

Emotions as *Shakti*, the *Gun*as and Their Relationship to Emotion

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Edward: Dear Ram, I've a question for you. I hope you will keep your answer simple. As you know, I am perennially short of time. The question is: What is emotion? What exactly is it?

Ram: Okay, I'll try to keep it simple, but don't count on it. It's a deep topic and needs a bit of background.

As usual, everything starts with the self, pure consciousness. The self is free of thought and emotion. It does not change. It is without energy. But it has within in the power to change, to become.

This power is called *maya* or *maya shakti*. When *maya* operates, the world is projected from within the self where it has been hidden. The first stage of the world is energy, *shakti*. When the *shakti* is seen through the senses it appears solid, as matter. Before human beings come into being, the insentient cosmos, made of the *shakti* in the form of the five elements, is formed over trillions of years. Then the *shakti* evolves the sentient beings. Sentient beings range from unicellular organisms to man, from the simple to the complex. The sentient beings are the self with three bodies, causal, subtle and gross. These three bodies are *shakti*, energy in subtle patterns that act as vehicles for the flow of pure *shakti*. Life is the self in the form of energy flowing through the three bodies into the world. When it flows into the physical body it can act. The subtle body is made of three vehicles or limbs, the emotions, the intellect and the ego. The ego is the subtlest vehicle, the first to receive the flow of *shakti*. When *shakti* flows into the ego it apparently becomes an individual, a *jiva*. In fact the *shakti* is impersonal and is never contaminated by the vehicle through which it is operating. Next, it flows into the intellect, what in the West we call the mind, activating it and giving the ego the power to think. The thoughts are *shakti* in the form of certain subtle bursts of energy. Then the *shakti* flows into the emotions, which are grosser energy patterns capable of moving ("emote" means to "move from," as in motion, motivation, etc.) the body in response to commands coming from the ego through the intellect. The Sanskrit term is *manas*, and actually means "mind" – so there is a potential for confusion here. The emotions are just flowing *shakti*, or desire. *Shakti* becomes desire when it flows into the causal body and ego. In itself the *shakti* wants nothing. It is just pure, formless energy. But when it associates with an individual (*jiva*) that does not know who it is, i.e. that it is the self, it turns into desire. For what? For the things in the world that are meant to make it feel whole and complete, satisfied. When the *shakti* is flowing nicely toward the objects and the things that the ego wants are manifesting in a reasonable way, one feels emotionally satisfied. This emotional satisfaction is just the experience of the *shakti*, the energy which, since it is actually the self, is pure bliss. Depending on the nature of the individual's past experiences, the *vasanas*, different positive feelings manifest: euphoria, love, pleasure, etc. and these feelings give rise to creative activities. But alas, the *shakti* often gets obstructed and this causes the negative emotions, usually in some sort of chain reaction – because the *shakti* is dynamic and will not sit still. So when an individual sees that something that it wants is not going to manifest, is not manifesting when it wants it (meaning

it is tormented by its desire for the object) or when it manifests an object it doesn't want, the *shakti* changes state and turns to anger, the primary emotion, which, if allowed to activate the body, can cause a lot of havoc in the world. If not, it causes dis-ease in the body. As noted, the *shakti* is constantly changing and eventually collapses into depression. If depression persists, delusion arises, and if it becomes a constant emotional state, it eventually clouds the intellect and discrimination is lost, and finally, as the texts, say, "the soul perishes." There are many names for all the subtle varieties of the primary emotions, anger and depression, but they are all just energy in a blocked or collapsed state. The texts don't bother to list them all, because of people doing inner work on the *shakti* directly and/or the thoughts that are causing the blockages.

The emotions are the grossest layer of the subtle body. And, as mentioned above, they are down-line from the ego and intellect. When a person finds that his or her emotions are regularly disturbed, it usually indicates that the ego has identified itself with a faulty view in the intellect and that causes it to be attached to the particular *vasana* arising. This causes the *shakti* to get blocked upstream and causes the negative emotions to arise.

When the ego understands that it is whole and complete, the *vasanas* exhaust, its desire for objects burns out, the *shakti* flows unobstructed through the subtle and gross bodies and things are emotionally fine. And conversely, as long as one hangs onto the view that one is inadequate and tries to obtain some worldly situation or object to prove that it is adequate, it will suffer negative emotions.

Edward: What is it for? What purpose does it serve?

