

Love over Ego 6: First Things First: Daniel in the Lions' Den

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In all the stories we've looked at in our *Love Over Ego* series, the king of Babylon, who represents our ego, has initiated some decree or action that represents a selfish desire. In our story today, Darius does not initiate, but rather responds. He was considering putting Daniel in charge of the whole realm, similarly to the way Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of all of Egypt. Other leaders urged him to make a decree that for 30 days, no one could worship or petition anyone but him or he would be thrown into a lions' den. Their hope was to trap Daniel. Darius went along with this.

This represents ways in which our ego can become susceptible to emotions we may not pay attention to, but which can manipulate us from the background – emotions such as shame, greed, or fear – sabotaging our efforts to make progress.

When Daniel knew Darius had signed his decree, he went home, opened the window to Jerusalem and prayed three times a day, as he always did. He did not pray in secret, but with the windows open, and in keeping with the practice of the day, he would almost certainly have prayed out loud, and in the distinctive chanting way Jews pray that is hard to miss. He was not ostentatious about his prayers, as the Scribes and Pharisees were, but neither did he hide it. That courage and devotion is a hallmark of Daniel in us.

There's an irony in this story in that Daniel was captive and yet was truly free, and Darius theoretically had complete freedom to do what he wanted, and yet allowed himself to be trapped into a foolish proclamation. The Lord teaches that following Him leads to true freedom, whereas those who give in to hell are controlled and trapped by them (AC 905). Daniel was constrained, seemingly, from praying to his God, yet he acted from that *inner* freedom that cannot be taken away, praying because it was who he was. Darius found himself trapped by allowing a foolish and self-aggrandizing proclamation. And because Darius in us is trapped, a conflict or trial arises, which is meant by Daniel's being thrown in the lions' den.

While Darius fasted, and declared that Daniel's God would save him, Daniel spent the night among the lions. In many ways, this trial is more about Darius than it is about Daniel. Darius was seeing what his actions had brought him to. The threat of loss – the emptying out of his joy and delight – is symbolized by his fasting. Part of temptation involves our coming to see the true effect of our behaviors. When this happens, we are able to make other choices. The lions can no longer harm us because we see them for what they are. This process of learning is painful, and even

frightening, but it opens us up to a joyful acknowledgment of the Lord and His power to save us.

Lessons: Daniel 6, *Arcana Caelestia* 8159:3