

## Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati

### Surrender and Freedom

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#### The first stage of surrender is graceful acceptance of *īśvara*

Surrender, in essence, amounts to surrendering our false notions. There is freedom in surrendering our false notions and that freedom is the reality of life and of us. The wrong notions and perceptions about the self, the world and God bind us. Progressively, we should drop our various false perceptions. Graceful acceptance also helps us let go of our false perceptions. The right perception is acknowledging that whatever is, is right. A fundamental truth is involved in this statement. As the *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad* says [1]:

ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत्।

*īśāvāsyamidam̐ sarvaṁ yatkiñca jagatyāṁ jagat.*

Whatever there is in this creation is nothing but the manifestation of *īśvara*.

*Īśvara* is not only the creator; He is also manifest as the creation. He is immanent even while he transcends the names and forms. This is the right perception. Until you gain the perception that everything, including yourself, is *īśvara*, you do not gain total freedom. When it is said that you are *īśvara*, it does not mean that you are omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. *Īśvara* is infinite in all aspects, whereas you have a personality with limited knowledge, power and capacity. You are not seeking oneness at the level of personality, but at the level of your true nature. The true nature of *īśvara*, the essence of love, freedom, happiness, and fullness, is the true nature of your self.

You tend to think that only when you can control the world, are you free and complete. Therefore, whenever you do not get your way, you get frustrated. These perceptions of freedom and completeness are false. Freedom is not to be equated to a specific situation or an event. Discovering what is and what you are, is freedom. This reality can be discovered only when the false perceptions go. You discover your wholeness, freedom, and who you are; these are denied by your false perceptions.

Vedanta says that I don't have to become free and whole because I am already free and whole. But this doesn't seem to be my experience. I don't feel

free or whole. There are thus two opposing perceptions. Which one of these perceptions should form the basis of my life? Surrender is in letting go of my perception of incompleteness, in favor of Vedanta's assertion of my wholeness. As I progressively give up my false notions, my perceptions begin to coincide with the perceptions of Vedanta. The perception that I am limited cannot be dropped just like that. It has to be surrendered in stages. The first stage is the graceful acceptance of *īśvara*.

### **The second stage of surrender is conformity to *dharma*, the order.**

My perception of being a limited being makes me a needy person. I am in need of security, comfort, acceptance, and approval. Whatever I do is essentially motivated by a desire to fulfill my needs. When I compare my perception with what the Upaniṣad teaches, I discover that it is not a legitimate perception. Therefore, the need is not a legitimate one. Since security and fearlessness is my nature, there is nothing that can provide me with security. The Taittirīyopaniṣad [2-7] says:

अभयं प्रतिष्ठां विन्दते ।

*abhayaṁ pratiṣṭhāṁ vindate.*

[The wise person] gains abidance in fearlessness.

Whatever I do on the basis of fear or insecurity is not going to be right. I compromise values out of fear and insecurity. I lie and cheat to protect myself. Very often, these values require me to pay a price. I have to let go of my likes and dislikes in order to be truthful and honest. I have to keep the impulse of insecurity and fear under check in order to conform to the order, *dharma*.

If I can 'bring' *īśvara* in every stage of my life, it becomes easier to follow the order. When *īśvara* is in my life, it becomes easier to follow the teaching of Vedanta. I need a protector. Usually, I look upon wealth, power, name, and fame as protectors. Therefore, whenever I let go of them, I feel insecure. One aspect of surrender is in having the faith that he will protect me, *rakṣiṣyati iti viśvāsaḥ*.

### **Dharma requires the recognition of interdependence in the world**

All this is easier said than done. Choosing *īśvara* as a protector is a process. As we take a step forward in this direction, we discover that He indeed does protect us. We develop a relationship with *īśvara* and, in course of time,

discover the truth. In this process, we will be able to let go of the hold on material things upon which we depend for our comfort and security. Material things do have value in life and they are required to an extent to nourish our egos. They give us a sense of self-esteem and self-respect. But if power and wealth are equated to security and success, we are assigning them too much value. There is no need to declare that the world is not needed. But at the same time, to say that we cannot do without material things is also incorrect. Giving too much value to anything creates attachment. Then, they become overly important to us. Detachment does not mean we do not need anything. There is a relationship of interdependence in the world. It is required for survival. A recognition and acceptance of this is necessary. We prioritize things according to what we consider important in our lives.

