

## *Love over Ego: True Identity*

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Everyone who is trying to live a spiritual life faces the challenge of putting love over ego. Ego says I am the center of the universe; love looks to serve others. There is a tension between these two outlooks. We need both – an awareness of our own needs, and a willingness to serve others. When love is in control, what we call ego is actually a healthy quality.

In our story, Nebuchadnezzar had conquered Judah, destroyed the temple, and taken many captives back to Babylon. Whenever it occurs in the Word, Babel or Babylon describes our ego, which desires to rule others.

Nebuchadnezzar worshiped many gods. Ego in us tends to worship anything that gives us short-term pleasure. Each of our egos has an array of things that become, for a time, the most important pleasures of our lives: Impatience, pride, social media, status, power, and revenge. These become our gods we worship.

The controlling part of us also tries to carry away our good desires. Maybe you can think of a time when in the heat of the moment you did something you thought you'd never do. The pleasure of that moment seduced you into doing something you'd never do otherwise. This is like the Jews being captured, brought to Babylon, and then trained to serve Nebuchadnezzar.

In our story Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah offer quiet resistance by choosing to follow the Lord even in a state of captivity. Ego in us tries to pervert them. We see this in the names each of these young men is given – each named for the Lord, but now renamed for a foreign god. Daniel means "God is my judge." He is renamed Belshazzar, "Treasure of Bel." Hananiah means "Jehovah has been gracious." He is renamed Shadrach, "Inspiration of Aku." Mishael means "Belonging to God." He is renamed Meshach, "Belonging to Aku." Azariah means "Jehovah is my help." He is renamed Abed-Nego, "Servant or slave of Nego."

These men entered a three-year training program – we might say brainwashing program – to convert them to suitable servants or slaves of Nebuchadnezzar and his desires.

The tension in our story focuses on a surprisingly small item--what these young men eat. Nebuchadnezzar instructed that the king's delicacies and wine should be given to them. This was the best food – what he himself ate. But likely it was also food from the feasts honoring the gods he worshiped, something the Old Testament forbade (Ex 34:15). That food stands for the delight in doing what is wrong. It is an intense and powerful delight (*DP* 215:9).

Daniel did not want to defile himself and proposed a test: Let him and his friends eat only vegetables and water for ten days, then see who looked healthier. This means the Daniel in us wants to stand for what the Lord says, and observe the results. We could do the same test. When we have done what is wrong, how does that feel? After the intense, passionate delight fades, what's left? And when we do what's right, even if it does not elate us at the time, what is the lasting effect? In the story, Daniel and his friends were tested and found to be ten times wiser than the others. When we choose to follow the Lord's will, even in hard times, He blesses us with many good things.

Lessons: Daniel 1, *Divine Love and Wisdom* 47