

Satsanga with Sri Swami Vidadatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

Bhaja Govindam – Verse 12

In the 12th verse, we find that he is drawing our attention to the play of time.

दिनयामिन्यौ सायं प्रातः शिशिरवसन्तौ पुनरायातः ।

कालः क्रीडति गच्छत्यायुः तदपि न मुञ्चत्याशावायुः ॥

dinayāminyau sāyam prātaḥ śīśiravasantaḥ punarāyātaḥ,
kālaḥ kṛīḍati gacchatyāyuh tadapi na muñcatyāśāvāyuh.

Day and night, dusk and dawn, winter and spring come and go again.
Time sports and life ebbs away, and yet the gust of desire never leaves (us).

Dina means day, and *yāmini* means night. *Dinayāminyau* is in the dual, meaning day and night. *Sāyam* is evening, *prātaḥ* is morning, *śīśira* is winter, and *vasanta* is spring. *Punarāyātaḥ* means they come again and again. A very beautiful picture of time is portrayed here. Referring to the inexorable passage of time, Śrī Śaṅkarācārya says, *kālaḥ kṛīḍati*, time is constantly sporting. The wheel of time is constantly moving ahead and waits for no one. Signifying the passage of time, the cycles of day and night, morning and evening, and spring and winter come and go over and over again. *Gacchatyāyuh*, life ebbs away. The inevitable truth of life is that with the passage of time, life is also slowly ebbing. *Tadapi na muñcatyāśāvāyuh*. *Āśāvāyuh* is the gust of desire. The problem is that even as life is slipping away, the *āśāvāyuh* or gust of desire, *tadapi na muñcati*, does not leave the person.

Our life is steadily ebbing away

Bharṭṛhari, the great sage-poet, also makes a similar observation on life. He says that the rising of the sun each morning marks the passing of one more day of our life.

आदित्यस्य गतागतैरहरहः सङ्क्षीयते जीवितं व्यापारैर्बहुकार्यभारगुरुभिः कालोऽपि न ज्ञायते ।

दृष्ट्वा जन्मजराविपत्तिमरणं त्रासश्च नोत्पद्यते पीत्वा मोहमयीं प्रमादमदिरामुन्मत्तभूतं जगत् ॥

ādityasya gatāgatairaharahaḥ saṅkṣīyate jīvitam vyāpārairbahukāryabhāragurubhiḥ
kālo'pi na jñāyate, drṣṭvā janmajarāvīpattimarṇam trāsaśca notpadyate pītva
mohamayīm pramādamadirāmunmattabhūtam jagat.

Daily, with the rising and setting of the sun, life shortens and time is not felt on account of affairs heavily burdened with manifold activities. Neither is fear produced at beholding birth, death, old age, and sufferings. Alas, the world is become mad by drinking the stupefying wine of delusion [Vairāgya Śatakam, 43].

Ādityasya gatāgatairaharahaḥ, every day that Aditya rises, *saṅkṣīyate jīvitam*, our life is slowly exhausted. Every day looks like every other day, especially in a tropical country like India where there is no significant change of weather. However, while we think that it is the same sun that has risen, and the same day that has returned, our life is slowly getting depleted. The days that have gone by never return. The days are passing us by, one after another, but what do we do during the day? We do not even know how the whole day passes, *kālo api na jñāyate*. The morning comes, and because we are so busy and preoccupied during the day, it is night even before we realize it. *Vyāpārairbahukāryabhāragurubhiḥ*, there is such a big burden of work to be accomplished. We are so engrossed in one activity or the other that we do not even heed the passing of each day. Man constantly looks around, and what does he find? He sees *janmajarāvīpattimaraṇam*, the phenomenon of birth and death, and old age and disease. However, in spite of seeing this constant suffering and pain everyday, *trāsaśca notpadyate*, there is no fear in this heart at all. How is it that man feels no urgency in spite of observing all this? Why is it that he does not strive to bring about the real fulfilment of life? *Pitvā mohamayīm pramādamadirāmunmattabhūtaṁ jagat*. The poet says that man does not know what is happening because he is intoxicated with *pramādamadirā*, the wine of inadvertance. That is why he does not know what is happening and nobody seems to take note of the realities of life.

