

**Ārṣa Vidyā Gurukulam, Saylorsburg, PA, USA**  
**33rd Anniversary – August 11, 2019<sup>1</sup>**

**Satsaṅga with Swami Vidadatmananda Saraswati**

Q. How does the inner divinity<sup>2</sup> function in a person who is a sinner or who is a saint? How can the same divinity function differently in a giver versus someone who destroys?

A: The question really is how is it that the same divinity appears to have totally contradictory manifestations? It is just like one electricity, functioning or manifesting, as light through a bulb, as heat through a heater, and as motion through a fan. The electricity is the same in all these different manifestations. The difference arises due to the medium through which the electricity functions or manifests. In the same manner, divinity manifests through a given personality. One's body, mind, and sense organs make up one's personality. Each one of us has his/her own personality. The word, such as sinner or saint, is nothing but a designation of the personality, and not the person. The divinity, in spite of being one, is expressed differently, because the medium through which it manifests is different, just as in the case of electricity. The same electricity, which while functioning through the different gadgets blesses one, can also kill, if one inserts one's fingers in an electrical outlet. It is not electricity that favors or punishes. It is only at the level of the medium of manifestation that the differences are. Similarly, the same consciousness, the same divinity, manifests through all of us. A 'sinner' is the designation of a body-mind-sense-complex, and a 'saint' is another such designation. The designations are like the wrapper on a chocolate. The chocolate is the same, but the wrappers are different. It is at the level of the wrapper that a transformation has to take place. One does not have to transform the divinity. One needs to transform the personality, the body-mind-sense-complex. The personality is the *upādhi*, the medium of manifestation of the divinity. There is no difference in the inner divinity, but the differences are in the vehicle or medium through which the divinity manifests.

Q: I understand that the Sanskrit word *pramāṇa* means a unique and valid means of knowledge. I believe that the acceptance of Veda, meaning the *śāstra*, is key to the pursuit of self-knowledge. However, there is always a struggle in the acceptance of the *śāstra* as a *pramāṇa*. Please kindly advise us as how to communicate *śāstra* as a *pramāṇa*, and its importance to someone who has no belief in it.

A: A unique means of knowledge that generates valid knowledge is called a *pramāṇa*. For example, my words as I speak are heard by you, through your faculty of hearing. The faculty of hearing is your *pramāṇa*, the valid means of knowledge for you to hear the words. Your eyes are

---

<sup>1</sup> The 33rd anniversary of the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Saylorsburg, PA, USA was conducted on August 11, 2019 at the newly inaugurated Swami Dayananda Vijñāna Bhavanam. The *satsaṅga* with Pūjya Swami Vidadatmananda Saraswati held on this occasion is summarized here. The Q&A session was transcribed by Shri Mani Natarajan, Smt. Revathi Manian and Janani Subramanian, and edited by V. Swaminathan. K. Maillacheruvu is acknowledged for helpful suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> At the anniversary function, Swami Tadatmananda Saraswati spoke on the inner divinity, which is one, all-pervasive, and the truth of all, and which is called differently as *ātmā*, *brahman*, or *īśvara*.

the valid means of knowledge to see the form and color. Why so? Because only through the eyes can one know the color or the form, and not through ears, nose, or any other means. Thus, a *pramāṇa* is a unique means to know something, which otherwise is not available to know by any other means of knowledge.

Among the means of knowledge available to us, the knowledge that we gain through sense organs is called perception. We perceive through the five sense organs, and knowledge gained through them is called *pratyakṣa-jñānam*, perception. It is the primary means of knowledge, and is called the first or the chief *pramāṇam*. We also infer using perceptive knowledge. For example, when we see smoke at a distance, we infer that there must be fire. This means of knowledge is called *anumānam*. Then, *upamānam*, or comparison, serves as a means of knowledge as well. The fourth is *arthāpatti*, presumption, which is a two-step inference; one thing cannot happen unless another thing is satisfied. The fifth is *anupalabdhi*, the knowledge of the absence of a thing. *Pratyakṣa* is the principal means of knowledge. The Upaniṣad says that *īśvara* has created our sense organs, which always look outward.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the organs of perception are only competent to reveal the knowledge of the objects of the world. They are not competent to reveal the self because they are directed outward. Now, let me further illustrate with an example as to why we cannot know the self through the organs of perception. Eyes see through the telescope to view objects at a distance. But through the telescope one cannot see one's own eyes. The eyes are the seer behind the telescope, but the telescope cannot reveal the seer (i.e., the eyes). The self is the perceiver through all the organs of perception; the seer, hearer, or thinker. However, the self cannot become the object of perception. In other words, we do not have any means of knowledge at our disposal to know the self.

