

# GOSPEL OF SRI RĀMAKRISHNA - PART 10

SWĀMI DAYATMANANDA

ॐ जननीं सारदां देवीं रामकृष्णं जगदगुरुम् ।

पादपद्मे तयोः श्रित्वा प्रणमामि मुहुर्मुहुः ॥

Jananim Sāradam devim Rāmakrishnam jagadgurum।

Pādapadme tayoh shritvā pranamāmi muhurmujuh ॥

ॐ तव कथामृतं तप्तजीवनं

कविभिरीडितं कल्मषापहम् ।

श्रवणमङ्गलं श्रीमदाततं

भुवि गृणन्ति ते भूरिदा जनाः ॥

Om tava kathāmṛtaṁ tapta-jīvanam

kavibhir īḍitaṁ kalmaṣāpaham ।

śravaṇa-maṅgalaṁ śrīmad ātataṁ

bhuvi gṛṇanti te bhūri-dā janāḥ ॥

## **Swami answers questions from Devotees:**

We are starting our “The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna”. Before I start, I would like to deal with the two questions posed by our group members. First question – *what exactly happens to our mind after our body’s lifetime ends? Where does it go? And how does it form part of our next rebirth or re-incarnation?* Whatever we have earned, whatever we have accumulated in the form of knowledge, in the form of good habits, all those things remain as part of our subtle body or Sukshma Sarira. And at the end of this physical body (gross body), the subtle body along with the causal body which we call Jiva, it travels to the next birth. So, if we have acquired good samskaras they will

be exactly in the same way, and as soon as we grow up, we start from where we left off. And the same thing happens if we have acquired what we call evil samskaras or unspiritual samskaras. So, two things will happen at the next birth – we get an appropriate body, appropriate family, appropriate social environment, everything tailor-made not by anybody else but by ourselves according to what we have done in this life as well as in past lives. This is the answer. Nothing is lost, good or bad, so we have to be extremely careful. And absolutely we alone are responsible for what we are and for what we will be in future. No God or none else is responsible, we alone are responsible.

Second question – *In Gospel, on page 234, there is an incident – a lady who led an immoral life, her name was Bhagavati Dasi, when she was young, either because of evil samskaras or because of some forced circumstances.* I would say only due to Purvajanma karma, either way, she led an immoral life. Later on, when she became old, naturally she became refrained from all those things. She must have earned some amount of money, with that she went on pilgrimage, did what every Hindu is supposed to do, and she must have been extraordinarily fortunate to meet Sri Ramakrishna. He was talking very encouragingly – the point we have to note down here is, Sri Ramakrishna never excluded anybody who wanted spiritual life He only deliberately excluded people who are worldly and who would not get any benefit from his advice, nor would he like to waste their time and of course, his own time. This Bhagavati Dasi, one day happened to come and meet and he was talking very nicely, and she was replying, “I went on pilgrimages, I constructed some ghats also, my name is written there”. Encouraged by these words, without knowing, she went forward and touched the holy feet of Sri Ramakrishna. Immediately, he jumped up with pain as though a scorpion had stung him. And then he went to the Ganges, took up some water, poured it, and he got a little bit of peace of mind.

The question was – *Was Sri Ramakrishna practicing exclusivism or were there other people also?* Yes. Here is a theory which all of us must understand. And based upon it, Sri Ramanujacharya had formulated some rule regarding food. Unfortunately, many people twisted it to the other extreme and said any food touched by, prepared by, or brought by a lower caste person should never be accepted, which strictly is not true at all. So, this Ramanujacharya said especially food, why? Because here is the theory – anybody who leads an immoral life, he carries the vibrations with that person. Though ordinary people like us, we may not recognize, we may not feel like a completely dirty cloth even if you put a little more ink or something on that cloth, does not make any difference. Most of us are, so far as spiritual life is concerned, like that. But people like Sri Ramakrishna who are like an extremely white piece of cloth, untouched by the slightest spot. The moment a small spot comes into touch, immediately that would become glaringly visible. So, the body of Sri Ramakrishna was made up of pure Sattva. And that is why any impure touch would cause him excruciating pain. So, it is not that Sri Ramakrishna was making discrimination, but the nature of his body is like that. When even we become pure, even the very touch of some people would be

