

Dealing with Obstacles

Satsang with Swami Viditatmanada Saraswati Arsha Vidya Gurukulam:

Question

What do obstacles tell us? Should we stop pursuing something that we set out to do, or should we continue?

Answer

What you do depends on the purpose for which you are performing the action. If the motivation is noble, we should do as best as we can and not stop just because obstacles come. However, there may be a limit as to how long we can go on. If we find that obstacles keep coming despite our best efforts, then we may perhaps let it go.

We should not drop something just because obstacles come in our way; obstacles are also a reality of life. There is a verse in Sanskrit, which says 'prārabyatena khalu vighna-bhayena nichaih'. Those who do not commence an undertaking for fear of obstacles are of the lowest order. 'Prārabya vighnavihata viramanti madhyah'. The middling ones are those who start something, but abandon it when they meet with obstacles. 'Vignaih punah punarapi pratihanya-mānāh prārabdhamuttamajanā na parityajanti'. The most exalted are those who do not give up what they have started even when they are repeatedly attacked by obstacles

It is the nature of obstacles to come. As it is said, 'śreyāmsi bahu vighnāni', whenever you undertake anything auspicious or good, there are bound to be many obstacles. Generally, we should continue to pursue what we set out to do and try to overcome the obstacles. We may say that they come to make us stronger or make our resolve stronger. We should be determined like a river that is determined to meet the ocean, despite whatever obstacles it faces. If the obstacles are small, the river will override them, and if the obstacles are big, it will skirt around them.

However, there is a limit to how long we should go on. If obstacles keep coming, we may have to review the whole situation again. Maybe these obstacles are trying to tell us something. Is there a different way of doing what we set out to do? You have to assess this and decide your strategy depending upon the situation.

Question

How do we know when to stop pursuing our activities?

Answer

Sometimes, circumstances tell us that perhaps what we are doing does not seem to be alright, because obstacles keep coming repeatedly. Still, if we think that our purpose is noble, and we are fighting for some important cause, we might want to go ahead with it despite the obstacles. This decision also depends upon the nobility of the cause. If it is not a big deal, we just let it go. If it is very important, we may want to persist longer. If it is extremely important, we should never give up. As Mahatma Gandhi said during the struggle for freedom, 'Do or die'. The freedom movement went on for many years. Thus, the decision whether to stop pursuing our activity or to keep persevering with it depends upon the worthiness of the cause.

1 Transcribed and edited by Chaya Raj, KK Davey, Jayshree Ramakrishnan.