

Satsang with Sri Swami Vidadatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
Likes, Dislikes, and Alertness

Question

Can you elaborate on likes and dislikes?

Answer

Likes and dislikes are habitual. When we do a given thing repeatedly, it becomes a habit. In the beginning, we need to be deliberate, but when it is done a number of times, it gets done without much deliberation. It is like learning to ride a bicycle. At first, there is a lot of tension. It is very tiring and exhausting. In the beginning, you hold on to the handle tightly to maintain balance. In a few months, however, it becomes somewhat natural; it becomes a habit. Similarly, there are certain habits formed in our mind relating to the forming of opinions and conclusions or judgments. For instance, I have a certain experience with a certain person whose behavior is such and such, and based on that experience, I conclude something about persons who behave in that manner. When I now see a similar behavior, I automatically conclude that this person must be like that other person. The mind works by such association. Thus, we develop likes and dislikes, judging an object either as a means of my comfort and happiness, or as a threat to my comfort and happiness. It has become a habit of the mind to always keep judging people, situations, and things as favorable or unfavorable, desirable or undesirable; we keep on branding them. This happens without any deliberation.

Once we brand something as desirable, we react in a certain way towards it -- we want it, we want to hold on to it, and we don't let it go.

When we brand something as a threat, we dislike it, hate it, avoid it, and remove it. These are the reactions. Our response is called a reaction when there is no deliberation behind the action. If there is no free will, or if there is no deliberation behind an action, it is called a reaction. Thus, we are always reacting. So, very often, we just form opinions without deliberation, and we act or react without deliberation.

At one point in time, there was certain understanding in my intellect. According to that understanding, I behaved in a particular manner repeatedly. Now that understanding has been ingrained and becomes habitual. As a result, even when my understanding changes, it takes a lot of time for me to change my habits. For example, I apply the brakes when I recognize that I am driving in the wrong direction, but the car takes its own time to come to a stop. Similarly, the mind, which has formed certain habits, takes its own time to correct those habits. To react, to judge, and to brand has become a habit of the mind. At some point in time in the past, there was deliberation involved, based on a certain understanding, but now the understanding has changed. Therefore, I must deliberately act to be able to reverse this habit.

Very often I hear, “Swamiji, I understand everything, but I cannot change my habits. That understanding does not help me at the right time. I know that I should not get angry, but somehow, when I am provoked, that understanding does not come to help me and I just habitually get angry, say something, or do something.” That is called habitual error. The way to solve this is through alertness. With this new understanding, I remain alert and bring that understanding into play every time I interact with others. In

due course, the new understanding will prevail and the old understanding or habit will go. This is also called *yoga*.

For example, being selfish has become my habit. I am selfish, because I am insecure. Unless I really take care of myself, I feel I am threatened. Therefore, I learn to be selfish; I always look after my own interests. The first question my mind asks is what is in it for me? This has become a habit. When I understand that this is actually inhibiting me, that it is restraining and binding me, I want to become free from this selfishness. However, every time I am about to do something, my mind automatically has a habit of acting in a selfish way. I must bring in my new understanding that selfishness is not right. “Give up selfishness. Be a little bit more generous. Be more charitable. Become more large-hearted. Be more sensitive.” When I apply that understanding, I will act in a non-selfish way. If the same selfishness comes back when I am about to do something, I must again assert my new value. It may require to be done a number of times.

Similarly, the attraction for sense pleasures is a result of habit. Actually, it is just my false perception. I recognize that there is no pleasure there, but because of past habit, the mind wants to keep going back to those objects. I must make the mind see all the disadvantages involved, and bring it back. Each time the mind goes back, I have to show it the disadvantage and make it come back again. This may have to be done a number of times before the mind becomes free from its habit of doing things the old way.

What is required for this is alertness. Introspection is also very helpful. What do we mean by meditation? Meditation is of the nature of

introspection. Meditation is being watchful of our thoughts, the pattern of our thoughts and always working with them, changing them.

Question

If we extend this concept of deliberation, isn't there a risk of being indecisive? At times, I want to weigh the pluses and minuses of each of the various options and make a deliberate effort to judge those opportunities. Isn't there a point at which we say alright you have to make a decision? How do you balance that aspect of making a deliberate choice with actually making a good choice?

Answer

Well, making a good choice is a result of deliberation. What is meant by deliberation is that you deliberate upon what is good and what is not so good. Therefore, whether something is good or not is the result of this deliberation. Now, if something is new, you may need to deliberate for long time. If something is familiar, the deliberation may not need much time. So deliberation does not imply any time frame. Deliberation simply means that you make the decision by your own choice. Sometimes the choice may be very clear and it does not take much time, and sometimes it is not clear and needs a longer time. The choice you wish to make thus depends upon each individual case¹.

¹ Transcribed and edited by Chaya Raj, KK Davey and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.