

## 2020 New Year Talk by Swami Paramarthanandaji

First of all, I wish all of you a very happy healthy peaceful and prosperous new year 2020. You must be very curious to know what I am going to talk about. Today, I propose to explain one of the statements that I often repeat in my Vedanta classes. And that statement is that in a Vedic society, family is the basic unit. Whereas in a democratic society, the individual is the basic unit.



Thus, there is a very big paradigm shift with regard to the Vedic and democratic society. It has got far reaching consequences which are already experienced. Many of the changes are irreversible, but it is worth knowing, what is the basic vision. So when we say in the Vedic society, family is a basic unit, it means, Veda gives great importance to family life. It is the basic is the answer. And I want to share some thoughts with regard to this basic vision, and also why Veda considers family life as a very important thing.

According to the Vedic vision, the Vedic family is designed in such a way that it can fulfill all human aspirations. By human aspiration, I mean, all the human goals, which we call as *puruṣārtha* - *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*. In modern language, they call it Maslow's hierarchy of human being. It is nothing but *puruṣārthas* only. While family life will help in the fulfillment of all the *puruṣārthas*, it will transform a human being also. To put in Swami Chinmayananda's language, transforming the animal-man into a man-man into a god-man. All these are possible, if we follow a Vedic life as envisioned by the Vedas.

In *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*, there is a section called *puruṣavida-brāhmaṇa*, first chapter 4<sup>th</sup> section. There, he talks about the first manifestation of Brahma as the creator of the rest of the universe. It says that, after Brahmaji arrived, he looked around, there was no one at all. There was no one for company. Therefore Brahmaji felt lonely and uncomfortable and he was looking for a partner.

स वै नैव रेमे तस्मादेकाकी न रमते                      Br.Up. 1.4.3

*sa vai naiva reme tasmādekākī na ramate*

Brahmaji was unhappy as an individual and therefore he looked around for a partner. Thereafter, he talks about how Brahmaji created Manu and Saharūpa and the details are given. The *upaniṣad* concludes in the section, that since, Brahmaji felt lonely, all the living beings including human beings will never be happy as single. So, the *upaniṣad* says

“*ātmaivedamagre āsīt*” ,

“*so kāmayata*” ,

“*jāyā me syāt*”

All the human beings also, having the genes of Brahmaji, they all uniformly want partners. Therefore desire for a partner and desire for getting progeny and desire for raising a family, the Veda says, it is an intrinsic desire of all living beings, including human beings. This is the fundamental universal aspiration or desire, which is called *artha-kāma-icchā*. *Kāma* means desire for a partner and *artha* means desire for wealth so that one can raise a family. Therefore family life fulfills the first fundamental and universal desire of a human being for *artha* and *kāma*. Only in family life, this *artha kāma* desire can be fulfilled.

Then Veda points out that if we use a family life, only for *artha* and *kāma*, we will prove that we are like all other animals. Because animals also get their mates and they also raise a family effectively.

So we also only get married and raise a family, we will prove ourselves to be an animal-man only. Therefore family life must be utilized to convert us from a mere animal-man to a man-man. Otherwise we will prove ourselves to be well dressed, sophisticated, smartphone wielding animals. That will be the only difference.

आहार-निद्रा-भय-मैतुनम् च सामान्यमेवतत् पशुभिर्नराणाम्  
बुद्धिः तेषाम् अधिगो विशेषः बुद्ध्याहिना पशुभिर्समानाः

*āhāra-nidrā-bhaya-maitunam ca sāmānyamevatat paśubhirnarāṇām  
buddhiḥ teṣām adhigo viśeṣaḥ buddhyāhinā paśubhirsamānāḥ*

Therefore family life is meant for *artha kāma*, alright, but it also must be utilized for raising our mind through *dharmic* activities. Therefore Veda prescribes several *dharmic* activities to bring about an internal transformation to develop values, to refine our mind, to remove our selfishness and to expand our mind to accommodate the entire cosmos and that is possible only by service. Therefore Veda prescribes varieties of religious and service activities for a *grhastha*. In addition to *artha* and *kāma* activities, many *dharmic* religious service activities are prescribed in the form of *pañca-mahā-yajña* which I have talked about very often. I don't want to get into that topic. Many religious activities are seeking the grace of god, grace of the rishis and grace of our ancestors, *deva-riṣi-pitṛ-pūjanam*. Many service activities are also prescribed in the form of *manuṣya-yajña* and *bhūta-yajña*. They are all to reduce our *ahaṅkāra*, our *mamakāra*, our *rāga*, our *dveṣa*, and to expand our mind.

