

Satsanga with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

**UPARATI, THE ABIDANCE OF THE MIND AND SENSE ORGANS, OR
TOTAL RENUNCIATION**

निवर्तितानामेतेषां तद्व्यतिरिक्तविषयेभ्य उपरमणमुपरतिरथवा विहितानां कर्मणां विधिना परित्यागः ॥

*nivartitānāmeteṣāṃ tadvyatiriktaviṣayebhya uparamaṇamuparatirathavā
vihitānāṃ karmaṇāṃ vidhinā parityāgaḥ* [Vedāntasāra, 21].

Uparati is the cessation of these external organs so restrained, from the pursuit of objects other than that, or it may mean the abandonment of the prescribed works according to scriptural injunctions.

The mind and sense organs, which have been thus restrained so that they remain focused and do not get distracted, is called *uparati*. The difference is subtle and should be understood. *Śama* is the mastery of the mind and bringing it back from its distractions. *Dama* is the restraint of the sense organs and bringing them back from their distractions and focusing them. *Upama* is the faculty by which the mind is focused where it wants to focus, namely, on *śravaṇam*, *mananam*, and *nidhidhyāsanam*, and that by which the sense organs are also disciplined so that they aid, rather than distract from the focus. Therefore, while *śama* is the discipline by which the mind is brought back from where it strays and *dama* is the control by which the sense organs that are distracted are brought back, *uparati* is the faculty that enables the mind and sense organs that are thus restrained to stay focused. As a result of the practice of *śama* and *dama*, we find that the mind and the sense organs slowly become abiding. This abidance of the mind and sense organs is called *uparati*.

Effort is involved in inculcating *śama* and *dama*, whereas, there is no effort in *uparati*. Our own experience shows that initially we like many things; I may enjoy watching movies or football games and, therefore, the mind immediately thinks of them whenever I have time. However, as I develop better interests the appeal of movies or games slowly wears off. The secret of controlling the mind and sense organs is not so much a mechanical practice, as it is the cultivating of a subtler or superior interest. *Raso'pyasya param dṛṣṭvā nivartate* [Bhagavad Gita, 2-59] when the mind experiences or sees something superior, its fascination for the inferior automatically drops off. Thus, if we want to free our minds from the fascination of worldly objects, it is necessary for the mind to see something better. For example, in the beginning, we like to listen to film music; however, as we begin to enjoy light classical music, the fascination for film music goes away. As we discover subtler things, our fascination for grosser things drops off. Initially, we keep disciplining our minds and sense organs; later, it is necessary to expose our minds to something beautiful, superior, and subtler; something that lies within. The idea is that beauty and happiness are both present within the Self. The mind, however, does not have an opportunity to become abiding. Why should the mind run after sense objects? It is only when a child is not

happy eating at home that he or she goes to eat out. When the mind discovers the inner joy or composure, its distractions will automatically stop. Thus, we have to tackle this problem on two fronts: first, by restraining or bringing back the mind and the sense organs when they are distracted and, secondly, by cultivating an interest in something subtler. As we understand the beauty that the scriptures reveal to us as being inherently present everywhere, the need of the mind for grosser beauty drops off slowly and the mind becomes abiding. A time will come when the mind and sense organs will become abiding effortlessly; they will then have discovered an inner poise, silence, or joy. This state is called *uparati*.

Uparati means the cessation of the sense pursuits of the mind and sense organs. It is the discovery of inner poise as a result of *śama* and *dama*. It is that faculty by which we are not distracted even when in the midst of sense objects. For example, we don't care for candies now even though we used to crave them in childhood. Our minds and sense organs become free from external needs to the extent that we discover inner self-sufficiency or inner poise.

Uparati can also mean total renunciation

Another definition that is given here is *athavā vihitānām karmaṇām vidhinā parityāgaḥ*. *Uparati* means cessation and so the word cessation can be understood as *parityāgaḥ*, the renunciation of *vihitānām karmaṇām*, all the enjoined duties, *vidhinā*, according to the stipulations or injunctions. In short, *uparati* means *sannyāsa* or renunciation. It is the renunciation of actions that are enjoined upon us. Renunciation has relevance only with reference to the concept of duty. These actions are specific to Vedic culture and we have to understand the spirit of renunciation in modern times. Nowadays, our culture, social norms, and perceptions are different. Renunciation as it is practiced in India would perhaps not be practical in the west, but we must understand *sannyāsa* or the renunciation of enjoined duties.

When the mind is conditioned to fulfill all its duties, it is not free to pursue knowledge

Everybody has a duty to perform and an obligation to fulfill because everyone enjoys privileges in life. To be aware of the privileges that we enjoy and to be able to pay back or compensate for these privileges is called duty. Life in India is looked upon as a life of duty. There is a concept of duty versus right. Generally speaking, we can say that the western society focuses more on the right of the individual, whereas, Indian society gives more importance to a person's duty.

