

Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
Vairāgya and Detachment

Question

What is *vairāgya*?

Answer

Vairāgya comes from the word *virāgaḥ*; the state of *virāgaḥ* is called *vairāgya*. *Virāgaḥ* is that state where the *rāga* has gone away. If *rāga* is translated as passion, *virāgaḥ* can be said to be dispassion. Passion is the passions of attachment and aversion, the impulses of likes and dislikes. *Rāga* is likes or attachment, and wherever attachment is, there is going to be *dveṣa* or aversion. There cannot be *rāga*, an attachment unless there is *dveṣa*, an aversion for something. Usually our interaction with the world is characterized by *rāga* and *dveṣa*. Both of these are impulses in our mind, and arise from a wrong perception or wrong evaluation of the objects of the world. We do not understand the right nature of something and instead superimpose upon it a value that it does not have. For example, we may look upon something as a means of happiness when it may actually not have any content of happiness. When I consider it as a means of happiness, there arises an attachment for that object or situation. Similarly when I look upon something as a source of sorrow, as a threat to my security, there arises an aversion for that object or situation. It may not be a real threat, but I perceive it as such. In both cases it is my subjective perception of a given situation. This subjective view is typically not shared by everybody. Where I have an attachment, others may not have the same attachment and my aversion for an object or situation may not be shared by others.

Virāga is freedom from attachment and aversion, and thus *vairāgya* is a state of mind that is free from attachment and aversion, a mind that sees things as they are. Attachment and aversion are the result of my projections. When the mind is free from projections and sees things as they are, that state is called *vairāgya*. It is freedom from reaction, objectivity. Pujya Swami Dayanandaji typically gives the example of a child who is very attached to his marbles. When he wins a marble, he feels very successful and when he loses one, he is very unhappy. When the same child becomes a father, his perception of the marbles is different. He sees them for what they are. As a child, however, he had superimposed upon them a value that they did not have. As an adult he is objective. That objective perception is called *vairāgya*.

Question

Would you say that detachment is something that happens more or less on its own as a result of emotional maturity or is it something that is promoted through active acts of discipline, e.g., *tapas*?

Answer

Detachment comes to the extent that you discover an inner self-sufficiency. Attachment is the result of the inner insufficiency. It is my inner insufficiency which makes me a needy person and the more needy I am, the more attached I am going to be. To the extent that I discover an inner self-sufficiency, to that extent I will discover inner freedom, and I will be free from attachment. Thus, freedom from attachment has to happen and it should be a result of inner sufficiency. If detachment is merely an intellectual act, without having discovered the inner self-sufficiency, then it may not last too long.

Question

Is love considered to be a form of attachment? If you have love, does it mean you have an insufficiency?

Answer

Love is usually out of sufficiency. Attachment is out of insufficiency, but love is out of sufficiency. Our love for children is out of sufficiency. Love brings about care, whereas attachment brings about demand. Thus, attachment is, in fact, a distorted form of love only. In every relationship there is always some love and some attachment. We have to watch out to what extent the attachment is there. I do not think any relationship is purely love. But then to the extent that we become free from needs, to that extent the attachment will be less, and to that extent you will be detached. Attachment means not free to give, whereas detachment is free to give.

Question

What about a strong attachment to God?

Answer

Attachment to God is called devotion. Attachment to God is a wonderful thing. That can be there only when the mind is detached from the worldly things, which is what the devotees want. In *bhakti* they want to use our natural faculty of attachment to change the focus from the world to God¹.

¹ Transcribed and edited by Malini, Chaya Raj and KK Davey.