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Context to the nugget

Devdutt talks about the distinction between building habits and enhancing awareness. He mentions that habits are often relevant only in a certain context and it is critical not to become a slave of the habit. He also elaborates on the notion of “Darshan” and “Para-jiva” and makes the distinction between self-awareness and awareness towards the other. He urges us to think about what we would do when presented with Sophie’s choice (where you have to pick between two equally deserving alternatives).

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): How people build habits? What are the lessons we can learn from Mythology on how we can start building some of the habits we haven’t been possibly exposed to in our growing up years?

Devdutt Pattanaik (DP): This concepts of habits is a western idea, habit is a bad word in Indian philosophy, another word for habit is conditioned I am conditioned to do it, conditioning there’s a pavlovian response, a god has a habit of salivating whenever the bell rings and the west has made it a virtue action without thought is habit repetitive action without thought is habit and if you look at the many of the cultures in the west they are like domesticated animals at a particular time they will get up and run, so they are on a treadmill all the time and this is seen as virtue, driving in a car with a coffee in your hand, nobody sees in America that this is tragedy, it’s a tragedy, you can’t enjoy your coffee, you can’t enjoy your drive you have glamourized slavery, you have glamourized slavery and nobody sees it because you have all the gurus in white coats with their chin what is called their fist on the chin photographs, these photographs that you see are telling you therefor it must be right nobody is questioning what is the habit? And habit has been somehow projected as a good thing Indian thought is all about awareness, it’s all about awareness, why are you doing what you are doing, why are you not doing what you are not doing, once you are aware then you realize what is of value to you and what is not value to you, so then breaking habits becomes difficult, there are good habits there are bad habits, habits are good or bad depending on context, so you will find people behaving, that’s why I always find, when experts come to Indian they have tough time because their habits suddenly in the new context they don’t know because oh my god there’s no place to run, oh my god they don’t have this thing because of their habit, you become like an animal and habit really goes to the lower part of your brain not the upper part of your brain and habit is about avoiding life, you do habits like it’s an addiction, it’s an autopilot and its addictive, like I have habit of writing, but its addiction if I don’t write I get withdrawal symptoms, which means I have trained my body to be in pain when I don’t do it and to get pleasure when I do it and I am not aware of it I am just doing it mechanically, so we are an awareness culture, awareness culture not habit culture, in habit culture empathy goes away, you see some of the western coaches talking and I am like it’s like the sport

coaches and in Indian we don't have the very big sport culture one of the reasons because this is about this physical forming thing and again the Brahmanical thing, it is the very lower end of the spectrum.

DJ: Talking about building awareness any pointers to how people could go about improving themselves in terms of...

DP: I think observing other people not as a judge, many people observe people as a judge but to recognize with empathy why is a person doing what he is doing what does the staff carry a particular kind of box how do they carry the food, why do they carry the food in a particular way? Why do they work in a particular set of hours? Why do some people talk more and do less and then you figure out and you see the dark side of it and you call out, call it out, that I noticed that you don't seem to be doing the work, and calling out very gently and compassionately putting them aside and saying that I have seen through it, I see through it and I personally believe in darshan, awareness not self-awareness but awareness of the other, everybody tells me about Maslow's law, Maslow's law is obsessed with the self, it's all about the self, there is no other, there is no other and the other is *Par*, *Swajeev*, *Parjeev* and from *Par* you have *Para* Transendent from *Para* you have *Param* infinite this consideration for the others does not exist in western thought, it goes to the point of saying that if I create value for the shareholder I will create value for the customer and them employee and I ask people ultimately if given a choice whose value matters? That reveals who you are as a person and everybody will say of course it is me I said life is you have decided that it is not so simple there are many people in the world who think very differently from you but you have conditioned yourself into believing.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This reminds me of what the Wharton Professor Adam Grant says in his book – Give and Take. He plots a 2 by 2 (one axis being concern for self-interest), the other axis being concern for other's interest. His research says that the successful people over the long run are able to find win-win answers to maximizing their self-interest and others' self-interest. He calls this being "Otherish" which in some ways is similar to Devdutt's point around building awareness for the other rather than just self-awareness. While he states that at an individual level, I guess similar principles apply at an organizational level as well.

The other key point to note is that habits are relevant in a certain context and when that changes, it is critical that we examine our habits to see if they are still fit for purpose. The only watch out is that sometimes our context changes suddenly and we take notice but sometimes the context shifts slowly and we don't realize it. It is critical that we are mindful of how our situation is changing and to examine if the habits are still relevant so that we avoid the frog in the boiling water syndrome.

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End of nugget transcription

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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