

GOSPEL OF SRI RĀMAKRISHNA - PART 13

SWĀMI DAYATMANANDJI

ॐ जननीं सारदां देवीं रामकृष्णं जगद्गुरुम् ।

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 ॥

Continuing the discussion on the Fourth Commandment of Sri Ramakrishna

We are meditating on the five commandments of Sri Ramakrishna that occur in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. In our last class, we had been discussing about what is Viveka. Sri Ramakrishna's fourth commandment of Sadhana is 'Always a Sadhaka must practice discrimination'. What is discrimination according to Sri Ramakrishna? Everything is temporary. Only God is eternal, permanent. And this is a fact of life. He was not teaching something which we need to believe. There are certain things we need to believe based upon the teachings of the scriptures – that God exists; that God

can be seen; there is life after death; and there are other worlds. These are things which are not available to us. But everything here is temporary is a day-to-day experience. Here is a person, he seems to be absolutely fine and he pops off in no time, for whatever reason. Everything is changing; we are changing; the whole cosmos is as if running at mind boggling speed. And that which is time within time, that is called Change. And most people are not aware – they say, yes! yesterday I was one day younger; today I am one day older. At what rate we are changing? At the speed of lightning. How light travels, and at that speed everything in this world is traveling. There is nothing static sitting there. A table, we think is not moving at all. So, the whole life, creation is a change, sustenance is a change and death, or dissolution is another change. Everything is changing in this world. That fact, if we can really keep in mind, what does it mean? It means we maybe young, we are going to become middle age, old age, many of us are old age people. And one day we have to quit this place. And what is so special about quitting this place? Everything that we are clinging, we are feeling “This is mine”, I do not want to give up even a small bit of it, everything we need to leave behind including such a precious body. If we can everyday keep this in mind, slowly our character will change. And in any case, without discrimination life is impossible. Twenty-four hours a day we are practicing discrimination. Even in the state called Sushupti, we are practicing discrimination albeit mechanically, unconsciously. How are we doing it? Suppose I am sleeping on my bed, deeply unconscious which we call deep sleep or Sushupti, and a particular position becomes very uncomfortable or even slightly uncomfortable and immediately, without thinking I change my position to a comfortable situation. And this is how we are practicing unconsciously. If a mosquito tries to sting us, and we are driving it away or killing it away, that is practice of discrimination. But if we can do it consciously and concentratedly by keeping certain things in view, for most of the people, discrimination like animals, immediate survival and instantaneous pleasure – these are the only two things that guide the discrimination process of every animal including human animal. But that is not true discrimination. That is more like instinct. When we are driving, we are also practicing discrimination keeping in view, those who are in front, at the back, by the side and the conditions of the road, everything. We do not call it a true practice of discrimination, that falls under what we call instinct.

When man promotes himself from the state of an animal to a human being, then he should enter into the next stage of evolution which is called reasoning. Reason is a special gift. That is why Aristotle had categorically mouthed it – Man is rational; should be rational. Not we are rational, we still follow our instincts. And that is the fact Sri Ramakrishna was telling, what is discrimination? Everything is temporary; only God is permanent. And the strange psychological fact is all of us long only for permanency in a particular way. When we are unhappy, we want to change it to