Then, how does one know the self? For this we require a means of knowledge, which reveals the true nature of ourselves. The fact is that one knows the self. The self is self-revealing, and therefore, one always knows the self, except that one knows the self wrongly. While divinity or limitlessness is the nature of the self, one looks upon oneself as a limited being. If one has no knowledge of the self, maybe life would have been simpler than what it is now. For example, in sleep, one has no knowledge of the self, one is not conscious of oneself. At that time one is in bliss; no sorrow, no conflict, no problem. As soon as one wakes up, one knows oneself because the self is self-revealing. However, one knows the self wrongly. In fact, one knows oneself quite contrary to what one is. Not knowing divinity as one's nature, one looks upon oneself as a sinner. Not knowing that limitlessness is one's nature, one looks upon oneself as limited. Not only do we not

---

<sup>3</sup> पराञ्चि खानि व्यतृणत्स्वयम्भूस्तस्मात्पराङ् पश्यति नान्तरात्मन्।  
*parāñci khāni vyatṛṇatsvayambhūstasmātparāṅ paśyati nāntarātman*  
कश्चिद्धीरः प्रत्यगात्मानमैक्षदावृत्तक्षुरमृतत्वमिच्छन् ॥  
*kaściddhīrah pratyagātmānamaiṣṭadāvṛttakṣuramṛtatvamicchān* (Kāthopaniṣat, 4.1) The Lord destroyed the sense organs (by making them) extrovert. Therefore, everyone perceives external (objects, and) not the *ātmā* within. Desiring immortality, a rare discriminative one with withdrawn eyes (from outer objects) sees the *ātmā* within. (from The Kāthopaniṣad, based on Swami Paramarthaṇanda's talks, compiled by Sarojini Varadarajan, Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Coimbatore, India, 2012.)

know ourselves, but we know ourselves wrongly. The wrong knowledge is the problem. It is not so much the simple ignorance of not knowing, but wrongly knowing is the problem. Therefore, right knowledge of the self is required. Since the organs of perception, and the mind are all directed outward, they cannot become the means of knowledge for knowing the knower. As the Upanishad says, “*vijñātāramare kena vijānīyāt*,” in the dialog between Yājñavalkya and Maitreyī when the former tells the latter, “Oh Maitreyi, through what should one know the knower?”<sup>4</sup> The knower cannot become the object of knowing. Therefore, *śāstra*, specifically, the Upaniṣad, is the *pramāṇam*, the unique and valid means of knowledge for knowing the self. You may say, “But Swami, didn’t you say that one as the very knower, cannot know the self?” Yes, that is true. But what the Upaniṣad does is that it tells us where we all are making mistakes. It removes all the errors that we are making, all the *viparītabuddhi*, the contrary notions that we entertain about ourselves. As the errors are removed, the true nature of the self is revealed. The Upaniṣad teaches us to let go the false perceptions of the self and in that regard, it is a *pramāṇam*.

