

Regret, Remorse and Guilty conscience

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Synopsis:

Regret, remorse and guilt are negative conscious and emotional reactions to personal past acts and behaviors. These arise in a person, as s/he grieves for the past mistakes. These three express the same negative emotion, in different hues, varying by the degree of intensity of the emotion felt by the individual.

Knowing the mistakes and correcting them is an expected human behavior. However, instead of learning from the mistakes, if one broods over the mistakes, then s/he could develop deeper negative feelings and end up in self-pity. These negative emotions are detrimental to the spiritual growth and prevent an individual to live a happy and balanced life. An effort was made in this article to discuss how these negative emotions arise in a person and how a sadhaka of PAM can handle these.

Article:

Major portion of an individual's life is lived primarily in the emotive or vital plane. The emotive plane is interplay of complex events that unfold as a result of actions and reactions with near and dear, relatives, friends, colleagues and even strangers. Depending on an individual's current state of consciousness, these events leave impressions, which would trigger various emotional experiences. Regret, Remorse and Guilt are resultant of such emotional experiences, when an individual feels the act that he committed or omitted is blameworthy and is not in alignment with his moral standards. These internalized moral standards were a result of his conditioned mind, due to the parental upbringing; learning obtained from peers, teachers, friends, associates and many such others; traditional values imparted through the life; knowledge gained through scriptural readings or recitations; and perhaps due to many unknown unreal projections and due to samskaras carried over from past lives.

Regret can be defined as a negative conscious and emotional reaction to personal past acts and behaviors. Whereas, remorse is a more direct and emotional form of regret over a past action that is considered by society to be hurtful, shameful, or violent. Unlike regret, in case of

remorse the individual has a strong desire for apology to others rather than an internal reflection on one's actions, and may express it (sincerely or not) in order to reduce the punishment one receives[1].

Few examples of regrettable and remorseful actions could be;

- Due to wasting time, gotten bad grades, resulting in remarks from teachers and parents
- Causing grief to others due to ones comments or actions
- Wrong actions have caused loss in business, hurting other partners
- In a moment of a carnal desire, engaged in vicarious pleasures
- Being driven by the animal within and deriving pleasure from impulsive tendencies and urges

- Missing to do sadhana per the regular schedule
- Not adhering to the Master's commandments
- Repeating the mistakes for which one has already sought forgiveness during prayer
- Our attitudes or feelings hurting others, especially elders and senior practicans of the system
- Being driven by the spiritual ahankar, due to one-upmanship
- Belittling co-travelers in the spiritual path
- Being abusive of fellow seekers, all in the name of training them, while actually enjoying doing it
- Have not followed the guidance of the trainer in practicing the spiritual path
- Actions done without heart full of love

- Committed a grave mistake breaking the principles set by the beloved Guru
- Disrupted the Master's work
- Etc.

The list is unending and these examples are only shown to illustrate few events ranging from mundane to spiritual. In all these acts and many such others, the act was performed only to be realized later that one has committed a mistake. The act was typically performed without clear cognizance of the due result. This realization of the lapse in his conduct typically comes in two ways. One way is the aspirant realizes by himself subsequent to the act based on his Viveka, while the other way of realizing the mistake is through some other person pointing out this lapse. Until certain amount of Viveka dawns to an individual, to perceive a mistake on his or her own doesn't happen. In either of the cases, depending on an individual state of mind, he or she will perceive these acts as mistakes and will feel a strong need to grieve about them. At this stage the individual is regretting and reflecting internally on the mistake

committed. In case of a remorse prone individual, the primary concern is to avoid the punishment that might result from the mistake, by offering an apology to others and other such means, as a way out of the lapse. The corrective mechanism is more towards external means and less of an internal reflection. It would be hard to differentiate between regret and remorse, as an individual typically tries to wiggle out of his mistake through both external attitude and internal corrective mechanism. It might be possible that, for a sadhaka who is seeking mastery over his self, though initially he might be more concerned about what others might think about his mistake; as the person progresses in a spiritual path, the concern would be more of an internal reflection on how not to repeat it.