happiness. But when we are happy, we do not wish to change it to unhappiness. When we are healthy, we do not want to feel sick and we are rich, we do not want to change it to poverty or suffering. So, the instinct is always from a lower state to a higher state. But most of us instinctively practice this discrimination only with regard to our worldly condition which includes our physical health. But it is surprising that many people do not take into consideration what is called mental improvement, emotional improvement which is called from a lower state of emotional intelligence to a higher state of emotional intelligence. What do I mean? Supposing circumstances are very good, and we are very happy, we try to cling to them, and our emotion feels that life is good. But no life ever allows anyone to sit so comfortably. In a matter of seconds, life can change; somebody can prick into our egotistic balloon or it maybe social circumstances or it can be the role of nature that we are undergoing now (Covid). So, it could be anything like that. Even somethings like, we depend upon many people – for example, we want servants to clean our house, to tend our gardens, to prepare our food, to do shopping for us and to drive our vehicles. If circumstances do not allow us to have these people and many times this can happen, either because of our faults or due to outside circumstances, we feel totally helpless, we become worried and that is an emotional state. You may ask, what can a person do at that time? The first thing is recognition of the fact – Oh yes, this has happened. Are the circumstances going to improve? May be or may not be. May be, it may take some time. May not be, it may be a permanent condition. Should the circumstances make me miserable? That is where the intelligence comes, the discrimination comes and I say, “Well, I accept the fact. Life is difficult. I do not have enough things to be happy, but I will not be bogged down, cowed down by these circumstances. I have to carry on my own life. So, I must develop enough powers of defense so that nobody can prick our easily prickable ego or emotions”. Emotions are very fragile. And the strange thing is, if somebody is giving us positive emotion, and that is also very fragile. Of course, rarely we get positive emotions. Most of the time, our condition is to adjust to changing circumstances. But sometimes conditions could be really horrible, and it would sometimes seem beyond all hopes. At that time also, our discrimination should flourish. What is the discrimination? Of course, circumstances are like that and my body may not be comfortable. But I have nothing to do with these things.

Let me cite an example: Mahapurush Maharaj Swami Shivanandaji, he was old, he was of course, our second president of the Ramakrishna Order. And he was suffering from Asthma. Because of old age, he suffered; but young people also could suffer – for example Swami Vivekananda was less than forty years old and he suffered terribly from Asthma. So, Mahapurush Maharaj was unable to sit, lie down, lean, and none of those things really helped him breathe freely. Asthma means not possible to breathe freely. So, he said, “Let me go into deep meditation”. He was remarking very beautifully, “Being an old man’s meditation, immediately I rose above the body

consciousness and I was there in that state for nearly forty-five minutes. And when the mind became a bit aware of the external world, I found that the body had obtained quite a good amount of rest and I was very happy”. Old man’s meditation does not mean that we are old and old people’s meditation. No - It means a person who has been practicing meditation for a very long time and a person has spent many years and become old improving his state of mediation. Old man’s means best type of meditation, much advancement in meditation. What is Mahapurush Maharaj trying to tell? He is telling, “This body will be old, and it could be subjected to everything but I have nothing to do with it. If my mind is absolutely fixed on God, I will be extremely happy”. This is the lesson we have to learn from every event that happens in our everyday life. Family is going on well; everybody is happy and healthy but suddenly circumstances come. How many lakhs of people have died because of this Covid which a few months before nobody would have been able to predict. Now, sometimes there maybe only one member earning livelihood. Now that person is gone. So many people we know, are losing jobs steadily because of the economic conditions. So, anything can happen. So, what should we do under those circumstances? Should we become depressed? There will be difficulties, for some of us, for most of us, I would say. But the inner personality must be developed. What is this inner personality? That I do not need to be depressed. That is where emotional intelligence comes into being. Being rational, practicing reason is one definite method of how we can improve our happiness, our well-being, our positiveness, everything.

And what am I talking about in the context of Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna? Sri Ramakrishna’s teaching that we have to develop, practice discrimination is not only conducive to spiritual life, but it is conducive to worldly happiness, worldly health, and worldly well-being as well. It is, in other words, indispensable. That is why the great Shankaracharya had written a very voluminous book and named it Vivekachudamani which we had just fortunately completed a few weeks back and we are now in the process of summarizing them. So, according to Sankaracharya, the foremost requisite for treading the path of knowledge is Viveka or Discrimination. That is, Viveka is indispensable, whatever be the path we tread. So, what is Viveka here? Sankara defines it thus – **A firm conviction of the mind to the effect that Brahman alone is real and the universe unreal.** Again, these are extreme words, from the Advaitic point of view, they mean something else. But from our practical standpoint, where we are standing right now, we do not need to take that this world is unreal. All that we need to cognize which is our day to day experience, everything is subject to change, and death is also one of the six factors of every being on this earth. So, that is what he means. This process of discrimination is useful only for those who are far advanced in spiritual life. But most of us are far from it. We are not aware of what is unreal even though we are living in its very midst. Not to speak of what is real – Of course, we do not know what is real, excepting learning it from our teachers,