excruciatingly, not only physically painful, but mentally deteriorating or brings our mind down. Since we are on this topic, I am inclined to tell a small story and it is a part of our spiritual understanding – there was a king and he was devoted. There was a good Sadhu nearby. One day the King went to meet the Sadhu and he was highly pleased and invited him, “Sir! Please come to my house. I would like to feed you”. The Sadhu first declined it, but later on, at the insistence of the King, he accepted it. Then, one day this Sadhu came, and the King was very happy, he got special dishes prepared, and himself served the Sadhu, and all the food was served in golden plates, golden cups, golden tumblers, etc. At the end of the meal, the Sadhu got up taking a golden tumbler to wash his hands, and mouth, after finishing it, he looked here and there, and surreptitiously slipped the tumbler into his Jholi and then he started walking away. The King was watching the whole lot and sent some people to fetch him back and said, “Holy Sir! You are a Sadhu. The whole thing with which you are served, all these plates, cups, and tumblers, I had already decided to give it to you. Why did you try to steal where there was no need for that”? Then the Sadhu said, “O King! I do not know why I did it. Something made me, forced me to do it. My whole life I never thought such thoughts. I led an impeccably pure life. I think there must be something wrong with the food that you have offered me”. The King said, “No. All the materials, food materials came from my own fields. It is all mine, there is nothing bad”. The Sadhu said, “No. Please enquire”. The King went on enquiring. Ultimately, his present Prime Minister’s father who was an old man, he was called, and he was asked about the truth. And he said, “Yes. The field from which this rice, vegetables, etc. had come, once upon a time, during your grandfather’s time, this field belonged to a poor man, your grandfather committed it, offered to pay some money but the poor man refused saying this all belongs to my ancestors, I would not like to sell it, I would like to keep it. But the King deceptively acquired that land. Of course, his son might or might not have known. Certainly, the present King never knew about it. He thought it was all legally acquired. So, anything grown in that illegally acquired property also becomes a stolen property, and that had affected my pure mind and that is why unbeknown to myself, as if somebody had taken possession of me and made me do this. So, what is the point we are discussing? When, through spiritual practice, we reach certain stage of spiritual development which means the mind acquires more Sattva, more purity, we can see in a gross way, anything that is impure or mixed with some evil, with some sin, instantaneously affects us. Now, I have to add a note – not only whether we know it or not, not only it affects only the pure people, it affects us also. This is why we have to be extremely cautious to accept anything that are possessed by impure people, not to speak of food only, going to hotels, where food is prepared even in hygienic manner, but by impure minds, should never be accepted. Only under extreme circumstances, if we have to accept such food, then we will have to offer it to God mentally (do Brahmarpanam) and then only accept it. The whole summary of what I spoke so far, is that there is a vast difference between pure and impure people, and especially spiritual practitioners should be extremely cautious about touching anything belonging to impure people, whether it is their bodies, their cloths, or any