For a sadhaka of Pranahuti Aided Meditation, the prescription to get out of regret and remorse is clearly stated in the tenth commandment of our loving Master, “At bed time, feeling the presence of God, repent for the wrongs committed unknowingly. Beg forgiveness in a supplicant mood, resolving not to allow the repetition of the same”[2]. Master goes on to state that, a sadhaka should seek forgiveness for the mistakes committed and

then take a resolve not to allow the repetition of the same. The individual should also seek forgiveness from those who were hurt by our actions. This is the way out of regret and remorse in our system, which is to accept our mistake and make a firm resolve to not repeat it! This sincere act on the part of the sadhaka will relieve him from the negative emotional states of regret and remorse.

If the prayer is offered whole heartedly and the abhyasis repents for his mistake, then for sure the abhyasis feels the relief from the burden of the negative thought. For this to be effective, the acceptance of Master as the forgiver has to be clearly accepted. If we can accept the Master as none but our spiritual mother, then it would be but natural to accept Him as the forgiver and we can submit all our lapses and come out of the prayer feeling relieved of the burden. Only mother knows how to patiently deal with the mistakes of the children and help them to outgrow those with love. This acceptance of Master as the spiritual mother will sure evolve, as the abhyasi practices with love and devotion. Though, the heart will take time to accept this, even if we can conceptualize this, the effectiveness of the prayer will be improved and an abhyasi can get up from prayer with the

confidence that he has learnt from the mistake and will get better, from then on.

Even after offering the prayer, instead of getting out of the regretting feeling, the individual could deepen his emotional turmoil and end up in severe negative emotional state, called guilt, “which is a cognitive or an emotional experience that occurs when a person realizes or believes—accurately or not—that he or she has violated a moral standard, and bears significant responsibility for that violation”[3]. Let us understand what causes guilt,

1. Conformist Consciousness: For quite a lot of individuals, the regrettable events may not even be matters of second thought, but for those unfortunate and perceived perfection seeking individuals, they cause severe feelings of emotional turmoil, the guilt. These individuals are the conformists, as quoted by our beloved guide Sri. K.C.Narayana, in his masterful elucidation of our Master’s message, ‘Moulding is the Preceptors Business’. While defining various streams of consciousness, He quotes conformists as the “Persons

who are very decided as to what is right and what is wrong and they know it fully. Violating the code of conduct or rules is abhorred and punished if possible, if not the culprit is severed of his connections with the family/village/or any other group to which he belongs. Any lapse in following the norms leads a sense of guilt and severe punishments are given and accepted. These persons who follow the norms, rules, regulations and restrictions that are imposed by an avowed authority that is usually a religious figure or book or tradition, generally pass off as saintly persons in society which appreciates their holding the rigid hierarchies. The consciousness here can be totally against freedom of spirit of others and conformism is the only principle recognized. This pattern in consciousness is common to find and in fact any society at any given point of time is ruled only by the influence of these persons. The self here is under severe bondage but it enjoys the credits that are showered on it by the society and many times is not even aware of its bondage. This is one of the toughest bonds that required to be broken in the path of freedom of spirit” [4]. The intensity of the regret reaches its pinnacle in these individuals, namely the conformists, who have established a high moral standard for their living. When a conformist feels that there was a mistake in his conduct, the perfectionist nature of the individual will analyze this incident and declares that the mistake is

grave in nature and will start grieving over this mistake and will start tormenting the mind, with the feeling of guilt.

2. Brooding nature of the mind: An individual mind, which has been trained to brood over thoughts, would not let go of the negative feeling of the lapse, that easily. It will keep breeding thought after thought, and will create a negative network of thoughts around the initial mistake, committed or perceived by the individual. Knowing the gravity of the mistake by itself is not going to cause the grief. Rather, the mind which has been trained to brood on these mistakes, will sure lead to the severe negative emotional state of guilt. Even if a person is not a conformist in nature, by brooding he can end up in a guilty feeling.

