

GOSPEL OF SRI RĀMAKRISHNA - PART 11

SWĀMI DAYATMANANDA

ॐ जननीं सारदां देवीं रामकृष्णं जगद्गुरुम् ।

पादपद्मे तयोः श्रित्वा प्रणमामि मुहुर्मुहुः ॥

Jananim Sāradam devam 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 iḍitam kalmaṣāpaham ।

śravaṇa-maṅgalaṁ śrīmad ātataṁ

Before we continue our Kathamrita class. I would like to deal with 2 questions that were raised by our devotees.

Questions:

The first is

Q1: What are moral values? Are they true across time, people and places?

Next

Q2: Are they subjective or objective?

Very beautiful question; very fundamental question which we all have to deal. First of all, what is morality?

Morality:

The first meaning in Sanskrit, Morality is called “*Dharma*”. The first meaning of Dharma is my true nature and to live in accordance with my true nature. A human

being has to be aware that he is a human being and not an animal. A father and mother have to be aware they are father and mother; a child has to be aware he is a child; etc. etc.

The second meaning of Dharma or Morality is: Each one of us, according to our division, according to our position in life, *Varna dharma*, *Ashram dharma*, to understand where I am, what I am, what is my place in society and how I should discharge my duties so that I can grow spiritually. That is also the second meaning of Dharma.

Then, is this Dharma, is it Universal? That means it applies past, present, future, and to everybody, at all places? Yes, there is a Dharma called subjective Dharma, *vyaktigata-dharma*, and there is an objective dharma. I will illustrate it soon. We are all living in society. Whenever a person starts living with a second; it could be other person, animal, a tree, a mountain, a river, in other words nature; living or non-living; there is a relationship. We are related. We are part of the whole. If I am doing injury to anything, whether it is a river, mountain, a bird, animal etc., we are truly harming ourselves.

This is the latest discovery of the scientist called Holistic attitude. Looking upon this whole world as one-unit, unified unit, and not as separate parts having no relationship with each other. So, each one of us, like a small part of a machine you can understand if one small part of a clock or car or airplane fails, the whole machine fails and many times leads to disaster. Something happens to each one of us. This is the universal Dharma. So that is the - how to adjust ourselves, understand that we are part of the whole and if we do some good to others, we are doing good to others and to myself. By doing harm to others, I am doing harm to myself. This is what so classically recaptured.

Once a religious teacher was asked “can you teach your religion in a very short period of time?” He said I will tell you in 1 min. “Do unto others what you wish others to do unto you. And do not do unto others what you do not wish others to do to you.” A great truth compressed in such a beautiful sentence because we and the others – there is no such thing, no division, no separation. We are part of the whole Either we all go up or we all go down. So, what a great, moral value. Again, I repeat- whatever does good to others is also doing to do good to me and whatever harms me or others also harms me and others. This is the essence of all Morality.

Practically, what are the moral values? There are great moral values beautifully brought out by Patanjali Yogi in the Yoga Shastra. All of you are familiar with it. They are called *Yamas* and *Niyamas*.

- i. *Ahimsa* -do not injure,
- ii. *Satya* – do not tell lie but speak truth,
- iii. *Brahmacharya* – have self-control, then
- iv. *Astheya* – means to steal; Do not steal anything belonging to anybody especially that which is belonging to God. *Isavasya Upanishad* tells us the whole universe belongs to God. It is God. If we look upon the whole thing as manifestation of God, we will be blessed and others also will be blessed. So,
- v. *Aparigraha* – take what is necessary. Do not take what you do not need. That means do not accumulate. On the other side, side of the coin, if we have to receive something, you must give atleast equivalent to it if not more. In what form? It could be in any form. If somebody gives money and I don't have to payback, pray for them, wish them well and prayer is

a very powerful gift we can give to anybody. So, do Japa if you don't have. Somebody helps you with money, you don't have money to give, give knowledge or give knowledge to somebody else. Receive from somebody and give to somebody. And if you don't have knowledge then help others who are spreading knowledge.

