

# Understanding the Unconscious<sup>1</sup>

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To be objective is what I call intelligent living. I need to be objective in many areas. And it is not enough that I understand this in general, vaguely. I must look deeply into certain areas that need to be understood, ventilated, in order to live a life of objectivity. There is a world available for public appreciation, but I live in my own world of fears, anxieties and projections. Everybody is living in a bubble. We have to prick this bubble and breathe fresh air. Let us understand first the reason for this subjectivity; then we will look into what it takes to be objective.

Ignorance can be one factor involved in subjectivity. Generally, that is the factor we address when we teach Vedanta. We teach 'what is' so that you get clear knowledge with reference to certain realities. This is one thing. There is another factor, which is psychological and cannot be dismissed. Anyone who does not wish to address his or her psychological issues because they are very painful, dismisses the psychological factor as merely psychological. Therefore, we are going to address it.

## *Addressing the psychological factor*

When one is born, there is total helplessness. A human child is not as simple as a calf. A calf is born, it struggles and stands on its four legs. A human baby, perhaps, was very safe and secure only when it was not yet born. The baby's body, connected to the mother, having its own heart, happily moving and floating inside, was totally secure, perhaps for the only period of time in its entire life. It is born to start an independent life. What a start to an independent life! To live independently one must have everything that is necessary. At least one must be able to beg. The newborn baby cannot even beg, but it is starting an independent life. The baby was safe a minute before. It is unsafe now, helpless, totally, since the cord is already snapped. It has to start its journey, an independent journey. Nothing is known. The eyes are still closed, not yet open. It starts its life with absolute trust in the person whose hands pick it up. It is one hundred percent trust. Maybe, vaguely, while prenatal, the baby had heard the voice of the mother. It hears the same voice now. Perhaps there is a small disturbance inside if the voice is different, because the baby is given to somebody else. Only a small disturbance, for it cannot afford to question the person who nourishes it. It has to completely deliver itself to this person because it does not have the wherewithal to survive. As an organism

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it is programmed to survive; it has got that instinct. It is the only goal in the beginning. There is no other goal. If you were to ask the baby, "What is the goal of life?" and if it could answer, it would say, "I want to survive." It has no other goal. It is not going to say, "I want to become the president of this country." Survival is the organism's untold story. It is the story of every organism.

#### *A child's total trust*

The baby is helpless. It cannot even turn, much less does it have any resources to survive. It delivers itself to what I call trust. Do you know what kind of trust? It is total trust. You can have total trust only in someone who is all-knowing. You cannot place absolute trust in a person who is fallible, bound by time, bound by ageing, bound by disease and death. You cannot totally trust that person who can create, but can create only small things, and who also says he cannot do anything else; much less can you trust a person who can create but cannot maintain what he creates. Perhaps a person can create, can keep it going, but cannot withdraw, cannot stop like some people who do not know when to stop talking. Well, that person you cannot trust. One hundred percent trust in such a person is not possible. You can only trust that person who does not have any limitation whatsoever, in terms of knowledge and in terms of *śakti*, power. Whichever way you look at that person, he or she has to have total capacity; that person alone you can totally trust.

However, innocence on the part of the child makes total trust possible. Total trust is necessary for that baby. It cannot afford to distrust; it has got to trust and trust totally. Total trust means trust that the trusted person will nourish, will take care. That person becomes *Īśvara*, God, for that child and on the lap of that person, it relaxes; it goes to sleep. To the voice of the person who rocks the cradle, or on the moving lap, the child goes to sleep because it is safe. In its awareness there is safety because of total trust. Safety comes from trust.

#### *Gradual erosion of the child's total trust*

A mother is trustworthy until her mobile rings. Once upon a time the door was knocked upon. Once upon a time the telephone rang. That was all 'once upon a time'. Now the mobile rings and you are away from the child. The child feels deprived because there is inconsistency. You are not around all the time. I want you to understand this thoroughly. We cannot afford to be ignorant of a few things. We need to know.

