

Life Is A Journey From I To We

One Saturday afternoon when my daughter was not quite three I strapped her into the child seat on my bike and we rode down to our neighborhood ice cream parlor. We bought a double scoop of Mint Chocolate Chip in a cup and shared it. When there was just one spoonful left I scooped it up and ate it, believing that Erin was so small she wouldn't care or even notice. I laid the cup down and she picked it up, scraped out the melted drippings in her spoon which I thought she would put it in her mouth. I immediately felt ashamed. Instead she held it out to me and said, "Here Daddy, last bite for you."

That event happened 12 years ago and to this day I still cringe and feel a hole in my gut every time I think about it. For it revealed to me that despite all my spiritual endeavors, somewhere deep in my core was a greedy, self-centered demon willing to rip off even his toddler.

Posted all around the ashram of the great Indian saint, Sai Baba, are little signs displaying spiritual aphorisms, reminding visitors of the reason they are there. One sign reads 'Life is a Journey from I to We.' That message impressed me like no other, to the extent that I still remember it 20 years later. Why? Because it reflects a universal truth of all religions: the path to peace and happiness is not about the indulgence of oneself and one's ego, but rather is love and kindness toward others.

When we are born, we don't differentiate between ourselves and the rest of the world. Everything is I.

As we become toddlers, we begin to realize that others share our world and we learn how to make concessions and accommodate them.

When we become teens, peers become all important and we try to subjugate our egos to fit in.

When we become adults, in order to make our way in a competitive society, we often put ourselves first, sometimes at the expense of others.

The time of greatest selflessness for most people is when we have children, and we put the needs of our infants above all else. We make tremendous selfless sacrifices for them, often without a thought for our own needs. We do this because they are innocent, helpless and beautiful. They need us. We love them. They love us back. The I/we boundary is transcended and, as those of us who have had children know, the results are heavenly.

While most of us are able to take selflessness to this level with our children, we have difficulty doing it in our everyday lives—with colleagues, friends, strangers. We continually assert our egos to ensure that "our needs are met" and that no one takes advantage of us.

But there are occasional exceptions to this. There are the rare few who are able to transcend their egos and see through the egos of others—to see them as innocent, helpless and beautiful. They are able to do with adults what most of us can manage only with infants—they lower the barriers between self and other and become we.

Many of us have known someone like this. Despite the fact that they are continually putting others first, they are paradoxically yet invariably happy and at peace. Their lives are rich and full. People are attracted to them like magnets, they are not taken advantage of and good things continually seem to come their way. They have completed the journey from I to we and entered the kingdom of heaven, right here on Earth.

About the Author

John Penberthy is the author of the spiritual allegory—now in 11 languages—To Bee or Not to Bee (Sterling Publishing). Available in bookstores, including Barnes & Noble, throughout North America. View the 60 second Preview and send free ecards at <http://www.ToBeeBook.com>. An andearing gift!

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