Not only Veda prescribes all these activities as compulsory activities, Veda insists that they must be done by the family members together. It is very important that all these religious and service activities should be done by all the family members as a team. This is very important, because, only then, family will function as one team and one unit. Otherwise, each member will pursue his / her own activity and family will not exist as one unit. Different members will go out at different times and they will come in at different times and they eat taking from refrigerator at different times and they will never have one harmonious unity. The unity will be among the cooks, drivers and watchman. They will function as one unit. But family members will not have that harmony and cohesiveness. Then such a family may break up also. Therefore, for the sake of family unity, Veda said that all the *pūjas*, ritual and services should be done by all the family members to indicate that all these are called *yajña*.

The very definition of *yajña* is given as *pañktah-yajñah*. *Pañkta* means, every family *pūjas* should involve five members, *yajamāna*, *patnī*, *putra*, *daiva-vittam*, and *mānuṣa-vittam*. Man should be involved. Wife should not say “you do, I will go somewhere”. Wife should also join. Children should not go somewhere. They all should join. Thus, *yajamāna*, *patnī* and *putra* should go together. And of course, *daiva-vittam*, it should be guided by the scriptural knowledge. And *mānuṣa-vittam*, it should involve money also, for *dānam* etc,. Therefore, all the *dharmic* activities are called *yajña*. *Pañktam* means family should survive together as one cohesive unit. Because Veda was very much aware that family unity is not that easy. Because every member of the family has got his own her own personality, different ways of thinking and different *rāga-dveṣas*, therefore, bringing different minds with different personalities together is very difficult.

*Gṛhasthāśrama* can be compared to a delicately balanced coalition government. Family life also is exactly like a coalition government. If we are going to highlight the differences, there will be quarrels; there will be fights and the family will breakup. In a broken family, everyone suffers and the greatest suffering is for the upcoming children. *Gṛhasthāśrama* will require lot of adjustments. It may be very painful. But if *gṛhasthāśrama* should survive, that adjustment is required and however much pain is involved, a family must learn to put up with the pain remembering that family is required for *dharma-anuṣṭhānam*.

The common minimum programme for a family is *dharma* and *mokṣa*. For the sake of *dharma* and for the sake of future *mokṣa*, we should be together as one unit and work together as one unit engaging in *dharmic* activities. It is the vision that is given by the Veda. If every family remembers this and keeps *dharma* and *mokṣa* as primary, then that family will complete one full term of *gṛhasthāśrama* life. In the process *gṛhastha* will get converted from animal-man to man-man. *Artha-kāma-pradhāna* to *dharma-pradhāna*.

What is the full term of *gṛhasthāśrama* ? According to Veda, the full term of *gṛhasthāśrama* means, raising the children to become healthy, responsible, well educated adult. In the Vedic society, getting the children married also was considered as part of *gṛhasthāśrama* term. Nowadays it is very difficult because the children do not belong to Vedic society, they belong to democratic society. So they have got their own philosophy. But really speaking, getting the children married also is considered as a duty of the *gṛhastha*. When that much is accomplished, then *gṛhasthāśrama* life is completed. Children are grown up and the *gṛhasthas* also have grown up to become the man-man, i.e., *dharma-pradhāna* human being.

Once *grhasthāśrama* is completed, Veda offers a very beautiful retirement programme for those who are interested to grow further. Because animal-man to man-man is not enough. Man-man to God-man is the ultimate growth. For that, Veda offers a comprehensive retirement scheme, in which one retires from professional life, retires from social life and retires from family life also. Life is dedicated for only spiritual enquiry and contemplation, *jñāna-yoga-pradhāna* life consisting of *śravaṇam*, *mananam* and *nididhyāsanam*. Varieties of schemes are offered by the Veda. *Vānaprasthāśrama* is one scheme; *sannyasāśrama* is another scheme.

Varieties of schemes are available for the *grhastha* to take to a retired life style. In this, husband and wife, the couple who have completed their duties, the couple decides to dedicate their lives for only spiritual *sādhana*. They don't look upon themselves as husband and wife. Husband wife relationship is deliberately ended. They look upon themselves as co-seekers in spiritual life. They change their infrastructure. Also they change to suit the pursuit of committed *śravaṇam mananam* and *nididhyāsanam*, without social distraction, professional distraction and family distractions. In short, self-enquiry and contemplation. This is an option given to the *grhasthas* who have completed their duties.

Once the couple decides to lead such a life, they have an option to stay with the children or to stay away from the children. Both options are given. Whatever option is chosen, the idea is that life should be dedicated for *mokṣa-puruṣārtha*, otherwise, spiritual *puruṣārtha*. Once this step is taken, the role of the parents and the role of children get reversed. Until now, parents served the children, helping them to grow. Now that the children are grown up, they have to serve the parents to pursue their spiritual life style. It means, children should cooperate with parents allowing them to get involved only in spiritual activities, not dragging them to any one of the worldly activities. Not only that, children have to provide all the support to the parents, nearby or far away. Whatever is the type of support, financial support or maintenance of the infrastructure, or all of them, the children take care of them and the family is dedicated to Vedantic study consisting of *Bhagavad-gītā* and *upaniṣad*. As a *grhastha*, they said no time Swamiji. But now as a retired *grhastha*, they should not complain, no time. Between two classes, they should revise also.

