

Satsang with Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
More on Relationships – 2 of 2

Question

How should I overcome the fear of interacting with certain people?

Answer

I guess some people make us feel small, some people humiliate us, insult us, or control us, and we don't want to interact with them. Then there is fear. Basically, fear exists because I don't want to be controlled or dominated; I don't want to feel small. When certain people make me feel helpless in their presence by their behavior, or whatever, there is fear.

One way of handling it is to prepare the mind before we interact with the person who is likely to act in a certain way or make me feel small. Prepare the mind to accept the person as he or she is, without reacting to their behavior. If I feel helpless or afraid, those are my reactions because I give too much importance to that person's behavior. Instead, I can say that it is the nature of that person to act in that particular manner. I need not take it personally. I need not internalize it. I am then able to see the person's behavior for what it is and not take it upon myself. For this, I might visualize how that person may walk, talk, or act, and how I might feel then. I can visualize it beforehand, and tell my mind how to respond. The response should not be one of retaliation.

When we feel that people try to intimidate us, what happens is that we are forced to confront the problems we have with ourselves. I am not comfortable with aspects of my own self, such as certain limitations that I think I have, or certain shortcomings that I may have which I can't accept. These other people make me aware of them and I feel unhappy. Some people have an uncanny knack of pushing some buttons and make me confront something that I don't want to face. So I can also learn from this. Why do I feel this way? Why do I feel dominated? Why do I feel frustrated? Why do I feel unhappy in the presence of this person? Okay, given that the person's behavior is what it is, what does it mean? What does it do to me? How does it affect me? What does it provoke in me? Thinking along these lines will give me an opportunity to learn something about myself. And perhaps also make me examine those aspects of myself that I am not willing to confront.

Some people force us to confront ourselves and we are constantly trying to avoid confronting ourselves. So, in that sense, some of these people can in fact be helpful to us by showing us what it is that we are trying to avoid. I can ask myself, suppose the person insults me why do I feel hurt or humiliated? I will see that there is an aspect of myself with which I am not comfortable. The fear of facing somebody is, therefore, really a fear of confronting some aspect of my own self, which I do not want to confront. I am uncomfortable because that person forces me to confront it. All of this amounts to settling an account with our own selves.

I should visualize what happens to me in the presence of that person. I should become aware of what aspect of me comes out and why I feel embarrassed or uncomfortable. Can I confront myself? Can I confront my shortcomings? Can I confront my limitations? Maybe somebody else is very smart and I am not smart enough. Maybe somebody else is very well informed and I am not so. Maybe somebody else has a dominating power that I don't have. I don't like these things. Can I bring myself to accept that I am not dominating, that I am not smart enough, that I am not as well informed? Can I accept it?

I can make all the efforts to become free from that or accept myself as I am and be comfortable with that. I don't have to impose things upon myself and think that I am necessarily different from what I am. To the extent that I accept myself and to the extent that I am comfortable with myself, to that extent will I be comfortable in the presence of other people. I will know what I am before that person tells me. It's alright with me. So, the fear of interacting with certain people arises entirely from the fear of interacting and confronting certain aspects in ourselves. Let us pay more attention to ourselves; let us understand ourselves, and let us learn to be comfortable with our own selves. This will also help in our interactions with other people¹.

¹ Transcribed and edited by Jaya Kannan, Jayshree Ramakrishnan, and KK Davey.