

**Satsanga with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati**  
**Arsha Vidya Gurukulam**

**TITIKṢĀ, ENDURANCE**

तितिक्षा - शीतोष्णादिद्वन्द्वसहिष्णुता ॥

*titikṣā - śītoṣṇādi-dvandva-sahiṣṇutā* [Vedāntasāra, 22].

*Titikṣā* is the endurance of heat and cold and other pairs of opposites.

*Sahiṣṇutā* is endurance; *dvandva* means the pairs of opposites; *śīta* is cold, and *uṣṇa* is hot. An endurance of the pairs of opposites, such as heat and cold, is called *titikṣā*.

***Endurance is the ability to withstand ups and downs***

In engineering, there is an endurance test that measures the extent to which a metal is able to endure stresses and strains. A metal may endure heat well, but break down when it is subjected to cold temperatures. Another metal may endure cold temperatures well, but break down when it is subjected to heat. We consider a metal acceptable only when it endures certain variations of both heat and cold. Similarly, our ability to withstand both ups and downs is called endurance. We need to cultivate the ability or strength to endure stresses and strains so that we don't get ruffled, disrupted, or perturbed by little changes that happen around us.

Life consists of pairs of opposites. Everything has the potential to manifest in a totally opposite or contradictory manner. For example, the weather can be hot now, cold later. The very same weather that is pleasant now, can become unpleasant later. Similarly, the very same person who is agreeable now can become disagreeable later. The very thing that I love right now can become an object of my hate. A thing that gives me joy now can also give me pain later. Such is life; everything has the potential of giving pleasure and also pain. A given situation can be agreeable or disagreeable and that is why it is called *mithyā*. *Mithyā* is that which you can never define conclusively. For example, you cannot say that a particular thing is beautiful. What appears beautiful to one person may appear ugly to someone else. What is conducive to one may seem just the opposite to someone else. What is agreeable to someone may be disagreeable to another. Not only that, but what is agreeable to me at a certain time and situation, may be disagreeable to me at another time and in another situation. The cup of coffee that I love at six o'clock in the morning may not necessarily be an object of love at two o'clock at night when I am fast asleep and someone wakes me up to offer it. We should understand that our likes and dislikes and our ideas of agreeable and disagreeable are relative. A thing is agreeable with reference to a particular time, place, and condition. At another time, place, or condition, that very thing, which is now an object of love or agreeability, can just as easily become an object of aversion. This is the nature of creation. If there were consistency, life would be easier and predictable. Nothing in life is

predictable; particularly ourselves. When I wake up in the morning, there is no way for me to say how I will feel at night. I cannot even say how I will feel five minutes later. Things are unpredictable, the human mind is unpredictable, and life is unpredictable. And even if life were not unpredictable, the way I respond to life is always unpredictable.

***Destiny presents opposing experiences at the physical, emotional, and intellectual levels***

We need to develop endurance to the changing situations of life. Life, whether we like it or not, subjects us to various situations that can be broadly classified as agreeable and disagreeable, desirable and undesirable, conducive and non-conductive, or pleasant and painful. As long as situations are pleasant, no one has to endure them. Pain is a fact of life and, therefore, we have to learn to accept it. We have to endure pain at the physical, emotional, and intellectual levels. At the physical level our experiences can be those of comfort and discomfort or heat and cold. At the emotional level, the experiences can be those of pleasure and pain. At the intellectual level, the experiences can be of honor and dishonor. One has to go through these pairs of opposites due to our *prārabdha*, destiny. Destiny keeps bringing us the opposing experiences at the physical, emotional, or intellectual levels. If an individual is constantly subjected to happiness and pleasure, he will get used to that. If an individual is constantly subjected to pain, perhaps he or she will get used to it as well. In countries where there is much poverty and suffering, people carry on with life because they get used to it. When we live in a given situation we get used to that. If it is cold year-round, it is fine. But the problem arises when it is cold and, later, it is warm. Once we get used to the comfort of heat, it becomes difficult to bear the cold. Similarly, in life, we are constantly subjected to opposing situations and there is no consistency or predictability in these situations. This is a fact of life. We are constantly subjected to opposing situations even if we live in an ashram where there are like-minded people. This is the nature of life and we cannot get away from this fact.

