

Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati

Surrender and Freedom

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Surrender lies in understanding the realities of life and developing a comfort within. It brings about freedom, which is the reality of life. We discover freedom to the extent that we understand and get comfortable with the realities of life.

Īśvara is the creator, sustainer, and dissolver of this world

A very important reality of life is *īśvara*. What is our definition of *īśvara*? The Upaniṣads say that *īśvara* is the creator, sustainer, and dissolver:

यतो वा इमानि भूतानि जायन्ते । येन जातानि जीवन्ति । यत्प्रयन्त्यभिसंविशन्ति ।

yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante, yena jātāni jīvanti, yatprayantyaḥsaviśanti.

That from which indeed these beings are born, by which (the beings) that are born live, and unto which they go back while resolving [Taittirīyopaniṣad, 3-1].

तवैश्वर्यं यत्तज्जगदुदयरक्षाप्रलयकृत् त्रयीवस्तु व्यस्तं तिस्रुषु गुणभिन्नासु तनुषु ।

tavaiśvaryaṁ yattajjagadudayarakṣāpralayakṛt trayīvastu vyastam tisruṣu guṇabhinnāsu tanuṣu.

O, Giver of Boons, Your greatness is the cause of creation, maintenance, and destruction of the whole universe; this is supported by three Vedas; it is distributed in the three qualities and three bodies [Śivamahimna stotra, 4].

This universe is a creation and thus, there must be a creator. While the proof of *īśvara* being the creator of this world is ultimately provided by the scriptures, there is reasonable evidence to show His existence. We do not provide reasons to prove *īśvara*, but we can provide logic to support what the scriptures say. If we keep an open mind, there is enough evidence to prove that there is *īśvara*. For example, a lecture hall is made up of a number of components, all of which are put together in a meaningful and intelligent manner so that the hall serves a useful purpose. The inert parts do not come together by themselves; the design and creation of the hall must be a deliberate action originating from an intelligent being. Similarly, the universe can be looked upon as an assemblage that is created or intelligently put together by somebody, to serve a useful purpose. It is

a cosmos, not a chaos. Whatever there is in the universe has a reason to be there and everything appears to be in its proper place. Therefore, *īśvara* or God must be its creator, sustainer, and dissolver.

Acceptance of *īśvara* is an acceptance of the order

The word *īśvara* is derived from the root *īś*, which means to rule. He is the ruler of everything in the universe. Everything seems to be functioning in accordance with a basic order. All the natural forces seem to conform to this order and nothing in the universe seems to have the freedom to transgress it. Even such powerful forces such as the wind, fire, water, earth, sun, and moon function in a systematic and compliant manner as though they are appointed to perform certain tasks; the sun rises and sets at the appointed time, water flows from a higher level to a lower level, the earth rotates around the sun, the moon rotates around the earth in a prescribed manner, and the planets move in an orderly and predictable manner. Everything functions according to that order or law.

The acceptance of *īśvara* is an acceptance of the order. We may not know the order in its entirety because of limitations in our own knowledge, but we can accept its existence. As human beings, we have some knowledge of the order. Based upon that knowledge, we can predict certain things and live our lives. We will never have total knowledge of the order because that would require one to be all-knowing. The knowledge of all of humanity put together would still be insufficient for this. Therefore, whatever understanding we have becomes the basis for living our lives.

Acceptance of *īśvara* is crucial for surrender

The acceptance of *īśvara* or this order is very important. It is only then that we will know that our lives are also a part of that whole order and not resist things. We find that we are required to conform to the order and also that nothing in nature resists the order. Following the order need not be a problem. I would not look upon the order as an infringement upon my freedom if I can accept it gracefully. The problem is that I want to have an order of my own. I want to be in control and expect things to go the way I would like them to happen. I have to recognize, however, that there already is an order, which decides how things happen; there is an appropriate result for every *karma* or action. An acceptance of this becomes the acceptance of *īśvara*.

Surrender is the ability to let go of our false perceptions

Īśvara is the creator. He must be a conscious being because this is an intelligent creation and intelligence always rests in a conscious being. This is where we part company with Science, which says that consciousness is the property of matter. We say instead, that matter is the manifestation of Consciousness. Science accepts only *pratyakṣa* or perception, and *anumāna* or inference as valid means of knowledge. In Vedanta, *śabdha*, the verbal testimony of the scriptures, is the ultimate *pramāṇa* or means of knowledge. If perception contradicts what the scriptures say, it is our perception that we analyze to see whether it is right or not. Very often, what we perceive seems to be contradictory to what the scriptures say, or vice versa. For instance, the scriptures say that non-duality or non-difference is the Truth. However, we perceive duality and division everywhere. Also, my perception of myself is that I am a limited being, whereas the scriptures tell me that I am limitless. This calls for surrender on my part; I should be able to surrender my perception in favor of the words of the scriptures, wherever I find this kind of contradiction. This is because the scriptures are looked upon as the very essence of God on account of our *śraddha* or faith and devotion in them. This surrender is called *śaraṇāgati*. It is the ability to let go of my perceptions, which is not easy to acquire.

