

Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati Surrender and Freedom

4 of 6

Graceful acceptance lies in having an objective frame of mind

Graceful acceptance is not to be equated with resignation or passiveness. It implies having a graceful frame of mind in a given situation. Acceptance is not an action; it is a perception. We have to surrender false perceptions, which are the source of our unhappiness and inhibit happiness, our true nature. I am not objective with reference to a situation when I react to it with anger and frustration. The situation is something that has been created by the laws of nature and there is nothing I can do about it. I have to accept gracefully that which I cannot change. Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita [2-27]:

जातस्य हि ध्रुवो मृत्युर्ध्रुवं जन्म मृतस्य च ।

तस्मादपरिहार्येऽर्थे न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि ॥

*jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyurdhruvaṁ janma mṛtasya ca,
tasmādaparihārye'rthe na tvam śocitumarhasi.*

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 cannot be altered.

An outcome is inevitable when we perform an action. We do not know which outcome corresponds to which action. We do not know which action is responsible for the situation that we are confronting now. Nevertheless, we are sure that whatever situation we face is a result of a particular action that we may have performed in the past. Graceful acceptance is having an objective frame of mind.

It is said that a Greek philosopher, after relocating and establishing himself in a distant island, invited his family to join him. His wife and children boarded a ship with all their belongings and set sail. One afternoon, he answered a knock on the door. A breathless messenger, in complete shock, stood outside. He said, "Sir, your ship has sunk." "What?" exclaimed the philosopher. "Your ship has sunk." "So what?" "Your family and your wealth have all sunk." "What?" "You have nothing now." "So what?" When the painful news was first broken to him, he exclaimed 'what' in disbelief. He was not willing to

accept it. After a few moments though, he had recognized that the ship had indeed sunk and there was nothing he or anybody could do about it; therefore, he replied 'so what'. This is gracefully accepting the reality of a situation.

Graceful acceptance is in responding appropriately to a situation, whether pleasant or unpleasant

Graceful acceptance does not mean that one should sit still and do nothing. There is no point in being frustrated and blaming people or situations; it will not change anything. One's reaction is a big obstacle to responding to a situation in an appropriate manner. The attitude of graceful acceptance enables us to have a frame of mind with which we can respond properly to an unpleasant situation, or, for that matter, to any situation. The same attitude of graceful acceptance should be there even in success. You need not take credit for success or blame for failure. You are the author of the action, not of the outcome. *Īśvara* determines the outcome through the laws of *karma*. Graceful acceptance is accepting Him as the author of both success and failure. If you trust that *īśvara* is your well-wisher, you will be inclined towards graceful acceptance. However painful an outcome might be, you will try to see the meaning and purpose in it. Since it comes from *īśvara*, it is his *prasāda*, grace. Whoever causes the situation is only an instrument of *īśvara*. Ultimately, it is He who decides your destiny. If you need to take action against someone who makes you angry, it should be a deliberate action, not a reaction arising out of anger. Graceful acceptance implies an objective frame of mind in which one's free will is used.

A failure is a blessing in disguise

Pain can also be accepted as the grace of God. It is not easy to do that because you have your own notions about the meaning of grace. You always want things to be favorable to you. When *īśvara* does not do what you want him to do, you think He is hurting you. Self-growth lies in accepting *īśvara* as always being right and instead, changing your perception of what is right and what is not. *Īśvara* can be the greatest therapist in bringing about a transformation in your perception. When success comes, it is evident that it is a blessing. A failure is a blessing in disguise. For a devotee, everything is a blessing. This is the only way to grow.

