

The Poison of Desire

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James: Dear Alia, very nice to hear from you. What I am about to say may not be what you want to hear, but sometimes it is good to hear the truth. Think of it as tough love. It is my feeling that you still have work to do in this world before you seek enlightenment directly. Your mind has too much *rajas* for you to be successful with self-inquiry. *Rajas* is the worry that comes from low self-esteem that results in excessive activity – which in turn wears down the mind. This is the cause of chronic fatigue. The activities themselves are not the problem, because a person whose mind is calm can act dynamically without suffering stress. There is always some kind of psychological problem behind the activities of a *rajasic* person. However, if you do not understand your own psychology – or if you do not really take it seriously, which some spiritually-inclined individuals tend to do, because they say it is all only just “the mind” and “not the real me” – then simplifying your life should be your goal. You are working way too hard and are too attached to the results. Things in life come very easily when your mind is quiet. There is no reason to chase anything or do anything except daily duties. Ambition has no place in the spiritual world.

Self-inquiry only works when a person has a high value for renunciation. Evidently you still hold out hope that there is an external solution. Hope is a completely useless emotion. When you really hit bottom self-inquiry comes naturally. You have avoided hitting bottom with various coping strategies, but you cannot keep this up much longer. If you persist in this frantic and obsessive search for something outside you could easily end up like in a wheel chair in the nut house on medication, like Fiona.

Rajas is a nasty poison, Alia. If you do not come to terms with who you really are, you can get over the chronic fatigue and then go right back to the same pattern of need-driven activity. There is a famous *guru*, Adhyshanti, who ended up in bed from chronic fatigue, got over it and then went right back into the world and did the same dumb things again and – guess what? – ended up back in bed. Your website’s motto “Get Your Life Back” is definitely inspirational, but leaves the impression that you will be going back to the same old life – this time with renewed energy. A better motto would be “Move to a New Life.”

It takes a long time for the penny to drop for *rajasic* people. They are like dogs straining on a leash – as soon as you unhook them they run off like demons with stupid smiles on their faces and just do, do, do mindlessly until they are exhausted. *Rajas* is an insidious kind of vanity, driven by unconscious pain. You believe that the world is there to satisfy you and that you deserve to get what you want and you do not pay attention to what is going on around you or within you. Sometimes the person is so driven that his or her ostensible goal masks the actual goal. The real goal is often just movement. It is activity itself that is craved. And behind it is a sad truth. A person afflicted with the disease of *rajas* cannot stand to sit with his or her own mind. He or she does not know how to handle certain thoughts and feelings, and so distraction is needed. This is the *tamasic* aspect of this syndrome. *Maya* has two powers, concealment and projection. To hide from yourself, you project goals.

This kind of person really has no boundaries. He or she usually tends to be a helper, a rescuer. I think your business is about doing well by doing good. It all looks very

innocent to the people who are being helped, but it is not usually that innocent. It usually goes back to some childhood pattern that springs from some sort of neglect (*tamas*). The child wants love and if it is not forthcoming because the parent is too busy or incapable of love, he or she will develop a big love deficit. This will drive the person to seek it from others – usually anybody that is available. They will do anything for the other person whether or not it is sensible or in their best interests – because they are looking for the validation. When the person responds favorably, they feel loved. This seems like a very obvious thing, almost simple-minded and infantile – which it is – but it is usually the underlying psychology. You are still young enough and smart enough to see into your psychology, but if you let it keep driving you, it will drive you right back to the same point over and over. If you finally wake up to it in your fifties or sixties you may not have the energy and the will to confront it.

So unless you are ready to drop out and give up – which I think you are not – you need to change your lifestyle, take advantage of your obsessive nature and make the *karma yoga* attitude your obsession. In this way you will succeed. Consecrate your actions to God and act calmly and patiently. This will reduce your *rajas*. You have big desires and expectations – success, love, respect, etc. – that are keeping you tied to the wheel of *karma*. In our tradition one is meant to have a family and serve the society to get those *vasanas* worked out before one commits to self-inquiry. If you were really fed up and ready to walk away from it all, I could help you. But my days of psychological counseling are behind me. It takes a tremendous commitment to a person and can take years to work it out, and our *karmic* situations are very different. I really like you and would love to help you with self-inquiry, but what can I do if you are not ready?

Did it ever occur to you that things are so difficult because the world cannot give you love? A successful business, a loving partner, fulfilling others' expectations cannot make you love yourself. If you are not good enough now, you will never be good enough. All worldly accomplishments mean nothing to a person who does not love himself or herself.

