

Satsanga with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

THE PURIFICATION AND CONCENTRATION OF THE MIND

एतेषां नित्यादीनां बुद्धिशुद्धिः परं प्रयोजनमुपासनानां तु चित्तैकाग्र्यं "तमेतमात्मानं वेदानुवचनेन ब्राह्मणा
विविदिषन्ति यज्ञेन" [वृ उ ४। ४। २२] इत्यादि श्रुतेः "तपसा कल्मषं हन्ति" [मनु १२ - १०४] इत्यादि
स्मृतेश्च ॥

*eteṣāṃ nityādīnāṃ buddhīśuddhiḥ paraṃ prayojanam-upāsanānāṃ tu
cittaikāgryam "tametamātmānaṃ vedānuvacanena brāhmaṇā vīvidiṣanti
yajñena" [Br.Up, 4-4-22] ityādi śruteḥ "tapasā kalmaṣaṃ hanti" [Manu 12-
104] ityādi smṛteṣca.*

Of these, *nitya* and other works mainly serve the purpose of purifying the mind, but the *upāsanā* chiefly aim at the concentration of the mind, as in such *śruti* passages, "Brahmins seek to know this Self by the study of the Vedas, by sacrifice" [Br.Up 4-4-22]; as well as in such *smṛti* passages, "They destroy sins by practising austerities" [Manu 12-104]. [Vedāntasāra, 13]

Paraṃ prajoyanam is the main purpose, *eteṣāṃ* is of these, *nityādīnāṃ* is *nitya-karma* and other works, and *budhīśuddhiḥ* is the purification of the mind. The primary result of the different rites, *nitya-karma*, *naimittika-karma*, and *prāyaścitta* is to acquire purification of the mind. *Upāsanānaṃ tu cittaikāgryam*, the primary result of *upāsanā* or mental worship is *cittaikāgryam*, the ability to focus the mind. Thus, the primary result of actions such as *nitya-karma* or actions performed at the level of body and speech in the spirit of worship is the purification of the mind, and the primary result of actions performed in the spirit of meditation or mental worship is the ability to concentrate or focus the mind.

Karma-yoga purifies the mind

The subject matter of how action performed in the spirit of worship brings about purification of the mind is discussed at great length in the Bhagavad Gita. The spirit of *karma-yoga* is that we should respond with an attitude of worship to any situation in which we find ourselves. Often, we are placed in a certain situation and are required to respond in a particular manner. How should we look upon that situation? We should look upon the situation as created by God and also look upon the action that we have to perform as given to us by God.

A *karma-yogī* is one who looks upon his life as a privilege and is appreciative of the opportunity to do something. The *karma-yogī* looks upon situations as created by God. He looks upon what is expected of him as a command of the Lord, merges his individual will with the will of the Lord, and gracefully accepts every situation that he encounters. He considers whatever has to be done in a given situation as his sacred duty. He performs the actions, small or big, in a spirit of worship. This is an ideal goal that we

should work towards. This means we should accept every situation that we come across in our lives. Generally, there is a tendency to resist anything that is imposed upon us because everyone likes to do what they like to do, not necessarily what is required of them. However, in *karma-yoga*, we merge our individual will with the will of God. Thus, the spirit of *karma-yoga* is that every little action that we perform in our day-to-day life from morning till evening can become a form of worship. It is not that we have to go to a temple or do a specific action to worship the Lord. Rather, even our mundane day-to-day actions can be turned into worship. Then, what to talk of specific actions performed as worship?

The mind gets distracted easily, however, and it is difficult to maintain this spirit of worship in our day-to-day activities. Often, we are unable to maintain this spirit of worship because of our own reactions. Therefore, it is necessary to set aside a certain time to perform specific actions of worship, which are called *nitya-karma* and *naimittika-karma*. There should be a time assigned for daily worship in the life of an aspirant. It does not matter what method of worship or which form of God one chooses to worship; what matters is that there is worship everyday. And there must be special worship on special days.

Karma-yoga thus has two aspects. One is the performance of specific worship because it is easy to maintain the spirit of devotion without any distractions at the time of worship. When I am working with people in the world, it is difficult to maintain that spirit of worship because of emotional issues and distractions. However, when I am sitting in front of the altar, there is no other distraction; I am with the Lord emotionally and it is easy to maintain the spirit of worship. Therefore, it is always recommended that there must be a time assigned or set aside for worship. Secondly, the same spirit is to be maintained during the rest of the day in performing our daily activities.

What is it that brings about purification of the mind? It is not actions, *per se*, that have a purifying effect, but actions performed in the spirit of worship, which bring about the purification of the mind. The idea is that it is not so much the action, but the spirit behind the action that brings about purification. What is that spirit? It is the spirit of worship. The action becomes but an occasion to invoke from within, the spirit of worship in one's mind; those actions become what we call *yoga*. Thus, it is said that when actions are performed in the spirit of *yoga*, the primary result is *budhiśuddhi*, purification of the mind.

