

Ahimsa and kṣamā

The most important values

New Year 2017 talk by Sri Swami Viditatmananda Saraswati

Happy New Year to all of you! Wish you all a very happy, healthy and a prosperous year. Beginning with the word prosperity, there are two kinds of prosperity. From today onwards may you have both kinds of prosperity! The first kind of prosperity is the one with which we are all familiar. That is the material prosperity in terms of money, fame, power, position. That of course you should have. And the other kind is the spiritual prosperity that Lord Kṛṣṇa calls *Devi sampat* or the divine wealth or the divine virtues. That prosperity is extremely important. So you wish and pray that you may also have this other prosperity, consisting of the divine virtues.

In the Bhagavad Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa describes many virtues of which two right now stand out in my mind. These are *ahimsa* or non-violence and *kṣamā* or cooperation, lightheartedness, forgiveness. Our Pujya Swamiji used to say that these two virtues, *ahimsa* and *kṣamā*, non-violence and accommodation, forgiveness, make a person a saint. This person may or may not be a wise person, but still having these virtues makes him a saintly person. He is a simple person who is comfortable with himself, who enjoys an inner harmony, an inner peace. Therefore, he automatically spreads peace around him. Through his thoughts, through his words, through his deeds, this saintly person spreads peace and happiness around him, because he is able to accept and love other people as they are. He does not make any demands upon them as to what they should be and what they should not be, accepting them as they are. That is the reason why people feel very comfortable with him. He is a non-demanding person and therefore there is harmony in the relationships also. This person enjoys harmony within himself or herself and also enjoys the harmony with the world around, with human beings around him. Our problem is usually with the human beings.

On the other hand, when one does not possess this divine virtue, one does not possess a saintliness, does not possess the spirit of non-violence or forgiveness, then one is not happy with oneself. Because it is a non-violence and the *kṣamā* or the non-violence or forgiveness brings out the very non-violent virtues within, it brings out the very best in me, brings out the true self in me. Seeing myself in that manner, I find myself happy with myself, satisfied with myself, accepting of myself. With this self-acceptance there is no conflict in the mind. So whenever I am a self-accepting person, a kind person, a compassionate person, I am free from conflicts in my mind and at that time I enjoy a peace and harmony within myself. I find that I am acceptable to myself. I am happy with myself.

When these virtues are not there, there cannot be happiness, there cannot be peace in the mind. Lord Kṛṣṇa says, *asantasya kutasukam*, how can a person be happy when that person does not enjoy the inner peace? How can there be happiness? Meaning that, inner peace is equated to happiness by Lord Kṛṣṇa, because happiness is a state of mind. It has nothing to do with what is around, with what one has, it has to do with what one is. And we can say that the happiness that a person enjoys is directly proportional to the inner wealth of virtues that one enjoys.

We need both kinds of prosperity, the material as well as the spiritual. Material wealth brings money and some power. Also we need name and fame to live our lives comfortably, to meet our needs, our responsibilities and our commitments. We have to live our lives and for living thus a responsible, accountable, comfortable life, we do need material wealth also. There is no question about it. But then, we also need to enjoy happiness and comfort, so inner comfort also is required. Outer comfort is required and inner comfort is very much required. For that we need the divine virtues of divine prosperity or divine wealth. In short there should be a judicious combination of both the material wealth as well as the divine wealth in our lives. Vedanta is not opposed to material wealth at all. Vedanta will suggest that material wealth should not be acquired by compromising the divine wealth. So while pursuing the inner or divine virtues, you may as well have the material wealth, then we have the best of both.

Briefly talking about these two virtues, *ahimsa* and *kṣamā*, *ahimsa* means non-violence. First of all we should have a value for non-violence. Since I do not want to be hurt by others, it is only proper that I also should not hurt others. That is the basis for the value of non-violence. I should not hurt others physically, as well as emotionally. I do not want to be hurt physically or emotionally, and therefore, I should be very conscious, alert and careful not to hurt others by my actions, by my words and by my thoughts, either physically or emotionally. And that is possible when I respect others.

As I respect myself as I am, I also have to strive to respect others as they are. Respecting others means respecting their sentiments, respecting their feelings, respecting their freedom to be what they are. Respecting their views, all of them even though they may be different from my own views and my own sentiments, but still I respect them. So respecting people means respecting their sentiments, respecting their freedom. This is the basis for practicing non-violence. Really speaking, by respecting others in this manner, I am respecting myself. Because in the ultimate sense their self and myself are not different. This value thus leads us to the knowledge of the oneness between themselves and myself. When I am able to display non-violence, it is harmony with the true self and there is inner peace and inner comfort.

Then the question arises, what if they hurt me? Swamiji, I try not to hurt others, other people hurt me. That is when the value of *kṣamā*, forgiveness by accommodation, or large-heartedness, gains importance. What is large-heartedness? To accept others, accommodate others, gracefully in spite of their thoughts, in spite of their words, in spite of their actions. Without demanding that they change their thoughts, words and actions, I gracefully accept them. This is how we now are able to do this with the people we love, like with our children. We are able to large-heartedly accept their words and deeds and still there is no resentment. My love doesn't get affected in spite of their behavior, because love and large-heartedness is there. For practicing *ahimsa*, we are required to have a similar large-heartedness and love for the other people also.

Secondly, we should also remind ourselves that a person who hurts others is a hurt person, because only a hurt person can hurt others. A happy person cannot hurt others. That a person's words, or the body language, or behavior is hurtful to me, shows that there is hurt within that person. That's why our swamiji used to tell us to have a two-step response. Rather than responding to the behavior of the person, which is a one-step response, step back and respond instead to the person behind the behavior and we will find a hurt person. This invokes our sympathy, our compassion. *Kṣamā* or forgiveness is possible when there is genuine sympathy, genuine compassion, which arises when we see the person who is a hurt person. So instead of responding to behavior, we try to respond to the person behind the behavior. Therefore, these are the most important values in relating to the people and relating to the world. *Ahimsa* and *kṣamā* are the most important values. While relating to others, I try not to hurt others by my words, behavior or thoughts. And in responding to the behavior of others, as best as I can I try to be as large-hearted as possible, as accommodative as possible. That brings about harmony in relationship; we can experience true love and happiness. That's a great challenge. The greatest challenge comes from the people who are closest to us. Those who are closest to us are more likely to hurt us, because we have greater expectations from them. We get hurt when our expectations are not met with. The closer the person is, the greater the expectations I am likely to have. Therefore, I am more likely to be hurt by people who are close to me. Secondly, we feel comfortable with people who are close to us; therefore, we are not very watchful or alert with reference to practicing our value.

When I feel comfortable, I become myself, I lose the awareness of my value, so my resentment, my anger comes out. This means that my aggressiveness or violence also is more likely to manifest before the people who are close to me. Therefore, in relating to those who are close to me, these two values become extremely important. Here there is a great challenge and we have to take up this challenge. The more we take up this challenge, the more we grow in our large-heartedness, in our accommodation, in our sensitivity; and the more we grow, the happier we are. The more the divine virtues are assimilated, the happier we find ourselves without any reason at all. Therefore, this becomes a journey towards becoming a saint, towards becoming a truly successful person.

Again, good luck to all of you so that you take up this challenge for this coming year, because we make these New Year resolves. This will be a good resolve, to try to be a person who practices *ahimsa* and *kṣamā*, non-violence and accommodation. Then you have the best of both. You have the outer comfort as well as the inner comfort. Best of luck. *Om tat sat*.