

Lecture I:
I Am who I Am
ἄΝΟΚ ΠΕ ΦΗΕΤΩΟΠ

“God created man in His own image.” (Genesis 1:27)

Who Am I? **I Am** God’s masterpiece. I have infinite genius because God made me with an intellect like His own. I am not an insect crawling in the sand of the dry desert, but **I Am** the crowning work of Creation. The crowning work of Creation typifies that:

- A. **I Am** important to God and to His Holy plan for the now and the hereafter.
- B. **I Am** the only creature beautified by the gifts of both mind and speech.
- C. **I Am** capable of growth.
- D. **I Am** with the potential to be useful in His service and that is greatness.
- E. **I Am** with the dream to build the road that leads to my destiny.
- F. **I Am** the only one who can follow that road and be responsible for my spiritual success while traveling it.
- G. **I Am** of reason to realize that nothing is spiritually too good to be true.

What are the goals that should optimize the person “**I Am**?” The first goal is to be willing to overcome obstacles. The Holy Bible is full of character greats whose life was filled with obstacles, yet they overcame them with perseverance. Abraham desired peace instead of strife; so he made an unselfish effort to find it rather than wait for it to eventually find him. (Genesis 13: 8-9)

“In the middle of famine, Jacob sent his sons to a foreign land in search of food instead of letting them wait for it to find them. A short man, Zaccheus wanted to see the Lord Jesus Christ, but due to his short stature the crowd obstructed his view; so he climbed a tree” (Luke 19:1-4). The goal here is not to let people overtake your spiritual desires, climb to a higher level to overcome the obstacles when necessary.

Whenever you consider the “**I Am**” make sure honesty and spiritually honorable are at the top of the list of defining characteristics when overcoming any obstacles of life may present you.

It has been said that “obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off the goal.” *“And Jesus said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him”* (Matthew 14:29-31).

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, teaches, *“We must reconcile who we are with one way of life, that being the life within the Church. It is not good for a person to have two personalities; one for the House of God and another for the world. The righteous person is always the same; he does not wear a different face for each different occasion.”*

Life with all its possibilities must have friends that are both gainful and with good spiritual lives within the Church. Family and enriching friends become a part of your support system and therefore a part of which “**I Am**” becomes. They should not be obstacles constantly encountered.

Do your friends enhance your spiritual life or do you find yourself often bored and discussing topics that you later wonder why you said or did that? St. Peter, in speaking to some who had broken with the old crowd, said *“Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you”* (I Peter 4:4). Do you often tell yourself, my friends cannot influence me, if I do not want them to?

We deceive ourselves if we think we are exempt from outside pressures. ***“Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners” (I Corinthians 15:33).***

King Herod for his ***“oath’s sake and them which sat with him to dine, commanded”*** that St. John the Baptist be beheaded (Matthew 14: 9,10). Perhaps if he had eaten meat with a different crowd, it would have been a different outcome than as we know it today.

Are you stimulated by your friends to grow spiritually? His Holiness tells this story of a man being surrounded only by followers:

He only ever surrounded himself by followers and adherents who agreed to everything and defended whatever he did, however wrong...And he was happy with their deference...He had absolutely no desire to surround himself with those who were on his own level, or above him, because his follower’s excessive praise had made him imagine that there was no one on his level and that it was impossible for anyone to be higher than he...Thus he lost friendship and sincere advice, and lost humility of heart and thoughts, and his mistakes, which those outside his circle of friends could see, multiplied. As his followers continued to defend them they increased even further...

There is a saying that your companions are like the buttons on an elevator. They will either take you up or they will take you down. ***“He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed” (Proverbs 13:20).***

In summary, Irenaeus (c.180) stated, ***“Not a single thing that has been made, or that will be made, escapes the knowledge of God. Rather, though His providence, every single thing has obtained its nature, rank, number, and special quality. Nothing whatever has been produced or is produced in vain or by accident. Instead, everything has been made with precise suitability and through the exercise of transcendent knowledge.”***

*This lecture synopsis is adapted from ‘Experiences in Life’ by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III; ‘Paradise of the Spirit’(vol.1) by His Grace the late Bishop Youanis

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