***Endurance is the acceptance of situations without retaliation***

The Vivekacūḍāmaṇi [24] defines *titikṣā* as:

सहनं सर्वदुःखानामप्रतीकारपूर्वकम्। चिन्ताविलापरहितं सा तितिक्षा निगद्यते ॥

*sahanam sarvaduḥkhānāmapratikārapūrvakam,*  
*cintāvilāparahitaṁ sā titikṣā nigadyate.*

Objectivity to all pains without any anxiety, complaint, or any attempt of revenge is called *titikṣā*.

The bearing or endurance of all afflictions, physical, emotional, or intellectual -- without retaliating to them is endurance. We usually retaliate to situations. Let me share this story about myself. When I first came to the United States, a friend took me for a drive on a beautiful scenic route. My friend introduced

me to the climate control in the car. I started turning the knobs. It became a little cold, so I turned it the other way to make the car a little warmer. Soon, the sun started shining and it became too warm so I turned the knob down. All of a sudden clouds came and it became too cold, so I turned the heat up. Thus, I went on turning the knob up and down. After 45 minutes my friend asked me, "How did you like the scenery?" "What scenery?" I asked. "Why, we passed such a beautiful scenic road!" I had not observed anything because I had been too busy turning the knob! Thus, we are too busy turning the knobs, trying to make everything agreeable. We cannot accept situations as they are; we always want things according to our preferences. We are so busy making things agreeable that there is no time to appreciate life as it is. This is called *pratikāra*, retaliation. To retaliate to a situation so that it becomes agreeable is not a good habit. We should develop the ability to suffer a little bit, to endure. Even in a temperature-controlled hall, there may be some people who feel it is too cold and some others who may feel it is too warm. There can never be a perfect situation or what we call an agreeable situation and we have to accept this fact of life.

There cannot be people who are totally agreeable to us. We may also encounter agreeable and disagreeable behavior from the same person on different occasions. We always want to change everything around us so that everything is agreeable to us. I change things around to suit my tastes, but my own fancy changes and I don't like the changed circumstances. I may like Spanish furniture now, but six months later, I may fancy Mediterranean furniture instead. The mind is fanciful. It will dislike later what it likes now.

### ***Our minds label situations***

Life is a series of events, situations, conditions, and circumstances that may be *anukula*, agreeable, or *pratikula*, disagreeable. I am constantly subjected to the pairs of opposites and I swell when it is agreeable and shrink when it is disagreeable. I should neither swell nor shrink. In fact, situations are neither agreeable nor disagreeable. They are what they are; the world is what it is, and people are what they are. It is the fanciful mind that brands them as agreeable or disagreeable. The happiness that I feel when I meet with something agreeable is a reaction. The sadness or unhappiness that I feel when I meet with something disagreeable is also a reaction. Generally speaking, our state of mind is governed not by us, but by situations, people etc. When someone smiles at me or speaks to me nicely, I am happy. When someone does not smile at me or does not speak to me, I am unhappy. This is the reason why we get exhausted or tired by the age of forty!

We have to understand that it is our own minds that determine or conclude that a given situation is unpleasant. It is my own mind that labels a given thing as honor or dishonor, pleasant or unpleasant, and happiness or unhappiness. All of these are simply fancies of the mind. In the world, there is no honor or dishonor and nothing agreeable or disagreeable. The world is what it is. What is agreeable to one is disagreeable to another. The food that

makes me so happy may not even merit a look from someone else. Many years ago, I took a friend of mine to an Indian restaurant in New York that served very good Indian food. Even before we could enter the place, he sniffed and said, "What is stinking here?" He would not even enter that restaurant. It is our own minds that decide that something is agreeable, good etc. These are all fancies of our own minds and we should not be influenced by them.