So, these are the 5 what we call getting rid of negative qualities harming, lying, accumulating, receiving without repaying and not having self-control. Now get rid of these negative qualities and acquire positive qualities and then only we can reinforce positive qualities and move forward. And the other 5 are called Spiritual qualities which are very positive.

- i. *Soucha*,
- ii. *Santosha*,
- iii. *Tapah*,
- iv. *Swadhyaya* and finally
- v. *Ishwara Pranidhana*.

I think I don't need to elaborate. You must have studied them very elaborately. So, these are the moral values.

Last Q of the part of the first Question Q1:

Are moral values subjective or objective?

Answer: They are both so long as we are even with something outside even if it is inert earth. We are advised to consider the earth as *BhumiMata*, water as *Varuna deva*, *Agni deva*, *Vayu devata*, *Akash devata*, *Surya devata*... everything what we call nature is nothing but manifestation of God. We have come manifested from this nature we are sustained by this nature and we go back. We, means, the bodies and minds go back to this nature.

So, so long as we are with something, somebody, some object, that is called objective dharma. We have to take into consideration the other object and behave righteously; dharmic way.

(7:36)

What is subjective morality?

Suppose I am absolutely alone and I am not doing any harm to anybody, neither any good to anybody. But I can do both harm and good to myself. For example: I am alone. There is nobody. Plenty of food. I can be a glutton. I can be lazy. I can be sleeping. I can make glib etc. Because there is nobody to watch me. So, anything that we do to harm ourselves to keep ourselves at a distance from God, that is called subjective morality.

There will come a time when we progress in spiritual life. We are not much concerned about objective morality. We are concerned only with subjective morality. We are left with our own conscience. And that is the subject of solitude also.

So, this is the answer. These moral values are even you yourself are subjective also and we are all part of the same fabric which is God. And the 5 Yamas and 5 Niyamas are these universal moral values applicable across past, present and future; across whether it is East, West, South or North, above or below... anywhere. This is the brief reply to that.

(8:58)

Second Question Q2:

In the Gospel Sri Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna talks about Brahman and the Primal Energy. The Sanskrit word is Shakti. Are Shakti and Brahman one and the same? What is the answer?

Answer: Yes and No. What do I mean? Yes, they are both exactly the same thing. Let me give a small illustration. There is an actor and he is a very skilled actor. He can take roles as a hero or as a villain. Usually hero means good person, villain means bad person. Not necessarily. But that is our perception has come to be. So, if he acts in both, the question is: Is he the same person, the good person and bad person, Or not? It is the same person, same reality, same truth. Brahman and Shakti .. Yes, they are absolutely one and the same but Brahman is acting in 2 roles. When Brahman, acts as something, then it is called Shakti. Brahman for example is manifesting in the form of the whole universe and then we call Brahman not as pure Brahman but Shakti. But when the same Brahman is viewed through our minds without any activity, and what is Brahman's activity? Creation, sustenance and dissolution. *Srishti, Sthiti, Laya or Samhara* or Pralaya. This word Laya brings the word Pralaya When Brahman seems to be acting, the name given is Shakti because action requires energy. Energy and Intelligence. And the highest energy, universal energy, universal consciousness, intelligence, knowledge is called Shakti. And the whole universe, this Shakti is divided because living and non-living everything is moving only. Here a question may come. How do we say a table which is here, it is moving? Because, if it doing something then it needs energy, it needs time and it needs space to do something. But if we examine the same table with a very powerful microscope, electronic microscope, there is nothing called static or nothing called sthiti. Every atom in that table is moving at mind-boggling velocity, at the speed of light and whatever moves that is energy. To move there must be space. A and to move from point A to point B space is necessary. So, Brahman and Shakti are 2 names. The highest reality viewed without any activity of Srishti, Sthiti, Laya is Brahman and Sri Ramakrishna calls the manifestation of this world as Shakti or the Divine Mother. So, the answer is they are the same in 2 different roles. With activity and without any activity. So, the answer is yes, they are the same but from the viewpoint of different roles they are quite separate. This is what we need to understand.

So, with this I think I have answered both the questions.

