



# Freedom from Prejudice

-Pujya Gurudevshri Rakeshbhai

Have you found yourself stuck in your concepts? Have you ever confronted someone only to realise you had built a grudge without verifying the truth? Have you lost a friendship to miscommunication or assumptions? Yes, this happens often in life. Here, Pujyashri Gurudev guides us in understanding how prejudices are formed and offers a simple solution to become free from them

In the state of ignorance, man is a big bundle of prejudices. He has his own set of beliefs regarding almost everything and everyone. He has compartmentalised his heart into two sections, black and white. For him, people are either 'bad' or 'good'. However, he fails to recognise the truth that they are shades of grey. People are neither just good nor are they only bad. They have their own strengths as well as weaknesses.

Therefore, do not censure anyone. Develop a way to learn from every person and each event. Benefit from what life has to offer you. One who does not have this virtue will not be able to learn even from the study of scriptures and the discourses of saints. Everyone has something worthwhile in him or her. One must learn to discover and imbibe that.

## Preconceived Notions

You have preconceived notions about people even before you meet them, based on what you have heard about them from others. Imagine a painter painting a portrait of a person he has never seen. What would you say about that painter? What would the portrait look like? The portrait may turn out to be beautiful or ugly but it surely will not match the one whose portrait it is. A painter who engages in such practices will not be able to run his business well. Similarly, an irresponsible seeker, quick to assume does not progress on the spiritual path.

To assume without knowing, experiencing or personally verifying the facts, is not the mark of a

seeker. A seeker is scientific. He will never jump to conclusions. It is not rational to pass judgements about people prior to meeting them, or to reject something without thoroughly examining it. A seeker is absolutely vigilant, responsible and patient. He does not form opinions based merely on hearsay; rather, he digs deeper into the matter to discover the truth.

## Injustice

A seeker not only shows great maturity while verbalising his views regarding others, but he also remains fully aware while listening to someone's opinion of another. He sees this as a huge responsibility. Unawareness in this is often the cause of many conflicts. Let us say someone is completely unknown to you. When another person speaks ill about that person, based on his likes and dislikes, if you accept that information without verifying it, you will hold a grudge against the first person. Once your mind is prejudiced, you will assess everything about him and every interaction with him through the lens of your biases. You will form false conclusions, spread incorrect information, and also erroneously doubt him. You will distance yourself from him, and in the process you will do him great injustice.

It is a sin to hold a bias against anyone. Even in a court of law, no judgement is passed or defendant penalised without a fair hearing. You are a real culprit, if without knowing the other person's intentions, based on rumours, hearsay, or assumptions; you try to prove someone low, vile or sinful. It is unjust to deliver a verdict on someone,

without giving him an opportunity to explain himself.

### **Incorrect Conclusions**

Another mistake you commit is that, based on one event, you tend to build a permanent belief. Once a man cautioned another that there was heavy rainfall in Ahmedabad in December, so if he was going there at that time, it would be wise to carry an umbrella. On hearing this conversation, a third person said that he had lived in Ahmedabad for thirty years and had never seen rainfall in December. So he saw no point in insisting on the umbrella. Here, both had formed their opinions based on their own personal experiences. The first person had been to Ahmedabad just once in his lifetime. This was in December and that year, the city had exceptionally heavy rains. On the other hand, the one who lived in Ahmedabad was incidentally out of town that December and therefore had never experienced rainfall in December. Undoubtedly, in that particular year, it had rained heavily in the month of December, however the inference that it always rains in December was incorrect. Because something occurs once, you believe that it must always be the same.

If a person has lied once, you conclude that he or she is a liar forever. Should one person cheat in a family, you will surmise that everyone in the family is a cheat. If a seeker from a spiritual group commits a sin you will judge the entire group to be sinners. Although the individual experience is true, it is incorrect to generalise it into a rule.

In unawareness, you make conclusions and then start believing them to be the truth and insist that others should have the same belief. You convincingly narrate them to others. Instead, if you can say, “this is my opinion”, “this is my experience”, “this is what someone has said”, then you allow others to think and draw their own conclusions independently.

### **Baseless Assertions**

When you dig deeper into finding the basis of your beliefs you will find that they are formed by

assumptions as opposed to facts. Just because a person encountered rains once in Ahmedabad in December he proclaimed that as reality. Most people do not analyse what they hear, they assume and accept it as a fact. They speak the way others speak and conduct themselves in the way they have been asked to behave. Based on unfounded beliefs, people fill their minds with many unwanted thoughts, and the stock keeps increasing day after day.

Many of your losses are supposed losses. Assuming others’ opinion of what they think about you, gives rise to thoughts, speculations, and negativities like anger. Thus, by mistaking assumptions for reality, you harm yourself for no reason at all.

Based on one bad experience with someone, you hold ill feelings towards him, his intentions, and his behaviour. Your mind remains engaged in mental arguments with that person. Hours or maybe months later, when you approach that person to clarify the issue, you may be surprised to learn that the person has no impression of that event left in his mind. It is then, that you realise how much time you wasted in thinking about a baseless matter.

### **Deaf to Reality**

Imaginations and preconceived notions have tied you down so rigidly that you are not open to listen to anything new. Even while listening to a discourse, fifty listeners hear fifty different things and understand only what they want to. Information given to two people is registered in the two minds differently. Words spoken by one person at one time, upon entering two minds, lead to two versions of the same tale. Surprisingly, both very convincingly quote their version and claim that this is exactly what was said by the speaker. Interestingly, their versions can be completely contrary to each other.

When you hear something, it often gets distorted. What you hear is one thing, and what reaches your brain is another. As if there is an invisible

instrument in the ears which performs unwanted censorship and then passes the message to the brain. The brain considers what it receives as real, and based on those misreported facts, passes judgement that this alone was spoken.

### **Do Not Cling**

Events occur, prejudices are formed, and you continue to live with those prejudices. Holding on to them is painful. What has passed has gone for good. Accepting what comes, and letting go when it leaves is the way to evolve spiritually. When you hold on to remainders from the past, it is not surprising that you do not experience peace.

Your progress is smothered when you are caught up in the past. If your energy is spent only in remembering the bad, if your vision gets sullied and your mind is in the clutches of the past, then you cannot progress on the path of liberation. Life is a cycle of meeting and parting. The attitude of welcoming the new and bidding farewell to the old is necessary. Life will become empty if you cannot accept events, and will stagnate if you do not let go of them. If you hold on to any event in your mind, you will experience stress. Let whatever is happening happen, whatever is coming come, let go of what is leaving but see that it does not leave any prejudices in your mind. Practise the sadhana of non-clinging and experience true freedom.