playing on our need for diversity, prompting us to consider: *Are you sure that this is the right method or the right mantra? Shouldn't you change your mantra?* By encouraging us to chop and change the 'ego' is again making sure we are not going anywhere. Instead, off we go on our restless search, avoiding the real work of becoming aware.

The thought *This is self-indulgent; we should do something useful for others instead* often appears. This has often been the accusation thrown at contemplatives throughout the ages. Remember the story of Mary and Martha? However, we can only truly be of support to others, when our 'ego' has been healed and our '*true self*' guides our actions: "*Acquire inner peace and thousands around you will find salvation.*"(St Seraphim of Sarov)

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