

Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
On Stress, Self-acceptance and Desires

Question

How can we overcome stress caused by uncertainty?

Answer

Stress is caused not only by anxiety, but also from our unwillingness to face the unpleasant. If I am willing to face the uncertain results, then there is no stress. The conflict in our mind arises not only from this uncertainty, but also because of yearning for certain results. Graceful acceptance is accepting the uncertainty part of the results. In order to cope with the results we can say, “I did not control it. It is controlled by the laws of the creator. God has given me this result.” Adding this religious or devotional element enables us to deal with an unfavorable result more easily. Lord Krishna says “*tasmādaparihārye’rthe na tvam śocitumarhasi’*, therefore you should not grieve over that which cannot be altered (BG 2-27). In short, it calls for preparedness for whatever comes because we cannot change it anyway. There is no point in dreaming about the things that you cannot control. It is not so simple for us to accept failures, especially because there are so many things at stake. Your job is very important, finishing the graduate school is very important, and so on. These are not ordinary things and that is why it is not that easy for us to take things as they come. But however important they are, we can not control the outcome, and it is best to take the results gracefully. Even if we don’t accept the results gracefully, we have to accept them anyway!

Question

Does self-acceptance lead to complacency?

Answer

Self-acceptance means being comfortable with your self as well as committing your self to change in the areas where some change is needed. The desire to move ahead is not through rejection of the self, but through acceptance of the self. While it is quite all right to be what you are, it is also all right to want to be better than what you are. Wanting to be wealthier, stronger, or more recognized is all right. When you create certain targets for yourself (e.g., 'I want to be so and so'), it is with the thought that when you become so and so, you will be all right; because you believe that you are not alright as you are right now. But you are all right now. You will be all right whether you become 'so and so' or not.

Question

I dislike myself when I am not able to do well enough, and end up pushing myself. Is it okay?

Answer

Just because I am not able to do well enough, it doesn't mean that I must hate myself. Neither is it necessary to push myself because I dislike myself. I can push myself, despite liking myself. Liking means understanding and accepting my limitations, and being aware that I should change in order to be better than what I am right now. There is an acceptance of myself even with my shortcomings and limitations. Acceptance could also help me to be committed to changing myself, so that I could be a better person.

Question

What is the best way to control our desires?

Answer

Rather than looking at it as control, the *Vendantins* are more inclined to understand our desires and then decide whether it is worth being fulfilled or not. As soon as a desire arises in my mind, instead of blindly going ahead and fulfilling it, it is very important that I ponder upon its usefulness. It would be good to evaluate whether fulfilling that particular desire is going to help me or hurt me; or plunge me into bondage or release me from bondage. Reflecting upon the desire to find out whether I would be converting a luxury to a necessity is also important.

It is not that you should not fulfill any desire at all. In some cases, where a desire may be related to the necessities of your day-to-day living, it should be fulfilled. There could be other legitimate needs which require to be fulfilled too. But there are some needs that are cultivated: needs that are not really there, but are perceived to be needs. In these cases, we must probe deeply to assess our need.

Question

What is meant by the abandonment of *rāga-dveṣa*?

Answer

Rāga and *dveṣa* (likes and dislikes), like any intruders come without our permission; because there is something that attracts them. If we find out their root cause and give them up, then it is inevitable that the *rāga-dveṣas* will also disappear. This is what is meant by “*rāga-dveṣas* will abandon us”.

As long as the ego exists, there is insecurity and I struggle to be at ease with

myself. With growing acceptance of my self, the *rāga-dveṣas* slowly leave me. Just as bacteria cannot breed in the refrigerator, so also *rāga-dveṣas* cannot find a breeding ground in an accepting self.

Question

Does being free of *rāga-dveṣas* make us indifferent?

Answer

Becoming free from likes and dislikes does not mean that we are indifferent. It only means that there is neither aversion nor attachment to anything. There is an acceptance of everything. For example, when I find a person to be dishonest, that is also in order. Once the *rāga-dveṣa* is not invoked in me, I can appreciate the person for what he/she is. It helps me to go beyond the superficial level and see the essential goodness hidden in this dishonesty also. When I do not react, I will be able to appreciate this. Everything is all right in its own place. Ultimately, nothing really invokes from me any kind of hatred or aversion or partiality¹.

¹ Summer 2003 *satsang*, transcribed and edited by Subbalakshmi Chandrasekaran, Jaya Kannan and Chaya Raj.