

**Satsanga with Sri Swami Vidadatmananda Saraswati**  
**Arsha Vidya Gurukulam**

**Bhaja Govindam – Verse 9**

We seem to be swept away by the current of life and in the process, lose our focus on the true goal. The ninth verse tells us how to maintain that focus. In a very short verse, the whole ladder of self-development or self-unfoldment is presented here by Śrī Śaṅkarācārya.

सत्सङ्गत्वे निस्सङ्गत्वं निस्सङ्गत्वे निर्मोहत्वम् ।

निर्मोहत्वे निश्चलतत्त्वं निश्चलतत्त्वे जीवन्मुक्तिः ॥

*satsaṅgatve nissṅgatvaṁ nissṅgatve nirmohatvam,*  
*nirmohatve niścalatattvaṁ niścalatattve jīvanmuktiḥ.*

Through the company of the wise or the good, there arises non-attachment; from non-attachment comes freedom from delusion; where there is freedom from delusion, there is abidance in self-knowledge, which leads to freedom while alive.

*Satsaṅgatve nissṅgatvam. Satām saṅgaḥ, satsaṅgaḥ.* The *saṅga* or company of the wise, or of good people is called *satsaṅgaḥ*. The importance of *satsaṅga* is talked about thrice in this text because their company is extremely important. Our mind often comes under the influence of our environment and it is necessary that we create a conducive environment that will have an agreeable influence on us.

**Our mind requires a conducive environment to grow**

The mind requires a suitable atmosphere to grow, in much the same way as a little plant does. As a sprout, it is very delicate and requires a lot of care and nurturing. It has to be provided the right fertilizer, manure, water etc. and also protection from animals. As it slowly grows it needs less and less care and when it is fully grown it is free and self-sufficient, and is then able to care for others. It is able to provide flowers, fruits, and shade. Before it acquires that kind of status, however, it begins as just a little sprout. Our mind is also like this sprout. It has to be taught and trained to follow certain values and priorities so that we get a proper perception of life.

## Assimilating self-knowledge is difficult

As we listen to Vedanta, what arises first is an understanding at the level of the intellect. Speak the truth, follow *dharma, satyam vada, dharmam cara* [Taittirīyopaniṣad, 1-11]. I begin to understand the importance of these values. I understand that this life is meant for the worship of Govinda and not meant to be squandered away in various pursuits. I understand that every pursuit should become the means for reaching the knowledge of Truth. We encounter a lot of difficulties when it comes to putting this understanding into practice. There are difficulties within the mind itself such as our habitual problems, which come in the way. At the same time, the temptations of the outer world create a disturbance or distraction.

The Kaṭhōpaniṣad says,

पराञ्चि खानि व्यतृणत् स्वयम्भूस्तस्मात्पराङ्पश्यति नान्तरात्मन् ।

कश्चिद्धीरः प्रत्यगात्मानमैक्षदावृत्तचक्षुरमृतत्वमिच्छन् ॥

*parāñci khāni vyatṛṇat svayambhūṭasmātparāṅpaśyati nāntarātman, kaściddhīraḥ pratyagātmanāmaikṣat āvṛttacakṣuramṛtatvamicchān.*

The self-existent (God) has rendered the senses (so) defective that they go outward, and hence man sees the external and not the internal self. Only a wise man desirous of immortality turns his eyes in, and beholds the inner *ātman* [Kaṭhōpaniṣad, 2-1-1].

*Parāñci khāni vyatṛṇat svayambhūḥ*, the Lord has made the sense organs and the mind extroverted. *Tasmād parāṅpaśyati na antarātman*, that is why man always looks outward and never into himself. In seeking pleasure or security, or a solution to his problems, he is drawn into the objects and situations of the world and never looks within himself. *Kaścid dhīraḥ*, the wise discriminating person, *pratyagātmanānam aikṣat*, who wants to see the self, *āvṛttacakṣuḥ*, withdraws his attention from the preoccupation with the pursuits of the world. *Amṛtatvamicchān* means he desires *amṛtatvam*, or immortality. In withdrawing his worldly attentiveness, he does not become isolated. His relationship with the world simply changes. It is now not one of exploiting, but one of giving. It is a relationship of worship. He becomes an introverted person, meaning he acquires an abiding mind. Then alone is it possible to dwell upon this fundamental question of life.