How to lead such a retired life? Lord Kṛṣṇa gives a beautiful guideline throughout the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

असक्तिरनभिष्वङ्गः पुत्रदारगृहादिषु।

नित्यं च समचित्तत्वमिष्टानिष्टोपपत्तिषु॥ BG १३ - ९

*asaktiranabhiṣvaṅgaḥ putradāragṛhādiṣu*

*nityam ca samacittatvamiṣṭāniṣṭopapattiṣu BG 13-9*

Gradually get detached from the family, the children, the grand children including the spouse. Detachment is the norm. In the family of the children and grandchildren, so many events will happen. Don't get obsessed with all those events. Family obsession must be gradually dropped and with an equanimous mind, one should pursue *Vedānta-vicāra*.

मयि चानन्ययोगेन भक्तिरव्यभिचारिणी।

विविक्तदेशसेवित्वमरतिर्जनसंसदि॥ BG १३ - १०

*mayi cānanyayogena bhaktiravyabhicāriṇī*

*viviktadeśasevitvamaratirjanasmsadi BG 13-10*

अध्यात्मज्ञाननित्यत्वं तत्त्वज्ञानार्थदर्शनम्।

एतज्ज्ञानमिति प्रोक्तमज्ञानं यदतोऽन्यथा॥ BG १३ - ११

*adhyātmajñānanityattvaṁ tatvajñānārthadarśanam*

*etajjñānamiti proktamajñānam yadato'nyathā BG 13-11*

May you take more and more seclusion, more and more study, more and more contemplation. And gradually grow into your own highest nature called *brahman* or *ātma*. This is called *mokṣa* pursuit. In fact *mokṣa* is dropping self-ignorance, dropping self-misconception and dropping the sense of self limitation and discovering the highest nature, "*ahaṁ brahmāsmi*". This spiritual *sādhana* must dominate the life of a retired *gṛhastha*.

Even though, *mokṣa* is the primary goal, there are so many other secondary benefits also, and the biggest practical benefit is the ability to confront old age. Confronting old age is not that easy. Lot of fear, lot of anxiety, lot of problems, degenerative issues will start appearing as the age advances. There will be death happening around. Old age disease and death are inevitable aspect of human life. When we are young, we are not aware, but after retirement, they all will share and if I could confront them, old age disease, death and separation, if I have to confront, spiritual knowledge is the biggest emotional immunity. Just as we wear a helmet or a seat belt to protect us from all types of accidents, to face old age and disease and death, we require an emotional helmet, an emotional seat belt to make the last part of the human journey.

If the spiritual teachings of *Bhagavad-gītā* and *upaniṣad* are available, we can say

यत् यत् भव्यम् भवतु भगवन् पूर्वकर्माणुरूपम्

*yat yat bhavyam bhavatu bhagavan pūrvakarmāṇurūpam*

Oh Lord!, let anything happen according to the law of *karma*, I am not afraid of old age, I am not afraid of diseases, I am not afraid of death also, because I have discovered my higher *brahman* nature.

Bharṭṛhari, a great person, writes in his *vairāgya-śatakam*, how an enlightened person should die. When death is nearing, he says, we should invite all the *pañca bhūtas*, the five elements which have gifted us this human body. So the human body is a mixture of *pañca bhūtāni - ākāṣa, vāyu, agni, āpaḥ, pṛthivī*. This body has been gifted not for enjoying worldly pleasure, but meant for discovering our immortal nature. So, before we face the mortality of the body, we should have discovered our own immortality. And Bharṭṛhari says, oh elements, all of you come, now it is time for me to give this body back to you with a note of thanks, because I have utilized this body very well. Now, I know I am *brahman*, body may go away, but I will continue to exist as *brahman* eternally.

I am merging into *brahman* without worrying about death and the separation. This is from man-man to god-man.

As a *gṛhastha*, I have *dharma, artha, and kāma*, but as a retired *gṛhastha* supported by children I pursue *mokṣa* and die as *sthitaprajña, a jñāni*. This is the Vedic vision. With the help of our own children hopefully, with Vedic society it all happens. In a democratic society, we don't know whether it will work. But this is how it should work. A Vedic family may not be possible now. But at least we can practice whatever is possible starting with *artha* and *kāma*, gradually shifting to *dharma* and finally going to *mokṣa*. It is the journey prescribed by the Veda.

On this auspicious New Year, let us pray to Lord Siddhi Vināyaka that we understand the goal of life and we also follow it. Before that we discover that we are none other than *brahman*. With these few words, I conclude my talk.



*Transcribed by Smt. Anuradha and edited by students of Swamiji*