Satsang with Sri Swami Viditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
More on Devotion

ये तु सर्वाणि कर्माणि मयि संन्यस्य मत्पराः ।

अनन्येनैव योगेन मां ध्यायन्त उपासते ॥

ye tu sarvāṇi karmāṇi mayi sannyasya matparāḥ,
ananyenaiva yogena māṁ dhyāyanta upāsate.

tu – however; *ye* – those who; *matparāḥ* – being the ones for whom I am the ultimate end; *sarvāṇi karmāṇi* – all actions; *mayi* – in Me; *sannyasya* – giving up; *ananyena eva yogena* – with a commitment; *dhyāyantaḥ* – meditating upon Me; *māṁ upāsate* – worship Me.

> However, those meditators being the ones for whom I am the ultimate end, giving up all actions unto Me, with a commitment in which there is indeed no other, meditating upon Me, worship Me [Bhagavad Gita, 12-7].

Performing actions conforming to dharma is dedicating all our actions to the Lord

Ye tu sarvāṇi karmāṇi mayi sannyasya, those who dedicate all their actions to Me. By 'Me', Lord Krishna refers to the Lord who is manifest as this universe; the creator, sustainer, and dissolver of the universe, and the universal order itself. The Lord alone is manifest as the universal order or dharma. Performing our actions in keeping with dharma, which is nothing but a manifestation of the Lord, amounts to dedicating our actions to the Lord. Therefore, whenever I perform an action, I keep that universal order in my mind. By universal order, we mean the universal values such as non-violence or *ahiṁsā*. In addition to *ahiṁsā*, these universal values include *satyam* or truthfulness, *asteyam* or non-stealing, *brahmacharyam* or non-indulgence, and *aparigraha* or non-hoarding.

If we are alert and ensure that our actions conform to these universal values, our actions will automatically be dedicated to the Lord. When I understand the value of these values, I develop a respect for the universal order; I recognize the order. I understand that it is this order around which the entire universe functions. Every element that makes up this universe participates in the scheme of things in keeping with this order. I recognize that this universal order is not totally different from me or unconnected to me. In the final analysis, this order turns out to be, indeed, my own Self. When

we perform an action in keeping with the universal order, we are indeed performing all the actions in keeping with our own Self.

We also know very well that whenever we violate any value, we don't feel good about ourselves; that violation creates a sense of guilt. We do find ourselves violating these values now and then because there are certain things more valuable than these values. We violate these universal values when, for example, we consider money, name, fame, recognition, respect, acceptance and social approval to be more valuable than conforming to these values. Therefore, the Lord says, may all actions be dedicated to me, *mayi sarvāṇi karmāṇi sannyasya*.

Matparaḥ, being devoted to me. The Lord says, "If you have trust or faith in Me and dedicate all your actions to Me, you can never lose." When we dedicate all our actions at the altar of dharma or values, we can never lose because He is the order and there is fairness in the order. This order is not a mechanical order, but a live, vibrant order. When we are dedicated to this order, we can be quite confident that we will not lose out. At times it may appear painful to follow these values because of our attachment to other things. I need to give up my attachment to these things to become attached to dharma.

Following dharma is equivalent to becoming detached from everything

When we examine the meaning of the word 'dharma', we understand that it ultimately requires us to become detached from everything. For example, let us analyze *ahiṁsā* or non-violence. I must perform an action such that it does not hurt anybody. Who is that anybody? Is it somebody in front of me? Not necessarily. It is possible that I may be hurting someone unknown to me when I perform an action. For example, when I consume more than what I require, I may be hurting someone who probably needs what I am consuming. Similarly, when I hoard something, I may be depriving someone else of what I hoard. Thus, when we analyze any one value, we will find that the value is very inclusive, pervasive, and vast. As we discover the different dimensions of the value, we will have to let go of more and more of our attachments. Any one value will require me to let go of every attachment, and ultimately, even the attachment to my body. As long as I am attached to something, I am going to be unfair to something else. For example, if I am attached to my body or my ego, I am going to be partial to my body or ego; anything that comes in the way of my affection for this attachment becomes an object of my dislike. Thus, any attachment anywhere is going to cause some aversion, injustice, partiality, or cruelty somewhere. It is a matter of being alert to what is involved when we perform an action.