Duty is something that I perform because I think it is becoming of me to do a given thing. It is becoming of me that I should act in a certain manner because I am a mother or father, husband or wife, son or daughter, or employer or employee. Every role has its own dignity and demands and I try to fulfill my role to the best of my ability. This urge is called duty and this

urge is always deliberately planted. In India, we grow up with an understanding of the idea of duty. The scriptures have planted this idea of *vihita-karma* or enjoined duties and these duties vary depending upon a person's station in life.

In performing *karma-yoga*, we should respond to every situation in a manner that is becoming of us and is fit and proper. If we fail to perform our duty, there is a sense of guilt. For example, I feel a sense of guilt if I don't do my regular prayer one day. The feeling of guilt arises when the idea of duty is entrenched in the mind; otherwise there is no guilt. If you emphasize the idea of your right, there is always a demand for rights. Duty requires taking into account the rights and requirements of others and, therefore, one becomes a giving person. In duty, there is consideration for other people and a consideration of what we should be doing for others. When we are unable to live up to our image of our selves, it creates guilt.

As discussed earlier, our duties are three-fold: those towards our parents and ancestors, towards our sages and teachers, and towards God. Different actions are performed to fulfill these duties. There is also duty towards the family and society. A person who has been performing these duties has an inner urge to do something all the time; as long as this urge is there in the mind, it is difficult to pay attention to the pursuit of knowledge. The mind is preoccupied with doing things because it is trained to do that. If duties are not given up, the mind will never be free. Therefore, there is a need to give up these duties. Even when people visit ashrams, their minds are on the duties they should be performing at home. They feel selfish and guilty, and the mind cannot be quiet when there is guilt. In order to make the mind free from a sense of guilt, there is *sannyāsa* or renunciation. This is when there is a formal renunciation of all obligatory duties; now, one is free from all obligatory duties and there is no sense of guilt.

A renunciate gives up all duties to pursue self-knowledge

When we become free from all duties, we also become free from all privileges. As long as we are enjoying privileges, we have a duty towards the world. When we renounce all the duties, we also renounce all our privileges. One who has taken *sannyāsa* and has renounced duties, makes no more demands of society; society has no claim on him either. Teachers of Vedanta feel that this kind of renunciation becomes necessary at some point in order to apply the mind to the pursuit of study. The Muṇḍakopaniṣad [1-2-12] says:

तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्मनिष्ठम् ॥

tadvijñānārtham sa gurumevābhigacchet samitpāṇiḥ śrotriyaṁ brahmaṇiṣṭham.

For knowing that Reality he should go, with sacrificial faggots in hand, only to a teacher versed in the Vedas and absorbed in *brahman*.

A person can go to a teacher only when he gives up his home. Home here includes all the privileges that the home provides. By giving up the privileges, the person gives up all the duties required towards home, family,

and society. This is *sannyāsa* or the renunciation of prescribed duties or enjoined actions.

Vihitānām karmanām vidhinā parityāgaḥ. *Sannyāsa* or renunciation is a *saṃskāra*, a ceremony, in which all enjoined duties are formally given up or renounced. It is not that one gives up all actions; for example, one does not give up actions required for sustaining the body such as eating or drinking. One does not give up actions required for the pursuit of knowledge such as the study of the scriptures, serving the teacher, prayers etc. A renunciate has no duty as far as his family or society is concerned and no claim or obligation either. This is *uparati* and is considered to be a very necessary qualification in the scriptures. We find statements such as:

न कर्मणा न प्रजया धनेन त्यागेनैके अमृतत्वमानशुः ।

na karmanā na prajayā dhanena tyāgenaike amṛtatvamānaśuḥ.

It is through renunciation that a few seekers have attained immortality – not through ritual, progeny, or wealth [Kaivalyopaniṣad, 3].

Thus, renunciation or *tyāga* is considered to be almost a necessary condition for the pursuit of knowledge. One cannot renounce everything right away. It is not an abrupt event. It is the culmination of many things that ultimately leads to renunciation. Śrī Saṅkarācārya always emphasizes *sarva-karma parityāgaḥ*, the renunciation of all duties.

वेदान्तविज्ञानसुनिश्चितार्थाः संन्यासयोगाद्यतयः शुद्धसत्त्वाः ।

vedāntavijñānasunīścītārthāḥ saṃnyāsayogādyatayaḥ śuddhasattvāḥ.

Through renunciation, the pure-minded renunciates have ascertained *brahman*, which is the object of Vedantic knowledge [Kaivalyopaniṣad, 4].

