

Living Intelligently



Satsang

with

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Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

<http://www.arshavidya.org>

Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati

Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati, a disciple of Sri Swami Dayananda Saraswati, is an outstanding teacher of Vedānta. He expounds Vedānta with a simplicity and directness that make it easy to assimilate. Having studied and worked in the United States prior to becoming a sannyāsi, Swami Veditatmananda is familiar with the lifestyles of India as well as the West. With this insight, he reaches out to students across both cultures, with equal ease.

Swamiji is traditional in his teaching and preserves the entirety of the age-old wisdom of the Upanishads. He takes a contemporary approach in his lectures, which enables the student to relate to his teaching and imbibe this knowledge without effort.

Swami Veditatmananda is the resident teacher at Tattvatirtha, which is situated in the western outskirts of Ahmedabad in Gujarat. As the name suggests, it is a center for learning the Tattva, or truth, as revealed in the Upanishads and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Apart from English, Swamiji teaches and writes in Gujarati as well. He also conducts management seminars with a view to illustrate the relevance of Vedānta in modern management.

Swamiji visits the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam at Saylorsburg, PA, every year, to conduct Vedānta classes and camps from spring through summer. At this time, he also travels all over the US and Canada delivering lectures.

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Value of values

Question

“There is no such thing as the Golden Rule. It is the creation of man’s mind.”

Please comment on this.

Answer

All human beings know that there is a universal law that applies equally to everyone. It is, that “I should not do unto others what I do not want done to me”. I want to live and I want to live happily. I know that my neighbor also wants to live and wants to live happily. Neither of us wants the other to come in his pursuit of happiness. This applies to everybody without exception. That is why it is a universal law. We are born with this knowledge. It was not created by any human mind at any particular time. Nobody ever wants be hurt or insulted or hated at any time. One always wants to be loved.

Firstly, people do understand that others’ rights should be protected, as much as they want their own rights to be protected. I know that he wants his right to be protected. Whether I want to protect his right or not is a different matter! I know that what belongs to me should not be stolen. I know that he does not want his property to be stolen either! That is why thieves steal at night when no one is looking! Whether I protect his right or not is a different matter. But I am aware that he wants his right to be protected.

Secondly, when I violate his right, I know that I am doing something wrong. This is because it is my own rule of not wanting my right violated, that I am not respecting with reference to him. The human being has the freedom to violate the rule. This violation is harmful and if people do not understand that violating this Golden Rule will harm them, they need to be told.

If I know this, how is it that I don’t always follow it? Am I violating out of choice or out of compulsion? When I hurt somebody, am I doing it willingly or helplessly? Our answer is that it is out of helplessness, rather than willingness that we behave so. If I had a choice, I would not want to hurt anyone. It is when I am overcome by negative propensities like anger and jealousy, that I do these things. We accept

something called ignorance. Ignorance creates likes and dislikes, and when our likes and dislikes overcome us we find ourselves violating the Golden Rule. Just because it is violated, it does not mean that the Golden Rule is not there; it is there.

In nature, there is no violence. The rule that obtains is that one life form depends upon another life form. Therefore a cat eats a mouse for dinner, because it needs food. It is not that a cat goes around destroying every mouse in sight! A tiger does not go around killing all the animals in sight. It will kill prey only when it requires food. Otherwise it leaves everybody alone. There is no unnecessary violence. Just as creation is part of the universe, destruction is also part of the universe. Birth is an aspect of the universe; death is also an aspect of the universe. Destruction is built into the process of creation, so that the process may continue. It is not destruction for the sake of destruction. The tiger does not have a choice. It is programmed to respond automatically. Its instinct is in keeping with the ecological balance. Ecological balance is always maintained. Where human beings go, they disturb this ecological balance. Nature automatically sustains its balance. It is this balance, which is part of the Golden Rule. All the values that are taught are in keeping with this Golden Rule.

Question

You feel you want to do something in one way but cannot and therefore, you act in a different way. How do we resolve such internal conflicts?

Answer

Generally internal conflicts are created whenever we try to go against a certain value or when there is a violation of a value. For instance, on the one hand we have a value for greed and on the other hand we have a value for doing something right. Greed arises from our own needs and our own insecurities. When we act in keeping with the universal values, such conflicts are reduced or resolved.

Question

Don't we get inner conflicts for other reasons?

Answer

Yes, inner conflicts can be due to other reasons also. Inner conflict can be present because I am helpless. I am required to do something that I do not want to do. Or the inner conflict may be present because I cannot do something, even though I want to do it or am required to do it. Not accepting the reality of a situation can also result in this conflict. So, a person's own limitations and helplessness can bring about inner conflicts. If the inner conflict is due to the violation of a value, we should try to align with the value. Adherence to values and acceptance of the situation, are the ways to deal with inner conflicts.

Question

We are in *kali yuga* and there is a lot of conflict in the society. Would we be able to turn things around if all of us study and practice Vedānta? Or does it also require divine intervention?

Answer

Both, a group effort and divine intervention are required. Divine intervention comes as a result of group prayer. Humanity has to learn the appropriate values to follow. At this time, we have adopted the value of pursuing pleasure and comfort, which is causing many of these conflicts. If humanity as a whole learns that misplaced values are causing conflict, it will change. For instance, humanity as a whole discovered the consequences of abusing the environment and so it has decided to change its behavior as much as it can.

Violating the laws of nature is one of the causes of these conflicts. For instance, consumption is a value under our current circumstances. It is a value against nature, because consuming more than what you need is against the law of nature. If the humanity understands this, it will certainly try to act in keeping with the laws. That is how the turn-around would come. This is how *sathya yuga* will come. *Kali yuga* will bring so much pain that people will learn from the pain and be transformed. Truth is indestructible. Truth will assert itself someday. Truth always wins.

Question

What is fairness? Everybody feels that they are fair according to his or her own standards. But they are not fair or neutral to others.

Answer

What is fairness? Fairness is where the reaction is in keeping with the action. We say that there is fairness in this universe. We are told that a reaction is both equal to and opposite of the action. We trust the order in the universe and say that karma, which means moral order or moral law, is fair.

Vedānta communicates this theme in its teaching. It stresses that you are essentially divine, which means that you are a whole and complete being and that you are inherently a kind and loving person. All the evil that we have in the universe, the cruelty, etc. that we see, is incidental and product of ignorance. Therefore the unfairness, which we observe, is caused by ignorance. But even then, there is a fundamental fairness in the scheme of things.

Fairness is when the reaction is in accordance with the action. Everyone feels fair, according to his or her own standards. What else can you do? You can only be fair according to your own standards, because that is what you have. In the *Taittirīya Upanishad*, there is,

ṛtam vadisyami, satyam vadisyami

May I speak ṛtam, may I speak satyam. [Taittirīya Upanishad 1-1]

Ṛtam means truth and *satyam* also means truth. Are there two kinds of truths and if so, what is the difference between them? *Ṛtam* is the truth that is in keeping with what the scriptures say, and *satyam* is the truth, which is in keeping with my understanding of what the scriptures say. Both are therefore the truth.

Fairness is a value. Every value is to be interpreted in a given situation. When I practice fairness, it is going to be in keeping with my interpretation of what fairness is. In order for me to be fair, I should understand what is meant by fairness, and then put this understanding into practice. Sometimes, I may think that I am being fair, but you may not think so. This is because I am acting according to my understanding of what fairness

is, which according to your understanding, is perhaps not fairness. Our standards of fairness are subjective and relative.

What is important is the spirit of fairness. It is possible that I think that a given action is fair, but from the result I may discover that it is not fair. I may learn from this. Thus, we keep on learning the meaning of these values as we practice them.

To return a favor that is done to me is fairness. But I must recognize that a favor is done to me. Sometimes, the recognition may not be there. A child may not understand what the mother does for him. When he comes home from school, he finds a glass of milk and a sandwich on the dining table. He doesn't know where it comes from. He may not know who gives him all these things, or bears his expenses etc. This being the case, he doesn't know what kind of favor is done to him. Therefore, he may say to his mom, "Mom, you are not doing anything for me." If mom fails to do some little thing, the child may feel that his mom is not fair. If dad fails to do some little thing, the child may feel that his dad is not fair. This is because he doesn't know exactly what it is that the parents are doing for him. As children grow, they will come to know. When they become parents, of course, they will know.

As we grow in our own understanding of what these values are, all we can do is to be fair according to our understanding of fairness, and have a commitment to be willing to learn. Life is a process of learning and growing. We understand that it is desirable to adhere to the truth, but it is the absolute nature of this truth that we have to understand and learn.

Absolute fairness is not possible for anybody to practice, because there is insecurity. Practicing a value absolutely will require me to offer myself completely, including my life. And we are not prepared to do that. Only a *sthitaprajña*, perhaps, is prepared for that. A *sthitaprajña* is a wise person who has no doubts, vagueness, or error with reference to the knowledge of *ātmā*. To the extent that we are not prepared for total sacrifice, the practice of the value is going to be limited. But to the extent that I am willing to sacrifice, it is possible to practice the value of fairness.

Question

Please comment on intellectual, versus emotional values.

Answer

There are two kinds of values, intellectual and emotional. I would rather call them *viveka* and *aviveka*. *Viveka* means discrimination and *aviveka* means lack of discrimination. Everything that is created is designed to serve a certain purpose. We should relate to that purpose and assign them a value that is due to them. For instance, we cannot say that money has no use at all. That would be emotional and improper. You cannot say that you don't need money because you do need it for sustaining your life. You have a family and therefore you need resources for your children and others. There is certain pragmatism when you say that you need money for your day-to-day life. But one can go to the other extreme and say that I cannot do without money. To become dependent upon money for my emotional security or for my happiness would be assigning too much importance to money. This disproportionate value that we give it, is an emotional value. The point is that we should assign the right degree of importance to everything, relative to its true role in our lives. This is, according to it an intellectual value. Let us take the example of shoes. They are very important to me. They give me comfort while walking and protect my feet and therefore I have a value for them. But still, when I enter my home, I place them where they belong. I cannot bring them into my *puja* room! Similarly, money has a proper place in our lives. It is not designed to provide me emotional security, or give me happiness.