from our Gurus or from the scriptures. But do we know that the world that we are living right amidst it, is unreal in what sense? Things are changing, circumstances are changing, people are born, people die, and anything can change which I have put in an aphoristic manner – **Anything can happen to anyone at any time at any place in any way.** And that is what we are witnessing every day. This is what Sri Ramakrishna means, **Accept the fact.** There is no need to guess it – Anything can happen to anybody at any time at any place. What is useful for us is to find out what makes us sane, rational, strong, pure, cheerful, balanced and of course, truthful. Many books are coming out which are categorized as Self-Help books. Many years back, there was a very beautiful, very wonderful book which has become what-is-called Best-seller even today – **The Power of Positive Thinking.** This is what discrimination should help us. We have to, through our rationality, and power of discrimination, find out what is the truth about the world, accept it and do our best to be positive, cheerful, strong, pure and move towards God or Truth. Without discrimination, man can never make progress. Any progress in life is always preceded by discrimination. Simple example – there is a pharmaceutical company. They have been selling medicine for a particular disease and it has been really useful but it has a lot of negative reactions. So, the persons employ researchers and the researchers discriminate what is it that is helping and what is it that is producing undesirable side effects. And they try their level best to reduce the side effects. And without that discrimination, life goes on exactly the same way – bringing more, heaping more misery. So, without discrimination, no man can ever make progress and not to speak of human beings, even animals, they learn through experiences and go on practicing this discrimination and they become quite manipulative, quite clever in doing things which can surprise us. So, what is the burden of what I have been talking for so many minutes now? That discrimination is most useful for spiritual life. It is also very useful if we want to live a worldly life. That means, a strong, healthy body, a very positive creative and rational mind, that is absolutely indispensable for happiness in this world. So, without discrimination, man will always be suffering only.

To properly develop this faculty of discrimination, which faculty we already have, each one of us within ourselves. In a way of speaking, each soul is potentially rational. As I mentioned earlier, man is a rational animal. It is there. But it must be isolated, studied and then, first thing that we need to do is relate it to our emotions. Emotions should not dictate or modify rationality. Most of the time, that is what happens. If something seems to be immediately pleasant and comfortable, our rationality tells us, “This is the thing I have to do in future also.” Many times, it is counter-productive. But if the rationality is really strong and really, we are practicing it, it should not be related to the emotion. On the other hand, it should modify our emotion. Even though Aristotle told us, Man is a rational animal, rarely we come across a rational person who is really rational. Either he thinks he is rational even though he is, everybody

recognizes him as irrational. But still, he would like to be praised highly, “Oh! This person is a very rational person.” Rationality is linked invariably with intelligence. But that is a great mistake we are making. Without intelligence, one cannot be rational. But even if a person has got intelligence, that alone is not sufficient because often, emotion uses the intelligence to make things rational which is called anti-rational, which in English we call it Rationalizing. Making something irrational appear as rational. So, intelligence is necessary. In fact, four things are necessary. If we want to make really our rationality which is in an infancy now, to grow into a young, very strong discriminating power. Let us discuss what are those four things. If we have to develop the power of discrimination properly, we need at least four conditions to be fulfilled. What is the first condition? Awareness. What is the second condition? Rationality. What is the third condition? A well-defined goal. And what is the last condition? Sufficient will power. If we have to develop discrimination (Viveka),

