

How to Teach the Value of the Values Swami Viditatmananda Saraswati's talk to teachers

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(... continuation of 4th and final part)

I may have performed an act of dishonesty such as stealing, because there is some material advantage in that. But as a result, it creates in me a sense of guilt because it is quite contrary to what I expect from myself, meaning that I was not able to live up to my own expectation of myself and when I cannot live up to my expectation of myself, I feel unhappy with myself. I feel dissatisfied with myself. I feel I am not good enough. I'm not worthy. This is the main problem. My own dissatisfaction with myself, the judging of myself as not worthy, is the cause of my sadness.

Why am I saying it? Because the time may come when I may not expect it from myself. Because you can make an argument: "Swamiji, what about a cold-blooded murderer who doesn't feel any guilt? There is no rule that you feel guilty. The thief doesn't feel guilty. He is deliberate. He plans his action very well and then commits the theft and feels very happy about it. Is it not so?" So, there is no rule that you feel guilty when you violate the values. There are people who do not feel guilty at all. Many people just tell lies right and left and feel nothing at all because that is the way to do things. It's convenient. Is it not so? There are people who kill hundreds of people, just blowing them off and they feel they have done something right. So someone can argue that there is no guilt feeling always.

Is it good to have no guilt? Someone says, "I think it is against the *purushartha* of

dharma." It is against dharma, that is true, and that it comes under the law of karma also is true, but for the person, if our argument is that following a value is required because otherwise we feel guilty, there are people who do not feel guilty at all in violating right. So there are exceptions to the rule. If there is an exception, then the rule is broken. The thing is that if you keep on abusing your freewill, if you keep on deliberately doing something that is wrong, the time comes when you stop feeling. You have lost the sensitivity. The idea is that by repeatedly abusing your freewill, you lose the sensitivity. Therefore, to feel guilty there must be sensitivity. One has to be sensitive to know that what I have done is wrong. If the sensitivity is not there, like a cat doesn't have that sensitivity, doesn't feel that there is anything wrong in killing a mouse, so when I don't feel wrong in killing somebody, what does it mean? It means that I have deteriorated to the level of being a cat. I am no more a human being.

Is it good? No it's not good, because sensitivity is what enables you to enjoy things. If you place a nice flower before a cow, what will it do? What a beautiful flower! What a color! No. At the most it will eat it. Can I call it enjoying a flower? No. For a cow the flower is perhaps a kind of food. For you, a flower generates lots of emotions. Why? Because you are a sensitive person. When there is sensitivity, it gives us the capacity to enjoy things, to contact something at a subtler level. A flower of

course is food at one level, but it has color, it has fragrance, it has beauty. To reach another level requires a greater sensitivity. Thus, by abusing freewill we keep losing sensitivity and are sacrificing our capacity to enjoy things. Then for the same level of enjoyment people who abuse the freewill require many hard things like alcohol. If you look at the private lives of these people, they are bound to be addicts; they are bound to be pursuing only hard kinds of pleasures, because they have no capacity to enjoy anything that calls for sensitivity. Therefore, it is a great damage that one does by abusing freewill. In some way you have to communicate this to your children by giving examples. As they say in Gujurathi, reading Bhāgavatam to someone without sensitivity is like reading Bhāgavatam before a buffalo. What does the buffalo understand? Nothing. So if I allow myself to be convinced into thinking like a buffalo, I will sacrifice millions and millions of years of evolution. From the level of a buffalo we have evolved to the level of human beings, which has taken I don't know how many million years. All that is compromised, therefore, next time when I am born, I will be born a buffalo. I will be born as an insensitive creature because I have already become that. Even though I am in a human form, I have already become a buffalo inside, meaning insensitive. Therefore, my next birth will be like that.

People sometimes ask a question, "Swamiji, if you were born a human being does it mean that you will be born as a human being?" Not at all; it depends on how I conduct myself. We create our own destiny. We don't need a third agent, God etc. to do this, we do it ourselves. So by using this freewill, or abusing the freewill, a human being is creating his or her own future. This has to be communicated in order to create a value for sensitivity. With this sensitivity you can enjoy music, and there are so many categories of music. When it comes to classical music I dose off because I don't

have that sensitivity. If you present a Picasso before me, I wonder "what is this?" I look for shapes and order and harmony and I don't find that. You need a different kind of sensitivity to appreciate what that is.

Therefore, sensitivity is the name of the game. One has to be sensitive to be able to follow the values. I should be sensitive to your feelings. If I am not sensitive, without any intension I will wind up doing something that hurts your feelings. "Oh, I did not mean that!" You did not mean it, but you did it anyway. How did you do it? It's because you are not sensitive. So therefore, following values like non-violence requires us to be sensitive people. The sensitivity is about the feelings of others. They have a right to live, a right to be free, a right to be respected. Just as I want to be respected, everyone has a right to be respected. Therefore, everybody should be respected. A child should be respected. We see in our upanishads also that the great teachers respected their students. Not only the students respect the teacher, the teacher also respects the students.

