

## God Centered Life

### Swami Paramarthananda Saraswati's Talk Sivaratri - 2017

*sadāśiva-samārambhāṃ śaṅkarācārya-madhyamām asmadācārya-paryantāṃ vande guru-paramparām*

In our tradition we have a very vast scriptural literature. The primary scriptures being the *vedās*; and based on the *vedās*, we have got several secondary streams of literature. And we believe that the *vedās* have been given by the Lord Himself, for the benefit of the humanity. In the *vedā* itself it is said, [śvetāśvataropaniṣad] -

*yo brahmāṇaṃ vidadhāti pūrvaṃ yo vai vedāṃśca prahiṇoti tasmai*

*taṃ ha devaṃ ātmabuddhiprakāśaṃ mumukṣurvai śaraṇamaham prapadye*

After creating the universe, the Lord gave the *vedās* to *brahmā*; and from *brahmā*, the Vedic teaching tradition has been coming down. This Vedic literature offers to help the humanity in leading a smooth and successful life. This scriptural guidance is available free of cost. The only required condition is, we should have trust in the efficacy and the validity and the utility of the *vedās*. If we have got that basic *śraddhā*, and we are willing to take the guidelines, it is available.

Whoever is willing to follow the *vedā*, is called a *vaidikaḥ*. In modern times, they are called as Hindus. Hindu is a modern name; but, our real name is *vaidikaḥ* - the one who accepts *vedā* as the guide in one's life. When we look at these vast scriptures, the *vedā* prescribes a life-style for us. And that life-style is a God-centered life, meaning, our life is going-around or centered-around God only. It is indicated by the *pradakṣiṇa* & *namaskāra* we do at the end of a *pūjā*. *Pradakṣiṇam* is a process in which God is kept in the centre and we go around God; indicating that, 'my life will be centred around God only'.

For this purpose, the scriptures bring God in to almost every activity of human life. It is not a one-day-a-week affair; but, throughout the day, throughout the life, we are not supposed to get our vision or mind away from the Lord. Therefore, in Hindu culture, God is involved in every activity of life. The day starts with remembrance of God.

*brāhme muhūrte utthāya cintayet ātmano hutam namaskṛtya gurum viṣṇum mātaram pitaram ca*

Therefore, the day starts with the four-fold *namaskāra* of *guru*, *viṣṇu*, *mātā*, and *pitā* (*Mātā pitā guru daivam*). Not only the day just begins with God, in every activity God is involved. Before eating we are supposed to remember God and offer to God; and then only eat. During *snānam* also we are supposed to visualise God to be in our heart and our *snānam* is an *abhiṣekam* done to the Lord. Not only the daily chores are connected with God, all other aspects of Hindu life - whether it is dance or whether it is music or whether it is art or whether it is architecture - anything you take, they are all centered on God.

Thus, scriptures give us instructions to maintain this God-centric lifestyle. The scriptures are not merely the prescriptions for God-centered life; but, there is a teaching to support this lifestyle. Why this God-centred life is prescribed? For that, there is an explanatory teaching. This teaching was also coming in the Hindu tradition.

Therefore, not only we lead a God-centered life, we also knew the purpose behind leading such a life. But, unfortunately, over the period, gradually the backup teaching has gone away; because, nobody is studying the scriptures. And without the backup teaching, when we are only mechanically going through that lifestyle, it becomes an empty shell - often appearing 'a meaningless ritual'. Rituals are not meaningless; the problem is that, one has not learnt the purpose and principle behind it. Though, this God-centered tradition had been maintained, but not the backup teaching. It is a well developed backup teaching. Even though it is a very, very vast subject, today I would like to share a few salient features of the backup teaching that we have, in order to support the God-centered lifestyle.

The first and foremost lesson of this backup teaching is - What is the very definition of God? We are just mechanically using the word 'God'. What is the definition of God? The scriptures give a provisional definition. That provisional definition is, that God is the 'creator of the world' - *srṣṭi kartā*. Of course that is only a provisional definition, to begin with.

But, when we are really ready to think well, the scriptures refine that definition. The refinement is required; because, *vedā* really does not believe in a 'creation' at all. The reason being, nothing can be created or destroyed. According to the modern scientific principle of 'law of conservation of matter and energy' matter can never be created, matter can never be destroyed, which means, everything is always there. As it is said, when a candle burns, nothing is lost. One form of matter is getting converted into another form! There is only transformation taking place; nothing is created nothing is destroyed. Therefore, we cannot talk about the 'creation of a world'. Even modern science does not accept the creation of this world. Before the world emerges, it was already existent in potential form. What is potentially there in an unmanifest form, alone comes to manifestation.

