



On judgement

by Kim Nataraja

One of the most difficult things to do in life is not to judge others; not only that but also not to judge ourselves. There is a saying from the Desert Fathers: "The old men used to say, 'there is nothing worse than passing judgment.' They knew the mind and heart of their fellow human beings; they were superb psychologists. They were aware that our tendency to gossip about, judge and criticize others is the way we show our own unresolved conflicts, which come from our internal woundedness, our conditioning and 'unmet needs': "Interior freedom is not yet possessed by anyone who cannot close his eyes to the fault of a friend, whether real or apparent." (Maximus the Confessor)

These are uncomfortable feelings and hence we project them out. We judge and criticize others for behaviour potentially our own: "Never point a finger of scorn or judgment at your fellow man because when you point, there are three fingers pointing back at you." (Bear Heart - 'The Wind is my Mother')

Projection also makes us blame others for our own shortcomings:

A brother was restless in the community and often moved to anger. So he said: "I will go and live somewhere by myself. And since I shall be able to talk or listen to no one, I shall be tranquil, and my passionate anger will cease." He went out and lived alone in a cave. But one day he filled his jug with water and put on the ground. It happened suddenly to fall over. He filled it again, and again it fell. And this happened at third time. And in a rage he snatched up the jug and broke it. Returning to his right mind, he knew that the demon of anger had mocked him, and he said: "I will return to the community. Wherever you live, you need effort and patience and above all God's help.

Moreover, in judging we take a freeze-frame of others, not allowing for their possible progress and growth. We deny them the possibility of change and trap them in a particular moment in time: "Abba Xanthias said, 'The thief was on the cross and he was justified by a single word; and Judas who was counted among the number of the apostles lost all his labour in one single night and descended from heaven to hell.'" (Stories from the Desert Fathers)

What we do to others, we constantly do to ourselves. Meditation is instrumental in acquiring this non-judgmental attitude. And yet, especially in meditation we often criticize ourselves: "Why is my mind always filled with thoughts? Why can't I sit still?" Do not judge. Just accept the way it is. Just observe and name what goes through your mind quite objectively and gently return to your mantra. Become an impartial observer. This approach soon becomes an integral part of our being and leads to objectivity, detachment and awareness.