

Satsang with Swami Dayananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

Freedom

Question:

Swamiji, what is freedom?¹

Answer:

I define freedom in a two-fold way: freedom from the past and freedom from and freedom from the concept of past, present and future. These are two types of freedom.

Freedom from the past refers to your own past life, meaning, this life, your childhood, and so on. Everyone's past has its own problems and these problems affect the person in the present. What I face now, at this moment, is not viewed objectively. It is always stifled, conditioned, prejudiced, and distorted by my own past. Freedom from this past means freedom from my psychological past.

Freedom from one's psychological past is a relative freedom, described in *Gita* as freedom from the pressure of one's own likes and dislikes. There is also an ultimate freedom, called liberation or *mokṣa*.

Freedom is always something undesirable. To be under the influence of the past is not very desirable because you miss the present. All sorrow, hurt, and pain are due to the past. Because the present, which becomes the past, also causes pain, you become subject to further pain. So the hurt get becomes more hurt and sad become more sad. That is how it is.

There is also freedom from being small, being an individual, being a mortal, one who is subject to disease and death. Here, too, there is bondage in that there is a sense of imperfection and inadequacy in terms of time, place, strength, and knowledge—all of which form the very core personality, essentially, since the body-mind-sense complex is taken to be the self, “I”.

This bondage is the basic bondage and is something I want to be free from. Being in the form of pain and therefore undesirable, I do not accept it. Ultimate freedom must necessarily be centered on the “I”, since I am the one who is bound and also the one who has to be free. This freedom is either already intrinsic to the self or it is not there at all.

If it is intrinsic to the self, then the bondage is born of self-ignorance or error. Removal of the ignorance and thereby the error, is freedom, *mokṣa*. Vedanta says that self is already free, here and now, and that it has always been free. Therefore, the already free self is recognized as it really is, meaning, I am free. And being identical with *Brahman*, the cause of whole creation, I am everything, I am the whole. This particular knowledge is what is meant by freedom, *mokṣa*.

For one who has this knowledge, there is no further birth, which is an extension of the freedom that is knowledge. There is oneness between the individual and the Lord. That I am the whole is a fact; it is the truth of the individual. It is also truth of the Lord. The Lord can say, “I am the whole,” and the individual can say the same thing because both are *Brahman*. This vision, gained through knowledge, is the only real freedom.

¹ Published in Arsha Vidya Gurukulam 3rd anniversary souvenir, 1989.