

BHAKTI YOGA - PART 19

SWĀMI DAYATMANANDA

Class begins with the chanting of the following Shanti mantra:

ॐ सह नावतु ।
सह नौ भुनक्तु ।
सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।
तेजस्वि नावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै ।
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Om Saha Naav Avatu |
Saha Nau Bhunaktu |
Saha Viiryam Karavaavahai |
Tejasvi Naav Adhiitam Asthu Maa Vidvissaavahai: |
Om Shantih Shantih Shantih: ||

Meaning:-

Om May Brahman protect us both |
May Brahman bestow upon us both, the fruit of knowledge |
May we both obtain the energy to acquire knowledge |
May what we both study reveal the truth
May we cherish no ill-feeling toward each other |
Om Peace Peace Peace be unto all ||

We have finished the first part of the path of devotion, Bhakti Yoga, by Swami Vivekananda. Therein Swamiji discusses certain preparations that need to be made before we can even enter the path of devotion. Not only the path of devotion, but to acquire anything great, we need a lot of preparations. All these preparations go by one name, they culminate in one goal. The preparation is only a part of the path, it is only traveling the path, it is only just to begin the journey – all these lead to one aim, which is a frightening word, ‘renunciation’.

Renunciation is a cornerstone of not only spiritual achievement, but also of any worldly achievement. Swami Vivekananda summarizes this point so beautifully. I read from here: “We have now finished what may be called the preparatory bhakti and are entering the study of Parâ-Bhakti or supreme devotion. We have to speak of a preparation to the practice of this supreme devotion. All such preparations are intended only for the purification of the soul. The repetition of names, the rituals, the forms, and the symbols, all these various things are for the purification of the soul. The greatest purifier among all such things, a purifier without which no one can enter the regions of this higher devotion (Parâ -Bhakti), is renunciation. This frightens many; yet, without it, there cannot be any spiritual growth. In all our Yogas this renunciation is necessary. This is the stepping-stone and the real center and the real heart of all spiritual culture — renunciation. This is religion — renunciation. (3.24) When the human soul draws back from the things of the world and tries to go into deeper things; when man, the spirit which has here somehow become concretized and materialized, understands that he is thereby going to be destroyed and to be reduced almost into mere matter, and turns his face away from matter — then begins renunciation, then begins real spiritual growth.”

There was a great social psychologist, his name was Erich Fromm. (4.03) He had written a very insightful book. I can almost call it a practical Vedantic book: *The Art of Loving*. It is a big book -- not very big, but a very thoughtful book. It made a very careful study, but at the end he summarizes. Incidentally, he is one of the most succinct and beautiful writers who knows how to summarize his discussions using the simplest form of language that anyone can understand very easily. In that conclusion about *The Practice of Love*, here are certain points, and when you hear them, you come to the conclusion that it was not Erich Fromm who was talking but it was Swami Vivekananda who was

talking. Let us start this -- I felt this is very necessary before we go into Swami Vivekananda's description of Supreme Devotion.

Erich Fromm, by the way, calls it "The Art of Loving." It is an art, and like any other art, it needs certain preparations. This is how he begins: "The practice of any art has certain general requirements, quite regardless of whether we deal with the art of carpentry, medicine, or the art of love. So, what are the things that are required? First, the practice of an art requires discipline. I will never be good at anything if I do not do it in a disciplined way. Anything I do, only if I am in the mood, (6.01) may be a nice or an amusing hobby, but we shall never become a master in that art. What is discipline? You know the funny quip of a great writer: 'I can resist anything but temptation¹.' Discipline is something that we don't want. Modern man absolutely hates discipline, yet he is forced at gunpoint to be a disciplined man. Go to the office half an hour late and try to come out half an hour earlier – see what will happen to your job, especially now-a-days (most are) contract jobs – it is not a permanent job. So, it seems modern man is a highly disciplined man, he gets up and goes to the office at the correct time, and then he comes out of it (in time) or even sometimes late. (7.02) He must be a disciplined man because five days in a week, eight hours (in each day), he is disciplining himself! But no – as soon as he comes out of the office, what do you think he will do? He will do anything but practice the art of discipline. He wants to relax. The word 'relax' -- we all use it, you have a right to enjoy yourself, you have a right to relax. What does that word mean? Do whatever you want to do, that is the meaning of the word relax. The problem is not discipline in the practice of that particular art, practicing every day for a certain number of hours – but it is discipline in one's whole life. Now remember, an art is not a profession, it is not even a hobby, it is the very heart of life. If a person says I am a painter, I am a musician, it is not a hobby, one or two hours he will paint or sing or write poetry (8.20) It is his

