

SSE Group 4

Health - Habits and Addictions

Value: Non-Violence

Sub Value: Good Manners

Objective: *Sow an action, reap a tendency;
Sow a tendency, reap a habit;
Sow a habit, reap a character;
Sow a character, reap a destiny.*

Not hurting or harming anyone including one's own self.

Sloka/Prayers

Opening Prayers – 3 Aumkaars, Ganesh Prarthana, 3 Gayathri mantras

Silent sitting: Jyoti meditation (2 minutes)

Group Discussion:

1. What is Habit?
2. The disease of Addictions
3. The only worthwhile addiction (words of Swami)

Group Activity: Students write on a piece of paper about an emotion that they find very difficult to handle without writing their names on it. All the slips will be collected and we can pick one or two slips and discuss how we can improve this emotion.

Story Telling: Story of an addict

Group Singing:

“Love is my Form..”

Life Application and Reflection

Students should write or discuss what is an example of one bad habit/addiction you have? What is a Countering good habits.

Closing Prayers: *Samastha loka sukhino bhavantu, Om Shanthi x 3*

The disease of addiction

Among the different problems that one faces as a teenager, the toughest ones are often those of addictions. In fact, the greatest problem that I have faced - of 'attachment' - (and I have written about it in considerable detail in the article entitled: [When God teaches you to walk](#)) is also an "addiction" of sorts. It is an addiction to people - their attention and affection. Addictions have a powerful persistence that seems to make them impossible to pluck out of the human psyche. At best, it appears as though one addiction can only be replaced by another.

I am sure that almost every teenager will have some addiction or the other - television, smoking, drugs, potato chips, chocolates, video games, watching porn, consuming meat, alcohol, betting, internet browsing, exercising, gossiping about people, Facebook, make-up, coffee, masturbating, shopping, pills, under-eating, religion, politics etc (got these by googling for the most addictive activities of modern times). The list goes on. There are any number of addictions but all of them follow the same predictable cycle. An emotional trigger leads to craving. That craving results in the ritual activity at the end of which there is either guilt, shame or a sense of feeling bad. It leads to a determination on the part of the 'victim' to give up the addiction. But that resolve remains only till the next trigger. After that, it is the same story.

[Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba](#), my Swami, has been my saviour on many occasions when it has come to addictions. There are two examples which He has given which has stuck in my mind. And whenever the question of battling addictions arises, these two pop up in my mind. One is a small story while the other is a play on words.

The story of the opium-addict

There was this opium addict who simply was not able to kick away his addiction. So strong was his craving for that psychotropic drug that though he knew it was not good for him, he was helpless in the face of the cravings. So, he was delighted when he came to know of a holy man who visited his place. While everyone went to him with different desires, the addict went to him seeking a cure from his dependence on addiction.

"So you want to give up your addiction to opium?" asked the holy man.

"Yes sire. However, I know that I cannot live without opium. So, tell me how I can give up the addiction without having to stop taking opium."

The holy man smiled. He asked the addict how much opium he needed everyday. When the amount was measured out, the holy man took a balancing scale and placed the opium on one of the pans. He balanced it with chalk pieces on the other pan.

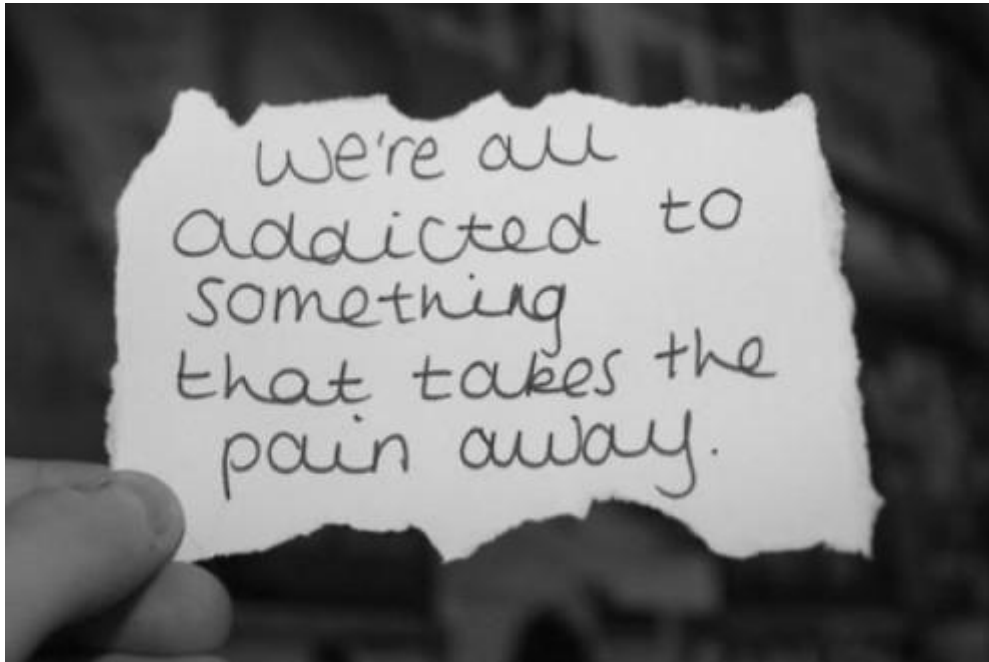
Giving the chalk pieces to the addict, he said,

"Everyday, weigh out opium against these chalk pieces and consume only that much. Is that fine?"