Ram: From the inside out to move you, to get what you want. When you have formed a picture in the intellect of what you want, you need energy to materialize it. In a recent email you said that your visit to Kyoto was essential to giving you the confidence to proceed with a World Spirit idea. Since World Spirit is your spiritual work, it is associated with certain symbols. When you make contact with the symbol, the Japanese temple, the *shakti* starts flowing into that idea and cleans out the block, the doubt, the subsequent ideas you need to accomplish it flood into the mind and you can move on the idea. You feel good about it. You are confident.

From the outside in to alert the subtle body to changes in the environment. The emotions, *manas*, are referred to as a "body" because bodies are instruments through which the conscious being transacts with the world. I've seen the *manas* referred to as a "counter" across which experience (feeling) is transacted. Just as the physical body acts as a counter across which sense information is transmitted, the *manas* is the instrument that interacts with the field of emotions. Human beings are entities situated in a vast field of emotional energy, a collective pool of positive and negative energies that can either uplift the mind or drag it down. When those jets crashed into the World Trade Center, even though it was just an image on a phosphorous screen that had no emotional content, an understanding, an idea arose in the collective mind, a fear-thought, which in turn activated the emotions and people became frightened. This awakened them to danger and motivated them protect themselves. It was a wake-up call. Out came the bombers, etc. Without the emotion nothing would have happened. My intellect is disconnected from my emotions. It takes its cues from the self. So when I saw the plane strike the building, nothing changed on the emotional level.

Edward: Do different emotions have different natures and different purposes?

Ram: Yes. When the *manas* becomes very subtle it can pick up on the pure emanations of *shakti* and follow them to their source, the self. This is called *bhakti*, and there are many stages of *bhakti*, from rather gross to exceptionally sublime. In certain people, women particularly, the *manas* is more refined than the intellect and it becomes an instrument of inquiry. Uma is one of those. Her *manas* is nearly as refined as is humanly possible, what is called “emotional intelligence,” so she has had a very wide range of self-experience since her teens, the kind of mind-blowing experiences that are spoken of in the *yogic* texts, and understands the teachings of Vedanta intuitively. I had very few actual verbal *satsangs* with her before her self-realization. And the information I gave in response to a question that arose directly from her experience was exceptionally simple, a four-word sentence, but it took her home because she could feel it. She cooks like a master chef although she has had no formal training because she can feel the *shakti* in the food. She’ll never mix incompatible energies, because they stress the digestive fire. This is all done through feeling. The self pervades the whole organism. It informs and regulates the three bodies, the three limbs of the subtle body, and the senses, so the self is accessible through any of them. The poses of *hatha yoga*, for example, when performed in a certain sequence, can cause self-experience. I know this from personal experience.

In grosser people the emotions are obviously connected to ideas. Jealousy, which I find particularly repugnant, is about controlling the object of one’s desire. The intellect, which in unevolved people plays handmaiden to the ego, knows that the ego is very attached to a certain feeling, what is incorrectly referred to as “love,” and needs a particular object to activate that feeling. So it generates this emotion to frighten the object into submission by clamping a heavy emotional chain around the subtle body of the beloved.

You told me to keep the word count down, so I won’t run on, but there is another whole overlay that adds a lot to the discussion of emotion and that is the topic of the *gunas*, the three universal energies. When you get into it you realize emotion is an interesting kind of universal language, a way of looking at the *shakti*, the self as experience. Since you enjoyed the discussion above, I decided to write a short essay on the *gunas* and their relationship to the emotions.

The *Gunas* and Their Relationship to Emotion

As I mentioned above, everything that we experience on any level is *shakti* functioning on the gross and subtle levels. Emotion, for example, is *shakti* playing in one limb (the mind) of the subtle body. The *shakti* has three modes or forms, called *gunas*. You will perhaps recall my discussion in Chapter III of *Meditation: Inquiry into the Self* of the three *gunas*, the energies in the mind and material nature. These *gunas*, or “ropes,” bind the mind and affect the quality of one’s thinking and feelings. The type and quality of the emotions are related to these energies. Psychologically they are situated up-line from the emotions, in the subtlest part of the self, the causal body. The causal body (*karana sharira* in Sanskrit), or what is called the unconscious mind in the West, is causal because it causes the thoughts and feelings that arise in the subtle body – which in turn outpicture as *karmas*, experience in the three worlds. The three worlds are the world of action, the world of emotional experience and the world of thoughts, ideas and concepts.

