

Sorry! Sorry!

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Like many westerners who have their roots in old Europe, the Middle East or Asia, many Asians, too, have their roots elsewhere, back in Confucian China, British India, or the west, and so on. Then, again, many of us have moved on again, this time as economic migrants—we migrate not for wealth but for well-being, not for the greener grass but the fresher air and opener sky.

Yet, deep in our unconscious, we may still carry some dark reflexes, some collective unconscious traits. My special interest here is the demeaning, even obsequious, habit of ejaculating, “Sorry! Sorry!” especially when there is no merit for even one.

A social tic

Or even more groveling, to make multiple ejaculations of “Sorry! Sorry! Sorry! ...” as if we have Tourette syndrome or the tic. Yet those with Tourette will often tell us that they do not like it at all, they are even ashamed of it, and wish to be rid of it. On the other hand, the Sorry syndrome is, as a rule, unconscious. This reflection is an effort to bring this unconscious tic-like habit to a conscious level, and hence overcome it.

Perhaps at this point, we are already feeling uncomfortable because we think we have been saying sorry, or saying it too often. It’s good that we are beginning to be conscious of an unconscious habit. We can now see the enemy, so to speak! When we can “see” something like this, we begin to understand it better.

No offence taken

If we do feel some discomfort now as we read this, this is a great moment of learning and truth, and bettering oneself. Simply accept all the thoughts and emotions that come and go right now. Just notice what is the underlying emotion, the one that seems to be there all the time.

When we do this with a calm and clear mind—stop reading for a moment and slowly count our in-out breathing from 1 to 10 (“In-out 1, in-out 2 ...”), and repeat if we like, just to relax ourselves. Then continue reading.

Fear

By now, we are likely to notice that the underlying emotion is **fear**. We are afraid of offending others, even when they are actually our friends. Another good thing we should notice is that we actually **dare** to ejaculate, “Sorry! Sorry! ... ” when we are amongst friends. We certainly do not want to lose our friends.

This does not mean we should never say sorry. There are right occasions when it is gracious to say sorry, especially when we have actually wronged someone. Sorry has a healing power and meaning. When used wrongly, it loses its meaning. When such words lose their meaning,

we also lose our freedom. Saying “Sorry! Sorry! ... ,” then, actually holds us back in an awkward way.

A classy tic

We are more likely to have this tic-like Sorry syndrome when we have been raised in an ambience where we are consciously or unconsciously conditioned to accept that certain people or groups, even professions, are “superior,” even more privileged or powerful than us. In other words, we are conditioned to know our place in such a class or status-conscious society. Hence, it is a kind of reverse political correctness.

The Sorry syndrome reflects other unconscious traits that insidiously limits our openness, honesty, joy and acceptance of others in a healthy relationship. When such traits are common in a community or culture, we will be seriously stunted in our creativity and genius.

We may then not easily recognize beauty and truth, much less appreciate them. We are caught in a loop of trying to do things **right**, or not getting caught (hence, habitually breaking the precepts) in whatever, in pleasing some “superior” person or “upper” class.

Rebel

At my late age, I have the privilege being perceived as being readily redundant: I will soon be dead (what a relief!). When we appreciate the fact that our time is running out, it is easier to be more honest about what is right or what is wrong. Hence, I am able to write this reflection, which, I hope, is helpful for many.

As I am losing time, I feel, ironically, that I have nothing to lose, even as a social rebel, or a “prophet” (my late brother’s label). Labels are odious. I’m only thinking outside the box so that we are not boxed in.

Indeed, I will have more to regret if I did not write this and similar challenging topics. I believe in rebirth, and that we will return to the same unconscious habits and conditioning ambience if we do not solve them now, or at least to try to do so.

Mindfulness

We don’t have to be a rebel to deal with the Sorry syndrome. Begin by acknowledging it, accepting that it is not a beneficial habit at all. Often this is enough to correct the situation. Another way, a better one, is to talk about it to others.

But don’t lose the thread here: remember, we must work to overcome this syndrome, which prepares us to deal with bigger things that will help us tap our inner goodness and genius, and inspire goodness and genius in others, too, for bettering ourself, our beliefs and our community.

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha’s Example and Teachings]

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