### **Ego gratification prevents us from adhering to dharma**

Vedanta is not totally insensitive to life as it is. There must be *viveka*, discernment, and a sense of proportion. Difficulty in following *dharma* arises when we give too much importance to certain things in life. Sometimes, we are willing to sacrifice honesty for money or power. Everything has a value and a price. What we can do is to raise our price. We may not be able to be totally honest right away, but we can stretch ourselves, stretch our ego, and make it more accommodating. Surrendering the ego is surrendering our likes and dislikes and our sense of smallness that brings about insecurity and selfishness. Usually, whatever we do is motivated by a desire to serve some purpose for ourselves. We always seek ego gratification because we see success and happiness in it. This is a false perception of success. The ego can never be gratified. It is like a bottomless pit and it controls stealthily and hides. As Lord Krishna says [Bhagavad Gita, 3-37, 40]:

काम एष क्रोध एष रजोगुणसमुद्भवः ।

महाशनो महापाप्मा विद्ध्येनमिह वैरिणम् ॥

*kāma eṣa krodha eṣa rajoguṇasamudbhavaḥ,*

*mahāśano mahāpāpmā viddhyenamihā vairiṇam.*

This desire, this anger, born of the *guṇa rajas* is a glutton and a great sinner. Know that to be the enemy here in this world.

इन्द्रियाणि मनो बुद्धिरस्याधिष्ठानमुच्यते ।

एतैर्विमोहयत्येष ज्ञानमावृत्य देहिनम् ॥

*indriyāṇi mano buddhirasyādhiṣṭhānamucyate,  
etaivimohayatyeṣa jñānamāvṛtya dehinam.*

Its location is said to be the senses, mind, and intellect. With these, it (*kāma*) deludes the person by covering his or her wisdom.

The desire for ego gratification is *kāma*. It hides in the sense organs and in the mind. It provides a rationale to justify whatever it is that we want to do at the intellectual level, and provides a rationale to whatever emotions we want to entertain at the emotional level, and whatever we want to experience at the level of the senses. *Avidyā*, ignorance, causes *kāma*, desire, which, in turn, leads to *karma*, action. *Kāma* pervades our life. The first product of our false perception is that we are limited and needy. We want to become limitless at the level of the ego. But that can never work. A mullah story is told to illustrate this idea.

### **We cannot become limitless at the level of the ego**

A mullah and his friends were boasting about various things, and there was a bet about who could spend a cold night atop a nearby mountain. The mullah took the challenge and spent the night on the mountain. The next morning, his surprised friends asked him how he was able to do that. He said that he had stayed up reading by candlelight. His friends felt that he had cheated because he had used candlelight to keep himself warm. The mullah wanted to teach them a lesson. So the next day, he invited them to his home for dinner. All the friends gathered around the dining table. The mullah went into the kitchen to bring the food. Time passed by, but the mullah did not come out. So the friends went into the kitchen to see why he was getting delayed so much. The mullah was waiting for a huge pot of rice to be cooked by the small flame of a candle!

Our expectation is to be limitless with this little ego. It is not going to work. The sooner we recognize this fact, the sooner we will be able to drop our futile attempt to discover satisfaction by meeting our needs. When the ego is satisfied for a few moments, it drops its demands. Vedanta explains that our happiness is not because of the fulfillment of desires, but because we become free from desire at that moment. Happiness is nothing but the relief that we experience from the burden of our desires. This is called *triṣṇā-kṣaya*, the removal of desire.

## Responsibility is in letting go of the process of ego gratification and including others in our life

How long can this false belief of security last? How long can the ego give satisfaction? Since it has no capacity of its own, it can only create an appearance of security and comfort. Its hollowness becomes evident when something else presents itself. To be successful, I expect the ego to be perfect. That can never be. I have let go of the process of gratifying the ego. This makes me calculative and selfish. Lord Krishna says [Bhagavad Gita, 3-9]:

यज्ञार्थात्कर्मणोऽन्यत्र लोकोऽयं कर्मबन्धनः ।

तदर्थं कर्म कौन्तेय मुक्तसङ्गः समाचर ॥

*yajñārthātkarmaṇo'nyatra loko'yaṁ karmabandhanaḥ,  
tadarthaṁ karma kaunteya muktasaṅgaḥ samācara.*

This person who is enjoined (to do action) is bound by *karma* other than that performed for the sake of *yajña*, (i.e., other than the action performed as an offering to *īśvara*). For that reason, O Kaunteya, being one free from attachment, perform action for the sake of that *yajña*.

