

Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
More on Renunciation

Question

How do we deal with our ego which will not allow us to let go of things?

Answer

It is not that our ego does not let go of things. It is more a feeling of insecurity that does not let go of things. For example, when we suffer a fracture in the leg and start walking with the help of crutches, we cannot let go of the crutches because we feel insecure. Letting go happens when we discover the security.

Ego is nothing but a bundle of insecurities. There are many crutches in our life, e.g., wealth, name, fame, recognition, family, friends. These need not be crutches, but generally they are. They can be a luxury also. For example, getting married or having a child is a luxury in the beginning. In course of time, however, it becomes a necessity because of attachment. Having a family or having materialistic things does not necessarily mean we have crutches. It depends on how we relate with them. If the relationship is one of attachment or dependence, then they are crutches. If we are not alert in relating to things, we may inadvertently become dependent on many things for our security and comfort. That is why we are reluctant to let go of things.

The process of inner growth is discovering the security within one's own self. We will be happy to let go to the extent we discover security within our selves. Ego can be *tamas*, *rajas* or *sattva*. Inner growth is a

transformation from *tamas* to *rajas* and from *rajas* to *sattva*. *Sāttvik* ego is one which is happy with itself by itself.

Letting go need not be an action. Letting go of the family, for example, means giving them the freedom to do what they want in our mind. A relationship of attachment is a controlling one. When we are attached to somebody, we control and we do not want to let them go. Because letting them go makes us insecure. Letting go would mean having no need to control anybody and being able to give the freedom without feeling insecure. This does not mean not caring for the family. One can still take care of the family by giving them the freedom and feeling happy that they enjoy that freedom. This is also called ‘renunciation’.

Holding on to our views, opinions and things arises from some kind of insecurity. It is not that a secure person does not have any stand. A secure person has an open mind and is willing to consider and accept others’ views. People derive security from their own beliefs. Being able to accept the other person’s view with an open mind comes when there is a feeling of security. Thus renunciation also means discovering inner security.

The ego is not interested in holding on to anything, because holding on to things means burden. The more things we hold on to, the more we have to look after them. This causes a lot of stress. People who hold on to lots of things are ‘stressed-out’ people. But this stress is necessary because it is for our security. Therefore, we do not hold on to things unless really necessary. Once we find that it is not necessary, we are happy to let go. Therefore, renunciation can be said to be a process of self-growth. In Pujya Swami Dayanandaji’s words this process is called ‘emotional maturity’.

‘Giving-up’ need not be an action because ‘holding-on’ is also not an action. Giving-up is a perception. Holding on to something is on account of lack of understanding and letting go is on account of understanding. Renunciation is understanding. It is possible to be in the midst of things physically and still be a renunciate. People equate renunciation to an action of actually creating a distance. If it is convenient, physical distance can perhaps be created. But first, there must be emotional distance. Then alone physical distance will help. Otherwise it will not help. According to Lord Krishna, when one creates a distance with an object of pleasure either by not partaking in the pleasure or by controlling oneself, but still has a lingering fascination for that object, then that self-control is really suppression. Renunciation as a way of life would mean creating a distance, first emotionally, then perhaps physically too.

Question

Does this renunciation make us insensitive?

Answer

Renunciation does not make us insensitive; in fact it makes us more sensitive. It does not mean being unattached or not caring for something. Lack of attachment means freedom from the need to control. Sometimes when our happiness depends upon the happiness of other people, we want them to conduct themselves in a way that makes us happy. This is the kind of control we exercise on them. Being sensitive to others’ feelings is ok. Being emotional is also ok as long as we are not controlled by our emotions, which then make us ineffective.

Renunciation is sometimes equated to insensitivity and not caring for anything. This *vairagya* or dispassion is wrongly understood as aversion. When we create physical distance we may not be able to care for somebody but we can always wish them well. Our feelings for them are always there. When we recognize the fact that it is the Lord who takes care of everything, we are free from such feelings too; we recognize that it is not we who take care of everything! Therefore it is not that we do not care, but we know that the Lord takes care of things.

Question

Would renunciation amount to giving up enthusiasm and losing motivation to do something?

Answer

Not really. Achievement itself may not change, but the purpose of achievement may change. Ego-gratification may be the purpose of achievement for a non-renunciate. But for a renunciate, the purpose of achievement may be to gratify somebody else's ego; that is, reaching out to people. One can still be enthusiastic and do things not for oneself alone, but for others. This does not mean that there is no enthusiasm or motivation. Before renunciation, one's enthusiasm is for achieving worldly ends, but after renunciation the enthusiasm is diverted to achieving one's inner growth.

Question

What is this self?

Answer

The self is what we call 'I'. This 'I' is a conscious being. When we analyze the nature of the conscious being it turns out to be 'Consciousness'. Therefore, the self is Consciousness. At this point in our life, the self is 'ego'. As our understanding of the self changes, our perception of the self also undergoes a change. But right now we understand the self as 'ego'. So the self is nothing but ego in all the above discussions on renunciation¹.

¹Transcribed and edited by Chaya Raj.