A definition of surrender

According to a school of Vedanta known as Viśiṣṭa-advaita, *śaraṇāgati* or *prapatti* is considered to be the most important means of attaining God. According to them, there are six aspects to *śaraṇāgati*:

*ānukūlyasya saṅkalpaḥ prātikūlyasya varjanam rakṣiṣyati iti viśvāsaḥ,
goptrutve varuṇam tathā ātma niksēpa kārpanye śadvida śaraṇāgatiḥ.*

The six aspects of surrender are: the acceptance of those things favorable to God; the rejection of unfavorable things; the conviction that He will give protection; the acceptance of God as one's protector; the offering of one's ego, and humility.

Anukūlyasya saṅkalpaḥ, a resolve to do what is agreeable or favorable to God. My *saṅkalpa* or resolve is in keeping with His will; whatever He likes is what I will. It is a determination on my part that I will always submit to Him. This requires me to surrender my tendency to violate the order. *Pratikūlyasya varjanam*, giving up what is *pratikūla*, not agreeable. Doing what is agreeable to God and not doing what is not agreeable means living a life in keeping with the order. The order

that is manifest in the universe is the will of God. The whole universe is considered to be the manifestation of His will. The Taittirīya Upaniṣad says that in the beginning of creation, the Lord desired to manifest as this universe. *Saḥ kāmayaṭa bahu syām prajayeya iti*, ‘May I become many’ [Taittirīya Upaniṣad, 2-6]. The universe appears to function in keeping with the order and, therefore, the order itself is the manifestation of the will of the Lord.

Rakṣisyati iti viśvāsaḥ, having a firm faith in His ability to protect. Sometimes, we are very insecure. The Muṇḍakopaniṣad [3-1-6] says, *satyameva jayate nānṛtam*, truth alone wins, not falsehood. Truth is His will and falsehood goes against His will. Therefore, my determination is to follow the truth and give up falsehood. I try to follow these rules, but, very often, I get disheartened. I find that many people in the world get away with falsehood and dishonesty. They seem to get ahead while the truthful ones are left behind. This makes me feel insecure and the insecurity comes in the way of my following the order. I must trust that I am in safe hands as long as I follow His will and trust that He will protect me. This is *śraddha*, faith or trust. In this, there is a surrender of my insecurity, which is a product of my false perception of myself.

Goptrutve varuṇam tathā, the acceptance of *īśvara* as my protector. I need a protector to help me let go of my insecurities. The last two aspects of surrender according to this definition are *ātma nikṣepa*, the offering of one’s ego, and *kārpanya*, acquiring the spirit of humility.

Surrender lies in correcting error at both intellectual and emotional level

Whenever our perception seems to contradict what is told to us by the scriptures, we have to be willing to let go of our own perceptions in favor of the words of the scriptures. Each one of us has an erroneous perception of ourselves, of the world, and of God, which is born of ignorance. The only way to shed this ignorance is to shed these perceptions. This error is at two levels: the level of wrong thinking on my part and that of the resultant habitual wrong behavior. Thus, as we discussed earlier, there is an intellectual error and a habitual error. Even if I correct my understanding, it will be quite some time before my habits are corrected. We often hear people say, “I understand everything but I am not able to put any of it into practice”. In his helplessness, even Duryodhana says, *jānāmi dharmam na ca me pravṛttiḥ jānāmi adharmaṁ na ca me nivṛttiḥ kenāpi devena ḥṛdisthitena yathā niyukto’smi tathā karomi*, ‘I know what is right, but cannot pursue it and I know what is wrong, but cannot refrain from it. In whichever

way I am impelled by the one sitting in my heart, that way I do.' Often, despite knowing what is right, we are controlled by our own impulses.

The first level of surrender is the true understanding of the realities of life. Unfortunately, I live my life based on a false understanding, which is responsible for many habitual patterns of thinking and behavior. I am bound to have *rāga* and *dveṣa*, attachment and aversion; these are products of my own perceptions. I look upon myself as needy and insecure and have a need to feel security and comfort. My life seems to be governed by a subjective perception of the desirable and the undesirable, and the resultant attachment and aversion. There is no such thing as that which is desirable or undesirable to everyone. Moreover, what is desirable now can become undesirable later. For instance, the doctor tells me that I should not be eating anything sweet because sugar is not good for my health. However, I find all sweets desirable, and it takes some effort to desist. A lot of alertness, self control, and discipline is required to overcome habitual error. Understanding the realities of life at an intellectual level is not difficult. People with a reasoning, analytical, or logical mind can appreciate this easily. The difficulty is in aligning one's entire personality with the new understanding. The difference between understanding and behavior, called habitual error, has to be corrected. This is called *yoga*.

