

Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati

Surrender and Freedom

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Viveka, discrimination, is seeing things the way they are, and *aviveka* is seeing what is not there. A standard example of *aviveka* is seeing a snake where there is a rope.

What I desire is to be totally free, perfect, and complete. I am unhappy when I find myself to be imperfect and incomplete. I expect to be complete. I am trying to become perfect by using my mind, intellect, and ego. At the level of the mind, I require friends etc. At the level of the intellect, I require all kinds of information and knowledge. At the level of the ego, I require power and recognition. All this is like trying to cook rice by the flame of a candle, as in that mullah story.

This body-mind-sense complex is limited. Therefore, it will remain limited no matter how hard I try. As long as I equate myself to this body and mind, I will never see myself as a perfect being. Only when I see myself truly for what I am, can I see myself as perfect. That calls for the ultimate *viveka*, the discrimination of the self from the non-self, and the ultimate surrender of my identification with this body-mind complex. The perception I have of myself is that I am mortal and a limited being. That perception has to be dropped.

The desire for freedom has to transform into a desire for knowledge

The stage of life when *karma* and *bhakti* are predominant is called *pravṛtti*. The life of a householder is that of *karma yoga* or *bhakti yoga*. As a householder, if I perform actions based on *dharma* and maintain an attitude of graceful acceptance, I acquire emotional maturity, inner growth, and freedom from many of my notions. In this process, I begin to realize that I can be limitless, not by becoming, but by knowing. This is when the desire for freedom gets transformed into a desire for knowledge. This important transformation has to take place for one to become eligible to receive and assimilate this knowledge.

This is the kind of transformation we see happening in Arjuna. He comes to the battlefield with a desire to fight and win. He equates victory with success. As he begins talking to Lord Krishna, he realizes that even victory could leave him an incomplete being [Bhagavad Gita, 1-32].

न काङ्क्षे विजयं कृष्ण न च राज्यं सुखानि च ।

किं नो राज्येन गोविन्द किं भोगैर्जीवितेन वा ॥

na kāṅkṣe vijayaṁ kṛṣṇa na ca rājyaṁ sukhāni ca,

kiṁ no rājyena govinda kiṁ bhogairjīvitena vā.

O Krishna, I want neither victory, nor the kingdom, nor comforts. O Govinda, of what use are a kingdom, enjoyments, or even life to us?

At one point, Arjuna tells Lord Krishna that even if he is made king of the three worlds, he does not see how the pain that he is suffering can be removed. It is very clear to Arjuna that even the highest accomplishments cannot remove the pain that arises from a sense of incompleteness. That is how he submits himself to Lord Krishna and requests him to teach. Thus, he becomes a *jijñāsu*, one desirous of knowledge, from being a *mumukṣu*, one desirous of freedom.

We begin to value knowledge only when we recognize that ignorance is our only problem

It becomes very clear that it is ignorance that is the cause for our wrong perception and, therefore, all our problems. This fundamental problem brings about the topical problems. Whatever we consider to be a problem is always spiritual in nature and not topical. As far as our lives are concerned, there are situations and these can be termed as problems that need to be solved. Things such as software design, strategies etc. become a problem only when they cause stress, concern, and fear. When the mind is free from stress, the problem can be handled. The desire to be successful, to have one's way, and to prove oneself arises from a fundamental spiritual problem. Sorrow and sadness are not material problems. No material things can remove sorrow. Sorrow is a creation of the individual and it is the result of ignorance. It is a spiritual problem and, therefore, there must be a spiritual solution for it.

Every solution brings about a problem of its own; there is no solution that can provide a final solution. All our rearrangements can only remove our discomfort. The need to want to be comfortable is natural. When all the energy is poured into acquiring comfort, sacrifices have to be made in other areas. Once we decide our priorities in life, what we do gets decided automatically by those priorities. The value for a new priority replaces the importance previously given to other things. When we recognize the fact that there is no problem in our life other than ignorance and the wrong perception created by it, we begin to value

knowledge. Until then, it remains merely as one of the many things that we value.

The life of activity enables us to tune up our minds

As times goes by, this commitment gains importance. It may even lead to renunciation, if you so choose. It is not necessary to become a renunciate to be wise. King Janaka is an example of a wise person who was not a renunciate. Renunciation is a gradual withdrawal from activity and an entry into a life of contemplation. Lord Krishna talks about two stages: one, a life of activity that aids in spiritual growth and the other, a life of contemplation that is the final stage of refinement. The major tuning up of our mind takes place during the life of activity. This is necessary and one discovers the need for it. That is how the proportion of study, thinking, and contemplation increases. As we gain an interest and satisfaction in the pursuit of knowledge, other things drop off. This is the next stage of surrender and discovering freedom.

