

Can Psychotics Benefit from Vedanta?

Ram (James Swartz)

2003-02-19

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/1823>

Ram: Dear Cynthia, in regard to your question about whether or not Vedanta might be helpful for someone with serious psychological problems, the answer is no. Enlightenment is for people who are already reasonably settled in life, people who have learned how to live in this world successfully. To live well as a human being requires a certain degree of mastery of the mind, and Vedanta requires an even higher degree of self-mastery. A person who is incapable of keeping his or her mind calm and clear is incapable of even rudimentary spiritual practice, much less self-inquiry.

Because each case is unique, it is hard to make a blanket statement about psychologically unsound people, but in general these people need some kind of therapy. Unfortunately, the therapies that seem to work best in the short run are chemical. In my experience, talk therapy doesn't work with manic depressives. I had a good friend who was diagnosed manic depressive [bipolar] and even though he loved me very much he did not listen to what I had to say. His mind was so excessively dull or wildly active that he could not retain information, much less act on it.

All the Vedantic texts say that you need to have your life in order before you are even qualified for enlightenment. Yes, you may get "experiences of the self" (and my friend had experiences of "the white light" that would make any mystic drool with envy) but you will not be able to understand the significance of these experiences and apply the knowledge gained if the mind is disturbed.

Honestly, Cynthia, I am not capable of helping emotionally disturbed people. I can barely help normal people understand their spiritual duties, much less get them to work on themselves. I only deal with people who know what they want spiritually - healthy, normal people who are seriously trying to sort out the existential riddle. When I was younger and had more energy, I tried to help people with psychological problems, but it takes a tremendous commitment in time and energy, and has to go on for many years before you see lasting results. I am getting old and I am just not up to it any more. So please don't suggest that your friend get in touch with me. It will be a waste of her time. I don't know what to suggest, since she has been through both talk therapy and medication and her condition is still the same. Sometimes people just have to learn to cope as best they can with their illnesses. I'm sorry to disappoint you because I know how much you care for her. I know it sounds rather lame but probably the best we can do is to pray for her.

Anyway, things are very fine here. As you know, I'm off to India for the winter. My email will be the same as last year. Keep in touch.

~ Love, Ram