Īśvara is saccidānanda

It is important to understand that there is *īśvara* in our lives, and that He is an intelligent, conscious being because this intelligent universe is His creation. The fact of Consciousness is the ultimate truth. For the scientist, matter is the ultimate truth and consciousness is but a product of some kind of chemical combination, which occurs in the brain. It is that which emerged when the 'primordial soup' reached the right temperature or pressure. Vedanta says that the chemical combination in the brain produces sentiency, not Consciousness. Sentiency is a manifestation of Consciousness. For example, when a bulb glows, we can either say that light is a property of the bulb or that the bulb is the locus of the manifestation of light. One could perhaps conclude that light is a property of the bulb or the tungsten filament. However, we say that the tungsten filament is where electricity manifests. Similarly, the brain is the locus of the manifestation of Consciousness.

Sat-cit-ānanda or Existence-Awareness-Happiness is the nature of *īśvara*, Truth or Consciousness. This *saccidānanda* alone manifests everywhere.

Depending upon the particular medium of manifestation, Consciousness manifests differently in different *upādhis* or names and forms, just as the manifestation of electricity varies depending upon the medium of manifestation. For instance, the same electricity manifests as light in a light bulb and as heat in a heater. In living beings, Consciousness manifests in the subtle body as life or sentiency; there is sentiency wherever there is a subtle body consisting of the mind, intellect and sense organs. In objects such as tables and chairs, there is no subtle body and therefore, no sentiency. Consciousness is understood to manifest in them as the state of existence. Where the mind is *sāttvik*, Consciousness is manifest as *ānanda*. We equate Consciousness either with sentiency or a state of mind. According to Western thinking, consciousness is a state of mind. However, the mind is itself an *upādhi*, a limiting adjunct, where Consciousness is manifest as thinking. It is in the brain that Consciousness manifests as the mind. Consciousness is to be accepted as something that is independent of matter; it is in matter that it manifests.

Happiness is our nature

The Upaniṣads say that the universe has emerged from *īśvara* and that it is sustained by *īśvara*, and also resolves into *īśvara*. It is Consciousness, *saccidānanda*. The Taittirīyopaniṣad calls it *ānanda* [3-6]:

आनन्दाद्येव खल्विमानि भूतानि जायन्ते । आनन्देन जातानि जीवन्ति । आनन्दं

प्रयन्त्यभिसंविशन्तीति ।

ānandādhyeva khalvimāni bhūtāni jāyante, ānandena jātāni jīvanti, ānandaṁ prayantyaḥsantīti.

Because, certainly, these beings are born from Happiness alone. (The beings) that are born live by means of Happiness. They go back to Happiness while resolving.

It is difficult for the human being to appreciate that the universe is born of Happiness, is sustained by Happiness, and goes back into Happiness. It is only the human being that is unhappy in this creation. Perhaps sadness and depression are privileges of human beings alone because of their sensitivity; the more sensitive we are, the more prone we are to be hurt and unhappy. We are unhappy because we are keenly conscious of all our limitations. Only when we are unhappy, however, will we seek a solution for it. Other living beings seem to be blissfully ignorant, and do not appear to seek any solutions. We have the

basic problem of unhappiness and sorrow, and therefore, cannot enjoy all that God has given us. As we have seen earlier, this problem is a product of our false perception of ourselves. Sorrow is but a reaction of the mind. It is not that a given situation will necessarily make me sad. It is the way I interpret the situation and the way I relate to it that causes the happiness or unhappiness. The Upaniṣad says that understanding or accepting the basic reality is *ānanda*. Happiness is my nature, but I project unhappiness.

Sorrow or sadness is a reaction. When that reaction is absent, the reality is one of joy or happiness. When there is great physical pain, it is difficult to keep this in mind. However, pain is one thing and sadness quite another. A strong identification with the body brings about pain. It is possible to become free from this identification and become free from the pain. If we accept the pain gracefully as a happening in life, we will not let pain lead to sadness. Sadness or sorrow arises out of helplessness and fear. It is not a reality of life. It is only a projection. The basic reality happens to be the order, the harmony, and the wholeness; *saccidānanda* is the basic reality. In most cases *sat* or Existence is clearly evident. In living beings, *cit* or Awareness is also evident. *Ānanda* or Happiness becomes evident only when the mind is mature. The manifestation of *saccidānanda* depends upon the means or medium of manifestation.

