

Satsanga with Sri Swami Viditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

Bhaja Govindam – Verse 3

The third verse points out another obstacle to the worship of Govinda. The human being's infatuation or craving for *kāma*, sense gratification, is another obstacle to the spiritual life.

नारीस्तनभर नाभीदेशं दृष्ट्वा मागामोहावेशम् ।

एतन्मांसावसादि विकारं मनसि विचिन्तय वारं वारम् ॥

nārīstanabhara nābhīdeśam dṛṣṭvā māgāmohāveśam,
etanmāṁsāvasādi vikāraṁ manasi vicintaya vāraṁ vāram.

Do not fall prey to infatuation upon seeing a woman's bosom or navel. These are nothing but the modification of flesh, etc. Deliberate on this repeatedly in your mind.

Nārīstanabhara nābhīdeśam dṛṣṭvā māgāmohāveśam means do not fall prey to infatuation upon seeing the bosom or navel of a woman. This verse is addressed to both sexes. What should I do in order to make my mind free from this infatuation?

'*Etanmāṁsāvasādi vikāraṁ manasi vicintaya vāraṁ vāram*', may you dwell upon the truth that the object of infatuation is nothing but a bundle of flesh, bones, and marrow. It is beautifully packaged and, therefore, attractive. The *pratipakṣa bhāvanā* or opposite standpoint to one's general view is provided here. Man does not think about what he is attracted to. He does not look beyond the superficial attribute of that which attracts him so much. It is the nature of the mind to superimpose on objects, a value that they do not have. We superimpose a veil of fascination or a veil of pleasantness over them and then desire them. Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, therefore, proposes a *pratipakṣa bhāvanā*.

Give up unnecessary preoccupations that distort priorities

Some people feel that there is a condemnation of money, pleasure etc. in these verses. We must keep in mind that there is no such condemnation here. There is only a condemnation of an unnecessary preoccupation with these things that leads to distraction and a waste of precious time, and a distortion of one's priorities. These little things assume a great importance in our mind and take up our energy because we do not appreciate them for what they are. Whenever the

mind is unduly distracted, the rule is to apply the *pratipakṣa bhāvanā* to release it from the disturbance.

Śrī Śāṅkarācārya does not recommend that you should suppress your feelings. Suppression will only result in a distortion of the mind. Sense gratification is a tremendous waste of energy that should be conserved and redirected towards something positive, towards one's own self-development.

Etanmāṁsāvasādi vikāram. He proposes a harsh but realistic way to look at the realities of life. The human body towards which the mind is attracted is nothing but a *vikāra*, a modification of flesh and bones, a packet of filth that is well packaged. It certainly appears very attractive on the outside, but when we look at the content, it is nothing but filth. The second line says, *manasi vicintaya vāraṁ vāram.* *Vicintaya* means by deliberation. *Vāram* means repeatedly. Śrī Śāṅkarācārya says, may you contemplate the true nature of this attraction, *vāraṁ vāram*, over and over again. This *pratipakṣa bhāvanā* is a way of releasing the mind from the fascination with the human body.

Most of humanity pursues two of the four *puruṣārthas*

Animals merely follow their instincts. If human beings also merely follow their instincts, they are not much different from animals. In this context it is said, '*āhāra-nidrā-bhaya-maithunam ca sāmānyam etat paśubhir-narāṇam.*' It means that human beings and animals have these things in common: *āhāra*, the need to appease hunger, *nidrā*, the need for sleep, *bhaya*, the need to protect oneself, and *maithunam*, the need for self-gratification. These are the natural instincts that are present in animals as well as human beings. Animals exhaust their lives in simply fulfilling these basic instincts. These are the values that are glorified today; a person who is intense about the fulfilment of these basic instincts is considered to be more successful than others. Here, however, we are saying that this is the life of animals.

Dharmo hi tesām adhi ko viśeṣaḥ. Dharmena hīnaḥ paśubhis-samānaḥ. The human being has something that sets him apart from the animals. He has an intellect, a discriminative faculty, with which he can think and assign the place to these things that is justifiably theirs; no more and no less. Today, we see that all of humanity is exhausting itself in the pursuit of *artha*, security, and *kāma*, sense gratification. When they become the predominant impulses in life, *dharma* or the value for virtue is bound to suffer.

The Hindu scriptures talk about the four *puruṣārthas* or ends that the human being seeks – *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, *mokṣa*. *Dharma* is righteousness. *Artha* is the pursuit of wealth and security. *Kāma* is the pursuit of sense pleasures. *Mokṣa* is the attainment of total freedom. *Artha* and *kāma* or the pursuit of security and sense gratification is natural. As long as this is based on *dharma*, it is alright. However, having the license to merely satisfy one’s impulses, man will adopt any means at his disposal to satisfy them. These two verses warn us against exactly that. May you seek to employ your energy for more profitable purposes rather than simply dissipate it through these channels¹.

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