Renunciation is talked about only in a Vedic context. In those times, students sought out the teachers and left the comforts of their home to live with the teacher. This is how renunciation of *karma*, duties, became necessary. There is a surrender of all rights and claims when there are no duties. They could live on alms and therefore, there was freedom from possessions.

Self-growth is a process of becoming free from emotional needs

Today's idea of ownership comes from false perceptions. When we analyze our possessions, we discover that we do not really own anything. *Īśvara*, the creator, is the owner of everything. We can look upon the things of the world as gifts given to us for our enjoyment. Thus, the relationship with possessions such as a house etc., changes slowly. Not that we become indifferent to these possessions, but we begin to realize that we don't possess any of them; we only use them. This is detachment, the freedom from dependence. Lord Krishna says [Bhagavad Gita, 13-9]:

असक्तिरनभिष्वङ्गः पुत्रदारगृहादिषु ।

नित्यं च समचित्तत्वमिष्टानिष्टोपपत्तिषु ॥

asaktiranabhiṣvaṅgaḥ putradāraḡrāhādiṣu,
nityam ca samacittatvamiṣṭāniṣṭopapattiṣu.

...absence of ownership, absence of excessive affection regarding son, wife and house, and always evenness of mind regarding the gain of the desirable and the undesirable...

There is freedom from possessions and an excessive attachment to those who are related to us closely. This happens slowly in the life of a householder. One lives a life of retirement only when one becomes free from emotional needs. For example, the sense of security provided by our family or wealth is an emotional need. Emotional growth is the process of becoming free from this need by discovering greater sufficiency in our selves. It doesn't mean that we have to give up everything. These things are simply of no concern any more. This is detachment. It is natural that things become important and occupy our mind because we are in the midst of them. It is difficult to remain detached in such situations. If one can accomplish that, however, one does not need any other renunciation.

Detachment arises as one discovers the unreality of things

As one grows internally, one becomes free of needs. Detachment comes with the discovery of the unreality or the *mithyātvam* of things. *Mithyā* is what a thing appears to be. As long as I look upon a thing as a source of security, it appears to be real. When I know of its unreality, my mind becomes free from attachment. Unless this mature relationship is present, I cannot enjoy freedom from these things.

Detachment is a preparation for retirement. The mind remains attached even if a physical distance is created because of false perceptions and the importance given to things. In the process of surrendering, this attachment also goes. When the relationship is a comfortable and healthy relationship, and not one of attraction and ownership, one is ready to give it up if need be, or remain in one's own place as a renunciate.

The life of renunciation enables one to pursue knowledge exclusively

A renunciate enjoys freedom of mind because he is free from possessions and duties. This frame of mind is required for the study of the scriptures. As the Pañcadaśī [7-106] points out, the study involves *tat cintanam tat kathanam anyonyam tat prabhodanam*, reflecting on It, talking about It and mutually producing logical arguments about It. This is the life of a renunciate. It is a life of study and contemplation. In Vedanta, this is called *vicāra*, the deliberation,

inquiry, or investigation into the nature of things. This requires a mind that enjoys leisure. The Muṇḍakopaniṣad [1-2-12] says:

तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् ।

tadvijñānārtham sa gurumevābhigacchet.

Therefore, to attain knowledge, he must necessarily approach a teacher.

The Vedas have two sections. The first section, the *karma-kāṇḍa*, talks about *dharma* and the second, the *jñāna-kāṇḍa*, reveals *brahman*. For the person living a life of activity, *dharma* is a means. The pursuit of knowledge under the guidance of a teacher is the life of contemplation and renunciation. This pursuit is most effective when the mind is *sāttvik*. The ego is devoted to study and does not react. The products of ignorance, doership and enjoyership, cease to exist in the wake of listening to the teaching, *śravaṇam*. Vedanta says, *tatvamasi*, you are that *brahman*. You are limitless and whole. It is the teacher, who makes us see this fact.

Separation of the subject from the object

Vedanta employs various methods to make us see our mistakes and explain the origin of these notions. One way is the separation of the subject from the object. This is the *dr̥k-dr̥ṣya-viveka*, the separation of the seer or the subject from the seen, the object. Even though the subject and object are two distinct entities, they are erroneously taken to be the same. We are made to see that what is really an object is taken to be the subject due to false identification. The body is not the subject. It is not the Self, but an object of one's perception. As much as the crystal is or the clock is, so also is this body an object of my awareness. To say that I am this body is a habitual error. As Bhagavān Śaṅkara says in the Adhyāsa Bhāṣyam, *ahamidam mamedamiti naisargiko'yam lokavyavahārah*, the Uncreated is expressed in the worldly transaction as 'I am this', 'This is mine'. A person is born with this notion of 'I' and 'mine' arising from the identification with the body-mind complex.