possessions belonging to them, of course not to speak of the food. And just now, I recollected an incident, perhaps you might have read it in the life of Holy Mother – there was a disciple of Holy mother and one day, he earnestly begged, “Ma! I have never had any spiritual experience. Out of your boundless grace, will you give me some experience?” Mother immediately put her hand on his head and his mind was lifted to a quite high plane. Then, Mother cautioned him, “My Son! For a few days, do not eat food anywhere else. You can eat only under two circumstances – if food is prepared in this Ashrama and offered to Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna); or food cooked by the hands of your own mother. Other than that, do not touch anybody’s food. The Brahmachari said yes. And one day, he had to go to the neighboring village to purchase something and there, it was almost noon by the time he had finished his work. And he met a devotee, the Brahmachari did not have, of course, any food. The devotee whom this Brahmachari knew was known to be a very good devotee. So, the devotee said, “Maharaj! Today it looks like you have not eaten food. Please come to my house nearby. Food is ready and you can have the food and return back”. The Brahmachari thought, “After all this is a devotee. Holy Mother’s advice does not count to this person.” So, he went there, took food. The moment food went into his body, immediately that high spiritual experience came to an end. So, this is the answer to your question. This Bhagavati Dasi led an impure life and impurity does not leave a person unless a person did hard Tapasya and progressed in spiritual life. Until that time, she might have refrained from that kind of earlier activities, but still her mindset might not have changed so much and that is why this impurity touches pure people very much. And this happened not only with Bhagavati Dasi but quite a number of other people. Now, anyway, I will just recollect one incident – Swami Vivekananda at that time, Narendranath, was coming to Sri Ramakrishna, frequenting him and many times, he observed Sri Ramakrishna’s body will not touch anything touched by some type of people. Narendranath misunderstood Sri Ramakrishna. He thought this man was still carrying some priestly samskaras, purohita’s samskaras, touch not these lower-class people, etc. etc. Touch me not – Orthodox Brahmin’s practice, even today, mostly in South India and elsewhere. So, he was thinking, and he kept quiet. So, one day, Sri Ramakrishna went to Calcutta and after meeting the devotees, he was returning by horse carriage to Dakshineswar. And Narendra happened to be there. On the way, Sri Ramakrishna felt very thirsty. So, he was expressing, “I am very thirsty. What can we do?” Narendranath said, “Nearby, there is my friend’s house. Let us stop the carriage and you can have some water, then we can proceed”. So, the carriage stopped in front of his friend’s house. Narendranath went inside. Narendranath’s friend’s family heard about Sri Ramakrishna. They received him with greatest respect, especially the elder brother of Narendra’s friend (we do not know who that friend was). So, this man hearing why they stopped there, went inside, washed a tumbler, filled it with water, brought it to Sri Ramakrishna and offered it to him. Sri Ramakrishna’s body reacted – his hand would not go to touch the tumbler. Some devotee who understood the situation, who knew the secret, immediately took that same tumbler from that friend’s elder brother’s hand, went inside, washed it

thoroughly, and filled from the same pot of water, and brought it and gave. This time, Sri Ramakrishna had no difficulty. Narendra was a witness to this incident. He thought, I would like to go to the bottom of the thing. So, instead of Sri Ramakrishna's earnest request, "Sir! I will come later on. You please proceed". And after Sri Ramakrishna left for Dakshineswar, he took his friend aside and asked, "What is the matter with your elder brother? You please tell me". And his friend told him, "How can I tell something bad about my own elder brother?" This man, he pretends to be a Vaishnava, there was a Tulasi mala around his neck and he does Harinama also, but he is leading secretly an immoral life. Now, Narendra's eyes opened. Sri Ramakrishna did not know either about his friend or his elder brother but still his body was so pure, just as, even while we are sleeping, if some bit of live charcoal touches our body, how instinctively we react, so that way Sri Ramakrishna had reacted to impurity. And only when we come across some people who have this kind of purity, can we really have a little bit of understanding of what real purity is. This is the reason. Sri Ramakrishna's love knew no bounds, but his body is limited, it will be affected, and its deterioration will come if impure people go on touching. That is the reason, not because he hated or looked down.

In fact, Sri Ramakrishna's view about men and women, especially about women, they are all manifestations of his own what he used to call, Divine Mother. He worshipped Holy Mother's feet himself, at the height of his youth. I will not go into the details but those who would like to know the real purity of Sri Ramakrishna must study his tantric practices under the guidance of Bhairavi Brahmani. When one day, he was forced to sit in the lap of a beautiful young naked woman and do Japa. And Sri Ramakrishna shuddered at that thought but the Divine Mother made him do that and he was completely oblivious of the external world and he soon merged in meditation. So, even though we do not manifestly see any impurity, and for that matter of fact, even purity, we have to be extremely careful about some worldly people whose worldliness can contaminate others. I would like just to add a very short note, we are all prone to the influence of either purity or impurity. That is the reason why we should completely avoid the company of unholy people and actively cultivate, assiduously, consciously cultivate the company of good people (Satsanga). That was the topic we discussed in our last class.

So, today's Gospel class, I am going to go into some detail about this Third Commandment of Sri Ramakrishna. Concluding what we discussed about Satsanga in our last class, there is a Sanskrit verse that says, even a moment's association with holy becomes a boat which takes one across the sea of transmigration.