Desires, however, grow with time

Many poets and teachers have referred to the play of time with reference to our life. *Kālaḥ krīḍati gacchatyāyuh*, with every moment, as time marches on, our life is also slowly but steadily ebbing. It is said that everything gets exhausted, grows old, or perishes under the influence of time. However, if there is one thing that does not diminish with time, it is desire. *Tadapi na muñcatyāśāvāyuh*. *Āśāvāyuh* or desire is something that only grows with time.

It is not we who enjoy them, but the pleasures that enjoy us

Bharṭṛhari offers another interesting observation on life. He says:

भोगा न भुक्ता वयमेव भुक्ताः तपो न तप्तं वयमेव तप्ताः ।

कालो न यातो वयमेव यातास्तृष्णा न जीर्णा वयमेव जीर्णाः ॥

*bhogā na bhuktā vayameva bhuktāḥ tapo na taptam vayameva taptāḥ, kālo na yāto
vayameva yātāstr̥ṣṇā na jīrnā vayameva jīrnāḥ.*

The worldly pleasures have not been enjoyed by us, but we ourselves have been devoured; no religious austerities have been gone through, but we ourselves have become scorched; time is not gone (being ever-present and infinite), but it is we who are gone (because of approaching death). Desire is not reduced in force, though we ourselves are reduced to senility [Vairāgya Śatakam, 7]

What the poet means here is that it is not as if we have enjoyed the various pleasures of life. Instead, we discover that it the pleasures that have enjoyed us. For instance, I might think that I am drinking tea, but, in reality, the tea is drinking me. How is it so? This is because without realizing it, I soon become addicted to drinking tea, and from then on, it is not I who am drinking tea, but the tea that demands or commands that I should drink it. The act of eating food is another example. The primary purpose of food is merely to appease hunger, but more often than not, food is eaten to satisfy the palate. I think that I am eating the food, but I am a compulsive eater, or require a certain kind of food alone. Therefore, it is really the food that commands that I should eat. The word for food, *annam*, is derived from the root *ad*, which means to eat. It is defined in the Taittriya Upaniṣad [2-2] as *adyate iti ca bhūtāni*, that which is eaten by people and which simultaneously eats the people. We think that we are eating food, but it is food that is constantly consuming us. Like this, we are addicted to so many things in life. Bhartṛhari says that on account of having made us dependant upon them, it is the objects and pleasures of the world that are enjoying us and not we who enjoy them.

In fulfilling desires, more desires arise

It is not as if we have performed penance, but the penance that seems to have performed us, *tapo na taptam vayameva taptāḥ*. It is not time that has perished, but we who have perished in time, *kālo na yāto vayameva yātāḥ*. It is not our craving that has subsided, or become old or exhausted, *tr̥ṣṇā na jīrnā vayameva jīrnāḥ*. It is we who have become dilapidated and decrepit in the process of fulfilling our cravings; the craving has only become stronger and

stronger. The unfortunate truth of life is that in the process of the fulfilment of desires, more desires arise.

Desires arise because of inner inadequacy

Every desire is the inner manifestation of the inadequacy or the incompleteness that I am feeling. Unless I address that inner incompleteness, the desires will keep on springing up and I will always keep on exerting myself to fulfill them. You may ask, "But Swamiji, if we do not have desires, how can there be any progress?" There is nothing wrong with desire. It is something that is naturally there and we can go ahead and fulfil these desires in legitimate ways. However, there is no end to these desires. They arise in the mind and we fulfill them thinking that no new desire will arise, except that the fulfilment of one desire only brings about ten more desires. Has it ever happened that somebody has fulfilled all his desires and can claim that all his desires are fulfilled? That is why Śrī Śaṅkarācārya says, *jñāte tattve kaḥ saṁsārah*. Vedanta addresses the problem of the inner inadequacy or incompleteness, which is the cause of desires.