There is no question of belief here. When you see me, do you say, “Swamiji, I see that the color of your cloth is orange and I believe it.” Or, “Swamiji, I hear that you are speaking in English and I believe that.” Is it a belief, or is it knowledge? The question of belief comes when we don’t have knowledge, when something is away from us, *parokṣa*. Heaven is a matter of belief because right now we don’t see it. If someone says ‘God is in heaven,’ then, it is also an object of belief. That which is *parokṣa* is not in the range of perception. It is remote, and is something to be believed, if one wants to. But Vedānta, that is, Upaniṣad, does not reveal something that is remote. It only reveals what is our own true nature which is *aparokṣa* and not *parokṣa*. In knowledge, the question of belief does not come. Vedanta does not expect us to believe what the Upaniṣad says. It expects us to understand it. When Upaniṣad says ‘you’re limitless,’ it is not a matter of belief. One should understand what that statement means, and see that one is limitless. Vedanta is a *pramāṇam* for self-knowledge, which does not require belief, but requires one’s understanding.

Now, as to how to communicate that *śāstra* is a *pramāṇa*, and its importance to someone who has no belief in it, you can bring the people, those who question, doubt, or do not believe the *śāstra*, if they are willing, to the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam. We can have a dialogue with them and see what it is that they don’t believe. When the person says, ‘I don’t believe in God,’ let us find out as to what he/she does not believe in. A person may say, ‘I don’t believe the God who has four hands.’ That is fine. What else does he not believe? He /she may, ‘I don’t believe in God who is in heaven.’ That is fine too. It simply means that one does not believe in a God of a certain concept. But I am sure that he will certainly believe in a God that Vedanta reveals. Therefore, if there are people with difficulties in believing or understanding, kindly bring them to us. This is the purpose of the *gurukulam*.

Q: At 70+ years of age, if the marriage of a son who is 35+ years old, does not get fructified, how does the parent deal with that situation?

---

<sup>4</sup> विज्ञातारमरे केन विजानीयात् इति | *vijñātāramare kena vijānīyāt iti* (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 2.4.14)

A: Thank god your marriage is fructified, you know. Why does one insist that the son will only be happy if he gets married? I do not mean that people who get married are not happy. But the point is that why do we think so. For that matter, why should anyone's son think that 'I am unhappy because I am not married.' This presupposes that "I'll be happy if I get married." Of course, marriage is a nice thing to do. There is no question about it. But if it doesn't take place, then accept it as *īśvara*'s will. How? One can pray, "Oh God, give me the serenity to accept gracefully things that I cannot change." Because the worries or anxieties as a parent are not going to change the situation. If they do so, then certainly one can entertain anxiety. But they don't. So, this serenity prayer says to accept gracefully what one cannot change. Of course, one can certainly pray that the children get married, and that they are happily married. Other than doing so, being anxious or being worried about it, may not serve any purpose.

We often complain about things that do not happen to us such as 'somebody had this thing, but I do not have it.' What is the guarantee that one would have been happier if one had that thing. "Swamiji, my child died at 25, it is so sad." I certainly sympathize with that. The point is, what is the guarantee that if that person had lived longer, he would have been happier? How do we know 'what is' is not the best? We have our own idea of what is good. When we find that 'what is' does not conform with our idea, we say it is not good. But, how do we know that what we think as good is really good or not? Or, what we think as good will really happen or not. We do not know. So as a parent, firstly, one can continue to make a sincere effort for fructification of the marriage. Secondly, one can pray for the wellbeing of the son's life, and leave all anxieties and worries to *īśvara*. All one can do is *puruṣārtha*, that is, self-effort. As a 70+ years old person, if one cannot make the self-effort, one has done all one could, and one should feel satisfied. Parents always believe that the children can be happy only if they get married. The belief might be okay, but one does not know that it is necessarily the case for that particular child. It might be a general situation that people are happy because they get married, but one does not know that the equation of marriage and happiness necessarily applies to every case. It may be that *īśvara* has a different idea. Therefore, if the children do not get married, bless them as they are, be happy as they are.

Q: If all good people get *mokṣa*, then the world will have only bad people left. Is this *Kali-yuga*?