1. Awareness
2. Rationality
3. A well-defined goal and
4. Sufficient will power.

Let us discuss these four points one by one. The faculty of discrimination will be absent or does not help us if these four requirements are not met. The very first requirement is Awareness. Most of us wade through life as sleepwalkers doing things mechanically, blissfully unaware of what we are doing. Laya or sleep or mechanical spiritual practice is one of the very first obstacles to Yoga. Until one develops the habit of doing everything with awareness, there will be little or no progress. If only we can cultivate the habit of keeping a watch on whatever we do, whether it is talking, reading, or cooking or meditating, a lot of problems both physical and mental can be avoided, certainly it saves time, money and effort. I will give you a very curious example – Sometimes devotees cook what we call Payesh (rice pudding) and bring to the Ashrama either to be offered to Sri Ramakrishna or to the Sadhus. And many times what I found that the rice is half-cooked and there will be lots and lots of sugar, over-sugaring what we call and so many undesirable things or fill it up with a lot of this Elachi or cardamom and also, lot of nuts, lot of drakshi (raisins). So, what am I talking about? Really you find anything excepting these things, there is very little payesh. Suppose this person develops this faculty of awareness, last time I prepared, it was disproportionate. The milk was disproportionate, and the amount of sugar was too much and too many ingredients are added and the rice did not boil properly. If all

these things I have done, this time I have to be careful not to do those things. And most of us know that there is a company called McDonald's and they sell lot of things. One of the best things I appreciate of this company is they have reduced everything to scientific calculation. So many materials, each material so much, everything has to be cooked exactly to the time, mixed in the absolutely right proportions. The result is, more or less, throughout the world, wherever you taste McDonald's thing, I'm not saying anything about health / unhealth, it tastes exactly the same because it is scientifically honed and they will not allow even this much deviation from it. If all of us, whether we are reading a book, or cooking, tending to a garden, whatever we are doing, or even talking on phone, I have heard so many devotees speaking to me. First thing is, "Maharaj! How are you?" I say, "I am fine." And I ask, "How are you?" and they also reply the same, more or less you know. But after two minutes, "Maharaj, how are you? I said, "I am fine." After two-three minutes, "Maharaj, how are you?" I said, you go back to my first time I replied how I am. Do not ask this question next time. So, if they only keep well, time is saved, the money we pay for the telephone call is saved, and the conversation becomes meaningful. That is why my Gurudev, Swami Yatiswarananda Maharaj used to tell, the first condition if we wish to progress in spiritual life, is to cultivate awareness, constant awareness. Every time. I am doing japa. Is my mind there? So, put a part of the mind as a watchman, that is what Sri Ramakrishna used to do. He divided his mind and a small part of his mind, he said "You watch whether this mind is really thinking of the Divine Mother or just running hither and thither." And one day, he had a vision – a young Sannyasin with a trident appeared before him and threatened him, "If your mind thinks anything else, I will pierce you with this trident." So, this is what Maharaj meant, constantly be aware. **Aware, aware aware!! Awareness means awareness means awareness.** So, this is the first thing. If we can only develop this habit of awareness, whether it is talking, reading, cooking, or meditating, lot of problems both physical and mental can be avoided, certainly it is a great time-saver, money and effort. I am quoting a beautiful collection of very useful hints:

Even though it was the Master's Day of Silence, a traveler begged for a word of wisdom that would guide him through his life's journey. The Master nodded affably, took a sheet of paper, and write a single word on it – "Awareness". The visitor was perplexed, "That is too brief". Would you please expand on it a bit? The Master took the paper back and wrote, "Awareness awareness awareness" What do these words mean? Said the stranger helplessly. The Master reached out for the paper and wrote, "Awareness Awareness Awareness means Awareness". This is a beautiful quotation from a book called, "One minute Wisdom" by Anthony de Mello. He was one of the greatest Christian Retreat masters. And he was really a universal person. He was not biased towards Christianity, he used to take useful teachings, even humorous stories

which help all of us and he compiled several books, how we can really get nuggets of wisdom from his books. Anthony D Mello S.J.