Desires exploit the weakness in our mind

Desires keep on propelling us from one situation to the other. Once they know our weakness, they will arise in our mind. We may resist them at first, but we are vulnerable and soon they get the better of us. I am reminded of an incident in this context. In Ahmedabad, there were many children in the hutments in our neighborhood. I would see them when I returned from class and decided to give them some *prasād*. I would ask them to chant 'Hari om', and give them some candy. Soon, even as they saw me coming, they would start chanting, "Hari om! Hari om!" and line up for prasād. Slowly, they began to consider that getting the *prasād* was their right. What in the beginning was a privilege or favor became a right, and they began to demand candy even for their brothers and sisters who could not come on that day. That also was ok with me. However, one afternoon at 2:30 pm, when I was resting, there was a knock on my door. Nobody would disturb me at that time, but whoever it was obviously did not know that practice. I did not respond to that knock, but they continued to knock. I got up a bit irritated and opened the door and found a six-year old boy there. Naturally, my irritation went away. I asked him, "What do you want?" He said, "Maharāj, *prasād*". I told him, "I have distributed the *prasād* already this morning." "I was not there this morning." "Where were you?" "I had gone to

school.” “So what? Come tomorrow!” “But I have not got my *prasād* for today! You must give me my share for today.” He knew that if he kept bugging me I would relent, and ultimately, he did manage to extract *prasād* from me. That morning, I had distributed only some sugar crystals because there were so many of them, but since he came alone, I gave him a piece of candy, and told him, “Don’t tell anyone, ok?” He promised not to tell anyone, but within minutes of his leaving, there was another knock. Another fellow had come for the candy. This went on until, one by one, all of them had come! They knew very well that the Swami was vulnerable, and by cajoling or coaxing him, they could get *prasād*. Similarly also, the desires know me well. When a desire arises in my mind, I may resist it in the beginning, except that, ultimately, the desire does get the better of me and I wind up fulfilling it.

Our desires keep growing

I am in India before coming to the United States looking for better prospects here. I go to school and get a degree. I start working and plan to return to India in 3-4 years after having saved a certain amount of money. I imagine that about \$25,000 would be quite adequate, only, I soon realize that it would not be enough and my target goes upto \$50,000. That means another three years of living here. By the time I save up \$50,000 the cost of living in India goes up, and in Bombay, \$50,000 will not fetch me an apartment. Therefore, my target saving goes up to \$100,000. All the while, I imagine that I am making progress, but I should understand that it is this desire that is taking me for a ride. This is not a condemnation of desire or a condemnation of doing or accomplishing something, but what happens is that the desires keep on arising, and I do not stop to think of what causes this. Neither do I realize that it is a manifestation of a more fundamental problem or more fundamental ill. Thus, I do not address that original problem.

As we saw earlier, what I am desiring is happiness. How much happiness do I want? I want boundless happiness and I want unconditional freedom. I do not realize that no accomplishment in this world has a capability of giving me either, except to a limited extent. Unless that need is fulfilled, these desires are not going to go. Of course, most people don’t think so much. They are simply driven by their desires and the sense of gratification. As a result, the hunger only keeps on growing, and slowly, we become greater experts in seeking entertainment and fulfilling pleasures. According to a Sanskrit saying, as time passes, man becomes more and more skillful in enjoyment. Formerly we were

happy with some kind of a radio. Then the transistor came. Then followed the tape recorders and stereos, the TV, the video, the DVD, the mp3 player and so on. In fact, not many people are interested in the radio these days. Everyone must have cable TV and video! Similarly, there was a time when even simple food would suffice, and having some 'kichdi' or rice was considered a luxury. Now we have to have rice and 'chapati' and two or three vegetables everyday. Today, there are 123 flavors of ice cream available in Ahmedabad, and a new flavor is launched almost everyday.

As our requirements and demands keep on growing, newer and newer products are created everyday and older models and designs are constantly becoming obsolete. All the while, we think that we are making progress, but we are only becoming more and more dependent. This is a game, and we don't realize that we are being exploited constantly. The entire marketing industry would not be there, unless they knew that we were gullible and could be exploited. Present a new product, and some fellow will want it. Somebody wears a new *sari*, and I want it, somebody wears a new ornament, and I want it, somebody has a new car, and I want it. We keep comparing ourselves with other people, find ourselves inadequate in something or the other, and thus, whether in our wardrobe or elsewhere, there is a growing collection of possessions. We must keep on acquiring more and more. This is a game in which, as the time ebbs away, my energy also slowly gets exhausted. The capability of the sense organs, even to derive enjoyment, slowly diminishes, but my mind continues to demand more and more. I may be suffering from diabetes, but my demand for sweets only grows. I cannot do without sweets. I will take insulin, but sweets I should have. How we become slaves to these things!