Now we move on to our subject: Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.

(12:25)

Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna:

In our last class, we were discussing about **solitude**. Sri Ramakrishna's 2nd commandment of sadhana. 1st commandment is to realize God, to love God and to remember Him always, to sing His names and glories that is the only goal of life. That is the *Purushartha; Moksha*. And within that Moksha, Dharma, Artha, Kama are also included which we discussed just now as an answer to the 1st question. Then the 4 commandments are there; 4 different paths. All unified, harmonized. 2nd commandment is to cultivate *Satsanga*; we discussed about it. Cultivate Holy company in form of persons, places, books, scriptures, or bhajans etc. 2nd commandment is now and then go into solitude and think of God all the time. That's what we have been discussing and we have reached midway almost. We will continue. In our last class, I think I narrated how in after 365AD, a group of great spiritual aspirants following the teachings of Jesus Christ chose desert to go and dwell. 1st person was St Paul and 2nd person was St Anthony-the-Great. Very briefly I narrated that's what I remember. The

story of St Anthony the Great who started this tradition of the monks who choose solitude and went on praying to God, repeating God's name. Daytime they labor etc. After 40 years this great soul had attained illumination, had the vision of Jesus Christ. Like anyone of us, and then he became a great teacher. And thousands of people renounced following his advice and teachings. Even today, desert fathers' tradition is continuing though we may not see that many people as it happened at that time. Now we will continue on quoting from Sri Ramakrishna i.e., from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna is now advising us on how to practice solitude and in that connection, He was citing the life of our ancient Rishis. Great Rishis. We must always remember, every Hindu must remember, that we are the children of the Rishis. Rishis were also called Aryas. We are the children of Aryas. That is why we are all Aryas meaning who leads a very spiritual and moral life. Sri Ramakrishna referring to the style of life these great Rishis used to follow is telling and I am quoting from him.

- i. *"The Rishis of the old attained the knowledge of Brahman."* That is the first thing. They were all Brahmajnanis.
- ii. *"One cannot have this so long as there is the slightest trace of worldliness."* This is the second point.

There is a conflict, a tension, between spiritual life and worldly life. They are like two opposite directions. If we are moving towards the west, the east falls far behind. But if we were moving towards east, symbolically towards God, towards the rising sun then we are called Spiritual people. If there is slightest trace of worldliness in such a person, it is impossible to progress in spiritual life. But as we stand, slowly, slowly we have to do *sadhana*.

(16:14)

Sadhana:

Sadhana means slowly overcoming our worldly tendencies and acquiring spiritual tendencies. So, these are the 2 points. All the Rishis were Brahmajnanis. If we follow in their footsteps, we have to eliminate the worldliness. Here one particular caution has to be maintained. When we say eliminate all worldly trace, it doesn't mean, we are not in this world. All the Rishis were in the world. Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda; they were all in the world only. Nobody can go outside this world. Sri Ramakrishna used to tell *"The boat can be in the water but water should not be in the boat."* We can be in the world but worldliness should not be within us. This is what he is telling now; he is stressing how they used to live, how they used to conduct their day-to-day affairs.

(17:12)

Solitude:

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, eat a little fruit or roots. They kept their minds aloof from sight, hearing, touch, and other things of the worldly nature. Only thus, did they realize Brahman as their own inner consciousness.

Our goal is to imitate our Rishis because they were our ancestors and that is how we trace our lineage; gotra, I belong to *Vishamitra* gotra or *Gautama* gotra, *Bharadwaj* gotra, *Atreyi* gotra, *Vashishta* gotra etc. etc.

Now religion apart, solitude is a need felt in all thoughtful vocations. Great writers, scientists, artists all labor hard in solitude. Solitude and greatness practically

go together. Swami Vivekananda used to say quoting the Upanishads: A great mountain as if *dhayetiva* it is merged in meditation. so still it is. A great river completely absorbed in its own life-spreading-waters without thinking anything, exuding its goodness giving life to everybody completely absorbed in doing good. So also, nature; every part of it.