Māṁ dhyāyantaḥ upāsate. If our idea of God is order, dharma or the values, we are constantly required to do *dhyānam* or contemplation upon what dharma means in a given situation. A value needs to be interpreted in every situation and therefore, needs to be contemplated upon. My attitude should be one of worship; my attitude itself becomes an altar of worship. When there is an altar of worship, I dedicate myself to that altar. Therefore, perform an action with an attitude of worship or with a prayerful attitude. A devotee is one who is totally dedicated to whatever he is devoted to. Therefore, if the goal in our lives becomes dharma, we become devotees to this goal and find it natural to dedicate ourselves totally to these actions. This is an excellent concept: looking upon god as dharma, the order, and the values. Dharma, order, and values can then become an altar of worship.

Following any one of these values is going to require me to give up everything. Each of these values has many dimensions. For example, Mahatma Gandhi used to say that following non-violence meant that he could not justify eating more than one simple meal a day because so many people in India went hungry. He could not justify wearing more than a loincloth because he considered it as hoarding. The more involved we get with dharma, the more we contemplate dharma, and the more we meditate upon dharma, the more we begin to appreciate the subtler dimensions of dharma. That is how it gradually pervades our lives. Very gradually, there is more of *īśvara* in our lives and less of 'I', the ego. Our tendency to violate the values decreases; in the beginning we are deliberate in following dharma and, slowly, we become more spontaneous, till we become incapable of violating dharma, or rather, become free from the need to violate dharma.

Following dharma increases self-esteem

Every offering involves a certain gain. When I am dedicated to god, or the values or dharma, it is not that this dedication is without any reward. Every little act of dedication has an immediate reward in the form of self-esteem. An excellent way of developing my self-esteem is to do what is right. Whenever I violate a value, for example, when I tell a lie or am dishonest, it is not conducive to my self-esteem at all. I don't feel good about myself. Whenever I do something that is improper, I do not feel good about myself. In fact, I fall in my own esteem. Therefore, to rise in my own esteem, I should do something that would be good for my self-esteem. Following the path of dharma or righteousness is an excellent way to increase one's self-esteem. This is the best way to manage the self, whether it is managing one's desires, or mind, or habitual tendencies to violate dharma. The scriptures tell us not to hurt anybody because we all have this natural tendency to hurt others. I

hurt others because there is something that is more important than me, and if something comes in the way of what I consider important, I violate the value. I become angry, intolerant, and upset. I look upon that impediment as an obstacle and I want to get rid of it. Ignorance brings out this sense of individuality, a sense of smallness, and a sense of insecurity. It is this insecurity that makes me violate the values. To assert a value, I must constantly subdue this insecurity, my sense to violate, my sense of individuality.

Dedicating my actions to the Lord, in essence, amounts to dedicating my ego to the Lord. It means dedicating my ignorance and all my negative tendencies that are habitually born of ignorance. The Lord is not asking for anything that is helpful to us; he is only asking for our garbage, that which we would do well to get rid of. For example, if you take a dip in the Ganges, all your sins are supposed to be washed off, but the Ganges herself does not become a sinner; she is infinite. In an *archana*, I take a flower, bring it to my heart, utter a name of the Lord and offer the flower at his feet. That offering is surrender; it is acceptance of the Lord in my life; it shows faith or trust. I trust in the fairness: I trust that whenever I function in keeping with the order there is nothing to lose, even if there is a short-term pain involved there. There is going to be pain because I have to let go of something to which I am attached. As we discussed earlier, following a value requires me to let go of some attachment. Letting go of an attachment is painful because I am deriving a certain amount of comfort and security from that attachment.

