

EGO TRAP

Criticism stops spiritual progress



ARUNA LADVA

There is always a little voice inside us that will get in the way of our progress; attempting to slow us down or sabotage our good efforts. This is still part of the same self, but the side that 'I the soul' would rather not choose to see or hear. When we are being critical, it reveals more about us than about the other person, or even the situation. Our critic goes from moaning and groaning; to whining and pining; and sometimes to sheer blasphemy and profanity. Whatever is inside of us eventually comes out. We sometimes do not even realize what we are saying, and how damaging our comments are. Our language can kill a person's ambition and that can sometimes be forever. Critical words can finish projects, plans and pro-

grammes too. The problem with our inner critic is that it feels it is protecting us. It is not protecting us, but it is the ego's way of protecting itself. Putting others down or being critical of things around us, makes us temporarily experience an ego boost so that we can look good in the eyes of others. This gives the ego the feeling of having the upper hand over others. No one likes to listen to critical people. Try spending a day with a negative person and one hour is more than enough! And with a positive soul? We want to spend more time in their company because our spirit feels uplifted, and wish the time together could stretch for longer. The inner critic often stops us from trying new things. The ego prevents us from attempting something that will expand our mind and allow us to grow. We want to take two steps forward, and then the critic raises its head and comments: "Who are you? What do you think you can do? You are certainly not capable. Better not try, because you don't want to look like a fool." In this way we stop our own progress and development, and we get nowhere. The ego feels it is doing a



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good job because if we never try anything then we will never fail. So we live in this incessant deep-seated illusion about, 'Who I think I am'. I am successful (but never really tried anything). I am peaceful (but never took risks in relationships and confronted anyone), I

am kind (but became stuck to the close ones who loved me and did not reach out to face any challenges in life) and the list goes on. From fear we never put a foot forward, we become stuck in our little world because we were afraid to try and fail. But who was giving us these messages all

along? It was the inner critic. The difference between the inner critic and the realistic thinker is that the inner critic has no proof, but it is full of 'what if' scenarios of failure. These just perpetuate a fear cycle of thinking in the mind. When there is true critical thinking, or we could say, re-

alistic thinking, we can take a fair measure about what is practical or not. However, the inner critic continues to criticize and justify its stories of fear by projecting past failures into our future. Some are just habituated to negative thinking. The first person who gets hurt with

negative thinking is me. I am the first person to get affected by my own thinking. This fact alone should be enough to say to my mind: "STOP!" and ask, "Give me one good reason to have a negative thought!" The only way to overcome self-criticism is to increase your self-respect. Once I be-

gin to respect myself, I will not want to hurt myself. When you love someone or something, you handle things with velvet gloves. Begin to talk to yourself in kind and loving ways. How would you encourage a small child? Do the same with yourself. How would you inspire your best friend? Treat yourself in the same way. Some people say to me, "Well it's only one... negative or critical thought I had." Well, that is all it takes, just one thought. Just one drop of poison is enough to spoil the big pot of milk. So... here is a good plan to help you steer your way through these kind of habits: Don't allow anyone with dirty feet to walk through your mind. Make your mind a sanctuary of peace and positivity. Increase self-respect by being kind to yourself. Change the way you talk to yourself. Being positive begets more positivity. Being critical is a choice. Be an observer of your thoughts and feelings. Aruna Ladva is an author and Rajyoga meditation teacher based in Oxford, UK.

INSIDE OUT

FINDING TRUE HAPPINESS



B.K. GEETA

To be happy and live happily is the fundamental human desire. Happiness is an innate quality of the human soul, and that is why it makes us feel complete and contented. All our endeavours are ultimately aimed at attaining happiness. What we understand about happiness is related to our beliefs about being happy. However, the need for happiness has driven a lot of people in the wrong direction. In an increasingly materialistic world, instead of looking for happiness within the self, people expend a lot of resources in the form of

money and energy to get happiness, and this quest goes on endlessly. The most common belief about happiness is that it comes from external conditions, such as material assets, favourable situations, and the friendly behaviour of others. Many people believe that happiness comes from having a lot of wealth, being free from medical or financial problems, having a comfortable life with a good social standing, professional reputation, and a caring family and friends. While this has been the normal belief about happiness, over time it has become perverted. In a world where negativity has reached extreme proportions, happiness has been coloured by vicious tendencies such as greed, lust, attachment, and fear. Rather than enjoying the good things of life, people find happiness in negativity. There are two kinds of negative happiness — one is finding happiness in harmful habits such as smoking, consuming