Inconsistency causes disturbance to the child. In its awareness, the mother has to be around. As the baby grows, it also recognises the other familiar voice of a different frequency that was heard while it was pre-natal, sometimes in the morning and evening. Sometimes it is heard after ten days. Even that is a soothing experience and gives a sense of security. Well, this consistency on the part of a mother makes the child feel secure. She may not be a working mother. This 'working mother' is a new expression, as though the other mothers do not work. They work in the kitchen, go to the market; they work at

home. As long as the mother is not away in the child's awareness, the child feels secure. As long as the mother does not fall ill, the child is secure. As long as the mother does not share the attention with another baby, the child is secure. As long as the mother does not raise her voice, the child is secure. As long as the mother does not argue with the other frequency-voiced person, the child is secure.

You can understand now that as the child grows, the insecurity also grows. It begins to see the fallibility, the inconsistency. Where is the total trust? The total trust gets violated, gets eroded all the time.

In a joint family the child always had a lap, an empty lap. It sat on the empty lap of a grandmother or of an aunt. Now there are no empty laps; even if a lap is empty, there is a laptop on it. Where is there an empty lap? There is no empty lap available, so the child grows insecure, and remains insecure, constantly seeking the same safety, the same security that it had experienced before it was born.

This particular experience of the child, which remains throughout its life, is what is called the unconscious. Every adult has the responsibility to process this insecurity with which one cannot live. To live intelligently, to live objectively, one has to understand this unconscious very thoroughly. The unconscious interprets everything. It vitiates every experience. It distorts everything. Nothing is seen as it is. We need to become conscious of this unconscious. We will.

We have an equivalent word '*kaṣāya*' in Sanskrit for the term unconscious. *Kaṣāya* controls one's life; one has no control over it. The nature of *kaṣāya*, the unconscious, is such that you cannot have any say over it, inasmuch as it is something that you are not conscious of. Really speaking, our mechanical behavior comes from this unconscious. Scriptures, such as the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Upaniṣads*, also address the problems caused by the unconscious. The word '*ātmavān*' of the scriptures, means the one who has *ātmā*. Everybody has an *ātmā*. *Ātmā* here is the whole *kārya-karaṇa-saṅghāta*, our body-mind-sense complex. *Ātmavān* is the one who has a say over the ways of one's mind. It reveals our *ĠNstra*'s recognition that one needs to address one's *kaṣāya*. In fact the whole Hindu *samskṛti* culture recognises this as an issue to be addressed.

Let us understand this *kaṣāya*, the unconscious. The human child, the survivor, wants to have its gods always on its side. Obviously it does not want to lose them or their grace. The child expects the parents to be totally free from any form of limitation. Where is the possibility? Knowledge-wise, power-wise, health-wise, longevity-wise, consistency-wise, the mother has to be free from limitation, but the fact is that the mother has limitations. As for the father, he has many more, not fewer. Therefore, as the child grows, the total trust that the child enjoyed gets violated. The helplessness of the child continues. The two-year-old is helpless. It has discovered its own ego, but begins to discover more and more limitations in the parents without verbalising them. The non-verbal recognition of the limitations that violate trust is deadly. This is the pain that forms the unconscious. The child cannot afford to have this pain. It will die of pain. Therefore, in nature, let us call it 'nature' for the time being, there is a provision for the child to put this pain under the carpet, the carpet of the conscious mind. It is the flip side of the ego, the shadow part of oneself, which we call the unconscious.

### ***Impact of nursery school on the child***

In these days of competition, we send the children to school even before they are two years old. I saw in a nursery school, in Bhavnagar (Gujarat), a child of just eighteen months old. I asked for its mother but the mother was not there. The person who runs this school, and who happened to be my host, was very happy, joyous, that in her school there was a child of one and one half years. She said, "You know, Swamiji, this child is only eighteen months old." It was a complete and deadly violation of the child's trust. It was blatant. Already, there are some violations that a parent cannot avoid. The mother has to go here and there; in between there are some quarrels, there is some headache, there is some shouting and so on. This is a mortal's lot, which itself causes enough problems for the child. These are the normal problems of people. If a one and a half year old, a two-year old or a three-year old is sent to a school, separating it from the mother, it is the cause for neurosis.