Surrender is a slow process

Lord Krishna says, "Draw all securities from Me." I think I am deriving security from others, but in fact, nothing can provide me comfort or security because everything in the world is insecure. The Lord is the only one from whom I can get total security. That is what is meant by *matparaḥ*, 'have trust in Me; have confidence in Me; you can never go wrong.' Giving up my security becomes very difficult and painful unless I have the trust and confidence in the scheme of things, in the fairness of things or in the words of the scriptures. We look upon these words of the scriptures as a valid means of knowledge and, therefore, these statements become very important to us. In the Bhagavad Gita [18-66], Lord Krishna says, *sarvadharmānparityajya māmekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja*, giving up all *karmas*, take refuge in Me alone. What is this dharma? How do I give up dharma? Which dharma do I give up? In this context, dharma means agenda. Give up all agenda. *Māmekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja*, take refuge in Me. May I be the only agenda that you have! That is what is meant here too, *sarvāṇi karmāṇi mayi sannyasya matparaḥ*. 'Dedicate all

your actions to Me; may I be the only agenda that you have and may you surrender to me'. This does not happen right away; it is what we need work for in our life. It is not possible that I can dedicate all my actions to the Lord immediately. It is a process and I slowly progress in this direction. *Matparaḥ* are those who are dedicated to Me, devoted to Me, trust Me, and have faith in Me. Devotion calls for faith and trust.

Ananyenaiva dhyāyanta māṁ upāsate, meditate upon Me all the time. If you have decided to follow the values, you have to meditate upon those values all the time. Every situation calls for a response from me and the response can be of different kinds: What is my intention in performing an action? What is my attitude? What kind of a perception do I have of the other person? What kind of a perception do I have of myself? We always have a perception of our self and a perception of those we confront; these perceptions decide how we interact with the world. It is these perceptions that decide my values. Following a value is not confined to just a few occasions a day. It is involved in every moment of our life.

Accepting the Lord requires letting go of our resistance

Accepting the Lord means accepting the infinite wisdom that he represents. When we say that the whole universe is a manifestation of the Lord, it means that the whole universe is a manifestation of the knowledge, omniscience. Everything really happens in his infinite wisdom. Letting go of my limited perceptions or limited conclusions and accepting that wisdom is accepting the Lord. This is *prasāda buddhi*: performing an action and accepting the reward as it comes; recognizing that the outcome of my action is, in fact, determined to be what it is because of god; accepting the infinite wisdom, and letting go of my resistance. When the results are not favorable to me, I am apt to resist or reject them. Recognizing that every outcome of an action is, in fact, in accordance with that order, which is omniscient and fair, and, therefore, accepting every outcome as fair is *prasāda buddhi*. Part of the worship of the Lord is keeping in tune with that order while performing the action and accepting the outcome of the action while receiving it. Each moment that I encounter is an outcome of an action. Whatever I do not control is an outcome of an action, *prārabdha* or destiny. What is destiny? It is the result of whatever I did in the past; that is what presents itself before me in the form of various situations.

What should be my attitude towards things that I cannot control? The result of an action is one of the things that I do not control. Whatever we encounter, however, is a result of some action or the other, done now or in the past.

The different situations that I face are not without reason. Why should a given thing happen to me? There must be some reason. I do not know what the reasons are. There must be some reason, some fairness involved; or there must be some benefit or well-being involved. Again, this is called *matparāḥ*, having trust in the Lord, that he is always a well-wisher of mine. The Lord declares, *'suhṛdaṁ sarvabhūtānām'* [Bhagavad Gita, 5-29], "I am the well wisher of all living beings". Therefore, we need to accept the Lord as our well wisher. This will require me to let go of my resistance, many of my complaints and the blaming which is, again, a habit. What is called ego is nothing but complaining, blaming, and resisting because I always want to control everything. I want the whole world to be favorable to me. If anybody or anything is not favorable to me, I react with intolerance, impatience, anger, or frustration. My anger and frustration shows nothing but my discomfort with the realities of life. Therefore, accepting god in our life means accepting the realities of life gracefully. What I have not created is created by the omniscient Lord, who is all knowledge, power, and fairness.