## ***Satsaṅga* is important for assimilation**

*Satsaṅgaḥ*, or the company of those who are good and have wisdom and insight exerts a positive influence upon us. We need an inspiring atmosphere in order to maintain our enthusiasm in a conducive and positive manner. Saint Tulsidas compared the mind to a beautiful garden of plants and fruits. The mind is a garden in which we hope to cultivate good attitudes and thoughts. This garden has a protective fence around it but there are five gaps in the fence through which animals may enter and destroy it. The five openings are the five organs of perception: the eyes, the ears, and the faculties of taste, touch, and smell. The influence of a myriad fascinating objects enters through these sense organs as we interact with the external world. This can become so compelling that whatever little good thinking we have developed, can be easily overpowered.

For example, when people attend classes and public discourses some inspiring values and ideas are generated in their mind. However, even as they go out, they come across some friend who asks them what they were listening to. "Swamiji said God is all powerful, omniscient etc." "Who is this God? Has your Swamiji seen God? Where is God? If there is a God, why would the world be like this?" In ten minutes, the friend manages to shake up the *śraddhā* of this person despite his listening to the discourse for one and half hours! We are very gullible and can be easily influenced both ways. It is therefore necessary to choose our company carefully because bad company will definitely have a bad influence on us.

The influence of *satsaṅga* can completely change a person. Ashrams, *gurukulams*, temples etc. provide a suitable atmosphere and conducive environment that have a good influence on us. It is true that we are all born with our own peculiarities and *saṁskāras* or personalities, yet, both the place where we are born and the company that we keep have a tremendous influence upon us.

## **The mind should be carefully nurtured in *satsaṅga***

There is no better *satsaṅga* than the direct exposure to the teaching. An indirect exposure to the scriptures such as listening to tapes, studying the books or participating in a study group are also valuable and provide ways to be in company of like-minded people. That is how a new family grows, one that entertains the same kind of values and respects and reveres the same kind of

scriptures, and one in which our *śraddhā* is slowly enhanced. The most important strength that we have is *śraddhā*, faith in the scriptures, faith in the wise, faith in the Lord, and faith in ourselves. This is the most important thing. At any cost, we must avoid the company of the bad and the company of non-believers or those who can shake our *śraddhā*. We should avoid discussion with others; there is no need for you to go around convincing others, or preaching to them. More often than not, they will convince you otherwise. What is necessary is that we must grow and realize how important this self-growth is.

The mind is very delicate and is like a fine instrument that must be treated with care. Therefore, be careful about what you are exposed to. We should keep ourselves away from undesirable influences, not only people, but even certain television shows, literature etc. I have nothing against them, but it is best to stay away from that which influences the mind in an unfavorable way. Be careful about what you read, the thoughts that you entertain, and the kind of things you do. Even your social company should become some sort of spiritual gathering in some ways, and become a means for self-growth. Thus, company at different levels is very important.

### **Satsaṅga creates detachment**

*Satsaṅgatve nissṅgatvam.* *Saṅga* means company or attachment. *Nissṅgatvam* is detachment or non-attachment. What does *satsaṅga* do? It creates *nissṅgatvam*, the lack of attachment. Where there is attachment with the good, there is a detachment from the bad. Thus, when I keep the company of the good, I slowly grow out of the influence of the bad. We always hear in Vedanta that we should give up attachment, but what is attachment?

Attachment is dependence upon the world. Very often, people think that giving up attachment means giving up contact with the family, or running away from the world. In fact, you cannot run away from the world because it is present everywhere in some form or the other. Therefore, it is not the physical objects of the world, but your dependence on them that has to be given up.

To have love for your family, your wife or children, is not attachment. We should be able to discriminate between love and attachment. Love is something we should always have; attachment is that which pollutes this love.

People mistakenly interpret detachment as being an aversion to the sense objects or to the world. The teachers do not ask not to have any contact with the world. The world is meant for our enjoyment. They are only teaching us how to

enjoy things. Enjoyment is having a relationship which is free from either dependence or demand, either attachment or aversion. Aversion is but a distorted form of attachment. Therefore, attachment and aversion, *rāga* and *dveṣa*, are the two sides of the same coin. Both represent bondage and dependence. They lead to an unhealthy relationship in which I lose my objectivity to the situations of the world; I allow my happiness to be determined by the situations and objects around me.