¹ Quote by Oscar Wilde: What else do you have to resist if it is not temptation?

very love. You have heard the lives of great artists like Beethoven, Van Gogh, or great scientists – 24 hours their minds are centered on that particular subject. You know what happened to Van Gogh, he was considered to be mad, he went mad, but was he really mad? From all standpoints, yes. But from the heart's standpoint, he was a man who was totally dedicated – he was prepared to suffer, he was prepared even to die, but not to give up his art, because that was more of his life than his ordinary life. ... Sri Ramakrishna was called mad; do you know that? Many people considered him mad, and he himself accepted it. He said, "I am mad, the whole world is mad, so there is nothing strange in my being mad. The only difference is that others are mad for enjoyment, name, fame, but I am mad for God." He is a very commonsensical man. You know, Swami Vivekananda thought, Sri Ramakrishna was mad, he was a monomaniac at the beginning. Many people tried to cure his madness. His mother also thought he was mad. In India, mothers have a peculiar idea – any time of madness can be cured by marriage. There is a problem with this kind of madness -- there was a man who was prepared to marry, but nobody was prepared to marry him, so he became mad. It is a big problem because his madness cannot be cured until he is married, (10.03) and he cannot be married until his madness is gone. How are you going to solve this problem? Sri Ramakrishna's mother tried that method, brought her son and tried to get him married. The idea is, (his) madness means absolutely focusing upon one particular idea to the detriment of everything else in life. A person is neglecting eating, drinking, sleeping, social contacts, everything – and focusing on only one thing. Many times, we also feel, there are many types of madness -- in one type of madness, a person becomes completely irrational or fanatic; in the other type of madness, a person is completely absorbed in something. For ordinary people, it is difficult to separate these two. Sri Ramakrishna was not irrational --- anything but irrational, but he was completely absorbed, possessed as it were. (11.06) Any great man, greatness means being possessed

by something, the greatness is proportional to the amount of being possessed by a particular idea, whether it is patriotism, art, science, and of course religion. A saint is a mad man. Getting married means, the man's mind will be diverted from something to which his mind is fixed. This is the simple psychological argument that people have got. But it does not work.

There was a scientist; he was so intent upon his discoveries of science. It so happened he was dating a woman, and they fixed a date for marriage, and that day he was troubled in mind from the early morning -- there was something very important today, what is it, what is it? After a long time, he remembered that, that day he was to be married. Immediately he called his fiancé and told her, "This is my condition. I don't think I will be able to make you happy, better get somebody else." He was a very sensible man. He was happy and he made the other person also happy. How many of us can claim that? So, to be absorbed completely for whole life (**is a form of madness**) – at moments we also become mad, but this kind of madness is only an emotional outburst. We have to be very intelligent in separating these two. You read some inspiring book, or speak with someone who is inspiring you, or watch a film which is very inspiring, you will feel that you will like to dedicate your whole life for the sake of God, (13.05) maybe (**feel like**) 'I am also like Sri Ramakrishna with intense longing for God-realization.' There was an American in one of our centers. I heard that he became this kind of emotional wreck. He read how Sri Ramakrishna one day was in the shrine. He was longing for God-realization, and saw a sword hanging there, so he touched it and said, "Mother if you do not reveal yourself to me. then I am going to kill myself." And of course, Mother revealed herself. So, this American went to the top of a building and cried out, "O Ramakrishna, if you don't show yourself to me then I am going to jump from this building." Of course, Sri Ramakrishna did not appear, he jumped and broke his bones, suffered, and made others suffer. Why Sri Ramakrishna did not come? Did he really mean it? That was a temporary

emotional outburst. Do you think, after five minutes that will stay? It would not be staying. We are all in that condition, highly emotional² people. This discipline is for the whole life. Now, what can make this discipline? It is like the question of the man who wanted to get married but could not, because he was mad, and he was mad because he could not get married. This discipline is like that. Why is there no discipline in our life? Because we don't have any abiding interest. Our modern man's mind is a basket of various fruits -- (15.01) five minutes interest in this, five minutes interest in that, so he cannot focus his mind at all. There is no abiding deep interest for anything, not to speak of religion, but anything. Why doesn't he have any interest in anything? It is because abiding interest comes when there is a discipline. And why is there no discipline? Because there is no interest. It is a vicious circle. Where do we start?