So, a person is great proportionate to the amount of stillness he attains. That stillness is called solitude. That stillness can be achieved only through meditation and through no other way. And meditation will become fruitful, successful only as we cultivate solitude.

It also means, I maybe in the midst of thousands of people but I will feel that I am alone, only God is with me and really, speaking we may be surrounded by people but nobody can help us as we discussed earlier. Only God can help us. Nobody belongs to us, only God belongs to us. To keep this truth in the mind and behave accordingly is called the practice of solitude even in the midst of big market, bustling market.

Swami Vivekananda who has written the most marvelous book on Karma Yoga practically ends the chapter with a beautiful story from the Mahabharata. Probably most of you recognize the story of the holy butcher; spiritual butcher, *Dharma-Vyadha*; and the brahmana. And the essence of it is: one can be a great *tapasvi*, ascetic. No need to go to a forest but in the mind - I and God, nobody else. While discharging duties to keep that attitude: God alone is real, God alone is True, God alone is my dearest and nearest. Everything else comes and goes which is a practical experience of all of us. That is called true solitude of the mind. That means it is the state of knowledge. That in this world only God exists.

So, as soon as we think of solitude, a first thing that comes to our mind is a place which has the least disturbance. No people, no sounds, no duties and responsibilities. In a way it is true but it is not really true. Why? Because if we go to a most solitary place, but we are incapable of thinking of God. We keep thinking only, brooding only, remembering only all the worldly relationship, our losses and gains, our pleasures and sufferings. that is no solitude at all. That is the greatest worldliness. So, what is Solitude?

Solitude is a place where we can afford to be ourselves. So, Solitude is to live for God, with God, In God.

Solitude is a way of living. Totally dependent on God. If one goes to a lonely spot with an abundance of provisions or even a mobile phone it doesn't become a solitary life but turns out to be a very pleasant picnic. Solitude is a state of mind, devoid of imaginations, thoughts and memories excepting that of God. In solitude only we must think of God, imagine of God, everything to do with God and not any work. Now, I have already explained in our past classes, Sri Ramakrishna used the word: "*majhe-majhe nirjana sthane jabe*". Now and then go to a solitary place. *Nirjanata* means where there are no *Janata* or people. But that is superficial meaning. The real meaning is: in this world, surely there is nobody. Even if they love you also, they are all helpless. Who can help you in this world? Only one person can help; one being can help and that is God, that is Guru, and nobody else. Sri Ramakrishna says" if you desire to live in this world unattached, you should first practice devotion in solitude for some time. Maybe one year, 6 months, a month or atleast a few days. During this period of retirement, you should constantly meditate upon God and pray to Him for divine love. You should think there is nothing in the world which

you may call your own. Those who you consider your own, are sure to pass away someday or other. God alone is really your own, He is your all in all.

(23:13)

Silence:

Next what is Silence? Silence is the very heart of Solitude. Silence is not making the mind empty. In Sanskrit we call it “*Mouna*”. Observance of Mouna. Specially on certain holy days like Ekadashi. We are supposed to fast and observe also *mouna*. What is Mouna? It is not making the mind empty. Nobody can make the mind empty. It is the art of emptying the mind of all worldly thoughts and slowly filling it with spiritual thoughts. Thoughts of God.

Next very important point. What does solitude really do? It is the confronting of oneself. In solitude one is forced to confront oneself. For many, this is most painful. What we call, if a person says “I am bored”, he is telling a great truth without understanding what he is meaning. What he is telling in “I am bored” is you are alone, there is nothing to entertain you, or engage you in other ways. Plainly speaking what you are telling yourself is “I am the most undesirable person in this world. I cannot stand my own sight. I am the greatest bore in this whole world”. Because If I am not the bore, then I should be very, very, happy with myself. We always go to people or places which give us the greatest happiness. If happiness doesn’t come with our own presence, that is a sure indication that there is something terribly lacking. Lack of character. Because we have never developed the art of being with ourselves facing ourselves. There are certain things, which we can do when we are facing ourselves. So, he is telling this is a most painful condition. Man does everything to escape this painful condition. Erich Fromm whom I am going to quote very soon used to tell something most valuable. He has written a most beautiful book titled: ‘Escape from freedom’. Man has created machines so that he can have lot of time on his hands. Then he found that he is incapable of using that time. Then he invented further machines to kill that available time. A most precious truth we should keep in our minds.