It has to come from within. You have to see how beautiful you are – as God made you. If you look through society's eyes, you will not see what you truly are.

Rajas is a disease, a lack of ease that comes from lack of self-esteem. It is very hard to understand because the ego thinks it is loving itself by doing what it wants to do. But doing what you want is not always good for you. If you smoke, for example, you think you are doing yourself a favor because smoking temporarily calms the mind. But you are not doing yourself a favor. In the moment – the moment when it takes away your *rajas* – it just feels that way. If you are active from dawn till dusk you think you are accomplishing things and moving toward your goal, but the goal of a spiritual person is peace of mind. So you have to see if what you are doing is leading to peace. If it isn't, then adjustments are required. What you want from the world is not under your control, but what you want from yourself can be brought under your control. But to get the mind quiet, you have to be willing to let go of those thoughts and ideas that disturb it.

When your self-esteem is low, you become very sensitive and defensive and you don't really listen. When you hear something that brings pain you will say that it is not true, that the other person is cruel, that you already know that and that you have the situation under control. You will say that this is just old stuff working out and that it is a one-off. But the activity persists because the underlying psychology

and the mental activity that it generates has not been properly addressed.

To be successful in life you have to assimilate the meaning of the experiences that life sends your way. If you are generating experiences very rapidly by your actions, you need to be very calm in order to assimilate them. If you do not assimilate them they hide in the unconscious and subtly and unfavorably influence the direction of your life.

Slowing down physically is helpful because it gives you less to process, but it does not slow down the tendency of the mind to move off the thought that is occupying it at the moment before the meaning of the thought has been completely assimilated. A word that goes with this tendency is "ambition." Another is "greed." Not necessarily money-greed but greed for experience, excitement and distraction. A distracted mind does not really listen to itself or to what comes in from outside.

The following is a bit of an advanced course in *rajas* but you are very intelligent and I think it might be helpful.

Most of the people that come to me are pretty *sattvic*. But I get fair share of *rajasic* types too. And I was terribly *rajasic* when I was in my early twenties. I had an epiphany that spelled the end of *rajas* for me. So I know a lot about this problem.

Vedanta is an amazing means of knowledge. It is terribly powerful and can effect transformation in your life more or less effortlessly. But for knowledge to work its magic, it needs to be assimilated. The *sattvic* types make the requisite adjustments to their understanding quickly and reap the benefits because they actually listen to what is being said. But the *rajasic* types hear what I say and think they have understood the knowledge, but they do not assimilate it - or only partly digest it - because they are not really listening to my words, they are listening to their reaction to my words. A *rajasic* mind is very quick. It seems like it is intelligent because it "gets" things quickly, but "getting it" does not always understand. What passes for understanding is an interpretation of what it hears - according to its *vasanas*. Hearing is not listening.

Listening is the basic spiritual practice of Vedanta. Actions that flow from fully assimilated knowledge liberate. Those that flow from interpreted knowledge bind. When *rajas* dominates the mind, it jumps the gun. It takes the interpreted meaning to be the real meaning and misses the hidden meaning.

Reducing activities is called *karma sanyass* and it is good, but it does not take care of the underlying tendency of the mind to project. It fails to grasp the hidden meaning, *adristha phala*. For that you need to do just one thing at a time and "be there" totally in every moment. You need to be very careful and deliberate with every action until the mind enjoys the present and does not wander. It can take years to bring the mind to heel. I have a friend who owns a meditation center, and when I visit him I see all kinds of people walking around like zombies - even in the dead of winter! It looks so strange because I assume that if they are walking they are going somewhere. But they are not going anywhere. They are practicing mindfulness, trying to get their attention tied to the body. You see the *rajas* problem in sports as well because sports people are very goal-oriented people. In baseball and tennis, for example, the mind needs to be totally in sync with the body or the timing is off and the ball will be mis-hit or missed altogether.

When *rajasic* people first hear the truth they tend to become completely inspired. And instead of sitting still and letting things really sink in, they invariably try to do

something with it. You cannot do something with the truth. It is not there to be used to change or fix things. So these people set right out to “improve” and change their work in the world, to make their lives more successful. And it sort of works. But it does not really work, because the *rajas* itself is still there generating more desires and more activity.

Underlying this tendency is a peculiar kind of unintuitive knowledge. In fact it is not knowledge at all. It is a belief that it is here on earth that we are seeking. And the degree to which you believe that the world is there to satisfy you is the degree of *rajas* that you experience. Anyway, I have run on too long now, so I will sign off, Alia. I hope this has been useful. Let me know how you react.

~ Much love, James