

Principles to overcome stress

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A Vedanta teacher shares a few principles on how to overcome stress, a condition which has now become the dreaded symptom of the times we live.

Stress has undoubtedly become the global epidemic of our time. Studies after studies show how it is detrimental not only to the mind, but also to the body causing cardiovascular diseases, obesity and skin problems. The body, after all, is a reflection of the mind. Besides, "if stress exists in one area of your life, it will invariably affect all the other areas. If your office environment is bothering you, you'll make your personal relationships a mess," says Vedanta teacher, Dr Janki Santoke.

YOU'RE THE SOURCE

Today, people have come to accept that there is going to be stress, and we must find ways to live with it. "But that's not what Vedanta says," says Dr Santoke. "For instance, if you have a

deadline to meet and say you're stressed, remember the deadline is not the cause of your stress; the source is sitting right within you."

The first point to understand about stress is that it is totally "internal."

"There is no external source of stress," reiterates Dr Santoke. "If that wasn't the case, then in the same condition, all of us would have been stressed."

She suggests an example. If in a non-smoking zone, someone lights up, the non-smokers can get annoyed, but the person who actually lit up is extremely relaxed. "So what was the cause of stress for one is actually a source of pleasure for another," explains Dr Santoke. "That cigarette is not the cause of pleasure and pain. It has to do with how you are relating to it." Fire is inherently hot, so if anyone goes near it she will feel the heat, "but that's not the case with stress," says Dr Santoke, driving home the point.

Take responsibility. "No object in the world has the capacity to cause you stress, but you and you alone. So, forget about blaming someone else," smiles Dr Santoke. "During such times, remove yourself from that situation and ask, had Buddha been in that position would he have been stressed? If you're a calm person, the environment, no matter how it is, will not affect you. You'll remain fine."

When someone calls himself herself 'stressed', the intellect is unable to govern his her mind. Intellect forms our discretion, the mind forms our emotion. Dr Santoke puts this in perspective, when she defines stress as nothing, "but mental agitation caused by unfulfilled desires."

OVERCOMING THE STRAIN

Stress is bad for you. Period. The idea of "good stress" is mostly hogwash. But there is one element of truth in that, says Dr Santoke, adding: "According to Vedanta, the human personality is categorised into 'tamas', 'rajas' and 'sattva'. Tamas is a state of inactivity, laziness and inertia; Rajas is a state of activity, agitation and stress; sattva is a state of calmness and clarity of thought. When one is in a tamasic state, heshe has to be goaded into action; one has to be given stress, so that he she can move. That initial stage, when you push desire and make some move from inactivity to activity, causes stress. This is the only time one can see stress positively."

Most city denizens, who think they need an adrenaline rush to perform better, find themselves in the 'rajasic' state. "But when you are in an agitated state, one can't perform or speak. Over time, you will burnout," says Dr Santoke.

SEEK KNOWLEDGE

So, what does one do? Strengthen the intellect, she urges. "This means govern your mind." Dr Santoke elucidates with an example. "If I say something rude and offensive, it was my choice to say it and I spent only 30 seconds of my life doing that and have forgotten about it. But it is your choice what you want to do with it. You could waste either three days or a whole lifetime thinking about what I said. What I said hasn't wasted your life, what you chose to do with it, has."

Understand a few facts about the world. Seek knowledge of Vedanta. Reflect on it and imbibe it. Know that world means change. "Every time it changes, you can't be feeling down in the doldrums," she says. "You may have a set of likings, but the world doesn't have to fit in those set of likes and dislikes. If you do, that is making an unreasonable demand and it may lead to stress.

The world conforms to no one's pattern." Know that the world is a mixture of opposites. "If you are going to meet good people, you are going to come across bad as well. And the proportion will always be 100 kauravas, five pandavas," she smiles. "This is the nature of the world. Get used to the idea."

Be realistic in your approach to life. For instance, if someone is running a business, it means sometimes profit, sometimes loss. "Understand the truths of life. Once you do that, things will bother you less," she says.

- Dr. Janki Santoke