Start with some discipline, get up in the morning, study holy books, and pray and meditate to God, and again you do it in the evening. And what do you do in between? Do you give it a holiday from spiritual disciplines? It is a 24-hour discipline. It is a struggle, but let us do it slowly, gradually, without giving up. Meanwhile (there are) emotional outbursts. Emotional outbursts are dictated by many factors, including weather³. So, circumstances, friends, weather, all these things (16.38) affect our faith, and so our discipline, our emotions. What is discipline? Discipline means, don't worry about your emotional states, whether you like it or not, whether you want it or not – you have decided to do something, you will do it. Until that determination comes, it is not possible to be great in anything, not to speak of religion. So, the problem, as Eric Fromm says, is not our discipline in the practice of that

² Do you know what is emotion? You know what email is, electronic mail. Similarly, emotion is *electronic motion*. One minute you say, 'I love', the next minute you say you don't.

³ Today it is cloudy weather – our devotion to God will be very sad. We all suffer from a disease called s-a-d. You know what it is? Seasonal Affectation Disorder. Our devotees have been suffering from it from today morning until now. When the sun came out, their faces became a little bit brighter.

particular art, practicing every day for a certain number of hours, but it is the discipline in one's whole life.

Modern man has extremely little self-discipline outside the sphere of work. Without such discipline, however, life becomes shattered, chaotic, lacks in concentration. One of the interesting points about why we are so less self-disciplined is the way the modern life is organized. We have all become cogs in a vast machine called 'modern life'. It leaves very little freedom for us. In the past, the desires were less, the time was more. You heard about the caste system, in the west what is called the guild system. A blacksmith's son becomes a blacksmith (18.11), a goldsmith's son becomes a goldsmith, a carpenter's son becomes a carpenter, a priest's son becomes a priest. So, the vocations are fixed. There is no competition, they do it because they accepted it as their life. Here in modern life, there are many problems. One problem is the vast amount of choice we have, and every choice is exceedingly tempting. Whatever choice we make, we regret⁴. (18.45) So much of choices are there in life, that a great thinker called it "Future Shock" and wrote a book about it. One of the causes of discontent in our modern life is this: Suppose you want to buy an MP3 player. You go to an electronics shop. There are hundreds of varieties. Whatever you buy, you are left with discontent, maybe the other model is much better. To add to this insult, next day you will see perhaps you paid 50 pounds, and today it is selling for 20 pounds! You will regret, why am I such a fool? I could have waited for one day and got the item for only 20 pounds! So, interest has to be cultivated. Interest comes from discipline. There is a Bengali saying that is difficult to translate: *Khete Khete bhaloi laagchhe*⁵. The thing is, we are creatures of habit. Whatever we are habituated, whether it is good or bad is not the point – habit makes us develop a liking for it. So, discipline is the route

⁴ Funny anecdote: Marrying is like eating in a restaurant (please take no offence). The man in the restaurant, when he orders something, and when the waiter supplies it, looks at his neighbor and starts regretting, 'Why didn't I order that?' Similarly, as soon as a man gets married, he starts regretting why didn't I marry the other woman? (19.14)

⁵ As you go on eating, you eventually get the taste out of it.

how we can develop interest. That is why Sri Ramakrishna insists so much on discipline, cultivation of holy company. Whether you like it or not (**does not matter**). If you like, there is no need for discipline, because your very liking will make you do things.

Unfortunately, in the field of religion, we are dealing with an unknown **entity**. We do not know God; we are not too sure whether He will help us⁶. You know the story? An atheist (21.25) was walking on a mountain road, slipped unfortunately, was tumbling down -- there was a big valley, and on the way, caught a branch. He was hanging there. He looked up, long way up, and looked down far below -- (**jetting???**) rocks were staring at him. He thought, this is the right time to call on God and see if there is anybody. He looked up and said,

-- "Is there anyone up there?" A gentle sweet voice came,

-- "Yes, I am God."

-- "Can you help me?"

-- "Sure, let go of the branch, I will catch you from below."

He thought a bit, and asked, "Is there anyone else?"