In solitude, one is forced to confront oneself. One can easily know one’s capacity, weaknesses, what thoughts are dominating our mind; etc. and how much time you are capable of keeping silent and of thinking of God. This answer: how much we are capable of Loving God comes only when we are absolutely left to our own devices. Then, there is another something.
(26:09)

Concentration:

Concentration and solitude are very intimately connected. If a person’s mind is roaming, that means he is not living in solitude. When a person’s mind is concentrated and to the extent it is concentrated, that is the time when the person is truly capable of concentrating. So, solitude and concentration go together. If we want to have solitude, we must have concentration. And if we wish to have concentration, we must have solitude.

This is the subject we have discussed very briefly. Solitude is a great help in acquiring concentration. But one must go into solitude to attain this divine love. Sri Ramakrishna is telling: “To get butter from milk, you must let it set into curd in a secluded spot in solitude. If it is too much disturbed, milk won’t turn into curd.”
(27:11)

Art of Loving:

Now I am going to quote a little bit from Erich Fromm. He has written a most thoughtful book. I would heartily recommend to all of you. It is called "The art of loving". Of course, don't misunderstand this lowly behavior of men and women as love. It is an art. It can be acquired like any other art with greatest practice of many, many, years if not lives. And one has to work very hard. Then only one can qualify. Erich Fromm is also telling us, that if we are claiming that we love somebody or something, if we cannot tolerate solitude then we cannot tolerate love because love and solitude are two different names. Probably you never heard these terms in your life. What is the relationship between love and solitude? Love is always solitary. It should not depend upon what we get. If we depend, then I love you and you love me; I scratch your back, you scratch my back. That is not love. That is shopkeeping as Swami Vivekananda says. And interestingly Swami Vivekananda in his Bhakti Yoga says, love is like a triangle. Triangle is where there are 3 angles all connected together. If one angle is broken then it does not help us. So, what are the things?

First, he says, Love knows no fear. If there is fear that means it is dependency; it is not love at all.

Second, Love knows no bargaining. No shopkeeping. I give you this, you give me that. That is far from what we call love. In fact, that is called lust.

Then the Third is Love is for its own sake. I love because I love to love. I get the joy just by loving. Whether you love me or not it doesn't really matter.

This beautiful concept that Erich Fromm is going to expound to us which I am going to quote to you very shortly, has been illustrated by Sri Ramakrishna with a beautiful parable. And I think most of you must have read that parable of Sri Ramakrishna. 2 yogis were there. They were sitting under 2 separate trees. Both of them were meditating on Lord Vishnu. One day they saw sage Narada going that way. They asked him "where are you going?" Narada answered "I am going to Vaikuntha. I am going to meet Narayana". Both of them put one question: "Would you ask on our behalf when is the Lord going to bestow His grace upon us?" Narada said "yes" and went on his way. After a few days he came that way and the first Yogi sitting under the first tree queried him: "did you ask?" "yes". "What was the answer?" "Look you have to be reborn one more time. Then God will give you his darshan and you will attend moksha. The yogi started weeping: "Oh my God! From my childhood I have renounced this world. Without knowing any worldly pleasures, I have been praying, fasting, thinking, meditating. And still I have to be born one more birth?" Narada said "sorry, that's what God replied". Then he came to the second yogi and said: "Look, you are sitting under a tamarind tree. Tamarind tree has one of the smallest leaves and a good grown, tamarind tree has billions of leaves. As many leaves as there are on this tree, so many times you will be reborn and then only God will give you darshan." And what do you think was the reaction of that yogi? He jumped up with joy, started dancing, clapping his hands, exclaiming: "What! God is going to appear to me so soon? I never expected it!" Suddenly Narayana appeared to him; the second yogi, and said: "My child, I am so pleased with your devotion. Come with me. I will take you with me to Vaikuntha."