Perhaps you can read the description of the three *gunas* in my book to save me writing them all

out here.

These three forms of the *shakti* play continually in every aspect of the manifested universe, the material world and the world of mind, the subtle body. In the subtle body, one predominates for a period, then another, then the third – according to their relative proportions in the causal body. The subtle body is never free of them. The two lower energies, *rajas* and *tamas*, are responsible for the primary emotions of fear and desire. Fear is a consequence of not knowing. If I invest money in the stock market I'm not certain that the market will go up, therefore I fear the loss of my money. People fear the dark, not because it is dark, but because it is very difficult to get knowledge in the dark. Fear is *tamasic*. *Tamas* is a veiling kind of energy, like a cloud. It has slow, sleepy waves that obscure perception and therefore knowledge. Jealousy is *tamasic*. The person fears the loss of a person to whom it is attached. It also has a *rajasic*, or *passionate*, aspect. The fear arises because of the contemplated loss of the pleasure associated with the object/person. Desire is *rajasic*. Whereas *tamas* is heavy and almost inert, *rajas* is a very volatile, unstable energy. It is called *vikeshepa shakti*, or projecting energy. It causes rapid and numerous blasts of stimulating, exciting energy to arise in the subtle body. If you were to record it on a graph it would generate a pattern of tall spikes and deep troughs. Whereas *tamas* is a protective and defensive, *rajas* is a very aggressive, outgoing energy. Perhaps you're familiar with it. Lust is *rajasic*. It needs to capture and possess the object it desires. This often takes a lot of work, so it supplies boundless motivation. But it is very demanding on the subtle body and eventually collapses into *tamas*, exhaustion. The feeling of being emotionally burned-out is *tamasic*. Envy is *rajasic*. It wants something it doesn't have. Depression, sloth, is *tamasic*. Its energy pattern is more or less a flat line. The mind is so sludgy that it cannot think and cannot therefore come up with the solution to one's problems. *Rajas* and *tamas* are like incestuous lovers. Where you find one you will usually find the other. Anger, blocked desire, is *rajasic* but can lead to delusion (*tamas*) if it is allowed to dominate the subtle body. Greed is *rajasic*. Hate is *rajasic*, but it is inspired by *tamas*, the fear that comes from lack of understanding. Cruelty is *tamasic*, an attempt to push away or destroy objects that one fears. Possessiveness is *rajasic*, an attempt to keep objects that one desires. It could also be considered *tamasic*, the attempt to hold on to what one fears losing. If you look into fear and desire you will see that they are basically two sides of the same coin, different ways of viewing the same situation, one positive (*rajas*) and the other negative (*tamas*). The coin in this case is the belief that one is limited, inadequate and incomplete. All the negative emotions are either *rajasic* or *tamasic*. It seems strange perhaps to classify passion and desire and excitement as negative because they seem positive with reference to sloth and fear, for example, but with reference to *sattva*, the third energy, they are negative.

All the positive emotions – love, charity, tenderness, compassion, generosity, etc. – are rooted in *sattva*. *Sattva* is a very subtle energy.

Whereas *tamas* is fundamentally opaque, *sattva* is like a fine, translucent film. When it is playing in the subtle body one is intellectually clear and emotionally happy. The reason for this is that the self (*chit*, consciousness), which is shining on and pervading the subtle body, is not dissipated by *rajas* or obscured and absorbed by *tamas*, but is intensified and reflected. The self is the source of happiness because its nature is bliss (wholeness) and awareness. This happiness is not felt when the mind is *tamasic* and only intermittently appreciated when it is *rajasic*. We are most happy when we are most aware because we understand what we are experiencing and doubt, *tamas*, does not arise. Doubt is not a happy state, because it confuses and agitates the subtle body, the instrument of experience.

How does one create an emotionally happy subtle body? By removing the relative proportions of *rajas* and *tamas* and increasing *sattva*. When practiced in the right spirit with the right understanding, all spiritual practices increase *sattva*. The big advantage of this way of seeing emotion lies in its impersonality. It is not identifying the source of emotional dysfunction as rooted in past trauma but in the universal qualities comprising the mind.

I hope this answers your question. If it doesn't, there probably isn't an answer or I haven't understood the question.

~ Love, Ram