See, he was dealing with God about whom we heard, we read, and had a little bit of faith but we are not ready to completely let go. That is one problem. The other problem is that, all around us, especially now-a-days, there are tremendous temptations -- the way people advertise, the things that we see, and more importantly or viciously the thought waves that are going on in people's mind all the time. You know, we are believers in the power of subtle thoughts that we constantly broadcast. If they are good thoughts then we are very fortunate, but unfortunately, they are all worldly thoughts, and that is why we have to live in this world in that atmosphere, fight against these odds, and yet, we have to progress in spiritual life. (23.11) What is it that can save us? Discipline is one thing that can save us. I will give you a beautiful example of what this discipline means.

⁶ One of the ideas is that God will help us.

There was a great soul and saint in South India, called Ramanuja. He had an old disciple. Ramanuja was asked by this old disciple: “What can I do to serve you?” Sri Ramanuja was the Guru. He said, “If you want to serve me, then this is what I would like you to do. Stay at your home; every day I go to the temple, and on my way back to my home, I will be passing your home, and there you will be sitting. Then I will wash your feet and drink the water from that washed feet⁷. This is the great service that you can do.” Because his disciple was an old man, an old brahmin, Ramanuja wanted to do this as a discipline for his devotion. The old man said, “This is my Guru’s commandment, I will abide by it.” So, every day at noon, he used to sit, and Ramanuja used to return from the temple, and on the way, he would wash his disciple’s feet, drink the water, and go. (25.07). One day, Ramanuja was preoccupied. He forgot and went straight home. At around midnight before going to bed, he remembered that he asked his disciple every day to sit there. He knew, his disciple would not eat food or move from the place until the Guru came there. Immediately Ramanuja went there, found the old man, without eating or drinking for the whole day, was sitting exactly in the same place. Ramanuja washed his feet immediately, drank it apologized, and sent the old man away, and came back. See the discipline! My Guru told me, whether it is a happy or an unhappy thing, whether I am hungry or not – it is his commandment, (26.01) it is a discipline. What a wonderful discipline it is! And he did it.

Study the lives of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. In one instance, Swami Adbhutananda⁸ was there. One evening (Sri Ramakrishna considered the evenings to be very holy for thinking of God), Latu Maharaj was dozing. Sri Ramakrishna rebuked him: “Is this the purpose for which you have

⁷ Indians do that to their teacher, they wash, they touch the Guru’s feet and want the dust. Unfortunately, I am not considered very valuable, because I don’t produce much dust, and what little dust is there is covered with socks. It is a faith, a devotee or a disciple considers the feet of the Guru as Lotus feet, very holy.

⁸ Latu Maharaj’s monastic name is Swami Adbhutananda.

come? Then you need not serve me. I want my disciples to be wide awake at this time. This is a sacred time, very suitable for thinking of God, and you are falling asleep now!” The disciple conquered sleep; In his whole life he would never again (fall asleep in the evening). In fact, he would not sleep for the whole night – only during the daytime, he used to sleep for 2-3 hours. This disciple’s life was so great; most of the daytime he would lie down with a thick blanket covering his whole body from head to foot. There were two problems – first of all it was not England, Kolkata is a very hot and humid place. If you put a blanket, then what will happen? The second problem is even more serious. (Some of) my audience sleep even while sitting, not to speak of lying down. If you lie down, then do you know what will happen? (27.35) Latu Maharaj never used to sleep, he used to lie down, and be absorbed in deep meditation. But he had to struggle very hard to achieve that state. (27.48) The point that we are talking about is, discipline is the secret of greatness in any field of life. Now a days, everything is taught except discipline, because discipline means sacrifice, discipline is a part of renunciation. You are not given freedom. When you feel like, you do it – that is not discipline, that is not freedom. You are set to do something, and you will do it. Modern man has very little self-discipline outside the sphere of work. Without such discipline, however, life becomes shattered, chaotic, and lacks in concentration. Discipline leads to concentration. Without concentration, nobody can become great.

There is an Upanishad called Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, one of the most marvelous Upanishads in Vedantic literature. In this Upanishad there is a statement that a man is great to the extent of his meditation. If a man can meditate, to that extent he is great. Greatness and meditation are the obverse and reverse of the same coin. What is meditation? It is concentrating upon a noble subject. Just imagine that in ordinary art, tremendous concentration is necessary. Perhaps some of you have heard of this incident: once Socrates, the great philosopher, fell to thinking about a particular subject (we don’t

remember what the subject was). Just when the thought came to him that ‘I must think about the subject’, he was standing at the middle of a street⁹. He was standing in the same posture for 24 hours (30.02). The next day he was still seen standing on the same street. By the way, Socrates was a real philosopher, not a speculative lecturing type philosopher – a real philosopher who had the vision of God. He was also highly humorous. He was a married man, and his wife was a shrew¹⁰. He was a humorous man – once a young man approached him,

-- “Sir, I want your advice.”

