

# Not Good at Being Human

Ram (James Swartz)

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**Ram:** Dear Sandy, I've been thinking about you lately, trying to understand the nature of your problems. I wish I'd come to see you because I would have been able to more quickly figure things out by observing you physically and talking directly with you. As it is I've tried to piece things together from the information I've received in your emails. Since I don't like to go off half-cocked, it has taken me a long time to come up with a reasonable analysis of your situation.

In a way, I think I'm not really the one to help you. Most of the people that the Lord sends to me have pretty much finished their worldly duties and can give their full attention to the discussion. Perhaps the advice I proffer can be useful, but along with your problem, I think you're pretty much in denial and probably won't even accept my analysis of the situation, much less the prescription for the cure. I've received no positive feedback from you on recent suggestions. Of course change involves doing things differently and letting go of certain things to which one is attached, so it is understandable if you cannot accept what I'm about to say.

Anyway, I'll try again and see if I can get through. I suggest that you not look for more work, that you quit worrying about your debts and take more time off. You are chronically fatigued. You do way too much of everything and the symptoms are getting more serious. You suffered a minor heart attack recently. So the solution is not, as you say in your email, to work another job, the solution is to take some of the pressure off. If you are so attached to your lifestyle that you can't live in reduced circumstances, then you need to look at that attachment. If you want to kill yourself to preserve a certain style of life, then I think you are fool. There is nothing more important than your health. If you fall down the social and economic ladder a couple of notches, so what? I went from a fabulous home in a ritzy neighborhood and high-powered work to flop houses and poverty in two years, and it was one of the best things I did. Are you going to let your pride stand in the way of happiness?

You are right. You are not good at being a human being. But that doesn't mean that you can't be good at it. I would state the problem in terms of values. Succeeding in the world's or your ego's eyes is more important to you than your health and your peace of mind. The spiritual path is about gaining peace of mind. Yet you live in such a way that you only make your mind more agitated. You can't hang on to the superficial materialist values that are driving you and think that you are going to be happy. You are not a materialist person, in fact I find you to be one of the most spiritual people I've met, yet you are behaving like a greedy materialist. Greedy for what? For experience. You believe the solution to every situation is that you should do more. You will not forego a single activity. When you should stay home and rest you're off on some foolish adventure, cramming it into the weekend, staying up all night in a wet forest, exhausting and injuring yourself – and then off to a demanding job on Monday morning. You can do this when you are twenty and get away with it, but you cannot do this when you are in poor health and sixty.

On top of it all your ego confuses you with silly New Age jargon. There is no question of not accepting financial prosperity. You are not financially prosperous, because you are so greedy for experience that you spend more than you make. Your belief, which is patently false, is that you shouldn't have to cut back on one expense but that all you have to do is "accept prosperity" and

the bucks will automatically flow in and solve your problem. The fact is that at whatever level of prosperity you are you will not feel prosperous, because your craving for experience is so great that you will inevitably live beyond your means. Prosperity has nothing to do with money. It is a feeling that comes when you have a peaceful mind.

There is no sense yakking about spiritual topics with you. You need to come out of your otherworldly dream and stop distracting yourself with mindless activities. You need to accept the fact that you are here in this body on earth for a reason and that reason is to understand how this world works and make it work for you. When you have figured that out you will quickly become enlightened. All the work you've done on the spiritual plane will be right there for you and will take you home. But spiritual seeking is useless unless you face yourself, refuse to indulge yourself like you do, quit making excuses and live a more practical, sensible life.

So here's the deal. It is painful for me to see you suffer. I hate hearing about all your setbacks and tragedies and frustrations. It is particularly painful when I can see that you haven't a clue about how you are sabotaging yourself. The solution is so simple it doesn't even occur to you. You have repressed the voice that tells you to slow down and let go. You have come down foursquare on the side of the idea that if only you had more money and more work your problems would sort out. You work like a demon as it is and you make plenty of money but it hasn't helped. If the money were inadequate, how can you spend it on things you don't need? Don't you think there is a reason why you can't find additional work? You say your higher self will take care of you, but you do not see that it is preventing you getting this new job – for a good reason. You have wonderful explanations as to why you can't find work (your age, the economy, etc.), but how about it being that you don't need it?

I won't stop caring for you if you do not heed my advice, but there is no sense wasting time giving profound spiritual teachings, making small talk or giving advice that is not valued. Your problem is no mystery. And the solution is no mystery. My suggestions are just generic advice that will work for anyone and everyone. They are scripturally sanctioned. There is nothing personal in them and I have nothing invested in whether or not you take them. They are good for you and will make your life better. If you don't like the fact that you have to let go of something to get something greater, then you deserve your suffering.