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alcohol or drugs, and seeking pleasure in violent acts. The other is to derive happiness from harming others. Seeing a rival team lose a game, an unfriendly neighbour having problems, a competitive colleague getting a poor appraisal, or even a close relative not making it to a prestigious college — all of these are a source of satisfaction for some people. The basic traits behind such

a mindset are jealousy and insecurity, which spring from low self-esteem or ego. Leg-pulling, slander, hindering others' progress, not cooperating in their tasks — all these create a negative or false feeling of being happy. Deriving happiness from seeing other people suffer is a sign of a perverted mind. People who know only the taste of negative happiness seek pleasure in hearing about

others' misfortunes. Just as an alcoholic cannot do without the stimulant that gives him a high but eventually brings pain and suffering, those who derive happiness from others' woes ultimately end up suffering. It is the law of karma — if we reap happiness by sowing seeds of discord and malice, we will experience negativity in our life one way or the other. The tendency to seek perverted pleasure comes from a

lack of self-respect, which arises from ignorance about one's true identity. For the human soul, happiness is a pure, loving and natural state of being. Such pure happiness is not dependent on external factors of success, failure, comforts or problems, of the self or others. True happiness is an inner state of being that comes from deep awareness of one's own goodness. When we relate to the world from a state of completeness and fullness within ourselves we are able to be constantly happy even in adverse circumstances. Instead of expecting to get happiness from others, we are able to radiate joy and share happiness with them. Self-realisation through spiritual wisdom, a deep, loving relationship with God, and giving unconditional happiness to others are the keys to living a happy life. B.K. Geeta is a Rajyoga teacher at the Brahma Kumaris headquarters in Abu Road, Rajasthan.

A THOUGHT FOR TODAY

Self-love is the ability to look in the mirror and see the soul behind the eyes. No matter what mistakes I am making, I know I am a spiritual being, doing my best and I am striving to learn, grow and do better. Today let me offer myself love and appreciation.

BALANCE

ATTACHMENT AND DETACHMENT



AL HODGSON

In Indian folklore there is a lovely story which illustrates the consequences of being fiercely attached to something we feel to be essential. The story is an instruction on how to catch a monkey. All that is needed is to put something that monkeys love to eat in the bottom of a narrow-necked jar. The monkey will reach in to get it,

and will not be able to extract the food because the neck of the jar is too narrow for the monkey's fist, only large enough for an empty hand. It is an excellent analogy of what we all do when we find something attractive and become attached, believing we cannot do without it. In the Bhagavad Gita (The Song of God) the protagonist, Arjuna, is leading his army into battle but his foes include members of his family and many of his friends. He finds that his attachment to them brings doubt and confusion, and clouds his judgement to such an extent that he cannot fulfil his responsibility to his army and protect his kingdom. He is desperate for guidance and strength and calls out to God. God tells him to simply



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let go of all the attachments and the way will become clear. This is a magnificent analogy of all of us. The battle is spiritual, and we are all

Arjuna once we begin a spiritual journey. If we are not yet on that journey, then attachment to things and people seems normal, expected, sometimes even

encouraged, because everyone is attached to objects and people. Forming attachments is how we make sense of our identity from childhood, we then identify

with them, and project that identity into the world. This identity is in fact very fragile and is protected fiercely by the ego. This identity breaks down easily once the ego is challenged, by insult, criticism or ridicule, and the ego often responds with childish behaviour, reminiscent of a two-year-old in a tantrum. The hurt though is real and causes havoc with our emotions and this can really affect our physical health with repercussions in the body, especially in the gut. So how would a spiritual master who had conquered attachment appear? They would be able to think straight and maintain stillness and calmness in difficult situations and when under attack. They would be clear-minded and have the wis-

dom to maintain an accurate perspective on life, based on who they really are, a being of spirit and not attached to the physical aspects of their life. It is in behaving in this way, that we are able to protect the self from emotional suffering, and have the capacity to be calm and loving and able to fulfil the most important spiritual message of all, which is to love one another. It is ego and pride that stops us from doing this and that is why we often see love and humility together, exuding a sense of selflessness. We need to effect a balance between non-attachment and fulfilling our responsibilities with care and love. We can form an attachment with the real self, the loving, peaceful, stable, knowledgeable, wise being that we are.

That is not a grasping attachment but one with a sense of powerful stability, like a tower, a tower of strength. This balance can be seen as a wheel on an axle; if it is too loose, it wobbles and if it is too tight, it will squeak and not run smoothly. So, we have to accept the lessons that come in front of us and see them as steppingstones to remaining permanently in the true state of mind. In this we must keep tolerance and compassion at the forefront, because everyone is doing the best they can on their own journey, on their own battlefield. Al Hodgson works in electronics for musicians, media design, and IT. He is based at the Brahma Kumaris' Global Retreat Centre, Oxfordshire, UK.