Socrates asked: “On what subject?”

-- “I want to get married. What is your advice?”

Socrates replied: “Young man, go and get married. If you get a good wife, then your life will turn out to be very happy. Otherwise, you don’t lose anything. You will become a great philosopher like me.”

Discipline leads to concentration of the mind. You know how Sri Ramakrishna often used to be in Samadhi. Swami Vivekananda, how concentrated **his mind** used to be! In the western world, people usually do not pay so much attention on them power of concentration. Swami Vivekananda came and met a great philosopher called Pearl Newsom. Pearl Dussen invited him to his home. Swamiji went and they had a little discussion. Then an incident happened. Swamiji was in the parlor (visitor’s room) and it was full of books. Paul Deussen had a talk with Swmiji and then he went inside for something. When he came back, he found Swamiji browsing a book in his vast library. Paul Deussen wanted to speak again with Swami Vivekananda, so he said, “Swamiji”; there was no reply. Again, he asked. “Swamiji” and there was no reply. Paul Deussent felt highly insulted -- he thought ‘this man is arrogant enough as not to reply to me.’ After some time, Swamiji became aware of Paul

⁹ Fortunately, there were no cars in those days.

¹⁰ The **shrew** – an unpleasant, ill-tempered woman characterized by scolding, nagging, and aggression –The theme is illustrated in Shakespeare’s play [*The Taming of the Shrew*](#).

Deussen's presence, and he apologized: "Sorry, were you asking me something?" Paul Deussen asked, "Are you really concentrating on this?" Swamiji said. "Yes." What happened at that time was that a new book has come out and nobody had seen that book except Paul Deussen, who acquired a copy of that book. Swamiji happened to read that book. So, Paul Deussen said, "I asked you 2-3 times, I called out your name, but you did not speak out! Were you neglecting me?" "No," Swamiji said, "It is my habit. On whatever I put my mind on, immediately it becomes concentrated." (32.57) Paul Deussen did not believe him. So, Swamiji said, "You test me. Here is a book that I was absorbed in reading." Paul Deussen asked some questions from that book. Swamiji could not have seen it because it came out 4-5 days ago. Not only did Swamiji answer his questions, but also, he verbatim quoted from that book page after page. Paul Deussen could not say anything, because here was a test. Whatever Swami Vivekananda had done, he used to put his mind on that. That is why he was so great. And the same truth holds for any great person. Greatness is proportional to the power of concentration.

That concentration is a necessary condition for the mastery of an art is not hard to prove. Concentration is rare in our culture. On the contrary, our culture leads to an unconcentrated and diffused mode of life, with hardly any parallel anywhere else. You do many things at once. You read, listen to the radio, talk, smoke, eat, drink, all at the same time. He gives an example. Smoking is one of the symptoms of the lack of concentration. It occupies hand, mouth, nose and eyes at the same time. So, the first is discipline. The second requirement, discipline leads to concentration. Is it so easy to acquire the power of concentration? You know, how stupid it is -- people sometimes come and ask **questions**. Once a person came¹¹ after my talk. I was sitting in the interview room, and he introduced himself and said,

"Swamiji I have a question to ask."

¹¹ That was his first time, and fortunately the last time, as I never saw him afterwards.

I said, "Fine, what is it?"

He said: "I want to ask about meditation and Samadhi."

I said, "First of all, let me ask *you* a question: how much time do you meditate?"

He said, "I meditate 5-10 minutes every day."

I said, "Ok, now what is your question?"

He said, "Can you explain to me what Samadhi is?"

A man who meditates 5-10 minutes a day, wants to know what Samadhi is like! I told him, "I only know, I cannot explain, but I can give you Samadhi in five minutes -- the quickest way of attaining Samadhi. Take a big stick and give (**yourself?**) a good blow. That will be instantaneous Samadhi."