Next, psychology tells us that by just being aware of our thoughts, emotions, motives in actions, many a problem can be nipped in the bud. Even if the problem persists, it would be easier to deal with, and much suffering could be avoided. One of the functions of a true teacher is to keep a watch over the aspirant's behavior and warn him of the impending trouble even before it surfaces. Here, the teacher is doing what the aspirant should have done himself. Many times, I will give you living examples – there was a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, a young man, and he wanted to hear sweet words from women. And there are some women who are much elder in age to him, and some of them used to consider this young man with what is called, Vatsalya bhava (motherly parental attitude). Sri Ramakrishna warned this young man, **Sadhu Savdhan!** These are all Maya's biggest traps. At first, it appears to be only just precautions. But this attitude soon turns into something extremely undesirable. In other words, when a man and woman in the right age meet together, however pure they are at the beginning, turns out very sour and spoil everything. That was the incident we read in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, in Sri Ramakrishna's life. That is why Sri Ramakrishna was very careful, to set an example he would not sit with women for a long time. He would not even allow Holy Mother to be with him for a long time for that matter. So, what happened to this young man? Later on, he must have realized because he had fallen. He did not heed the advice of Sri Ramakrishna. After falling, he came to his senses. Of course, we do not know what happened to him afterwards. Sri Ramakrishna was not merely cautioning; he was reminding us the power of Mahamaya. So, I also have to mention here – there is a special Buddhistic sect called Zen Buddhism. Zen Buddhism means Dhyana Buddhism. In India, meditation in Sanskrit is called Dhyana. This Dhyana aspect is much emphasized by one particular sect of Buddhism. When this Buddhism spread to China, it became Chan. Dhyana became Chan. And subsequently, when it spread to Japan, that word 'Chan' degenerated into Zen. Really what it means is meditation (Dhyana). And their special sadhana is to be continuously aware. And there was one great person, I think Goenka. He started very beautiful system called Vipassanā. And many people attend it. The purpose of this vipassana or the practice is, you just be aware of how you are sitting, how you are breathing, how the breath air is going in or out, whether your limbs are moving, what sensations you feel throughout the body, especially at certain points in the body for example, below the nose, between the lips and the nose, that is supposed to be the least sensitive area. But if we focus upon it, then even sensations can be detected there. So, when a person becomes sufficiently observing, developed observational powers – the power of observing, then that person directs all that energy towards the mental changes that take place – what type of thoughts arise. I am going into details because this is called practical spirituality. So, a person is talking

with another person. First of all, if he is aware, what are we talking, are we wasting our time, am I wasting the other person's time, is he wasting my time? Are we talking anything that is useful or the purpose for which we are coming together, next why am I talking such a long time with this particular person? Is it because the person is so attractive, so likable, I am liking this person in which case, the talking is only a secondary effect, but the person is pulling me by the power of his or her attraction? That is the primary thing. And that attraction is giving me unconscious pleasure. Therefore, I am talking to this person. Or do I want to run away from something, something is bothering me, that is why this is one way of escaping for a few short moments from that agonizing mental condition or am I expecting something from this person, if not now in future, I might be promoted or I might get a better job or something positive in my life can take place. So, these are called motivations. Motives – am I aware of my motive? Not only of immediate benefit but of long-term benefit, of future benefit. Or am I talking with this person so that I can curry into his favor or I can take advantage of that person, I can squeeze something for my own selfish purpose, so many things... The net of Mahamaya is very very widely spread. But if a sadhaka is aware that these are the motivations, then the control of the mind, that means controlling those motives or getting rid of them if they are not helpful in my spiritual life or even in my worldly life. In every way, this awareness helps us very much. So, this awareness is very important. Psychology tells us that just being aware of thoughts, etc. that many a problem can be nipped in the bud. Even if the problem persists, it would be easier to deal with and much suffering could be avoided. One of the functions of the Guru is to keep a watch over the aspirant's behavior and warn him of the impending trouble even before it surfaces. Something comes to my mind; I have to share it with you. There was a time when Mahapurush Maharaj was the president and there was some famine in nearby areas, and Ramakrishna Mission organized a famine Relief work. One Brahmachari was sent there, and he did it extremely conscientiously, very sincerely with great devotion and very efficiently. And the camp was closed, and the volunteers and the Brahmachari returned, they came to Belur Math. The volunteers straight went to Mahapurush Maharaj's room and he enquired about the work. He was highly pleased when he was told that the Brahmachari really did a marvelous work. He was highly pleased. Meanwhile the Brahmachari went to take bath, and then he paid a visit, did pranams in the temple to Sri Ramakrishna and then came to Mahapurush Maharaj. The moment he entered, Mahapurush Maharaj started scolding him right and left for several minutes non-stop. We can only imagine what is the reaction of that Brahmachari that he was full of pride, full of self-satisfaction, I have done the best job I can, perhaps better than others and Mahapurush Maharaj certainly will appreciate me, pat my back. May be that was his thought, we do not know. But the moment he entered into the room, right in front of the devotees who were all in praise for him, Mahapurush Maharaj started scolding