What is the meaning of this parable? Every parable is laden with layers of meaning. The more we think about it, the more it helps us. So, what is it? What is the moral? What are the meanings? For the first yogi, thinking of God is a most painful duty on earth. He perhaps, will commit suicide if he is asked to meditate on God another one minute more. Because he was not getting any joy. That's why he felt so painful that in next birth you will get the vision of God. But for this second Yogi, thinking of God is so joyful that he is prepared to be reborn any number of times. He

doesn't mind if God says: "You have to be born. You will never get my darshan. But you will have to be going on being born." He says: "I don't care whether you come or not. I am so happy thinking about you. '*neenyako ninna hangyako ranga..*' (there is no need of you or your obligation. The strength of your name alone is sufficient). I don't care for your form, I don't care for you in person, I have your name and that jewel gives me Brahmananda and I can spend any number of births.

This type of refrain we get in so many devotional poetries. Oh Lord, I don't care. You make me born as an insect, lowest of the lowest insect but with this provision, this caveat, this qualification that let me, let my heart and me be only be devoted to you. Let Thy lotus feet never depart from my heart. If you can fulfill this condition then I don't care; any number of births, joyfully I will carry on. This is called ***ahaituki Bhakti***. That's what we are talking here. Love for love's sake. I don't care whether you will come or not. I don't care if God exists or not. My thought that God exists gives me so much joy that it is more than enough for me. So, this is what we are telling.

Now I have to bring a beautiful concept here. Some of our devotees may be wondering, why does not God give us that bhakti? Bhakti means love actually. Love for God is called bhakti; love for anybody is called worldliness. *Prapanchikata, samsarattwa* etc. Why could he not give it to us?

Infact, we are all like children and all these ashrams have been created. Not only *Sannyas-ashrama, brahmacharya-ashrama, garhastya-ashrama, vanaprastha-ashrama*. Why this marriage business? Why go on getting caught in these snares of the children, relatives, acquiring properties, money etc., protecting them and all that? The answer is: God is slowly leading us. When we are not married, mostly we love our own selves. When we are married, then we love each other. That means I care both for me and my wife; my wife cares for both herself and her husband. As the family expands, slowly, slowly their love expands. Most of the time, that expansion stops with the family and it does not go further. But it does go further after many a birth. Blessed is the person who realizes that I have to love not only my own family but other families too. Other countries also, other places, other religions, other languages and even living, non-living; everything belongs to God. It is to train us in acquiring more and more love and unconditionally. Not because we get something.

The highest example of this love is: a mother loves her children just because they are her children. She rarely expects anything. Of course, we say that. Even a mother has some expectations but compared to any other human love, motherly love is considered to be the most unselfish and universal love. So, this is the reason why God created this world so that this is like a gymnasium. We expand our concept of love. We expand and identify ourselves with others. That is called love. Love means identifying ourselves with the larger whole than this psychophysical organism.

Let me first very briefly tell about Erich Fromm. He was a social psychologist. That means, unlike a personal psychologist who diagnoses and tries to help mentally sick people. These social psychologists do not deal with individuals. They deal with only with societies as a whole. They study the societies and try to analyze the behavior of the societies. And if the societies are suffering from unhappiness, dissatisfaction etc., they try to find out the root causes, try to advise them to improve themselves.

So, this social psychologist Erich Fromm had written most marvelous books and I would say he rarely uses the word spiritual life, spiritual principles, spirituality but he is talking nothing else but spirituality. Such a person, he has written, as I mentioned earlier "The Art of Loving". I would recommend you to read this book. Atleast if you wish I can send you the synopsis of this particular book, the art of loving.

I am going to quote a few sentences from there. What is he telling?

Erich Fromm equates concentration with solitude, and solitude with love. He says: 'a most important step in learning concentration is to be alone with oneself without reading, listening to the radio, smoking or drinking. Indeed, to be able to concentrate means to be alone with oneself.' And he continues .. 'This ability is precisely a condition for the ability to love. If we have to develop the ability to love, we must have the ability to concentrate and to be in solitude.' How? He is going to explain.