This is an age of instantaneous gratification. What is the necessary thing for achieving concentration? (35.53) *Sa tu dīrgha kāla nairantary abhyasaat*. Patanjali, the father of Yoga, himself poses a question:

-- "When does a man achieve concentration?"

-- "For a long long time, unbroken discipline and purposive practice will bring the result."

-- "How long will it take?"

Patanjali himself answered: "It depends on at what speed you are progressing¹²." It may take (**several**) lives to be there. Do not become impatient. What is the condition necessary for concentration? Patience. So, Erich Fromm says: "A third factor is patience." Again, anyone who tried to master an art knows that patience is necessary. If you want to achieve anything, if one is after quick results, one never learns an art. Yet for modern man, patience is as difficult to practice as discipline and concentration. (38.01) Our whole industrial system

¹² If you are walking towards London, then it will take several days to reach. If you are taking a bike, it will be quicker. If you travel by car, then it will be even quicker. If you go by helicopter, it will be even quicker. A man in a busy city was walking. In all the roads, cars were rushing here and there. A policeman was directing the traffic. The man went (to him), stood in the middle and asked: "Can you tell me the shortest route to the hospital?" The policeman said, "If you happen to stand here for three minutes, then you will be in the hospital. That is the quickest way." ☺

fosters exactly the opposite. What is it? Quickness. All our machines are designed for quickness. The car and airplane bring us quickly to our destinations. The quicker, the better. The modern man thinks he loses something, (i.e. time) when he does not do things quickly. Yet he does not know what to do with the time he gains, except kill it. What a paradoxical statement! All our entertainment industry is designed with one purpose in mind – how to kill time. And how impatient we become. You know about road rage? It is a true incident, one of our devotees told me. A man was traveling in a car. He was driving a bit slowly. A man behind him was impatient. He was sounding the horn, but for some reason, the man in front did not give way. The man behind him passed him through the other lane, again entered into the same lane, and started moving in front of the car that did not give way. At some point, he suddenly applied the brake. This man was not expecting it. He rammed against the other car, and he broke his neck, and still suffering from it. Road rage, airplane rage, television rage – have you heard about television rage? Suppose there is only one TV and there are three kids. One kid watches something. The other grown up kid wants to watch something else. He will go and slap the younger one, and then change the channel. (40.03) The latest rage is called Internet rage. A case came (in the news) a few weeks back. Two people were chatting. One fellow felt insulted during the Internet chatting. He got the IP address (??? should be home address), went to the fellow, and rang the doorbell. When he came out, he got hold of that person and gave him a good thrashing. (40.25) Of course we all know what religious rage is. It is one of the oldest phenomenon: my religion is superior to your religion. If you don't follow my religion, then I will come and kill you. Even today it is happening. (40.47) See, in how many ways man is becoming impatient! On the contrary, those who want to master an art ... there is a beautiful Zen incident that I mentioned to you earlier, but it is worth mentioning again and again. There was a Zen master in Japan. He was a master in archery. A young man wanted to

become his disciple. He had to serve his parents too. He asked the Zen master, “If I become your disciple and work very diligently, how much time will it take to become a master?” The master replied, “It will take about five years.”

-- “Suppose I work day and night, then how much time will it take?”

-- “It will take about 20 years.”

-- “Suppose I work even harder day and night?”

-- “It will take 50 years.”

What is the point? It is not how hard you work, (**what matters is**) how patiently you work. (41.59), The more you are in a hurry, the less likely you master anything. Even changing dress – if you do it calm and quietly, you can do it very quickly, but if you do it in a hurry, it takes a long time. Have you not noticed that? So, if you don’t become patient, then you will become a patient. Better develop a little patience – it is very necessary. So, the third condition is: infinite patience is very necessary. Swami Vivekananda used another word for it – perseverance, (42.42) infinite perseverance! Even if you fail a million times, don’t give it up. When can you persevere? Only when you have infinite patience, you can really persevere. Fourth, eventually a condition of learning any art is supreme concern with the mastery of the art. If the art is not something of supreme importance, the apprentice will never learn it. There was a wonderful incident, Sri Ramakrishna mentions it. In Mahabharata where the five brothers fight with the hundred Kauravas, there was the master of archery called Dronacharya. He trained the princes from both families (**and wanted to figure out**) who would be the greatest archer. Dronacharya set up a test to test their skills. What he did was, he tied a bird to the top branch of a tree, and then called his pupils. The test was to pierce the eye of the bird. (44.05). **Then he asked:**

-- “Do you understand it?”