All material things have a purpose to serve. We should not expect from them what they are not designed to provide. We require them in our day-to-day life, but they cannot give us freedom, or security, or happiness. We superimpose happiness, security, and freedom upon these material things. This superimposition is an emotional value. They can satisfy our basic needs like hunger and thirst. They can and do provide us comfort, and to the extent that we need comfort, we need these things. But beyond this, they cannot do anything. We cannot eat money. All the same, we need money to appease our hunger and thirst and provide us the basic comforts of life.

Of course we all know that there is no end to what we call comfort. Therefore, we should keep our life as simple as we can. We should have as few requirements as possible. We can never be totally free from requirements because this is how everybody is created. We are dependent upon the universe for our needs and the universe, in turn, is dependent upon us. We must recognize this interdependence, but at the same time be able to assess the role that they play in our lives. We should assign them the importance that they deserve, no more or no less. This is what we call *viveka* or discrimination. Giving more or less importance can be called an emotional value, meaning that it is due to *aviveka*, superimposition or subjective projection. When I hate a certain thing, it is a subjective projection. When I am attached to something, it is a subjective projection too. If there are problems we must understand them, as they are, not more or not less. Some people say there are no problems at all. That is not right because there are problems in life. Some say that there are only problems in life. That is also not right. Thus having a pragmatic approach to things in life is necessary. Otherwise there can be a lot of conflict in our mind.

Question

To a goldsmith my wedding ring is just a piece of gold. But I have an emotional value for it because it symbolizes something. Please comment.

Answer

A wedding ring has an emotional value. You assign it that value. This is quite ok. Otherwise you would not call it a “wedding ring”. You would just call it gold. You cannot be indifferent to the wedding ring and you should protect it. If, however, the wedding ring is lost and you feel that you are lost, it is overkill. You should deal with the loss appropriately. You should then be aware that it is gold that you have lost, and that you can always buy another ring.

Question

Can I say that all of my emotions are of my own creation?

Answer

We should define what emotion is. Love and compassion are also emotions. It is a wonderful thing to have emotions such as love and compassion. This is why we use the word superimposition or projection for other emotions such as greed, hatred etc. Superimposition is to see something when is not there, such as projecting a snake upon a piece of rope. Then you imagine that you see a snake where there is only rope. Therefore, we have to become free from superimposition.

Freedom from Attachment

One may ask, “What happens when I gain the knowledge that happiness comes from within myself? Does it mean I become the Almighty? Or does it mean I become Omniscient? Does it mean I control the world?” Nothing really happens. It is just that one begins to see things in the right perspective. Lord Krishna has described such a person as *ātmanyevātmanā tuṣṭaḥ*, a person who is happy in oneself with oneself alone [BG¹ 2-55]. The person has discovered the satisfaction of wholeness from his own self.

Lord Krishna further says, ‘*vīta rāga bhaya krodhaḥ*, free from longing, fear and anger [BG 2-56]’. Such a person is free from *rāga*, *bhaya* and *krodha*. *Rāga* means attachment which results into demands, *bhaya* is fear and *krodha* is anger. This person’s mind becomes free from demands, anger and fear. This anger, fear and demand deprive us of happiness. Once these are removed, we become happy and can then own up to what we are. Today, our life is an endless process of becoming what we are not. We feel we are not wealthy enough and want to become wealthier. We feel we are not strong enough and want to become stronger and so on and so forth. It is all right to become wealthy, strong and powerful. But these can only be embellishments. They cannot make us happier than we already are.

The *Bhagavad Gītā* teaches us to stop the process of becoming something else and begin the process of owning up to what we are. We have to live a way of life, whereby what we choose becomes a reality for us. And the formula to live this way of life is to be ‘*vīta rāga bhaya krodhaḥ*’.

When we cannot do without something we call it *rāga*, attachment or dependence. Very often we are controlled by something for which we have a weakness. We confuse attachment with love. Though attachment is also love, we should understand that love comes from a platform of freedom and strength, whereas attachment comes from a platform of need. Before we know it, we get attached to things. What in the beginning is a luxury becomes a necessity in the course of time. Vedānta does not say we should not enjoy life. Vedānta says, ‘*tena tyaktena bhujñīthāḥ*, enjoy things with freedom’ [Īśāvāsya Upanishad, 1]. Lord Krishna also says ‘*tyāgācchāntiranantaram*, from

¹ BG = *Bhagavad Gītā*

renunciation follows peace immediately' [BG 12-12]. When the mind enjoys freedom from dependence, there is *śanti* or peace of mind. Thus the *Bhagavad Gītā* teaches us how to relate to things. We always associate Vedānta with *sannyāsa* or renunciation. Vedānta teaches us to live intelligently. It teaches us the art of becoming happy. Becoming happy is not easy; it is very difficult.

We have a weakness for several things. For instance, we cannot control ourselves when we see good food in front of us. This is dependence or attachment. It is all right to enjoy good food, but we should not become dependent on that. That for which we have a weakness, should not control us. The basic rule to live intelligently is to be free and not be controlled by anything. We can enjoy everything but with *tyāga*, or the spirit of renunciation of the attachment to, or dependence on it.

Freedom from Desires

Desires are a product of ignorance. Getting rid of ignorance is a process. Some of the desires are helpful, some are hurtful, and some are neither helpful nor hurtful. There could be some desires that may be conducive to our self-growth. Your desire to come to the *Gurukulam* is also a desire, but a desire that may be helpful to your growth. So we cannot say that desire *per se* is wrong. We have to see whether a desire will be helpful or not. Yes, as we grow, our needs gradually reduce as we discover more satisfaction with ourselves. This is what is called growth. Desires therefore automatically become fewer. So freedom from desires is a “growing out” of desires, so that desires do not have a need to be there.

The ultimate goal is to become free from the need to desire. The Vedāntic perception is that you are what you seek to be. Ideally therefore, there should be no needs at all. But this is not the reality right now! Therefore we accept the need and analyze whether fulfilling that need is going to help or hurt us, and accordingly, make a decision.

Question

How do we manage our desires?

Answer

Desire is called *kāmā* in Sanskrit. We have to manage our desires and should not be managed by them. As long as we can manage our desires, we can afford to have desires. Desires create a problem when they manage us. Such desires are called binding desires. When not fulfilled, such binding desires can potentially result in reactions such as anger. If a desire is not fulfilled and if we can accept it as such, it is not a binding desire.

Usually, a desire indicates a certain lack in me; a certain want. The desire is generally for something that I do not have. There cannot be a desire to have something that I already have. However, there are two kinds of desires. One, a set of desires for something that I do not have, and the other a set of desires for something that *I think I do not have*.

Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati usually tells a story to illustrate the second kind of desire. A man is reading a newspaper with his reading glasses. A friend drops by and this man tucks his reading glasses on his head and begins talking to that friend. The friend goes away after about 15 minutes. The man tries to resume reading his newspaper. He can't read because he can't find his glasses. He starts looking for his glasses where he normally keeps them and can't find them there. He gets irritated and looks for them all over the house. He then gets upset and starts screaming at his wife. She is in the kitchen and does not respond. After a few minutes, she comes in and asks him, "What is the matter?" "Where did you keep my reading glasses? I can't find them anywhere!" Although she sees where they are, she tells him, "I have not taken them. I don't know where you kept them!" She watches this drama for a few minutes. Her son comes and he also watches the drama for a few more minutes. The youngest son walks in and his dad asks him, "Have you seen my reading glasses?" He says, "Yes, dad. I can show you where your glasses are, but on one condition." "What is the condition?" "I should be allowed to go to the movies tonight!" "Sure. Where are my glasses?" "Dad, the glasses are right on your head!" The man then realizes that the glasses that he was searching for all this while are right on his head. The very action, of searching for the glasses, is because I desire the glasses. The desire for my glasses is also a desire. What kind of a desire? A desire for something that I think I do not have!

Vedānta says that it is alright to desire something that we do not have, such as a house or a car. Which category does the desire for happiness fall into? Is it a desire for something that I do not have? Vedānta would say that it is a desire for something that I think I do not have. The reading glasses are already with that man! For some reason, he thinks he does not have them! Similarly, happiness is my nature. For some reason I take myself to be an unhappy person, an insignificant person, a little person, a limited person, a helpless person! I feel I am insignificant and I want to be significant. I think I am helpless and I want to be free. So all these desires, like the desire for becoming significant, the desire for becoming free or the desire for becoming happy, are all there for something *I think* I do not have. These desires can never be fulfilled, like that desire for finding the reading glasses. He could never find it no matter what he did. Or, as in the story of 'The 10th Man', the leader can never find the 10th man, regardless of what he

does. The means of fulfilling that kind of desire is knowledge, not action! No amount of action can fulfill the desire to be happy, the desire to be free.

How do we manage desires? When a desire arises in our minds, let us analyze what we seek to accomplish by fulfilling that desire. Is it desire for something that I do not have? Or is it desire for something that I have? “Swamiji, I do not have a million dollars and I want to have a million dollars.” “Ok, what do you want the million dollars for?” “I want it so that I can buy a new house and a new car.” “For what?” “So that I can be happy.”

Ultimately, the one desire behind most desires is really the desire to be happy. There are some natural desires like the need for food, the need for clothes, the need for shelter and the need for transportation that can be understood because these are desires to help us sustain our lives. However if we are looking for some specific gourmet food, it is a cultivated desire. Other cultivated desires include, for instance, the desire for name brand clothes or a particular kind of car, say, a Lexus. Such cultivated desires are doomed to fail, meaning that these desires can never be fulfilled. Even if we get that Lexus, the desire for happiness cannot be fulfilled, because the Lexus cannot give us happiness forever.

Therefore, to manage our desires, the first thing to do is to analyze what it is that we are seeking in the fulfilling of the desire. Are we seeking to be happier than we are? Or more secure than we are? Nothing has the capacity to give us happiness or security. When desires are not fulfilled, there is frustration. When those desires are fulfilled, the happiness comes momentarily and then goes away. Therefore, there is some frustration anyway.