Thus, letting go of my resistance, letting go of my complaints, letting go of my tendency to blame, letting go of that intolerance, and letting go of the frustration is a great process of growth. Pujya Swami Dayanandaji says, "I make it impossible for the world to do anything to me. I make it impossible for the world to upset me." You can't tighten the screw if there are no threads on the screw. Blaming, complaining, intolerance, impatience, and non-acceptance are the 'threads'. The world or this order or god has an uncanny knack of tightening our screw or pushing our buttons. God pushes these buttons so that we learn something from our experiences. From every experience of frustration or disappointment, we can learn something: how there is a tendency on our part to resist, not accept or reject; how we are not comfortable with the realities of life, and how to develop comfort with god or with the realities of life. *Karma-yoga* is not an ordinary thing; it brings about a complete transformation.

According to Pujya Swamiji, God is the greatest therapist; we should accept Him as a therapist and allow Him to work. In what way is He a great therapist? He pushes my buttons, often very gently. If I accept Him, accept the very order, have trust in Him and give Him the benefit of the doubt, I will let go of my resistance, intolerance, and impatience. They are all nothing but manifestations of my ignorance. The ego is nothing but the product of ignorance and all these tendencies are nothing but the manifestation of my ignorance.

By following values we are obliging ourselves

Ananyenaiva yogena. Yoga means joining. *Ananya* is when there is no *anya*, other. *Ananya-yoga* is joining with the Lord and nothing else. *Māṁ dhyāyanta upāsate*, those who worship me. Life becomes a form of worship if we live it with a worshipful attitude. By following a value, I am not obliging anybody. In fact, I am obliging myself, and I look upon that as an opportunity to use my freewill. I am a human being gifted with freewill. I am gifted with the faculty of deliberation. I can perform deliberate actions. That is what distinguishes me from other living beings. They perform impulsive actions, whereas I have the faculty of choice so that I can perform deliberate actions. That is grace.

We are enjoying His grace all the time

Meditating upon the Lord can also mean meditating upon this grace. I am enjoying His grace all the time. As Pujya Swamiji says, we are enjoying His grace every moment. My heart is throbbing 'lub' and 'dub' all the time. Between the 'lub' and the 'dub', there is a small rest or gap. This throbbing need not happen. It can stop anytime, but it goes on due to grace. Every doctor knows that there are millions of things that can go wrong with our body; but the fact that it is functioning more or less well is due to grace.

What I have is grace, and what I do not have is also graœ. "Swamiji, how can you say that? I did not get this; I did not get that." Who knows whether you would have been better off if you had gotten all the things you wanted. We do not know. It is a matter of faith. If you say that you would have been better off having something, you may as well say that you could have been better off without having that thing. Therefore, give the benefit of the doubt to that infinite wisdom; that is called surrender: surrendering my little wisdom to the infinite wisdom; surrendering gracefully, not out of helplessness; a surrender that comes out of trust. Thus, life becomes a process of worship.

Every action can become a means of offering to the Lord

It is not that we have to perform any special actions for worshipping god. If we are adept, any action is fine. As Lord Krishna says,

यत्करोषि यदश्नासि यज्जुहोषि ददासि यत्।
यत्तपस्यसि कौन्तेय तत्कुरुष्व मदर्पणम्॥

yatkaroṣi yadaśnāsi yajjuhoṣi dadāsi yat,
yattapasyasi kaunteya tatkuruṣva madarpaṇam.

> Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever ritual you perform, whatever you give, whatever religious discipline you folllow, Arjuna, please do it as an offering to Me [Bhagavad Gita, 9-27].