I know this sounds unpleasant, but you have not yet hit bottom and are not really serious about sorting yourself out – although the handwriting is on the wall. So if you won't cut back, then the best thing is for you to crash. Sometimes people are so stubborn they need a big disaster to wake them up. I hope you're smart enough to heed this warning before that happens.

Some years ago the Lord sent a young gay man to me. He was quite confused and quite unhappy. And I could see that his problem was that he was not actually homosexual. After a failed love affair with a woman, he got the idea in his head that maybe he was gay. But he was actually heterosexual. I told him this and suggested that he give up the lifestyle, not only because it wasn't right for him but because it was dangerous. He didn't listen. About ten years later I was sitting in a restaurant in San Francisco and he came up and greeted me enthusiastically. I could see that he was dying of AIDS. I didn't quite know what to say, because it was obvious that he was a goner. But I said, "How are you?" And he said with a lot of happiness and joy, "I've never been happier in my life." Two weeks later he was dead.

It was very nice that he had finally attained peace, but at what cost? Had he taken my advice he'd

have found peace and had a nice long life to enjoy it.

Please don't take this as an attack. Think of it as tough love. You need to listen to someone who will tell you the truth. You are simply too self-indulgent. You are a typical greedy American. You think the solution to everything is more, more, more. More money, more work, more exciting, pleasing activities – whatever. Please take this to heart and get to work simplifying your life. The *mantra* you need is “less is more.” Chant it daily. It means fewer ego-driven activities equals more peace of mind. Peace of mind is what you need. You will not get it through money or any other worldly way. You get it by getting rid of the things that are disturbing you.

**Sandy:** Dear Ram, thank you for the letter. Actually, that is one of the most on-target letters that you have sent to me in a long time. I agree with at least 95% of it. You are correct when you say that I want too much of the material world. Actually, I have gotten worse about this in the past few months than I have ever been. Probably about 35% of my debt is due to my getting things that I did not just have to have...

**Ram:** I'm glad you basically agreed with my analysis of your situation. Let me just add a little more to it. I made the statement that you were “greedy for experience” and I would like to talk a little bit about this.

I think that you haven't been critical in your thinking about want. You probably picked up your views when you were very young. People who have reasonably strong materialistic inclinations invariably believe that what they want is what they need. They feel a sense of lack and a picture of something that will remove that feeling (a vacation, a love affair, a better job, a new car – literally anything) comes into the mind. Without thinking through the whole process of materializing the object, they assume the object will erase the sense of lack. So they set out to get it one way or another. If they are spiritually inclined they may pray for it or do a ritual meant to manifest it. Most ritualism is about getting wanted objects, as is the idea of “materializing” things and situations popular in New Age culture. There is nothing “wrong” with wanting things, but if you think through the process of getting and enjoying and keeping things you will see that it creates problems of its own – and only temporarily solves the “lack” problem. If you obtained something and you never wanted that or anything else again, it would be intelligent to pursue that thing. But this never happens.

When you start to mature you find yourself questioning the want. You should have realized that for all the wanting and all the getting there is a serious limitation in the idea that getting what you want will solve the existential problem – unless you want the understanding that you are whole and complete, not a needy, wanting creature.

Who is it that wants all these things? Why is this person feeling incomplete? These are reasonable and natural questions one needs to ask because at the end of the day, no matter what you get, the wanting persists – and wanting hurts. And really, from a spiritual perspective, a wanting person is an ugly person. Excess desire contorts and constipates the personality. I am reminded of the lyrics of a Frank Zappa tune: “What is the ugliest part of your body? Some say your nose. Some say your toes. I say it's your mind, your mind, your mind.”

In some people this sense of wanting is more or less non-specific. There is a great unquestioned sense of lack that causes them to become “experience-hungry.” They just cannot sit still. Life is

seen as a jam-packed, unending series of activities. Not doing anything to get what one wants is considered wasting time. They often feel excessively virtuous because they work so hard. This usually starts in childhood. Kids are often so happy at just being alive and having fun being in the world and learning about the world that they refuse to sleep. They don't want to miss out on any experience. Even when there is really nothing to do or doing a doing will not produce beneficial resultsm experience-hungry people continue to generate experience through their actions. This kind of person never goes to sleep at night without contemplating the next day's (long) list of activities.

One problem with the doing idea is that there is always a limit on experience, the most obvious being that one day you are going to stop experiencing altogether. Be that as it may, you can only experience so much because the human organism is quite limited. And more experience creates relatively more experience, but it also creates more craving for experience, so along with a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction one continues to experience dissatisfaction in proportion to the degree of one's want-inspired doings. Another problem is that the wantier is not in control of experience and the results of experience, so much of one's experience is negative (one gets what one doesn't want), and this generates the desire to avoid certain experiences. So getting what one doesn't want adds to one's sense of lack too.