A: Well, there is a long queue for *mokṣa*, don't worry. Everybody will not get *mokṣa*. We wish that is the case. If all good people get *mokṣa*, then the bad people will also be motivated to become good. They may think, 'Because all these good people got *mokṣa*, got liberated, we should also become like that.' So bad people will get the motivation to become good. This question is really if everybody gets *mokṣa*, then what will happen to this universe? Well, 'all people' means what? Right now, there are more than seven billion human beings. Do you know how many *jīvas*, living beings, are there? Being a human being is great, but the humans are a very small minority. Seven billion is not a large number at all, compared to the number of mosquitoes, ants, different insects, trees, plants and so on and so forth. There are trillions and trillions of *jīvātmās*. According to the law of *karma* everyone is in an embodiment because of one's *karma*, and when the *karma* gets exhausted in that embodiment, then another embodiment is assumed. When a human embodiment

is taken, then *mokṣa* is possible. But there are still countless *jīvātmās* waiting to assume the human form. They would all have to get *mokṣa* for this world to become empty. So don't worry.

The concern here is that 'if there are only bad people in this world, then what will happen.' Even bad people are a minority by the way. Of course, the media only publicizes shooting and other crimes. I have no objection to that, but from the media we seem to think that there is only suffering in the world, there is only *adharmā*, and that there are only bad things that are happening. No doubt, there are enough good things also, but nobody is interested in hearing about them. The news of good things is all very bland; there is no *masālā*, no spice in them. So media has no interest in reporting the news of a good person or his/her good deeds. When we open the newspaper or switch on a TV channel, we want to see only spicy things. But if *dharma* were not there, the universe cannot function. *Dharma* is *dhāraṇāt dharmah*, that which upholds. Although *adharmā* is publicized, the fact that the universe seems to be functioning shows *dharma* must be there. Sometimes we also feel that *adharmā* alone is there in the universe, but that is not so. For everyone who kills someone, there will be ten people helping others also. A lot of good work is going on, lots of charities are going on, and many people are reaching out to help others. If that were not the case, this universe cannot function. So be assured that there are enough good people in the world even now, even in the *Kali-yuga*. *Kali* means *kalaha*, that is, conflict. So people condemn *Kali-yuga* as the *yuga* of conflict.

The saints say that a person living in the *Kali-yuga* has the most advantage, as one can get liberated by simply saying the God's name and nothing more. In *Satya-yuga*, one must perform all kinds of penance, etc., to be liberated. In the *Tretā-yuga*, one has to perform all kinds of *yajñas*. In *Dvāpara-yuga*, one must perform all kinds of rituals and things. There is a popular verse, "*kalau kalmaṣacittānām pāpadravyoṇopajīvinām vidhikriyāvihīnānām harērnāmaiva kēvalam,*"<sup>5</sup> according to which in *Kali-yuga*, '*hareḥ nāma eva kevalam*' all that you need is *hari-nāma*, the name of Hari, that is all. In *Kali-yuga*, people's minds are polluted (*kalmaṣacittānām*), they sustain on money that is acquired by foul means (*pāpadravyoṇopajīvinām*), nobody knows what is the right thing to do (*vidhikriyāvihīnānām*), but one saving grace is '*harernāma eva kevalam.*' So, *Kali-yuga* is the best *yuga*. So nothing to worry about.

Q: In a personal situation, while arguing in favor of *dharma*, if the other person brings up a different, apparently unrelated, and seemingly *adharmic* argument, anger flares up. How does one keep control and win the argument?

A: This "win" thing is a difficult thing. The anger flares up, because one is not able to win. The person who is arguing in favor of *dharma* has the right argument, and yet is not able to convince the other person. Perhaps, the other person does not know the norms of reasoning. He says anything and everything. The anger flares up because one is frustrated. One is frustrated because one cannot make the other person understand what one is saying. The other person seems to have control over the argument process by whichever way he/she argues. If you find yourself with such a person,