3. Repeated references to the mistake: While one grieves for the lapse, the ill-fated help to torment the consciousness further comes from third person(s), who mostly are one of our dearest and respected co-travelers in the spiritual path, all in the name of ‘we have to create humility in him, since he committed the mistake being an arrogant!’ This sure is not a reference to the acts of the trainers, who act purposefully to create a crack in the ego shield of individual. The individual, who is prone to

brooding and criticizing himself, is already beating himself badly, and struggling to find his ground and figure out a way to redeem himself from the lapse; only to be reminded of the incident in different angles, again and again by the third person(s), providing further fuel to his disturbed state of mind. Having personally gone through this phase in my life, I can say this state of mind perhaps can be likened to hell! Though the fellow brethren is well intended, the apparent lack of understanding of the situation and how it triggers negative emotions in the individual are causes for why this well intended help only aggravates the situation, at times, resulting in severe guilt.

What is the way out of Guilt?

In the religious world, guilt and fear are the driving forces for the majority of the religious prescriptions, including austerities and penances, which pertain to self-affliction either at physical, vital or mental planes, to redeem one from the mistake. Behavioral studies, such as those conducted by the famous psychologist B. F. Skinner, show that punishment is the least effective

method of changing behavior. Punishing brings “a temporary suppression of the behavior,” but only with constant supervision and application. In repeated experiments, Skinner found that punishment—either applying a negative stimulus or taking away a positive one—effectively extinguished a subject’s behavior, but that the behavior returned when the punishment was discontinued and eventually all responses came out again. These studies reaffirm our faith that the suppression of thoughts or feelings is not effective and one necessarily has to take recourse of our Master’s profound system, which helps to evaporate these negative thought patterns.

In Pranahuti Aided Meditation, the way out of guilt is through the remembrance of the Master and following the regular sadhana assiduously and taking help from the trainer through individual sittings.

We need to be diligent in our meditational practices such as meditation and purification processes, to get rid of

feeling of guilt. One should make a firm will, not to linger long with the thoughts of guilt when they arise in meditations. Since these are deeper impressions; they won't leave our consciousness that easily. First and foremost, we need to learn to be patient with us during this unlearning process. We should meditate on the divine light and learn to be unmindful of these. Knowing that it's a guilty thought pattern will allow us to 'let go' of these.

We should not let our mind indulge in these thoughts during our purification processes, as recommended by our dear brother, Rev Sri KCN, "I can say that the moment one feels bad one should realize that an old habit has recurred. One may feel guilty, fearful, anxious, sad, angry, resentful, or just uneasy. These thoughts are so habitual that we sometimes are not even aware we are thinking them. Our negative emotions are our best signal to know that we are on an old trap. It is only when we adopt the process of just ignoring the thoughts that we can come out of them or else we will be battling with them through the entire period of purification which really means that we are not thinking of purification at all"[5]. We need to act firm willed during purification to

get rid of these negative thought patterns.

Prayer is the cry of an aspirant's heart. While, there are many ways an aspirant would cry for seeking forgiveness of his mistakes, this prayer at bedtime should always result in a determined resolve, not to repeat the mistakes, but should never lead to unwarranted self-pity. That is precisely what a severely guilt prone person could end up in, with repeated prayers and offerings to the Master! The issue here is there is no confidence that the prayer was accepted by the Master in the first offering. The mistaken notions about prayer which were obtained either through the prior traditional knowledge or imparted by fellow brethren get into the complex mental play here and the person is offering prayer again and again losing the self confidence, beating himself badly. The prayer, which is the way out of guilt, in this case could end up as a trap in itself! Only a trainer can pull an individual out of this self-pity, which is a lower state of vibration. The important wisdom to be gained is the restlessness to get better shouldn't be confused with a guilty feeling. One should learn from mistakes, seek forgiveness from the Master and practice not to repeat the same mistakes, without indulging in self-pity, which

is a worst form of the ego. This was best summarized by Rev Sri. KCN, “We must be patient with ourselves and our karmic condition, and we should try to be more kind to ourselves and avoid indulging in expressions of guilt, shame and self-bashing in the name of deep spiritual aspiration. Surely we need to repent for the wrongs done but we need not kneel so low as to totally lose our awareness of individual endowment and end up in self pity[6].”