In the awareness of the child there is no presence of the mother. In fact, the child feels

banished when it is sent to the school; the mother has vanished from its awareness. The child feels that the all-knowing, almighty mother, the trusted one, cannot commit a mistake. So, it concludes, "Something is wrong with me; that is why I am being sent away." People say that this neurosis is a contribution of the society. The sociologists talk about this. It is all ignorance, nothing but sheer ignorance. This contribution is only made by the parents. They have banished the child to the school.

The parents question, "How will they learn social etiquette, social skills?" What social skills? Do we not have social skills? Everybody has social skills. You can teach all about social skills in just two days; it does not take time. What we need are stable people. The parents also argue, "How will my child later compete in this competitive world if it does not go to nursery school? Further, these elementary schools will not give admission unless I have a nursery school certificate." That is another problem. We need to change this.

These nursery schools destroy the stability, the sanity of the future generation. The current generation itself comes out of that. Later on, we push these children to score ninety-seven percent, ninety-eight percent, ninety-nine percent and so on. The father scored just seventy percent; the mother scored seventy two percent. If we go by the genetic average, this child should score only seventy one percent. How will he or she score that ninety-nine? Genetically it is illogical. Therefore you constantly push the children until they have a break down. If they do not have a break down, you will not know what they will do later on.

Do not send the children to nursery school. You send the children to school from class one when the child is five year old. That is the correct thing to do.

### *A need for a re-look at nursery schools*

If one sends the child to a nursery school, then someone must accompany the child from home. Therefore, I say, let us have nursery schools where the mother also comes to the school.

"Swamiji, every mother cannot come."

"Then, why should she become a mother?"

"What Swamiji, she wants to be a mother."

"But then let her be a mother."

"No, she is a mother in the morning, a mother in the evening."

"What is she in between?"

"She is a working woman."

Even at the work place the feeling of a mother is always there. You cannot be a mother in the morning, a mother in the evening, and smother the mother in between. It is

impossible. You are a mother always, even without the child. However, if the child is without the mother, it is not right.

We have started two schools now in Chennai where mothers accompany the children. In fact, we should start such a school in every locality. Ask the children to come with their mothers and start one school. Do away with all the nursery schools once and for all or make them do what they ought to do. It is important that they do this because nobody has the right to destroy a life. All evidence says that it is not good for the child, for the whole society, for our culture, for our country. When someone goes against the evidence, then that person has not really understood.

I appeal now to the sanity of the people. We need to be very gentle to our children, sensitive to their needs and never be responsible for separating a child from its mother, from its gods. Never come in between a child and its gods in the name of schooling. In our culture, you cannot come between a husband and his wife. You cannot even walk in between them when they are talking to each other. You cannot walk in between a mother and a child. You cannot walk in between a teacher and his student. You should never come in between the child and its gods. This is very important.

### ***Vedic system of education***

In ancient times, we did not have this kind of a situation. When we read the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* we find that *Uddālaka*, the father of *Śvetaketu*, sent *Śvetaketu* to a *gurukulam* when he was twelve years old. We have to learn from the Veda; a child is sent to a *gurukulam* only after it is twelve years old. Until then the child has to learn at home. It means that the teenage years are spent in the *gurukulam*. It is a wonderful arrangement for the parents because they are free from the children's teenage problems. The teachers at the *gurukulam* will deal with the teenage problems. Until he or she is twelve years old, the child has to remain with the parents and study. It is a very sane arrangement.