The different levels of false notions

Vedanta asserts that we have not deliberated upon our conclusions about ourselves. We have taken for granted that we are the body, the mind, needy, incomplete etc. How did we arrive at this conclusion? Just because we see or feel something, it doesn't mean that it has to be right. Vedanta addresses the fundamental feeling that we are limited, mortal beings. If we associate ourselves

with the body, we are born with the body and will die with it. But the one who appreciates the birth and growth of the body is essentially different from the body. The birth and death of the body is not the birth and death of the Self. Similarly, happiness and unhappiness are particular states of mind. We are aware of them and therefore, we cannot be the mind. I am the subject, the knower, the one who is aware of the mind and my mind is but an object of my awareness. While watching a movie, we momentarily forget that we are spectators and become one of the characters on the screen. Similarly, when the mind comes up with the idea of happiness, we declare ourselves happy. This is due to our identification with the mind. In truth, our status is that of a spectator, an observer, the subject, the one who is aware of these states of the mind. At the level of the intellect, there are concepts like 'I am a doctor' or 'I am a teacher' etc. I, the individual, am aware of these concepts. The one who is aware is always different from that of which he is aware. The subject is different from the object.

It is not enough to say that what one takes oneself to be is wrong. It is also necessary to understand why one has this mistaken notion and where it originates. If we know where this false perception comes from, we can correct it. It is in the wake of the knowledge that I am the Self, *īśvaroḥam*, and that I am *īśvara* and not a *jīva*, that the final surrender takes place. This is the surrender of the most subtle of notions or false perceptions such as 'I am a doer, I am an enjoyer' etc. Then one is totally free.

The wise person accepts himself completely

Describing a wise person, Lord Krishna says [Bhagavad Gita, 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 Pārtha, happy in oneself, with oneself alone, that person is said to be one of ascertained knowledge.

One who has surrendered all his desires, demands, and expectations discovers satisfaction with himself and in himself. In this process of surrender, I progressively keep discovering satisfaction and freedom. It culminates in my total acceptance of myself as I am. Then, life itself becomes a luxury and nothing

creates the notion of any limitation. Right now, the body is not a luxury because it creates a sense that I am mortal. When I can maintain a distance between the subject and object, I can take things as they are. I can enjoy a flower as it is because I am totally objective towards it. If I expect it to be different from what it is, I cannot find enjoyment in it.

Inner freedom is the vision of oneness

For a wise person, everything becomes a luxury. When you enjoy yourself, every moment becomes a source of enjoyment. Another dimension of this teaching is that whatever exists is you. Even though this recognition begins with the understanding that you are the subject and not the object, the final insight is *īśāvāsyamidam sarvaṃ*, whatever is, is nothing but the manifestation of your self [Īśāvāsyā Upaniṣad, 1]. There is no duality whatsoever. Once you gain this knowledge, there is no sense of distance, division, or separation. You do not feel excluded by anything. In this, there is total freedom. There are no projections or reactions. The Bhagavad Gita says [2-56]:

दुःखेष्वनुद्विग्नमनाः सुखेषु विगतस्पृहः ।

वीतरागभयक्रोधः स्थितधीर्मुनिरुच्यते ॥

*duḥkheṣvanudvignamanāḥ sukheṣu vigataspr̥hāḥ,
vītarāgabhayakrodhaḥ sthitadhīrmunirucyate.*

The one who is not affected by adversities, who is without yearning for pleasures, and is free from longing, fear, and anger is said to be a wise person whose knowledge remains.

In situations that are generally considered painful, he is free. In situations that are considered tempting, he is not tempted. He abides in his own self, in the wholeness that he is. That is the final freedom that emerges from total surrender. The surrendering of my self is the surrendering of the ego, the sense of individuality. The surrender becomes complete in the discovery that the individuality is false. What I took to be small is limitless and complete. There is total surrender in this. When Lord Krishna completes his teaching in the Bhagavad Gita, he says, "Giving up all your notions and false perceptions surrender unto me. Discover that I am your very self. I will release you from all your pain. There is no cause for grief at all because grief is a product of ignorance. It has no reality in the wake of knowledge."

सर्वधर्मान्परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं ब्रज ।

अहं त्वां सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ॥

*sarvadharmānparityajya māmekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja,
ahaṁ tvāṁ sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayisyāmi mā śucaḥ.*

Giving up all *karmas*, take refuge in Me alone. I will release you from all *karma*; do not grieve [Bhagavad Gita, 18-66]¹.

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