The tool with which to analyze our desires is called *viveka*. The desire to be happy is there because of *aviveka* or non-discernment, not discerning the fact that wholeness is my nature. Therefore, a desire to be whole or happy is a desire arising from *aviveka*, non-discrimination which, in turn, arises from ignorance. The way to deal with that desire is through *viveka* or discrimination. Vedānta would say, “*nitya anitya vastu viveka*”, meaning the discrimination between what is permanent, *nitya* and that, which is impermanent, *anitya*. What I am seeking is fullness. I should recognize that.

The best way to manage our desires is by understanding where the desire originates. Desires mostly originate from ignorance. Some desires originate from our needs because we have a body; we have a family, children and responsibilities. The desire to fulfill these natural desires is a legitimate desire. It is quite all right to pursue legitimate desires. Others have to be resolved via discrimination. What do I seek to accomplish through fulfilling the desire? Is it sense gratification? Is it ego gratification? Is it merely for that? The things that I am seeking have no capacity to fulfill my desire to be complete! Desires to satisfy our natural needs are genuine desires. But desires to satisfy our ego or the desire to satisfy our senses cannot deliver what it is that we are seeking!

To have desire is quite all right. I cannot be without desire. As long as I feel incomplete, there will be desire. But I should know how to fulfill that desire. That desire for completeness cannot be fulfilled by action. The desire for completeness can be fulfilled only through knowledge, knowledge and recognition, that completeness is my nature. *Viveka* is required to analyze whether the desire is for something that is already acquired or the desire is for something that is not acquired.

Freedom from Anger

Question

I have understood that *kāma*, *krodha* and *lobha* have to be controlled and avoided. Could you show me the ways to control them, especially anger, which afflicts our lives so much? Is anger an acquired emotion? Having recognized what harm it can do to oneself and others, especially children, what can one do to resolve this?

Answer

Kāma means lust, *krodha* means anger and *lobha* means greed. Lord Krishna identifies these three tendencies of lust, anger and greed, as our prime enemies. “Your enemies reside within yourself”, Lord Krishna says, “May you become free from them!”

Anger does a lot of harm, both to others and to us. Like a matchstick, which burns itself before it burns anything else, anger will first burn the place where it originates and then burn everything in its path. Anger also causes a lot of damage particularly to children. Children do not understand why their parents get angry. Sometimes others with whom we get angry are also unaware of why we are angry. We should remember that anger does not solve any problem or accomplish anything.

We cannot control anger. We can only control something that is within our control. When we can use our free will, we can control something. Although we say, “I got angry” or “Don’t get angry”, in fact it is not the person who ‘gets’ angry. It is anger that gets us and controls us. This is why, regardless of how much you try, you cannot get angry deliberately. So we can neither control nor give up anger. What we can do, however, is give up the cause of the anger. Give up the cause and the effect goes away by itself.

What is the cause of anger? We get angry when our demands or expectations are not met with. We all have certain expectations and demands of others. If they do not meet with our expectations, or reject those demands, we feel rejected. This sense of rejection makes us angry. For example, if somebody does not invite me I feel I am rejected. Having been invited, if some one does not receive me properly, I feel I am rejected. Having been received, if I do not get the proper place at the table, I feel I am rejected. It takes so little for me to feel rejected. And what do I do when I feel rejected?

I react by rejecting others. If you reject me, I reject you. If you hurt me, I hurt you in return. So anger is our reaction to feeling rejected. We have become very sensitive and feel rejected in no time.

The first thing we can do is understand our expectations of all the people around us as to how they should be or should not be, what they should do or should not do, etc. Our tendency to make demands of the behavior of others is our desire to control them to behave in a certain way, to fulfill our expectations, so as to make us feel good about ourselves. What we really expect from others is that they should gratify our ego in being who we would like them to be.

Why do we expect this from others? It is because we don't feel good about ourselves and want others to make us feel happy. My suggestion is that as best as we can, we should become free of this tendency to control, to make demands, to have expectations, to need other people to change and be agreeable, so that we can be happy. An analysis of every episode of anger will enable us to learn about some demand that is buried within us that came to surface. We should ask ourselves, "Is it fair that I make this demand and desire to control behavior so I am happy?"

For instance, as parents, we have many behavioral expectations of our children and when these are not fulfilled, we get angry. Very often children do not even know what our expectations are, of them. As long as this demand is for their well-being, I think it is quite fair. But very often these demands from children are for our own sake. We want to mould them to fit our own image of what is desirable and make us happy in our being able to achieve it. We fail to recognize that children are independent entities with their own minds, their own things to do, their own lives and their own destinies. The role of a parent is, like that of a gardener's to help plants grow, to help our children grow. We should give care, tenderness, concern and freedom to grow as best as possible. No growth is possible in an atmosphere of control. We should remind ourselves that while we may have the freedom to make demands, we do not have the freedom to demand that they be fulfilled.

If we can resolve to drop even one demand, there is one less cause for anger. We should slowly stop demanding from the individuals around us that they should conform

to being what will make us happy. We should recognize that we have inexhaustible inner resources that we could tap for becoming and remaining happy.

The other important thing is to not equate ourselves with our demands. Thus, when our expectations are rejected we will not feel that we, as individuals, are rejected.

All anger stems from expectations and demands. Lord Krishna says, that what begins as a *kāma* or a *kāmana* - a desire or a demand, becomes *krodha* or anger when it is not fulfilled. Let us then become aware of how our mind functions and see what kinds of demands we have of the individuals around us. This is the only way to become free from *krodha*.

The basic reason for anger is within us. We do not feel good about ourselves, do not accept ourselves and even reject ourselves, and hence, when others seem to reject us, we make an issue of it.

Lobha or greed is another undesirable aspect of the mind. The Īśāvāsya Upanishad says,

mā grdhaḥ kasyasvid dhanam

May you not covet any body's wealth! [Īśāvāsya Upanishad, 1]

In fact, you should not covet even your own wealth. Recognize that wealth does not belong to you or anybody else. It is our notion that it belongs to some one or the other. All wealth belongs to the Lord or the totality. Our relationship to it is merely that of a trustee. This is how we can gradually deal with *kāma*, *krodha* and *lobha*. Let us learn the *Bhagavad Gītā* better. Let us understand ourselves better. Let us learn the values of life. Let us learn to understand, if not control the mind, calm it and try to make it a friend. Let us strive to let go of all hurtful impulses and tendencies.

Prayer to the Lord is also one of the things that we can do to help control our impulses. "Lord, please help me to become free from likes and dislikes. Help me rein in my expectations and give people the freedom to be who they can be. May I have the freedom to work hard and be satisfied with what I get. Whatever you have given me is the result of my honest effort, and let me be happy with as much".

Question

Can a person be ‘comfortably angry’?

Answer

Nobody can be comfortable being angry.

Question

But anger drives and motivates people to achieve greater heights!

Answer

No. Anger cannot do that. It can only hurt either others or oneself. Some kind of a need on my part motivates me to achieve greater things, such as a need to be recognized or a need to be successful or a need to get ahead or a need to be better than others. It is such a need that motivates a person, or drives a person. Not anger.

Question

Is it possible to be detached and be angry at the same time?

Answer

Anger is a result of attachment. Anger, greed and jealousy are the result of attachment. Detachment means freedom from these passions.

Freedom from Greed

Question

Can you please elaborate on *lobha*?

Answer

Lobha means greed. What is greed? Typically, it is defined as not being able to part with what we have, even when there is a worthy recipient. Greed however has another aspect to it. It is also a lack of contentment with what we have. Thus greed is a disposition on the part of a person who is not satisfied with what he has, and who cannot part with what he has.

Lobha or greed arises from a sense of insecurity. We are not able to derive security from within ourselves. Therefore, we need to surround ourselves with things, which we look upon as a source of security. We build fences around ourselves to protect ourselves. We acquire wealth, name, fame, power, etc. because we see security in them. We feel that wealth makes us secure; that we can have whatever we need, whenever we need it. We feel that power gives us security; that we will thus not be controlled, manipulated, or dominated over, and instead, we can control others! These are some of the means of security.

Unfortunately, though we look upon them as a source of security, they do not have the capacity to give us security. That is why, even after acquiring them, we do not seem to find security and want even more. And even after possessing more, we do not feel secure. We feel we are not big enough or comfortable enough. Our sense of discontentment or insecurity doesn't seem to go away despite our acquiring so much!

The more we acquire, the more we are concerned about protecting it. Power is always like that. We know that if we have it, others may want it too. It is a zero-sum game. In the case of power, demand exceeds supply! Those who have power are always concerned that someday it may be snatched away from them, and have the need to hold on to it.

arthamanartham bhāvaya nityam nāstitataḥ sukhaleśaḥ satyam

Wealth is calamitous, truly there is no joy in it. Reflect thus at all times. [Bhajagovindam, 29]

“*Arthamanartham, bhāvaya nityam*” means that we always observe the fact that *artha* is *anartham*. *Artha* has several meanings. One of them is ‘meaning’, as in *pada* and *artha* or word and meaning. *Śrī Śankarācharyā* uses a different meaning of the word *artham*, in *arthamanartham*. Here, *artham* means wealth, and *anartha* means harm. “Understand that what you call wealth is in fact *anartha*, or that, which brings about all kinds of calamities and causes you harm. Recognize that what you call *artha* is harmful.” *Sankara* cautions. It is a person who wants to grow spiritually who is addressed here, and not anybody else. He is warned that *artha* is harmful because *artha* includes wealth, name, fame, recognition, everything. It can never satisfy you. This is told to a mature person, who is now ready to think about the meaning of life, and not to anybody else! Whatever teaching is imparted must be imparted to an *adhikārī*. If the same thing is told to anybody else, it may perhaps create the wrong impression.

In the *Kāthopanisad*, *Yamaraja* offers *Naciketas* wealth. *Naciketas* says to *Yamaraja*, “*na vittena tarpanīyo manusyaḥ*, man is not to be satisfied with wealth” [1-1-27], meaning that a human being can never be satisfied by wealth. The more we have, the more we want it. It is remarkable.