Surrender is in understanding that this world, which is a manifestation of *īśvara*, is complete

The basic reality of life is that there never was a time when *īśvara* was not and there never will be a time when *īśvara* will not be. Being is His very nature. That is why He is called *sat*, Existence. Existence is the nature of reality, which is called *īśvara*. Even when the world is not, *īśvara* is. The appearance of the world is cyclic, from the unmanifest state to manifest condition or from cause to effect and then back to the causal state and so on. In this play of creation, sustenance, and dissolution, *īśvara* is present as Existence, the very substratum or platform for this play to go on. He is *cit*, the conscious principle. Knowledge or intelligence is centered on the conscious principle, not on an inert principle. Therefore, Consciousness is the reality of life. *īśvara* is of the nature of Happiness, Wholeness, Joy, or Completeness. Thus, Happiness is the reality of life. That *īśvara* is Whole or Complete means that this creation is not a product of any need; no reason, need, or desire can be assigned to this creation. It is simply the nature of *īśvara* to manifest as this creation. *Pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidam*, the cause is Whole and its manifestation is also Wholeness. Understanding this

reality of life is the first level of surrender. Submitting one's resistance to this reality is surrender.

That *īśvara* is Whole and that this universe is the manifestation of that Wholeness can be verified. It is not that we cannot experience joy in this world. It is a matter of preparing the mind. Vedanta calls it *antaḥkaraṇa śuddhi*, the purification of the mind. This is also verifiable. There are two kinds of beliefs: verifiable and unverifiable. The belief that *īśvara* is somewhere in heaven and can be seen or experienced only after death is not verifiable. We just have to accept it. Vedanta talks about an *īśvara* who is right here, not elsewhere. The entire universe is a manifestation of *īśvara*, the order. This is something to be understood rather than believed. The understanding requires a preliminary acceptance; it is a belief pending discovery.

***īśvara* or Completeness can be discovered by a pure, mature mind**

The fact of *īśvara* can be discovered as being a reality in our lives. He is not merely a hypothetical possibility. Beauty and happiness can be seen everywhere when the mind is prepared. If I am not able to see the order, harmony or intelligence everywhere, it is not because it is not there. Instead, it is because I have yet to cultivate the instrument with which to see reality: my own mind. What we need is a mind that enjoys purity and maturity. The process of surrendering is a process of acquiring the maturity by which these things become very real. Harmony and beauty can then be seen in our lives. We need to cultivate this frame of mind in course of time so that we may begin to accept *saccidānanda* as the basic reality. This omniscience can be seen manifested everywhere. You look at this body, for instance, and see that it is a marvel of creation; it is put together so intelligently. An important aspect of *īśvara* is that he is benevolent. What obtains is not just a mechanical order. It is live, intelligent, and benevolent. The purpose of the whole creation is to bless, to create conditions so that everyone can grow and ultimately recognize their freedom. This is a matter of belief. Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita [5-29] that he is the friend and well-wisher of all beings:

सुहृदं सर्वभूतानां ज्ञात्वा मां शान्तिमृच्छति ॥

suhṛdaṁ sarvaabhūtānāṁ jñātvā mām śāntimṛcchati.

Knowing Me as the friend of all beings, he or she gains peace (liberation).

Accepting *īśvara* is accepting His creation

When we observe the creation, we see how every living being is cared for. Even before anything is born, there is a provision made for sustaining that life, and whatever is required during the period of its growth is provided. One may ask that if God is kind, why would there be death? It is because he is kind that there is death. If it were not for death, earth would be inundated with humans and other beings. Death should not be looked upon as termination of existence. It is merely a station at which life or existence gets another embodiment. This worn body is taken away and a new one is given. As the Bhagavad Gita points out, death is like discarding one's worn garment and acquiring a new one. It is an act of kindness. All this is required. In a place where old age is respected, you don't mind being old. We think something is not alright when things are different from our notions of how they should be. We judge things based on arbitrary standards of right and wrong determined by the world. If we drop these standards and judge things based on the intelligence of this manifestation, we will find that everything is quite alright. When there is no resistance, you can develop comfort with anything. For instance, if I have no difficulty in accepting my body as it is, it doesn't matter what anybody else says about it. Accepting *īśvara* means accepting His creation. If I can let go of all my perceptions, which are born of my limited wisdom, and gracefully accept myself as I am, I have freedom. There is freedom in conforming to the order that is *īśvara*¹.

¹ Transcribed and edited by Swamini Srividyananda, Krishnakumar (KK) S. Davey, and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.