

**Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati**  
**Arsha Vidya Gurukulam**  
**On Duty and *Karma***

***Question***

How does one work to the best of one's ability without seeking reward?

***Answer***

When we perform an action, it is only natural for us to be concerned about the outcome. For example, while shooting an arrow, the objective is to shoot the target. Not being attached to the reward means accepting gracefully the verdict from God. For example in the case of a court case, we tend to think that it was really the Supreme Court that gave us the verdict; ultimately God alone is functioning through that Court. On further reflection, you may wonder why the Supreme Court gave us such a verdict. It might appear as though there were so many factors. You might be led to believe, for example, that the political affiliation or orientation of the Court was a key factor in influencing the judgment. Ultimately the graceful acceptance of "what is" alone matters. This is what is meant by not being attached to the result. Even though we perform an action with the objective of reaching a certain end, we cannot judge ourselves based on that end. That is, we cannot judge ourselves as a success or failure. We can only judge ourselves based on the effort that we made. The key is in enjoying the process and gracefully accepting the outcome.

### ***Question***

Can you please elaborate on *sakāma karma* and *nishkāma karma*?

### ***Answer***

We talked of two kinds of actions, *sakāma karma*, actions that are prompted with the desire for fulfilling my own needs and *nishkāma karma*, actions that are performed out of a sense of gratitude, in the sense of an offering. When somebody does something for the welfare of the society, then he looks upon that action as an offering. When we do not desire any reward for ourselves, then it brings about the grace of the Lord, it brings about the purification of the mind and thereby helps us in our spiritual growth.

### ***Question***

What is our duty, now that we live here in the U.S?

### ***Answer***

Almost everybody living here in the U.S is doing something useful for India by sponsoring some projects back home, making some donations, supporting some cause or the other, etc. This kind of sensitivity and sense of gratitude is evident in our people. In order to do your bit, take up a cause of your choice and make a valuable contribution, e.g., helping the poor or the sick, or contributing to the *Aim for Seva* program.

Sometimes the impression here is that the donations sent to India get dissipated. Therefore you can visit the NGOs (Non-Government Organizations) in India. Seeing for yourself that these organizations are doing very good work can serve as an assurance.

One could also offer professional help the way some of our doctors do. If we are unable to offer service, we could at least make donations to support the causes.

### ***Question***

Can one's *prārabdha* be changed?

### ***Answer***

*Prārabdha* means destiny. Destiny is the result of the actions that have already been performed and which have started fructifying. So we cannot change what has already been done, but we can influence the effect of the action by creating a new effect in the present. Performing an action in the present can reduce the effect of the past action.

### ***Question***

Does *prāyaścitta* come under that?

### ***Answer***

Yes. *Prāyaścitta* is an act of atonement, which is deliberately performed to neutralize the effect of our past actions. What has been done in the past cannot be undone, but the effect can be reduced. If

the effect is very strong, then we can somewhat reduce it. If it is a little weak, we may be able to change it altogether or make it ineffective by prayer, which is also an act of *prāyaścitta*.

### ***Question***

How does *prāyaścitta karma* help us?

### ***Answer***

*Prāyaścitta karma* (or atonement-actions) involves performing some virtuous action to neutralize the negative effects of the past. The Vedas recommend the appropriate kind of prayers and type of action to be performed depending on the type of fault or omission that may have been committed. Though mere repentance cannot wipe out a *pāpa*, repentance can still serve as a form of prayer. The beneficial effect of performing a prayer will definitely reduce the intensity of the effect of negative *karma*<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Summer 2003 *satsang*, transcribed and edited by Subbalakshmi Chandrasekaran, Chaya Raj and Jaya Kannan..