

PODCAST 167: WHY DO WE CRITICIZE?

Om Sri Sai Ram

Welcome to Prasanthi Sandesh. We often come across people who like to criticize many people and complain about life. So basically we should know why do we criticize? Why do we complain about life? Let us consider a couple of thoughts in this connection.

To criticize people or to complain about people may give you a good feeling because when criticizing others, you feel you're higher. When complaining about others, you feel you are better. In other words, it is very, very ego fulfilling. So that's what we'll certainly come to notice if we look. Only rarely are there three people who do not criticize, who do not complain. Well, those are the people who have dropped their egos. When there's no ego, then there's no point, so why should you bother about it. It's none of your business. It no longer pays you off.

While criticizing and complaining, the ego is helped and nourished. Therefore, drop the ego. It's only this ego that makes you criticize others and feel superior over others. That's wrong, that's wrong.

Now once you drop the ego, you start seeing people in a new light. Perhaps the same person that you might have criticized in the same situation, instead of criticizing him, you will feel a great compassion for him, a great love, and a deep desire to help him. That's the difference, and that's what happens once the ego is dropped.

Also we should think in this direction: you'll see that if you were in his place in this situation, you would behave in the same way. So then there's nothing to complain about. Yes, where is the need? Then your outlook will become more human and friendlier, and you will have a deeper acceptance of people as they are. In fact, you only know some part of them, but you don't know their whole life. So it's very easy to criticize. It does not require much intelligence.

So there's one story which I would like to share with you now. It is the story of a person by the name of Turgenev, T U R G E N E V. Turgenev was famously known as the fool. So there lived this man in a village who was completely disturbed because the whole village thought that he is an idiot.

A wise man was passing through that village so that young man went to him. He said, "Help me, because for twenty-four hours a day, I am criticized. Whatever I do, I am criticized. If I don't do anything, I am criticized. If I speak, I am criticized. If I don't speak, I am criticized. I don't know the way out."

The wise man said, "Don't be worried." He whispered a secret into his ear and told him, "After one month, I'll come back. Meet me and then tell me how things are going."

The young man went to the marketplace and started working on the formula given by the wise man. Somebody said, "What a beautiful sunset!" Immediately he said, "What is beautiful in it? Prove what is beautiful in it."

The man who had said it was a beautiful sunset was shocked. This was a beautiful sunset. But where was the proof? Was there any evidence? Do you know what beauty is? Everybody knows, but nobody can prove it. So the man remained silent.

Everybody started laughing and said, "Strange! We used to think that this man was an idiot, but he is a great intellectual."

This was the formula given by that wise man: Criticize anything. Just roam about the village watching, and when anybody says anything or does anything, criticize it. Particularly criticize things which are taken for granted and things which nobody questions.

If somebody uses the word 'God,' immediately catch hold of him: "Where is God? What nonsense are you talking about?" Then somebody talks about love. Catch hold of him. "What is love? Where is love?" Put this question in front of everybody. Then somebody will say, "Love is in the heart," so he replies, "No, there is nothing in the heart. You can go and ask any surgeon. In the heart there's nothing like love. There is only the blood circulating system which just pumps blood and purifies. What does it have to do with love?" So that's how things went on.

After one month that wise man came back. By that time the idiot, the fool, had become a wise man! He had become a wise man. Then the wise man said, "Just remember one thing. Don't assert anything from your side, so nobody can criticize you. Let them assert things. You just criticize and complain and always be aggressive. Never be defensive. Don't take any defensive attitude. Attack! Be aggressive. Criticize each and everyone, and they'll worship you." So that fool or idiot became the wise man. It does not need much intelligence to criticize or complain so very easily you can become wise. Easily you can become very intelligent.

There used to be one professor who taught logic. Within a few days when anyone mentioned the name of a book which did not exist with a fictitious writer, the professor would immediately criticize it. "I have read that book and there's nothing in it."

