

Mankind's "Fall" From Grace

by Steven Horne

In the years that followed my first experiences with emotional healing, many opportunities presented themselves to perform what I now called emotional facilitation. I called it facilitation because I didn't feel that I was the one doing the work. It was sort of like being an emotional midwife. The mother does the work of delivering the baby; the midwife is a coach and assistant. In fact, I had even thought of the process as "emotional midwifery."

After five years and nearly one hundred and fifty sessions, I had accumulated an incredible body of experience in guiding people on the inward journey through the heart to acknowledge their own nakedness and allow God to heal them. These people had come from all walks of life and numerous religious persuasions. Over and over again, I had seen that the person's ability to experience the light inside wasn't dependant on a particular doctrine or belief system, but rather on the capacity to face the truth of about themselves.

One day, after experiencing a particularly traumatic sequence of crises in my life, I had a profound spiritual experience while seeking guidance through meditation and prayer. I realized that most of the world's religions had been started by someone who had undertaken this inner journey to the light. I already knew that there was no way to explain what it is like to be enfolded in the unconditional love and peace that emanates from the Divine presence in the inner sanctuary of the temple of our being.

Words are only symbols and only have meaning as we are able to relate them to common experiences. So, when one has experienced something that another person has not, language is inadequate to create understanding. One has to resort to the tools of poetry and art, simile

and metaphor, ritual and ordinance, to try to create a likeness that at least gives another an idea of the experience. Jesus' use of parables is a case in point. He often began his parables with "The kingdom of heaven is like unto..." indicating that the story he was telling was an attempt to relate the known experience of the people with the unknown experience of the Spirit.

What I understood was that the rituals, ordinances, scriptures, stories, etc. which make up the world's religions are all such teaching devices. Since the idea is to relate the known to the unknown, all such teaching devices were bound to the culture and time of the teacher. In other words, the teacher had to communicate to the people of his or her time and culture, so the teaching devices selected would be the best tools for reaching that particular group of people.

The problems with religion comes because people fail to grasp the spiritual reality their religious symbols point to. In fact, they come to believe that salvation is found in the teaching devices themselves. Their prophets, their scriptures, their ordinances and rituals are the correct ones and the only ones with saving power. So, if one person calls God Allah and another calls God Jehovah and a third person calls God Christ, they all can't be right. They must be worshiping different Gods. Your way of worshiping is different than mine, so you must be evil, since my religion is obviously the correct one. All of this is created from the illusions of the ego, which has to be win or be right.

What I saw that day was that the experience of the Divine was beyond all religions, beyond all doctrines or dogmas, and that no symbol, no ritual, no name and no set of scriptures could possibly contain the reality of the Creator of All. Maybe that's why some Native Americans refer to the Creator as Great Mystery.

When I look at the great diversity of plant and animal life inhabiting this planet, it is clear to me that the Creator loves diversity. God created

incredible diversity of landscapes and lifeforms on this one planet alone. Why therefore would the Creator of such diversity be concerned that he is referred to by different words and worshipped and sought for in different ways in different cultures? The Divine is above such earthly pettiness. In fact, it is completely out of alignment with the oneness that is God.

The at-one-ment of God restores us from our lost state to a state of grace. It overcomes the effects of our “fall” from grace. Although I can explain this process dozens of different ways, using symbols from different religions and cultures, I find it easiest to express it using the stories of the Judeo-Christian traditions in which I was raised.

It was a book entitled *Who Told You That You Were Naked?*, written by a Trappist monk named John Jacob Raub, which first helped me see the symbolism in the story of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden and how it pertains to our human condition. Whether you consider the story a literal account or not, the tale acts as a metaphor for the common human experience of “the fall.”

In the Garden of Eden story, Adam and Eve start out naked and innocent. How could they be otherwise? They are God’s children. He created them and when He created them and everything else in the world He pronounced it “very good” or in the original Hebrew, “excellent in every way.” God did not make Adam and Eve imperfect, evil or sinful. A perfect Creator cannot make imperfection.