This manifestation or emergence or evolution of this universe we are calling 'creation'. But, it is only *abhivyaktiḥ*, not *srṣṭiḥ*. *Abhivyaktiḥ* means, the manifestation of the entire universe - which was there in potential form - which we call as the 'seed' of the universe. *Vedā* defines God as the very seed of this entire universe, whose existence you can never question; because, without the seed, you cannot have a universe. Just as, without a seed, a tree cannot come. Without the seed, the universe cannot appear. This 'seed', which existed before the emergence of the universe, is called *īśvaraḥ*.

*bījasyāntarivāñkuro jagadidaṃ prāñnirvikalpaṃ punaḥ māyākalpita deśakālakalanā vaicitrya citrīkṛtam ... [dakṣiṇāmūrti stotraṃ]*

And in bhagavad gītā, kṛṣṇā says, *bījaṃ māṃ sarvabhūtānāṃ viddhi pārtha sanātanam* [7.10]

- Arjunā!, may you understand me, the Lord, to be the very cause or the seed of the entire universe.

From that 'seed' - which is called God - alone, the entire universe, consisting of all the galaxies [in modern language] and planets and all living beings, everything emerges.

Then, the scriptures point out that, you can divide the entire universe broadly into two categories. One is, the emergence of the inert material universe - called *acetana tattvam*; and the second is, emergence of the living being - which is called the *cetana tattvam*. Not only the universe consists of the inert material part, the universe consists of the sentient living beings also, called *cetana tattvam*. Thus, *cetana-acetana rūpa prapañcaḥ*, which is *vyakta prapañcaḥ* (*vyaktaḥ* means manifest universe), consisting of *cetana-acetana aṃśa dvayam*, evolved out of that one 'seed', called God.

Then, the scriptures point out, if the universe is a mixture of these two, [*cetana and acetana*], both *cetana and acetana*, must have also existed in the seed, in potential form. Because, what is not in the potential form cannot emerge. From the coconut seed only coconut tree emerges, not mango tree; because, it is not there. Mango tree emerges out of mango seed. So, whatever emerges out, must be already existing in the 'seed'. If the universe is a mixture of *cetana* and *acetana tattvam*, then, God the 'seed' - also must be a composite entity, consisting of *cetana-acetana dvayam*. *Vedā* believes in the law conservation of matter also; *vedā* believes in the law of conservation of the life principle also. Therefore, both - life as well as matter - must be there in the beginning.

Thus, according to Vedic scriptures, God is a composite entity, consisting of *cetana acetana aṃśa dvayam*. Different names are given in the scriptures. In the bhagavad gītā, *kṛṣṇā* names them as *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. *puruṣa* referring to the sentient component and *prakṛti* referring to the insentient component.

*prakṛtiṃ puruṣaṃ caiva viddhyanādī ubhāvapi*

*vikāraṃśca guṇāṃścaiva viddhi prakṛtisambhavān [gītā 13.19]*

*kāryakāraṇakartṛtve hetuḥ prakṛtirucyate*

*puruṣaḥ sukhaduḥkhānām bhokṛtve heturucyate [gītā 13.20]*

*puruṣa* evolves in the form of living beings. *Prakṛti* evolves in the form of the inert principle. This *puruṣa- prakṛti* mixture is called *īśvaraḥ*. Otherwise called, *brahman-māyā*; *māyā sahitam brahman* is *īśvara*. Symbolically, it is represented as *ardhanārīśvaraḥ*. *Ardhanārīśvara* represents *puruṣa-prakṛti tattvam*. Not separately, but together.

So, the first lesson of the backup teaching is – life should be God-centric. And that God, which is the centre of our life, is none other than the 'seed' of the universe, which is *cetana-acetana tattva dvayam*. This is lesson number one.

The next lesson that these scriptures give - now that we know 'God is the seed' or 'cause'; and the world - the *prapañca*, is the 'product', the evolute, the *kāryam*. Or, God is *kāraṇam*; world is *kāryam*. God is *avyaktam*; world is *vyaktam*. So, *kāraṇa īśvaraḥ* and *kārya prapañca*. *kāraṇa īśvaraḥ* – meaning God, the cause. *kārya prapañca* means – world, the product.

Then, the scriptures point out, when you study the cause and effect, we can recognise certain features belonging to both. 'Causal features' and 'effectual features', these are very important to know in the backup teaching.

