

Satsanga with Sri Swami Vidadatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

Bhaja Govindam – Verse 16

This verse presents a picture of various ascetics. The other verses thus far have talked of householders, showing how they have been distracted and not lived intelligently, and have therefore, not accomplished or even attempted to accomplish the purpose of their life. A similar observation is made in verse 16 about an ascetic.

अग्रे वह्निः पृष्ठेभानुः रात्रौ चुबुकसमर्पितजानुः ।

करतलभिक्षस्तरुतलवासः तदपि न मुञ्चत्याशापाशः ॥

agre vahniḥ pṛṣṭhebhānuḥ rātrau cubukasamarpitajānuḥ,
karatalabhikṣastarutalavāsaḥ tadapi na muñcatyāśāpāśaḥ.

Behold there is the man who sits warming up his body with the fire in front and the sun at the back, at night he curls up the body to keep himself warm; he receives his alms in the bowl of his hands and lives under the shelter of trees. Even then he has not been released from the noose of desires.

Here is the picture of a renunciate who has renounced everything, who has nothing with him. *Agre vahniḥ pṛṣṭhebhānuḥ*. *Agre* means in front. *Vahniḥ* is fire. There is fire in front of him, and *pṛṣṭhebhānuḥ*, at his back is the sun. *Rātrau cubukasamarpitajānuḥ*, at night he sits curled up against the cold. This is a person who has no possessions at all, not even a blanket to cover himself with. During the day, he sits in the sun and gets some warmth. When it gets cold at night, he lights up a fire, and when the fire goes out, *cubukasamarpitajānuḥ*, he sits with his knees folded and his chin touching his knees in order to ward off the cold. *Karatala* is the palm of the hand. He receives his *bhikṣa*, his alms, in his palms, *karatalabhikṣaḥ*. He does not even have a begging bowl. He is satisfied with whatever *bhikṣa* he is able to receive in the palms of his hands. Where does he live? *Tarutalavāsaḥ*, he lives under a tree. Imagine an ascetic has no dwelling place, who does not have a begging bowl, and who does not even have a blanket to protect himself from the inclement weather. This is a great renunciate who has renounced everything, and still, the observation is, *tadapi na muñcatyāśāpāśaḥ*. *Pāśaḥ* is the noose, and *āśāpāśaḥ* is the noose of desire. In spite of having renounced every possession, and every form of pleasure or enjoyment in his life, he is still entangled in the noose of cravings and desire. The noose of desire does

not leave this ascetic also. It is not that all ascetics are like that. This is only an observation, and the idea is that the desires or cravings do not leave you, regardless of where you go.

Renunciation is in the mind

You cannot escape desires merely by creating a distance between yourself and these cravings and desires. They do not go away by any kind of action on your part. It is not that you if leave home or wear certain clothes or lead a certain way of life you become a renunciate.

Renunciation is in the mind. The robes that you wear are nothing but the manifestation of your state of mind. It is in the mind that desires are to be renounced. What is to be renounced in life? Who is a renunciate? A renunciate is one who has renounced all cravings and desires.

Desires are to be grown out of, not given up

It looks as though, again, Vedanta seems to be against desires and cravings. Every time we listen to Vedanta we seem to hear, "Give up your desires and cravings." But we don't actually say that. We don't ask you to give up your desires, but ask you to grow out of your desires. We have already seen the mechanism of desires. What is it that brings about a desire in my mind. A desire arises when I don't feel good about myself, because there is a sense of incompleteness or inadequacy in my mind. I cannot accept myself to be incomplete or inadequate, and therefore, there is a basic urge to be complete, to be adequate.

The desire behind all desires

The desire behind all the desires is to become complete or become adequate. Depending upon my perception of adequacy, I seek to fulfil desires in different ways. Thus, one may seek to become wealthy, thinking that he will become adequate that way. Another may want to become a powerful person, while someone else seeks name and fame. People are searching for different kinds of powers such as powers at the physical level, including inner powers at the mental level. People are searching for all kinds of different things, hoping that by acquiring those things, they can become adequate. There is one quest that man has and that is to become adequate. Therefore, desire is an expression of the inner inadequacy that I am feeling and my attempt to fulfill the desire is nothing but an attempt to become adequate. You can't grudge anybody for

having a desire. It is not possible to give up desire, even if somebody preaches to us to renounce our desires. They are asking us to do something which we cannot do, because desiring is not under my control, it just arises. As long as there is inadequacy inside, nobody can give up desire. When there is a pressure cooker on the stove, as long as there is fire, there will be steam forming and blowing out of that cooker. You may pour some cold water on it and the steam may cool down for some time, but it will come out eventually and continue until you remove the cause namely fire. Similarly, we may only suppress our desires by trying to forget about them, or even trying to fulfil them, but unless the basic inadequacy goes away, the desire will not go away. All that we can do is perhaps understand our desires.

Desires cannot be satisfied by conventional pursuits

We have to understand what it is that we desire. What I seek is to become a complete being, an acceptable being. What is required next is the discriminative power to understand what it is that can make me complete. That is where maturity or understanding is required. Are these pursuits going to make me complete? Does my experience show that I have become a more adequate person having achieved all these things in my life? Do I find myself to be a more adequate person than I was earlier? I was born a wanting person, but I continue to remain a wanting person. I go on wanting, except that while what I ask for keeps on changing, the demanding self ever remains there. I want this or I want that. The want does not go away; only its appearance changes. Thus, when I think about the experiences in my life, I realize that my want cannot be satisfied by these conventional pursuits. That is where Vedanta comes to our help and tells us that there is no reason to feel the inadequacy that we are feeling because you are the adequate self. Therefore, the sense of inadequacy is not because you have a reason for it, but because you are ignorant, or do not know your true nature.

