

Satsanga with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

Bhaja Govindam – Verse 15

Another observation of life is presented in the 15th verse.

अङ्गं गलितं पलितं मुण्डं दशनविहीनं जातं तुण्डम् ।

वृद्धो याति गृहीत्वा दण्डं तदपि न मुञ्चत्याशापिण्डम् ॥

aṅgaṁ galitaṁ palitaṁ muṇḍaṁ daśanavihīnaṁ jātaṁ tuṇḍam,
vṛddho yāti grhītvā daṇḍaṁ tadapi na muñcatyāśāpiṇḍam.

The body has weakened; the head has turned grey; the mouth has become toothless; the old man moves about with his staff. Even then, he does not give up his bundle of hopes and desires.

This is an observation of an old man, *aṅgaṁ galitaṁ*, whose body has become old and decrepit. *Muṇḍam* is the head. The head has become bald or grey, *palitaṁ muṇḍam*. This is how we grow to be in old age. Slowly, the limbs become loose and the body becomes weaker and weaker. The hair starts turning grey. *Tuṇḍam* is the mouth and *daśanam* is the tooth. *Daśanavihīnaṁ* means toothless. The mouth is rendered toothless, *daśanavihīnaṁ jātaṁ tuṇḍam*. The teeth start falling one by one. That is how the old age comes upon us. *Vṛddha* is an old man, whose body has ripened. *Yāti grhītvā daṇḍam*. With age, his spinal chord has become weaker, and he is not able to keep himself straight or sustain the weight of his body. Therefore, he requires a staff in order to support himself. *Vṛddho yāti grhītvā daṇḍam*, this is a picture of a tottering old man leaning upon his staff. There is nothing wrong in becoming an old person. To be old is not his fault; this is the way of life.

In India, we always respect old age. We always respect maturity, and maturity can be there because of age. An old man is called *vayoḥ vṛddhaḥ*, one who is mature in age. *Tapo vṛddhaḥ* is one who is mature because of his *tapas* or austerity. We respect them also. *Jñāna vṛddhaḥ*, is one who is mature on account of *jñāna*, or wisdom.

An old person need not necessarily be emotionally mature

An elderly person, naturally, deserves our respect. However, we are told, *tadapi na muñcatyāśāpiṇḍam*. How sad it is that even though he has grown so old, and therefore incapable of really enjoying the sense pleasures anymore, *tadapi*,

even then, *na muñcatyāśāpiṇḍam*, this old man still does not give up the bundle of hopes and desires. *Piṇḍam* is a heap or bundle.

As you grow old, whether you like it or not, your body will also grow old. If there is one thing for which we do not have to make an effort, it is the fact of growing older. Whoever is born has to grow. Soon, before you realize it, you start shaving, and you are ready for marriage! A human being can grow in age, but may not grow in his mind. Or he may not grow in maturity. This kind of disparity or split can be there in a human being. Such a split is being pointed out here.

Emotional maturity implies a greater degree of self-sufficiency

What is meant by growing in maturity? What is called growth in life? What do we call success in life? How do our scriptures look at success in human life? The success is growing in inner maturity, growing in inner purity, growing in inner freedom. As you go along in life, you discover a greater and greater freedom, a greater and greater degree of self-sufficiency, and a progressively greater sense of satisfaction with oneself. You are able to say, now I have lived enough in this life, let me now proceed to the next step.

There was a time when I would play with marbles, and those days are long gone. Then I started playing with a bat and ball; those days also went. I used to ride a bicycle, and then I rode a scooter, and then later it was a motorcar. As we go along in our life, we keep dropping what is minor and keep picking up what is greater. This is how we grow.

All the growth at the level of the body is fine, but what is meant by inner growth or emotional maturity? What is it? Emotional maturity is to grow in inner composure or inner equipoise, our inner balance and inner cheerfulness. It implies becoming free from reactions, becoming free from likes and dislikes, desires and fascination. It means becoming free from dependence, in as much as a desire represents dependence. When my mind desires something, it shows that I am dependent on that object for happiness or security. I expect to get some happiness or some security out of that. Otherwise I would not desire it. Thus, a desire represents a dependence upon that thing for my happiness or security.