To understand the features of the cause and effect, our scriptures generally take certain examples. In *chāndogya upaniṣad*, several examples are given in *ṣaṣṭho'dhyāyaḥ* (sixth chapter) *yathā soṃyaikena mṛtṣpiṇḍena sarvaṃ mṛnmayam vijñātam syād vācārambhaṇam vikāro nāmadheyam mṛttiketyeva satyam*

*yathā soṃyaikena lohamāṇinā sarvaṃ lohamayam vijñātam syād vācārambhaṇam vikāro nāmadheyam lohamityeva satyam ...*

The example is to, understand. Let us imagine a piece of gold out of which the gold smith brings out varieties of ornaments. In fact, goldsmith does not 'create' ornaments, according to our revised understanding. He does not 'create' ornaments, he has shaped the gold into varieties of ornaments. We have got so many.

Now, if you study the features of gold and ornaments, we can note four features in the 'cause' and four features in the 'effect'. What are the four features of the cause? Gold is one lump - *ekaḥ*. Gold is the content or the substance behind all the ornaments. Therefore, gold is the essence or *sārah* (*ekaḥ* and *sārah*). And, gold is *nityaḥ*. Before the emergence of ornament, gold 'was'. After emergence of the ornament, gold 'is'. So, even after the emergence of ornaments gold is. Even after melting of ornaments, gold 'will be'. Therefore, *kāraṇam trikāle api tiṣṭhati* (*trikālam* means, past, present and future). Finally, gold is independently existent by itself, even without the support of ornaments. Therefore, it is called *satyam* (*satyam* means, independently existent).

Thus, *kāraṇam* is *eka sāra nitya satyam*. We will take the first letter of each one. E-*eka*, S-*sāra*, N-*nitya*, S-*satyam*. 'ESNS'. *Kāraṇam* is ESNS. Remember, *kāraṇam* is the essence.

What about ornaments? They are diagonally opposite. *Aneka* (*aneke* means countless products). And *asāra*, ornaments do not have substantiality of their own. Ornaments do not have any weight of their own, weight of ornaments really belong to gold only. Therefore, ornament is pith less, it is non-substantial, *asārah*. Then, the ornament is *anityaḥ*. And finally, *asatyaḥ* (*asatyaḥ* meaning - It does not have its own original existence. It has only borrowed existence).

Our scriptures say, you have to extrapolate this to God and the world also. God being the *kāraṇam* God has to be *ekam*.

That is why, in modern science also, before the big bang happened, even before the manifestation of time & space itself, the condition, they name it singularity. 'Single', means, *ekam* only. They are not able to understand what is that singularity. They know this much - 'that condition is singular'. Thus, God is one.

Not only that. God is the *sāra* - the only substantial entity. Then, what is the third one? God alone is *nityam*. What about the world? It is *anityam*. Finally, God alone is *satyam*. The only reality that is existing independently. Whereas, the world is *anekeḥ*, *asārah*, *anityaḥ* and *asatyaḥ*. This is a very important corollary, derived from the second lesson.

So, why are these things told? Because, the next step is very important. Since the world by its very nature is *aneke*, *asāra*, *anitya*, *asatyam*, it has got certain advantages or plus points, and also certain negative points. An intelligent person, who is living in this world and making a life in this world, must be aware of these plus points and negative points.

The world is full of variety, in *śabda sparśa rūpa rasa gandha*. Each sense organ has got its own area and in each one, there are infinite varieties. Therefore, the world has got beauty, world has got variety, world has got novelty (they are all the glories of this universe and wonderful, so enjoy them thoroughly). But, even though the world has got all these things, it is *anityam*, *asatyam* and *asāram*. *Asāram* means, it is empty or hollow. Superficially, it is attractive; but, it is empty on enquiry. Not only it is hollow, it is also fleeting and temporary. Therefore, nothing in life is stable. Everything is beautiful but nothing is stable. Whether it is material object or the people or our own relationships or our own body, everything is *kṣaṇa bhaṅguraṃ* - unstable, perishable. Therefore, we can never rely upon anything in the world for our security.

One of the fundamental human problems is, we are all born with a sense of insecurity. Our scriptures call this, the problem of *saṃsāra*. Among many definitions of *saṃsāra*, one of the definitions is, the sense of insecurity.