**Kshanamapi sajjana sangatireka bhavati bhavarnava tarane nauka**

Even one moment's association can transform one's life. The life of Bhavahari Baba proves conclusively. A thief entered into Bhavahari Baba's room to steal. And Bhavahari Baba happened to wake up and the thief got frightened and ran out; Bhavahari Baba, in a moment, understood the whole thing, took up the bundle which

the thief had already made, ran after him, put it at his feet and he told, “Lord! Pardon me for interrupting your work!!”. What a marvelous statement. “O Lord, Rama! You wanted to take things belonging to yourself but unnecessarily of course, unconsciously, I woke up and I interrupted your work. Everything belongs to you. This whole world belongs to you. I also belong to you. And these utensils you wanted to take, they are not mine, they are yours. So, please take them”. That momentary association made that thief hate his own, abhor his own life. He must have thought (we do not know the details), “What a filthy life I am leading! Here is a person who is considering me as Rama himself when I know I am a terrible thief”. So, that moment he renounced this world, went to North India, took up Sannyasa, became one of the most respected Sannyasins whom Swami Vivekananda happened to meet, made pranams, enquired how the conversion came and he himself narrated his autobiography. That is how a momentary association with the holy can help us. That is why Sri Ramakrishna’s second commandment is – Always cultivate holy company. Satsanga. And as I mentioned earlier, it does not mean only people; people are of course, the best conveyor of God’s spirituality. But books, pilgrimages, etc. I would even include what we call, hospices. All our devotees to increase their dispassion, from now and then, must visit hospices where people are sure to die but they are not in a hospital, they are specially taken care of. These hospices are popular especially in western countries. If you really visit them, awakening is sure to come seeing their miserable condition. Even though they are provided with so many things, but mentally they have not cultivated the capacity to use their time and be happy by themselves, which brings us to our subject for today which is the Third commandment of Sri Ramakrishna, which is Solitude. What is Solitude? And how solitude should be practiced? What is its benefit, etc. First, let me read a little bit from the Gospel.

*The mind cannot dwell on God if it is immersed day and night in worldliness, in worldly duties and responsibilities. It is most necessary to go into solitude now and then and think of God. To fix mind on God is very difficult in the beginning unless one practices meditation in solitude. When a tree is young, it should be fenced all around. Otherwise, it may be destroyed by cattle.*

A beautiful analogy – when a tree in the state of a plant, there must a hedge, and within the hedge the plant is safe to grow without being damaged or destroyed. So, that fencing around, not allowing external obstacles, forces which are too strong for us to resist at this stage of our development, is called real solitude. Sri Ramakrishna continues...

*To meditate, you should withdraw within yourself or retire to a secluded corner or to the forest. How solitude can be created in order to meditate? Sri Ramakrishna’s phraseology in Bengali – **Bane Kane Mane**. Bane means ‘in a forest’, Kane means ‘in a corner’, Mane means ‘in the mind itself’. What does he mean? If you have a good fortune to have a beautiful spot outside which is solitary, where there is very little disturbance, then retire there, that would be best option for anybody to practice this*

solitude. If it is not possible for whatever reason, then find out in your house, the quietest corner. Often unfortunately, many Hindus have puja rooms. And these puja rooms invariably, are located between the kitchen and the toilet, wherefrom most horrible sounds will be coming from both sides. But it may be possible to find out the best spot possible, probably a small room, where you close it, sit down, and do the best to protect yourself from all disturbances and that is called a Corner. A corner does not mean a corner of a room, corner means the quietest spot which gives the least bit of sounds compared to other places. But if that is also not possible; and that is not possible for most of us because we are living in high-raised buildings and only apartments, etc. then the only option is “man me”, in the mind. Find out a spot, imagine a beautiful solitary place and imagination can go a long, long way in creating a beautiful atmosphere. Imagine you are on the top of a huge mountain, and below, a huge ocean is there and it is night, full moonlit night and the whole place is absolutely quiet except for the chirping of some crickets or a few birds and contemplating the heaven studded with brilliant stars above and the vast ocean below and the most beautiful surroundings of the mountain or hill, and you are alone with the Divine Lord, no one else. He is in front of you. You are in front of him. Or you are sitting in his lap. Or it may be the Divine Mother. And this imagination can go a long way to help us even amidst these disturbing noises that are emanating from outside. I can tell you something very important here – At first, this imagination seems to be unrealistic. How can I stop all the noises coming from outside? But you see, practice this, and slowly as the mind gets absorbed, a person can be so much merged in that thought that even the voice of thunder cannot really disturb. Of course, we are far away from that situation. But gradually, slowly we have to acquire that habit. This is one of the techniques that Patanjali says, “Meditate imagining a beautiful spot which appeals to you”. What I have given you is from my own experience. But suppose you have visited some beautiful spot which captivated your mind, you can substitute there and sit there mentally, and actually you are there mentally. How come? I will give the analogy of dream. Suppose you are here in Bangalore; you go to bed. And you can imagine that you are on Mt. Everest in your dream. If it is possible in dream, that is also nothing but very strong imagination. So, consciously also, it is possible to make imagination. It will take a long time and it also requires strong power of imagination and will-power. But this is the best way to think about God and that actually is the meaning of Solitude. So, now we are able to deal with what is real solitude. Revd. Yatiswarananda Maharaj has this comment to pass – *The real solitude is mental. Outside solitude helps only in creating mental solitude in the beginner. If we are not able to have inner solitude, we are not very much benefited by outward solitude.*