### ***Endurance is maintaining one's poise or equanimity of mind in all situations***

In short, *titikṣā* means maintaining a poise or equanimity of mind under different situations, whether pleasant or unpleasant. We cannot change the nature of things, people, situations, or values. At the moment, we can only change ourselves and perhaps some people who may be under our influence; other than that, we cannot change anything. Knowing this, we realize that everything is created by God and that God presents different situations before us. We look at them with the understanding that if Lord has given an unpleasant situation, there must be a purpose behind it. We accept it, learn from the experience, and shake it off. An ability to shake off unpleasant things is *titikṣā* or endurance.

Ideally, like the wise man, we should surrender the body to destiny, *prārabdhāya samarpitam svavapuḥ* [Maniṣā Pañcakam, 3]. Whatever destiny determines is fine with him; there is no interference with destiny. Not to interfere with destiny may not be practical for us; yet, at the same time, we should not be so sensitive that a little frown on someone's face or one offending statement can bother us for a week or a month. Sensitivity is fine. It is nice to be sensitive to the feelings of others or the beauty of life. But if we are prone to getting hurt, disturbed, or perturbed, it is a symptom of instability and a lack of endurance, not sensitivity. We want to maintain a poise of mind in all situations.

### ***Retaliation contradicts the spiritual pursuit***

What is the relevance of endurance or *titikṣā* in the context of the pursuit of knowledge? While pursuing knowledge, we want a mind that enjoys poise, objectivity, or equanimity. A so-called "sensitive" mind that loses its balance and poise in every little situation is going to be unable to apply itself to the study or to contemplation. Therefore, endurance, rather than a tendency to retaliate, is required. If somebody tells me something, I need not retaliate. Some people are concerned that by not retaliating they will be taken for granted. However, that is not the case. If you don't retaliate, nothing will happen to you.

There is a famous story of a snake that came as a disciple before a saint in India. The saint advised the snake to practice non-violence by not biting, hurting, or killing anybody. The snake returned to the wise man in three days and said, "I don't retaliate at all. But people keep throwing stones at me and bothering me." Then the saint said, "I told you that you should not bite

anybody, but that does not mean you should not pretend as though you are about to hurt or bite someone, particularly when they are bothering you.” The saint meant that the snake should not retaliate from within. If you have to take a stand and do certain things in your day-to-day life, you may do that; internally, however, there should not be a spirit of retaliation. You may be pragmatic, but not aggressive or retaliative. The aggression and retaliation that we are brought up to show are opposed to the very thing that we are seeking. The Self is not aggressive and It does not retaliate. The Self abides equally everywhere. It imparts existence and awareness to everybody equally, whether tiger or lamb. There is no discrimination at all. Lord Krishna says [Bhagavad Gita, 9-29]:

समोऽहं सर्वभूतेषु न मे द्वेष्योऽस्ति न प्रियः ।

*samo'ham sarvabhūteṣu na me dveṣyo'sti na priyaḥ.*

I am the same in all beings. There is no one I dislike nor do I have a favourite.

Similarly, there should not be any aggressiveness or retaliation in our lives. This is *titikṣā*.

***Endurance is freedom from anxiety, lamentation, and retaliation, both inwardly and outwardly***

Very often, people interpret *titikṣā* as putting up with things. In India, this understanding of *titikṣā* is very common. It means putting up with situations without reacting and retaliating. Women in particular are subjected to all kinds of unpleasant situations. They put up with them and suffer. But *titikṣā* is not merely suffering without retaliation. If I put up with it outwardly, but resist it inwardly, it is not *titikṣā*. *Titikṣā* means endurance or forbearance, not suffering; rather, it is the ability to put up with the unpleasant without suffering internally. These may be at the physical, emotional, and intellectual levels, and we simply accept as a fact that things are sometimes pleasant and sometimes unpleasant. If one is able to improve the situation, one should go ahead and do it. Sometimes, we can do something about a situation. However, there are many things over which we have no control. Generally speaking, the most we can address is our own responses to those situations, and those of people who may be within our field of influence. Beyond that, there is very little that we can do to change situations, things, happenings, or people.

It is necessary to develop endurance so as not to get perturbed in various situations. We cannot enjoy a balanced or a poised mind if situations can influence, perturb, or disturb us. It is accepted that a seeker of knowledge, even while in an ashram or some other appropriate environment, may still encounter difficulties like the vagaries of the weather. The pairs of opposites will greet us all the time and we should receive them as cheerfully as we can. This is called *titikṣā*.