A selfish action is a binding action. Whenever you perform an action motivated by selfishness, it will make you more selfish and insecure. An action originating from insecurity will only make you more insecure. Give up this sense of selfishness, self-centeredness, and narrow mindedness. If you know your true nature as being limitless, there will be no selfishness. You are a recipient of what the world has to offer. In whatever you do, therefore, there must be a consideration for the need of the whole world. This is a slow process. Your life is possible only because of what the other members of the society provide. So assign their share first and partake of the remainder. When you serve only your interest, you tend to be insensitive to other people's needs and hurt them. A lot of this pain is inflicted because of your concern about your own security. The only way to overcome this is to gradually include others in your life. This is called responsibility.

Performing an action keeping in mind one's self-interest is not the right thing. It will keep you permanently in the cycle of birth and death. Fulfilling a desire never actually fulfills that desire. Lord Krishna says that if you leave this body with a desire, you will be born again to fulfill that desire.

## Growing out of desires is the only way to liberation

Even though we live a life of *dharma*, that itself is not enough. *Dhārmic* people can also have desire for themselves. They may want to go to heaven to enjoy the pleasures offered there, but they cannot gain liberation or freedom. Lord Krishna says [Bhagavad Gita, 9-21]:

ते तं भुक्त्वा स्वर्गलोकं विशालं क्षीणे पुण्ये मर्त्यलोकं विशन्ति ।

एवं त्रयीधर्ममनुप्रपन्ना गतागतं कामकामा लभन्ते ॥

*te taṁ bhuktvā svargalokaṁ viśālaṁ kṣīṇe puṇye martyalokaṁ viśanti,*  
*evaṁ trayīdharmamanuprapannā gatāgataṁ kāmakāmā labhante.*

These people, having enjoyed that vast heaven, when their *puṇya* is exhausted, enter the world of mortals. In this manner, following the rituals in the three Vedas, those who are desirous of various ends gain the condition of coming and going, *samsāra*.

You perform rituals and various actions to earn *puṇya* and gain pleasures. When the *puṇya* is exhausted, you will have start all over again because you are as incomplete as you were before. Hence, growing out of desires is the only way to attain liberation. This is the second stage in *viveka*, discrimination. This is at a more mature level.

## Only an introverted and abiding mind can discover freedom

It is true that desiring and fulfilling a desire is a privilege. But do make sure that you don't compromise the means for the end in this process of fulfilling desires. The Kaṭhōpaniṣad says [2-1-1]:

पराञ्चि खानि व्यतृणत् स्वयम्भूस्तस्मात्पराङ्पश्यति नान्तरात्मन् ।

*parāñci khāni vyatṛṇat svayambhūstasmātparāṅpaśyati nāntarātman.*

God has rendered the senses (so) defective that they go outward, and hence man sees the external and not the internal self.

The human being is born extroverted. There is a natural affinity for the objects and pleasures of the world. Therefore, a human being always looks out at the world seeking happiness and security. The mind is directed towards things and pleasures other than the self. This can be an obstacle. Only when the mind becomes introverted and abiding, can you discover freedom and happiness, which is your nature.

## Success is in finding total comfort with one's self

When a desire arises, recognize that it is a product of ignorance. Every desire is an expression of your inadequacy that is born of ignorance. The need for happiness is an emotional need. Objects in the world can fulfill that need to a certain extent. Beyond that, they cannot give you happiness or security. As desires arise in the mind, subject them to scrutiny. Don't jump to fulfill them immediately. This is *vairgya*, dispassion. It involves analyzing the nature of every object of desire and recognizing its limitations through discrimination.

परीक्ष्य लोकान् कर्मचितान् ब्रह्मणो निर्वेदमायान्नास्त्यकृतः कृतेन ।

*parīkṣya lokān karmacitān brahmaṇo nirvedamāyānnāstyakṛtaḥ kṛtena.*

Having examined the worlds that are achieved through *karma*, a brahmin should become dispassionate. The unproduced is not possible through *karma* [Muṇḍakopaniṣad, 1-2-12].