-- “Yes.”

-- “What do you see in front of you? Do you see the tree?”

-- "Yes, I see the tree."

-- "Out! You failed the test. There is no need to discharge the arrow.

The fact that you could see the tree (implied that) you are a failure."

The next man came. (Dronacharya asked), "Do you see the tree?"

He said: "No Sir, I don't see the tree,"

-- "What do you see?"

-- "I see the branch."

-- "Out! You have failed."

The third man came. (44.34)

-- "What do you see? Do you see the branch?"

-- "No Sir."

-- "What do you see?"

-- "I see the bird."

-- "Out! You failed!"

At last came Arjuna. The teacher asked him:

-- "Do you see the tree?"

-- "No."

-- "Do you see the branches?"

-- "No."

-- "Do you see the bird?"

-- "No."

-- "Then what do you see?"

-- "I only see the eye of the bird."

Dronacharya said: "You don't need to discharge the arrow. I know it will pierce."

Those who have studied Mahabharata know how he (Arjuna) obtained the hand of Draupadi. There was a test. There was a fountain. Above the fountain was a revolving wheel, and a fish was tied. Now, Arjuna had to look at the pool, see

the reflection of the revolving fish, and looking at that he has to pierce the eye of the fish. If he could do that, what a master he was! What is the point here? The point is: to be able to come to that state where a person can only see the eye of the bird¹³, how much patience is necessary, how much of discipline is necessary, how much of concentration is necessary!

Discipline, then concentration, then patience – all these for how long? You see, love means that it is not a one-hour affair – it is an affair for life after life. (46.11) I really admire this great saint Rabeya – one of her sayings was: “Oh Lord, if I love you in the hope of gaining paradise, then exclude me from the paradise. If I love you for fear of hell, then burn me in hell. But if I love you for the sake of loving you, then exclude me not from your presence.” This is what Sri Ramakrishna used to say *ahetuka bhakti*, i.e. motiveless devotion, or devotion for its own sake. For anything else that kind of love can come when our whole life is concentrated on that love. Eventually, a condition of learning any art is the supreme concern with the mastery of the art. If the art is not something of supreme importance, the apprentice will never learn it. He may be a dabbler, he may learn a little bit of it, but he is not going to be a master. One more point must be made as the general condition of learning an art. It is a very interesting and important point. What is it? One does not begin to learn an art directly, but indirectly as it were. One must learn a great number of other, and often seemingly disconnected things, before one starts with the art itself. This is a wonderful psychological point. I will give an example. Imagine you are a lover of music, and you want to learn a new song. So, what do you do? Don't attack it directly. Just play the song and go on listening to it once or twice. Do not go on listening to it 100 times. ‘I will not stop listening to it until I master it – so I go on listening to it 50 or 100 or 300 times -- it won't work. You know what you should do? Just listen to it once or twice. Put it off. Do something else. Something mysterious, something marvelous happens. That you learn just

¹³ Here, the eye of the bird means the goal.

once or twice, it goes deep down to the unconscious, and it starts working from there. Then, after a few days, you listen to it once or twice. Then forget about it. Then after a few days you will see that one morning you get up, and you are **whistling** the song so beautifully like a copycat. (49.00). So, what has happened here? The subconscious has taken over. **The subconscious mind learned the song perfectly.** If you think this is not right, then read the book “The Art of Happiness” by Bertrand Russell. In that book he says how to be happy. Don’t attack happiness directly, you cannot go to a shop and say, “I want to buy one liter of happiness.” There is no such thing like that. Happiness is always the indirect result of doing something worthwhile. He says, suppose you have a problem. Concentrate your mind. Do your best to attack the problem. Work on it without respite, for some time. Then forget about it and go about something else. Take up some other problem, something completely disconnected with the subject. The subconscious will take it over, it is not sleeping -- it is working. One day, in the early morning, you will see that the problem has solved by itself. This is what Erich Fromm is talking here, and I know it works. For any art, just do a little bit of work, give a little bit of food (I can also compare, perhaps not a very good example). Suppose you want to become strong. Go on stuffing yourself with food. Do you will become strong? Eat a little bit of food, then leave off, go and do something. What happens is, the digestive system begins to work. It digests what you have already eaten, and it prepares you for the next meal. That was, slowly we gain more and more strength. That applies to the art of devotion, how to progress in the life of devotion.