him right and left and center. Of course, in those days the juniors never contradicted the senior. Nowadays, it is a different story – they start scolding us and we have to suffer, parents have to suffer from children, and teachers have to suffer from students, senior Swamis have to suffer from junior Swamis or even Brahmacharis for that matter of fact. Times have changed. Of course, it is wisdom to accept the changed conditions and be as cheerful as possible. So, this person, he had to bear with it and then, after some time, made pranams and went back. And again, at nighttime, all the Sadhus and Brahmacharis came, made pranams, and then got his blessings, maybe a bit of talk and they went. This Brahmachari was standing there, and Mahapurush Maharaj looked at him and said, “My Child! Do you know why I scolded you in the afternoon?” Of course, the Brahmachari did not know. He said, “No Maharaj, I do not know why you scolded me.” Mahapurush Maharaj said, “I see a seed of Ahankara (Egotism) has already started growing within you. You may not be aware of it now, but after few years, you will look back and say what a marvelous job I have done”. Especially, if you compare it, that is not Mahapurush Maharaj’s words, it is my insertion. Especially, when you are aware how the present-day people are conducting reliefs, etc. then there is every chance that your egotism will grow beyond any control. I perceived it, I burnt it to the very roots, and you will never again become proud. What a grace Mahapurush Maharaj had bestowed upon this Brahmachari! If, at any time, that egotism is to, even the hint of that egotism “I did very well” were to spring up, immediately Mahapurush Maharaj’s scolding will open his eyes and say, “It was Thakur who sent me, it was Thakur who gave me the inspiration, it was Sri Ramakrishna who got the work done by me, it was the people who had donated whatever I distributed, and it was Sri Ramakrishna in the form of the poor and indigent people who received the help, I am just an instrument and I have been given that opportunity and that is my greatest blessing, grace of God, he has given / utilized this unworthy instrument for fulfilling his mission” This kind of thoughts, spiritual thoughts will come which will help that person to progress. What are we talking about? If we are aware, many problems, even before they sprout, even when they are in a seed state, can be avoided by the virtue of this one wonderful spiritual quality called Awareness. How does one develop awareness? One develops this awareness through constant practice, there is no shortcut.

The second requirement, if we wish to develop Viveka, is Reason and develop Rationality. Viveka and Rationality are not exactly the same. Rationality is to accept, gather, analyze, and understand the facts in the right way. That is called Rationality. But to use that Rationality, so that we can progress in life, that is called Discrimination. But without Rationality, you can understand we cannot go any farther, not even one millimeter. In this context, one of the ancient Sanskrit sayings –