---

<sup>5</sup> कलौ कल्मषचित्तानां पापद्रव्योपजीविनां विधिक्रियाविहीनानां हरेर्नामैव केवलम् ।

understand that you cannot convince a person who has decided not to be convinced. We cannot convince somebody who has already made up the mind that ‘I am not going to be convinced.’ For whatever reason, the other person has decided that *dharma* is wrong. Some people’s minds are like that, as Lord Kṛṣṇa describes in the Bhagavad Gītā, “*astyamapraṭiṣṭham te jagad āhuranīśvaram, aparasparasambhūtaṁ kimanyatkāmahaitukam,*” “These people say that there is no truth in this universe.”<sup>6</sup> They would say, “Swamiji, everybody is a hypocrite, everybody is lying, nobody is honest.” These are all their conclusions. If we ask them, “Don’t you think there is something called *dharma*?” They respond “No *dharma*, no basis (*apraṭiṣṭham*).” They ask, “What is the basis (*praṭiṣṭham*)?” We say, *dharma* is the basis, which upholds the Universe. If we were to say, “Do you realize that this universe is a creation, and that there must be a creator? Do you realize that this universe is functioning in an orderly manner, and so there must be an ordainer? Don’t you see that the processes of creation, sustenance and dissolution are going on in an orderly manner? Don’t you think there is *īśvara*?” he would say, “I don’t believe?”; “What sort of *īśvara* do you have?”; “Why is there hunger in the world?”; “Why is there violence?” People hold on to such questions because that is how they seek their security. Their whole sense of wellbeing is built upon their belief system, which is arrived at by some kind of their own personal reasoning. Many people are not willing to change their personal reasoning, because then they have to change their belief system, and they become insecure. If one is deriving one’s security from belief, one doesn’t want to change it. And, some people are very smart and they can distract you with all kinds of *adharmic* arguments. So, you first assess the situation as to what kind of a person you are dealing with. Does the person have an agenda of holding on to his belief system? If relinquishing his belief system will make him feel insecure, he is not going to change his belief. Therefore, he is going to come up with some argument. He will not let go his beliefs even if you come up with a good argument. With a good argument, you can prove anything. You can come up with 15 reasons to show how things are going wrong, and that the world is bad. Similarly, you can come up with a few things to say that the world is good. Arguments can be made in one way or the other. Sometimes one may feel a need to convince others. One may feel that what one believes is right only if one is able to convince another of that belief. But then, the other person may have an agenda, and does not want to be convinced. I think that one should not make it one’s agenda to convince people. One should interact only with people one wants to learn from.

I have found from experience that it is safe to reason things only with people who are open-minded. If the person is close-minded, there is very little one can do other than getting frustrated. Even when you argue with somebody, don’t have an agenda to convince the other person. Don’t put a burden on yourself that you have to convince the other person. It is a very stressful thing

---

<sup>6</sup> अस्त्यमप्रतिष्ठं ते जगदाहरनीश्वरम् । *astyamapraṭiṣṭham te jagadāhuranīśvaram*

अपरस्परसम्भूतं किमन्यत्कामहैतुकम् ॥ *aparasparasambhūtaṁ kimanyatkāmahaitukam* (Bhagavad Gītā, 16.8)

They say, this world (of people) is untruthful, without (ethical) basis, Godless, and is born of the union of male female, is driven by passion and nothing else. (Note that the translations of the Gītā verses referred in this article are taken from Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Arsha Vidya Research Publication Trust, Chennai, India, 5th reprint, 2015.)

particularly to convince somebody who does not want to be convinced. It is frustrating, and so anger flares up. So, when you find that your anger is flaring up, just let go. Once a 'born-again' Christian was arguing with Pūjya Swamiji that as per the Bible, the universe is 5000 years old. He believed in it firmly. Pūjya Swamiji told him in a gentle manner how the universe cannot be only 5000 years, that one can find things in India which are more than 5000 years old, and that there were dinosaurs. The other person replied how can one know when the dinosaurs existed. Pūjya Swamiji mentioned how from carbon dating it was found that the dinosaurs' bones were hundreds of thousands of years old. Then, the other person finally argued, "Do you know something? Don't you think that God, who created this universe, can also create a few dinosaurs' remains, and put them on earth?" At this point Pūjya Swamiji said, "Let us have coffee!" Because, further arguments will not yield anything. If you want to convince that person, you will only get frustrated. So, assess the limit of the arguments, whether the arguments are crossing the limits, and whether your frustration is coming up, at which time it is better to have coffee.