The gust of desire grows even in old age

Bhogā na bhuktā vayameva bhuktāḥ, it is not we who enjoy pleasures, but the pleasures that are enjoying us. *Trṣṇā na jīrṇā vayameva jīrṇāḥ*. Our *trṣṇām*, thirst or seeking has not become old. It is we who have become old while the craving becomes more and more powerful. Unfortunately, the person who has more is considered to be more successful. In the US, even at the age of 65 or 70 a person can enjoy life as though he were only 25! That means he has not grown in all these years. At the age of 70, the fellow gets married, for the third time. What for? These are the misplaced values of life. People in India are also beginning to follow this lifestyle thinking that we are civilized and modern, not realizing that

as the body grows old the mind should also grow in maturity. That is what the *ācārya* means when he says *tadapi na muñcatyāśāvāyuh*.

The gust of desire and craving does not leave the individual even as in his old age. He becomes infirm and incapable of fulfilling his desires, and is incapable of even eating the food that he has cooked because his stomach or health does not permit it. These people are doing *tapas*, but not out of choice! With all the food that is available, they are not able to eat anything. If these people were fasting for the sake of god or something like that and not for the sake of the body, they would atleast derive some *puṇya* from it.

The poet Bharṭṛhari says, throughout my life I have done all that the great *yogis* do, but have not derived any benefit from it. The *yogis* leave their home, I also left my home. For what? For the sake of earning money. The *yogis* wander in the sun, in the heat, and the cold, and I also wandered in the heat and the cold. For what? Again, for the sake of making money. The *yogis* are constantly in contemplation. They contemplate upon the feet of Lord Śiva. I also did that. I did everything that the *yogis* do, but did not get anything in return. Whether we like it or not, we do all this. Like the poet, we also exert ourselves and undergo much trouble and suffering, but it is all in vain. This is being pointed out here in, *kālah kriḍati gacchatyāyuh tadapi na muñcatyāśāvāyuh*. Time does not spare anybody; as it sports, life ebbs away.

Growing out of desires is living intelligently

As we grow older, the mark of maturity is that we become more and more free. There is a greater sense of satisfaction, and fulfilment within. Maturity means that my requirements reduce as I grow. In our tradition, we have the four *āśramas* - *bramacarya*, *gṛhstha*, *vānaprastha*, and *sannyāsa*. Who is a *vānaprastha*? He is the one who lives a life of austerity in the forest. When can you do that? It can happen only when you have the satisfaction of having lived your life properly in *gṛhsthāśrama*. At some age, whether 55 or 60 or 65, we should retire. This means retiring from needs and necessities, not merely sitting idle. Otherwise where is the retirement? If my needs and necessities have not gone away, and I retire and am idle, there is a terrible problem because outwardly I cannot do anything, but inwardly all my needs have remained. When people talk to me about retirement, I always wonder whether they have retired in their mind. Retirement should begin in the mind. It implies a withdrawal from needs and necessities and the developing of self-sufficiency. A mature man is a man who is self-sufficient.

The experience of the life of a householder is called growth only when we become self-sufficient. At the end of *gṛhsthāśrama*, then, I have the satisfaction that I have enjoyed enough. My mind is free from any cravings. Then alone can I apply the mind or focus that mind on penance, austerities, or worship, in leading the life of *vānaprastha*. If that does not happen, it can only mean that we have not grown. Thus, the burden of desires or burden of cravings always remains in my head, *tadapi na muñcatyāśāvāyuh*. This is a pitiable situation and is outlined further in subsequent verses, as to how the person has become old, but his desires and cravings are as young as ever.

This verse is cautioning us and telling us to lead our life intelligently. May you drink, but not let the drink consume you. May you eat the food, but not let the food eat you. May you enjoy the objects doubtless, but not let the objects enjoy you. We should enjoy our life in such a manner that we retain our freedom and, in course of time, discover an inner self-sufficiency so that we become free from the dependence upon the world for our enjoyment¹.

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