

Satsanga with Sri Swami Vidadatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

Bhaja Govindam – Verse 21

This is a beautiful verse that talks of prayer.

पुनरपि जननं पुनरपि मरणं पुनरपि जननी जठरे शयनम् ।

इह संसारे बहुदुस्तारे कृपयाऽपारे पाहि मुरारे ॥

punarapi jananam punarapi maranam punarapi janani jathare sayanam,
iha saṁsāre bahudustāre kṛpayā'pāre pāhi murāre.

Being born again, dying again, and again lying in the mother's womb; this *saṁsāra* is extremely difficult to cross over. Save me, O destroyer of Mura, through your infinite compassion.

This first line, *punarapi jananam punarapi maranam*, describes the process of *saṁsāra*. *Punaḥ* is again, *jananam* is birth. *Punarapi jananam* means being born again, *punarapi maranam* means dying again. *Punarapi janani jathare sayanam*, sleeping again in the womb of the mother. *Sayanam* is lying.

***Saṁsāra* is a cyclic process of birth and death amid a lot of pain**

Saṁsāra is nothing but a repeated process of birth and death. Why does this cycle go on? It is because what I am pursuing or seeking is not fulfilled in the journey of this lifetime. Naturally, then, when I die, there are unfulfilled desires in my heart, and those unfulfilled desires make me take another birth in a suitable environment so that I can fulfill my desires. If, again, the desires are not fulfilled, the journey is not concluded in that embodiment and I give it up only to acquire yet another new embodiment. This is the reason we talk of the process of repeated births and deaths. It is because a man is born incomplete and he dies incomplete as well. The journey goes on till a total fulfilment is gained. The description of this cyclic process also represents the pain and suffering that we constantly go through in life because birth and death are also extremely painful. In between, of course, there is old age, there is disease, and all kinds of other afflictions. Thus, there is constant pain. As Pujya Swami Dayanandaji points out, the nature of life is '*duḥkham-duḥkham-sukham-duḥkham-duḥkham*'; a little pleasure preceded by a lot of pain and followed by a lot of pain. If there were not even that little pleasure, we would not survive.

There is a story in the *Yogavāsiṣṭa*, which illustrates this. A man was being chased by a tiger and was running for his life. He found a well and not knowing where to go, plunged into it. Fortunately for him, some roots of a tree had grown through the wall in the middle of the well. He grabbed hold of the roots and managed not to fall into the water. As he hung there, he looked up and saw the tiger. He looked down, and below him was a snake in the water, waiting for him. Then he saw that there were two rats among the roots. The rats were gnawing away at the very root from which he was hanging. At that time, there was a honeycomb on a tree above the well, from which honey was dripping slowly. The story goes, that this fellow who was hanging for dear life, stretched out to catch a falling drop of honey in his mouth. Thus, even in the midst of tremendous fear, this little drop of honey caused him to go on. Such pessimistic pictures are given only in order to make us understand certain realities of life.

Pain of *saṁsāra* should incite us to come out of it

We are preoccupied and sometimes don't realize how our life is constantly filled with struggle, pain, and sorrow. Everybody thinks that their life is sorrowful, but the truth is that they have not observed others' lives. God has made no exception. There is a reason why there is pain and suffering in this life. It is so that some day we will have an incentive to get out of this business. If it were not so, we would remain stuck in this life. Therefore, the *ācārya* is saying, what a pity it is, lying again in the womb of the mother, being born again and dying again. There is only pain, all along. When will this end?

Iha saṁsāre bahudustāre apāre. *Saṁsāra*, as we said earlier, is a sequence of birth and death. It is compared to an ocean. It is *dustāra*, extremely difficult to cross. *Tru* means to cross. *Pāram* means shore. *Apāra* is that which has no shore. This *saṁsāra* is described as being an ocean, which has no shore and is extremely difficult to cross. Not only are there waves that buffet and assault, but also aquatic creatures, which attack. Thus do we struggle, in this life. There is no end to this kind of *saṁsāra*.