The story of the 99 gold coins, illustrates how one can never be satisfied with what one has. A guru wanted to teach his disciple, a valuable lesson about *lobha*. One morning, when the disciple opened his door, he found a bag containing 99 gold coins. He immediately assumed that one was missing. “If there had been 100, it would have been wonderful!” He now wanted the 100th gold coin. He worked overtime and saved money. He would not even eat properly because he wanted to save that money. All this, for the 100th coin! After a lot of labor and pain, he acquired one gold coin and put it in the bag. The next morning he counted the coins. Again, there were only 99! He started working again. After six months he earned another gold coin. He put it in the bag. Yet again, upon counting, there were only 99!

There is an old verse in Sanskrit, which illustrates the grip of *lobha* even better.

nissvo hyekaśatam śatī daśaśatam lakṣam sahasrādhīpaḥ

lakṣeśo kṣitipālatām kṣitipatiḥ cakreśavat sampadam

cakreśaḥ punarindratam surapatirbrahmaspadam vānchhati

brahma viṣṇupadam harirharapadam trṣṇāvadhim ko gataḥ

The one who has no money wants 100. The one who has a 100 wants 1000. The one who has 1000 wants 100,000. The one who has 100,000 wants to be a king. The king wants to be a sovereign of the earth. The sovereign of the earth wants to be Indra, the king of heavens. Indra wants to be Brahmā. Brahmā wants to be Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu wants to be Śiva. Who has ever attained the end of craving?

Nissvo hyekaśatam. *Nisva* means one who has no money at all. Ask him, “What do you want?” “Just give me 100”. In those days, 100, was a lot of money. “Give me 100, I will be happy.” “Here it is. Have 100.”

Śatī daśaśatam. Go to him after six months and ask him, “Are you happy now?” “I would like to have 1000, “Ok.”

Lakṣam sahasrādhīpaḥ. Ask the one who has 1000 or *sahasra*, “Are you happy?” “I want *lakṣam* or 1,00,000.” The *lakshyam* of those days is like a billion today. That is how it was. All right, give the *sahasrādhīpaḥ*, a lakh of rupees. “Are you happy now?”

Lakṣeśo kṣitipālatām. What does he want now? He has all the money. He wants power now. He is contesting elections. The wealthy wants to be a *kṣitipāla*, a king. Ok, make him king of one kingdom. “Are you happy now?”

Kṣitipatiḥ cakreśavat sampadam. “No. I want to be a *Chakravarti*, the king of the whole earth.” Ok, make him the king of the whole earth. After six months, go to him. “Are you happy now?”

Cakreśaḥ punarindratam, the one who is the Lord of the whole earth, wants to be Indra. He wants to be the Lord of Heavens, of the three worlds. All right, make him Indra. “Hey Indra, are you happy?”

Surapatirbrahmaspadam vānchhati. “I want to become Brahmā”. All right! Make him Brahmā. “Are you happy?”

Brahma viṣṇupadam. “I want to become Vishnu”.

Hariḥ harapadam. “I want to be Hara or Śiva”.

Trṣṇāvadhim ko gataḥ. “Whoever gained the end of the craving?” the verse concludes. Craving is such that you can never satisfy it! The more you get, the stronger the craving becomes.

So *lobha*, or greed can very fittingly be compared to fire. The more you try to satisfy it, the fiercer it becomes. In the case of *kāma* and *krodha*, when you satisfy them, they leave you at least momentarily. If you satisfy a desire, it goes away momentarily and similarly, when you express your anger, it goes away for the time being. But *lobha* will never go away. Therefore it is compared to a ocean, that is without any bounds. This is the nature of *lobha*.

What should one do about *lobha*? Cultivate *santosa* or contentment. Be content with what you have. Know that you can never find contentment from what you have or what you will get; you have to discover contentment from within yourself. Recognize that contentment is born of your inner security and that you have to discover this security in yourself.

We definitely require wealth as well as other things. We need them in our day-to-day life. We require money, we require some recognition, and we require some power too. We require all these things. I would suggest that you acquire as much as you can. You acquire as much money as you can, acquire as much power as you can, and acquire as much recognition and fame as you can. Do that. But understand that they cannot give you satisfaction or contentment. They can be the means, but are not the end.

If you look upon these things as the end, they can never fulfill the purpose. Yes, it is nice to have money, so that you can help. You can serve, and you can contribute. It is good to have power, recognition and some influence also. Then alone can you help people. Otherwise you cannot help. To help, to serve requires resources. Money is a resource; power is a resource; wealth is a resource. Resources are good. You take from them what you need and make the rest available for others. The contentment you get by satisfying somebody else is a lasting contentment, much more than the contentment you get by consuming it yourself. Consuming these things can never give you contentment.

Santosa is a component of *niyama*, prescribed in the *astānga-yoga* of Patañjali²:

sauca-santosa-tapah-svādhyāya- īśvara-pranidhānāni-niyamāh

Niyama comprises purity, contentment, penance, study of scriptures and meditation upon (or renunciation of fruits of action to) Īśvara. Patañjali Yogasutra 2-32.

The only antidote for *lobha* or greed is *santosa* or contentment. Again, as Śrī Śankarācharyā says in the *Bhaja Govindam*:

*mūḍha jahīhi dhanāgamtr̥ṣṇām kuru sadbuddhiṃ manasi vit̥ṣṇām
yallabhase nijakarmopāttam vittaṃ tena vinodaya cittam*

Hey deluded person, may you give up the craving pertaining to wealth, and entertain the thought of the Lord in the mind free from craving. Be content with that whatever wealth you get by your honest work. [Bhaja Govindam, 2]

² *Yama* (restraint – non-injury, non-stealing, celibacy, non-acceptance of gifts, truth), *niyama* (see definition above), *āsana* (correct posture), *prānāyāma* (regulation of breath), *pratyāhāra* (withdrawal of the mind), *dhāranā* (fixing the mind), *dhyāna* (meditation), *samādhi* (absorption) are the eight limbs (steps) to *yoga* or total absorption.

Freedom from Worries and Anxieties

Question

How do we become free from worries and anxieties?

Answer

To worry is something natural. It is not as if there can be no worries in life. Though it would be easy to declare that there are no reasons to worry, there can be some genuine causes for worry.

Let us understand the nature of worries. Why are we worried? There may be a question about physical security. Suppose I am subjected to physical abuse, there can be a worry that I may again be abused. Health can be a cause for worry. Income can be a cause for worry. The future can be a cause for worry. These are some of the things we may be worried about.

We must, however, recognize that mere worrying does not help. Worry will not accomplish anything. If we find ourselves worried about something, we must confront the object of worry and act upon it. Worried about health, security or income? If we can alter the unpleasant, we should try to change things to make the situation more pleasant or agreeable.

There are certain inevitable things in life that we cannot help and which we cannot change. Worrying about things that we cannot change is not right. Lord Krishna says,

tasmādaparihārye 'rthe na tvam śociturmarhasi

You should not grieve over that which can not be altered. [BG 2-27]

When there is something inevitable in life that we cannot change, we have to accept it gracefully. We must have the willingness to also accept the unpleasant realities of life, willingness to accept the unpleasant.

Anxiety occurs because we are not willing to accept the unpleasant. It is natural that we are unwilling to accept pain and unwilling to accept the unfavorable. But we have to remind ourselves that the unpleasant, the unfavorable, the undesirable is also a reality of life. If I find that I cannot avoid certain things, I must be willing to accept them

gracefully. Accept the unpleasant, accept pain gracefully. Physical pain is one thing that we may not be able to avoid. We have to accept it gracefully, as being what God has destined for us. Do so in a spirit of humility, not defiance or worry and anxiety, or sadness and fear. As they say, ‘if you cannot win them, join them’. Accept it gracefully, as boldly as you can and with a prayerful mind. Prayer will also help in reducing the anxiety. Let us pray and seek the grace of the Lord so that the unfavorable situations can be avoided, but that we may get the strength to face them if they do come.

Worries and anxieties call for a response from us. To the extent that we can, we should try to provide the response in our willingness to accept the inevitable in life. When we are born, we are bound to grow old. When the body is there, diseases are bound to occur. When birth is there, death will surely come. When wealth is there, poverty can also be at hand. When association is there, disassociation can be there. These are some of the laws of nature. This being the case, we have to accept them, however difficult they may be, not out of a sense of helplessness, but with grace. If possible, accept them as *prasāda*, the grace of the Lord.

In every situation, there are certain things that we can change and many things that we cannot change. What we can change, we should use our will and courage to change. What we cannot change, we should accept gracefully. This is the way to deal with worries and anxieties. When we were born, everything was provided for us. As we have been going along in life also, what we need has been provided to us. Have some trust, in that there is somebody who is taking care of us; that whoever has caused this birth, will take care. This does not mean that we remain with folded hands and don’t do anything. But we must have *śraddhā*, faith or trust in the scheme of things; a reasonable trust that there is fairness and that it will take care of everything. It should also be acceptable that it may not always do so.

When worry comes, let us ask this question, “Why am I worried?” Let us confront that worry. “Swamiji, what will happen, if...? Suppose that happens, then what?” Sometimes we do not confront the situations. We just worry. What if I lose my job? I ask, so, what will happen? I won’t have income. So what will happen? I cannot

pay my mortgage. So what will happen? I cannot live in this house? Go to an apartment. What will people think of me? Let them think whatever they want.

Very often, we impose so many requirements upon ourselves. We have an image about ourselves and think that we cannot be otherwise. But we can be. When we really take this process far enough, we will be able to confront the unpleasant also. It is not that we cannot confront it. We can. If not, we pray to the Lord to give us the strength to confront what we need to confront in our life.

God, give me the serenity to accept gracefully what I cannot change

Give me the will and courage to change what I can

And give me the wisdom to know the difference

Freedom from Sadness

Question

In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, we learn that we should not grieve for things that we need not grieve for. Swamiji, can you please elaborate on this point with reference to day-to-day living?