In Kathopanishad we saw how the great teacher Dharmaraja, the Lord Death, praises his disciple Naciketas: "How great you are!" "You are even greater than me," at one point he says. "I wish I had students like you." So, respect for everybody, whoever it is, is a basic value. PujyaSwamiji says that you should respect your audience. Don't think that they don't understand. Sometimes the speaker says, "These fellows don't understand anyway." Don't say that. Everybody understands. Not only that, but it is the duty of the teacher to see that the listeners understand and not to dismiss them because you think that they don't live up to some intellectual expectation. The teacher should be able to communicate to the student at the level where the student is. When children are growing, you have to be particularly sensitive to their feelings. How will they interpret what I am saying? How will they feel?

Thus, non-violence, the basic value, requires us to be sensitive people, sensitive to the feelings and the emotions of others. But still, we find ourselves violating the value of non-violence. You can hurt somebody by a physical action; you can hit somebody. That's the very crude violence that is well known. You can hurt the plants by plucking leaves. Sometimes people do that; just absent mindedly they keep plucking leaves. If you are not careful when walking on the road, you might be crushing some creatures particularly in the monsoon season. That's why in India, you see that the sādhus are always parivrajaka, meaning that they are wandering monks. He is aniketa, he has no house. He has no kitchen, therefore a bhikshu. But the sadhus during the months of monsoon will not travel. During the caturmasya, the four months (they call it caturmasya, but actually it is two months), they camp in one place because travelling in those days along the road there would be creatures coming out because the water goes into the houses and they all come out, poor fellows. And quite possibly you might injure them. This is physical injury. You should be careful.

Then, in our culture vegetarian food is respected because its basic value is non-violence. Eating meat requires killing living beings, animals and other creatures, and that is a great deal of violence. When you teach like this, the importance of vegetarian food from non-violence and health points of view etc., you should equip yourself with all this understanding before you go to the class. In order to teach the topic, there must be statistical data, some stories, some other research information should be there. But then, they will ask you a question. "Swamiji, you say that eating meat is violence, but then you say that the plants and vegetables also are life. Whether you are a vegetarian eating plants and vegetables, what is the difference between eating egg and eggplant? Egg is life, eggplant also is life. Pumpkin is life and a

chicken also is life. What is the difference? You are eating a live organism anyway."

There are a couple of ways of answering that question. One way of answering the question is, look at the process of evolution. How does the evolution take place? It starts from a unicellular organism and has completed its process by becoming a human being, the most evolved organism. In between there are millions of organisms and different levels of evolution. How you determine that a given creature is more evolved as a creature depends upon the consciousness and sensitivity. The human being is the most evolved because a human being is a self-conscious and sensitive being. A cat is less evolved, having less consciousness and less sensitivity. A mosquito is even less evolved. A plant is even less evolved. So now you have a choice between a plant, like eggplant, and fish. Which is more evolved eggplant or fish? How many million years does it take for an organism to evolve from being an eggplant to being a fish? Is it not so? So when you consume an eggplant, you are consuming a certain amount of nature's resources, when you consume a fish you are consuming much more work on the part of nature, because it has taken so many million years to evolve and therefore, killing a fish is much more violent than consuming an eggplant. Both involve violence, but consuming vegetarian food involves the minimum violence. Consuming fish would involve more. Consuming chicken would involve more. A goat involves more. A cow involves even more, because they are of a greater category of evolution. Among animals, a cow is the most evolved animal as compared to the wild carnivorous animals. Herbivores are more evolved than carnivores like tigers, lions and so on. So killing a lion may be less violent than killing a cow. And a lion is more evolved than perhaps lower forms of animals.

Thus, when consuming vegetables, we are consuming the minimum resources of nature. That's why it is true that when we eat vegetarian food we are involved to a certain extent in violence. That is the nature, you can't help it. Even if you want, you can't eat rocks. Can you eat pebbles? If you could eat pebbles it would be no violence at all. But anyway, the rule is *jivojivasyajivanam*, one life form supports another life form. One life form requires another life form to survive. Every life form requires live food. That is why we eat live food. So plants, fruits and vegetables, are alive, otherwise we can't eat them. That's why they say to eat them when they are alive. The way Indians cook, by the time you are finished with cooking most of the life is gone, because of frying, spicing, and so on. Live food is raw food. That's why naturopathy prescribes that you should eat only raw food.

Another argument is that vegetables and fruits do not have the feeling to protect themselves. They don't move away when you pluck them or eat them, whereas even a small insect will move away when it sees somebody coming. A vegetable has much less consciousness than an insect has. The less consciousness you have, the less the reaction is. The more the consciousness is, the more the reaction is. But somebody will say that just because it doesn't have much consciousness, doesn't mean you can kill it. Therefore, *jivojivasyajivanam*, every life form requires live food.

