

Blame the Gunas, Not Your Mom and Pop

Ram (James Swartz)

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Ram: Dear Charles, I was impressed with your eloquent, logical, patient, firm and kind letter to Edward. I think you hit the nail on the head when you talked about the emotional nature of his work. I also found your criticism of Marxist language interesting. I've often felt that the English liberal intelligentsia was doing itself a serious disservice by hanging onto that dated terminology. I think that not only is the language of the left caught up in Victorian concepts, but the language of the psychological world is also rooted in late Victorian concepts. Freud discovered the unconscious, and a therapy developed that is based almost solely on the idea that suffering comes from repression. Remove the repression and you're okay. Or in the language of the sixties, if it feels good do it.

It does feel good to release pent-up emotion. You get your peak experience, your breakthrough and this is transformational. True, the language was updated by the Americans in the sixties and seventies, but the concepts were not. I wouldn't argue against therapy, as you know, but as it is conceived in the West it suffers from an inability to look beyond symptoms into root causes. It is almost wholly centered on the conscious experience of the ego, and has become a feel-good therapy. But this feel-good state is like the transitory subjective change that follows a shot of heroin or a vaginal orgasm. The obstacle, the repression, returns and one is confronted with the same sense of unease again, owing to the nature of the unconscious – which doesn't care if you're a hard-core addict or a nice, middle-class therapist.

Quite unconnected to this argument with Edward, on my morning walks around the mountain I've been thinking about the idea of therapy in light of Vedic ideas of the nature of the mind, and it seems to me that the Vedic idea of the *gunas*, the qualities of mind, is a much more useful model for dealing with emotional energy – because it depersonalizes the whole business. Vedic psychology explains emotional dis-ease with reference to desire and the qualities inherent in the mind. When you don't get what you want (or don't want – this takes care of fear) or can't stand waiting for it to happen (or not to happen), you have an emotional reaction. If your mind is essentially *tamasic*, dull, you will become depressed. If your mind is essentially *rajasic*, active, you will become angry.

The way you deal with emotion in the Vedic system has nothing to do with releasing repressed energy (since it just comes back later and you develop a *vasana* for releasing repressed energy, i.e. you get stuck on your therapy, but has everything to do with (1) looking into why you want what you want – which opens one up to understand the psychology of the ego – and (2) understanding the mechanism that causes wants (and fears) to materialize (or not), (3) assuming a proven attitude (*karma yoga*) that effectively purges the unconscious of the causes of emotional dis-ease. This understanding is completely impersonal, applying to everyone at every level.

The *Veda* does not counsel analysis of the past, the childhood, for example. Leave mom and pop and the society out of it, it says. Follow *dharma* and you will be psychologically healthy. The West, which refuses to address desire, says get what you want and you will be happy – which we know is patently untrue. Buddha's whole spiritual system was based on the idea that desire was the cause of suffering. Desire

is universal and the solution, follow *dharma*, is also universal. In the West everything is personal. You are thought to be this specific person, born into a specific environment, nothing more than the sum of your personal experiences. Your mom did this, your dad did that, you lost your brother in the war and therefore you are a flawed human being. But the *Veda* says that you are pure and perfect from the get-go, but if you can't see that – if you take yourself to be a flawed person – you can correct yourself by following a certain way of life – a life based on principle and the recognition of universal values, not on passion. The Buddha too came up with a certain lifestyle: the Eightfold Path. What's behind the prescription – following *dharma* – is the impersonal world of reality, the self, some call it God. And unless you've been opened to that and understood it for what it is (quite apart from the conceptual, relative you), you remain imprisoned in your relative self. As far as I know, there is virtually no discussion in the Western psychological world about desire. The reason, I think is because the ego is just one's fears and desires. You attack desire and you attack ego. This can't be, because who will be left if the ego is dismissed? No more greedy consumers, no more therapy, no more life as we know it.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* it says, "Let not the wise unsettle the minds of the ignorant." I generally don't do things I will regret and almost never regret the things I do, but I did have a twinge of regret for sending that letter to Edward without taking care to see that he couldn't take it personally. I should have known from his attack on you that he did not really grasp the idea of the non-conceptual, experiential, universal self. Although he must have experienced the absolute, not only in his therapeutic work but in his personal life insofar as he lives very intensely from what I can gather, he seems not to have recognized what it is. I can only speculate on the reason, but I've found that when you are focusing on releasing pain and enjoying the subsequent bliss you are not generally in a dispassionate state of mind. The intellect is submerged in the experience of bliss, is not alert enough to understand where the bliss comes from and follow it to its source. I do remember one statement he made in the letter to me that made me realize that he hadn't recognized the non-conceptual. He said that I was arguing for a deeper awareness (which is true from one point of view), but I could tell that he thought that that awareness was something that might belong to an ego. Of course we know that it doesn't. It is the nature of the self. No matter how deep one's ego consciousness is, it is always shallow and personal – and existentially unsatisfactory. This was the idea behind my argument that therapy, as it is conceived in the West, is just another prison, based on what might be called the myth of freedom.

Anyway, it was very good to get your letter which was more or less a summary of many years of inquiry and, as far as I can see, right on the money. I admire the persistent and straightforward way you've followed your path. At some level I was sure that this was how it was for you, but it was good to see it in black and white. I've always felt that enlightenment is only half a loaf if one can't express it clearly.

As for me, I've been excellent. I've pretty much come to the end of my spiritual life, I think. India no longer fascinates and attracts me, although I quite enjoy it. I agree with you about the first chapter of my book, but I don't feel inclined to rewrite it or to write anything else.

The whole thing should be revamped. It was really a labor of love, one constrained by lack of funds and flagging energy. There was a woman, a successful publisher, who knew how to make it into a book that would sell in the bookstores and when she outlined the whole process and the expense I decided to just cobble it together on

my own and let it be. And I've come to a plateau with my art. It's as good as it's going to get for now and although I dabble in it a couple of hours a day, the big obsession is finished. People really like it, and perhaps I'll try to peddle it when I get to the States. Or not.

Most of the people I've been working with spiritually over the years no longer need assistance, and I've been uninclined to take on anybody else, although another fellow popped into my energy bubble the other day and I realized that the Lord was not letting me off the hook so easily. I feel like I've achieved everything I've been sent to earth to achieve and am sunk in an ever-deepening spirit of dispassion and renunciation. I look at these things that I've done, that are supposed to represent me, and they barely register in my consciousness, as if they belonged to someone from a different world. For a long time, over thirty years, I've felt that the only truly interesting event to come was death, but that was never an issue until recently. I can now see the end, how it is shaping everything that is happening in the present, and I welcome it.

~ Love, Ram