Now, one of the things Sri Ramakrishna used to insist very much is, cultivate the company of the holy. How does it benefit? Not directly. I know many people who cultivate the company of sadhus, monks, holy people, but obviously they don’t seem to feel any benefit at that point of time. I think, many of you can understand what I am talking about. Long after that, perhaps

many years later, suddenly what we cultivated earlier, comes to our mind, 'Oh, you know, that monk used to tell me that. The other one used to do this to me.' It gives tremendous amount of lift, inspiration, happiness. Many things happen. This is a wonderful subject by itself. I don't want to deviate so much. Have you ever thought (52.01) that in your childhood perhaps you have eaten something, and the very remembrance of the wonderful thing that you have eaten gives you more happiness than what you are eating now? But don't worry, what you are eating right now will give you happiness after a few years. It is the very nature of memory and psychology. Learning is a very important art. You just pay a little bit of attention, give a little break to the mind, then again pay attention – that way we are likely to learn quicker than frontal attack or intense attack. This is like a warfare -- you attack, do something, then withdraw, then attack; otherwise it will be like *The Light Brigade*. It is considered to be a heroic act, but it is a terrible disaster when looked at posthumously. (53.03) You know about *The Light Brigade* during the Second World War that was a terrible disaster! So, that is what Erich Fromm was pointing: "One does not learn an Art directly, but indirectly as it were. One must learn a great number of other -- and often seemingly disconnected things -- before one starts with the art itself. If one wants to become a master in any art, then one's whole life must be devoted to it, or at least related to it. One's own person becomes an instrument in the practice of the art, and must be kept fit, according to the specific functions it has to fulfil. With regard to the art of loving, this means that anyone who aspires to become a master in this art must begin by practicing discipline, concentration and patience throughout every phase of his life."

There is nothing called spiritual holiday, but continuous spiritual practice can often lead to boredom. For any higher subject, if we are not fit, then it becomes boring. You have been sitting here for almost an hour, how many times have you taken a break during this hour and went on an

around-the-world trip? I am glad that you did this because you couldn't have withstood it. A bishop was giving a talk, and almost 90% of the heads started nodding at every statement he was making. At the end, he thanked all of them and said. "I am so glad that my audience, even in their sleep also, agree with what I say." Most of the lectures become boring because the subject is so high, and a person's monotonous voice comes; but don't think it is a waste – even in your sleep, there is something called sleep-learning. Many (55.09) things enter your ears, then go to your minds. Anyway, I will tell you an incident and then stop the talk here. There was a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, He was a very hardworking man, and he used to come to Dakshineswar. It was his devotion that brought him there. He used to come, bow down to the gods in the temples, and bow down to Sri Ramakrishna, spread a mat, and go to sleep. At around 10.30PM or so, Sri Ramakrishna would wake him up, he would once more bow down to him, and then go home. Some devotees criticized him and said, "This man, what is the purpose of his coming here? He comes here and only sleeps!" (55.57) Sri Ramakrishna said. "Don't disturb him. He works very hard. He has that much faith in me, that sleeping in my presence brings him so much of benefit. Sri Ramakrishna did not disturb him, and there are two reasons. (1) The very presence of a holy man can affect us even when we are sleeping there, or we are not very mindful about it, because that is the power of the holiness vibration. (2) There is the psychological factor: now the psychologists know that children or most of the babies, what do they do, they sleep or seem to be sleeping. Most of the psychologists uncovered the fact that the babies are learning at a very fast speed even during their sleep. They are observing the accent, the way of behavior, and the languages. You know how many languages they can learn? Even during the sleeping period, scientists have uncovered very little of the secrets of the mind. We believe, even sleep-learning is a way of learning. There must, of course, be a conscious way of learning, but sleep in the presence of holy people, or sometimes we say: 'sleep on a subject', by that

we mean let the unconscious take over and do the work. How do we know that this man was not observing the holiness of Sri Ramakrishna, and growing in devotion to God? So, it is good to cultivate holy company. This is what Erich Fromm was telling, if we want to learn any form of art, here it is the art of loving, be in the presence of people who love, and observe, not so much by their instructions, but by being in their very presence.

There are wonderful points that we will discuss in our future classes, but to sum up, to learn to love God, like any other art, requires discipline, concentration, and infinite amount of patience, and above all, it can be learned more indirectly rather than directly.