*Titikṣā* implies becoming free from retaliation inwardly. There is no *cintā*, anxiety, or *vilāpa*, lamentation. *Titikṣā* is that attitude or endurance, which is free from anxiety, lamentation, and retaliation, outwardly as well as inwardly. This attitude enables us to enjoy a poise of mind even when life brings disagreeable situations at the physical, intellectual, and emotional level. It is the value, which enables us to maintain a poise of mind, and not get perturbed, disturbed, react, or retaliate. In the Bhagavad Gita [2-27], Lord Krishna says,

जातस्य हि ध्रुवो मृत्युर्ध्रुवं जन्म मृतस्य च। तस्मादपरिहार्येऽर्थे न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि ॥

*jātasya hi dhruvo mrtyurdhruvaṁ 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.

Life presents us with situations, only some of which we can change or do something about. There are many things that we cannot do anything about because they are not under our control. We should accept such situations cheerfully or pleasantly. If we can do something to improve a situation, we should go ahead and do it. Thus, *titikṣā* or endurance does not necessarily mean that we become totally unresponsive to a situation; rather, we do not react to situations. Our response can thus be free from reaction. *Titikṣā* is the ability to absorb the shocks that life presents and to endure the discomfort or pain that comes without reacting outwardly or inwardly.

As a value, *titikṣā* is very important because we are related to the world wherever we are. Even if a person lives alone in a forest, there also are trees and animals, the sun and moon, rain and other natural phenomena with which he will have to relate. We find that what we are relating with is not always agreeable to us. In such cases we have to learn to accept the disagreeable situations also with a poised mind. This is *titikṣā*.

### ***Endurance lies in dismissing all situations through discrimination***

Lord Krishna teaches Arjuna the value of *titikṣā* in the Bhagavad Gita.

मात्रास्पर्शास्तु कौन्तेय शीतोष्णसुखदुःखदाः। आगमापायिनोऽनित्यास्तांस्तितिक्षस्व भारत ॥

*mātrāsparśāstu kaunteya śītoṣṇasukhaduḥkhadāḥ,  
āgamāpāyino'nityāstāṁstitikṣasva bhārata.*

O! Son of Kunti, the contacts of the sense organs with the sensory world, which give rise to cold and heat, pleasure and pain, which have the nature of coming and going, are not constant. Endure them, O descendant of Bharata [Bhagavad Gita, 2-14].

नासतो विद्यते भावो नाभावो विद्यते सतः। उभयोरपि दृष्टोऽन्तस्त्वनयोस्तत्त्वदर्शिभिः ॥

*nāsato vidyate bhāvo nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ,  
ubhayorapi drṣṭo'ntastvanayostattvadarśibhiḥ.*

For the unreal (*mithyā*), there is never any being. For the real, there is never any non-being. The ultimate truth of both of these is seen by the knowers of the truth [Bhagavad Gita, 2-16].

There are no such things as heat and cold, pleasure and pain, and honor and dishonor; they are all *mithyā*, not real. The situations created by the world are not real and, therefore, the resulting reactions are also not real. May you focus your mind upon the Reality and become free from the influence that the unreal things create in you. This is difficult, but it is the final level of *titikṣā*. It is the attitude that it does not matter whether something is agreeable or disagreeable; both are *mithyā*. When one is able to dismiss all situations through *viveka*, he displays *titikṣā*.

*Titikṣā* is not an easy value to cultivate or follow, but is essential for our growth. We have to work on our ability to endure without outward or inward reaction or retaliation, anxiety or lament. We get perturbed in various situations because all of us want to retaliate on account of our fears and anxieties. Every situation brings out one of these emotions in us. When we find these reactions arising within ourselves, we should deal with them. Ideally, we should be free from these reactions. We should work with them so that in course of time we are able to maintain a poise of mind in various changing and contradictory situations<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Vedāntasāra lectures. Transcribed and edited by Malini, KrishnaKumar (KK) S. Davey and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.