

Self-Transformation Is Not Ego-Determined

Ram (James Swartz)

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Lynn: Dear Ram, re not being able to transform the self... I guess I think that the mind can reflect greater truth, greater self-expression, and so in that way, if the mind is open, it can be transformed by this greater energy... but not by itself. Do you agree?

Ram: Yes. Transformation is not an ego-determined event. The ego/mind needs to recognize the need for change, but it also needs to know that because it is the problem it cannot also be the solution. Still, it needs to do what it thinks it best and this willingness to try is the signal to the self to guide the ego toward the experiences and understandings that can transform it.

An open mind is one that is ready to see things differently. For example, you are not satisfied with the way you communicate. This is why you are taking communication classes. So you are open to communicating in another way, one based on a non-dual view rather than an egoic view. This has caused some change in the way you actually communicate, and you are probably less dissatisfied with yourself than you were. You are willing to admit that the way you communicate is not worthy of who you really are, so you are trying to help the mind catch up. At the same time you know it really doesn't matter, because you are not the mind, you are the limitless self. So knowing this, you needn't hold your happiness hostage to the day when you can communicate as self to self. If you were on a desert island you would not be taking classes in communication, because there would be no one to communicate with, but your own subjective ugliness would still be coming up. Self-realization is a little like being on a desert island, there is only you, so whatever problems the mind has are tolerated, maybe even enjoyed, because you love yourself enough to accept your faults. It's only when you step out in the world that you discover that people don't have such a charitable view of you as you have.

My argument was about people who think they are people and who don't like the person they are and try to make that person different without realizing that the problem is that they don't like themselves in the first place, because it is quite possible to love yourself if you are not perfect. And the problem with changing yourself so that you are acceptable to yourself is that, once you have changed, your standards about what you are willing to accept may change, so you may find new faults with the changed person and have to go about changing it again. Take, for example, the woman who changed her wallpaper, then didn't like the new wallpaper, changed it again and still didn't like it, so she changed it back to the way it was when she started and then she liked it. I'm saying look into this desire to be different before you set out to change. It may be that the very desire is illegitimate and therefore the changes will be unnecessary.

For example, if you only took up communication class because you embarrassed yourself in the eyes of others by your unskillful or unkind words, this would not be a good reason to change. This would only serve to protect your ego. But if you really felt bad about injuring yourself and others by your words, this would be a legitimate reason. But this may still leave unanswered the question of why you do not communicate with love. So the problem may not be solved simply by changing your

style of communication. The problem would only be solved by realizing that there is nobody here but you. When you see that you are everyone, you naturally communicate with love. The only purpose of communication is love. Getting what you want from others or hurting others with unkind or undiplomatic comments doesn't cut it spiritually.

Lynn: I liked hearing again the idea that the positive and negative forces tend to balance each other... it's such a peaceful idea, and quite beyond the usual contracted point of view...fear-driven... of our culture.

Ram: Yes, if there is some downside to yourself that you think needs changing, it is probably intelligent to find the opposite quality in yourself before you set out to change. In this way your view of yourself will be realistic, not unnecessarily negative. You won't have much success if your view of yourself is unremittingly negative. You simply will not have the confidence to see any program of change through to the end. I'm not arguing against changing the mind. I've changed my limited self much over the years. I do not remotely resemble the person I was thirty-five years ago - except for the positive qualities. But I didn't wait until my mind got better to be happy. If you do, you may never be satisfied. Remember that story of *The Princess and the Pea*? They put a pea under one mattress and she missed a night's sleep. So they put two mattresses and she still missed a night's sleep. With ten between her and the pea she still didn't sleep. This means that dissatisfaction evolves with the changes you make. It gets more subtle. This is so because the cause of the dissatisfaction has nothing to do with the number of mattresses. The problem is the pea - which I take to represent self-ignorance. It needs to go. If it goes, one mattress is plenty. You can even sleep on the floor if the pea is there.

Most of us that think of ourselves as conscious beings, have some sort of duty to ourselves to make life as pain-free as we possibly can.

Lynn: Do you mean for ourselves is the same as for others?

Ram: Yes. Your ego, which you may take to be you, is an "other" to you, the self. There is no difference between your ego and someone else's ego. It is just ego. You're noticing that your pain becomes your husband's pain when you do not communicate non-dualistically. So rather than worry about helping other people, you need only worry about yourself. When you come to the conclusion that your own lack of self-love is causing you to injure others and you start loving yourself, you have fixed the world.