Also, protection of the environment is much greater when people eat vegetarian food, than when people eat animals. More resources of nature are involved in sustaining the animals. Even though the cow is considered sacred in India and most people do not kill the cows, the cows contribute to the greenhouse gases effect. There are more cows in India than in USA, but at least they are not bred for food. So,

we have to keep open minded and keep learning and be willing to change.

The more sensitive a person you are, the more likely you are to get hurt because more faults come to your notice. So, the next value is *kshama*, acceptance. You can be a non-violent person if you are also an accepting and forgiving person. You have a two-step response. When a person hurts me, my immediate response is to hurt back. That is called a one-step response. A two-step response is that I step back and then I see my feeling. In a one-step response, no feeling is involved. So, in stepping back I recognize that this person hurt me and ask myself, why did this person hurt me? Have I done something? Then I have time to think and I can respond to the person rather than to the behavior. So, this person has done something by which I am hurt, but that person is in pain and does not know how to manage the pain. I happen to be here, and therefore, he is unloading his pain on me. Thus, seeing that a person is in pain may arouse your sympathy and it may be possible for you to accept that person's behavior and not react to it.

Question: What about the dialog that Arjuna had with Lord Krishna about killing the respected people in his own clan?

Often this basic question is asked, in the *Bhagavadgita* isn't Lord Krishna telling Arjuna to fight? So, one common interpretation of *Gita* is that Lord Krishna is teaching violence to Arjuna. He was asking him to kill. But no, Lord Krishna is not asking Arjuna to kill. Lord Krishna is asking Arjuna to perform his *dharma*, his duty. Arjuna is a *kshatriya* and the duty of a *kshatriya* is to protect *dharma*. So ideally Arjuna and the Pandavas represent *dharma* and the Kauravas represent *adharma*. This is a conflict between *dharma* and *adharma*. So, Lord Krishna says to Arjuna, "Your

duty is to protect dharma; why don't you do that?"

So, perhaps we have to interpret this as the active resistance against evil. Duryodhana represents evil. If you do not resist that, it will spread throughout the whole society. If one limb is rotting, someone has to remove the limb and it is violence. But that is to protect the rest of the body. Similarly, all those Kauravas in the battlefield of the Mahabharata, called Kurukshetra, are supposed to represent the evil that had accumulated on earth. Therefore, the whole thing was designed to bring an end to them, to eliminate that evil. So Arjuna who asked not to fight, has to perform his duty. And most important now, for your information, in the second chapter Lord Krishna says, *t a s m a d u t t i s h t o k a u n t e y a y u d d h a y a k r t a n i s h c a y a* (ii). Therefore, hey Kaunteya, *uttishto*, arise, and return to fight. But before you fight, what state of mind should you have? *Sukha-dukhe same k r i t v a l a b h a - a l a b h h a u j a y a - a j a y a u t a t o y u d d h a y a y u j y a s v a n a i v a p a m a v a p s y a s i* (iii). Then afterwards, Arjuna engages in the battle. Before that, create the state of mind. What is it? *Sukha-*

dukhe same kritva, be even-minded towards pleasure and pain. *Labhalabhau*, be even minded towards gain and loss. *Jayajayau*, be even-minded towards victory and defeat, meaning that you are fighting this battle, not for victory, but for protecting dharma. If escaping is your goal, you will perhaps compromise dharma. Therefore, being even-minded means being non-violent. But how can you even fight a battle being non-violent? If you have the right attitude, you can. So violence is an attitude and non-violence also is an attitude. Non-violence is not to give up action. No, it is an attitude. Sometimes outwardly, it may involve a violent action. But inwardly the intension is to bring about the good of a larger number of people. Just as a surgeon amputates a limb, it is for the wellbeing of the body. Therefore, Lord Krishna asked Arjuna to perform his duty on the basis of non-violence. In the 18th chapter he says, *hatvapisaimanllokannahantinani badhyateiv. Yasyanahaikatobhavo buddhiryasyanalipyate*, It is free from *ahankara*, that I am doing it. And one will have no attachment to the outcome. You are destroying all these people and are not incurring any sin, because the attitude is non-violence.

Concluded

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- i Bhagavadgita, Ch 3, 21. Whatsoever an important person does, that alone the other people do.
 - ii Bhagavadgītā, Ch 2, 37. Therefore, Kaunteya (Arjuna)! get up, having resolved to fight.
 - iii Bhagavadgītā, Ch 2, 38. Taking pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat to be the same, prepare for battle.
 - iv Bhagavadgītā, Ch 18, 17. The one who has no doership, the one whose mind is not affected, he, even killing these people, does not kill, nor is he bound.