Right from birth as a baby we felt insecure clinging on to the mother's sari and that clinging continues later to varieties of objects etc. All the human struggles are, according to our scriptures, driven by the sense of insecurity. It is because of the sense of insecurity and to get out of this problem of insecurity, we are holding on to things, without knowing that those very things are insecure. I acquire things to solve the problem of insecurity; and later, I am worried about *their* security. Therefore, world can never give security. World can never solve the fundamental problem of insecurity, called *saṃsāra*.

Freedom from this problem is called *mokṣaḥ*. If you want to solve this insecurity problem, we should never hold on to the *anitya vastu*. We should have '*nitya anitya vastu vivekaḥ*'. We should not hold on to *anitya vastu*. We have to hold on to only *nitya vastu*. What is that *nitya vastu*? *kāraṇa īśvaraḥ* alone is *śāśvatam*.

Therefore, every human being, if he/she has to resolve this fundamental problem, he/she should not seek the worldly things but, has to seek God, and God alone. Until then, there will be continuous problem of insecurity. Either one is affected by fear or affected by grief, as *Arjunā* does in the first chapter of the *gītā*.

*sīdanti mama gātrāṇi mukham ca pariśuṣyati vepathuḥ ca śarīre me roma-harṣaḥ ca jāyate  
gāṇḍīvaṃ sraṃsate hastāttvakcaiva paridahyate na ca śaknomyavasthātum bhramatīva ca me  
manaḥ ...*

Even the very thought of losing his near & dear ones, even the imaginary loss, *Arjunā* is unable to withstand. "When I cannot withstand even the imaginary loss, how am I going to withstand the actual loss?"

Therefore, if we are far-sighted ones, we cannot use the world for security. If the world cannot give security, it cannot give peace of mind also. How can an insecure person enjoy peace? If there is no peace and security, where is the question of happiness?

All the sense pleasures that people are after, are not for solving the problem, but only for forgetting the fundamental problem that is constantly disturbing. We are only trying to forget the problems, by pursuing sense pleasures. We are only escaping from the problems, we are not solving them. The escapist methods cannot help us for long.

Therefore, scriptures guide us. If you want to solve the fundamental problem, then seek God for security. When, God becomes my goal to solve the problem of insecurity, I have turned to spirituality. Spirituality begins when I have recognised the problem of insecurity and when I turn towards God.

Then, the scriptures go to the next lesson. How to find God? Where to find God? Because, world cannot help me. It is beautiful like the example of cardboard chair. A cardboard chair has been beautifully made and well decorated with varieties of papers, various colours, stickers, etc. Beautiful chair, made out of cardboard. You can use it for everything except for sitting over that. Similarly, according to the scriptures, the entire world is like a cardboard chair. Emotionally leaning on anything in the creation, is like sitting on a cardboard chair. So, our scriptures say, 'leaning on the world for emotional health is a risky affair. Learn to find God and lean on God and God alone'.

*ananyāścintayanto māṃ ye janāḥ paryupāsate teṣāṃ nityābhīyuktānāṃ yogakṣemaṃ vahāmyaham*

How to find God and find security? That is the final part of the teaching. Scriptures present it in two stages. The first stage is, preparation of the mind to find God. Because, God is the principle, which is the ultimate seed and cause; and which being the extremely subtle principle, beyond even time and space.

Because, before singularity,(the word '*before*' itself is meaningless) time and space existed. It must be an extremely subtle principle. So, we have to prepare the mind. And therefore the initial stage is, make use of the world for preparing the mind, Never use the world for security, the world which includes even people and relationships (it could be a disturbing news but it is a fact).

Therefore, never use the world for peace, security and happiness because world simply cannot give these. World is not useless, use it as a field of service - by serving the world in different areas, by contributing to the world. That is elaborately discussed in the scriptures in the form of *pañca mahā yajñāḥ*. Contribute to your family, to the society, to the culture, to the animals, to the plants - all these are wonderful infrastructure required for the spiritual *sādhana*. Therefore, use the world for, preparing the mind.

Once the mind is prepared, seek God by taking the help of a guru. And with the help of the guru and scriptural teaching, you will find God.

Where to find God? The scriptures ask - where to find the *kāraṇam*? Where have you got the gold in all the ornaments? Wherever the ornaments are, there itself the gold 'is'. Behind the temporary ornaments, the permanent gold is hidden. Similarly, behind the temporary universe, the infinite *nitya īśvara* is hidden.

*aṅguṣṭhamātraḥ puruṣo madhya ātmani tiṣṭhati*

*īśānaṃ bhūtabhavyasya na tato vijugupsate*

*etadvai tat [kāthopaniṣad mantrā 2.1.12]*

In this very world itself, in every object, in every living being, which means, in the very 'me', in the perishable part of 'me', behind the perishable part of 'me', the imperishable God is available.