The right frame of mind alone is happiness

Nothing in this world is capable of giving you lasting happiness. Your frame of mind alone is happiness. You normally judge an outcome by your own criteria of success and failure. Rather than being judgmental about success and failure or right and wrong, you should take whatever comes from *īśvara* as being right and as success. Be objective in whatever you choose to do. By giving you certain outcomes, *īśvara* may be suggesting that you change your definition of success. There is no place for resignation or non-response. Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita [3-8]:

नियतं कुरु कर्म त्वं कर्म ज्यायो ह्यकर्मणः ।

शरीरयात्रापि च ते न प्रसिद्धयेदकर्मणः ॥

*niyataṁ kuru karma tvam karma jyāyo hyakarmanah,
śarīrayātrāpi ca te na prasiddhyedakarmanah.*

Do action that is to be done because action is superior to inaction. And due to inaction, even the maintenance of your body would become impossible.

Surrender is the acceptance of one's responsibility in every situation.

The next value in reference to surrender is responsibility. We have a tendency to resign, escape, and avoid. We should surrender such tendencies and take responsibility in every situation. Graceful acceptance coupled with responsibility will bring about the right response in every situation. Performing action in keeping with the existing order is responsibility. Just as the whole universe is functioning in accordance with an order, so also should you function in accordance with the order. The scriptures teach this order in the form of values. Truthfulness, honesty, and non-violence are the basic values, which govern the functioning of the world. When your actions are in accordance with these values, you are being responsible. Not only are you required to respond to situations, but you are required to do what is right as well. You are doing what is right when you act in accordance with these values or when you do what is expected of you in a given situation.

Graceful acceptance enables us to understand our minds

We are expected to play a certain role in every situation. Every role calls for an appropriate response. The Bhagavad Gita calls it *kartavya*, duty. We have a duty to do what is proper. Just as graceful acceptance is difficult, so also is

performing your duty not easy. Only when we start watching ourselves do we discover our lack of gracefulness. We are quick to react because we want situations and people to meet our demands. Graceful acceptance enables us to understand our minds: the build-up of anger and frustration, our demands for things to go our way, and our tendency to want to be in control. Life, however, does not work that way. It has its own rhythm and agenda. It is we who are required to be attuned to that rhythm, rather than expect that the world will be attuned to us. There is nothing lost if we make the adjustment. This is self-growth; it is not easy.

Similarly, taking responsibility and doing what is right is also not easy. Often, it is very painful. What is right is not always pleasant. Lord Krishna asks us to perform our duty and not attempt to escape it. It was right for Arjuna to fight the battle, but he wanted to find an escape from it because it was painful. He presented a number of arguments to Lord Krishna to justify why the war should not be fought. As a *kṣatriya*, it was his duty to face the situation. We are fortunate that we are not in as painful a position as that in which Arjuna found himself.

Graceful acceptance is in understanding and being sensitive to others' needs

Sometimes, situations are painful. What you are required to do may not be pleasant. When your subordinates don't act responsibly or your child does not work hard, should you accept it gracefully? Graceful acceptance does mean accepting them as they are. Emotional problems or some other factors restrict their performance. Understanding and being sensitive to their needs is graceful acceptance. Just because they do not conform to your standards, it does not mean you reject them. Try to understand the helplessness of others, and respect them. Whatever actions you choose to take should not be out of anger or resentment. It should come out of an overall consideration for others. Before doing anything, be sympathetic towards that person and reach out to help as much as possible. Extend this attitude of acceptance to everyone with whom you are associated. This gives them, and you, a certain freedom. This is a very tall order, but this is what graceful acceptance means.

Once, a certain prophet of Islam was able to subdue his opponent in a fight. Sitting upon his chest, he drew his sword and was poised to kill him. Suddenly he got up, let go of the other person, and started to walk away. People asked him why he had let go of his opponent. The prophet replied, "When I

subdued him, he spat at me and I got angry. Rather than killing him out of anger, I let him go”.

Graceful acceptance is in being respectful of the universe

Acceptance means being respectful of the whole creation for what it is. Snakes, poison ivy etc. are what they are because they are created that way. Therefore, don't hate them for what they are. Keep them in their place out of respect. This attitude is based on truth and reality. Ultimately, everything is God. Our goal is to see *brahman* everywhere. The moment we act out of anger or rejection, we don't see that. The attitude of graceful acceptance will enable us, ultimately, to see not only the grace of God, but God himself in all his manifestations. This is the truth. *Īśvara* is not only the creator of this universe, but He manifests as this very world.