Lynn: I think that I've been doing a pretty good job of "learning" to stay balanced (or maybe moving my attention to a place of balance?), especially when I was meditating, but I also know that I still get identified with certain thoughts...

Ram: I think so too. I've noticed that you are much more equanimous. Still, one needs to remain vigilant.

Lynn: I'm interested in communication skills because "I" have always wanted to learn, i.e. I have the idea that it would be "helpful" to myself and to the world... But

in the infinite sense, I can't really know that.

Ram: In a way these communication classes seem a little like the tail wagging the dog. I'm not criticizing it, but have you thought about why you communicate violently? It seems strange to call it a skill "I" have always wanted to "learn" because it seems to me that the problem is that when you are not in a state of love you are going to communicate violently. Maybe using this technique puts you into a loving state? When you are in a state of love there is no need for a technique. The words come out soaked in love. So the real non-violent communication is the understanding that you are whole and complete, therefore have nothing to gain or lose by communicating - so you just communicate your wholeness and completeness - okay, call it love.

Lynn: And I can see that I have an old habitual way of thinking that life is about continually "changing" and "getting better." I don't think I subscribe to it as much as I used to, but it's still there. It's a way of clinging, from fear, I guess, to an idea that things can get better... how I think I want it to be. I do want things to change... starvation, cruelty, violence in the world... but it seems like a presumptuous attitude, doesn't it? I don't like thinking that I might be run by the idea of "change is better," but I can see in my attitude that I do have an expectation of "progress" and that others should also "change for the better." So thanks for pointing it out again.

Ram: This is an important point, so I'll say some more. When you say that you or the world should be different, you are only expressing dissatisfaction. And what is implied, I think, is that your determination that things are not satisfactory is real. But is it? What is it based on? Scripture says that this is a blissful non-dual reality and that you are whole and complete. Your epiphanies show that everything is fine with both you and the world, but you still want it different. Why?

I think the desire for a better world is a good desire. But it should only remain a desire because the world is not "better" for a very good reason. If it were "better" it would still be worse than it could be, so it would have to get "better" again. And this sort of thinking never stops.

So I prefer to believe that the misery in the world is very necessary and needs to stay. Why? Because people only look at themselves when they suffer. When things are "better" they just wallow in enjoyment and set themselves up for disappointment. Things were very much "better" in the USA a couple of years ago, now we have 9/11 and a recession. So "better" is no longer better. But strangely, "worse" (three thousand dead) is proving to be "better." We are now setting out to rid the world of people who think violence is the way to solve problems. "Better" is good and "worse" is good.

Ram (from previous email): That the quantity of negative *vasanas* is unknown makes it particularly difficult to sustain a program of purification. I meet quite a few persons who have been on the path for twenty to thirty years who have simply given up trying to change because no matter how much they transform or overcome there is always more coming up from within.

Lynn: Yes, I can see that too... I can see with my communication class, I have a choice... I can do it or not. I enjoy it because it is stimulating... I feel satisfaction in learning... so maybe I'm doing it for pleasure.

Ram: This is one of the reasons I like you, this love of learning.

Furthermore, the "princess and the pea" syndrome is always operational; the subtler and purer you get the more subtle the negativities become. Vedanta says that *antah karana shuddhi*, the purification of the mind, is always plagued with conflict because the mind is by nature dualistic.

Lynn: So there will be endless propositions of the mind about what to do or change and the self will be run around by these expectations... unless the mind is educated by self-knowledge?

Ram: Yes, absolutely. It is like your house. You can see it as something which always needs fixing and be down on it or you can see it as a warm, comfy home and enjoy it.

Lynn: When I first read this *satsang*, I thought that you were responding to my letter about starting to the classes because I felt I "needed to"... and maybe you were. I thought you were saying that you thought I shouldn't do them... and I guess I withdrew a bit... and then you wrote that you're glad I'm doing it... so I guess you were just wanting to elucidate the workings of this action?

Ram: I almost never say that a person shouldn't do what they want. I'm into encouraging a person to look at why they want what they want. If they get what they want, it may be a good thing. Or not. If they don't get what they want, that may be beneficial. Or not. So it is never about what you do or you don't do, unless you are doing something obviously stupid and detrimental, like stealing or smoking. In general I try to encourage people to do these self-help programs.

~ Much love to you, Ram