

Satsang with Swami Vidadatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
More on Values

Question

Most of us are so busy making a living that we never realize what the purpose of our life is. How do we know what our purpose is?

Answer

We know the purpose of our life by exposing ourselves to the teaching. Even if you do not know the purpose of life and even if you do not have the leisure to think about it, if you commit yourself to the basic values and to *dharma*, it will lead you in the right way. We all know what the basic values are. We all know what we expect from others. The basic values are that we do not harm others; we give others the freedom to follow their own goals, while we follow our own; we live a sensitive life; we subdue our impulses to be dishonest and violate the values. What this requires is a contemplative life, nothing else. Time is not a problem, actually. There is always time. Thus if we live a life based on *dharma*, the purpose becomes clear to us.

Question

What is the most important *dharma* to achieve?

Answer

Ahimsā paramodharma, meaning *ahimsā* or non-violence is the most exalted value. Every *dharma* is a variation of *ahimsā*. *Satya* or truthfulness, *aparigraha* or non-hoarding, *asteya* or non-stealing, and *brahmacharya* or non-indulgence, are all, in the end, *ahimsā* only. Lying, hoarding, stealing, indulging, violates somebody's rights, and so it is all *himsā* or violence.

Question

When we are on this path, are we going away from the mainstream and thinking in a totally different channel? Will we become split personality? How will we manage?

Answer

When you say, “We are on this path,” what are you saying? It is the path of goodness and value. It is not something different. It means, whenever I do something, I do it as it should be done. The path is not doing something externally—the change is internal. It is a change of perception. It is not a path where I change what I am doing outside. It does not mean that I become an oddball or something. You can be in the mainstream and still be your own person. Your thinking becomes different, but it does not mean that you stop relating to people. You become more effective relating to people, that is all. Will I become a split personality? I think the fear is that I am working in the world one way and thinking another way. There is no need for split personality here—your thinking becomes better and it also affects your actions. There is no difference.

Question

In *Mahabharata*, there are several instances where people have lied. How can *Vedānta* justify this?

Answer

Vedānta asks you to be truthful for your sake, not for *Vedānta*’s sake. To tell the truth is in our best interest. To tell a lie is to hurt us. So *Vedānta* says stop hurting you.

Question

You discussed the immense benefits of being internally reinforced. How can I help others close to me achieve this goal, or do I just let them figure it out?

Answer

We can share this with others and inspire them and communicate with them; but if they do not accept it, then you let them figure it out.

Question

What will happen to a person who lives an ethical life but does not believe in God?

Answer

The person believes in *dharma*, righteousness, and morality; that is God. If you are living a life of values, then you believe in those values, is it not so? When can you follow the values of truthfulness and nonviolence? Only if you believe in it. A person can lead a moral life if morality is important to him; that is God. He may use some other name; he may perhaps not believe in God who is in the heavens. As long as morality is important to this person, he believes in God; that is what we call as the very order.

Question

What is more important: intention or action?

Answer

Both are equally important. Good intention should also be backed by good action. Intentions should not remain intentions; they should be translated into action.

Question

What is your view on physician-assisted suicide?

Answer

If the physician-assisted suicide is done with the intention of relieving the suffering, it is okay. One needs to deliberate and consider all the aspects of the case. If you see a person suffering and if an assisted suicide is the only way to help relieve the suffering, it may not be wrong.¹

¹ Based on satsang with Swamiji in Long Island, NY, Summer '03. Transcribed and edited by Anjali Bhat and Aparna Modi.