Adam and Eve walk and talk with God in the Garden of Eden and have available to them the Tree of Life or the love of God which they can partake of continually. If they can partake of the fruit of the Tree of Life, then they are part of the at-ONE-ment of God, because the Tree of Life represents God’s infinite and eternal love, the binding force of the universe. We can see that this is so because they are surrounded with abundance—everything they need is provided for them.

In the Garden of Eden, there is another tree, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which we are told stands in opposition to the Tree of Life. If the Tree of Life represents the love and oneness of God, then this tree must represent its opposite, which is separation or alienation (or being unloved). I like to think of it as the tree of judgment. When Adam and Eve partake of the fruit of this tree they are “cut off” from the presence of God, which demonstrates that this tree represents being separated from the oneness of God.

Adam and Eve partake of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil because they are tempted by the desire to be something more than they are. They are told that they will be “like the gods” if they eat of the forbidden fruit. So, in order to partake of this fruit, they must judge that what they were created to be is not good enough and desire to be something different. After making this self-judgement and partaking of the fruit they realize that they are naked and feel ashamed.

To hide their shame, Adam and Eve clothe themselves with fig leaves. When they hear God coming they feel guilty. God will know what they have done, so they hide in fear.

God asks “Where did you go?” (as if He didn’t know!).

Adam and Eve reply, “We’re over here, hiding in the bushes.”

“Why are you hiding in the bushes?” God asks for their benefit, not His.

“Because we are naked.”

Now, comes God’s interesting response, “Who told you that you were naked?”

In response to this question, Adam immediately blames Eve for what has happened and Eve blames the serpent who tempted her. Yet, God has not condemned or chastized them at all. He has only asked

them a question. He has not condemned them. They have condemned themselves.

This is the Biblical account which claims to be the the story of the original sin. I prefer to think of it as the story of the “origin” of all sin. It is the story of how “sin” (as it is called) originates in our lives.

Like Adam and Eve, we are born into this world naked and innocent. The two trees represent the two paths which are before all of us. One, the tree of life, represents the unconditional love of God and his grace, and the other is the path of separation from God. I call it the tree of judgement, because to partake of it is to know good and evil.

The spontaneous, unconditional love of children demonstrates that they are still connected to the eternal source of love. They are still able to partake of the tree of life, which represents the at-one-ment of God and his unconditional love.

But as we grow up, at some point we are tempted to make a decision to partake of the tree of judgement. I believe this happens because our parents, siblings, and others start telling us that there is something wrong with us. In our desire to be like the people we “idolize” we forsake the path of the tree of life, and judge ourselves as being in need of being like our “idols” or “gods.”

It is this act of self-judgement that is the original sin or the origin of sin in our lives. We realize that we are naked (that is, inadequate in some way) and so we become ashamed. We abandon our true nature and try to become someone we are not in order to win love and approval. This false persona, or mask we wear to try to win love and approval, is represented in the story by the apron of fig leaves.

This creates an ego self, a false self, which as time goes on becomes more and more entrenched until we forget that we are not the mask we have adopted. As much as the mask makes us feel safer on some level,

