

Free-Floating Anxiety

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Mat: Dear James, I can't seem to purify the belief that has my solar plexus in knots. Usually, the *vasanas* will exhaust themselves after a while but this one is constantly "on." As the self it doesn't bother anything but I have experienced it releasing itself once, only for it to reappear quite rapidly. I believe it has to do with how "others" view "me," because as soon as I looked at my friend in the face fear arose and it closed up again. Even just the thought of judgment from others brings up fear. It's manageable and I don't identify with it but I want it purified. It's uncomfortable. The body can't breathe properly. Could you advise me on how to go about exploring this?

James: Hi, Mat. This is the big one, the king of all *vasanas*. We call it primordial, beginningless ignorance (*tamas*), or *maya*. A more user-friendly term is "free-floating anxiety." What it means is that because your self-knowledge is not firm there is a non-specific, unnamed, existential fear. Dread. It is sometimes called the fear of "being and becoming." The Christians call it "original sin." It is always present yet hidden in the causal body and it is looking for objects to attach to (*rajas*). It is related to "others," alright; it is the ultimate experience of duality, or "otherness." Not everyone experiences it directly like you do, although many do. In *samsaris* it works out in petty, mundane and indirect ways all day long, year after year. You will notice that it is called "beginningless" ignorance. The implied meaning of this phrase is that it is not endless. As you have experienced, it disappeared for a bit then reappeared, so you know that it is not real.

Unfortunately, there is no quick, easy fix, so you are going to have to somehow embrace it. By that I mean that it will be helpful to use it to motivate yourself to "practice knowledge." Obviously, the root of the problem is the "me" that "others" seem to be judging. In the first place, you should know that as long as that me associates with people it is going to be in a field of judgment. It is completely unreasonable to expect people not to judge that me. I suppose by "judge" you mean "don't like" Mat since people who like you do not make you feel uncomfortable.

The second thing you should know is that these people are under the spell of the same basic ignorance that afflicts you and that said ignorance requires that they project their dislikes on objects. So what they think about Mat has nothing to do with Mat unless he has done something to irritate them. I don't think this is the case because you say that "even the thought of judgment brings up that fear." In any case, if you have bad-vibed them or treated them in a less than loving fashion and they dislike you, the judgment is well-deserved, and you should take it as *prasad*. Well, you should take it as *prasad* even if it isn't. When a person projects dislike toward you, you should understand that they are just expressing a bad feeling they have toward themselves. Likes and dislikes are the way people negotiate their way through life, they are completely natural. If someone doesn't like "you," you should be happy because it lets you know right away who to avoid. It is total foolishness to want to be liked by people.

One of the biggest keys to success is intelligent avoidance of unpleasant objects. At the same time you should ask yourself if you have judgments about others. Of

course you do, so you can sympathize with them. This should make you relax in their presence. When somebody has a bad thought about me in my presence I resolve to get them to change it, not because I want to be liked by them but just to make them think. I don't acknowledge it, as that would set things off on the wrong foot. I make a point of being particularly loving toward them. I think, "That bastard, how dare he or she look at me this way," and I behave contrary to their projection. They are looking to have their view corroborated but I don't let that happen. Or they have power issues and need to feel superior, so when they pick up on your reaction - when they see that they have made you uncomfortable - it makes them feel big.

Another dimension to this inquiry is why you should feel bad when someone doesn't like you. And the answer may be because in some way you share their opinion. Their thought triggers a thought that invokes your own sense of inadequacy and smallness. Inquiry is required to remove this thought and the feeling that arises from it. The basic issue is *viragya*, lack of dispassion. You can't separate the thought that you are disliked from the feeling of dis-ease that it engenders. This is because your confidence in the knowledge that you are beautiful is not up to speed. So when this happens you should bring the knowledge to mind and/or alternatively enumerate your good qualities to yourself: "I'm not a murderer or a child molester. I'm a good person. I love God. I am dedicated to the truth. I am kind and intelligent, etc." In other words, you should apply the opposite thought.

All this basically boils down to one issue: why you don't love yourself as you are. If you loved yourself it would not make any difference what people think. If you can't accept the scripture's contention that you are beautiful and perfect then you have appreciate the fact that you had no choice in who you are, either as the self or as Mat. If you could have been different you would have been. You cannot change you. You can only understand and accept yourself as you are - warts and all, if there are any.

~ Much love, James