But mind you, the outward solitude if we are sincere, can create the inward solitude. So, what is solitude? Maharaj continues...

*Real solitude consists in realizing the One without a second who is within. In other words, to know that I am the Atman is real solitude. In the first stage of Sadhana, one cannot do without strict regularity in Japam and meditation in solitude. We must be alone at least*

*during a certain time of the day. This is very very essential. Every day try to have a dip into this eternal inner ocean of bliss and plenitude and freedom. The whole life then becomes worth living. Just as sleep is essential for the health of this body, this inner solitude is necessary for the health of the soul. Meditation means coming in touch with the cosmic power knowingly, consciously, purposefully, and real meditation always replenishes the body and the soul. Disconnect yourself from your environment. Unless you put up the hedge you can never grow. A beginner cannot grow without a hedge. There are always hurricanes and cyclones and there are goats who come and eat the tender plants. The aspirant should always rise to higher planes of thought. Lower planes at this stage of our development are real to us. But they are not safe for us. Real but not safe for us. So, we should make it a point never to dwell on the lower planes. If we do, we are bound to have a nasty fall and may ruin our whole spiritual life for good. We should protect ourselves from outside dangers. We must know how to strike root in the soil of reality and dive deep into the very depth of our own soul. This fencing in may be a temporary glass case existence and you may not like the idea because you do not understand but it is necessary for all who really want to advance. We must first develop strength and later, we can stand heat and cold, hurricanes and cyclones, and goats without being affected.*

This is what Revd. Swami Yatiswarananda Maharaj has something to say. So, I repeat the statement – First, we must develop strength and later on, we can get rid of this hedge and then we can stand heat and cold, means the ups and downs of life, hurricanes and cyclones – catastrophic events like the death of somebody, the betrayal of somebody, losing of the job upon which our whole family depends, sudden accidents that can come, all these terribly tragic events that can happen are categorized under ‘Hurricanes and Cyclones’ and goats, what are the goats? Kama, Krodha, Lobha, Moha, Mada, Matsarya – these are of course, ferocious wild goats but there are also domesticated goats. What are the domesticated goats? Some friend comes to you and says, “Ah! I could not do without seeing you”. Somebody else comes and addresses you with Darling, Honey, and all these beautiful words, these are the real goats which do the real damage because you can resist enemies and try to forget them but you can never get out of the clutches of Mahamaya that comes in the form of such loving family members, parents, children and friends, etc. So, this is what Revd. Maharaj means.

Now, we will go a little deep into this concept of Solitude which is Sri Ramakrishna’s third commandment. This is a commandment, do not forget it. If we do not practice, we will be the persons who lose everything. Now incidentally, this Corona disease has made us somehow, a little bit of, enter into that solitude. Previously, people were forced to go out and they can mix with people, talk, shop, but now, everyone is mostly confined for two to three months. And people have not developed real capacity to spend their time and use the time in a better way. Strangely, even companies like the Mobile services or libraries, they are offering free books for people to read, and more entertainment, more bandwidth so that people will not die of sheer boredom. And



actually, from worldly point of view, it is most damaging. Why is it damaging? We will discuss a little bit further on.