Answer

The answer is contained in the question itself. We should not grieve for things that we need not grieve for. Grief arises when, number one, we do not understand the realities of life, and number two, we are not willing to accept these realities. We do not understand that the whole universe functions according to a certain order and that we cannot change this order. If we understand this reality, we will be able to deal with it comfortably. Sometimes, even when we understand, we do not accept it. Hence, in order to deal with the grief in our life, we need both understanding and acceptance.

Lord Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gītā* that there are two entities. One is what we call the self, or *ātmā*. The other is what we call *anātmā*, the non-self. My body-mind-sense complex is what we call *anatmā* or the non-self, the personality. The *ātmā* is the person, the self, the conscious being. These are the two entities and neither of them deserves to be grieved for. What is the reality about the self? The reality about the self is that the self is immortal. It is free from birth and death and growth and decay. It is ever full and complete. This is the nature of the self and that is what the person is, that is what I am. And when I am immortal, when I am complete, there is no cause for grief at all.

Grief or sorrow comes when there is a certain loss, when there is hurt and when there is guilt. When I feel like I am the victim of somebody's actions, there is sorrow, or when I find that I have victimized somebody, then also there is sorrow. When somebody has become the victim of what I do, I feel bad about it. Or when I become a victim of what somebody else does, then also I feel bad about it.

Sorrow comes as a result of a buildup of a certain sequence of thought. Let us say that somebody insults me. If I simply do not accept it, I could just shake it off thinking, "That's his opinion." But what happens is that I keep thinking about what he said. He called me a thief or a liar! How can he do that? Who is he to do that? This train of

thought keeps on building up and gains momentum. Like the water in a river that gains momentum and turns into a flood, so also a given thought builds up, gains momentum, and gathers sufficient power to throw me off or drown me.

Therefore, when you find your mind repeating a certain thought pattern, become alert and recognize that you are allowing this build up to take place. In case of someone insulting you, if you know you are not what the other person thinks or says you are, just drop the thought. If there is some validity in what that person has said, do something about it. When someone says something about me, either the person is wrong, in which case, I need not worry; or, the person is right and then also, I need not worry, because then I can learn something from it. Do not encourage the build-up of a negative thought because it would gather momentum and ultimately sadness, which can grow into depression, also. If something unpleasant or unfavorable happens and I consider someone else responsible for that, there is anger. If I consider myself responsible, there is frustration. It is better that I do not blame anybody. I remind myself that unpleasantness is a reality of life and so is failure.

Life consists of pairs of opposites like the favorable and unfavorable, pleasant and unpleasant, heat and cold, comfort and discomfort, honor and dishonor, success and failure, birth and death etc. These pairs of opposites are called *dvandvam*. Like the two sides of a coin, these pairs are always associated and they will come to us, one by one. We cannot predict in what order they may come. There is no rule that comfort will come after discomfort, or that success will come after failure.

That there is a possibility of failure, of the undesirable is a reality of life. That is how life is. With reference to that, Lord Krishna teaches us:

nityam ca samacittatvam iṣṭāniṣṭopapattiṣu

..and always evenness of mind regarding the gain of the desirable and the undesirable... [BG 13-9]

Iṣṭa means desirable and *aniṣṭa* means undesirable. We should greet both of them as they come. We should accept them with a balanced mind, with equanimity. The idea is to develop a comfort with this basic reality of life. The situation never remains the same; it keeps on changing. Sometimes pleasant, sometimes unpleasant, sometimes

favorable, sometimes unfavorable; this is how life is. We can ask, “What can I learn from this? How can I use this situation for my growth?” To grow is the purpose of life. If we can remain free from blaming, a situation will not cause grief or sorrow. As Lord Krishna says,

*jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyurdhruvaṃ janma mṛtasya ca
tasmādaparihārye ’rthe na tvam śociturm arhasi*

Because, for that which is born, death is certain, and for that which is dead, birth is certain, therefore, you should not grieve over that which can not be altered. [BG 2-27]

“Hey, Arjuna, death is certain for the one who is born, and birth is certain for the one who is dying, or will die.” This is just an example of what we call the realities of life. “Therefore, Arjuna, it does not behoove you to grieve for that which you cannot change.”

In short, the whole universe is created and functioning according to a certain order and according to certain laws. We have neither created the laws nor can we change them. They are going to function in their own way. “Therefore, Arjuna”, Lord Krishna says, “do not grieve for that which you cannot change or control, because you just cannot avoid it.”

Even though, there is no point in grieving for what we cannot avoid, I am afraid, most of us will definitely grieve on account of death of ‘near and dear one’. This is understandable. Death is a big thing. But then we also grieve for many little things in life. I can understand that if somebody near or dear dies, there is definitely a loss in our life. There is a vacuum created and it is going to leave a deep impression on us. Hence, to say that there should be no grief at all may not be easy to follow, but we can deal with the grief if we are prepared, knowing that it is going to happen some day.

The example is given is that of traveling in trains in India, where several passengers come together. Sometimes the railroad journey is for twenty-four hours or more, and in the train these ten or fifteen people share a certain compartment, as well as their lunches. Someone buys a cup of tea for everybody, and you buy some fruits for everybody. This is how you develop a certain relationship. It begins as an acquaintance,

and then when you start sharing something, perhaps a certain bonding takes place. But we know very well that as the destinations arrive, people will go their respective ways. When one person leaves and says, “Okay, thanks, bye-bye,” I say, “Are you leaving?” with tears in my eyes. “Oh, please don’t leave me.” He says, “Oh, I have to leave you. My destination has come.” Everybody has to leave when his or her destination comes. Usually, in the course of train journeys, we do not weep because we know this. We know that we are going to separate; destiny has brought us together from different origins, and destiny has decided the different destinations. Since we are prepared for the fact, we do not have much difficulty in dealing with the separation when the passengers leave, one by one.

Within the home and in the family, there is a similar situation, wherein everybody is pursuing his or her own agenda. Every soul or *jīva* has its own agenda, its own journey. In the process of that journey, we have gotten together. It is a wonderful thing, this getting together. We develop relationships, and we share and help to make each other happy and help each other grow. But if we keep in mind the fact that some day everyone has to leave for his or her own destination, then we can deal with this fact. If you have this understanding, there is acceptance and comfort with this fact. Therefore, we may say that, sorrow or grief arises on account of not accepting the realities of life.

That I may make an effort and the effort may not produce a successful result is another reality of life. We need not call it failure. Lord Krishna does not like to judge a result as a failure. He says that the result is always going to be in accordance with the action, and therefore, there is no such thing as success or failure. Everything functions according to the law, Swamiji used to say. When I bring my palms together, there is a clapping sound. When I clap my palms, and the sound of clapping is produced, is it success or failure? If you want the sound, it is success. If you don’t, it is failure. If I keep on clapping and want the sound, I would call the result, a success. If I go on clapping but then don’t want clapping to make the sound, I would call the result, failure. So the sound of clapping is neither success nor failure. It is simply a result of an action, in keeping with the laws of nature.

Understand that success and failure are relative. It is most amazing that an event, which somebody judges as a success, is the very event that is judged as a failure by somebody else. If I expect my investment to yield a rate or return of twenty-five percent but get only fifteen percent, I think I have failed. But somebody who expects a five percent rate of return but gets fifteen percent, feels that he has succeeded. If I expect a B minus and I get an A minus, I am successful. If I expect an A plus and get an A minus, I am a failure. So understand that success and failure are entirely subjective, meaning that they are more a projection of my mind than a reality of life.

Even comfort and discomfort are subjective. What is comfort? Is this temperature comfortable? Is everybody comfortable? If everybody were comfortable, it would be a miracle. There is always somebody who feels cold and somebody else who feels warm. In any environment, there are people who feel very cold and will wrap themselves in a shawl while other people feel very warm and remove their wraps. So there is no such thing as pleasant or unpleasant, delicious or tasteless. “Oh, the food is very delicious” is what somebody says, and another person doesn’t care for it. What is aroma and what is stench? All of these things are relative.

We have preconceived ideas of what is right and what is wrong, what is success and what is failure, what is favorable and what is unfavorable, what is honor and what is dishonor and so on. Everything is relative. Somebody may feel happy that he was invited to a party while somebody else can feel miserable because he was not made to sit at a given table and somebody else sat at that table. That would be enough to make him miserable. But, Swamiji, even though I was made to sit at the proper table, the host did not talk to me properly. That’s it. He talked to me properly all right, but then when he served me, he didn’t do it properly. After all, anything can offend a person and one can feel bad. And, there are those whom nothing can offend. They think everything is wonderful!

Therefore, sorrow is purely a projection of the mind. It is not a reality of life. Lord Krishna says that there is no reason for sorrow at all. The *ātmā*, the self, does not deserve to be a cause of sorrow because it is immortal. And the body, the non-self, does not deserve to be cause of sorrow because it is mortal, regardless of what you do. And,

therefore, when we understand the realities of life we can accept them as *prasāda* or the grace of the Lord. “Swamiji, somebody has given me a slap. Is it *prasāda*?” I do not know. But you have to perhaps think about it.

We may not be able to see the grace of the Lord in many things. But we can perhaps give God the benefit of the doubt. In some cases, we may be able to see his grace, while in others we may not. But we can always allow the benefit of the doubt that there is a basic fairness and therefore things happen according to the fairness of the Lord. Thus, even if I do not understand something, I accept it gracefully because I cannot change it anyway. Lord, give me the serenity to accept what I cannot change. We call this serenity ‘*prasāda buddhi*’ or the graceful acceptance of things that we cannot change.

A graceful acceptance of that which is not in our control is a very practical thing. It is a good policy and will help us deal with reactions such as sorrow. A reaction arises because we resist or do not accept the reality of life. This is how we can deal with sorrow in our day-to-day life; count your blessings and don’t complain about what you don’t have. We can always complain about many things that we don’t have. But at the same time, it is also a fact that there are a number of things that we do have, also. There is a very beautiful prayer by Pujya Swamiji, “Lord, give me this wisdom that I can see your grace in everything. I have nothing to ask of you because you have given me everything without my asking. You have given me the eyes with which I can see, the ears with which I can hear, the mind with which I can think and the intellect with which I can make decisions. All of these are given to me. And, therefore, I think that you have given me plenty.”

