

The importance of the emotions

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3 March 2023



We have looked at Evagrius' emphasis on becoming aware what our '*demons*' are, recognizing them, acknowledging them and thus robbing them of their power. He talked about '*purifying the emotions*': purifying and transfiguring the emotions back to their original state of divinely given energy: "*The ascetic life is the spiritual method for cleansing the emotional part of the soul.*"

It is important to keep in mind that Evagrius is talking about '*cleansing*' the emotions. We need to purify those that have been distorted by 'unmet' ego needs. He doesn't talk about suppressing them. In fact, emotions need to be expressed. This is best explained by Maximus the Confessor: "*You don't grow, however, by avoiding conflict, irritation or annoyance, but by trying gently to clear up the misunderstandings and if that is not possible, by taking the other person into one's prayer, keeping silent, absolutely refusing to speak evil of him.*"

When God created humanity he not only gave us our survival instinct, but also a soul, the seat of emotions, to deepen and enrich our experiences. But the emotional part of the soul can both be a help and a hindrance. We have seen that the emotions are a hindrance, when steered overwhelmingly by material desires and unmet needs; they cloud the vision

and obstruct access to what the Greek philosophers called the 'nous'. By this they meant our intuitive intelligence, the spirit, which is the highest part of the soul and our point of communion with Divine Reality.

Victory over the 'evil thoughts' leads to 'apatheia', a state of emotional balance, serenity and harmony. Then we are no longer dominated by our passionate 'ego' desires and we can become aware of the light of the Divine within us. This enables us to live in the Divine Presence and intuitively 'know' how it relates to ordinary reality: "*The Kingdom of God is apatheia of the soul along with true knowledge of existing things.*" (Evagrius)

This harmony, the reintegration of their whole being and the ensuing spiritual freedom move the ascetics to the level of 'angels'. As we saw, the 'demons' are there to hinder us, the 'angels' are there to help us. Therefore when the ascetics reached this state, they too would become more and more concerned about the welfare of others and would help them guided by love: "*Agape [unconditional love] is the offspring of apatheia.*"

The 'praxis' is therefore never seen to be about our own spiritual advancement; on the contrary the experience of 'unconditional love' in the vision of God leads to an increase in compassionate love for everyone and harmony and unity with all: "*Happy is the monk who views the welfare and progress of all men with as much joy as if it were his own.*"

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