After all, Madam Montessori's system came within the last few years. We can change it again within a few years. Ms. Montessori was a good woman. She thought she was contributing something to the growth of the child. She never knew that she was causing neurosis. This neurosis makes the child feel, "I am no good, that is why my mother sent me away." The worst thing is the mother telling me, "Swamiji, my child is different; she loves school. She comes back and tells me all about school and how she enjoyed it." The more the child loves school, the more is the pain underneath. The child seems to be happy because she wants to win her mother back. The more the child expresses its great admiration for the parents, the greater is the pain underneath. The unconscious gets loaded day after day. By the age of four and a half the unconscious build-up is over, and then there is a conscious build-up. The conscious build-up confirms the unconscious anyway. So, during one's entire life there is this feeling that 'nobody likes me, nobody wants me' and a sense of loneliness. In this crowded *jagat*, there is loneliness. Think this over. When you look up, there are stars. When you look around, there are people and

people. If there are no people, you have enough bugs at least. You do not lack company at any time. How can anybody be lonely? It is only a sense.

Besides this, the child also has an intrinsic sense of its own worth, its own goodness. So the child also feels that it is not understood. It thinks "I have not done anything wrong. Why should I be sent away? Why should I be banished, punished like this? It is not my mistake. And yet, because the parents are gods, "Maybe there is a mistake because I am banished. My parents cannot be wrong, but at the same time, I have not done anything wrong." Thus, the innocent child is really confused. The confusion remains during the entire lifetime of the person; it makes his or her reaction to every situation subjective instead of objective.

One projects things that are not there. Simple things are converted into problems. For instance, somebody, who is very dear to you was trying to sneeze, and that was exactly the time you asked the person, "Do you still like me?" The person was trying to sneeze and was making such contortions that his face looked as though he was frowning. Since his face was 'frowning', it was taken to be an answer, a negative answer. Even body language becomes a very big problem.

#### *Need for communication at home*

When there is no communication at home, people walk on eggshells. Parents tell me, "Swamiji, we never quarrel in the presence of our children." Do they really believe that the children do not know that they quarrel? Well, the children always sense that something has happened. Later, when the parents return laughing, the child sees something wrong in that extra laughter and walks on eggshells in the house. In the West, such a home is called dysfunctional. You can understand what a dysfunctional home is. Between the parents there is no understanding, no amity and there is no joy; so the child is always in a panic. This is before the child is four and a half years old and even after that the panic continues.

#### *Structured society was a blessing*

Long ago, the Indian mind was considered to be solid and secure because people lived in a highly structured and predictable society. If the father were a priest, the son also would be a priest. Therefore, there were no worries about what one would do in life. The son would be a priest. He may be a better priest, more informed, highly educated and a scholar. Thus, in the very profession itself excellence was accomplished. Because it was secure and structured, there was some sanity in the society. I do not want that kind of a social system to come back. I do not care for that, but I care for sanity and we cannot barter it away for anything. Why are we sacrificing emotional stability?

#### *Happiness is accepting oneself totally as a person*

A part of Indian society is the person who is happy just sitting under a tree. He does not have anything. This is something to tell the whole world. A person with a mere loin cloth

is blessed when he is happy and contented, *kaupīnavantaḥ khalu bhāgyavantaḥ*. It is not that all loin-clothed people are blessed, but there are people who are happy being what they are, even if they do not have anything. After all, what is it that one wants to accomplish? You need to accept yourself as a person totally. If you have total acceptance inside and outside, you have made it. Until then, you seek the approval of others, approval of the society. You want to prove yourself to be somebody. It is a constant struggle.

### *Stability in a structured society and home*

We say this is a progressive society. Honestly speaking, India had a sanity that everyone admired. Even today, there is a reality that we better recognise. I do not say it as a credit to us. What is that reality? Every one of the post-war independent countries, countries that became independent from the colonising countries, has had coups. Even in our neighbouring country, which was a part of this country, a country carved out of our country, there have been coups, one after another. Then, how come there has not been a single coup in India? Is there something wrong with us? Did not India have situations where there should have been a revolution? Were there no occasions for a coup? There were occasions, but then, a coup never took place. It is our culture; there is sanity and there is stability. I do not want to think that it is a left over of our past culture. It has not completely disappeared; it is still alive.

