

Sivaratri Talk 2018 by Swami Paramarthananda sakāma bhakti and niṣkāma bhakti

सदाशिवसमारम्भां शङ्कराचार्यमध्यमाम्
अस्मदाचार्यपर्यन्तां वन्देगुरुपरम्पराम्
*sadāśivasamārambhām śaṅkarācāryamadhyamām
asmadācāryaparyantām vandeguruparamparām*

Today I would like to share some thoughts on two types of *bhakti*, namely *sakāma bhakti* and *niṣkāma bhakti*. We all know the word *bhakti* means devotion to *īśvara*, the *īśvara* about whom a *bhaktā* has got some understanding, from the scriptures. That *īśvara* or *bhagavān* is the ultimate cause of universe, *śriṣṭi sthiti laya kartā*.

The *bhagavān* is *sarvajñaḥ* omniscient, *sarva-śaktiḥ* omnipotent etc,. A *bhaktā* has got a general understanding, and the devotion towards such an *īśvara* is called *bhakti*. And for the sake of practicing *bhakti*, our scriptures have given several forms for the *bhagavān*, even though *bhagavān* is only one. Several representative forms are given in the form of *śiva*, *viṣṇu*, *devī*, etc,.

And according to the taste, a *bhaktā* shows his devotion towards the desired *iṣṭa devatā*. This reverential attitude towards *bhagavān* is *bhakti*. The attitude is *bhakti* and the worship is also called *bhakti*. And this *bhakti* alone is of two types, *sakāma bhakti* and *niṣkāma bhakti*.

What is *sakāma bhakti* ? When a *bhaktā* offers reverential worship, and through that worship he wants to fulfill his various desires. He wants to employ the *bhakti* for the fulfillment of his desires. The desires can be either in the form of getting various things, or in the form of getting rid of various things. When a *sakāma bhaktā* uses this *sakāma bhakti*, for the fulfillment of his desires, he has got a rough idea about the *sakāma bhakti*. And the understanding of the *sakāma bhakti* is based on various ideas, he has heard and gathered from different sources.

What is the common understanding of *sakāma bhakti* ? It is widely held understanding, unfortunately a wrong understanding. In many places a *bhaktā* has heard that *bhagavān* is omniscient, omnipotent and all compassionate. The combination is very important - omniscient, omnipotent and compassionate. We are all children of the *bhagavān*. Because *bhagavān* is the creator and we are *bhaktās*, when we appeal to the *bhagavān* for anything, what is *bhagavān's* job? As the omniscient , omnipotent, compassionate Lord, whatever I appeal, *bhagavān* will fulfill. *Bhagavān* can never say, "I cannot give". When I seek, anything from local people, they can answer "I cannot afford". But *bhagavān* cannot give that answer. Therefore what is the expectation of the *bhaktā*? Whatever I ask, it is *bhagavān's* job to just keep giving them.

There is something fundamentally wrong about our understanding of *sakāma bhakti*, therefore we should revise our understanding. According to the scriptures, *sakāma bhakti* means *sakāma karma sahita bhakti*. Always *sakāma bhakti* should go along with a relevant *karma* or action. A relevant *karma* prescribed by the scriptures, based on the type of *kāma*. The scriptures do prescribe varieties of *sakāma karmāṇi*. After performing those *karmāṇi* or actions, a *sakāma bhaktā* appeals for the *karma phalam*. So the appeal is always for *sakāma karma phalam*. And when *bhagavān* receives this appeal, *bhagavān* gives the result not based on the appeal, but based on the type of *karma* performed. Because *bhagavān* is defined as *karma-phala-dātā*. Therefore *sakāma bhakti* should be understood as a type of *karma* only. And once I understand it is a *karma*, and *bhagavān* will give the *karma-phalam* not according to my desire, but according to the law of *karma*.

According to *sakāma bhakti* which is a form of *karma*, the *phalam* is going to be dependent on the law of *karma*. So, the result may be in keeping with my expectation, or the result may not be in keeping with my expectation. The *karma-phalam* can be *aniṣṭam iṣṭam miśram ca trividham karmaṇaḥ*. Therefore, *sakāma bhakti* may become successful, or may not become successful. There is no guarantee, that our *sakāma bhakti*, our *sakāma pūja* or our *sakāma japa* or our *sakāma pāraṇam* will be always successful. This understanding must be very clear.