"If I am attached to another person because I cannot stand on my own feet, he or she may be a lifesaver but the relationship is not one of love. It is a dependent love." 'Rightly practiced, solitude bestows both physical and mental health. Most people now, as psychologists, especially social psychologist have pointed out to us, they feel loneliness. What is the loneliness? I am alone but I am not lonely. I am midst of a thousand people but I feel terribly lonely. This terrible disease called loneliness, has been studied and depicted in great books. Especially almost 40 – 50 years back, a beautiful book has come by an American author, that is called 'The Lonely Crowd'. Most of us, and this corona disease has proved, we are incapable of living at home even though all physical facilities and health facilities are available. So, if we want to be happy really, we have to develop the ability to be in solitude. That means to be with our own selves. And we should try to slowly lessen dependency upon everything in this world including living and non-living. That means persons, that means entertainment, etc. etc.

(39:43)

But, the most important benefit of solitude; what are they? Above all solitude gives us the opportunity for reflecting on the most important questions of life. Animals, don't think about seriously what is the truth, what is the goal of life, all those questions. Human beings alone have been given that invaluable opportunity to think about. Now, I have to insert a note here: "Why do I want to think about all those things? I am quite happy as I am. I have a good family; I have a good job. Yes, all these things are wonderful. Two facts we have to understand now.

There is no guarantee this is going to last my whole life. A change can occur within the twinkling of a second. It could be accident, it could be corona disease, it could be somebody coming and murdering or something falling upon us. **Life is very, very, fragile** like **Vidyut chalam Jivanam** (strike of a lightning).

(40:44)

Second point, more important point is; if a person is truly blessed, fortunate to have a good family and enough sustenance, more than enough sustenance, good health both physical and mental and a long life. But the happiness that such a person derives is absolutely nil or very minimal compared to what he could get.

I always illustrate this with the beautiful example. There was a prince and he was to be the king when he grows up. He was kidnapped by a beggar and brought up as a beggar. He became a very fortunate beggar. He gets more than enough for living a happy life and he thinks how fortunate I am; I am a lucky beggar. One day, the old prime minister was passing that way. Had a look at this young beggar sitting in front of a big temple. Instantaneously he recognized and then he tried to convince him: "you are not a beggar. You are a lost prince of this kingdom. Come with me." At first the prince would not accept such a proposal. But the minister convinced him, took him, proved to him - indeed he was the lost prince. Now, he claimed his own kingdom. Now why did I give this story? Yes, as a beggar he was quite happy and compared to others he was more fortunate. But what is the comparison between a beggar's

fortunate happiness and a king's who has got a whole kingdom under his control.! Is there any parallel?

That's what our scriptures are telling. We have lost our *samrajya* (kingdom). We are the children of immortal bliss. That was what Swami Vivekananda wanted to proclaim to the whole world. Especially at the parliament of religions.

श्रूण्वन्तु विश्वे अमृतस्य पुत्रा आ ये धामानि दिव्यनि तस्थुः॥[2/5]

वेदाहमेतं पुरुषं महान्त -

मादित्य वर्णं तमसः परस्तात्।

तमेव विदित्वाऽतिमृत्युमेति

नान्यः पन्था विद्यतेऽयन्याय॥ [3/8]

śrūṅvantu viśve amṛtasya putrā ā ye dhāmāni divyani tasthuḥ ||[2/5]

vedāhametaṁ puruṣaṁ mahānta -

māditya varṇaṁ tamasaḥ parastāt |

tameva viditvā'atimṛtyumeti

nānyaḥ panthā vidyate'yanyāya || [3/8]

[Hear ye, children of immortal bliss.

even ye that resides in Higher spheres!

I have found the Ancient One, blazing like the sun, beyond all darkness.

knowing Him alone you shall be saved from death over again

There is no other path to go by.]

Hear ye children of immortal bliss. Not only those who are the denizens of this earth, even those who are living in all the above worlds. Listen all of you. There is a state which is beyond death, beyond birth.