Inner obstacles can be removed only by the grace of God

The *smṛti* says, *nitya-naimittikaireva kurvaṇe duritakṣayam*, only daily and incidental worship will help us overcome our *durita*, inner obstacles. The difficulties that we experience in our lives are nothing but these obstacles. For example, I want to love somebody, but find that I am not able to do so. I want to have the spirit of generosity, but I am not able to bring it out. I want to be

good, but often, I am not able to be that way. I want to be generous, charitable, sympathetic, good, and kind. Generally, I am not able to command those feelings to arise in my mind. Why is it so? This is on account of what we call obstacles.

There may perhaps be some psychological reasons for these obstacles, but the Vedic way of treating them is through worship. We accept the fact that what we require in life is the grace of God. Our experience of these inner emotional and intellectual difficulties gets reflected in our day-to-day behavior and creates various conflicts. We realize that we have to get over them and the way to do it is by acquiring the grace of God.

We do not know what brings about these obstacles. We accept that it must be some past actions that cause them. They stifle one's beauty and purity, distort one's nature, and bring about a distortion of the mind. How do we become free from these obstacles? These obstacles can be removed only by acquiring the grace of God. We acquire His grace through worship and slowly become free of these inner difficulties.

One may go to a psychiatrist or therapist, which is all right. However, such therapies will only work when there is worship in our lives. Otherwise, they will have a limited effect. Ultimately, it is God's grace alone that will remove these obstacles. The *śruti* says, *dharmeṇa pāpamāpanuditi*, by *dharma* or righteousness, our *pāpa* are slowly dissipated. Lord Krishna tells us how to acquire that *siddhi* or accomplishment in terms of inner purification:

स्वे स्वे कर्मण्यभिरतः संसिद्धिं लभते नरः। स्वकर्मनिरतः सिद्धिं यथा विन्दति तच्छृणु ॥

sve sve karmaṇyabhirataḥ saṁsiddhiṁ labhate naraḥ,
svakarmanirataḥ siddhiṁ yathā vindati tacchṛṇu.

A man who delights in his own duty gains success. Listen to how one devoted to his own duty finds success [Bhagavad Gita, 18-45].

Siddhi or accomplishment is to be acquired by being devoted to our duties, which come to us because of our situation in life, and by performing them in the spirit of worship. This is why *karma-yoga* is very important. The purpose is *buddhiśuddhi*, purification of the mind, which is a prerequisite for the study of Vedānta or the study of the scriptures.

The performance of duties in the spirit of worship brings about a desire to know

The Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad [4-4-22] says:

तमेतं वेदानुवचनेन ब्राह्मणा विविदिषन्ति यज्ञेन दानेन तपसाऽनाशकेन ।

tametam vedānuvacanena brāhmaṇā vividiṣanti yajñena dānena
tapasā'nāśakena.

The Brahmins seek to know It through the study of the Vedas, and sacrifices, charity, and austerity consisting of a dispassionate enjoyment of sense-objects.

These Brahmins, the seekers or aspirants, *vividiṣanti*, seek to know the Self. They seek to invoke from within themselves a *vividiṣā* or desire to know. This desire to know is a great thing. In fact, what we want is the burning desire to know the Truth. How do we invoke that desire from within? The desire to know the Truth manifests to the extent that the mind becomes pure. The seekers want to know the Self, *vedānūvacanena*, by the study of the Vedas, *yajñena*, by the performance of sacrifices, *dānena*, through charity, and *tapasā*, through austerity. In short, Vedanta maintains that the performance of our duties in the spirit of worship, charity, austerity, or penance brings about purification of the mind and, ultimately, a desire to know, *jijñāsā*. It is by the purification of the mind that *mumukṣā* or the desire to become free gets transformed into *jijñāsā*, the desire to know.

The Manusmṛti [12-104] says, *tapasā kalmaṣaṃ hanti*, by these austerities and penances, one slowly gets rid of the obstacles. As we said earlier, everyone wishes to be good, kind, and charitable. Typically, however, we are not able to invoke that frame of mind due to obstacles that are called *pāpa*. *Karma* and *upāsana*, which are worship at the level of the body, speech, and mind, become the means for the removal of those obstacles. They purify the heart and free the mind from such reactions as sadness, likes, and dislikes. This results in a pleasant, cheerful, happy, or pure mind.

Sometimes sadness, greed, or similar reactions surface in the mind and it is suggested that we get rid of these impurities through penance. We are not sure about the reason for their presence except to say that some past actions may have resulted in these reactions. The scriptures recommend the performing of actions in the spirit of worship to eliminate or overcome these impurities. The actions performed at the level of the body and that of speech are classified as *nitya* and *naimittika-karma*, and actions performed at the level of the mind are called *upāsana*¹.

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