The tradition of retiring into solitude is immemorial. Vedanta – Hinduism advocates what we call as a stage of life, this solitude. Where does it do it? After leading a fruitful righteous Grihastha dharma (Householder's life). Every Hindu is advocated, commanded to enter into the third stage of life. What is it called? Vanaprastha Ashrama. What is Vanaprastha Ashrama? Retire because your responsibilities have been done, discharged properly, your children have grown up, you do not need to poke your nose or your fingers into that. Now, look forward and say what is going to be my future life? How am I going to go to my darling God? What is the best way? This capacity to withdraw into solitude, (What is solitude? Total dependence upon God and total independence from everything else is called Solitude) and Solitude is the very inner meaning of Vanaprastha Ashrama. Of course, in the olden days, 'Vana' means forest. Forest does not mean a place full of tigers and lions, and dangerous place. Here, Vana means a place full of natural silence, solitude where we can commune with God without much disturbance. That is the meaning of 'Vana'. In that sense, we all have to practice. The more we practice, really the more we will be happier people. Sri Ramakrishna himself is a great exemplary for this attitude. As soon as his temple duties were over, Sri Ramakrishna would retire into the surrounding jungle to practice meditation. After the passing of Sri Ramakrishna, most of his disciples wandered off to the Himalayas and to various other holy places to perform hard austerities. Many early Christian holy men took to the deserts and engaged themselves in the life of unceasing prayer and contemplation. That is how early Christian people gave hundreds of the greatest monks, they were known famously as Desert Monks (Monks who prefer desert). What is a desert? Desert is a place far away from the rumble and grumble of city life where people can be alone and always with God.

Now, I am going to tell you the most wonderful story; you might have heard from my previous lectures, but it is worth repeating a thousand times. One of the greatest saints, in fact, the second Desert Father he was called; the second monk who was so well known later on. His name was St. Anthony the Great. Very briefly I will tell you, those who are interested please note down – St. Anthony the Great. He was the second great Sannyasin of the monastic tradition started in the late third century A.D. They were all Christians following the teachings of Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ's advice was, if you have developed sufficient discrimination and as a result, dispassion, give up the world, take up my cross and follow me. 'Give up the world, take up my cross and follow me' meaning you enter either into Vanaprastha Ashrama, even better become a monk. And thousands of people have followed it. What did they do? They took up to a life, no formal Sannyasa, but internally they went into the most solitary places - Egyptian mountains, Egyptian deserts and there they built monasteries and their name and fame spread and later on, attracted thousands of disciples, sincere people, and out of whom many had become very great people. There was a village, it was a Christian village, there was a wealthy family, and the parents died; they had a

son and a daughter and the name of the son was Anthony and like devout Christians, they used to attend Sunday service. There was an old priest, he used to hold sermons. So that is how every Sunday a formal observation of Christian religion, etc. like our devotees go to temples, etc. But this man's samskaras must have developed by that time. So, one Sunday he went, and he heard the priest take up the story of Jesus Christ. There was an incident – a rich young man came to him and said, “Master, what shall I do in order to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven?” Remember, Kingdom of Heaven is not Swargaloka but what we call Moksha, the equivalent of Liberation, Mukti, Moksha. That is called a Christian's Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus Christ said, “Why? Have you not heard your ancestors; did they not teach you that you must observe the Ten Commandments of Moses?” The young man replied, “Yes, I have been observing them since my childhood”. Jesus Christ said, “If that be so, then go back, sell your properties, distribute it among the poor, take up the cross and follow me”. Meaning, become a monk like myself. The young man went away sadly, then Christ remarked, “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for rich people to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven”. That was the subject matter of the weekly sermon. The old priest must have spoken on the same theme many times in the past. But that did not bring about any what we call Conversion in anybody. This particular Sunday, the young man Anthony with his sister went there, and somehow those words, because he was ready, they entered into his mind, transformed him completely. He came from the Church to home, sold all his property, sent his sister to a convent, himself distributed all the wealth to the poor, took up a few things to lead a solitary life and went into the Egyptian deserts. Now, there are some mountains, and those mountains have wonderful caves. And many of these caves could not be accessed; there was no route. They are on the sheer mountain cliffs. The only way is, they choose one of these caves and the villagers lower them through a basket. And once they enter, unless they are sick, there is no way for them to go out. So, this Anthony expressed his desire, he entered into a kind of contract with one of the villagers (I will tell you why?), and he was lowered into a cave which he thought was suitable, and there he started praying. But how do they spend the whole day? This young man had learnt the art of weaving mats. Some kind of leaves, they make baskets, mats, etc. and they believed that whole day time they have to labor hard in doing some physical work, and nights, etc. is exclusively to be devoted to God. But of course, while weaving, doing work also, they go on chanting the name of the Lord and especially, praying. Prayer is one of the greatest Sadhanas, Spiritual Sadhana in Christian life. Whereas for Hindus and Buddhists, it became more of contemplation and meditation. Of course, for devotees, it is Japa of their IshTa mantra. So, this St. Anthony, he was supplied with all the necessary raw materials. Whole day, he used to do the weaving and once in a week, the villager comes, and he lowers the basket with sufficient bread and water for the whole week. And this person, whatever he made ready, mats and baskets, etc. he would put the same into the basket. So, in exchange he would supply him with whatever is necessary. So, joyfully, this young man went on praying. But something strange happened. And that happens only in solitude. That is why people are

