

Likes and Dislikes Are Very Valuable

Ram (James Swartz)

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Mike: Dear Ram, in your *Rise in Love* blog you bring up two issues that I have been giving a lot of attention to of late. We talked about a lot about them in the past, which in the spiritual scene are a source of great confusion and stupidity. I am talking about role of desires and aversions (likes and dislikes) and the reality of our existential situation.

It is strange that the Vedantic idea of neutralizing desires and aversions is consistently and habitually misunderstood. To hate desires and aversions is to hate the life we have been given. It's not spiritual, it is lunacy. It also causes a self-hatred which is often taken to be a virtue. You might remember that very helpful discussion we had on my intractable problem with guilt. It was a major shift for me.

Without desires I would not move in directions that are good for me and without aversions I would not move to a more comfortable room when it gets cold. Likes and dislikes are important, necessary and helpful. The idea of getting rid of them or that they are not spiritual is insane.

Dayananda makes it very clear that desires and aversions are neutralised when they no longer create reactions in the mind. To be liked and appreciated is very pleasant. To deny this fact because of nutty spiritual notions is crazy. To be disliked is not pleasant. To deny this fact is also crazy. However, if I am disliked and suffer from a painful emotional reaction, the desire to be liked is managing me, I am not managing it.

The value of neutralising the desire so that it can no longer distort my clarity of perception or drive me to do stupid and unhelpful things is obvious. A pure and steady mind is extremely valuable, but it is not a mind without desires or aversions. It is a mind whose quality is not being determined by them. The idea that likes and dislikes are a problem in themselves and that they are somehow non-spiritual can produce all kinds of psychopathology. This leads to your second point.

Vedanta does not deny our experience of living in the world. It completely embraces it. It just says that it is of the nature of appearances coming and going within this consciousness and that these appearances do not have an independent existence. They have no being of their own. Things appear in consciousness but their reality is borrowed from the consciousness, like the reality of a clay cup is clay. Daily life is really happening. Some of the Neos say it is not happening, but this is not true. The only question is as to the nature of this happening. It is just consciousness appearing as events and objects.

This crazy denial of the reality of daily life and stupid notions about desires and aversions put me off Vedanta at first. Meeting you introduced me to this wonderful study. You were not holy and full of sweetness and light. You just clearly explained what the subject matter was without all that peace and love stuff that so many spiritual types go on about. It makes me want to vomit.

Thanks to you I started to see my life clearer through the Vedantic vision. You are iconoclastic, there is no doubt. You are also irreverent, but you made accessible to me a teaching tradition which I would have otherwise have dismissed.

Congratulations on your marriage. I am very happy for you, Ram. Enjoy.

~ Love, Mike