Seek the Lord's help to get out of *saṁsāra*

This verse represents the prayer of the devotee, *kṛpayā apāre pāhi murāre*. *Murāri* is Lord Kṛṣṇa or Lord Nārāyaṇa, the *ari*, enemy, of the demon *Mura*. *Mura* stands for the ego. The only one who can destroy that demon is Lord Kṛṣṇa. The prayer is, hey *Murāri*, Oh Lord, oh enemy of the ego, *pāhi*, please protect me. I am drowning in this ocean of *saṁsāra*, totally helpless, and being

attacked from all directions by various forces. I see no end to it and do not know how to cross it. Therefore, hey Murāri, oh lord, please save me, *kṛpayā*, by your grace, by your kindness. Please shower your compassion, your grace upon me, and raise me out of *samsāra*. This is a very important part of one's spiritual pursuit that is recognized at some point in time, due to one's own inabilities or helplessness.

We need to overcome our inner enemies

Very often, we find that we are helpless against our own inner difficulties, our own inner urges, passions, or reactions. We find that these enemies have entered our heart, which at the moment is ruled by the demons. Who are the demons? They are subsequently mentioned to be *kāma*, lust, *krodha*, anger, *lobha*, miserliness, *moha*, delusion, *mada*, pride or arrogance, and *mātsarya*, jealousy. Thus, the demons of lust, anger, jealousy, pride, arrogance, resentment etc. are ruling my heart and there is no room for God. The *devatās* that inhabit my heart have disappeared. We read in the *purāṇas*, stories of constant struggles between the *devas* and the *asuras* in which the *asuras* often win the battle and the *devas* are driven away from the heavens. The poor *devas* then go to the Lord seeking his intervention. The Lord comes to their help, the *asuras* are driven back and the *devas* regain the kingdom of heavens. My heart is comparable to the heavens, and should be really be inhabited by the *devas*, but what do I find? It is conquered by these demons instead, and unfortunately, I cannot do anything about it. I just can't help it. All these reactions and passions take hold of me, and I find myself helpless. When there is helplessness, there is prayer. It is said that when there is prayer, the Lord definitely comes and saves you.

There are many examples of these prayers in our *purāṇas*. One famous story is the *gaja-graha* story. *Gaja* is elephant, *graha* means crocodile. It is the story of the great elephant devotee Gajendra. Gajendra was once sporting in the waters of a lake when a huge crocodile came along and caught hold of one of his legs and started pulling him down into the water. The elephant was powerful and started to pull away towards the shore, but the crocodile had a strong hold and continued to drag him down. The struggle went on until the elephant started losing his power. He was slowly becoming weaker, and the crocodile was becoming stronger. The elephant began to drown and as the water started rising, he realized that he could not save himself in this struggle. It was at this time that he called out to the Lord. Hey Govinda! Hey Gopala! Please come along and save me. It is said that even as he uttered the word Govinda, Lord

Kṛṣṇa appeared on his vehicle, Garuda. He killed the crocodile with his *śaṅkha* and *chakra*, and saved Gajendra. This story, called *gaja-graha*, is the story of our life.

This kind of a battle is constantly going on in our own heart, between our noble tendencies and our demonic tendencies. As long as we think that we are strong enough, we keep on fighting or struggling in our life. When we find that we are indeed helpless, we seek the help of the Lord.

Prayer is essential to overcome helplessness

Here, the devotee says, I am helpless, Oh Lord, in this battle of *saṁsāra*. I find that I cannot conquer my own inner passions or my own inner enemies. I have become a slave to my own passions. They have now become very powerful. Prayer is therefore, a very important aspect of spiritual pursuit and, for that matter, any pursuit. As we become more sensitive, we realize the importance of prayer. Generally, we do not even know that these demons are there within ourselves. We think that anger is a good thing to have, and that it is good to have passion. That is why we have invited all these things in our life and they have now become very powerful. When I study Vedanta I gain an understanding of the values of life, and then realize that these are the wrong things to have, that these are obstacles. These are the demons that actually deprive me of my own dignity, of my own knowledge and happiness. Now, when I want to get rid of them, I find that I am helpless. That is when I pray to the Lord and seek his help.

Seeking the help of the Lord and getting the strength is very important because we find ourselves weak and falling. Even though I have made a resolve not to come under the influence of anger, lust, and so forth, I still find that I come under their spell again and again. I can't resist those temptations. For example, I do not want to eat any sweets, but the candies in the bowl are very tempting, and I pick one up and put it in my mouth. Even while putting it in my mouth, I know that I am doing something wrong, but I cannot resist the strong temptation. We constantly find that we cannot resist such strong temptations and the only one who can help is God. Therefore pray to the lord, *iha saṁsāre bahudustāre kṛpayā'pāre pāhi murāre*. Oh, enemy of the demon Mura, please save me from this ocean of *saṁsāra*¹.

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