

## Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati Surrender and Freedom

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Lord Krishna describes His nature as *īśvara* in the Bhagavad Gita, “I am all-powerful, capable of creation, sustenance, and dissolution. I am the very dispenser of the result of actions. I am the refuge of all living beings. I am the well-wisher of all living beings.”

पिताहमस्य जगतो माता धाता पितामहः ।

वेद्यं पवित्रमोकार ऋक्साम यजुरेव च ॥

*pitāhamasya jagato mātā dhātā pitāmahaḥ,  
vedyaṁ pavitramoṅkāra ṛksāma yajureva ca.*

I am the father of this world, I am the mother, I am the one who sustains it, and I am the grandfather (the uncaused cause). I am what is to be known, I am the purifier, I am the *oṅkāra*, and I am the *Ṛk*, *Sāma*, and *Yajur* Vedas [Bhagavad Gita, 9-17].

*Śaraṇam* is to be translated as refuge. In surrender, my unhappiness, fears, anxieties, and insecurities are destroyed or removed. *īśvara* blesses everyone. This is the reality.

### Understanding God requires the tuning up of our perceptions with those of the scriptures

When it comes to the realities of life, we accept the scriptures as the ultimate *pramāṇam*, valid means of knowledge. Whenever our own perceptions are different, we attempt to let go of them as they are born of our ignorance and limited knowledge and understanding of the world. Since we are born ignorant, we have a false perception of ourselves. We take ourselves to be small, limited, insignificant, and needy. We look upon the world as either fulfilling or threatening our needs. These perceptions are the cause of our unhappiness. To the extent that these false perceptions cease to exist, to that extent does our sense of bondage or limitation also cease to be. Tuning up our perceptions with those offered by the scriptures is acquiring a true understanding of God. How do we live a life in accordance with the scriptures?

## **Whatever happens is in order**

First of all, we should gain the understanding that there is benevolence and fairness in this universe, even though some events appear to be unfair. When you look at some limited aspect of the creation, there may appear to be disorder. But when we look at the overall picture, we find that what appears to be injustice at any given point, works itself out in course of time. There is no reason why anything should be unfair because this creation did not arise out of need or incompleteness. If the creation were a product of attachment or aversion or likes and dislikes, it could potentially be unfair. Whenever I act out of attachment or aversion, my actions can tend to be unfair. I will be partial to the one to whom I am attached, and cruel to the one toward whom I have aversion. We do find a lot of disparity in the world. Many are gifted with things while others remain deprived. This is where the order and law of *karma* comes into play. Whatever happens is due to this order. Our *śraddhā* is that even when *īśvara* gives me an undesirable result it is not a punishment. This creation has come out of the Wholeness, *saccidānanda*, and therefore, there is no scope for likes and dislikes. Suppose our observation does not seem to concur with this, surrender, then, is a willingness to give up our observation and accept the scriptural declaration. If I continue to function on the basis of my insecurity, my actions will not be in keeping with the order. Our evaluation of what we perceive is based on our preconceived notions. To the extent we accept the order of *īśvara*, to that extent are we free. This understanding at the intellectual level can be put into practice at the practical level by cultivating an attitude of graceful acceptance.

## **Graceful acceptance lies in surrendering our notions and becoming objective**

Graceful acceptance is the accepting of whatever happens in a graceful manner and with the conviction that there is fairness. Generally, I have no difficulty in accepting outcomes that are in keeping with my expectations. The difficulty arises when I come across unfavorable situations. Graceful acceptance lies in attributing the authorship to *īśvara* both in success and failure, and accepting Him as the order that creates the situations. Then, even when my mind protests that this should not be so, I would accept a situation in the belief that it is a product of the infinite wisdom and therefore, it should be alright; my attitude would be different. Freedom lies in surrendering our notions and deliberately taking *īśvara's* side. I can then become objective with respect to my own notions. What I need for that is objectivity, the ability to create a distance.

In this, when my mind reacts, I create a distance from that reaction by deliberately identifying with *īśvara*. If I review my notions and conclusions from that standpoint, I can be objective and see that my reactions arise from a sense of insecurity, need, or fear; I can see that there is a rejection of the realities of life or a resistance to them. Graceful acceptance is in accepting whatever there is, to be in order; that it has a reason to be thus, and it is meant for my growth. Even in pain, there is a lesson: growth.

### **Graceful acceptance is the evenness of mind gained out of a trust in *īśvara***

Sometimes, I give up my prayers in frustration as they do not seem to work. However, prayer does work. Prayer is a deliberate action and every action has a result. The result may not be what I want it to be, but there is indeed some result. Whatever is happening to me could very well be due to my prayers. When I say things are working out or not working out, that judgment is determined by my limited knowledge. In the long run, I may be better off if my current wish is not fulfilled, although, from a short-term perspective, it may appear different. This is giving the benefit of the doubt to *īśvara*: *śraddhā*, and *bhakti*. It becomes possible only to the extent that I have trust in *īśvara*. In the Bhagavad Gita, this attitude of mind is called *samatvam*.

