

Criticism and Self-Nature

Ram (James Swartz)

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James: Dear Karl, I reread your recent letter and my reply and expanded a few ideas a bit. I made one mistake in the previous email, which I corrected in this one. I know the negative emotions have gone, but it is good to think about things with the benefit of hindsight. I think you have probably learned the lesson that *Isvara* had in mind when it created this drama.

You can call me anything you like, but if you had seen me as I am these negative feelings would never have happened. The fact is that it is a great blessing to meet a wise person who has feet of clay, who is not masquerading behind a spiritual mask. If there is a lesson to be learned by all this, it is that the spiritual life is just a passing phase and that the sooner one grows out of it the better.

Karl: I love you so much, I am grateful for everything, but I am not a devotee who says “yes” and “amen” to everything. I have the right to question and discriminate. If everybody would do that, then stories like the Suddhananda scandal wouldn't happen. That is the first thing I learned from the scriptures: no blind faith in the teacher.

Ram: I know you are not a devotee. I don't have devotees. The last thing I want is a devotee. I am amazed to hear you say this because I say this all the time in public in front of many people. It goes to show that people only hear what they want to hear. Watch the videos on the qualifications of a teacher if you have a doubt. I have always said not to trust the teacher but to trust the scripture. I have always taken the piss out of myself. It disturbs people who want to project holiness and purity on me. I could be very rich and famous and powerful if I accepted that purity projection and played the role that is expected. But I refuse to. I prefer to be myself. I am not ashamed of who I am as a person. I do not want to be better or different. Remember how embarrassing it was for you years ago when Mary went around telling everyone you were enlightened? You hated it. People have a need to worship, and when they don't know the self that need gets projected onto spiritual figures. Only a fool accepts it.

Karl: Discrimination stands over all. I got confused by this contradiction and didn't approach you, because I wasn't allowed to question anything.

James: Who didn't allow you? This is nonsense, Karl. How about taking responsibility? There was nobody but you who allowed or disallowed anything. You are very good at blaming an imaginary “they” – the cruel, hard society, your controlling stepmother, the big mean critical *guru*, etc. – who made your life miserable.

It is true that discrimination is an important quality, but what is the basis of one's discrimination? Is it your interpretation of your own psychology? Or put it this way: Which I has the discrimination? Is this Karl's discrimination based on his likes and

dislikes? I would say your discrimination is very poor in this case because your criticisms don't hold up.

Discrimination is seeing things from the self's point of view. Your discrimination is firmly in the hands of your likes and dislikes. How do you justify your criticism of me with the fact that I recognized your spirituality and only praised you? I gave you an opportunity in life. So it is lack of discrimination on your part that led you to say that about me. Your statements do not fit the facts. The core *pratibandika* knot that was exposed by this recent drama that *Isvara* is unraveling for you lately disturbed your intellect and robbed your discrimination. Desire, then anger, then delusion, says the *Gita*. This principle operates in everyone.

You are no exception just because you know you are awareness. The basis of your statement is no different from a few others in the *satsang*. It is purely an irrational dislike based on the prevailing view in the sentimental spiritual world that any criticism or judgment is bad because it is duality or not loving. I say this because it is a good example of the downside of being sensitive and vulnerable. If a fair-minded person like me criticizes something, be assured that there is value in that criticism. Fear of criticism comes from low self-esteem. If the tough you listens it, you will gain a lot.

It is natural to react with anger to criticism. It seems like a violation of life's number-one value, non-injury, and often it is well-intentioned or not. But it is not good, because it builds up a suit of armor that becomes part of one's personality and makes responding to life problematic. And if you let that happen you can rest assured that you will somehow become critical in the process. You will almost never see your critical tendency, but even if you are a loving person it will work out, often in ways so trivial and subtle and impersonal that you will never pick it up. This is particularly true with spiritual types who are subject to a lot of criticism from family and friends but who feel that it is not right to be angry and fight. So they will suppress it and it will leak out in ways that are acceptable to maintaining their self-image.

But you needn't develop defensiveness and become cold and hard and indifferent to immunize yourself from criticism. You can protect yourself with understanding. I am sometimes criticized. Before I react I think about the issue. Is it true? If it is not true, I understand that the person is projecting a dislike and that I am the hook on which they need to hang it. Then I understand that projection is unconscious. You do not project when you are present and alert, because you can actually see what the truth is. This is why Vedanta encourages the cultivation of *sattva*.

If you are *sattvic*, even if what you see is unpalatable you will not react. You will respond but your response will be tempered with understanding/love. You will not react, because you will consider the source, i.e. understand that the projection was *Isvara*, the unconscious, outpicturing and that the person, the conscious being, was not in control. There is a statement attributed to Christ that addresses this issue: hate the sin, not the sinner. This means that the *samskara* is responsible, not the person. The person is the self under the spell of self-ignorance. Ignorance is not something you can do anything about until you know what ignorance is. So nobody is to blame, assuming we are dealing with people of good will. There are some demons who consciously injure people, but these need not concern us.

