

You Can't Be in the Now, You Are the Now

Ram (James Swartz)

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Ram: Dear Patricia, it sounds like you enjoyed an idyllic vacation, both the innocent love of nature bits and the not-so-innocent nature of love bits. Good on you, as the Aussies say. I'm not the one to chastise you for "getting a bit lax," because "lax" is good – up to a point.

As long as you're wondering if you should get more "disciplined" you probably shouldn't, because if there is a doubt about it you're probably just fine as you are. When you really cross over the line into serious spiritual sloth you will know it. There is nothing unspiritual about having a good time, indulging your senses a bit. In fact I think it is absolutely necessary to get off the path a bit here and there. My *guru* used to say that we should "sin intelligently." The Buddha called his path "*madhyamika*," which means "middle way," the idea being that going too far in either the direction of indulgence or discipline is counterproductive.

Concerning your statement, "It's hard to know exactly how present I am at the moment," here are my thoughts. Who is this "I" that is supposed to be present? It is an imaginary I. Why? Because you are always present. That you are aware of these apparently conflicting thoughts in your mind means that you are already present. This whole teaching about "being present" is bogus. The mind is always subject to fluctuation – moving from *rajas* to *tamas* to *sattva*

endlessly – hopping from the past to the future and back – so at what point during its fluctuations could it be considered present? And just when is the present? The present lasts a nanosecond or less and then is gone. Do you want to make your mind move off the present thought onto the upcoming thought every nanosecond? This would be quite a feat. And let's not forget that this only applies to the mind. Are you the mind? The mind may be you, but you are not the mind.

"Being present" is not a spiritual path. If you think you are not present it simply means you are identified with a mind that is obsessing about the future or locked in the past. Every movement of mind occurs in ever-present awareness, the self. I would think it would be more spiritually profitable to inquire into who wants to be more "present" and why. Can anything really be done to make you more present? On the level of the mind, maybe what you mean by a lack of presentness is just *rajas*, desire. When you want something you tend to feel frustrated in the present because the want puts the mind in the future.

The thing about awareness, which is what is always present, is that it doesn't fluctuate. There is no "more" or "less" as far as it is concerned. And if more awareness or presentness were the result of some action, maintaining it would involve continuing the actions that were producing it, and increasing it would involve increasingly more effort. To maintain or increase it would also involve an agent, somebody, and that somebody would be the ego – etc. So the question really isn't about what you can do to increase it, the question is how to understand what is occurring in awareness.

In this case, it seems to be a doubt about whether Patricia should bear down a bit more on her "spiritual" practice or not. If this is actually the issue then it probably

never hurts to pray and meditate, etc. but as far as doing is concerned, one always has to consider the results insofar as the doer, the ego, has limited energy and results are always subject to decay. Is the effort worth it? Does it deliver more happiness than not doing it?

Perhaps you will be benefited by thinking about what awareness actually is, since it is you and it is always present. If you can understand who you are you will see that you are eternally present. You cannot accomplish presentness. In fact you can't even entertain the thought that you are not present unless you are present. If you are somewhere else, how will you know what is going on here and now?

Think: Am I responsible for awareness? Or is it a given? If it is a given then all that is possible is to understand what it is - and appreciate that everything occurs in your presence.

Patricia: But it does seem to me that when I "try" it ultimately doesn't get me too far - seeing as there's nowhere to go anyway. But maybe that's an excuse and I should get more disciplined again.

Ram: I don't think it's an excuse. There is nowhere to go. You are absolutely fine as you are. You are not going to get better or worse.

Patricia: That sneaky ego might be having a field day, thinking it's got one over me and I haven't noticed...

Ram: I doubt it. You're at least as suspicious of it as it is sneaky.

Inquiry Is Going on All the Time

Patricia: ...or at least start to more consciously enquire "Who am I?" in my daily activity to see what comes up.

Ram: Inquiry is going on all the time with you, Patricia. It is really not a question of consciously thinking about who you are "in daily activity." Inquiry is natural to you. You have that kind of mind. Things happen and one tries to understand them. That is inquiry.

Patricia: I seem to have been just a little bit too interested in enjoying myself lately.

No Discipline Required

Ram: As opposed to what? This statement seems to have some religious thinking behind it - "Having fun is potentially sinful, must wear the hair shirt - get disciplined

- hand and feet over cobblestones to Lourdes," etc. Spiritual life should be enjoyable. I'm not a great fan of the "discipline" idea. If you are doing what you love, you will naturally be disciplined. When you make love you don't have to keep doing it over and over to be disciplined at it. You are disciplined because you love it. If you meditate or do any so-called "spiritual" practice it should be because you enjoy it.

Patricia: The positive side is that feeling extra relaxed and enjoying myself hasn't exactly felt unwelcome, even though I know it all comes and goes.

Ram: I think this is a good attitude. The mind is subject to the *gunas*. Life is meant to be enjoyed.

Patricia: As far as the situation with my room-mate goes... I felt very awkward around her when I got back and wished I could just be on my own. That lasted for a few days, though I didn't see her much over the weekend. And then, the day before yesterday (i.e. Sunday evening) I suddenly noticed that I was feeling different. I had been out to the Centre, and felt relaxed and okay around her when I got back. And I've pretty much felt that ever since. It's almost like I'm waiting for it to change... but not wanting to be pessimistic about the prospects at the same time.

Ram: The best thing with people is to be proactive, not just let things sit in the mind and hope they will go away. When you are feeling good, make a point of seeing that some of that goodness gets into them. Bring them a gift, do a favor, make some jokes, honestly inquire into their life, etc. In those kinds of situations, people want to be free of the negative thought - and they will be more likely to let it go if they see that it isn't an issue with you. For small things like that it isn't best to mention the problem directly, although once you get the person softened up, sympathetic to you, then you can apologize (even if you feel you are the aggrieved party) and steer the relationship into positive territory.

Patricia: I was thinking about it, and I suddenly had this feeling that you had something to do with it - that you had been praying for me about this situation or sending energy to it in some way. I don't know if I'm right - my impression may not be correct and you don't have to say whether you did or not, but I just thought I'd mention it anyway.

Ram: Well, sometimes discussing something with someone like me opens up a new way of seeing things and that can unblock you. Anyway, it will all work out favorably. You're on a good path. Keep it up.

~ Much love to you, Ram