सिद्धयसिद्धयोः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते ॥

*siddhyasiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvaṁ yoga ucyate.*

...remaining the same to success and failure alike. This evenness of mind is called *yoga* [2-48].

नित्यं च समचित्तत्वमिष्टानिष्टोपपत्तिषु ॥

*nityaṁ ca samacittatvam iṣṭāniṣṭopapattiṣu.*

...and always evenness of mind regarding the gain of the desirable and the undesirable... [13-10]

### **Graceful acceptance is the trust that there is fairness in all situations**

One aspect of living a life of surrender is surrendering our resistance to the realities of life and maintaining a certain poise of mind in all situations with an attitude of graceful acceptance. There is freedom in that. I am required to let go of my pre-conceived notions, likes and dislikes, and definitions of success and failure. Lord Krishna says that He, not us, should define success and failure. Whatever happens is called success. Rather than keeping my notions intact and requiring the world to change in order to concur with my notions, I leave the

realities as they are and keep on changing my notions instead. This will slowly and surely transform my notions of success and failure completely. Graceful acceptance is the recognition that whatever happens is authored by the Lord. The effort is in my hands; I can call myself the author of the action. As far as the result or outcome of the action is concerned, however, the author is *īśvara*; the result is in keeping with His law. Yes, some seem to violate the laws and get away with it all the time. But we do not know the relationship between cause and effect. I do not know if what is happening to me today is necessarily the result of what I did yesterday. I cannot determine whether what is happening to me now is the result of my honesty; nor can I say that the seeming success of someone else is due to his dishonesty now. Success and failure can have many causes. For example, a farmer grows different crops in different seasons. The grain is stored in bins in layers as each is harvested – rice, wheat, corn etc. Even when he is pouring the corn, if the vent in the bottom is opened, he gets rice. This happens because the rice was stored earlier. The corn will pour out when the right time comes. There should be trust that there is fairness in this universe. There is no reason for punishment. There is a tremendous relief in this manner of acceptance because a lot of my complaints and blames are given up. The graceful acceptance of what happens around me comes from identifying with *īśvara* and de-identifying with my own likes and dislikes.

### **Graceful acceptance includes accepting oneself**

As there is graceful acceptance of situations, let there also be a graceful acceptance of myself. When things do not go my way, I have a tendency to brand myself a failure. This brings out anger and frustration in me. A mind free from blame and complaint enjoys graceful acceptance. In the process of growing up, a lot of resentment has accumulated in my mind. I have become very sensitive and prone to hurt. I have always felt that a lot of injustice has been done to me. However, whatever happens to me is in keeping with my own *karma*. Nothing happens without a reason. The psychologists do not have the benefit of taking the past birth into consideration. They accept only the present birth as the beginning of life and therefore, explain whatever happens to me as being based on this life. But that is not the case. This is not my first birth; there cannot ever be a first birth. An event cannot happen unless there is a cause. Birth being an event, it must have a past cause. I must have existed in the past and done something to cause this birth. This is an ongoing process without a beginning. Nobody can visualize its beginning. A beginning implies that before

that moment it did not exist. Our minds can never visualize non-existence. Nothing comes into existence without a reason. There is a cause for any effect to emerge. I have had countless embodiments in the past. Therefore, the present is the result of the past. The pain and pleasure I experience now is my destiny, and therefore, I have to go through it. Nobody causes these situations. They are only instrumental in creating a situation that I have to go through. It is our ignorance of this alone that should take the blame. Just as pleasure is a reality of life, pain is also a reality of life. No one in the world is free of pain. Pain also contributes to our life.

### **Graceful acceptance is in letting go of the past**

If whatever happened in the past is fair, I have no need to entertain the hurts I have been nursing. This is my destiny. It is meant to happen. No one is to blame since it is the result of my *karma*. Thus, I become free from harboring blame, resentment, and anger. This graceful acceptance enables me to resolve the feelings of guilt and hurt.

Guilt is when I blame myself for doing something wrong. At any given time, I do what I am capable of doing with whatever knowledge and understanding I have. I act out of the best of intentions. Therefore, there is no need for blame. Later, even if my perspectives change, I should not judge my past actions or decisions as right or wrong. People often question specific events in the *Ramāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. The characters in those two epics made their decisions in keeping with the code of conduct and social mores of their times. You cannot justify some of their actions now. Social customs and conditions are always subject to change depending on time and place. A new law supersedes the laws of the past. Vedanta is very practical and pragmatic. It gives importance to that which pertains to eternal reality. The spirit is eternal, while the form is subject to change. Therefore, there is no need to blame anybody. Learn whatever you can from your past actions, and then let it go. Let go of the past; what is gone is gone. As long as our current actions are governed by our past, we are not living in the present. As long as I blame, I am not oriented towards understanding.