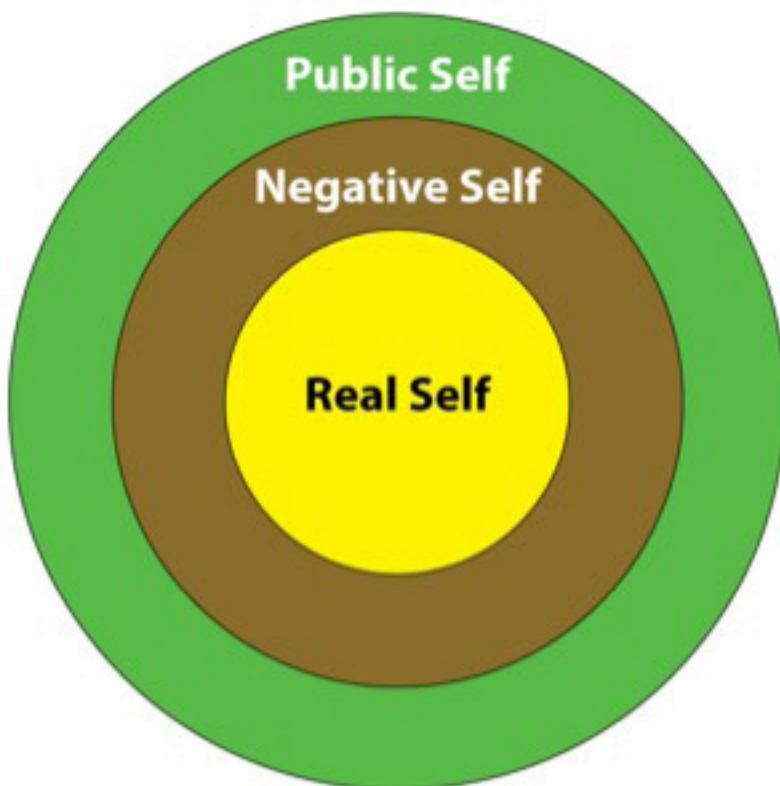
it also creates a sense of loneliness and alienation. Deep down inside we know that if people knew what we were really like they would reject us. So, we feel a deep sense of guilt about who and what we are.

The model at the bottom of the page is similar to the body temple model in the previous posting. Our outer, or “public” self is the persona we try to project to the world, proving we are a “good” person, or at least someone worthy of having love and friendship.

Underneath this, however, we know all our private struggles, problems, pain, weaknesses and “sins.” We know that if we let others see this part of us, most would condemn and reject us. So, we put on our “fig leaves” and “coats of skin,” and hide. We not only hide from others, we learn to hide from God because of our sense of shame and guilt.

Shame and guilt lead to fear. When we are judging ourselves and God comes looking for us, we are afraid. God will see our inadequacy. So we hide from Him. When He asks why, we respond that we are hiding because we are naked, that is, we are unworthy, bad, evil, sinful

or otherwise inadequate in some way.



My message to you is that God does not agree with our perception of ourselves. That was a key point John Jacob Raub pointed out in his book *Who Told You That You Were Naked?* God does not say to Adam and Eve, “By golly, you’re right, you’re naked, I never noticed that before. It’s a good thing you put on some clothes. Boy,

I wouldn't want to have to see your nakedness." He just asks, "Who told you this?" and Adam and Eve immediately resort to blaming someone else.

That's the progression, self-judgement (the origin of sin), leads to shame, which leads to a hiding of the real self, which leads to guilt and fear. Guilt and fear leads to blame, which is how we project our own self-condemnation away from ourselves to try to avoid the punishment we feel we deserve. We cannot step into the light because we are certain that what is waiting there is punishment.

This is the fate of all mankind, every single one of us. None are immune. Because we entered into self-judgement, we disconnected ourselves from God's love and entered the world of judgement. Because of this, we no longer sense our connection to the greater whole, and we feel isolated, alienated and alone. We are wanderers in the "[a]-lone and dreary world." We become "laws unto ourselves." This is the original sin that each of us makes in our own lives and it is also the "origin of" all of our dysfunctional behavior.

The question may arise, why does feeling "cut off" from God's love and presence cause us to commit sin? It's because we no longer recognize that we are part of a greater whole. We no longer comprehend the mystery that our brothers and sisters are really part of ourselves and that whatever we do to them, we are automatically doing to ourselves, because they are a part of us.

In our own bodies, the hand does not want to hit the foot and our teeth are not likely to deliberately bite off one of our fingers. Why not? Because they are all part of the same body and we do not injure our own bodies because it hurts. In just this same manner, if we were connected to the oneness of God, we would feel the feelings of those around us as part of ourselves. We would find it impossible to maliciously injure others because we'd be injuring ourselves.