A desire is a symptom or manifestation of an inner dependence or an inner bondage. That is the reason why the more the desires I have, the more bound or more dependent I am. A desire represents a kind of slavery. As we go through a variety of experiences in life, it should result in a satisfaction that I

have enjoyed this life, that I have gained the pleasures and don't need them anymore. This is because as I enjoy, I keep discovering an inner satisfaction, an inner maturity. So we would say that a man has become mature when at the end of his life as a householder, he is ready to retire. He is ready to give up the pleasures of the householder. He is now ready to take up a life of austerity, prayer, and worship. This is what we call *vānaprastha āśrama*, or going to the *vanam* or forest.

Going to a forest may not take place literally, because it is very inconvenient to live in the forest. In the US, nobody will allow you to live in the forest either. You perhaps won't even survive. So one does not have to literally go to the forest, but going to the forest means retiring from daily involvement. The parents would hand over all the household affairs to the eldest son, and then retire.

Today, people don't retire. If he is in business or industry, this man does not hand over control to his children. Nobody really retires these days. I may not go to work, but all decisions must be made with my concurrence. Control is difficult to give up because I am seeking security from that. I feel I will be nowhere once I give up my position of power. I will be nothing and will not be respected. Therefore, I am seeking security from the respect, regard, and power that comes from controlling people. This shows my inner insecurity. So maturity is to discover an inner security as we go along in life.

Renunciation should be the goal of life

When I am past living the life of a householder, I am ready to give up my inner insecurity, I am ready to give up those crutches to which I was holding on so far for my happiness and security. I am ready to retire to a forest because the need for those crutches is no more, and I can now dedicate myself to prayers and worship, meditation and austerities. Then one matures from *vānaprastha āśrama* to completely renounce even that, and the fourth *āśrama* becomes the life of a renunciate. So *sannyāsa* or renunciation is the goal of life as presented by our scriptures. The life of a householder is, therefore, nothing but a preparation for renunciation.

As we will see later, in the 18th verse, *kasya sukham na karoti virāgaḥ*, there is real happiness only in renunciation. As I discover that renunciation, a little inner fulfilment, I become freer. It does not matter if my body grows old. That is a biological phenomenon. I cannot stop it. It would be nice if I keep my body in fit

condition, but a day will come when my teeth will fall, when my hair will turn grey, regardless of what I do. There is nothing wrong in it. I need not feel bad about it or ashamed of it. Today, we don't even want to accept the fact of old age. I can't stand this grey hair, and I do whatever I can to color them black. If the teeth have fallen, I put in some false teeth. There is nothing wrong in looking good, but why do I have such hesitation or shame in appearing as I am? Because, again, I do not accept myself as I am. Maturity lies in all of these respects. These are the facts of life and I learn to live happily with them.

Mature with age

The observation here is that this old man has not achieved this maturity that comes with age. Not that every old man is like that, or that every *sādhū* is like the one described in the previous verse, but this observation is presented for people who are not yet old and are growing old. *Tadapi na muñcatyāsāpiṇḍam*, this man, who is leaning on a staff because he cannot carry his own weight, still has a tremendous burden on his head of a variety of desires, expectations, hopes, and cravings. *Bhogā na bhuktā vayameva bhuktāḥ*; this man has spent his entire life seeking pleasures and fulfilling his cravings. Therefore, the cravings have grown more and more powerful even though the fellow has become weak and is incapable of even enjoying what he has, or incapable of giving expression to his cravings. This is a very miserable state of affairs. Therefore, here is a warning: lead your life intelligently and do not put yourself in a situation where inwardly all your powerful cravings are there, and outwardly you are incapable of fulfilling those cravings¹.

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