

Satsanga with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

Attachment vs. Duty

Question

Swamiji, how can one reduce attachment and still be able to conduct one's duties?

Answer

There is nothing wrong with attachment. Having some attachment is okay. Actually, without attachment, nothing can be done. Nobody can perform their duty without attachment. For instance, one performs one's duty only towards one's child; one doesn't do the same thing for every other child. One does something special for one's child. A person does something for their own spouse or their own parents. Thus, there is that attachment towards one's own. A person has a special relationship with their spouse, their parents, their children, their siblings, and their friends, and these special relationships will remain. And where there is a relationship of affection, there is some attachment as well, which enables you to do special things for them. Therefore, some attachment is always there in life.

Generally speaking, there is no life without attachment unless we are wise persons. However, we have to draw the line somewhere so that the attachment does not become a burden. It is quite all right that I am attached to my child because it enables me, motivates me, or inspires me to do something for my child. But my attachment should not become a demanding attachment as in 'I did all this for you. What did you do for me in return?' When I start demanding or controlling on account of my relationship, the attachment becomes binding. As long as the attachment makes me help them or take care of them, the attachment is okay. When the attachment becomes somewhat distorted and I start controlling them or equating them to me, the distance reduces. At that point, I do not look upon them as individuals in their own right; I look upon them as an extension of myself; I begin to see them in my own image. I think, therefore, that if I am a doctor, my child should also be a doctor. If I am a so and so, I want that they should also be a so and so. I begin to regard their success as my success and their failure as my failure. This is called attachment that is binding. It is an attachment in which the one related to me ceases to have a separate individuality and is as though a part of me or an extension of me. This

kind of relationship causes unhappiness both to me as well as to the one to whom I am attached.

Understand that attachment in the form of care and concern must be there in our relationships. Detachment does not mean that I don't care what happens to my son or to the one closely related to me. We cannot be indifferent. We have to be concerned. At the same time, if we can give them the freedom to be what they are while doing what we want to do, what we need to do, or even what we would like to do, it would be an ideal relationship; we would have the privilege of expressing our care and concern for them and they would have the privilege of receiving that from us while, at the same time, also having the freedom to grow in their own way. We facilitate, not control, their growth. We should be like the gardener, who only facilitates the growth of a plant. He does not control it because he cannot control it. If I try to control it, I would want to pull the plant out because it doesn't grow fast enough! The plant wants to grow where there is sunlight and I want it to grow where I would like it and try to twist it this way and that. Similarly, we come in the way of the freedom and growth of those we love. Therefore, one must recognize boundaries and draw boundary lines. All of these things require a lot of experience and wisdom. It is difficult, but desirable. It is also easy to say and difficult to do, but then, this is what we have to learn to do. From all our experiences, we must recognize what attachment does and when we see that it hurts, we should pull back; we must recognize boundaries. We must learn from our own experiences. We must value having healthy relationships and keep watching and adjusting our expectations and behavior¹.

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