Only knowing your true nature, that Purusha, who is beyond all darkness (*tvameva viditva*),

Having known him alone, (*atimrityumeti*) for eternity you will go beyond the clutches of *mrityu* (death). Death means unhappiness; death means an end of life. Again, you will be born, etc.

(*nanyapatha vidyate ayanaya*) There is no other way. You know who you are and you become free forever. You do not know who you are, then you are condemned to come and go, to suffer in this ocean of the world.

This is what the Upanishads are telling and that was the message Sri Ramakrishna had proclaimed to the whole world; the avatar of this 19th century, of course through Swami Vivekananda.

So, this is the most important part: If we are in real solitude, we have this invaluable opportunity to put these most important questions. Why most important? Because, if we find the answers, we attain *moksha*, or the highest goal.

The Questions:

So, what are these questions?

1. Who am I?
2. Why am I here?
3. What is Life?
4. What is its (Life's) meaning?

5. What is my goal?
6. What do I really want?
7. How am I supposed to lead my life?
8. How am I supposed to respond to the vagaries of Life?
9. What are my priorities?
10. What are my weaknesses? And above all
11. How can I improve myself?

Solitude is a great boon, making us turn our attention inward, giving us an invaluable opportunity to ponder over these important questions of life and evolve a plan of action.

(45:00)

3 Types of Solitude:

There are 3 types of Solitude.

- (i) External
- (ii) Internal
- (iii) Self

External Solitude: A place which is very quiet and beautiful and the climate is also very favorable and no one to disturb us. That purely is external solitude.

Then there is:

Internal Solitude: Amidst all the duties that we discharge, wherever we are, whatever be the time, we are anchored to that one thought at the same time keeping aware of the world and discharging our duties. This is what is called *samattwa buddhi*, Equanimity.

The third of course is

Self: Completely being absorbed in God with the self. No other thoughts ever intrude into this.

Therefore, we have to practice Solitude, the second commandment of sadhana that is advised by Sri Ramakrishna. One can and must have daily solitude right in one's house every single day. A sincere aspirant should set aside some time daily for spiritual practice.

How to Practice Solitude:

Sri Ramakrishna's advice on how to practice solitude exhorts "when you practice discipline in solitude keep yourself entirely away from your family. You must not allow your wife, son, daughter, mother, father, sister, brother, friends or relatives anywhere near you. While thus practicing discipline in solitude, you should think: 'I have no one in this world. God alone is my all in all.'

Now, one more point here. Most of the people nowadays have forgotten that Hinduism has divided life into 4 stages. The third stage is Vanaprastha. If a person has earned enough money, enough to live a simple life in future; immediately he should retire. This has 2 benefits, socially and also for one's own self.

Socially means, nowadays jobs are in shortage. If one retires voluntarily then other people will step in and in turn their life would also become more fulfilled.

But, for one's own self this is the time to enjoy life, to study, read books, enjoy whatever you want to enjoy. Above all think about God and that is the thought. One

day I have to go and noone will go with me. How can I go thinking only of God? *Antahkale maameva smaran muktwa kalebaram*. How to pass away from this body thinking of God alone at the last moment.

This becomes possible only if one starts preparing early in life. Sri Ramakrishna's advice to the spiritual aspirants to retire into solitude now and then is a commandment. A commandment is something that we can never neglect. And if we neglect, like a military commandment a person who deserts he will be prosecuted, he will be even shot dead. Here in this space, we shoot ourselves. Hence, retiring into solitude now and then is indispensable. But we must start practicing slowly little by little. Understanding its implications, understanding its gains that we can get. Thus alone, we can progress in spiritual life.

(48:25)

So, in brief I have spoken really speaking very, very, briefly. On each of these points we can spend hours together thinking deeply the implications of it. But all of you are good devotees, very intelligent and I leave that task to you. With this I am closing my today's talk.

Om Jananim Sāradam devam Rāmakrishnam jagadgurum |

Pādapadme tayoh shritvā pranamāmi muhurmuḥuḥ ||

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