May you seek that God, find that god and discover security in that very eternal truth in 'you'. Thereafter, life becomes not a struggle for security; but, an expression of the security, that 'I already have found in God'.

Thus, first part of life is to serve the world for preparing the mind. After finding God, life is to serve the world, to declare the glory of the Lord. First, the preparation; next is declaration. First step is preparation by serving. Next step is service again, declaring the glory of the Lord. I do not need anything for my peace security and happiness as I have found them within me myself.

*ādi śaṅkarācāryā* - among the many *ślokās* he wrote, there is a very beautiful work called *śivāparādha kṣamāpaṇa stotram*, a beautiful set of *ślokās*. There he says, 'I did not know that you alone are the ultimate security. Therefore, I was running after various things of the world. In boyhood stage, I was interested in toys. In youth, I was interested in friends. In old age, I am worried about something else. In each stage, I just spent my life in search of one thing or other. I did not seek you'.

'*kṣantavyo me aparādhaḥ śiva śiva śiva bho śrī-mahādeva śambho*'. I did not recognise your presence and value. Therefore, after getting many battering life experiences, now only I know, 'I cannot rely on any blessed thing, except God'.

*kiṃ vā anena dhanena vājīkaribhiḥ prāptena rājyena kiṃ kiṃ vā putra-kalatra-mitra-paśubhir dehena gehena kim*

*jñātvaitat kṣaṇa-bhaṅguraṃ sapadi re tyājyaṃ mano dūrataḥ svātmārthaṃ guruvākyato bhaja mana śrīpārvatīvallabham*

*kiṃ vā anena dhanena* - what is the use of money? Money cannot avoid old age; money cannot help me escape from diseases or death.

Therefore, *dhanena vājīkaribhiḥ prāptena rājyena kiṃ* - kingdom you get, what is the use?

*kiṃ vā putra kalatra mitra paśubhir* - What is the use of *kalatra* (spouse), *mitra* (friend), *paśubhir* (cattle, pet)

*jñātvā etat kṣaṇa bhaṅguraṃ* - Already they are in the process of dying. Indications are already there.

*tyājyaṃ mano dūrataḥ* - stop depending on all these perishable things, hey *manaḥ* (mind)

Śaṅkarācāryā is advising his own mind. Hey *manaḥ*, *dūrataḥ tyājyaṃ* - drop all the dependences on the world. Emotional dependence on the world is called, attachment. Give up all the attachments. Serve them; but, never get attached to them. *jñātvā etat kṣaṇa bhaṅguraṃ sapadi re* - God can take away anything at any time. Therefore, from world dependence, may you switch over to God dependence. *svātmārthaṃ guruvākyataḥ* - with the help of guru's teaching, *bhaja mana śrīpārvatī vallabham* - may you seek *pārvatī paramēśvara*

*Māyā sahitam brahma - īśvara*, who is everywhere, may you seek. And once you seek that Lord, ultimately you will find, that God is *ekaḥ sāraḥ nityaḥ* and *satyaḥ*. God is there in my very heart. In fact, it is nothing but my real and higher nature. When I claim that God as my real nature, that is called '*aham brahma asmi*'. That God - discovered as 'self' - is the real 'I'. Therefore, God dependence becomes self-dependence. Life's mission is accomplished. Thereafter, the whole life is a joy. All the *upaniṣads* talk about the joy of that person who has found security in himself. Life becomes a *līlā* for him.

*aṅoraṅīyān aham eva tadvad mahān ahaṃ viśvam ahaṃ vicitram*

*purātano'haṃ puruṣo'ham īśaḥ hiraṇmayo'haṃ śivarūpam asmi* [kaivalyopaniṣad 20]

'I am' that self, which is the real nature behind the entire universe. Thus, life itself will become successful and meaningful; because, we would have solved our fundamental problem of saṃsāra. But, all these are possible only if we take the guidance of the scriptures and lead a life which is God-centric.

And in Hinduism, we have got so many rituals and functions. People ask the question, 'why do we have so many functions?' We think it is a burden and expenditure. They are not meant for expenditure; but, they are meant to regularly remind us, 'do not get lost in worldly pursuit and forget the real goal of discovering security in that ultimate God which is myself'. And, *śivarātri pūjā* is also only to remind us of this truth.

Our life has to be God-centric. Our mission has to be discovery of that God in ourselves. With these words, I will conclude my talk.

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Transcribed and edited by Swamiji's devotee students