One fact about wanting that is generally ignored is that wanting is painful. When you say you want something you are just saying that you don't enjoy not having something that your mind imagines will make you happy. It may have nothing to do with your actual physical situation. You may be in the peak of health and sitting in the lap of luxury yet feel absolutely rotten because you have been unable to obtain something you want. In Western societies this aspect of desire has been completely swept under the carpet for an obvious reason: it is bad for business. Wanting is presented as very desirable and intelligent and one is taken into the fantasy of the object so quickly, in advertising, for example, that one never has time to question the want at all.

It is probably unreasonable to expect the wantier to disappear altogether. It seems that wanting is the bedrock condition of the individual self that we think we are, so except in exceptional people, people who have seen through the whole wanting state of mind and abandoned it for life in the present, most people need to learn how to manage their desires. The philosophy of *karma yoga*, which is the foundation of all Vedic spiritual practice, evolved in response to this question of desire. It is a conscious practice, a change of attitude based on a clear knowledge of how *karma* and desire work, that will purge the unconscious of unnecessary experience and the craving for experience. If you want to know more about it you should read my Chapter III [of *How to Attain Enlightenment*].

An experience-happy person afflicted with excessive desire can make an interesting adjustment that will make life a lot more enjoyable. Since they are incapable of giving up wanting, they can learn to want things that will solve rather than exacerbate their sense of existential frustration. For example, if you understood the value of peace of mind and pursued a lifestyle that produced peace, you would find that your need for money would decrease – along with the concomitant worry. You would learn to desire and value “downtime” and leisure, not as an interlude between frantic bursts of activity, but because it allowed the body and mind to rest and heal. Desire is not a healing energy. It is not life-affirming, contrary to the romantic and commercial notion currently in vogue. You could learn to value people for who they are rather than as vehicles for the attainment of your desires. You could take up activities, like walking, that improved your health and reduced trips to the doctor – which costs a lot of money – which in turn you have to work hard

to get. Once you have understood how inherently frustrating wanting is, you could actually start wanting not to want and slowly dismantle the superstructure of thought and feeling that keeps you running frantically after this and that.

Wanting and not wanting, desire and fear, takes a lot of energy. If you're gross and don't value the mind you will ignore the fact that not only are you physically tired, you are mentally and emotionally exhausted. Like an angry caged animal the mind that moves incessantly between its likes and dislikes wastes a lot of energy. One thing you notice when you begin to reduce your desires is an increase in energy. When you meditate, holding the mind on the silence, your batteries are quickly charged. Even if you let the mind run but do not identify with it, it becomes efficient and makes more energy available.

**Sandy:** No, I don't really rest while awake. I don't sleep well either. I must stop or else I'll be even sicker than I feel already. I am doing things to try to accomplish this. One of the things I want more than any other is to be in India next year and free of all of this. Is that running away or being where I am supposed to be? At this point, I don't even know anymore. I especially don't know today.

**Ram:** Well, the idea is good. But it won't work unless you have looked at the reason why you are so full of desire, why you are in such a hurry, why you are a compulsive doer. You mentioned that you even wanted to reduce your debts faster. Of course this is a good idea, but given your penchant for overwork it will just make matters worse. If you had thought about the consequences of your actions before you performed them, you wouldn't have bought those useless things and you wouldn't be worrying about paying them off now. So what has to happen is that you have to put some kind of check on yourself. The way to do it is to think things through beforehand and see where you are likely to end up if you follow a certain course of action. Instead of just mindlessly giving in to your desires, you need to think about what you can actually reasonably expect to gain and what the cost is. If the likely result is that you will be more secure and peaceful, then do the action. There are no free lunches here. Everything has a price. Excess activity and desire wears out the body and mind. This is just a fact. There is no way around it. So if you come to India it should be with one goal: to live a simple life. If you look at the lives of the spiritual masters and mistresses you will find that they are prime examples of simplicity. And this is something worth emulating. I could have pretty much anything I want. I have the education, the background, the connections, many practical skills, the knowledge how to create wealth, etc. But I live a very simple life for one reason – I do not like my greedy mind. It is ugly. And so a long time ago I set out to get it under control and now it is a well-trained beast. It does not call the shots. I treat myself well but I also know how to do without. It is a valuable knowledge.

So India or America, nothing is going to change until your goal is clear. Once you have made up your mind that the old way isn't for you anymore and you have settled on a simple, stress-free life, it won't be difficult to accomplish. To me "hitting bottom" means you have to have become completely fed up with your self. You need to repent, say to yourself, "I've screwed up and I would like to see things differently. I am ready to do things differently." Just running off to India with the belief that something miraculous might happen to change you or your life will not work. The change has to come from within. Just saying that you should change is not good enough. Good intentions stink. You have to make up your mind once and for all then get on with your new life one day at a time.

~ Love, Ram