Desires can be taken care of only by Self-knowledge

Vedanta points the problem of our life to be an ignorance of the nature of reality, rather than a real inadequacy. Thus the inadequacy or incompleteness that I feel about myself is not legitimate or genuine. It is something that is a result of ignorance. Unless the ignorance of the self goes, this sense of inadequacy will not go.

परीक्ष्य लोकान् कर्मचितान् ब्रह्मणो निर्वेदमायान्नास्त्यकृतः कृतेन ।

तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्मनिष्ठम् ॥

*parīkṣya lokān karmacitān brahmaṇo nirvedamāyānnāstyakṛtaḥ kṛtena,
tadvijñānārtham sa gurumevābhigacchet samitpāṇiḥ śrotriyaṁ brahmaniṣṭham.*

Having analyzed the worldly experiences and achievements acquired through *karma*, a mature person gains dispassion and discerns that the uncreated (limitlessness) cannot be produced by action. To know That (limitlessness), he should go, with twigs in his hand (servitude), to a teacher who is learned in the scriptures and who is steadfast in the knowledge of himself [Muṇḍakopaniṣad 1-2-12].

When one understands that what I am seeking is the limitless which cannot be created, but is only to be known, my attention is drawn to knowledge, and to inquiry, rather than to doing things. It is by *viveka* or discrimination that the desires can be transformed from the desire for the mundane to the desire for knowledge. Desire will always be there, except now it becomes a desire for *mokṣa* or a desire for knowledge. Thus, even in the one who has renounced life, there is a desire. What is his desire? He wants to know. He has understood that it is knowledge that is going to remove the sense of incompleteness. Therefore, what we call a renunciate is a mature person who has understood life, and has understood himself. He has understood his own urge, his own need. We don't understand our own need and therefore, go around trying to fulfill the need. It is one who has understood that need who realizes that it is the knowledge of the Self and the study of the scriptures that will solve the problem. Out of this understanding, therefore, he gives up the pursuits of material achievement.

Renunciation without gaining maturity is suppression

Renunciation is nothing but maturity or understanding. When you have that you can certainly give up things, and not miss them. You will understand that you don't need those things. Then alone is the mind free to do what it has to do because we require a relaxed mind in order to study, contemplate, learn, and gain the knowledge. This is what is involved in renunciation. Suppose a person renounces things without having understood this, *tadapi na muñcatyāśāpāśaḥ*, the noose of desire does not leave him because that sense of inadequacy still remains as well as the need to remove that sense of inadequacy. A person becomes a renunciate by giving up all the means to fulfill his desires, and he has nothing left with which to fulfill the demands of his senses. However, if the needs and

demands of the senses remain, then it is a very pitiable condition. It is pitiable to give up something but retain the need for it. By will, I resolve that I will not drink tea or coffee from tomorrow, but then every morning I crave that. That manner of giving up does not help me because it only creates a sense of deprivation and suppression.

Renunciation begins with giving up attachment and aversion

Doing something is not a solution. Not doing something is also not a solution; understanding alone is the solution. When that maturity is there, one is ready for the life of renunciation. Actually, one should become a renunciate before giving up anything. That is why Lord Kṛṣṇa teaches us *karma yoga*. The life of a householder should become a life of worship. The actions he performs then become an offering to the Lord, and that is how he is a *sannyāsī* in the making. The person who neither hates nor longs for anything should be known as always a renunciate, *jñeyah sa nityasannyāsī yo na dveṣṭi na kāṅkṣati* [Bhagavadgītā, 5-3].

Lord Kṛṣṇa points out how the process of renunciation takes place. What is the first thing that you have to renounce? It is your *rāgas* and *dveṣas*, meaning desires. When they say that we must renounce desires, it means that we have to renounce *rāga* or attachment and *dveṣa* or aversions, which have arisen, as we saw earlier, because of not understanding the nature of things. When I impose upon something a certain value that does not belong to it, there is *rāga*. Similarly, when I hate something, also because of not understanding, there is *dveṣa*. So *rāga-dveṣas* are both results of *aviveka* or non-discrimination. They have thus to be eliminated. That is the training that you have to gain as a householder.

So, is a person mature when he grows old? When can we call him mature? As one advances in age, if he also advances in freedom from *rāga-dveṣa*, we know that he is a growing person. So growth in our life is becoming free from *rāga-dveṣas* or reactions. Thus, it is when I become free from reactions that I am fit to become a renunciate, not otherwise. If I have a reacting mind, and I am a renunciate, then there is a big problem, because I do not have any means to fulfil my reactions and the reactions are all there. The impulses are all there. If they have not become quiet, the life of renunciation is a very wrong life to assume.

Here, we have a person who has not become free from the impulses within, but has outwardly given up everything. However, just because you live

the life of austerity, or self-denial, it does not mean that those desires or cravings are going to go away. They will go only as a result of mature living or mature thinking¹.

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