

Overcoming Praise Addiction -- Day by Day

By Dr. Michael Obsatz – May 2023

We learn early on to please those who have power over us and take care of us. We are taught to "do what we are told" and when we do, we are often praised for it. If we "don't do what we are told" we are not praised, and sometimes punished. Praise is part of "external validation," the need for someone outside of ourselves to notice us, appreciate us, validate us. "Good boy!" "Good girl!"

It starts with our parents and other relatives. It moves to teachers, ministers, bosses, coaches, and peers. Many people want to be accepted and valued. They look outside themselves for such approval. The idea can lead to a lack of trust in one's own inner worth.

This works well in a system of Empire Consciousness. This system is about domination, power, control, hierarchy, and oppression. Nobody wants to be at the bottom. Being at the top provides more resources, opportunities, and validation. We start believing that we are worthy because of what we accomplish or possess rather than being worthy for just being who we are. Praise from bosses and those in charge (those with power) can result in raises and promotions. "Making it" to the top is the goal, becoming champions, stars, and celebrities.

This loss of trust in one's authentic self and externalizing one's value and worth is part of an addictive process. One becomes addicted to external definitions of who one should be, and how one should live and act.

Oeness Consciousness is a radical alternative to this Empire system. Spiritual connection, love of self, and knowing one's value and worth means one has personal power. External validation is about giving one's power away to others.

When a person gives away internal power, they crave external power. Part of the loss of authenticity involves grieving -- with responses of anger, rage, shame, guilt, depression, and addiction. People are more easy to control if they don't value themselves. Empire Consciousness is about taking away internal power with the promise of external domination power. However, such external power never fills the deep hole inside.

The hymn, "Be Thou My Vision" has a line about "vain, empty praise." It was written in the early nineteenth century. It is about having a higher spiritual vision rather than seeking praise from other people. In other words, it suggests movement from Empire Consciousness to Oeness Consciousness. With Oeness Consciousness, our joy and personal meaning and fulfillment comes from our connections to spirit, ourselves, others, and the earth.

I am reminded of the beautiful song, "Day by Day," from Godspell, written in 1973. Three things we pray: "See God more clearly, Follow God more nearly, Love God more dearly -- Day by day.