Somebody can say, “Swamiji, the Lord has given me eyes, but only two. Why not three eyes?” One can ask this question. “Oh, I can see, all right, but I can’t see very far.” One can say this. “But I can’t see at close range.” One can say this too. Thus there are limitations as well as privileges. The glass is half full; you can either call it half full, or half empty. It is all a matter of how one perceives life and therefore sorrow is a result of a certain perception. And freedom from sorrow is a result of another perception. A wrong perception gives rise to sorrow, and the right perception will bring freedom from sorrow.

Understand that sorrow is a result of perception and nothing else. The other day the Super Bowl was being played. The Giants won, and San Francisco lost. A boy who was watching this game rushed over and just kicked the TV. I said, “What are you doing?” “I hate these Giants!” Why? Because he was rooting for San Francisco! Even though he lives in New York, he was rooting for the Forty Niners. I live in New York, and I was rooting for New York. The same event could make one person happy and another so miserable.

If you want to be miserable, there will be enough reasons to be miserable. If you want to be happy, there are enough reasons to be happy. Given any situation, we have to decide to be happy. Let the situation be what it is. “But Swamiji, I am being insulted.” Why do you call it an insult? That is the other person’s problem. “Somebody is treating me badly.” Well, all right, don’t personalize it; don’t internalize it; don’t accept it. And don’t retaliate, also. Remember that sorrow is a result of perception and happiness is also the result of a perception. Whenever I feel sad, whenever I feel sorrowful, there must be some wrong perception on my part. Let me examine the perception that has caused this and correct it. You can try to correct or change the situation if that is possible. I am not saying that you should not do something about the sorrow. You can create distance from a painful situation or with someone who harms you. One can do that. One should do whatever is practically possible in order to create comfort for oneself. Ultimately however, sorrow is the result of a given perception. And freedom from sorrow is a result of right perception.

Freedom in Relationships

Question

According to the *Bhagavad Gītā*, you should see the good in people and elevate them. Let us say you follow this advice in the current economic down turn and elevate your colleagues at work in front of your boss and in the process keep your contributions unknown. As a result, the boss may come to the conclusion that your colleagues are superior to you and decide to fire you. Now you do not have a job and are unable to send your kids to college. Following the *Bhagavad Gītā*'s advice and just accepting the results of actions seems to be difficult in this situation. Kindly comment.

Answer

Whenever you interact with somebody, “elevating him or her” means that you are making that person feel good about themselves and comfortable in your presence. You are accepting that person. That is what elevating means. Elevating does not mean that you have to praise or publicize that person. Elevation means acceptance or respect. Please understand that respect and acceptance is not an action; it is an attitude of mind.

Every person has his or her virtues and limitations. If I focus my attention on the limitation of a person, I will reject the person in my mind. If I focus my attention on the virtues of the person, I am going to respect the person. Again, respect and rejection are both the results of a perception. There is a rose in my hand, and there are thorns on its stem. If I give importance to the thorns, I will think that the rose is painful. If I give importance to the rose, I will think that it is very pleasant. This is how a reaction depends upon how we perceive a thing.

Everything is a combination of the pleasant and the painful, a combination of virtue and limitation. While nothing is perfect, nothing is worthless either. Whatever has been created is imperfect and incomplete, but at the same time, whatever is created also has a purpose. Focus on that purpose and you will see the goodness. In everything and everybody, there is always something, which, perhaps, is worth praising; some utility, some value, some beauty or a contribution of some sort.

If your mind can see that useful or beautiful aspect in a person, there is going to be a respect and acceptance of that person. This is all it takes to make the person feel

accepted by you and feel good about himself or herself. Don't make a demand upon the person that he should be different from what he is. When you have a demanding relationship, you make the person uncomfortable. When you have an accepting relationship, you make the person comfortable.

When you relate to somebody, the way to get the best out of that person is to make that person comfortable. Suppose, that you want to inspire a person to make the best food, - the Swamis know all about getting the best food out of a person - a simple compliment such as, "Oh, the other day, the dosa you made was wonderful" will ensure that you get the best dosa. If you say, "You don't know how to make idli properly" or you say, "What is this chutney? It's no good", you are not going to inspire the best in that person. If six food items are prepared, and two are good, two are not so good, and two are bad, what should you be talking about? Focus your attention on the things that are good. If you think that things are not good and can help the person make them better, help them. "Oh, I think that when you make the dosa, you know, you should have this batter done this way", and so on. Otherwise, focus your attention on the things that are good.

Have the attitude of always helping the other person with reference to his limitation rather than making his limitation an issue. Unfortunately, what we often do is make the weakness or limitation of a person an issue, to try to feel good about ourselves. I feel good about myself in the light of the limitations of others. For example, if there are two lines drawn, there are two ways of making my line bigger. I can either make my line bigger, or I can make the other line shorter. Usually, people make the other line shorter and have the feeling that they are superior. This is very negative and unproductive. You can become bigger than you are, but for that you need not make the other person smaller. Let the other person also feel big in your presence. This is called 'love'.

Love is when you make the other person feel bigger in your presence, feel elevated, feel good and feel accepted. Then you are accepted as well. This is what we meant by saying that you should elevate the other person. When you reject somebody, you are going to be rejected too, because the rejected person will retaliate. Nobody likes to be rejected.

In the situation that was described above, the meeting with the boss and elevating a person by praising him in the presence of the colleagues, you can do that provided you are willing to live with the consequences. The thing to understand is that there are values, which we cannot practice right away in total measure. Each value has to be interpreted and practiced within certain limitations and we should set boundaries when we practice them. Practicing a value always requires me to give up something or do without something. Sometimes it may even result in some deprivation. So practicing a value requires me to suffer a little bit. That suffering is the means of my growth. But there is a limit to how much I can suffer. Let us recognize our limits, and practice the value such that we do not hurt ourselves.

This is an extreme case where I imagine that the boss doesn't understand for himself, takes my word for what it is and since I praise the person, thinks that he is praiseworthy and I am not. I would expect that bosses are smarter than this. You have to consider your own capacity or the extent to which you are able to stretch yourself, and you also have to look at the maturity of your boss. I think the boss must have some other data, regarding what this fellow has been doing and what you have been doing, and the purpose of what you are saying. So, whether you are saying something out of courtesy or something that is genuine, supposing that this scenario is true, if you are not able to live with the consequences, please practice this value within your own limits. Practice every value, even the values of truthfulness, honesty or non-violence, within your own limits.

Sometimes, being honest may be hurting you. Then, ask yourself, "Am I willing to be hurt that much?" If I am not, I will practice the value within my boundaries. Any one value, to be practiced in its totality, will require me to give up myself totally. I am not prepared for that, as yet. So I practice a value to the extent that I am willing to give something up. But I do make a commitment that to the extent that I can I will try to stretch my limits every time.

Therefore, to answer this question, if you feel that your boss will take your words for granted, promote your colleague and fire you, don't do that, because sending your children to college is important. Having the job is important. Supporting your family is important. You are required to elevate your children, and elevate your family also. So,

when you are functioning with the spirit of elevating others, you have to strike a balance between elevating a colleague and elevating the family. Understand that every person has to perform many roles. A man is a husband, a father, a doctor etc. Every value calls for a balance between the roles. I have to strike that balance between the various roles and their attendant requirements and conduct myself in view of that. Always remember that a value has to be interpreted with reference to a given situation, at a given time, place and situation, and must be practiced accordingly.

Question

The *Bhagavad Gītā* says that you should see the good in people and elevate them. But it also tells you not to tolerate *adharma* and nip it in the bud at the level of the family and community. Which of the two should be followed in a family situation when according to everyone in the family one person lashes out at people without provocation. This particular family member is just angry, not insane and cannot be approached gently.

Answer

Acceptance is not a behavior or an action. It is the attitude that you have in relating to the person. For instance, what is honesty? It is not a given action that is called honesty or dishonesty, but the intention with which you perform the action. It is an attitude of mind and spirit that you have, which is called honesty or dishonesty. Similarly, elevating a person or accepting a person, even one who is angry or hurtful of other people, is having sympathy in your mind for that person.

“But Swamiji, how can you sympathize? This fellow is hurting everybody.” Perhaps it would help if you could look at the person behind the behavior. Usually, behind aggressive or hurtful behavior, you will find a person who feels hurt. Very often, people who are angry or intolerant are suffering from insecurity. They typically suffer from a sense of rejection.

When does a person get angry? Usually a person gets angry when he feels rejected. “But I did not do anything to make him feel that way.” You may not have done anything to reject that person, but he still feels rejected! Feeling rejected is something subjective. He may feel that he is not accepted or respected.

Somewhere along the process of his growing up, he may have been rejected again and again by the elders. Elders sometimes make demands of their children, which the children are not able to satisfy. “What is your score on that test?” “Ninety percent”, the child says, with pride. “Is that all? Not ninety-five?” In this manner, regardless of what the child does, he does not seem to satisfy the people who are important to him.

Every one of us has some people who are important to us, whose approval and acceptance is also important to us. The father may be the important person, or the mother may be the important person, or even an uncle or someone else. If you get their acceptance, there is nourishment and if you don't, there is hurt. Very often, people who were not fortunate enough to get this manner of nourishment and support when growing up, have more than their share of hurt.

So here is a person who is entertaining or nursing a lot of resentment and anger against the people who, in his opinion, have done him an injustice, hurt him or not accepted him. He grows up with this kind of feeling of anger and resentment. This is why he reacts quite out of proportion, to the slightest sign of non-acceptance by somebody else. The situation may not call for that kind of reaction but then, because the person has become so sensitive, the least suggestion of non-acceptance, or hint of confrontation or questioning, creates a sense of hurt and rejection in that person. And the person reacts by rejecting you.

