

Self-Confidence

It may have nothing to do with me, but if a
friend or loved one is sad or angry, I can
secretly wonder, What did I do? What can I do?
Why didn't I do it all better to begin with?

I am often surprised and humbled by how quickly in my insecurity I can begin to assume responsibility for all the wrongs and sufferings I see around me. When thrown off-center, when old patterns return, when feeling exhausted or depressed, I so quickly become the exaggerated cause of all that is not right with the world.

I know I am not alone in this. Perhaps it is one of the laws of emotional weather: sudden lows result in isolated storms. It has happened to me enough over the years that I have to acknowledge the power of negative self-centeredness. We typically think of the ego-centered as being conceited and self-inflated and quite selfish. But this recurring struggle with exaggerated responsibility has made me realize that more often we are ego-centered when feeling deflated, when feeling shaken from our sense of oneness with things. In that place of separation, we become darkly self-centered, blaming ourselves for not fixing things or making things right or for letting bad things happen. Underneath these self-recriminations is the grandiose assumption that we have the power, in the first place, to control events that are really beyond any human being's influence.

Certainly, we affect each other, and often, but to assume that other people's inner moods hinge on my presence is an egocentric way to keep myself in a cycle of sacrifice and guilt. Further, to assume that another's condition or way of being in the world hinges on my presence is the beginning of self-oppression and codependence. In extreme moments of negative self-centeredness, we can even assume magical proportions of burden, in which we feel acutely responsible for a loved one's illness or misfortune because we weren't good enough or there enough or perfect enough.

It is helpful to note here psychologist Michael Mahoney's definition of *self-confidence*. He traces confidence to the Latin *confidere*, "fidelity," and understands self-confidence as a fidelity to the self. Indeed, it is only a devotion to that sacred bottom beneath our moods of insecurity that brings us back in accord with the center of the heart which shares the same living center with all beings. This is what the Hindu tradition calls Atman, the shared immortal self.

So now, when I trip into moments of low-esteem and feel certain that I am the cause of all this bad weather, I try to feel the pace of the Earth turning beneath my feet and the pace of the clouds drifting over my head and the pace of my heart opening after a lifetime of pain. When these align, I am weakened of my ordinary will and awakened into a power greater than any one heart, greater than the weather of any one day or the mood of any one life.