आहार-निद्रा-भय-मैथुनं च समानमेतत्पशुभिर्नराणाम् ।

धर्मो हि तेषामधिको विशेषो धर्मेण हीनाः पशुभिः समानाः ॥

āhāra-nidrā-bhaya-maithunaṃ cha samānam_etat_pashubhir_narāṇām |

dharmo hi teṣhāmadhiko vishesho dharmeṇa hīnāḥ pashubhiḥ samānāḥ ||

Hunger, sleep, insecurity, and sex urge are common to men and animals. But the understanding of Dharma, Viveka is the extra quality of man which makes really what a man is. This is a quotation from a beautiful book called Hitopadesha. Upadesha means instruction. Hita means a good instruction. The instruction which will help us both in secular as well as spiritual life. Without Dharma, he is just an animal. The word 'Dharma' may be loosely translated as right conducted behavior which is the result of right knowledge. And right knowledge can only be got from being rational. To be rational means to be objective, to be fair, and just. So, what are we talking about? If we can judge things objectively, with fairness and justice, that will lead us to right knowledge, not distorted knowledge. And right knowledge leads us to, only can be got from being rational, and only right knowledge can lead us to the right way of life which is called Dharma. That means, first of all, we have to be objective, rational. Rationality gives us right knowledge and right knowledge leads us in the right way of life and that will help us to develop what is called Rationality. It is the only way of doing anything rightly. Man is a rational animal, is a well-known adage. But experience definitely shows that human beings are rarely rational, they are emotional, and they are instinctual. There was a great saint in the Sixteenth Century in France. He was called St. Francis de Sales. And he was a very practical teacher and he puts it so succinctly thus –

We are human only because of our reason. And yet is it very rare to find people who are truly reasonable. Self love frequently falsifies rationality and leads it into a thousand kinds of injustices which though often, small, are nonetheless dangerous. We fought our neighbor for a trifle but excuse ourselves for a major fault. We desire to sell for a good price but to buy at a bargain. We demand that justice be meted out in the house of another but want mercy in our own. We wish people to take our remarks in the right light, but we are sensitive and prickly about what is said to us. If we take an aversion to someone, no matter what he does, we find him at fault, and ceaselessly badger and annoy him. We are punctilious about maintaining our rank but want others to be humble and accommodating. We readily complain about our neighbor but are annoyed when he complains about us. What we do for another always seems considerable to us. But what he does for us always seems to be insignificant. Be just in all your actions, always put yourself in your neighbor's place and put your neighbor in your place. And then you will judge fairly. Imagine yourself the seller when you are buying and the buyer, put yourself in the position of the buyer when selling. And then you will sell and buy fairly. We lose nothing by living generously, nobly,

courteously, with a royal zest and rational heart. Examine your heart often to be assured that it is behaving towards your neighbor as you would want him to behave towards you. Therein lies true reason.

This is marvelous quotation. Any number of times, you have to read it. **Introduction to the Divine Life by St. Francis de Sales.** Most of the ills and sufferings in the world can be attributed to irrationality – just find out! Some country, illegally, immorally, forcibly, wants to grab some other person's land. Why? Because they claim, "Oh! Our ancestors had it. It belongs to us." Is it rational now? For a bit of land, how many people's lives can be lost and also, I cannot refrain from mentioning here, how much cruelty we are practicing towards animals?! I am, what you call, fair enough to understand everybody will not be a vegetarian. But then there is something called a limit (sIma) where we confine. Just rationally, do not become too much a glutton, or a greedy person. Ok, occasionally, Sri Ramakrishna never forbade anybody to eat a bit of fish or a bit of meat, that means he was a very practical man. First of all, if he forbids nobody will listen to him. But he used to approve and say, "All the attention should not go only towards taking detailed care of what I am eating, what I am not eating." But it does not mean I can do whatever I like. Sri Ramakrishna later on, he used to tell "Nowadays I cannot watch sacrifice of an animal". So, the root cause of all the suffering that we encounter in this world is because of irrationality. And the root cause of irrationality is narcissism, selfishness. Woe to God more of us are more rational and reasonable?

And now, I am going to support this beautiful teaching from St. Francis de Sales by Eric Fromm. He is one of my most admired authors. He was a social psychologist. He studies societies, he diagnoses their ills and also prescribes means for how they can become better societies. On this admirable quality (Narcissism). Narcissism means selfishness. Because people are selfish, they justify whatever they do and that is called Irrationality. What is this Eric Fromm saying about this quotation?

The narcissistic orientation is one in which one experiences as real only that which exists within oneself, while the phenomena in the outside world have no reality in themselves but are experienced only from the viewpoint of their being useful or dangerous to one.