Lord Krishna says, [Bhagavad Gita, 18-61], *īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānām hṛddeśe'rjuna tiṣṭhati*, *īśvara* abides at the seat of the intellect (in the hearts) of all beings. Therefore, He is the self of all. He is all-pervasive. To know *īśvara* means to know that He is the *nimitta kāraṇam*, the efficient cause, and also the *upādāna kāraṇam*, the material cause of this world.

Freedom is in letting go of our binding opinions

If your response to situations is dictated by *rāga* and *dveṣa* or likes and dislikes, these reactions deny you the appreciation of the realities of life. In a given situation, painful decisions may have to be made. Your decisions should come out of mature consideration. Every relationship involves *anugraha*, favor, and *nigraha*, restraint. Every situation calls for leniency; favor the other person and let them have their way. However, it cannot be that you always do only what you want or what the other person wants. There are times when restraint has also to be used. A charioteer gives free rein to the horses, but restrains them when needed. Just because you have to take an unpleasant action, it does not mean you have to be angry. It can be done with a mature understanding. A battle cannot be fought otherwise. Lord Krishna says [Bhagavad Gita, 2-38]:

सुखदुःखे समे कृत्वा लाभालाभौ जयाजयौ ।

ततो युद्धाय युज्यस्व नैवं पापमवाप्स्यसि ॥

sukhaduḥkhe same kṛtvā lābhālābhau jayājayau,
tato yuddhāya yujyasva naivaṁ pāpamavāpsyasi.

Taking pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat to be the same, prepare for battle. Thus, you will incur no sin.

We all want success. Yet, we should know that things don't always work the way we want them to work. We have to be ready to accept whatever be the result. Everything is a calculated risk. Even when we talk, we never know what the words are going to convey; the intended meaning may potentially be misinterpreted. Actions done with the best of intentions and attitudes may not bring the desired result. Therefore, ask yourself whether you are ready for failure. You are not working towards failure, but you must be prepared for it. Will you be devastated or can you retain an objective frame of mind? All of this requires us to surrender our tendency to react when things do not go our way.

We see success and security when things go our way. We take it for granted that it is right only when events go as expected; otherwise, it is not. Our expectations are based on limited knowledge. On the other hand, surrendering our opinions and conclusions based on our limited intellect and accepting a situation as created by God's infinite wisdom is practical and pragmatic. There is freedom in this because it is our own opinions and conclusions that bind us. To the extent we let them go, to that extent is there freedom. All this is graceful acceptance.

Responsibility lies in performing actions in keeping with the values

Responsibility implies recognizing that you have the accountability to respond to every situation appropriately. Your actions should be in keeping with your position, role, and status, e.g., manager, father, teacher, friend etc. There is always a dignified response to every interaction. Accept that whatever you do and say at any given moment is important and has some consequences. Lord Krishna says [Bhagavad Gita, 2-47]:

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥

karmanyevādhikāraṣṭe mā phaleṣu kadācana,

mā karmaphalāheturbhūrmā te saṅgo'stoakarmaṇi.

Your choice is in action only, never in the result thereof. Do not be the author of the results of the action. Let your attachment not be to inaction.

Responsibility lies in performing actions the right way, in keeping with the values. Be honest, truthful, non-violent, and sensitive to the rights of others. Being responsible is also a way of surrendering to the order. You follow the order and surrender whatever tendencies you may have to potentially violate the order. In order for you to act responsibly, it is necessary that you must subdue your opposite tendencies. You may have a tendency to get angry, greedy, selfish, and fearful. Subdue them. These hurtful tendencies need to be subdued every time you want to act in keeping with the basic values of life. This is one dimension of responsibility.