A rejected person rejects others. Anger is my response to your rejection of me. We may not have done anything to deserve that and I am not saying that just because a person is angry with you, you deserve that anger. All I am saying is that there is some reason for the person to act the way he does. Though it may not seem reasonable from our standpoint, the person seeks to justify what he does. If you understand where this person is coming from, why he behaves the way he does and how he suffers from a sense of rejection and hurt, there will be sympathy for the person at least in your mind. This is what we mean by accepting the person.

You may not have done anything to hurt that person, but somebody else has hurt him in the past, and you may have become the occasion for that hurt to surface. What happens is that by your behavior, you may inadvertently be evoking the hurt person in

him. And, therefore, you may want to look at yourself, “Am I doing something by which that hurt person is invoked? Can I bring about some change in my own approach or my own behavior so that the person feels more accepted?” Try to see if you can do that. If you cannot, at least have sympathy in your mind for that person, so that whenever you interact with him, it will be from the platform of sympathy rather than from a platform of reaction. This is all we can say.

What you should do depends upon the particular situation. If you feel that such a person must be restrained because he is hurting either himself or others, do that. But that restraining should not be a punishment; it should be done out of as much sympathy as possible. It is not easy, but this is what we can do for our own mental health. If we keep on reacting, then we are also hurting ourselves or damaging ourselves. If we can cultivate as much sympathy as possible through our understanding, it will help us in dealing with these kinds of situations.

Question

Swamiji, what do you do when friends or even close family members sometimes mistake kindness and love for hatred? How do I avoid this wrong perception?

Answer

It is rather unusual that friends or close family members interpret kindness or love as hatred. Kindness doesn't always mean favoring. Kindness may involve favoring and sometimes even restraining also. It is not easy to mistake kindness or love for hatred. But, two things may be involved. Perhaps my way of expressing my kindness and love is such that people do not know where I am coming from.

Some people's way of expressing themselves is not very clear to others. Here is an example. Some time ago in India, I met a person who was a Forest Officer. He was very comfortable with wild animals. He used to have a female tiger, in his yard that was like a pet. This tiger loved him and he loved this tiger. Whenever he went away on his trips, naturally, the tiger missed him. When he returned, the tiger would be angry and would not come to him for a little while. Afterwards, peace would be re-established and the tiger would express her love. What would the tiger do to express its love? It would

lick his hand. Her tongue was so rough that it felt like thorns. So when this tiger licked his hand, the hand would start bleeding.

People sometimes may not understand the way we express love. Our words, behavior, or body language may be such that perhaps the intention is not conveyed. This is because kindness is in your mind. Love also, is in your mind. It is conveyed in your actions. Others can only infer your kindness or love. We infer that a person is very kind, because he is an accommodating person, a giving person, and a loving person. Similarly, love is also inferred when he accepts us and does something that we like.

People infer your love or kindness by your physical actions. It is possible that your way of expressing kindness and love may be such that it is interpreted as hatred. So if you are genuinely kind and loving, perhaps you have to look at the way in which you express the kindness. Is it expressed in a way that people can understand? It is not enough to have good intentions. How we communicate our intentions is also very important. Thus, we may have to examine the manner in which our intentions are communicated and see whether some change can be brought about so that people can understand our intentions for what they are.

Another possible reason for the misinterpretation of our good intentions could be the people's unwillingness to change their existing impressions of us. Maybe in the past I was a bit rough. Maybe I was not very kind. Maybe I was not a loving person. This is what their general impression of me may have been, which they continue to have. So even if I now act as a kind or loving person, they think that I am just posing or pretending. It is possible then, that even though my kindness is expressed in action, people may not actually give me credit for that.

“How do I avoid this wrong perception?” Maybe you may try to avoid giving others a wrong perception in the first place. Also, other people should be willing to change their perception of you. It may be that they do not want to change their perception, because it is in their interest not to change their perception. Then you cannot do anything. But if they are available to changing their perception, the perception can be changed. We can always communicate in words. You can ask, “What action of mine makes you think that I hate you or that I am not kind?”

Let us also learn from others. Maybe we can learn from people who interpret our actions as unkindness or hatred. We can learn what makes them think that way. We can communicate with the people whose acceptance is important to us and from that, learn and try to bring about changes in the way we express ourselves. We may help the situation by communicating in words and at the same time making an attempt to change our language so that they will understand.

Question

How do we resolve conflicts, particularly when both parties seem to be right?

Answer

This can be done by negotiation, because both are seemingly right from their own standpoint. If each is willing to understand the standpoint of the other and meet halfway, perhaps it may work out. But this can only happen if both are willing.

Question

Does detachment apply to personal relationships?

Answer

Yes, very much. Detachment means love, non-demanding love. Attachment implies demand.

Question

But if you are non-demanding, you can be taken advantage of! For example, I cooperate with all my colleagues and my boss at work. But I find that they keep increasing their demands. That is a case where I am non-demanding but they are demanding.

Answer

When you say you are non-demanding, it appears that outwardly you are not demanding, but inwardly, you are demanding that others should not take advantage of you. In that case, you have to protect yourself. When you follow values, you should draw boundaries depending upon the extent to which you can stretch yourself or reach out to others. Every value requires you to reach out. When you help others, you are reaching out. When you are honest, you are reaching out. When you are kind, you are

reaching out. All values require you to reach out. But there is generally a limit to the extent you can reach out. Therefore draw boundaries. You can reach out thus far and no further. This boundary depends upon your ability to let go, to be able to live with pain. Hopefully, you will develop the ability to reach out more and more. But you must respect yourself as you are, with your needs and your limitations. If you over stretch yourself, you will hurt yourself. While following the values, you also respect your own boundaries and hope that you can stretch the boundaries as you go along, depending upon your capacity to give or your capacity to sustain pain.

Question

Is it possible to be detached and still be emotional?

Answer

Yes, you can be emotional in true sense only when you are detached. Otherwise attachment converts emotions into passions. For example, anger and greed are passions. We cannot control our passions. Whenever you are comfortable with an emotion, call it emotion. Whenever you are not comfortable with an emotion, call it passion. When there is anger in my mind, I am uncomfortable. Anger, grief or jealousy make me uncomfortable with myself. When there is kindness, or compassion I am comfortable and happy with myself. Therefore we call our responses, emotions when they are our nature and passions when they are not our nature.

Freedom from Limitations

Question

Swamiji, you had said that we are what we are and no one can change that, and we just have to accept that and live with it. Does this mean that we can't change or learn new things? We all want our kids to do well in school and outside, and what if they start saying the same thing back to us? Could you please explain?

Answer

Although there are certain things about us that we can change, we are what we are and hence, there are certain things about us that we cannot change. For instance, "I was born as a man," "I was born as a woman," "I am the son of these parents," "I am five feet, eight inches tall" these are things that cannot be changed. I also have a personality consisting of the body, sense organs, mind and intellect. Each one of these has a capacity, but at the same time, each one of these also has a limitation. There is nothing we can do about it. I do have an intellect with which I can learn and know, but there is going to be a limit to what I can do with my intellect. There is a limit to what I can do with my hands, my legs, with whatever equipment that has been given to me. So, I am a limited being and I have to accept that fact.

To live with it means to develop a comfort with the fact that limitation is all right. It is not a crime to be limited. Everyone is created limited, but within these limitations there can be some differences among people. Somebody may be more limited in one way and less limited in some other way. Differences exist, but the fact remains that I am created and therefore I am limited. I cannot change the fact that I am limited. I can change what I know and what I do. I can know more and I can do more. I can make certain types of changes and still the fact that I am a limited being will not change. I may have a certain potential that I can explore, but I may not have some other potential. For example, someone may say, "Swamiji, I just cannot learn computers. My brain doesn't go there." Somebody else may say, "Medicine is impossible. The other day I saw a dissection of a cat and I decided medicine is not for me."

Everyone is not cut out for everything; everybody doesn't have every potential; everybody cannot do everything. This fact about me has to be accepted and I have to

accept it gracefully. I should accept it and live with it. Living with it means that I accept it gracefully and develop a comfort with it.

This does not mean that we can't change or learn new things. We can change things and we can learn new things. Still, there are certain things about me that I cannot change, as in the examples I just gave. That I am a son of these parents, I cannot change. That I am a brother of this sister, I cannot change. That I am the father of this son, I cannot change. But there also are a few things I can change. I have been given the capacity to learn, a capacity to act, a capacity to desire. I can definitely explore these, and grow. Still, because each of these capacities also has its limitations, however much I grow, I am still going to be a limited person. Therefore, ultimately, I will have to accept myself as I am.

If I keep judging myself by comparing myself with others, I will always feel inadequate and will never be comfortable with myself. Therefore, I have to discover comfort within myself and accept myself. I have to accept that it is quite all right that I am a limited being. This does not mean that I do not do anything about my limitations. Wherever change is possible, I definitely try to overcome the limitation. But, I should bring about a change, while accepting myself as I am. "Swamiji, I am an angry person. I want to bring about a change in myself. I want to deal with my anger." You can try to change, but not out of anger. The moment I reject myself and get angry, I lose the capacity to bring about a change in myself. Sometimes people get angry at their own anger.

When we say we accept ourselves, it means we should accept ourselves with all our virtues and limitations or faults. We can have a commitment to do whatever we can with our faults, but that is not to be done by rejecting ourselves, because it is natural to have faults. I have not created them. They are given to me. The mind with all its *samskāras* or impressions is given to me. The body is given to me. The sense organs are given to me. The brain with its potential is given to me. And I accept it gracefully. I can proceed to change whatever I can, without rejecting myself, while still accepting myself. So, yes, we can change and we can learn new things, and we should. But during that process there must always be self-acceptance.

The question is, “We all want our kids to do well in school and outside.” That is wonderful. “What if they start saying the same things back to us (that certain things can’t be changed)?” Kids also have limitations. Sometimes we want to push our children, “You must become a doctor.” That child may not be inclined to be a doctor or an engineer. When you say you want your child to do well, what do you mean by ‘well’? That he or she must become a doctor? Or does “well” mean that my child should grow in keeping with his potential? Will you allow whatever personality there is, to flower? It is like a gardener saying, “This seed must produce a mango.” It may not be able to. The seed has its own potential, it may be an apple seed, not a mango seed. It is not that only mangoes have done well. Apples, also, have done well in their own right.