“Wow! This is a solution that nobody offered to me. Okay. I shall do as you say, but will it help me get rid of my addiction?”

“Not yet. You will have to pray to God. Then alone will the de-addiction occur. And pray with all your heart. Then, write the holy word ‘Aum’ thrice on this slate with the chalk pieces I gave you before you indulge in the opium. You will be cured and healed in due course.”

Needless to say, within a few months time, the chalk pieces wore down to almost nothing because of the writing on the slate. The opium consumption reduced gradually till it completely vanished! In the meanwhile, the former addict also developed love and devotion to the Lord.



Just have to make sure that in the process of taking away the pain, it does not introduce us to a greater pain!

The lessons from that story

Through simple stories, Swami conveys so many messages. Reading the above story, these were the three points that struck me:

1. An addiction cannot be given up in an instant, just like that, based on a decision made in a strong moment. Since it is nursed by the mind and not just the body, it is a tough opponent to combat. That is why the addict needed months to get over it.
2. Directly telling the addict to give up on something he indulges in will be of no help as it simply shuts him to any further inputs. The giving-up process has to be disguised with something else - some other activity. That is why the holy man assures the addict that he would not have to actually give up opium!

Going a little deeper into this point, this is the method God always uses. If He were to tell us -

All your possessions, relations, careers and wealth are useless. Come unto me and I shall give you the ultimate after taking away the useless things

- nobody would have ever sought God!

That happens because we are all so addicted to the world. That is why Swami disguises the ultimate gift by offering us trinkets and tinsel in the beginning. As He says,

“I give you what you seek so that one day you will seek what I have come to give.”

Prayer and God’s grace are vital for giving up addictions as they are for anything else in life. Theoretically, the addict in the story could have written anything on the slate to reduce the size of the chalk pieces. Even words like “train”, “buffalo” or “Aurangzeb” should have done the trick right? But these are the subtle nuances we have to grasp while listening to Swami’s chinna katha. The need to write ‘Aum’ implies the need for God’s help.



Taking that final leap...

Shutting out an addiction completely

The actions that we perform are very vital in deciding our habits. And addictions are nothing but habits that have got hardened. Sri Sathya Sai Baba says:

Sow an action, reap a tendency; Sow a tendency, reap a habit; Sow a habit, reap a character; Sow a character, reap a destiny.

That beautifully summarizes the importance of actions and need to cultivate good habits. An addiction always results from a bad habit. And so, it is important to completely eliminate the habit(s) that led to the addiction in the first place. Many times, it so happens that a person who has decided to quit smoking, reaches the verge of quitting it completely and then turns complacent. He feels very confident that having done so much, he will be able to do away with the addiction anytime he wishes. So, he continues to play with those same habits that got him ensnared into the addiction.

In emphasizing on the importance of ridding oneself completely of a bad habit, Swami does a beautiful play on the word - HABIT.

He says that when one decides to give up a habit, one must do so completely. If he gives up only a part of it, say 'H', then 'A BIT' still remains. Now, he gives up the 'A' and a 'BIT' still remains. Giving up the 'B' to kick out the habit, he realizes that 'IT' still remains. He throws out the 'I' now and 'T' (habit of drinking tea) still remains!

I could not help smiling when I heard Swami do this play on the word HABIT in a discourse during my school days. And it has remained embedded in my consciousness ever since. The explanation shows that human faults are like garden weeds. They grow without cultivation and soon take over the whole place if they are not thinned out and eliminated completely.

Parting thoughts - the only worthwhile addiction

Is there an addiction, a madness, that is worth cultivating in life? There is! What is that? Let me reveal that through another small incident.

It was during the morning of Sivarathri on the 10th March 2013. The morning discourse was on via [Radio Sai](#). During the course of that discourse, Swami said (the gist)

“ Looking at people who worship God, many people call them mad. Looking at such people who do not believe in God, you people think that they are mad. The truth is...”

At this point, I thought that Swami would stand for the devotees. I was in for a little shock.

Swami continued,

“The truth is that both are mad!”