frightened of solitude. After a few days, as soon as it was sunset, suddenly all the women whom he used to see in his village, young women cackling, laughing, joking, walking voluptuously, seductively, and going and fetching water, going to the well, coming back from the well, you know the villagers have peculiar ways of exhibiting themselves, both men and women. So, this young man must have seen many of those women but for some reason, he was not at all attracted to them at that time. But those young women who were in his memory assumed extraordinarily beautiful proportions, what we call the Divine damsels, every woman appeared like a divine damsel, so attractive, irresistibly attractive but Anthony knew these are the tricks of the Devils. And I have to caution you, what they used to call Devils, the Christian Desert fathers used to call devils, is what modern psychology calls our unconscious impulses. We might suppress them for some time but invariably, they will come for, at the appropriate time, especially when we are with ourselves; nothing else to distract us. Now, there is something very important for us to understand. Many devotees ask the question, “Swamiji, when we are busy with our worldly duties, we can take God’s name joyfully. The mind does it very nicely, naturally, automatically, without much effort or resistance. But as you advise us, the moment we give up all activities, sit, at that time, all unwanted thoughts with tremendous force come and disturb us. How come?” The answer is very simple – “When you are engaged with other activities, naturally those activities occupy a lot of our mind. So, all these devils, I am talking about bad samskaras, unspiritual samskaras, they peep in and say, our master / our friend is very busy, this is not the time to speak with him face to face. As soon as we are alone giving up everything, and they enter into the doors without our permission. Now, this man is not doing anything, this is the right time for us and to have face to face talk. The fact is, until we develop sufficient concentration in our solitude, it is not possible to become idle. That is why it is aptly said, an idle brain is a devil’s workshop. All the devils come here”. Coming back to our story... Anthony pacified; the more these appearances became so attractive, luscious, seductive, Anthony increased his prayer because he was a great spiritual aspirant. “O Lord! Please protect me!” The moment his mind turned towards prayer, immediately all the damsels disappeared, in their places appeared ferocious devils glaring at him, gnashing their teeth, they assaulted him left and right, practically whole night, he used to pass like that. Of course, the modern psychology tells that it is a struggle of the unconscious with the conscious. The conscious is filled with the thoughts of God, but the unconscious accumulated over a number of births, innumerable births, is now coming and is not allowing us to move forward. This is absolutely true because Sadhana means war. War means between the evil samskaras means worldly samskaras and the spiritual samskaras. And here also, we have to understand one thing. Evil samskaras do not mean only the thoughts of murdering or raping or killing or such damaging things. Even the ordinary attachment, this is my mother, this is my child, this is my husband, this is my wife, very ordinary attachments, they are the greatest obstructions to our spiritual life. Whatever it be, this Anthony never ceased taking surrender in God, praying for forty years, and after forty years, all the tremors of his unconscious were

completely overcome. His mind became absolutely pure; no other thought excepting the thought of God came and his face shone like a knower of Brahman and other people could recognize it. Like this, thousands of people revered him as the greatest Saint, and this was the story of St. Anthony the great. Now, why did I mention? Because of one single reason – **Solitude is absolutely necessary for all of us.** So, that is the subject we are dealing with. Sri Ramakrishna referring how our seers, Vedic Rishis, what type of life they used to lead, he is remarking and he must be knowing how they led because he is the incarnation of God, he is the God who bestowed His grace upon these Rishis and he knew they deserved it, because of the type of life they led. So, what was he saying?