ब्राह्मणाः पुत्रैषणायश्च वित्तैषणायश्च लोकैषणायश्च व्युत्थायाथ भिक्षाचर्यं चरन्ति ।

brāhmaṇāḥ putraiṣaṇāyāśca vittaiṣaṇāyāśca lokaiṣaṇāyāśca vyutthāyātha bhikṣācaryam caranti.

Knowing this very Self, the Brahmins renounce the desire for sons, wealth, and the worlds, and lead a mendicant's life [Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad, 3-5-1].

Actions can be renounced only when the mind becomes free of its demands

When can a person renounce action? Action cannot be renounced unless the cause of the action is also renounced. Actions originate from desires, *kāma*. Invariably, actions are performed in response to desires that we want to fulfill. Therefore, we can renounce actions only when our minds have essentially become free from demands. Otherwise, the demands are still in the mind while the actions, which are a means to the fulfillment of the demands, are given up. To give up things like a job or a source of income

when the need for material comforts remains is an unenviable, tragic, and pitiable condition. Says Lord Krishna [Bhagavad Gita, 3-6]:

कर्मेन्द्रियाणि संयम्य य आस्ते मनसा स्मरन्। इन्द्रियार्थान्विमूढात्मा मिथ्याचारः स उच्यते॥

karmendriyāṇi saṁyamya ya āste manasā smaran,
indriyārthānvoimūḍhātmā mithyācāraḥ sa ucyate.

The one who, controlling the organs of action, sits with the mind remembering the sense objects is deluded and is called a person of false conduct.

A person who does not perform any actions at the level of sense organs, but whose mind keeps dwelling on the various sense pleasures is a hypocrite. It is only when the mind becomes free of its demands for sense experiences that it is ready to renounce. A mind matured through the practice of *śama* and *dama* alone is ready for *uparati* or renunciation of action.

pravṛtti-lakṣaṇo yogo jñānaṁ saṁnyāsa-lakṣanam,
tasmajjñānaṁ puraskṛtya saṁnyasediha buddhimān.

Verse meaning and source?

Yoga involves *pravṛtti* or activity and *jñānam* involves *nivṛtṭiḥ* or disengagement from activity. *Uparati* is becoming disengaged from action and maintaining a focus on knowledge. *Uparati* is cessation or abidance; it is derived from the word *ramaḥ* to dwell or sport and *uparamaḥ* is the cessation of all sporting. *Uparati* or *uparamaḥ* is attained when our sense organs and mind cease to sport with sense objects and abide in the Self.

A renunciate's lifestyle is in tune with the nature of the Self

Uparati, *sannyāsa*, or renunciation is a lifestyle conducive to the pursuit of knowledge. The Self is actionless by nature. A student of Vedanta pursues Self-knowledge and, therefore, it makes sense that the lifestyle of a seeker should also be in keeping with the very nature of the Self. What we do should be in keeping with what we want to become or want to know. Thus, it becomes clear that if I want to discover the Self, which is of the nature of knowledge and love, I should live a life that reflects knowledge and love. If I want to discover the Self, which is pure, my lifestyle should also be pure. What I want to know is what I want to be. In the case of the Self, what I want to know, what I want to be, and what I am are the same. Becoming and being are one.

Normally, in becoming, a person tries to become other than what he or she is. For example, a physicist investigating atoms or molecules does not have to become the atoms and molecules that he is trying to know. His lifestyle and values need not reflect the nature of the atoms and molecules that he is investigating; who he is has nothing to do with what he is investigating. In the study of Vedanta, however, the Self that I am investigating is my own self. Therefore, I, the investigator, must necessarily be in tune with what I want to know. The frame of mind should conform to

the nature of the Self. It is comparable to a transistor that I tune to a given frequency and wavelength to receive the desired music. My mind should be tuned to the object of knowledge: the Self. The Self happens to be of the nature of love and joy, and free from any actions, involvement, bondage or impurities. This is the nature of the Self that I want to know. Therefore I, the knower, should also be similar to the very nature of the Self. There must be a tuning up between I, who want to know the Self, and the Self, the object of my knowledge.

Very often, Vedāntins believe that our lifestyles have nothing to do with the knowledge that we are seeking. They argue that our lifestyles and values do not matter since *brahman* is pure and action-less, Atman is *brahman*, and everything else is *mithyā*. I am what I want to know. Therefore, there has to be a tuning up, an agreement or compatibility between the knower and the known. The Self is pure; therefore, my life should be pure and my mind should also be free from the impurities of likes and dislikes. The Self is of the nature of truth; therefore, there should be truthfulness in my life. The Self does not harm anything or anybody; therefore, my life should reflect non-violence. The Self is of the nature of accommodation; therefore, my life should also reflect accommodation. The Self is action-less; therefore, my life also should be free from activities that are meant to achieve or acquire something. Lord Krishna gives a practical definition of *sannyāsa*: giving up all desire-prompted actions.