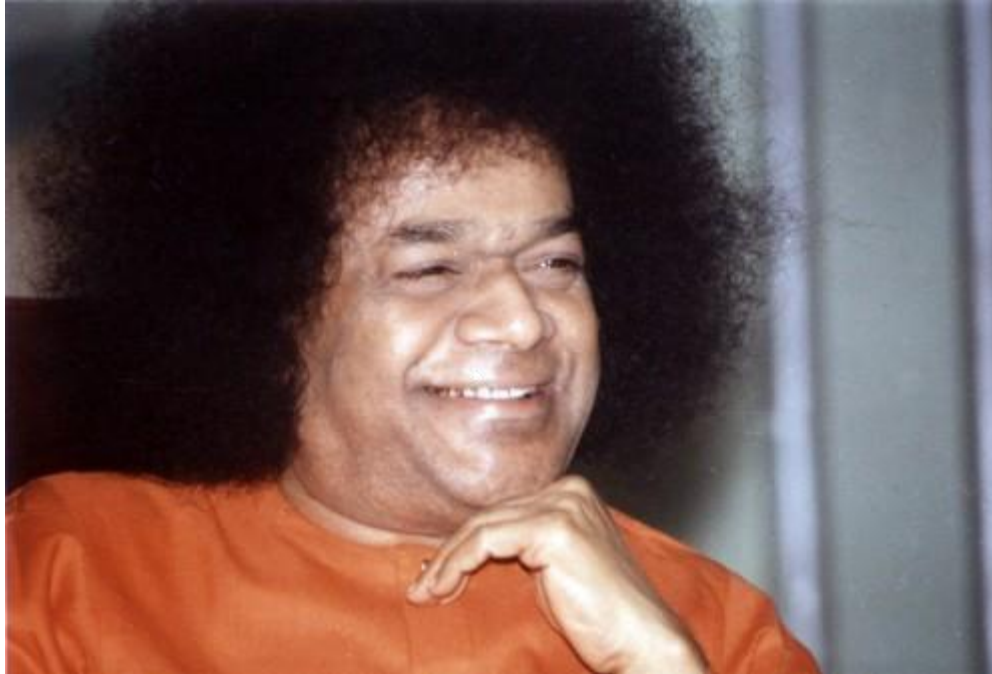
When I heard this, I thought,

“Swami this is not fair. we have trusted you and placed faith in you. But you call us mad?!”

Swami resolved my question beautifully in His very next statement,

“Both are mad. But madness for God is the least harmful and the most beneficial while madness for the world results in misery!”

Madness for God, the addiction for God is possibly the only worthwhile addiction that one can have in life.



Of all the madnesses that afflict man, God-madness is the least harmful and most beneficial! :)

A beautiful solution which Sri Sathya Sai demonstrated in an interview to give up a bad habit

An addiction is a habit that has gone beyond control. So, while the 'opium-addict' story of gradually giving up works for an addiction, a 'bad-habit' has a slightly different treatment.

A few teachers from the Brindavan campus of the Institute got the privilege of being called in for an interview with Swami. As always, the first enquiries Swami made were about the students and how they were faring. The teachers told Him that they were all doing well by His grace. Swami was happy. He then began to speak about the importance of inculcating good habits and giving up bad ones.

The professor of Mathematics who was seated in front of Swami asked a doubt, "Swami, how should one give up one's habit - all at once OR little by little?"

Swami looked at Him, almost with pity and asked back,

"Suppose you think you are holding a rope in your hand. Suddenly you look at it and realize that it is a snake! Will you release it little by little or drop it all at once??"

Everyone laughed, including Swami, at the dramatic example. The message was clear.

But the professor persisted,

"Swami, but a bad habit does **NOT** go away so easily. What to do?"



There is something magical in going the opposite way when it comes to bad habits.

Suddenly Swami's face changed. It became serious. He almost glared at the professor. Then, He began to search for something. He found an empty envelope on the window sill. He picked it and rolled it into a tube. When the professor was about to ready himself to receive a blow from the rolled envelope, Swami released the envelope. It now lay in His palm, slightly curved.

"How will you straighten this?" He asked.

Nobody answered as they awaited Swami to provide it. Swami now turned the envelope around, rolled it in the opposite direction and released it. It now lay flat in His palm.

He then smiled and said,

"TO REMOVE A BAD HABIT START A NEW (COUNTERING) GOOD HABIT."

With that, the enlightening session ended.

Today, there is chaos all over the world, not because there are no intelligent people, no emotional human beings or no healthy persons. What is the problem with our human society? Despite many experiments conducted on three levels—mind, body, and matter—we have not been able to create an integrated human being. We have not understood the importance of an integral way of life. The power of thought and the power of emotion are both great powers. For total integration, we need to know how to use the power of emotion and how to prevent the mind from being disturbed by our emotions.

You may have heard this analogy. Once there was a lame man. He couldn't walk. He had no crutches, he had nothing at his disposal. And there was a blind man. Both wanted to go to the same village. They started talking to each other, "Is there a way? We both have the same destination." And after discussion they found a way. The lame man climbed onto the shoulders of the blind man and guided him to their common destination. So too should the power of thought and the power of emotion combine forces to achieve an integrated way of life.

It also means that after introspection and proper understanding of the various aspects of your internal states, you can all find solutions in life. Learn to think, not to brood or to worry. Have clarity of mind. Don't become a worrier, become a warrior. All problems can be solved because all these problems are self-created. As you are responsible for creating your problems, you have the power to be freed from these very same problems.

Now, virtually all our actions are controlled by our thoughts. And all our thoughts are controlled by our emotions. You may be a cultured and highly educated person in society, but suddenly a single emotion upsets you and you start doing things that should not be done. One emotion can disturb your whole being. You spend so much time and energy in culturing, in cultivating, in educating yourself. Yet, one single emotion can disturb you and make you a monster.