

How to Change Bad Habits

Ram (James Swartz)

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Arnold: Dear Ram, I hope your things are going well. For many reasons my writing to you has been postponed, but now I'm writing once again.

These last months my mind has been clogged and becoming denser, severe *tamas*. I'm asking for your advice and help regarding changing bad habits. In the past I could develop some "good" habits, but they fell apart. To be specific, I'm having problems with discipline when it comes to setting limits. For example: foods, sleep, even my piano practise has been disturbed. I can't seem to get any focus and know what is good for me and what isn't, which habits I should keep and which I should get rid of.

For instance, even if I am uncomfortable using a certain chair I don't do anything about it and days pass by and the problem remains unresolved. So how does one make changes?

Ram: Hi, Arnold. The best way to make changes is to analyze the consequences of your actions. If you think through what you are doing you will realize that *adharmic* actions have unpleasant results. If you keep using a chair when it is uncomfortable, this is a sign that you perversely value discomfort over comfort. So if you contemplate the suffering that a particular course of action brings you can decide whether or not you want to continue. If you know full well that something is going to produce suffering and you keep doing it, then you have a psychological problem and should seek therapy.

The most important practice, along with the analysis of *karma* and its results, is the assuming the self's point of view: "I am whole and complete. I am the self. Actions and their results are up to the field in which they are initiated. They do not validate or invalidate me. They cause pleasure and pain, but pleasure and pain have nothing to do with me."

Seeing yourself as the self means looking for what is good and true and right in every situation and at every moment rather than what is wrong. It sounds to me like you have a pretty blessed life, that things are pretty good. If you can't see it go to the slums every week and hang out there. Have a look at what real suffering is and you will come to appreciate the fact that you have the incredible luxury of worrying about food and sex and piano practice. It will give you a sense of perspective. When you get to India you will be more affected by the extreme poverty and suffering than you will by any *yoga ashram*. It will change your attitude.

Basically, it sounds like you are struggling with *tamas*, inertia. It is a difficult feeling to deal with. The best way to deal with it is to make the change that you know you need to make when the inner voice says "do it." If you override that voice because doing what needs to be done seems difficult, you are just reinforcing the *tamas* and the next time you hear the voice that says "do it" you will more easily ignore it. *Sadhana* is really about paying attention to these two voices and following the right one. But the key is to make the change the minute you feel the impulse. This nips *tamas* in the bud.

At the same time you need to see how *tamas* is associated with *rajas*. *Rajas* produces *tamas*, so

you need to manage the *rajas* too. This means asking yourself if you really need to do all the things that *rajas* is telling you you need to do and then cutting back on the actions that produce the dullness.

These two forces are what you have to deal with throughout your whole life whether or not you are self-realized, so it is important to learn how to manage them when you are young. I'm sure that you will be successful. I hope that these words have been useful.

~ Love, Ram