काम्यानां कर्मणां न्यासं संन्यासं कवयो विदुः। वैकर्मफलत्यागं प्राहुस्त्यागं विचक्षणाः ॥

*kāmyānāṃ karmaṇāṃ nyāsaṃ saṃnyāsaṃ kavayo viduḥ,
sarvakarmaphalatyāgaṃ prāhustyāgaṃ vicakṣaṇāḥ.*

The wise know *sannyāsa* as the renunciation of actions for desired objects; the learned people say that the renunciation of the results of action is *tyāga* [Bhagavad Gita, 18-2].

Arjuna wants to know the meaning of the words *tyāga* and *sannyāsa*. Generally, they are used as synonyms, but *tyāga* means abandoning or giving up something, and *sannyāsa* means giving it up for good. We are not told to give up actions *per se*; we require actions meant for self-purification so that we may pursue knowledge. It is only actions that are prompted by desire, which should be given up.

The Self is *asangaḥ*, unconnected or unattached. In India, there are wandering monks who follow the stipulation that a monk should not stay in one place for more than a few days. There are all kinds of such disciplines and stipulations. Their wandering shows that there is no attachment or identification with any one place or set-up. The purpose of this constant moving is to ensure that the monk remains unattached and unconnected to anything. If my life shows all kinds of attachments, naturally, I am not in tune with the Self. We should not think that we can get away with any lifestyle, east or west. One may not be able to practice *sannyāsa* or renunciation in the west as it is practiced in the east because the requisite

social set-up is not available; however, it is the spirit that should and be maintained.

A certain setup is required for the pursuit of self-knowledge

A *sādhu* is a simple person whose needs are minimal. Our lives should reflect this simplicity, minimal dependence, and lack of demands. *Sannyāsa* is a lifestyle that is conducive to the discovery of the nature of the Self, regardless of whether one is wearing orange robes or living in a monastery or ashram. It is a lifestyle that reflects certain values in keeping with the nature of the Self. One can continue to live at home and be a *sannyāsi*. It may be more difficult because it is not very easy to remain a renunciate while living at home amidst all kinds of attachments, relationships, and objects. Seekers of knowledge require a certain atmosphere and, therefore, living in an ashram with a teacher is recommended. Such seekers or students used to be called *antevāsi*; they lived a life of celibacy and simplicity with their teacher and served him.

In theory, you don't require any particular set-up to be a renunciate. Practically, however, a place and a certain set-up are required. You can study Vedanta wherever you are, but it is not that easy. It is difficult to chant *Hare Rama, Hare Krishna* in Times Square; the place exerts its own influence on your mind. Therefore, Lord Krishna talks of *viviktadeśa-sevitvam-aratir-janasamsadi* [Bhagavad Gita, 13-11], the disposition of repairing to a quiet place and not longing for the company of people. There is freedom from the need for the company of other people and love for solitude. That does not mean you become an isolated person or indifferent to people. You can remain the same pleasant and cheerful person, but become abiding and self-sufficient. These values are given to show that a certain atmosphere, set-up, or life-style is required. Without certain values, one cannot gain Self-knowledge. If our lives do not reflect the values, this knowledge is not going to be assimilated even if one studies all the scriptures.

Sannyāsa is a lifestyle conducive to the pursuit of knowledge and that lifestyle can be different in different societies, cultures, and social set-ups. The spirit of renunciation is very important, regardless of place, time, or dress. The knowledge of the Self is the same everywhere, regardless of place, time, or condition. Therefore, it is very important to understand the spirit of the lifestyle of *sannyāsa*.

Renunciation happens as we understand and assimilate Vedanta

Renunciation is not something that we can force; it is something that should happen. We will automatically become renunciates if we are sincere in our pursuit and assimilate the knowledge. Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, in particular, emphasized the need for renunciation. Who is a renunciate? It is a person who is self-sufficient. Basically, when we renounce things, what we give up is dependence and attachments. An insecure person cannot renounce. We grow out of our dependence on things to the extent that we discover security

and self-sufficiency within ourselves. Thus, we discover freedom or independence as we understand and assimilate the teaching. It is not that we force a certain lifestyle; rather, as we understand and assimilate the teaching, our dependence, needs, and demands drop off slowly and we discover an inner sufficiency. This is *uparati*.

Śama is restraint of the mind, *dama* is restraint of the external sense organs, and *uparati* is the culmination of that restraint. When the mind and the sense organs become centered upon the Self, we discover an inner self-sufficiency, poise, or silence. We call a person who has discovered that self-sufficiency a renunciate, regardless of where he lives and how he lives¹.

¹ Based on Vedāntasāra lectures. Transcribed and edited by Malini, KrishnaKumar (KK) S. Davey and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.