Q: Swamiji, often we hold on to some fear of what happened in the past. It keeps haunting us that the same will repeat. How to overcome the fear? It is hard to be objective many times.

A: I do not know what it is that happened in the past, but some event happened, some episode happened, some separation happened, or whatever happened. Now you are in the present, ask yourself, "If that happens again, then what?" When the situation happened in the past, you were not prepared, you were too excited, or too distracted, or too fearful to think clearly, and it caused some suffering to you. But now you are objective. Right now it is not happening. So, when you are objective, then you can think of, 'What should I do if it happens?' You can work out a strategy. For example, you know all the fire-escapes here, and if there is fire, you will know which way to exit quickly. Fear has to be confronted. People always imagine the worst case scenarios in their minds. So my suggestion is that imagine that the worst case scenario happens, and ask yourself, 'what will happen?'

"Oh Swamiji, what will happen, if I lose my job?"

"Work at McDonald's."

"I can't do that."

"Everybody has to do that, so you can survive."

"Swamiji, I cannot afford this car."

"Have a smaller car."

"No, I can't."

"Well then, travel in bus."

"Swamiji, I can't afford this big house."

"Then, live in an apartment."

"I cannot afford that."

"Live somewhere else."

People are working in McDonald's or other similar places and living their lives. One can live. One can survive. So even in the worst case scenario, I am sure that there is always a way out. And, we

can think of that when we are objective. In the midst of the event, one's thinking is stunted, that's why one can't think. But now in the present, one can visualize in the mind the fear-causing situation, and come up with a mitigating solution. What can one do against lightning strikes? One can install a lightning arrester. It is like that. In other words, if you apply yourself objectively, you don't become frozen in fear. Ask yourself, "What if it happens? What strategy do I have? What can I do?" I am sure your mind will come up with some strategies. If not, ask somebody what to do. There are doomsday folks who have constructed in Montana or in some place underground bunkers for the eventuality when the world comes to an end. Their leader would predict that on such and such a day the world will come to an end, and they will seek shelter in the bunkers. Similarly, one prepares an underground bunker, meaning something like a bunker that can give security for a worst case situation.

Q: Why is that even people doing good *karma* still suffer?

A: What do you mean by 'good *karma* and suffer'? Does it mean that goodness and suffering cannot go together? Goodness and suffering can go together. In fact you find this in history, most good people experienced suffering. Look at the life of any saint, most of them have gone through a lot of trials and tribulations, lots of suffering. Suffering is due to *prārabdha* whereas good *karma* is one's *puruṣārtha*, freewill. By a good *karma*, in the present, one creates for oneself a bright future, destiny. The suffering that is experienced today, is not the result of good *karma* done today. One does not know how *karma* connects with the *karma-phala*. What is happening today, is the result of the past deeds. What we are doing today, will yield results in the future. One cannot connect that presently one is doing good *karma*, and still suffering. Because *karma* always gives result in future. One can be sure that the good *karma* that one is doing today, will yield good results in the future. The suffering that is there today is the result of the past. One saint used to say that a devotee of God when he suffers from fever will say, "I am doing *tapāścaryā*, penance." Because *tapas*, penance, means to suffer. We suffer in one way or the other. The devotee looks at suffering as *tapas*. People do *tapas* sitting near *agni*, fire or the sun. Suffering from fever, is the same as sitting near a fire. The result being the same, converting the fever to an act of *tapas* of sitting near a fire, is a matter of attitude.

Many years ago in Ahmedabad Swami Chinmayanandaji inaugurated a Chinmaya Mission center. There were no ceiling fans. It was the month of May when it gets very hot in Ahmedabad. After the function, Swamiji was giving a Satsang. It was 11'0 clock when it was already very hot. We brought some pedestal fans from a contractor which made so much noise that nobody could hear what Swamiji was saying. Swamiji ordered to shut off the fans and we did. Nobody could say anything. We were perspiring. Then, Swamiji said, "Do you know something? In London, people pay a lot of money for a sauna bath. You are getting it for free here!" This is just a change in attitude as to how an unpleasant situation is faced. In any case, good *karma*, even if brings about suffering, it must have some hidden benefit. It must be a blessing in disguise. Because pain also is required for growth, and that is why God has given pain. Without pain there is no gain. One has to understand that suffering does not mean punishment. Suffering does not mean that God is



punishing us, ‘He is not kind to us, He is unfair, why should it happen to me?’ and so forth. Suffering also may have something to contribute in one’s life. One can look upon suffering, though not something desirable, as an experience to increase one’s tolerance. One can also appreciate the condition of other people when they are suffering, and learn to be more compassionate, and more sympathetic to them than before.