In any case you won't attack back. You won't tell the truth. Telling the truth to a lie is a lie. I usually just let the judgments slide. Sometimes I use humor to point the

criticism out to show the person that I do not have a problem with it. If the projection is very angry (*rajasic*) and the person is firmly in thrall to the energy, I will either walk away or attack back. If I attack I will not let my intellect be influenced by the anger. I will have thought out all arguments beforehand based on the facts of our relationship and I will try to present them in such a way that the person looks at his or her self.

Karl: I couldn't approach you, because I didn't feel comfortable to show my weak spots. The *vasana* program was running the show because I never was allowed to be weak in life.

James: Here is the same story. Who didn't allow you, Karl? You didn't allow you. You are not a victim of life. And why would you want to be weak anyway? This sounds very much like self-pity to me.

By the way, I knew your weak spots all along. I never thought you were only a tough bastard inside. You just couldn't tell what I saw, because you saw your idea of me. I was there all along, very quiet, so quiet you had no idea you were being observed from within.

Also, everyone who comes to me is weak in some way. I show weak people how to be strong by giving them self-knowledge.

You give the impression that you are seeing clearly now, apart from your *vasanas*. But to quote you above, the *vasana* program (is still) running the show. It is true recent events exposed some *vasanas* that you had not hitherto acknowledged, but you are definitely seeing me through a *vasana* screen now. You think your unconscious is clear? It will keep projecting for a long time. There is a lot more to the *vasana* story than you think. You need to stay eternally vigilant and catch these projections as they arise and lay them to rest before they create *karma*.

Karl: I was extremely pure my whole childhood, connected with my environment. I could feel everything. But I had no way to root myself, to protect myself from all the bad energies or a way to deal with an oversensitive personality. I wanted peace, but I found myself in a world full of cruelty. Everybody told me to "man up" in my childhood, and so did you. Everybody in the family and society told me not to be like this or like that, as if being sensitive is a disease. I felt love for bugs and cried when somebody stepped on them and pain when a tree was cut down.

How can a human being live in this society like this? Nobody understood me. Everybody was tough. To protect myself I put on a steel jacket and pretended to be strong to get the world to respect me. I never was strong. I was always vulnerable. I tried so hard to become strong, but it was all a fake because my real human nature, my *svadharma* – my sensitive personality – was suppressed.

James: The truth is that your mind was *sattvic*, *rajasic* and *tamasic* as a child – as it is today. Your statement that your toughness was fake is no more true than the statement that your real nature is sweet and vulnerable. The toughness is *Isvara* and the sweetness is *Isvara*. Embrace them both and be happy. Don't run from toughness and run toward sweetness.

This is a very common story. It applies to nearly everyone in the spiritual world and most everyone else. I think you are romanticizing *sattva*, making a nice story about it to glorify yourself in some way or to get sympathy.

I think it would be better to give up on this sensitive inner child business, discover your inner adult and make a story about that if you have to make stories. Identify with a particular *guna* if you like, but be fair about it.

Karl: Now life is holding up a mirror. It's time to embrace the female side, allowing the sensitive side to be. I found my real *svadharma*, my true nature. But my relative *svadharma* as an individual was violated for a long time. I can see the core program. I can see the harm the *vasanas* did to this little person. It's all a great purification process.

James: I think you are just sentimental and romantic, Karl. This female side is not your relative *svadharma*. The hard male side is as much your *svadharma*. Look at it from *Isvara's* point of view. Your *jiva* is a little confused. You are neither a man or a woman. Maleness and femaleness are total duality. Why not accept the fact that is okay to be tough and embrace it? Be tough when it is called for and vulnerable when it is appropriate.

It was all *Isvara* doing it all along. *Isvara* made you tough because you need to be tough in this world at times. It is a great blessing. Shankara says that a masculine temperament is necessary for *moksa*. It helped you realize who you really are.

But the real problem is identifying with the mind. The mind is tough at *Isvara's* behest and it is vulnerable at *Isvara's* behest. It is just *Isvara*. If you are the self you understand the upside of toughness and the downside of vulnerability.

Karl: Understanding is healing. Now I told you everything. And it was good to speak it out. No more pretending.

James: Yes, no need to hide. You can tell me anything. I am not what you think I am. We can Skype one day, but let's keep it as emails now if you want to continue. I want you to write it all down so I can point out the strengths and weaknesses of your arguments. You are not dispassionate about yourself. You think you are, but you aren't. And if you write it down and think about it before you say it, keeping in mind the self, you will probably see the truth and the untruth yourself.