In being attached, I superimpose a greater value on something than it has, and in having aversion, I see less value in it than it deserves. Thus, when it is said that we should become free from attachment, it also means that we should seek to become free from aversion. It is *satsaṅga*, the company of the good, that enables us to slowly become free from both attachment and aversion.

### **Becoming more objective is detachment**

We do not really see the world as it is. We interpret it in the light of our own notions and superimpositions. In not being able to appreciate the thing for what it is, we find ourselves attracted to something or repelled by something else. What is meant by *satsaṅgatve nissṅgatvam* is that in the company of the wise, I slowly become objective. I learn to develop an objective perception of the world and deal with the realities of life, rather than living in a world defined by how I see it. For example, when I call something mine, or say that it is yours, it is purely a notion in my mind. When I call something good or bad, or beautiful or ugly, it is, again, because of a certain notion in my mind. These notions are entirely subjective for the very simple reason that, what to me is beautiful may seem ugly to another, or what I think is delicious may not appear so to another person. Then again, even these notions are not constant because we are as though riding a fence in the mind all the time. Our whims are so fanciful that what appears to be appealing or beautiful today, may not seem so desirable the very next day and the mind does not want it anymore.

In *satsaṅga*, we are not only in the physical company of the wise, but also learn from their words and their actions. We see how they conduct themselves, how they relate to people and situations, and how they are able to remain free from reactions. We see that they are able to maintain their composure in various situations and realize that it is really the way of their life. This is how we also slowly develop a composure of the mind and a freedom from the reactions of likes and dislikes. This is *satsaṅgatve nissṅgatvam*.

## Detachment purifies the mind

*Nissaṅgatve nirmohatvam.* As the mind becomes clear, it slowly becomes free from *moha* or delusion. A deluded mind superimposes an unjustified value upon the things of the world. As the mind slowly becomes free from this *moha* it becomes free from *rāga* and *dveṣa*. This is called purification of the mind. What is meant by purification of the mind? When do I know that my mind is pure?

*Rāga-dveṣas* or attachments and aversions are the impurities of the mind. A mind under the influence of *rāga-dveṣas* is a reactive mind. When something confirms my attachment I get elated and when something contradicts it I get depressed. Elation is the product of *rāga* and depression is the product of *dveṣa*. While I cannot see my *rāga-dveṣas* directly, when I find myself reacting I can see the product of these *rāga-dveṣas*. These reactions could be anger, greed, resentment, repression, sadness etc. A reactive mind is an impure mind. As my mind becomes free from these reactions, I know that my mind is pure.

To the extent that the mind is free from *rāga-dveṣas*, it is pure. To the extent that the mind is pure, it enjoys peace, serenity, and composure, and to the extent that the mind is composed, it enjoys balance or equipoise. Just as water becomes transparent and pure when you remove the dirt from it, so also, as the *rāga-dveṣas* are removed from the mind, it becomes pure and serene, and we enjoy tranquility of the mind.

## A pure mind can understand the Truth

*Nirmohatve niścalatattvam.* When the mind becomes tranquil, it becomes objective. It is then able to understand the purport of the scriptures. Until then, whatever we hear is processed by a mind which is distorted by *rāga-dveṣas*. When those distortions are not there, the mind is able to truly appreciate the unfoldment of the vision of the scriptures. When the *saṅga*, or *rāga-dveṣas* go, the *moha* or delusion goes; when the delusion goes, the mind is able to understand clearly what the scriptures reveal. That is how the knowledge takes place and one slowly gains an abidance in that knowledge.

## Understanding the Truth leads to liberation while living

*Niścalatattve jīvanmuktiḥ.* When this abidance in the knowledge happens, there is freedom even while one is alive. This is the growth that the scriptures present before us, the goal presented by Vedanta. The goal is *jīvanmuktiḥ*, becoming free even when we are in this body. It is not the *mukti* or liberation

after death, but the liberation or the freedom even while I am here. Vedanta says very clearly that liberation or freedom has to come even when I am alive. Then alone can I be liberated after this body falls. It is *satsaṅgaḥ*, the company of the wise or the company of the good, which ultimately leads to *jīvanmuktiḥ*.

A tree does not require any water or manure; it is free and itself a source of shade, flowers, and fruits. Similarly, the *jīvanmukta* does not require anything. He becomes a source of love and inspiration for others<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Transcribed and edited by Krishnakumar (KK) S. Davey and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.