

Satsanga with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

Kāmya-karma, desire-prompted actions

काम्यानि - स्वर्गादीष्टसाधनानि ज्योतिष्टोमादीनि ॥

kāmyāni-svargādīṣṭasādhanāni jyotiṣṭomādīni.

Sacrifices such as the Jyotiṣṭoma, which enable the performer to get the desired fruits such as attaining the heavens etc., are known as *kāmya-karma* [Vedāntasāra, 7].

Kāmyāni are *kāmya-karma* or desire-prompted actions, which should be avoided. The *jyotiṣṭoma* is a ritual performed for attaining *svarga*, the heavens. Various rituals and actions are performed for the attainment of the heavens and other desirable ends.

There is an innate human desire to attain happiness. As the mind and the sense organs are extroverted by nature, a person naturally looks outward at the objects of the world in order to gain happiness. The mind seeks happiness and fulfillment in the objects of the world and, therefore, one wants to acquire different objects. Actions performed to acquire desirable ends are called *kāmya-karma*.

Artha means security, wealth, name, and fame. *Kāma* means desires or pleasures. *Kāmya* is that which is desirable. A *kāmya-karma* is an action performed in order to attain desirable ends like material prosperity, name, fame, power etc. Actions prompted by the desire for *artha* and *kāma* are generally called *kāmya-karma*. Actions performed with a desire to attain these limited ends are called *kāmya-karma*. An aspirant who is desirous of liberation should avoid *kāmya-karma* and this can be done only when there is an understanding of the limitation of *kāmya-karma*.

The Vedas sanction the fulfillment of our legitimate desires through legitimate means

In Vedanta, we often hear that desires are not good and that desires are our enemy. It appears as though we should get rid of desires. But this is not so. Vedanta, in fact, asks us to understand the nature of our desires. It is very natural that various desires arise in our minds. There is the desire for security because we have a sense of insecurity. There is the desire for happiness because we feel sad or unhappy. There are many other natural desires such as the desire for pleasure, comfort, recognition, and respect. It is acceptable that we have these desires and one should seek to fulfill these desires through legitimate means.

The Vedas recognize the desires and fundamental urges of human beings and give us the means for the fulfillment of these urges: *kāmya-karma*, desire-prompted actions. The Vedas sanction the fulfillment of our desires through legitimate means. They urge us to not compromise the means for the

sake of the ends. Vedāntins ask us to enjoy life in such a manner that we don't hurt others or hurt ourselves. The basic harmony of life should not be violated. Hurting violates this harmony. Therefore, it is recommended that you seek to fulfill your legitimate desires through legitimate means and make sure that you follow the fundamental values of non-violence, truthfulness, and non-stealing. It is quite legitimate to fulfill your desires while you abide by these values. However, at some point in time, a person may begin to wonder what he has achieved in fulfilling all his desires. Has he gained any lasting fulfillment?

The results of desire-prompted actions are limited

Generally, for most people, it is necessary to attain something in life in order to gain a certain self-confidence and self-acceptance. When that stage is reached, a person starts thinking, "All right I have achieved these things, but what is the net result of all these achievements? What am I seeking? Have these achievements really enabled me to attain what I am fundamentally seeking? I know I am seeking happiness and security, but what is the nature of the happiness and security that I am seeking? Is it limited happiness? Is it limited security?" As he examines his own needs, he understands that what he seeks is lasting happiness, not just a temporary happiness. He needs lasting security, not temporary security. Undoubtedly, the world and all the things it offers can give him some happiness and security. However, they can only give the happiness and security that are limited in time, place, and measure while what we seek is lasting happiness and security. Can we get that by performing *kāmya-karma*? What do the desire-prompted actions do? For example, I perform an action propelled by a desire and my desire is fulfilled. However, when I experience the fulfillment of the desire, I might either like the result or dislike it. This is the peculiarity of the result of *kāmya-karma*.

The results of desire-prompted actions are binding

When I perform an action propelled by a desire, my attention is on the result than on the action. I can have one of two responses toward the result. If the result is branded a success, I respond favorably to it; if the result is branded a failure, I respond unfavorably to it. If the result is favorable there is *rāga* or attachment and if the result is unfavorable there is *dveṣa* or hatred. I find that my relationship to the result and to the various situations I encounter in life is one of attraction or repulsion. Therefore, through the performance of *kāmya-karma*, not only do I gain certain achievements in my life, but I simultaneously also accumulate *rāga* and *dveṣa*, attractions and repulsions. These likes and dislikes are the reactions that we call impurities. *Kāmya-karma* brings with it not only material results, but also likes and dislikes. These likes and dislikes are the seeds of further desires because there is a natural desire to achieve what I like and avoid what I dislike. Likes and dislikes thus become the cause for further desires, which, in turn, become the cause for further actions in a perpetual chain of action and reaction. *Kāmya-*

karma has a tendency to perpetuate the chain of action and reaction over many lifetimes. To sum up, a mature aspirant seeks to avoid *kāmya-karma* or desire-prompted action because he knows that the result of desire-prompted action is limited and the result is a binding and not a releasing result.

Desire-prompted actions can be avoided through discrimination

Bhagavān Ramana Maharishi says at the beginning of the Upadeśasāram [1, 2] that the result of every desire-prompted action is limited; therefore, the sense of limitation does not go even after gaining the result.

कर्तुराज्ञाया प्राप्यते फलम्। कर्म किं परं कर्म तज्जदम्॥

karturājñāyā prāpyate phalam, karma kiṃ paraṃ karma tadjadam.

The result of an action is obtained by the laws of the Lord. How can the action, which is inert, be limitless?

कृतिमहोदधौ पतनकारणम्। फलमशाश्वतं गतिनिरोधकम्॥

kṛtimahodadhau patanakāraṇam, phalamaśāśvataṃ gatinirodhakam.

(Action) is the cause for (one to) fall in the vast ocean of (further) action. The result of an action is limited and (hence) is an obstruction to (knowledge which is the direct means of) liberation.

There is a temporary satisfaction in the result after performing an action, but the seeker continues to remain. What we want is to become free from this constant seeking, but none of the achievements in the world have the capability to rid us of our seeking. Bondage is nothing other than our inherent beggarliness. Therefore, we should avoid *kāmya-karma*. We can avoid it only through understanding, *viveka* or discrimination.

An intelligent analysis of life's experiences leads us to understand that the results attained as a result of our actions are limited and that limited results cannot give what we are seeking in life. Therefore, we should seek happiness and security not from the world, but from our own selves. It is as a result of this understanding that one is able to give up *kāmya-karma*. To give up desire-prompted actions one has to give up desires. Usually, there is a calculation of personal gain behind the performance of every action. In giving up *kāmya-karma*, it is not the action that is given up, but the desire or selfishness behind the action that is given up¹.

¹ Based on Vedāntasāra lectures. Transcribed and edited by Malini, KK Davey and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.