Yat karosi madarpaṇam, whatever you do, offer it to me. How can I offer my walking and talking to the Lord? Yes, you can offer anything and everything to him. One devotee comes to a swami and says, "I have a habit of playing dice. Can I offer that to God?" "Sure, you can do that. He is one player and you are the other. You play on his behalf and play as he would." "Swamiji, I am an entertainer." "Ok, go ahead and entertain the Lord; make him laugh." The *Narada Bhakti Sutras* also says you should offer whatever you do to the Lord. Offer even your anger to Him; let Him be your punching bag. Nobody else is ready to take these things from you anyways. Nobody wants your greed; therefore, be greedy with Him; ask for some more grace or favors. Please do. Ask Him, "How is it that I am still getting angry?" Thus, you can offer all your negative tendencies to Him. He is infinite. You cannot 'tighten' Him in any way; the Lord has no threads at all. Thus, every action can become a means of offering our devotion to Him, and our commitment to Him in recognition of the fact that He is always offering something to us. Is it not so? The Lord is offering Himself to us all the time. He is working for us silently all the time.

The Lord is constantly offering himself in a spirit of self-offering

Lord Krishna says to Arjuna:

> न मे पार्थास्ति कर्तव्यं त्रिषु लोकेषु किञ्चन ।
>
> नानवाप्तमवाप्तव्यं वर्त एव च कर्मणि ॥
>
> *na me pārthāsti kartavyaṁ triṣu lokeṣu kiñcana,*
> *nānavāptamav āptavyaṁ varta eva ca karmaṇi.*
> Oh! Partha, for me, there is nothing to be done. In the three worlds, there is nothing to be accomplished by Me, which is not yet accomplished. Yet, I am engaged in action [Bhagavad Gita, 3-22].

As Lord Krishna, he is nothing but a manifestation of the Lord in totality. He is an *avatāra* or an incarnation, meaning that all the faculties of the Lord are manifest in this form in which he has appeared. He is omniscient and omnipotent. We are all born as a result of *karma*, but an incarnation is not a result of *karma*. By His own will, He takes a certain form. As Lord Krishna, He does not have to do anything as He is already full and complete. *Varta eva*

ca karmaṇi, 'even then, I am always engaged in activities.' Why? It is His pleasure to be engaged in activities. Not only is He constantly active as Lord Krishna, but He is constantly active as the universal order also.

> यदादित्यगतं तेजो जगद्भासयतेऽखिलम् ।
>
> यच्चन्द्रमसि यच्चाग्नौ तत्तेजो विद्धि मामकम् ॥
>
> *yadādityagataṁ tejo jagadbhāsayate'khilam,*
> *yaccandramasi yaccāgnau tattejo viddhi māmakam.*
> May you know that the brilliance that obtains in the sun and illumines the entire world, that which is in the moon, and which is in the fire, belongs to Me [Bhagavad Gita, 15-12].

"I am the sun; I am the moon, and I am the fire and I illumine the whole world. *Gāmāviśya ca bhūtāni dhārayāmyahamojasā* [Bhagavad Gita, 15-13] and having entered the earth, I sustain the beings with strength. I hold everything in its own place by my power. I hold the sun where it is, the moon where it is, and the heavens where they are." "But Swamiji, this is all superstition. Science tells us that nobody needs to hold these planets. The force of gravity does the job." But who or what is that force that holds everything in an atom, for example? Why is it there? How does it hold everything together? "*Mayi sarvamidaṁ protaṁ sūtre maṇigaṇā iva* [Bhagavad Gita, 7-7], all this is woven (has its being) in Me, like the beads in a string". The Lord is, thus, always active. He is a role model. He is not just acting, but is doing things in a total spirit of self-offering or *yajña.*

We do not offer ourselves completely because of our ignorance

We find this spirit of self-offering everywhere in nature; everything is offering itself.