In a structured society there is stability. In a structured home there is stability. When the home is not structured, when what happens today and what will happen tomorrow are not very clear, the home becomes dysfunctional. The children are always in a panic.

### *The unconscious controls one's life*

Everyone has an unconscious. That is why a lot of things happen to us, like *krodha*, anger. It is not that we are consciously getting angry. Anger is considered to be a *mahāpāpmā*, the greatest enemy, sitting inside us. Anger is born of the unconscious.

With reference to desire, there is a certain choice involved. With anger, the choice is surrendered. That is the reason why one cannot decide to be angry. You cannot consciously be angry even if I plead to you. I can ask you to clap, "Please clap." You can either clap, or you need not clap, because freedom is literally in your hands. When I said, "Clap, come on, clap", some of you clapped, some of you did not clap and perhaps thought, like typical Indians, "Others will clap, why should I clap?" In this clapping, there is complete freedom. It is centred on your will. You can either do it or you need not do it. Yet, when I tell you, "Be angry for half a minute", it is different. Not being angry is one thing, but being incapable of being angry is quite another. Not doing *adharma* is one thing, but being incapable of doing *adharma* is quite another. It is entirely a different level of one's growth. Are you incapable of being angry just for half a minute? Well, one does get angry but not consciously, which amounts to saying that one gets angry unconsciously.

"Swamiji, it is not that unconsciously I get angry. There is always somebody that makes me angry." No, it is the unconscious. If somebody can make you angry, it is due to the unconscious. Nobody is capable of making you angry. You have given yourself to somebody for him or her to make you angry; this is the unconscious. It means that you live in a world of your own projection. There is no person or anything in the world that can make you angry. Anger is a symptom. It is an outcome and an expression of the pain that is there in the unconscious. Therefore, the unconscious is a child frozen in time.

Everyone has a child in himself or herself. The child has something beautiful; it has innocence, it has freshness. It gives you those curious looks, asks curious questions, the what, why, how and so on. They always have the same freshness whether they come from the child outside, the child within or from the adult.

If the adult ego and the child are one and the same, integrated, then one always looks at things afresh, always questions, always wants to know. We need that child, its freshness. Even now you have that. Yet, when anger takes over, jealousy takes over, hatred takes over, one feels possessed.

### ***Processing the unconscious***

*Arjuna* asked the question, "Why does one do things even when one does not want to?" It is an old question, nothing new. I have told you that the reason for this is the unconscious, the inner child. One's life is controlled by the unconscious, so it has to be ventilated, to be brought out, to be expressed. In life it is expressing itself anyway, without your knowledge. If you do not have an insight into this, it will continue to

express throughout your life. If you have knowledge, you can process the whole matter. You can welcome your fears; you can welcome your anxieties. Since you have the knowledge of what is going on, you can understand; you have the space provided by that knowledge. Knowledge is the only saving grace.

### *One-step and two-step response*

The inner space is provided by a certain clarity and understanding of all that has happened to me. It gives me a beautiful frame of mind to deal with myself, and also, others. Not only have things happened to me, things have happened to others too. A person behaves in a particular way because there is a background. I recognise the person's background in that behaviour. This recognition gives me space, so I will not immediately react to that person. This is what I call a two-step response to the world. A one-step response is, "How can you say that?" "How you can ever say that?" How dare you say that?" It is a mechanical response.

With a two-step response, you say, "Oh, there is a background behind the person's remark." You have the space inside for that. You recognise that there is a background for his or her statement; otherwise this statement would be unacceptable. It is unbecoming of the person. You understand that there is something behind the person's behaviour, and you respond to the person, not the behaviour. Thus, you make a two-step response.

A two-step response gives you that inner leisure, the inner space to deal with people of different backgrounds without being ruffled, without being taken for a ride. You can just step back and look at them kindly. Here is where kindness comes, compassion comes and understanding comes. If everyone had this two-step response then everybody would be saintly. All saintliness lies just one step away. Everybody has this saintliness one step away. To respond to the world consciously, you first need to respond to your own issues. You need to have the space to welcome your anger, your fear.