Let's call me James from now on, okay? You do not know who Ram is. This way you cannot hide behind the *guru/disciple* idea. I am not a *guru*. You are not a disciple. These are just ideas. You are talking to a normal person. This communication difficulty is a *mithya* problem. The problem with *mithya*, Karl, is that it just does not go away even when you know you are the self. :-)

Here is an analysis of the whole cycle of emotions that come when *maya* casts its cloud over awareness:

The Separation

If I am limitless, adequate and complete, yet think of myself as limited, inadequate and incomplete, I am living a lie. Christianity has labeled this separated state “original sin.” It is original because it is the source of erroneous views about oneself, the world and God – the self. It is called “sin” because it misses the mark about who we really are. To miss the mark is to suffer.

Stage One: Guilt

The error of non-apprehension of the self is the mother of ego and the cause of a chain of negative states of mind, the first of which is guilt – feeling bad for making a mistake. Guilt, which is largely unconscious and a synonym for The Separation, torments us until we realize what we’re missing by living out of the light of the self. We would like to erase the mistake, but have in the interim subconsciously accumulated a great store of negative feelings, beliefs, ideas and experiences which continually roil and cloud the mind with reaction, attachment and delusion. Attached, reactive, deluded minds are incapable of inquiry.

We infer guilt by observing our self-loathing, anger, depression, inadequacy, failure, impotence, emptiness, longing, desire, arrogance and the constant feeling that things should be more-better-different.

Stage Two: Fear

The psychology of ego is infantile and may account for the religious view of humans as children of God. When a child breaks the rules he or she immediately fears punishment. But God, the self, being unconditional love, will not punish us for separating, but – here’s the rub – we believe it will. Perhaps fear is a reasonable reaction to The Separation because we have unwittingly removed our true support and protection in life. The longer we remain separate, the deeper the hidden reservoir of fear becomes. Unfortunately, the causal body is dynamic and fear oozes out, attaching itself in thousands of ways to various objects, both animate and inanimate, polluting our contact with the world.

Stage Three: Denial

The best way to live with fear – mutated guilt – is to repress it, push it down into the causal body, a phenomenon known in the psychological world as denial. However, what goes in must come out, so the repressed energy eventually erupts into the subtle body, creating intense extroverting waves which completely obscure the self, making inquiry quite impossible.

Stage Four: Projection

When guilt erupts, the subtle body is painfully conscious of it. To avoid taking responsibility, the ego quickly and automatically directs the pain to an object. It finds convenient scapegoats: the world, Mom and Pop, its childhood, the government, fate – and even God. The unconscious purpose of projection is to separate the ego from the sin of self-separation even though self-separation is not all bad from ego’s point of view, because it opens up the fertile field of victimhood – which makes it feel marginally better about itself.

Stage Five: Anger

Having successfully laid the blame on someone or something outside, the next logical step is: get angry at the object, usually a person, and attack. The need to project guilt is perhaps the major root of hatred and anger. Anger, obviously, is inimical to inquiry, because inquiry, instead of flowing inward toward the self, is completely wrapped up in projected objects.

By following ego's idea we seem to have solved the problem – but attack makes us feel guilty. So instead of doing away with our uncomfortable emotions we are right back where we started. And as if to make matters worse, the ego, who is no fool, has a vested interest in seeing that we believe in the reality of The Separation. As long as we believe we are separate, ego is in business because it is the belief that we are separate.

So when we take up a spiritual way of life and begin to practice inquiry we not only have to contend with ego's self-serving thought system but its predictably negative view of our desire to inquire.

Knowledge, not ego, does the work. Perhaps the biggest danger is allowing the ego to co-opt the inquiry by donning the guise of a sincere, humble seeker. Inquiry should facilitate ego-transcendence, disengage ego-identification and purify the subtle body to the degree that it lifts the mind into the plane of the self where the ego is no longer the subject, the experiencer, but becomes an object of awareness. Inquiry that fails to expose the ego and ego-generated thoughts and emotions won't lead to self-knowledge even if it produces extraordinary experiences.

If we define inquiry on the level of practice as purification of the thought- and feeling-waves in the subtle body, we have our work cut out for us. If we understand inquiry as the flow of attention toward the self, one can easily see how the subtle-body disturbance keeps us merely processing the effects of our spiritual ignorance instead of meditating on the self. Processing is an ego-driven activity, designed to keep ego firmly in control of thought processes, unlike inquiry, which should free thoughts and feelings from ego-manipulation and control. If inquiry is seen as the process of undoing the tight knots of the psyche, this convoluted psychological mess is what we have to work with.

Stage Six: Defense

As if dealing with the guilt/denial/projection/fear/attack cycle were not enough, a secondary complex develops: the attack/defense cycle. When you attack you need armor, a defensive posture, because of the fear of being attacked back. The more we defend ourselves the more we reinforce our guilt. Attack is projected fear, so defense is an attempt to protect against fear, but like all Separation-induced thoughts and feelings, it reinforces the precise *samskara* it is intended to relieve.

If the ultimate purpose of inquiry is to provide an environment conducive to self-knowledge, participation in ego's game is a waste of time because it teaches that the guilty, fearful ego is the self.