As we move on the path, to get rid of guilt, a simple act of knowing that one is getting in to the habituated guilty thought pattern is all that’s sufficient. As we move on the path, we get to differentiate between various thought patterns that bind or liberate us. Knowing these as they raise and fall within us is a liberating experience by itself; which one has to experience and feel for oneself. Knowing one’s own limitations at physical, vital and mental plane offers an opportunity to be kind to ourselves and find a way out of them through the help of our own will power, assisted by that of trainers. To align with nature, which means to live plain and simple, one has to live in present, forgetting the individuated self and forgiving the wrongs done by others. This act of

forgiving has to start with forgiving one's own self for the lapses that were committed. How could an individual forgive others, if he can't forgive himself!? Forgiving is for sure a divine quality and we have to practice that first with ourselves. Being divine doesn't necessarily have to equate to total perfection. If we can see from this view point, that we are tending towards perfection and total perfection is a myth from an old adage, then we can be kind to ourselves and learn the art of forgiving, which will get us out of the guilty feeling and many such other negative and binding thought patterns. Then first and foremost, we will be happy and only from a happy person, the love will flow naturally, with no strings attached.

I would like to share a dream I had a few years back, when I used to go through severe guilty feelings and struggling to find a way out. In the dream, I was hugging an ugly looking person, who was crying inconsolably. When I woke up, I recollected that the crying person was none other than me only. That was the first instance; I have started learning to accept myself. However, it has taken many more beatings to learn it better and the learning continues. Dualities are part of nature. The yin-

yang theory or the concept of matter and spirit, all these point to opposing dualities. For that matter the grey light that dawn on us in higher spiritual conditions, is a mix of black and white. Without the opposing forces, the discussion of balance perhaps would be irrelevant! We have to learn to accept the negative side of us and patiently get over it, to move towards higher levels of balance.

Our beloved guide in his article on the Path to Liberation states that, “Many of us suffer from guilt; but until we resolve the issue of guilt we cannot be plain and simple and forthright. Guilt and fear are, of course, part of the tradition that we have inherited from our elders. That tradition is one of separateness. Separation of people into sexes, races, colors, religions and name what you want”[7]. This is the integral view of our Masters. The beauty of our system lies in decimating the separatist or individuated view point for the spiritual aspiration and replacing it with one of wholistic, inclusive and summative view point, which is liberating. Rev Sri KCN goes on to state, “In the Era of the Grand Master where new order is getting established and in fact there is a new dawning of reality, we find it our responsibility to

transform these tools of the dark ages.

When our spirit feels crushed by a heavy feeling of guilt or fear, we can either:

a) Go into meditation to trace the feeling back to its source and find out who originally put that feeling of fear or guilt in us. Then, when we understand the original purpose of that programming and its inappropriateness today, we can relieve our self of that imaginary division, or

b) Ignore the same totally regardless of where it came from, using a statement of freedom by feeling the grace of the Master that is felt as unconditional love which flows through us all.

Today's inherited cultural baggage includes many subconscious archetypes. Among these are the ideas of oaths of obedience, poverty and chastity. Whether we have made these oaths in previous lives as a monk or a nun, or just inherited them along with today's cultural mindset, they can be equally debilitating. It is time for these unconscious, outmoded restrictions to go. Oaths of obedience serve only those in charge of an institution. Under a guise it becomes the worst form of tyranny, the very opposite of freedom. I am aware of few persons who took oath with their Master and chose falsehood and have offended themselves with notions of guilt etc., It has always been easier to be in charge as the anointed leader of a group as long as no one is going to question our authority"[7]. We need to contemplate on these words of the wisdom and the clarion call to move on to the new spiritual era as outlined, envisioned and willed by the Masters.

Let us have the courage to squarely say NO to the binding thought patterns such as guilt, by aligning more and more with the Master. The determination to live in a liberated state of mind, the confidence that the moment we were introduced into the system the Master has

accepted us into his fold, faith in the dawn of new era, faith in the integral view point of our system and above all the confidence to acknowledge and accept our petty limitations and believing in our ability to overcome them with a firm will supported by a trainer's will, for sure will help us in getting out of the guilty feeling and lead a happy, balanced and harmonious way of living, by being plain and simple to be identical with the nature.

Pranams.

References:

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