Understanding fears

WHEN CERTAIN FEARS BECOME OVERWHELMING, THEY INCAPACITATE US AND RENDER US UNABLE TO TAKE EVEN A SLIGHTLY BOLD STEP FORWARD

by Swami Veda Bharati

Many of us are riddled with fears of every nature. The primary ones include fear of social failure, loss of name, fame and social standing, loss of affection and personal esteem in relationships and illness. We also fear suffering violence from others, suffering violence from nature, economic hardship, moral and spiritual failure (not being true to one's ideals) and finally death.

Many times one may direct these fears into self-destructive tendencies, an unconscious drive towards failure, or even suicide. It can be said safely that other fears stem from any or all of the above. This includes some of our fears of the unknown, fears we cannot quite identify.

When we experience any kind of fear we must first try to place it in one or the other of the above categories. Many of our fears are mixed bags from the above categories. We need to analyse all these and find spiritual antidotes for them.

When certain fears become overwhelming, they incapacitate us, and render us unable to take even a slightly bold step forward. They make us escape into ourselves, to the point of making us, in extreme cases, catatonic. Before we reach such an acute stage, we are advised to seek professional counselling from a psychologist or a psychiatrist. A psychologist helps us by way of analysing our problem. A psychiatrist determines whether the problem is of neural-hormonal origin that may be cured through medication.

In the field of psychological counselling, there are many systems and methods, from Freudian analysis to transactional analysis. These do not take questions of God and soul into account in trying to understand what has transpired in shaping a person's mind. The analysis is based on the lesser human urges.

Other Western psychologists have developed many different methods of psycho-spiritual counselling. By the phrase 'psycho-spiritual', we mean approaches, which do not look only at psychological distortions that our experiences generate but they take into account a deeper spiritual urge in the human being. It is the lack of fulfilment of these spiritual drives that makes us prone to psychological distortions.

Some of the most commonly practised fields of psycho-spiritual counselling are:

- The system developed by Carl Jung, a disciple of Freud who pulled away from his teacher and developed his own system of psycho-spiritual transformation
- Humanist psychology, a conglomeration of numerous free thinking schools, most popular in USA
- Transpersonal psychology firmly rooted in spiritual values about mind, also originated in USA.

Each one of these has a detailed theory and history but it is not our purpose to provide training into that here. All these have borrowed to a certain degree from Indian – Hindu-Vedic, Yoga, and Buddhist ideas – as well as from Sino-Zen traditions and have modified them in modern terminologies.

Then there are methods of spiritual counselling in which the priests of various religious denominations in the West are trained to advise those with marital and other family problems, illness, death, grief, based on the religious teachings. It is a normal practice in the West for the Christian or Jewish priest to visit inmates in prison and patients in hospital as well as the dying person or his/her family, irrespective of religion. The freedom to visit one's parishioner is common practice. I can walk into any hospital in America even at 2 am and say, "I am such and such person's priest" and I have free access. In India, the system is not organised or institutionalised – and, unlike in the Western countries, there is so far no formal training of the priest in the field of psychology, but the family guru often has such duties and privileges to render, even uninvited, psycho-spiritual counselling.

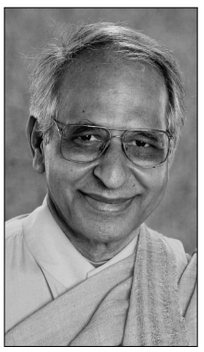
One is the first and the best counsellor to oneself.

This is a simplified paraphrasing of a verse from the Bhagavad Gita:

Uddhared aatmanaattmaanam
Naatmaanam ava-saadayet;
Atmaiva hy aatmano bandhur
Aatmaiva ripur aatmanah.

One should seek to raise oneself by oneself.
Let not one get oneself pressed down.
Self, alone, indeed is the friend of the self.
Self, alone, is the self's foe. BhG.6.5

Based on this, we shall proceed further with the thoughts on how we may counsel ourselves when fears of any kind threaten us. ☯



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