Responsibility involves being alert and protecting oneself

Your intentions also should be right. There should be an alignment between your thoughts, words, and actions. Let there be honesty and transparency. Should you let yourself be hurt by a dishonest person by accepting him? Just as you avoid poison ivy and snakes, so also should you avoid such people. Human beings can abuse their free will. The abuse of free will also arises out of helplessness and insecurity. Avoid such people and protect yourself. It is necessary to be alert and cautious while living in a competitive or aggressive society. This is also a responsibility.

Acting in keeping with the values is essential to discover our true nature

Let every action become a means of invoking the goodness within us. This is how *karma* becomes *yoga*. The ultimate goal is to recognize that I am *brahman*. *Brahman* is all goodness, kindness, truthfulness, and wholeness. If this is my nature and I want to discover it, how can it be that I act in a dishonest manner and hope to discover that goodness? I cannot discover my true nature this way. When I act in keeping with the order, I oblige myself.

It is not true that honest people lose and dishonest people win; honest people don't always finish last. Honesty alone does not guarantee that one will succeed in life. Success calls for talent, skills, abilities, confidence etc. You should think about what you ultimately want in your life. Success and happiness are subjective phenomena, not external phenomena. You feel happy whenever you are respectful of yourself and accept yourself. That is when you discover satisfaction. If that is the criterion, why do you judge yourself based on external criteria? You should judge yourself based on effort and not based on the outcome. Being honest and good is conducive to self-respect.

You do not like yourself when you are angry, reactive, and dishonest. The person who reacts then is not you; it is your anger, which reacts. You don't get angry; it is anger that gets you. You find that whenever your action is based on values, it is conducive to self-respect and self-worth. It will require overcoming various temptations in order to do what is right. If you are required to exercise early in the morning, you will have to let go of some comfortable sleep. Certain lines have to be drawn to control temptations. Tendencies to indulge, violate, compromise, and escape have to be kept under check. Thus, in course of time, you will develop into an integrated person, a person who enjoys self-control or mastery over himself. Lord Krishna refers to this as success [Bhagavad Gita, 5-7].

योगयुक्तो विशुद्धात्मा विजितात्मा जितेन्द्रियः ।

सर्वभूतात्मभूतात्मा कुर्वन्नपि न लिप्यते ॥

*yogayukto viśuddhātmā vijitātmā jitendriyaḥ,
sarvabhūtātmabhūtātmā kurvoannapi na lipyate.*

One whose mind is purified by being committed to a life of *karma-yoga*, who has mastered the body and has the sense organs under control, and who knows oneself to be the self in all beings, (such a person) is not affected even while doing (actions).

When one lives a life that is conducive to the purification of the mind, self-mastery, and self-control, he becomes an integrated person.

You have the favor, grace, or support of your own personality. As Lord Krishna says, your own mind can become your friend or enemy. The mind that is under control of your likes and dislikes, anger etc. is the enemy. The mind that is free from these hurtful tendencies is a friend. You want a mind and a personality that is friendly to you. You want to enjoy its grace, support, togetherness, and integrated personality.

The violation of a value is a violation of my self.

Even though there is a common idea of what success entails, and it is measured in terms of wealth and fame, it cannot be valued for its own sake. If this comes at the cost of your self, you should drop the value assigned to it. Giving too much value to such things is *adhyāsa*, superimposition. Whenever you compromise a value for the sake of money, money becomes more important than you yourself. Whenever you violate a value, you violate yourself. Values such as truthfulness and non-violence are, in fact, the order in this universe.

That order is no different than you. The order in accordance with which the whole universe functions is your self. This is to be discovered. This is called Advaita. When this order is violated, it creates a seed of conflict, guilt, non-acceptance, dissatisfaction, and discomfort. Whenever you act in keeping with the values, you act in accordance with your own nature. Such action is conducive to integrity and harmony within your self.

I am the very goal I am seeking

Following the values is possible only when we have clarity about our life. That is called *viveka*, discernment. It is this discernment that we are seeking in our life. Do we want wealth? As the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad [2-4-5] says:

आत्मनस्तु कामाय सर्वं प्रियं भवति ।

ātmanastu kāmāya sarvaṁ priyaṁ bhavati.