> अन्नाद्भवन्ति भूतानि पर्जन्यादन्नसम्भवः ।
>
> यज्ञाद्भवति पर्जन्यो यज्ञः कर्मसमुद्भवः ॥ ३-१४ ॥
>
> *annādbhavanti bhūtāni parjanyādannasambhavaḥ,*
> *yajñādbhavati parjanyo yajñaḥ karmasamudbhavaḥ.*
> [Bhagavad Gita, 3-14]

All beings are born and raised because of food, this food is produced from the rain, and the rain is a product of *yajña*, the spirit of self-sacrifice. The water in the reservoir surrenders itself and becomes the water vapor in the cloud; the clouds offer themselves to become the rain; the rain offers itself to become the juice or the sap in the vegetables, which, in turn, offer themselves to become our food. Food offers itself to become energy, but this cycle stops in the human being. There is no holding back in the rest of this cycle: the waters

offer themselves totally; the clouds offer themselves totally, and the plants offer themselves totally. Only the human beings do not offer themselves completely because of their insecurities and greed, which are products of ignorance. The more we support our insecurity or greed, the more we are supporting our ignorance. That is why Lord Krishna asks us to offer all our actions to Him. What we are offering to Him, in fact, is our greed and insecurity. What else can we offer?

Recognizing realities of life is devotion

What belongs to me anyway? What is meant by offering? I can only offer something that belongs to me. We came to this world with nothing. Many things are given to us, as we grow up. There is no private property; such notions are born out of our ignorance. We think that we are offering our actions to the Lord, but everything that is required to perform an action also is due to him. "I built this building Swamiji!" "How did you build it? I saw other people building it." "But, I planned it; I designed it." "How did you draw the plans?" "I used my intellect. I have all the right training." "Where did you get the training?" "I went to engineering school." "But, many people taught you at the school." "Yes, but I used my brains, Swamiji." "But who gave you those brains?" That is also given to you!

Anything that we have is given to us. Therefore, when we think about the realities of life, we become humble. We can never be proud or arrogant because it does not make sense. Therefore, what am I offering? *Tera tujko arpan*, oh Lord, I am offering what belongs to you. *Tvadiya vastu govinda tubhyam eva samarpaye*, hey govinda, what belongs to you is what I am offering to you. It is a great thing to recognize that what I am offering belongs to Him. That is devotion. Recognizing the realities of life itself becomes devotion.

Devotion born of understanding is a sustaining devotion

Devotion is not apart from knowledge. When I understand things, devotion automatically arises in me. When I understand that everything belongs to Him, an attitude of humility and devotion arises in me. When I recognize that everything is done for me, a spirit of returning the favor arises in me. What we call devotion is, thus, never apart from knowledge. It is knowledge that brings about this attitude which we call devotion. Therefore a devotion born of understanding is a sustaining devotion, whereas a devotion that is born without any understanding can easily go away; if something happens that I do not understand, that devotion can go. Therefore what does Lord Krishna mean when he asks us to offer all our actions to him?

Devotion is a process of letting go of our notions, born of ignorance

My action is offering something that already belongs to Him, except in that process, I also offer my likes and dislikes; I offer my resistance; I offer my complaints; I offer my attachments, and I offer my greed. Thus, action really becomes a vehicle for offering all these tendencies, which inhibit my freedom. The freedom or wholeness that is my nature is inhibited by my greed, insecurities, intolerances, and anger. These are the tendencies that inhibit the freedom that is my true nature. What is meant by devotion is making every action a vehicle of offering these inhibiting factors. *Karma-yoga*, therefore, becomes a constant process of self-growth. It is not that the world automatically becomes incapable of doing something to me. To be able to see it thus is a result of this process of internal growth. By following dharma, by following the values, by following an attitude of humility, and by recognizing that everything is provided to me, it is only right that I return that favor with a sense of gratitude. Devotion involves a sense of gratitude. Devotion involves trust; it involves an acceptance of that wisdom, and it involves letting go of my notions, born of ignorance. All this is a process, which ultimately results in inner growth[1].

[1] Based on a Arsha Vidya Gurukulam Summer Camp class taught by Swamiji on Chapter 12 of the Gita. Transcribed and edited by Bhavani Chandramouli, Krishnakumar (KK) S. Davey, and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.