



Preconceived Notions Rule Us



A person's character and attitude can change any moment. Today's enemy can be tomorrow's friend and vice versa. We should be able to look on people with an open mind and without prejudice.

We regard some people as good, and brand some as good for nothing. After some time, we will say that those very people we had earlier praised as good are bad, and those whom we had dismissed as good for nothing are nice folks. Thus, our opinion and outlook keep changing. How does this happen? The main reason is that we lack true knowledge. We amass sufficient information about the body and the external world. But we know nothing about our own mind. Prejudging everything has become a habit with us.

If we approach everything with preconceived notions, we will not have real knowledge about anything. We should be able to see everything as it is. We should learn how to look on everything with an open mind. Only then can we see what is true. The person we saw yesterday is not the same today. Whenever someone goes to a tailor to get clothes stitched, out of habit the tailor will retake the person's measurements. He doesn't think, "I already took his measurements the last time." The tailor knows that a person's size and tastes can change. We should have this kind of outlook when we interact with people.

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friend and vice versa. We should be able to look on people with an open mind and without prejudice, instead of sizing them up based on our past impressions.

There are those who think that acting on preconceived ideas will help them avoid obstacles. Actually, what is needed is alertness, not preconceived ideas. Prejudging is an unfavourable attitude, and alertness a favourable one. When we prejudice, we miss out on new knowledge. However, when we act with alertness, we gain new insights.

There is a story about a man who lost his wallet, which contained a lot of money. Until a few moments before, it was where he had kept it in his room. The man, his wife and their children started searching the whole house. They couldn't find it anywhere. Sometime during the search, the man's youngest son, a seven-year-old, said, "The boy next door had come here a little earlier." The man, who until then had only affection for that boy, suddenly started having doubts about him. "Haven't you seen the way he looks? There's no doubt about it. He's the one who stole the wallet," declared the man, who began to discern deceitfulness in the boy's manner of sitting, walking and talking. He lost his trust in that boy. He began to express his anger and coldness towards everyone in that boy's family. The man who lost his wallet also lost his peace of mind.

Later, while sweeping and cleaning the house, the man found the lost wallet in a gap in the sofa. In the very next moment, his attitude towards the boy next door changed. As in the past, he was once again considered a good, faultless and innocent boy. When we regard something with prejudice, a judgment will first form in the mind. Thereafter, we will see everything in the light of that judgement. That outlook is often misleading.

Prejudging is nothing but projecting our likes and dislikes on others. It will not help us see the truth; it will hamper our outlook, too. It is like looking at the world through glasses of many different tints. We will say, "Blue world", or "Black world", or "Green world". We won't know how the world really looks like. We should be able to understand and evaluate the world, situations, experiences and ourselves without prejudice and with awareness, maturity and discrimination. This is only possible if we assimilate spiritual principles.

The writer is a world-renowned spiritual leader