I need to recognize what I want in my life. Needs are never ending. I was born needy and as I grew, the needs also grew accordingly. Though our objects of need change, the need for objects remains. None of our accomplishments create a sense of satisfaction. There is never comfort with myself as I am. Can I relax within myself without needing to do *prāṇāyāma*, *japa*, or meditation? Success is measured by the satisfaction with one's self. Contentment is not something I can will. It has to happen. I cannot declare that I am satisfied. I have to find satisfaction. That requires a lot of hard work.

Living life intelligently makes me a satisfied person progressively. Am I more content than before or am I still a discontented person? Formerly, I was uncomfortably miserable and now, I am comfortably miserable. Comfort is required to deal with internal misery, but it should not become an end in itself. Comfort itself should not become important. There is no end to comforts. They should enable me to do something important in my life. Ultimately, the measure of success is how comfortable and satisfied am I with myself. Total success is total comfort with one's self.

## We desire the limitless, not material objects

Whenever there is a desire, inquire as to whether the desire is for a higher purpose or for the thing itself. Desires are endless; therefore, keep a check on them. Recognize that desires have to be fulfilled from within your self and not from any external source. Nothing else is capable of bringing about that

fulfillment because your desire is for the limitless. You have to own up to the limitlessness that is your true nature. It is not enough that you are *brahman*; you must know that you are *brahman*. As long as you keep fulfilling desires, your mind will remain extroverted. It cannot be comfortable with itself.

### **We must take the time to watch our minds deliberately**

Drop every activity and assign time for yourself so that you can be with your self, look at your self, know your self, and know your personality. A deliberate attempt to make the mind free from desires and emotions is *pratipakṣa bhāvana*, taking the opposite viewpoint.

I deal with an emotion such as anger with forgiveness and compassion. Jealousy, for example, arises from a false perception that someone is better than I. It is not his accomplishment that makes me unhappy, but that I am not as well accomplished. It makes me aware of my perceived limitation and lack. This causes pain and a sense of inadequacy. It makes me face something that I do not want to face within myself. The best way to deal with jealousy is to congratulate the other person's success and be happy for him. Attempting to become happy from the happiness of others is a good way to become happy. Deliberately cultivate this habit and in time, it will happen. You have to constantly watch and deal with your mind. Since we are swept away by many things and there is no leisure to watch our mind deliberately, take time off to just be with your self and think. Get familiar with your mind and emotions and decide upon a strategy to deal with them. This is surrendering your reactions. There is freedom in that because anger, jealousy, frustration, attachment and aversion are all expressions of bondage. To the extent you let go of these emotions, to that extent will you discover freedom. This stage is called *viveka*, discerning the basic priorities of life.

### **Our true nature, limitlessness, cannot be attained by effort**

What do you want in life? I want to be unconditionally free of every limitation and bondage. Discover the fact that the desire behind all desires is the desire to be free and limitless. Let there be this clarity about what you want in life and how to get it. If limitlessness is what you desire, it cannot be attained because every effort and achievement is limited. There are two kinds of desires, natural and cultivated.



Hunger is a natural desire, but the desire for a particular type of food to appease that hunger, is cultivated. The desire to be limitless is a natural desire because you find yourself always wanting to be limitless. There is always provision for fulfilling natural desires in this creation. If everything in this world is limited, how will I fulfill my desire to be limitless?

The story goes that two people boarded a train on a long journey, one with large amount of cash in his briefcase and the other with the intention of robbing that money. After the train started, the wealthy man opened his briefcase and began to count the bills even in front of the robber. At night, the robber searched everywhere for that money, but could not find it. This scenario repeated the next night too. When they reached their destination, out of sheer frustration, the robber revealed his real identity and asked the wealthy man where his money had been hidden during the journey. The person with the money replied, "Under your pillow." It had not occurred to the thief to look under his own pillow! Similarly, you do not look for God within yourself, but search everywhere else fruitlessly. Your being limitless is not in name, fame, power or heaven. It is your own nature. All you have to do is recognize this fact. It is not something to be accomplished. It is an awareness of what has already been achieved. There is freedom and surrender in this realization.

As we grow in maturity, surrender takes place in stages. At the highest level, you have surrendered, recognizing the reality that what you are seeking is your self. It is not something to be sought from outside your self, but is to be discovered within your self. This is surrendering the false notion that what you are seeking is different from your self<sup>1</sup>.

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