

Loving Our Human Nature

August 12, 2018

I have a friend who submits her artwork to various groups and juried shows. Sometimes it's accepted and she feels elated and deserving. Other times of course she experiences rejection and questions her talent.

I should mention that this friend is a kind, compassionate, and devoted Reiki practitioner. She volunteers tirelessly. She's exquisitely self-aware — she manages to witness her actions, intentions, and motivations with razor-sharp attention.

And she's mortified by her ego, especially when it comes to her creative work. She loves to paint, she's clearly gifted, but she suppresses her joy when she produces something inspired and particularly when her talent is recognized and celebrated by her peers. My friend is so aware of the problematic nature of the human ego that the moment she feels delight at being awarded or recognized, she begins this process of self-punishment.

Don't even get me started on when she faces rejection in her creative work! She really beats herself up because her ego is bruised.

Let's just first get on the table that everyone (EVERYONE, even the Pope and Mother Teresa) act out of ego. We cannot help it. It is the filter through which our spirits evidence their longing for self-expression. It's with our ego-minds that we judge ourselves when we ask, "Is my spirit worthwhile enough to HAVE any longings, let alone express them?" And by which we judge others when we question, "Why does HER spirit seem to be so confidently and freely expressed?" That's the nature of the world we human beings live in and it is impossible to escape. Because we literally are separate beings from each other in the physical world, it is impossible NOT to draw lines between "me" and "you," because if I can define "me" as myself, there must necessarily be a "you" in someone else.

Yeah, yeah, I know... deep down inside we're all one. Do unto others and all that. Give away what we most need to receive, etc., etc. But the fact remains that while in physical form we are separate from one other and built in that physical separation is UNAVOIDABLE comparison, competition, and hierarchy. That's the human part of our nature.

Jesus was both human and divine. He struggled with his human nature too; he got angry. He was sad; he felt fear. He begged God to take the cup of suffering away from him. And he also told us that we are like him. Every one of us has a human nature and a divine nature.

Maybe you could look at that part of yourself the way you might if you had to train a puppy who was doing "bad" without meaning to. Nipping and biting is part of a pup's growing nature without truly intending or wanting to hurt. You're trying to live with the puppy's nature; you need lots of patience, tolerance, nimbleness of spirit, humor, forgiveness, understanding, and

ultimately the awareness that "this is just the way growing dogs are." With acceptance, life is made somewhat more tolerable.

It isn't exactly the same of course, but consider that the human part of you, which is the seat of your ego, judgments, and emotional wounds, operates on a level that is not too sophisticated: instinctual and often outside the bounds of constant control and intention.

So what if you do something you're not too proud of. Welcome to the human race! I just did that the other day; I'm on my Library Board of Trustees and lost my temper with one of the town residents who seems hell-bent on baseless accusations of graft and corruption and I was insulted, frustrated, and tired of this particular person's baiting. It was not my finest moment. My human nature was very much provoked.

Like my friend, after this exchange I became acutely self-aware. I saw how my ego, my human nature, flared up and clouded my view. It's at these moments of self-awareness where God gives us an opportunity: we can use this moment to beat ourselves up for being human, or we can surrender to the divine guidance and make amends. My friend often uses this opportunity to punish herself, and that paralyzes her. She feels flawed, and wrong — simply because she's human — so she recedes a little further from her divine nature.

Much of what we have to do to make amends happens after the fact, but it still has as much value -- and Kabbalists say even more value -- than if we never did the "bad" thing to begin with.

In Kabbalah teachings there's a story of three people who encounter a bag of gold in an empty room, clearly belonging to someone else. The first person isn't even tempted; he knows it is immoral and illegal to steal. The second person steals the gold; he's a thief who definitely adheres to the finders-keepers rule of law. The third person engages in an inner battle of right and wrong first, then rationalizes that he could take the gold, so he does. Later, this third person is still wrestling with his conscience so he returns the gold. In the story, the teacher asks, "Who is more righteous in God's eyes?" and everyone always chooses the first person because he was so holy and God-like already that he wasn't even tempted. But God loves the third person the best because He recognizes that we all have this nature, but we can overcome it; and it's forgivable and authentic to do wrong and then make it right.

When you use that moment of painful awareness of your human nature to love yourself instead of punish yourself for being human, it's so much easier to make amends. Love never diminishes; it always expands. In that moment of ego-awareness, love yourself, and that love will amplify your thoughts and gestures and provide you with the courage (if you need it) to make things right. When you make a mistake and use your divine nature to illuminate amends, you're in the company of God's most beloved.

If you let your human nature do it's thing; if you feel badly about it, then it's perfectly okay and acceptable to apologize, explain, or ask for forgiveness (from yourself or someone else).

"We judge ourselves by our intentions and others by their actions;" the key being WE JUDGE. We all judge. We can't help it.

It's not possible, nor is it realistic, to expect we can sustain our divine natures. We can't stay in a lovely meditative trance all day. As a medium, it's not possible for me to be "on" all the time, even in the midst of a reading. We dip in and out of this altered state. We can suppress the conscious mind and our human nature for a bit, but we can't stay there.

We will all experience comparison, hierarchy, and competition. We will all judge. We will all, naturally, separate us from them. That's our human nature. Our divine nature offers course correction, a handhold, a standard by which to adhere when that painful ego pinch occurs.

My friend recognizes that her creative work is a combination of her human knowledge, her study, her experience, and her eye, and inspiration — that which comes for her divine nature. Whatever we do creatively, whether it's dance, art, poetry, conversation, gardening, rearranging the furniture — that is our divine nature, our very own piece of the divine that exists within us, yearning to express itself. Of course we will feel rejection or joy, because the spirit must express itself through us: the human being. It's like the divine idea has to pass through the filter of our personalities and ego. Why not? That's what makes each divine inspiration unique. We are GOING to have a human response to our own creations AND to others'.

If you create something — heck, if you use the power of your mind to create your LIFE (which I hope you're doing; if not, there's a workshop on exactly that after today's service), you are going to judge it, compare it against others' creations, and hear others' judgments about it. If in that moment your human nature creates a sting, causes you to feel more self-aware than usual, it's an opportunity.

All of us strive to be better people. We all have those moments where the divine nature dawns and our thoughts seem suspended from our human natures. Where, if we're honest, we can see the ego that's part of our human nature. When we observe ourselves in that moment, you might feel something like being neutral or separate. Looking at your flaw or your mistake or your ego dispassionately.

In that moment of suspension, we truly see ourselves through our divine nature. Take the moment as the gift that it is. Carry on being divine for just a few moments longer and excuse yourself for being human. Don't bury yourself, don't hate your human nature, don't vilify your ego.

Especially when it comes to your creative expression. That's your divine nature, creating through you! Giving you the opportunity to mimic the divine. Create! Love your work, no matter what people say! Celebrate your creations. They come through our divine nature, and they speak to the

divine nature of others. That's why beauty and appreciation for art, for dance, for poetry — it's ALWAYS in the mind of the beholder.

As I told my friend, rejoice when your artwork speaks to someone else, and don't worry if it isn't received as you expect. The creation is for YOU, a time to dip into your divine nature.

Look, setting limits on what we desire creates inner conflict. But we do it anyway, don't we? We all drank the humility kool-aid, we all swallowed the idea that we really honor God when we minimize ourselves.

It follows that we have a hard time celebrating ourselves, our voices, opinions, ideas, and creations. We don't have to set human nature against our divine nature; they can exist quite comfortably together.

As if we could limit the divine.

Amen.