*The Rishis of the old attained the knowledge of Brahman. One cannot have this so long as there is slightest trace of worldliness. How hard the Rishis labored! Early in the morning, they would go away from the hermitage, and would spend the whole day in solitude, meditating on Brahman. At night, they would return to the hermitage, and eat a little fruit or roots. They kept their minds aloof from the object of sight, hearing, touch, and other things of worldly nature. Only thus, did they realize Brahman as their own inner consciousness.*

We may not become, we are not Rishis, we have not the capacity to lead that kind of life. But remember this, if we want to realize God, have Darshana of God, we have to follow exactly their footsteps, may not be in this life, may be in another one crore lives, but inevitably when we approach God, this is what happens. We have to cut ourselves from all attachments and everything including our body and mind and only be attached to God. But I am not saying that running away from home, what I am telling is, it is a purely the spiritual attitude of the mind, you can live with everybody but we have to say, nobody belongs to me, I do not belong to anyone. So, this is from a religious point of view.

Religion apart, Solitude is a need felt in all thoughtful occasions. Nobody has become great without adopting solitude. Solitude means to be with oneself, to think deeply and with concentration. So, great writers, great scientists, great artists, anyone whom we can recollect as great, all labor hard and in solitude. As soon as we think about solitude, the first thing that comes to our mind is a place which has the least disturbance. No people, no sounds, no duties, no responsibilities, and above all, no worries, or anxieties. Relatively speaking, a place which affords us a sense of restfulness and freedom. Solitude is a place where we can afford to be ourselves. True solitude is to live for God, to live in God. Solitude is a way of living totally dependent upon God. If one goes to a lonely spot with an abundance of provisions, it does not become a solitary life, it turns out to be a pleasant picnic. Solitude is a state of mind devoid of imaginations and thoughts and memories excepting that of God. Now, a specific word, Sri Ramakrishna used was *Nirjanastan* – a place where there are no people. Of course, he is not referring merely to the absence of people, primarily he is indicating that one should give up dependence on any person or a thing except God. I

will just add a short note on this before I end this class. Sri Ramakrishna said, “maja maje nirjana stane jao” Now and then, whenever you can afford, go to a solitary place. The word he used was **Nirjana**. Jana means person(s), people; Nirjana means no people. What he meant is not that. If you go to a solitary place in a solitary cave but carry your mobile phone, your whole world is more than with you. That is not what he meant. What he meant is, in this world a few people can help us physically, they can take away a bit of our burden, they can provide us food, some comfort, speak with us nicely and become friends with us. Beyond this, nobody can do a single thing for us. We have to sleep, we have to eat, we have to digest, we have to take medicine, we have to worry for ourselves, everything we have to do for our own selves. Even a husband and wife, who sleep side by side, their sleep is different, their dreams are different, everything is different. So, what Sri Ramakrishna meant is, in spiritual life, do not depend upon anybody. Total dependence upon God, that is called Nirjana. As I mentioned in earlier classes, “O Lord! Excepting you, there is nobody who can help me intellectually, physically, morally, or spiritually. The only person who can be depended upon, is You”. Why? Because everyone is bound. One bound person cannot help another person become free. Only a free person can help a bound person to become free. And the only, completely totally free person is God. So, **Nirjanastan** means now and then, go into solitude and you have to do certain things there. But one of the most important things is pray intensely, do you japa, meditation intensely. But to have this firm conviction, excepting God nobody can help me, excepting God nobody can save me. That is the third condition of Saranagati, excepting Ishwara nobody can save us. This beautiful concept and other ideas about Solitude, we will discuss in our future class.

**Om Jananim Sāradam devim Rāmakrishnam jagadgurum |**

**Pādapadme tayoh shritvā pranamāmi muhurmuḥuḥ ||**

**May Sri Rāmakrishna, Holy Mother and Swāmi Vivekānanda bless us all with Bhakti.**