### **Ultimately, graceful acceptance lies in accepting our limitations**

*Īśvara* is the author of results, the *karma-phala-dāta*. In His infinite wisdom, He has decided that this is what is good for me. Therefore, it must be right. Someday I will understand his logic. For now, I accept it gracefully. There is no

such thing as a success or failure. It exists merely in my perception. There is only action and result.

Success and failure, however, are very real things in the everyday world because our performance is always judged based on certain standards determined by the world. When I work in the world, I need to respect its code of conduct without rejecting myself. I respect the standards that the world has with reference to performance, success, and failure. I do the best I can and gracefully accept the results. It implies an acceptance of my limitations: I cannot expect myself to be omniscient or all-knowing and omnipotent or all-powerful, or expect that whatever I do must always be right. I place demands upon myself and label myself a failure when these demands are not met. Graceful acceptance lies in accepting my limitations and knowing that I am alright as I am. This is humility. It is also a kind of surrender. It comes from accepting the realities of life. Humility comes when I accept that I am limited. The powers that I am endowed with are limited in nature, but I do have a commitment to cultivate these powers.

### **Graceful acceptance lies in bringing about necessary changes, based on understanding and deliberation**

It may appear that Vedanta offers a justification for not doing things; one can claim to accept oneself gracefully and not bother to change. However, graceful acceptance is not an action. It is a perception that I am alright as I am. If I feel that a change is needed, I bring about that change. The change arises from understanding and deliberation, not from frustration or disappointment. I have a commitment to work on my limitations as much as I can. I know that regardless of what I do, I will not be limitless or perfect. From the standpoint of the Self that I am, I am limitless. From the standpoint of my personality, I am limited. I look upon my body, mind and intellect as my self. As long as I look upon myself as an individual being, I will be limited. I should not be ashamed to accept myself as imperfect and limited. Rather, I should work on my limitations. I should try to improve my skills and knowledge. My commitment should come from the fact that it is my duty to explore the potential that has been given to me. It is my responsibility to grow in terms of my knowledge and activities. I work not only to fulfill my own needs, but also to contribute to others who are needy. On the one hand, I have a commitment to do the best I can, while, on the other, I have to recognize and acknowledge that I can never be perfect or without limitations. There is humility in accepting myself as I am. This graceful

acceptance is surrender. In this acceptance, there is freedom and an appreciation of everything for what it is.

### **Graceful acceptance is being in the present and enjoying things as they are**

When the mind enjoys graceful acceptance, you can enjoy things as they are. Why do we pre-suppose that only certain things can be enjoyed? If we accept whatever is as being beautiful, we can enjoy anything. To the extent that the mind becomes free from these projections or preconceived notions, to that extent does it become free to enjoy things as they are. The Upaniṣads say that this creation came from the fullness of the Lord and therefore, it reflects beauty, harmony, order, and wholeness. One day, this should become our experience. It isn't that we have to do something to experience it. What we are already experiencing is indeed this fullness. Our interpretation, based on our preconceived notions, is, however, different. We can be more in tune with the reality as our preconceived notions disappear.

Graceful acceptance enables me to be in the present and enjoy it as it is. I don't need anything else. If you do not have a preconceived notion of what is beautiful, successful, or enjoyable, you can be in tune with what is and enjoy it; this includes being comfortable with yourself. Life becomes a luxury to be enjoyed. The simple fact that I can walk can be a great source of enjoyment; I don't need to necessarily walk a long distance to be happy. This is freedom—a freedom from the need to change things around me. The surrender of my demands, complaints, blaming, judging, and preconceived notions makes me free to be what I am and enjoy what is.

### **Ultimately, all our issues disappear when we understand the reality**

Vedanta teaches that all my problems are resolved when I understand the reality. When I realize that all this is *mithyā* or unreal and know *satyam* or the Truth, my *mithyā* problems are resolved. Ultimately, questions of fairness etc., will not matter because the duality we perceive is but deceptive. When the truth of non-duality is discovered, none of the questions remain. Vedanta says that when we understand the nature of reality, the 'what' or 'why' will not remain. If you look closely at what you consider as creation, duality etc., you will find that there is only one, although it appears as many. That many-ness is not the ultimate reality. Oneness alone is the reality. Why should a rope appear as a snake? Only if the snake were real, should the question 'why' arise. Similarly, the question, "Why should *īśvara* appear as this universe?" vanishes, since this

universe is *mithyā*. Since the world is not real, the question is not valid. This is the ultimate answer<sup>1</sup>.

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