### *Managing the anger*

"Swamiji, this seems to be something different. We are always told to control our anger." If you control your anger, a few days later, you will have a *tsunami*. We do not control anger; we control the expression of anger. Please understand the difference. By not expressing your anger, you do not victimise your children; you do not victimise your spouse. Marriage does not mean having a sparring partner. You do not victimise anyone. 'Control your anger' is a loose statement. You cannot control anger, because anger does not seek your permission to come. It does not ask, "May I come? I have been waiting for some time. May I come now?"

There is so much ignorance about anger that it has become a moneymaking topic. At some workshops on 'how to control anger', they say, "Whenever you are angry, think of this or of that. Divert yourself from anger." If you divert your anger you will develop diverticulitis! Where will the anger go? You only control the expression of your anger. You can use your will for this, that too with the help of people. Intelligent living is to seek help when you need help. Therefore, if you can use your will with some help, you can avoid victimising anyone. This is called *dama*; *dama* means *bāhyendriya-nigraha*,

control of the external organs. You do not victimise anyone, but since anger is inside you, smoke will come out of your ears.

To avoid that, you write the anger out. Writing the anger out means getting rid of anger. You handle your own unconscious intelligently; you handle yourself intelligently. You cannot be ignorant about this.

When a New Year begins, you make a vow, "I am going to write a diary." Recently<sup>2</sup> you might have made one. Please check the diary now; check all the diaries from 1999 onwards at least. You may have entries on the first three pages. The rest will be blank and it may have been used as a scrapbook. Such is its fate. So, do not make these unintelligent vows. Why do you make them? Be intelligent. You know that you are not going to write a diary, so, why do you make the vow? In the same way, never say, "Hereafter, I am not going to get angry." It is wrong. You say, "I welcome anger, but I am not going to victimise anyone. I will not victimise my own children. I am not going to victimise my spouse. I am not going to victimise my in-laws, or anyone; I am not going to victimise myself either." It is clean as a whistle. It is not correct to victimise oneself either. We need to be intelligent. We need to handle this intelligently.

### *Welcome the anger*

You welcome anger. When it comes, you do not victimise anyone, but you do not reject the anger either. It is easier with some help. You can help yourself and you can ask your own family for help, and thus convert a dysfunctional home into a functional one. Make it functional by telling everybody, "In this house, hereafter, nobody is going to victimise anyone because of his or her anger." It means that when you are angry, you say, "I am angry now, I will talk to you later." Tell the others also, "When you are angry, say that you will talk later." Empower them by saying, "Whenever I am angry, please remind me that I am angry, so that I will not victimise others." Tell this to your children; they will remind you before you get anywhere near anger. They know. "Dad, you are somewhere near getting angry." They know; they can remind you. They also cannot victimise anyone. Make the home functional. You cannot hand over a better inheritance to your children than an honest home, a clean home where there is understanding. The growth, self-growth is in the home. What kind of a home is it where the self is crippled? What kind of a home is it where, the children scamper to their own rooms or wherever they can hide themselves, because father is coming?" The 'father's coming' is like a warning, like a tiger's coming. Except the dog, everybody goes inside. There are some people from whom even the dogs go away. It is not right. This is not intelligent living. We need to be intelligent. I say, we need to be intelligent.

The recognition of an unconscious is a breakthrough. Therefore you do not blame yourself. No child is responsible for all that has happened. It is absolutely innocent. It

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<sup>2</sup> This lecture-series was held in January, 2005.

does not mean, however, that the parents are to blame. They have their own unconscious to deal with. There is no need to blame anyone; if they had cared a little more, they would have done much better, but they did not know. The result is that you have pain and anger is the outcome. With this understanding, you can create a home, a functional home, without traces of the old problems. There is dialogue; there is fairness. Even a small hut becomes heaven when there is dialogue, when there is understanding. You can be honest only when there is no shame. You need not be ashamed of anger because you understand that it is not wrong; that it is the expression of the unconscious. This is how you change.