Thus a *sakāma bhaktā* faces a very high risk of losing his very faith in God, if he doesn't understand the principle of *sakāma bhakti*, when his expectations fail. Therefore according to our scriptures, *bhakti* should never be confined to *sakāma bhakti* only. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Kṛṣṇā strongly criticizes, *sakāma bhaktās* who totally rely upon *sakāma bhakti*

*yāmimām puṣpitām vācam pravadantyavipaścitaḥ
vedavādaratāḥ pārtha nānyadastīti vādinaḥ* BG Verse 2-42

*kāmātmānaḥ svargaparā janmakarmaphalaprādām
kriyāvīśeṣabahulām bhogaiśvaryaḡatim prati* BG Verse 2-43

*bhogaiśvaryaḡasaktānām tayāpahṡtacetasām
vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḡ samādhau na vidhīyate* BG Verse 2-44

*kāmaistaistairḡtajñānāḡ prapadyante'nyadevatāḡ
taḡ taḡ niyamamāsthāya prakṡtyā niyatāḡ svayā* BG Verse 7-20

These *sakāma bhaktā's* mind will never rest in peace. It is always with anxiety. When *sakāma bhakti* doesn't work, it would give rise to lot of anger and depression. Anger towards God himself.

And in Bhagavad Gita, Lord Kṛṣṇā warns that the success of *sakāma bhakti* is highly doubtful, because always rules and regulations in *sakāma bhakti*, are more rigid. Which deity should be worshipped? What *naivedyam* should be offered. Which type of flower can be offered? What should be the type of *pūjā*? If we violate the prescribed rules and regulations, result may not come as expected.

Even with a little bit of practice of *niṣkāma bhakti*, one will see a sea of change in his/her mind. The difference will be in the degree of success, but it is always success. The degree of success is directly proportional to the time and effort I am willing to put in practicing this *yoga-abhyāsa* as prescribed in scriptures. And by practicing this, I seek mental strength rather than anything else. Scriptures point out as what type of transformation one can accomplish by practicing *niṣkāma bhakti*. It is so wonderful and attractive.

In Bhagavad Gita there is a chapter called, 'bhakti-yoga' in which Lord Kṛṣṇā condenses the *niṣkāma bhakti* and *yoga-abhyāsa* in a set of 10 - 12 verses.

santuṣṭaḥ satataṁ yogī yatātmā dṛḍhaniścayaḥ

mayyarpitamanobuddhīyo madbhaktaḥ sa me priyaḥ BG Verse 12-14

satataṁ santuṣṭaḥ - always happy and contented with whatever he can earn legitimately without comparing himself with others. He is happy with what he has.

yasmānnodvijate loko lokānnodvijate ca yaḥ

harṣāmarṣabhayodvegairmukto yaḥ sa ca me priyaḥ BG Verse 12-15

The one who doesn't disturb the world also. He enjoys such a tender considerate mind that he doesn't disturb the world. But more importantly he enjoys such a strong mind that he is not disturbed by the events of the world. Not only the world, events happening in the family, events happening to own body.

yo na hr̥ṣyati na dveṣṭi na śocati na kāṅkṣati

śubhāśubhāparityāgī bhaktimānyaḥ sa me priyaḥ BG Verse 12-17

He doesn't divide the world into *śubham* and *aśubham*. For him the whole creation is manifestation of *bhagavān*. Therefore, there is no *aśubham*, everything is *śubham* and *maṅgalam* only. We don't consider anything *aśubham* including death.

"*mṛtyorbhibhēti kiṁ mūḍhā kiṁ na vimuñcati*".

Are you afraid of death O fool! ? Just by being afraid of death, do you think that death will leave you" ?

Biggest problem of the mind is *bhayam*. And the first benefit of *niṣkāma bhakti* is understanding and removal of this *bhayam*.

abhayaṁ satvaśuddhiḥ jñāna yoga vyavasthitih BG Verse 16-1

abhayaṁ pratiṣṭhāṁ vindate atha so'bhayaṁ(सोऽभयं) gato bhavati TU

Therefore *sakāma bhakti* is ok, but more important is *niṣkāma bhakti*. It requires scriptural study, minimum Bhagavad Gita study. *Jñānam* is the remedy for *bhayam* and *jñānam* is the only medicine for *bhayam*.

Thus understand *sakāma bhakti*, understand *niṣkāma bhakti*. Follow both of them and enjoy the benefit of *bhakti*. On this auspicious *śivarātri* day (or night), may Lord *śiva* help us in practice *niṣkāma bhakti*, study of scriptures, and discover a strong mind.

Om pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidaṁ pūrṇātpūrṇamudacyate I

pūrṇasyapūrṇamādāyapūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate II

Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