

Satsang with Swami Viditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
Harmonious Living

Question

Is God inside the terrorists?

Answer

And if so, then why doesn't He stop the terrorism? That is the question, isn't it? When I climb the tree and fall down, why doesn't God stop me? Because everything follows the law, that's all. When Rāmā wanted to cross the ocean into Lanka, he prayed for three days to ask the ocean to give way. The ocean did not respond and Rāmā got angry and shot his arrows at the ocean. The ocean appeared in the form of a *brāhmanā* and said that God had created laws that must be followed. Anyone who goes into the water must drown, whether it is a saint or a sinner. There is a story told by Ramakrishna Paramahansa. A man was taught by his teacher that God is everywhere. He was walking down a street and came across an elephant. The *mahout* (elephant driver) told the man to get out of the way because the elephant was mad, but the man said it didn't matter because the elephant was God and would not hurt him. Of course the elephant picked him up with its trunk and threw him. Later, the teacher came to see the man, who had bandages all over him. The man asked why the elephant hurt him if it was God. The teacher replied that the *mahout* was also God, and the man should have listened to the *mahout*. The elephant was just obeying the laws of its nature.

Things are functioning by the laws, and the terrorist is also a product of that. There is a reason why the terrorists are terrorists. Let us remove the cause, and the effects will go away. Suppose I keep on creating the cause. I keep on abusing my body; then I get all kinds of illnesses; and then I complain! But when I was abusing my body too, God was there. That is why God gives us these laws, to follow. Even the terrorist knows that what he is doing is wrong. Out of total compulsion, he creates violence. There are reasons why the compulsions are created, and we have to look at the history. If we are terrorized by terrorists, possibly we have contributed in some way. By not doing what we are supposed to do we are contributing. Everything follows the order. The terrorist will face the consequences of what he does.

Question

We are all one with God, yet I see in the name of God, people are fighting with each other rather than living in harmony or peace. For example, Rāmā's birthplace—I do not even know if it is really the birthplace, yet people fight over it!

Answer

People often ask this question. We never really fight in the name of religion. We fight because we want to fight. Human beings want to fight, because they are insecure. They feel threatened. People don't just fight in the name of religion—they fight in the name of anything. We have found that people will use any reason to fight, and the reason is just an excuse. People fight because of their insecurity. Religion is a cause of fighting, but what they are really fighting for is their own insecurity and vested interests.

Question

Why has god endowed people with these evil tendencies?

Answer

Evil tendencies must also have a good purpose; otherwise God would not have created them. Evil tendencies are created so we can appreciate the good tendencies and so that we can gain this victory by gaining knowledge and overcoming ignorance.

Question

There are several instances of violence in the Hindu tradition. How can we explain this?

Answer

Non-violence does not mean there is no self-defense. If somebody is attacking you, not reacting is only cowardice. It is necessary to protect yourself. So protection from evil is necessary. When one part of the body is rotting, to remove that may appear to be violent from the standpoint of that part, but it is a necessity from the standpoint of benefiting the whole body.

Question

In *Mahābhārata*, there were a lot of deaths. How can one explain it in the context of *dharma*?

Answer

There are situations where death is inevitable. Lord Krishna tried to avoid war, but, at some point, war became inevitable to preserve *dharma*. It is like a surgeon removing a rotten part of the body in order to help the rest of the body.

Question

Krishna asked Arjuna to rise up and fight. Is that not violence?

Answer

Yes. But in the next verse, Krishna says if, in your mind, gain and loss are equal, happiness and unhappiness are equal, victory and defeat are equal, then you are fighting a battle for *dharma* and not for victory. That means that state of mind is nonviolence. It does not mean action is nonviolent. The state of mind we have and the intentions we have is what determines whether an action is violent or not. Sometimes, not doing something can be violent; and doing something may not be violent. Do not act out of anger, jealousy or revenge. Base your actions on the understanding of *dharma*. Performing an action in a righteous way makes action nonviolent. Otherwise, in every action, there is a certain amount of violence. It is not called violence when you take the minimum from the nature.

Question

There are a lot of animals killed in America. Can that be justified?

Answer

They may not believe that killing is wrong. They may believe that it is okay to kill if you can use the animal. Vedānta says one should do least harm in any situation.

Question

What is the *Vedāntic* view of death penalty?

Answer

Vedānta only gives broad principles. There is no *Vedāntic* view of the death penalty, so this is my view. Ideally, penalty is given to correct a person. Death penalty is a kind of penalty. Punishment is meant to create fear in other people. If correction is possible, death penalty is not right. Does he have a right to live or do we have a right to kill? It's possible that the person and the conditions may change. Then one should not give death penalty. If the person is killed, what is the outcome? Do you feel good about it? I don't think so.¹

¹ Based on satsang with Swamiji in Long Island, NY, Summer '03. Transcribed and edited by Anjali Bhat and Aparna Modi.