Then, as the story goes, that same person met the Vice-Chancellor and tells him the whole thing. He said, "This is sheer dishonesty because at first he criticizes those who have really written books. Then seeing his attitude that he criticizes everybody, I suspected that he had not read these books, but was just trying to show that he's so well read, so wise, and so intelligent. So I tried a few fictitious names and he criticized them also. He said, 'There's nothing in those books. Those writers know nothing,' while those writers don't even exist, and those books don't exist. What to do?"

The Vice-Chancellor said, "This is strange. I used to think that the professor was a responsible man."

Then this first person said, "Call him sometime. I'll drop him by casually and prove it."

This person then wrote down two, three, four names of books which do not exist, had never existed and will never exist, with writers who are just as fictitious. And these names were given to that professor. The professor immediately said, "Don't waste my time. Those are all ordinary, mediocre writers and the books they have written have nothing original in them."

The Vice-Chancellor could not believe his eyes. "Do you know that these four books do not exist at all? Neither have these four men ever existed. So why are you criticizing them?" Then the professor realized his position and became afraid of the whole situation.

This other person said, "Don't try to fool everybody. I have been asking you about other books which have not existed. This was only a proof. I wanted to show the Vice-Chancellor that a professor of your stature should at least be sincere enough to acknowledge that he has not read a particular book."

That is an episode where these fellows go on criticizing without even reading the books, and without knowing the names of the authors, because their strength lies in criticism. And so that man must have been an idiot. On enquiry people have come to know that the professor had never even been to the library! He had never referred to any other book. He only criticized.

So a wise man, an intelligent man, is always humble. Please note this. Your question is about why are we so ready to criticize? Why? To complain is very simple. The psychology behind it is that this is the simplest way, the cheapest way, to prove that you are somebody special and that you know more than the other. But in fact you are simply proving that you are an idiot like Turgenev and nobody else.

Be humble in the world of wisdom. Before criticizing anyone, look into the facts from all directions, from all angles, from all possible viewpoints, and you'll be surprised. You'll find there's actually very little that can be criticized or complained about. This you'll notice this. Therefore the so-called complaints and criticisms only fulfill your ego. That's all.

One professor got his doctorate on the topic 'Adi Shankara and Bradley'. The two very famous people and his doctoral dissertation were brought to a third person. This person read that whole thesis completely, from one end to the other end. This third person did not give his opinion after completing the reading of that entire thesis. On the other hand he said, "I cannot give you my opinion in such a cheap way. I'll look at all sources you have looked into. I'll look into other sources that you have not looked into. Therefore I am not prepared to give you any opinion now."

Then this man who got the doctorate said, "My God! It is good that you are not one of my examiners. Otherwise I would never have been able to get the doctorate. I worked on it for six years, and in six months you have gone through all the sources that I have referred to. You have even gone to other sources which I have not even heard of."

This happens only to those people who simply praise or condemn without going into an in-depth study. Unless a thesis contributes an original point, it does not deserve a doctorate. In fact nobody is interested in praising anybody simply in finding those qualities which everybody has. We don't praise normal qualities. Nobody is ready to do that.

In fact we can help those qualities grow, but everybody is afraid to do that. If all are growing, then what about him? His whole concern is that his ego should go on becoming bigger, and the easiest way to do that is to criticize everybody and complain about everything. Be negative. Make negativity your very approach. For this you don't need any intelligence. Any idiot can do it. Any idiot will do.

This is all we can say about criticism. But to be really critical, one has to be very compassionate, very loving, and one has to be ready to devote time and energy and intelligence. Then it is not criticism. Then it is not inimical. It is not antagonistic. It is a friendly suggestion, and a sympathetic approach.

Everyone here should learn to be sympathetic. Your meditation should help you not to criticize, but to appreciate as you're intelligent enough. You can appreciate in such a way that whatever you want to criticize will be understood without being said. It will be understood without being said aloud.

So as we think of criticism, as we feel like criticizing anyone, let us look at this subject from this new angle.

Thank you for your time.