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Context to the nugget conversation

Raghu expands on the notion of Shantham and calls it the state of quiet high potential but something that is completely silent. He likens it to someone like a Roger Federer who is in “flow”. He calls it the state where one is fully alert and fully alive and open to all possibilities. He also speaks about how busy leaders can try and access that space of Shantham.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): A related point you mention in the book, Raghu, is you talk about the distinction between heroic and asuric action and you say that often the difference is the state of emotion one operates from, you touched upon it right now. And you go on to say that we all need to operate from a state of equanimity or shantam. Can you say more about this?

Raghu Ananthanarayanan (RA): See, shantam is a very, very highly valued state of being. All of yoga actually attempts to bring you to that state of shantam or equanimity. Shantam is usually translated as peace, which is, you know, it's not peace. It's the state of quiet high potential but completely quiet. It's like a good like Federer or a good batsman who is still and watching the ball. He is not pre-committed in any way. He is very alive. That is shantam. And he can respond immediately to whatever is appropriate. If you are pre-committed, you can't do that. So, shantam is that pregnant powerful silence.

DJ: Fully alert and fully alive.

RA: Fully alert, fully alive, all possibilities. Now, if I can find a way of getting there and being there most of the time, imagine how powerful I will be, and every action of mine will then be the best that I can be in that moment. But most of us are caught with conditioning. That's the compulsion, compulsiveness and all that, that I talked about. We are caught at different other states which are much more suboptimal than this. So, shantam is a very, very prized way to be, I mean, Chanakya has written a book on why a leader should be a yogi, why a king should be a.... he has written about yoga and he emphasises this. How does this person stay in shantam? And then when you are adjudicating, you are going to be as wise as you can be, when you decide to fight somebody, you know whether it's a real fight or a self-acquisitive fight. So, if you can be in shantam, the chances are you will respond from a deeper intelligence. That's the Krishna voice that I said. But if you are not, the chances are you are going to respond from a self-centred space either in pleasure-seeking or pain avoidance, either acquisitive or violent-reactive; any action that comes out of self-centeredness will turn out to be asuric, it's not dharmic.

DJ: And for busy leaders in the corporate world, you have done a lot of work with leaders in the corporate world, what do you advise them to start at least to go in the direction of accessing shantam? What are some of the practices that you are...

RA: See, I think there is a greater and greater understanding today that mindfulness at least is understood as an important thing. And I know a lot of leaders, I have had a long conversation with what's his name... Bansi... who's that guy, he is there in the book also, Vallabh Bhansali. I have had a long conversation with Vallabh Bhansali. Now, he talks about the importance of vipassana meditation and how it helped him as a human being. There are many younger people, Vellayan, whom again I have interviewed in the book, he speaks about how much he has been influenced by Sadhguru. There's a Mustapha whom I discuss with, he speaks about how studying the Quran in depth has helped him to understand how to make decisions and his life is a very interesting life.

PC Mustapha of ID Fresh Food?

RA: Yeah, PC Mustapha, ID Foods, phenomenal. So, there are many people who have this intent, they know that they are gifted, something in their life has told them I must use this gift in ways that are dharmic that help people and the leadership that they exhibit, the way they deal with people is of a different order. There are other people whom I have seen whom I have met who got triggered by an opportunity in the market or this or that. Their approach definitely has an acquisitiveness where utilitarian philosophy using oneself as a tool and using other people around as tools predominates. I don't see these organisations unless there is some big shift that happens becoming institutions. Like the Tatas, for example, you see them describe many of their decision-making processes, it's profoundly human, it has a huge dharmic underlying thing around it, they might make mistakes here and there, that's fine. But most of the leaders I have met there have this ability to be self-reflective to ask the larger question and things like that. And I am absolutely certain if the world has to go forward from where we are now, unless there are many, many leaders of this kind, you cannot look at a meaningful future. We are at the brink.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I love the metaphor of Sport. Every moment is almost like facing a new ball in cricket. And as they say, we need to see if it is a yorker, a bouncer, an over-pitched ball, a googly or something else and play the ball on its merit. If we try and get a boundary every ball or defend every ball, it just wouldn't make sense. I guess every moment is a bit like that. We need to play each moment as it shows up without pre-meditating a shot.

Something similar came up in my conversation with Rich Fernandez (RF) who heads Search Inside Yourself, a Leadership Development organization incubated in Google. He speaks about the notion of response flexibility versus reacting to every moment.

RF: *"something that we teach we call it response flexibility the ability to respond rather than react to challenging situations and most people in business face challenging situation all the time but if you are only reacting to them and being very hot and angry all the time you are being responsible actually. You are not being balanced and you are not being clear headed and that's the difference being response flexible in the face of challenges and disruption is a critical skills for business leaders and for technical leaders and it does very much have to do with your own internal landscape and that's why we call the curriculum Search Inside Yourself because we believe that to be an effective leader and a thriving person a lot more you need to develop those skills of awareness and self-knowledge and self-management in order to be effective."*

DJ: Subsequently, in that conversation, Rich uses the example of Captain Sully Sullenberger, who successfully landed a plane on the Hudson and saved 100+ lives. He speaks about the shantam frame from where Captain Sully operated from. If this is of interest, please look up my conversation with Rich Fernandez in the Guests section of the podcast. Even better go and see the movie Sully where Tom Hanks plays the central character.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Rich Fernandez that is referenced: [Meta-distress and Response-flexibility](#).

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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