

# The Road to Freedom through Small-Self Acceptance

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**Marsha:** So you are saying that if you just accept yourself warts and all the possibility of change is there. If not, you are always fighting yourself?

**Ram:** Yes. The Serenity Prayer comes to mind:

God, give me grace to accept with serenity  
The things that cannot be changed,  
Courage to change the things  
Which should be changed,  
And the Wisdom to distinguish  
The one from the other.

This is that whole debate between free will and determinism, between nature and nurture.

You believe in astrology and I do too, up to a point. Astrology is saying that you have a certain basic nature imprinted on your psyche when you come into this life. Vedanta agrees. We call it the *samskaras*, the patterns of energy that manifest as particular kinds of behavior. This is not something that you have control over, except indirectly – as you suggest below – through observation and analysis. The universe – okay, God, if you are of a religious persuasion – needs to have you here to perform certain functions to keep the creation going. It gives you the body and the mind and puts you in circumstances that are in harmony with your *karma*. It makes you forget who you were in your last life and gives you a fresh start in this one. And the world into which we are born is always the same – an eternal field of physical, moral, spiritual and psychological laws and processes.

The human mind is fundamentally a set-up. For example, the mind – what you would call the emotions – performs a certain valuable function. It creates doubt. It is important that consciousness evolve this function because life is not what it seems. There is the reality that lies behind everything and there are innumerable events going on all the time which may or may not reflect the underlying reality. When you are dating someone, for example, you are attracted to this person, and in the best of all possible worlds, you would love to “be with” this person but “you don’t know how you feel,” to quote a wise woman I know. It is important that you not know how you feel, because it is difficult to believe that the wonderful words coming out of this potential love-object actually correspond to reality. He sees you as a divine goddess and even you, who hold yourself in the highest regard, wonder if he is talking about someone else. His statements about himself, which you would like to believe, just seem to be too good to be true. Is he deluded or not?

This subjective function is not a pleasant one, as you well know. It creates very short fingernails. And it is not under your control. It is an instinctual, evolutionary function designed for self-protection because *samsara* is not just sweetness and light. It is a duality. There is good and there is evil. There is right and wrong. There is the truth

and there are appearances and it is always changing. The truth becomes untrue and what is untrue becomes true. It is a constantly shifting matrix. How do you make up your mind? What factors influence your decision? Fortunately, consciousness evolved another “higher” function to help you resolve doubt. You cannot move forward in life as long as you are doubtful. You cannot fulfill your divine purpose. This function – and it is the same in everyone – is called intellect and it is the power to decide, to resolve doubt. This is what the prayer refers to when it says “the wisdom to distinguish.” The intellect needs information – wisdom – so that it can resolve the doubt that the mind feels. This is where free will can come in.

I say it “can come in” because in many people it does not come in. They fail to exercise it. The mind does get made up eventually – you cannot live in perpetual doubt or you will go mad – but what makes it up in unevolved people is their conditioning (nature). How you are conditioned by your past becomes your nature as a human being. Nature means that you stick with what you have been taught, what has worked or not worked before. It is highly unlikely that you will marry a man whose circumstances were so different from yours, like you did before.

What you are as a human being is not really who you are. You have an identity beyond that. But because of conditioning everyone believes they are their conditioning. So in this sense you are that person and you have no free will. You think you cannot change what you are. One thing you regularly say is, “I am an emotional person.” In terms of your own experience it is true. I think you would probably love not to be an emotional person, or at least to be free of the negative emotions and only feel the positive ones, but it is very, very difficult to accomplish this with will power alone.

This is where the free will and God come into the picture. You realize that this is just the hand you have been dealt by fate, by *karma* – okay, by God, or in your case by your chart – and you accept it. In psychology it is called “Shadow” content. It is things about yourself that contradict your good opinion of yourself. I resolved 85 percent of my Shadow content with self-inquiry, 10 percent with dreamwork and the other five percent will have to wait until the next life. It will not change. Should I waste the rest of my already full and interesting life trying to get rid of something that I have no control over? Should I feel bad about something that I did not create? I did my best. So I exercise my free will and accept the remaining five percent. Will I rot in hell for it? Maybe, but tough shit. I am not going to make myself miserable wanting to be different because I am not living up to some saintly ideal. When you exercise free will in line with wisdom, a great peace descends on you. You turn it over to God. God put that stuff there and God will have to sort it out. You relax, knowing you have done your best.

At the same time you actually do have some free will. Within the scope of your life, certain choices can be made: San Francisco or Los Angeles? In your case you waited until all the facts were in and you decided on Los Angeles. There is still a doubt – you kept your house in San Francisco – but it is a manageable doubt.

Yes, I am saying that if you do not accept your nature, you will always be in conflict. When I was young I was a real rebel. I was a total extrovert. I thought the way I wanted it to be was the way it should be and since it wasn't what I wanted, I went against everything. I could not accept the way the world was. One day I was having a chat with Swamiji and he said to me, “You know, Ram, you are what you are rebelling against.” I don't know why it had never occurred to me, but I suddenly saw that I was in conflict with myself. And within a very short time that conflict

disappeared. It disappeared because I realized that I did not want to injure myself with my judgments and opinions. Yes, “the world” was fucked up, but so what? I couldn’t change myself as long as I was unaware of myself. But when I saw that my judgments about people and society, the government, etc. were really judgments about myself, I dropped them. This was wisdom. I could see that “the world” was not really separate from my feelings about it. I could see that my feelings about it were just projections of my feelings about myself. I didn’t like myself.

**Marsha:** Do you feel that it is possible to change your basic nature and by accepting the good and bad, it is possible to change?

**Ram:** Yes. Definitely. Change happens naturally and automatically when you let go of this inner conflict. There is no doer. It just happens and you witness it.

**Marsha:** I do believe that I can change if I work at it – maybe that just means observing myself, accepting my less thrilling parts, and I will be able to change.

**Ram:** This is right, Marsha. Wanting to change is not change. It is the antithesis of change. It keeps the negative things in place. You have to let go of the desire to be different from what (you think) you are, and then you will see who you really are. The road to freedom, enlightenment, is through accepting and loving yourself as you are, warts and all. “All” means the good stuff too. As human beings we are a mixture of light and dark. We are not different from the world. We are part and parcel of it. It has given us everything. But as awareness, we can go beyond the world that our self-ignorance created.

~ Much love, Ram