So, if we want to be rational, the first thing we have to deal with, is pay attention to selfishness. Of course, the word selfishness has also a positive meaning. We have to understand that. When I was a brahmachari, just joined at our Delhi Ashrama, one senior Swami from South India came and in my naivety, I went and asked him, "What is the way to progress spiritually?" and he looked at me and said, "Be selfish and you will progress spiritually". And that puzzled me for many years; everybody is teaching selflessness and this Swami deliberately is provoking me saying, "Be selfish". It took

me many years to understand what he really meant. You have joined this Ashrama to become more spiritual and pay attention to that. That is called true selfishness. Now you are trying to be unselfish forgetting your goal in life. You just remind yourself, "I am a very selfish person. I want to progress in spiritual life and whatever is opposite, whatever cannot make me spiritual, or tries to pull me down, I must mercilessly destroy it and I must develop those qualities which will help me." That is true selfishness, truly to be rooted, to be centered in the Self (with a capital 'S'). that is Selfishness. Now what we are doing is, we are trying to be selfless and that means it is truly selfishness (with a lower 's') and it takes us down and down into the morass of this secular world (tApa traya). One of the great characteristics to get rid of the selfishness, to be opposite of narcissism is to be objective. It is a very rare quality. In English language, we use a beautiful word 'to put oneself in the shoe of the other person'. So, Eric Fromm continues...

What is called Objectivity? It is the faculty to see people and things as they are, objectively, and to be able to separate this objective picture from a picture which is formed by one's desires and fears. All forms are psychosis, shows the inability to be objective to an extreme degree. For the insane person, the only reality that exists is that which is within him, that of his fears and desires, etc. He sees the world outside as symbols of his inner world, as his creation. All of us do the same when we dream. In the dream, we produce events, we stage dramas, which are the expression of our wishes and fears. Although sometimes, we also exhibit our insights and judgement. And while we are asleep, we are convinced that the product of our dreams is as real as the reality which we perceive in our waking state. The insane person or the dreamer fails completely in having an objective view of the world outside. But all of us are more or less insane. I repeat, all of us are more or less insane or more or less asleep. All of us have an unobjective view of the world, one which is distorted by your narcissistic, that means selfish orientation.

This beautiful quotation is from a book called **Art of Loving**. It is one of the most marvelous books. Every spiritual aspirant must go through it in order to understand scriptural teachings much better. Needless to say, that without Objectivity, there is no getting rid of selfishness. Without selfishness being gotten rid of, we cannot become rational. Without being rational, we cannot practice Viveka or the power of discrimination. We would not even be a human if we do not become a rational person. So, all these points are totally involved in understanding Sri Ramakrishna's fourth commandment, "Practice Discrimination all the time". And Sri Ramakrishna was one of those greatest souls whose rationality is so sharp that even it defeated people who prided themselves that we are modern educated people and we are very rational type of people. Now, I will tell you something very interesting and close this talk. Swami Vivekananda studied both Eastern and Western philosophy. Narendranath, even when he was visiting Sri Ramakrishna, he prided himself, "I am very objective, very

rational. Nobody can defeat me in argument because I am so rational” and he had that kind of, bit of true also, but a bit of pride. So, one day, unconsciously, Narendranath used the word ‘blind faith’. Sri Ramakrishna jumped on him, caught hold of him and said, “Naren, are there two kinds of faith – one is blind faith, unseeing faith and another is seeing faith?” Hot ice-cream is a contradiction in terms. Seeing faith is a contradiction. If you are seeing, that is a fact. But if you believe somebody, some trustworthy persons, that is called Faith. So, all faith by nature is blind. Blind in the sense, not irrational, but we find there are people who are very unselfish, noble and very spiritual and whatever they speak, that is only truth so, we have no option but to have faith in their words, in their instructions. So, faith is blind until it is turned into Realization, into a fact. So, so many of us, we have that faculty, we have to develop that faculty. And in order to develop that faculty, I said we must have rationality, we must be objective, we must be aware, we must have set goals. And when we understand this in such detail, then we think “Oh my God! So much of meaning is involved in Sri Ramakrishna’s fourth commandment – Practice Discrimination always!” These are beautiful points; there are some more points we will discuss in our next class.

Om Jananim Sāradam devam Rāmakrishnam jagadgurum |

Pādapadme tayoh shritvā pranamāmi muhurmuḥuḥ ||

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