

## Power mode, love mode

There are three basic ways we normally relate to people. We generally measure people, seeing them as being inferior to us, or better than us, or we're both just as good. At each of these levels of relating to others, we might react to the other with pleasure or with displeasure, that is, whether we like him or dislike him. Let us here call this contrasting emotional reactions as the "love" mode (accepting response) and the "power" mode (rejecting or controlling response).

How we decide to react to other person depends, in an important way, on how we were treated as children and other conditionings such as early religious training or peer influence. Those of us who were generally happy in our childhood and formative years easily respond to other, no matter what level, with healthy respect and positive engagement. We easily make friends and enjoy friendships. This is a vital foundation for greater happiness for ourselves and for others.

Not all of us, however, have pervasive happiness in our past. The worst case scenario is to have abusive and demanding parents who talk down to us and see us merely as a family investment or worse. Since, in our formative years, we have lived with an authority figure, we would naturally react respectfully and reticently to those we perceive as authority figures. If this goes on too long, we might find ourselves becoming more aggressive, especially with others who have had similar "power-mode" conditionings.

Again, if we have only been significantly exposed to down-talking early in life, we might find ourselves talking down to others when we perceive them as being "inferior" to us, that is, those we do not regard as authority figures. Even when people are kind to us or gentle with us, we react rudely or discordantly to them. In psychological lingo, we call this "displacement," that is, unconscious shifting of an aggressive feeling towards a "safe" or less anxiety-producing person.

The painful payback is that we would be rejected by those who are unfamiliar with the psychology of human emotions, or are for any reason uncomfortable with such conduct. To worsen the situation, when someone tries to point the truth of our conduct to us, we react angrily or negatively (maybe because this triggers a painful past "power mode" experience). So we are not *responding* to the person before us at all: we are neurotically *reacting* to our past. We are still haunted by our past. The bottom line is that not many people would befriend us, and would not even like us.

What do we do then to heal ourselves? Firstly, we must understand and accept that this negative reactivity of ours is *unconscious*. We simply refuse (at first) to accept that it is even a fault: we are not conscious of it! The reality is that we are hurting others or are doing something very negative for ourselves, too. We are caught in the rut of painfully reactive and unfriendly, even rude, behaviour, so that we might end up being regarded as being anti-social.

In short, the healing process starts by our willingness to raise this bad habit, which is an unconscious tendency, up and out into the light of our clear awareness. When the enemy is seen, it is easier to deal with it.

The next time we notice any hint of such a reactivity arising, we should mentally pause for a moment. Mindfully examine our thoughts: this might occur surprising

quickly and clearly enough if we really try. Then, regard the person we are with as a friend (especially when he is one), and try to reword what we are going to say in a positive way. Speak with lovingkindness.

Even if we at first fail, and have reacted to others in a power mode, we can still, after the fact, reflect on what spurred us on uncontrollably. Reassess our actions and motives so that they are clear of the three negative roots (greed, hate and delusion), or perhaps at least without greed or hate; for, delusion is somehow often present in the unawakened mind. Secondly, it is good to regularly visualize a very positive person with great lovingkindness who inspires us. He should be a constant part of our lovingkindness meditation.

On the other hand, what do we do if we meet or know someone like this? Firstly, do not take such a conduct of power-mode as a personal affront. That is the way the person helplessly is at that moment. If we, too, react negatively, then we are only invoking our own past demons. Secondly, the person who fails to communicate in a love mode should be shown great compassion (meaning kindness to others even when they do not deserve it). “Surely such a person would find it difficult to make good friends! Let me wish this person well.”

If the person is receptive enough, or if we are skillful enough, we could gently suggest some kind of role reversal. If the other person is able to see the painful reality of the situation, and owns up, that’s good. If not, continue to be friendly and supportive of the person so that he goes away without feeling that we have confronted him, despite the reality being the reverse. The point is people will change, and in time, they would acknowledge that we have been a part of their healing process.

On the other hand, if we know the unfriendly person well enough then it would be easier to help him, with the right moves. Firstly, we must cultivate a heart of lovingkindness towards this person. Then at the right time, patiently point out the negativity of his habitual tendency. Sometimes, a firm statement of truth – “You are being confrontational!” – might help. Sometimes, we might need to employ a middle language of stories of happiness. Otherwise, we could resort to a gentle skillful means of role reversal.

As part of a long-term healing process, we need to inspire the person to think of positive role models and let go of past demons. Usually, such a person might not even like meditation (they might find it difficult), but a simple visualization shouldn’t be too difficult. If the person is capable of meditating, then either the breath meditation or lovingkindness meditation should help, depending on whichever method is easier for him.

If we value happiness around us, then we should never reject such people, especially when we can do something to help them. Often we might need to extend our hand of friendship out far enough and hold out our open hand long enough before we can warmly or healingly touch such a person. We are helping the willfully blind to see. Let our light gradually and gently open their eyes and light up their lives. At the same time, we need to smile in our hearts, too. For, such a smile lights up our faces.

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