

Understanding the power of company

Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you too can become great.

—Mark Twain

Are there people in your life — whether family, friends, coworkers, or other groups of associates — where you come into their company feeling great but walk away feeling disempowered, upset, or angry? These emotions may be signs that either these associates aren't beneficial to you, or that they're triggering personal issues you need to clear up, or both.

Be Careful

Paying attention to the power of company is not intended to make you avoid all uncomfortable or challenging situations. Sometimes the people who challenge you are the ones who help you grow.

Here are some questions you can ask to contemplate the beneficial or harmful nature of the company you choose to keep:

- **Ask yourself whether the people around you are the right people for you to spend a lot of time with.**

Do they respect and support you and your positive ambitions?

Would they be happy or jealous to see you achieve your dreams?

Are these the kind of people you want to be like?

Are you hanging out with an uplifting crowd, or are their lowered expectations for themselves keeping you down?

- **When you're with people that upset you, examine the tension or anxiety that is coming up inside. Ask yourself:**

What emotional buttons are being pushed?

Where do your anxious feelings come from? Can you remember feeling a similar reaction to the same or other people in your life? Don't forget to look all the way back to childhood, especially if it is your family that is pushing your buttons, as only family can.

How much of your distress is coming from the other person's behavior, and how much is from your projections on their behavior? Usually, experiences tend to be a mixture of the two.

What's really bothering you about the situation? Is it something you can just discuss openly and honestly with the person? Is the outer tension a reflection of an inner struggle you may be having with your own conflicting desires and beliefs?

Is the tension you're feeling a sign that you shouldn't be spending time with the person or group, or that you need to adjust some element in the relationship?

Consider

If your friends or family are judging some aspect of your life and their fault-finding is upsetting you, look to see whether some part of you may hold the same judgments about yourself. You may be feeling upset because someone is speaking an uncomfortable truth. Also, if you find certain problematic circumstances arising over and over again in your relationships, you can contemplate how these problems may be coming from something that you need to shift or resolve within yourself.

Because it may not always be possible to avoid difficult people – especially when dealing with family and work situations – you need to ultimately become clear and strong enough to withstand any outer situation that may arise.

As you continue on your spiritual journey, you may even begin to sense that some challenging people and events are appearing in your life for an important and potentially beneficial purpose. For example, these challenging people may be coming to strengthen your resolve and inspire you to contemplate and be moved to express, explain, and demonstrate your beliefs and convictions in an even more tangible form than you have before.

Spiritual Wisdom

The Indian sage Sri Ramakrishna explained the importance of company in different phases of your spiritual journey with this analogy:

"A young plant should be always protected by a fence from the mischief of goats and cows and little urchins. But when once it becomes a big tree, a flock of goats or a herd of cows may find shelter under its spreading boughs, and fill their stomachs with its leaves. So when you have but little faith within you, you should protect it from the evil influences of bad company and worldliness. But when once you grow strong in faith, no worldliness or evil inclination will dare approach your holy presence; and many who are wicked will become godly through your holy contact."