It is not for the sake of all that all is loved, but for one's own sake that it is loved.

Things in the world are important not for their own sake, but because I am important. The most important one in my life is my self. Anyone or anything becomes important only because it makes me feel important. If I am important to me, I am the very goal I am seeking. Therefore, success is to be discovered from within my self and not anywhere else. Looking upon the objects of the world as a source of happiness is a false notion. Power and wealth in this lifetime alone do not mean success. I have to be alive, say, five hundred years from today, to find out whether I was successful or not. Our judgment is based on the values prevalent today. Our idea of success typically depends upon the fancies of the world and the values of people around us. But then, these values keep changing. Values undergo change in every society. The values have been different in the different *yugas*. In the *satya-yuga*, meditation was valued, rituals were valued in the *dvāpara-yuga*, *homa*, *yajña* etc. in the *treta-yuga*, and no one knows what the values are in the *kali-yuga*.

Success is the discovery of comfort within oneself.

We have to adhere to the fundamental value that success and happiness is my own nature. We have to own up to ourselves. The way to accomplish this is to have a mind that enjoys purity, togetherness, and integrity, and a mind that is our friend. The Kaṭhōpaniṣad [1-2-20] says:

तमक्रतुः पश्यति वीतशोको धातुप्रसादान्महिमानमात्मनः ॥

tamakratuḥ paśyati vītaśoko dhātuprasādānmahimānamātmanah.

The desireless sees that glory of the Self through the serenity of the organs (and becomes) free from grief.

One sees the glory of one's own self when the mind becomes free from likes and dislikes and gains purity, and when the personality becomes integrated and favorable to me. This is *ātma kṛpā*. There are different kinds of *kṛpās*: *īśvara kṛpā* or the grace of God, *guru kṛpā* or the grace of the teacher, *śāstra kṛpā* or the grace of the scriptures, and *ātma kṛpā* or the grace of one's own self. My own mind should become pleased with me, or, in other words, I should be pleased with myself. This is the ultimate success. When this is present, I discover the glories of my self. I am greater than this mere body-mind-sense complex. The wise person discovers the glory of his own self and becomes free from all grief.

We become free from grief and unhappiness in recognizing our own glories. For this, we need a mind that is poised to discover our glories and enjoy the purity and togetherness. Retirement is ideal when we can be comfortable with ourselves. Solitude can be enjoyed only when we can enjoy being by ourselves. Discovering comfort with ourselves is success. As Lord Krishna says [2-55]:

प्रजहाति यदा कामान्सर्वान्पार्थ मनोगतान् ।

आत्मन्येवात्मना तुष्टः स्थितप्रज्ञस्तदोच्यते ॥

*prajahāti yadā kāmānsarvānpārtha manogatān,
ātmanyevātmanā tuṣṭaḥ sthitaprajñastadocyate.*

When a person gives up all the desires as they appear in the mind, O Partha, happy in oneself, with oneself alone, that person is said to be one of ascertained knowledge.

He has, in course of time, acquired a mind that is pleased with itself by living a life of surrender. He has surrendered whatever comes in the way of having that disposition of mind. Basically, we are divine, limitless, and of the nature of goodness. That alone is the truth. Still, we do have some negative tendencies. What we call evil is but the product of ignorance. It is superficial and can be removed. By living a life keeping with the basic values, these obstacles can be removed.

To discover freedom we have to surrender tendencies that bind us

One aspect of surrender is graceful acceptance and the other is the performing of actions in keeping with the basic values. When I follow a value, I feel good about myself. I become worthy in my own perception. I become acceptable to myself. That is the real success. Our perceptions about success have to be dropped in favor of the perceptions that the scriptures provide us. We surrender that which is an obstacle and a source of unhappiness. Otherwise, there will be no freedom in surrender, only loss. We surrender tendencies that bind, for the sake of discovering freedom¹.

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