By suffering we generally mean some event that brings about uncomfortable situations, that which brings physical hardships. The event itself is a result of *karma*. But when we become sad because of that suffering, it is because of ignorance. Sadness is in our mind, and mental suffering in the form of anxieties, worries, frustration, all of these, are the result of ignorance. We are the author of the mental suffering, and we cannot blame *karma* for that. *Karma* does not bring about anxiety or mental hardships. Anxiety is the result of ignorance, and wrong notions. So, it looks like good people are suffering, meaning that there seems to be hardships in their lives. But a connection need not be made between physical hardships, and mental suffering. If such suffering is there, then it is due to ignorance, due to projection of the mind, and one has to strive to overcome that ignorance.

Q: Is there a free will? If there is no free will, then how will one get *punya-pāpa*?

A: No, one will not get *punya-pāpa* if there is no free will. Animals have no free will. If a cat makes a mouse its breakfast, there is no *pāpa*. A cat does not make a predetermination that it is going to kill so many mice on a given day. When it is hungry, it kills. When it is not hungry, it sits in the corner, and doesn’t go around hunting. Human beings hunt, and kill the animals for the sake of pleasure, as a sport. In such an act, there is free will, and therefore, there is *punya-pāpa*. Human beings have free will. Why do we say so? Sometimes having done something, the person feels guilty, ‘I wish I had not said that; I wish I had not done this.’ When inadvertently one causes pain or suffering to someone, one feels guilty. The guilt shows that there is free will. A cat, not having a free will, can have a mouse as its breakfast, lunch or dinner, and still feels no guilt. Human beings have guilt, have free will, and therefore, there is *punya-pāpa*. How much *punya-pāpa*? No limit. One can acquire as much *punya* as one wants by performing good *karma*. One has the free will to do so. Or, one can keep on abusing free will and accumulate much *pāpa*. There is no limit to *punya-pāpa* that one can accumulate.

Q: Is renunciation different for householders than for *sannyāsīs*?

A: Renunciation is for every human being. As discussed earlier in the class,<sup>7</sup> the first level of renunciation is giving up *adharma*. This is applicable to everybody. I think in the householder’s life, there is more chance of *adharma* than in a *sannyāsī*’s life. *Sannyāsīs* get free food. As a householder, one has to earn his/her livelihood, and in that process *adharma* is possible. But *sannyāsa* does not just mean wearing the ochre robe. It is the spirit of renunciation that is important. *Adharma* should first be renounced. One should not do unto others, what one does not

---

<sup>7</sup> Swamiji is referring to his keynote address given earlier at the anniversary function on the topic of “Renunciation.”

want others do unto oneself. At least that much of renunciation should be there. Then, when a situation calls for, one does what is to be done. One does not cop out by finding excuses to escape from one's duty. The third level is, one does to others, what one wants others to do to oneself. This is a very great thing. This is living as a contributor, by giving up self-centeredness. The fourth level is renouncing *karma* which is what we generally call as *sannyāsa*. But whoever has the spirit of *tyāga* is a *sannyāsī*. In fact, Lord Kṛṣṇa praises a *karma-yogī* also as a *sannyāsī*. Who is a *karma-yogī*? A *karma-yogī* is a person, who is not controlled by his *raga-dveṣas*, likes and dislikes. He is one who performs the *karma*, that is to be done, whether he likes it or not. That means, he has to renounce what is convenient, what he likes to do, which may not be right. He does what is right.