Thus, all sin arises from the original sin of separating ourselves from the ONE-ness of God through self judgment. We judge ourselves as being inadequate, become ashamed, feel guilty and afraid and in so doing cut ourselves off from the Tree of Life. Interestingly enough, although our first judgment is against self, our sense of shame and guilt immediately make us want to find someone outside ourselves to affix the blame to.

Here is where pride or ego enters our lives. Because we feel guilty and ashamed and do not like ourselves, we seek to adopt roles and personas (masks) which give us a false sense of belonging. When we conform to this external set of standards, we have the illusion of acceptance from others. We also have the feeling of superiority to those who do not follow our standards or our expectations. Thus, we become proud of our adopted persona and critical of the personas of others, not recognizing that everyone's persona is a defense mechanism.

This is why "works" by themselves cannot save us. When our "good works" are motivated by the desire to prove to others how good we are, they are not good works.

You see, when we do works to try to prove how good we are, we are doing these works to build up our pride. The pride we feel over "being good" is the reward we receive for these works. Pride is the source of enmity or separation, the ego's need to feel special. It is one of the strategies we have to face to shame, fear, guilt and self-condemnation we feel.

In this state of feeling separate and isolated, everything we do is for selfish reasons. We try to "be good" to gain approval of others because we want their love. Thus, even our "good works" become egocentric. We do them out of the need to feel superior, or out of the need to feel worthy of being loved. We cannot bear fruit until we are grafted back into the vine. We cannot bear fruit until we reconnect with the tree of life.

God is no respecter of persons. He loves all of us equally. In His light and at-ONE-ment, we are all part of each other. In the light of his mercy, love and unity, whatever we do to another, we are doing to ourselves. It is only because we are cut off from His presence that we do not perceive this.

However, the words I write cannot begin to convey what it feels like to partake of the fruit of the tree of life and experience God's unconditional love. It has to be experienced to be understood and the path back is to reverse the process of how we got here.

For starters, you have to stop projecting the blame for your feelings onto others and repeating the stories you've created about how others have wronged you, let you down, made you feel this way or that way. You have to start realizing that all the judgements you hurl against those around you are really reflections of how you feel about yourself.

For instance, liars have a hard time believing anyone because they perceive their own lying nature in everyone around them. Manipulators have a hard time trusting anyone because they see their own manipulative intentions in the actions of others. Controllers think everyone is trying to control them. We could go on and on, but the simple truth is that if you honestly examine the judgements you make of those around you, you will find that it is the result of something you are afraid of seeing inside yourself.

You turn inward by asking yourself, how do I feel about this? You breathe deeply and instead of running away from the feeling, you allow yourself to experience and acknowledge it. Are you feeling angry, sad, afraid? What is your inner experience? Turn your awareness to it.

As you begin to do this you will encounter your hidden fears, shame and guilt. You will eventually find the harsh judgements you have made against yourself and it will be a humbling, even quite humiliating

experience. Notice the similarity in the words, humble, humiliating and human. You will discover your own humanity.

Some spiritual leaders have called this experience *the dark night of the soul*. Many times we have to reach a point in our life where the comfortability of our life is shattered in order to get us to confront this inner self. Whatever the triggering event or condition, as you become painfully self-aware you will be able to find the inner light if you look for it. You will know you have found it when a profound feeling of peace and a sense of being loved washes over you.

It takes courage to make this journey because you have to drop the accusations, step out from behind the bushes, take off your ego masks (fig leaves), and stand there without all of the things you possess and do to reassure yourself that you are a worthwhile person. In that nakedness, unclothed with the pretenses you put up before the world, you will say, “God, I’m naked.” And to your amazement, he will reply, “Of course, I’ve known it all along and I love you just the way you are.”

We have found our way through the “negative self” and away from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We have again discovered the tree of life, the unconditional love of our father. We lose the spirit of bondage caused by fear and receive the spirit where we look to God as our Abba (best translated as “daddy”), a loving kind Father who is only there to help us, not to condemn us.

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