What is meant by growth? While we encourage our children to do the best they can, we should, at the same time recognize what their potential is, accept that, and accordingly guide, not push, our children.

Question

How do we know what our limitations are?

Answer

I think we know them very well. We know ourselves very well, because it is direct knowledge. Therefore we are aware of our limitations as well as our virtues. You may also ask, “How do I know what my potential is?” Perhaps we can consult someone else if we do not know what our potential is. We can, perhaps, learn something more about it. We can learn by consulting other people or exploring different things by ourselves. For example, we can see whether we have potential in mathematics or physics. There are all kinds of aptitude tests one can take.

But even after discovering what my limitations are, my ego may not like to accept that I am a limited person. That I will always be a limited person is the basic fact. The ego will always have a problem. Even if I become more accomplished than I am now, the ego will feel limited. I can become mighty, but I can never become almighty. I can become well informed, but I cannot become omniscient. Therefore, I will always find myself limited at the level of my personality.

Recognizing that limitation is a reality of life, we must become comfortable with it and accept it gracefully. I recognize that not only am I limited, but all that is created, is limited also. Therefore, everybody else is limited as well. If I do not accept the fact that I am limited, I can never be comfortable with myself. For instance, how do I accept the weather? Summer is very hot, but then I know that it is the nature of summer to be hot. Winter is very cold, but then I know it is the nature of winter to be cold. How do I accept it? In the same way, I have to gracefully accept the fact that I am a limited person. It is then that I can do whatever is possible, about my limitations.

There are two ways of living life. One way is to progressively become more and more dependent on things, and the other way is to progressively become more and more independent of things. Lord Krishna describes this very well in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. He says, ‘that which in the beginning is bitter turns out to be very sweet in the end’. This is called ‘*sāttvik sukha*’. *Sāttvik sukha* is the way to really enjoy something. It is, in the beginning, a little bitter, but later on, becomes sweet. There is also another way, which in the beginning is sweet, but later on turns out bitter. When we get increasingly attached to things, there is always fear that we may not get them. When we do not obtain them, we get angry. Thus, dependence on something always brings ‘fear’ and ‘anger’. This is what we call ‘stress’.

When we analyze why we have stress in our life, the answer would be, fear or anger. There is also a modification of fear in the form of jealousy and a modification of anger in the form of resentment. Fear and anger come from dependence. Therefore, Lord Krishna says, “Live a life that is based on independence and not on dependence.” Since we know that we are needy and dependent, the only way to live a life based on independence is to ‘fake till we make it’. Fake that we are free and not needy. We have to behave in a manner that we are independent and free from need. This is the intelligent lifestyle that the *Bhagavad Gītā* teaches us.

The *Kāthopanishad* describes two lifestyles. One is called ‘*śreyas*’ and the other is called ‘*preyas*’. *Śreyas* is the path of the good and *preyas* is the path of the pleasant. Treading the path of the pleasant would mean, giving in to our impulses. It means that

we keep on acting as prompted by our likes and dislikes to appease our temptations, without examining whether it is right or not. We find that many people simply live a life based on impulses that occur in their mind. Our mind is prey to a lot of temptations. It has all kinds of fascinations. As children we do not know anything about life. We watch our parents, elders and other people in the family and learn from them. We find that all of them value money. We learn that money is very valuable and can buy toys, clothes, candies, balloons and many more things. Thus as we grow, we value money, name, fame, power and recognition. We also grow up thinking that happiness lies outside of us. Thus our mind has this fascination and temptation for things outside and keeps on making demands. If we do not examine these demands, but give in to all the whims and fancies of our mind, we end up becoming a slave to those things. This is what is called a life of '*preyas*', the path of the pleasant or *bhoga*. This is a life that is dedicated to the enjoyment of pleasures. This is a life whereby our ego is gratified. Our senses are gratified when we get objects of pleasure. Thus we seek two kinds of gratification. One is at the level of the senses, and the other is at the level of the ego.

But we are taught the path of good. This path is dedicated to discovering the wholeness within us. Our mind can be compared to a river. It is a stream of thoughts flowing from within us. When we eat breakfast, our mind is already contemplating what to eat for lunch. Thus our mind is preoccupied with discovering new ways of getting gratification. It also happens that our mind needs variety. We are bored with the same thing and want new things all the time. It is because of this that we have new cars, new fashions, new computers and so many more new items available for purchase. But there is no end to this. Our mind is like a river flowing towards the ocean, thereby releasing all its energy. We have to change this flow from running out and dispersing, to slowly coming back towards itself, like the turning of the course of a river, back to its own source. This is not an easy task, but this is what we need to do. In India, in places like *Rishikesh* and *Haridwar*, the River Ganges turns towards its own source and therefore these places are considered very sacred and auspicious. Thus intelligent living would mean turning towards our own source. This does not mean turning away from the world. It means, not seeking gratification all the time from something other than ourselves.

We all know about Alexander the Great. He was a Greek King who wanted to conquer the whole world. He had planned to conquer India too. One day Alexander was walking on the beach when he saw a man sun bathing. This man was very handsome and Alexander was impressed with him. Alexander noticed that this man was very relaxed, free and enjoying life. Alexander went to this man and introduced himself and asked him if he could be of some help. The man asked Alexander to move away as he was blocking the sun. Alexander told this man that since he was so relaxed and free, if at all he were to be born again as a human being, he would like to be born as this man. The man told Alexander that he could be like him right that moment, rather than on being born again. But Alexander wanted to conquer the whole world. The man pointed out that Alexander did not need to wait until he conquered the world in order to relax. He further pointed out that Alexander might also die pursuing his ambition, thereby losing the opportunity to really rest. In fact, Alexander did die on his way to India and did not get an opportunity to rest. The other man, with no need to conquer the world, was satisfied with himself, relaxed and resting. The point here is that one need not achieve everything in life to really rest or relax. Sometimes, it may be too late.

Here, resting does not mean being lazy, not doing anything. We have to understand that resting does not mean becoming inactive. It does not mean dropping out of life. This is not what the *Bhagavad Gītā* teaches. Arjuna wanted to drop out of the battle, not because he was afraid of fighting the battle, but because it was extremely painful and emotional to fight his own cousins. Lord Krishna was not impressed with Arjuna's arguments. Arjuna told Krishna that he wanted to become a renunciate. A renunciate gives up all responsibilities. Lord Krishna told Arjuna that one does not become a renunciate just by wearing saffron-colored clothes. Merely going away to the forest also does not make one a renunciate. Likewise, resting also does not mean doing nothing. Resting means being free from conflicts, and in a condition where the mind is completely satisfied with itself. It is a state of being '*ātmanevātmanā tuṣṭah*', one is satisfied with oneself by himself [BG 2-55]. This is not easy at all. It is not easy to be satisfied with oneself. The man mentioned earlier, was a person who was free from all conflicts, fear, insecurity and demands. This is what we call 'freedom'. Freedom does not mean the ability to fly in the air or walk on water. We always think that *mokṣa* or

liberation is something unusual, that something unusual is necessary, to make us free and discover the freedom from ourselves. But that is not so. *Mokṣa* means being free from conflicts, from complexes.

Intelligent living is doing things by which we progressively discover this freedom. This is what the *Bhagavad Gītā* also teaches us. The first step to achieve this would be to ‘fake it till we make it’. We act as though we are rich and not needy. We act as though we are free. When we perceive things in this way, there will be a whole set of different values. When we feel we are not needy, we act as though we are generous, which is not easy. We do have a lot of insecurities. Therefore Lord Krishna says:

*yattadagre viṣamiva pariṇāme ’mṛtopamam
tatsukhaṃ sāttvikam proktamātmabuddhiprasādam*

That happiness is called *sāttvikam*, which is very difficult in the beginning and is like poison, but results in the nectar-like sweetness of freedom. It is born of the *prasāda* or the purity from within one’s own self. [BG 18-37]

This is a process of self-purification. The *Bhagavad Gītā* teaches this self-purification or emotional maturity, in two stages.

The first stage is doing something and the second stage is knowing something. They are *karma*, action and *jñāna*, knowledge. *Karma* and *jñāna* are not two separate paths. We need to have a clear perception, because whatever we do is determined by the perception we have about ourselves, and of the world. First we need understanding and then we need to translate this understanding into reality. The translation of the understanding into reality is a life of ‘*śreyas*’ or a life of *yoga* and this is what the *Bhagavad Gītā* teaches us.

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This booklet contains responses to a number of interesting questions answered by Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati during the course of the New Jersey Public Talks, as well as at satsangs held at homes and in the Family Camps of the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam. These have been appearing regularly in the form of weekly emails to interested seekers in the tri-state area. Our heartfelt thanks to Madhu Chatrath, June Christopher, Kalyani Dave, Connie DeMartino, Chaya Rajaram and K. Ramesh for help with the transcription and editing that have made these weekly emails possible.

Swamiji answers these questions, however diverse or repetitive, with great patience and deliberation, and provides clarification in his characteristic style of undemanding simplicity. His responses illustrate how discerning he is, of the workings of the modern mind, as he guides us with compassion through the process of reconciling the ancient wisdom of our scriptures, with the realities of modern life. This booklet is a compilation of all the weekly emails in an effort to synthesize them so that all seekers can benefit from Swamiji's pragmatic answers.

We would like to express our deep gratitude to Swamiji for having given us the opportunity to work with him on this project. Putting this booklet together has, in itself, been an instructive and enriching process for us. Time and time again, we encountered questions that we have ourselves grappled with, and heard the echo of doubts that have arisen in our own minds, only to have them resolved by Swamiji's practical and reassuring solutions. Our pranams to Pujya Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati from whom we have all learnt so much and without whom this booklet would not have been possible.

Jayshree Ramakrishnan

Krishnakumar (KK) S. Davey

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