Then, one expects kindness from whoever one reaches out to. In that same vein, one should be kind to others who reach out to oneself. In other words, one becomes a contributor by renouncing self-centeredness. So, for the householders, renunciation should be there at multiple levels. This spirit of renunciation brings emotional maturity. Becoming a *sannyāsī* without the emotional maturity is fraught with difficulties. Because one does not have any way of expressing the things that happen in the mind. There is no way of fulfilling one's desires. It is better to remain active. If there is a scope for fulfilling the desires, then do so in the right way. Only when one is a renunciate in spirit, then one can become a renunciate in form. It's like a certificate. One does not become a doctor because one has a certificate. One becomes a doctor, then one gets the certificate.

Q: If one is studying the Bhagavad Gītā, and cooperating with the process, will it bring one to renunciation?

A: Studying Bhagavad Gītā, and then trying to put the teaching into practice will bring one to renunciation. Studying Bhagavad Gītā itself is a good, pious act. It brings *puṇya*. But, putting into practice what Bhagavad Gita teaches is better. It brings us to renunciation. By 'cooperating with the process,' if you mean the spirit of becoming a contributor, then yes, studying Bhagavad Gītā, and implementing the teachings in our lives, will bring us to the portal of renunciation. Lord Kṛṣṇa says:<sup>8</sup>

*anāśritaḥ karmaphalaṁ kāryaṁ karma karoti yaḥ  
sa saṁnyāsī ca yogī ca na niragnirnacākriyaḥ*

*anāśritaḥ karmaphalaṁ*, without any demand that this *karma* should bring a personnel reward, one performs the duty, does what is to be done. Lord Kṛṣṇa says that such a person, *sa saṁnyāsī*, is a renunciate in a secondary sense and a *yogī* as well. When one lives a life based on *dharma*, to whatever extent one brings about the spirit of kindness and contribution, to that extent one is a *sannyāsī*. One has to become such as *sannyāsī* first, before retiring from active life, Otherwise, one is neither here nor there. Because retirement is a difficult thing. I asked once a retired person

<sup>8</sup> अनाश्रितः कर्मफलं कार्यं कर्म करोति यः । स संन्यासी च योगी च न निरग्निर्नचाक्रियः ॥ (Bhagavad Gītā 6.1)

The one who performs action that is to be done, not driven by ends in view, he is a *sannyāsī* and a *yogī* as well. And not just the one who has renounced all fire rituals, and who does not perform any other action.

of his routine. He said, “I wake up in the morning a little late, have tea, and read the newspaper. Then I take a bath, do something, and then go to the bank (for gossip!), where I was working earlier to meet my friends. I come home, have lunch, and have a nap in the afternoon. Then, I will watch something on TV.” This is how a person is spending time in retirement. So while living, he is killing time. Retirement may not necessarily be beneficial. It requires a lot of emotional maturity to use the time properly. In my opinion, one should not retire as long as one is fit. It is better to continue.

Q: If everything is *brahman*, why it is so difficult to recognize it or understand this fact?

A: Everything is *brahman* is one thing, but it is unmanifest right now. We have to bring *brahman* to manifest in ourselves. Do you know what is unmanifest? It is like, the sun is shining alright, but it is hidden behind the clouds. Even though the sun is shining, we don't get the benefit of light. Similarly, we are *brahman*, but there is a cloud, which veils the glory of *brahman*. Therefore, we are not able to recognize this fact in ourselves or in others also. The process of renunciation, that we described,<sup>7</sup> removes the layers of clouds, one by one. The first layer is *adharmā*. When it is removed, the sun shines some more. If inactivity is removed, another layer is gone. The sun shines more. When self-centeredness is cleared, another layer is gone. The sun shines a lot more. When *āvaraṇam*, ignorance, is gone, the sun shines the brightest. The life of *karma-yoga*, the life of being a contributor adhering to values, gives us a cheerful, happy mind. Then, when the teacher says, “Happiness is your nature,” we can understand. When a sad person is told, “You are happiness,” it makes him more sad. So, for this *upadeśa*, teaching, to work, we have to undertake the process of transforming ourselves.