

Camp at AVG Anaikatti by Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati

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Value of Values



A group of twenty values mentioned in the thirteenth chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita in five verses from the 7th ślokā to 11th ślokā is said to be “Knowledge”. Krishna calls them as knowledge as they are important for every human being to live a happy and fulfilled life. Everyone wants to be happy. To be happy, one should follow these values. Not following the values makes the person unhappy. To satisfy our basic need of happiness, and avoiding unhappiness, one should follow these virtues. Whatever we do or not do, behind everything the motivation is either attaining happiness or getting rid of unhappiness. This is universal desire, without exception. This is the fundamental reality of life. This applies to everybody equally. We all are seeking that basic reality which is happiness. In technical word, it can be called *brahman*, *satyam-jñānam-anantam* and they all amounts to one word- happiness. Since this is the only important thing in our life, it is obvious that which leads to happiness should become the most or only important thing of life.

When Lord Krishna says that this is knowledge, it is important because there is ignorance in our life. We want happiness but we do not know where it is. We have this misconception of looking for it where it is not, which is ignorance. Ignorance is not knowing something. It is the absence of knowledge. This ignorance is more dangerous, it has two aspects *āvaraṇa* and *vikṣepa*. The nature of ignorance is beautifully explained through the rope-snake example in Vedanta. Not knowing what it is *āvaraṇam*, - I did not know the rope. Seeing it as a snake creates fear in me. What I think is a snake causes fear in me. Rope is causing fear on account of ignorance and it is my conclusion that this object is snake and that causes fear. Is there a valid reason for the fear? That fear cannot go unless I know the object as rope. Self, *ātmā* is like a rope, and we are born with ignorance of our true nature. Everything is Brahman - *tat tvamasi*, my own self is Brahman. All the *upaniṣads* reveals this fact that you are limitless. I don't know what my true nature is. If Brahman is difficult to perceive, let me say, "I am beautiful, kind, loving person."

It is the perception of snake that causes fear, I am a fearful insecure creature, always on the guard. You can see how we are suffering, not because of what we are but what we think ourselves to be. Fear is not caused by rope but by what I think and perceive that object to be. Ignorance has two aspects, not knowing what it is and taking it contrary to what it is. Limitlessness, happiness, fearlessness is my true nature, and I take to be opposite of all of that. Our life is based on our perception of ourselves. What I think, what I desire, what I do, the way I come across, is all based on my perception of myself. How I perceive myself is not based on what I am. Like a millionaire actor playing the role of a beggar. How I perceive myself is what determines how I live and do things. This is how self-ignorance causes the distorted perception of myself. Self-knowledge will be the right perception of myself. Ignorance is the false or distorted perception of myself. The knowledge is the one that enables me to have true perception of myself. For that, we expose ourselves to the teaching of Vedanta.

Every day we are told in Vedanta class that you are *Brahman*, everything is *Brahman*. In spite of being told, it doesn't create impact on us. One Swami during *cāturmāsa*, was giving Vedanta teaching. One guy always responsive and happy was disturbed in last days. Swami calls him, and asks: "What is the matter". "Swami ji, three days ago after evening class, someone caught hold of my neck and shouted at me, "are you blind?" I realized that I was not wearing my shoes but the same make of a new pair of shoes of the other person. That person tells me that I am blind, thief . . . Swamiji he told me blind, thief... how can he do that, accuse me like this. For three nights, I lost my sleep."Swami ji said, "For two months I am telling you, you are Brahman that did not affect you and once this fellow told you, you are blind, thief and you got affected !!!"

śruti is communicating with us. What is that communication? You are Brahman, what all is there is *Brahman*. Kindness, love, beauty is a reality. If these words created corresponding reference in my mind, knowledge has taken place. I know I am *Brahman* but it doesn't seem to create as much impact as someone says you are stupid. Four people were going and when their names are called, they look back one by one. When it is said 'Oh stupid..' all the four looks back... That's our perception about ourselves. That shows what perception I have about myself. If the self-ignorance doesn't affect my life, I will not take care of it. There are many things that I don't know. We are ignorant about most of the things. "There is very little thing that we know", Bhartuhari says so. *Aparāvidyā*, ignorance is fine; what is important is *parāvidyā*, knowledge of self. This ignorance causes misery in our life, and it is important to remove it. It can be removed by exposing ourselves to the knowledge by *śravaṇam*. It will bless us only if our mind was able to see the meaning of the words of the *upaniṣad* coming to us through the teachers. If we see it as the sages saw it, then it makes difference in our lives.

There is one important faculty called mind. Even for worldly knowledge, we require proper preparations. Preparation of mind – *saṃskāra* is required for learning anything. Orientation of mind is needed. Even to understand my words, the listener should have *saṃskāra* of English language and the subject matter. Everything requires preparation. When we are told that you are Brahman, for that to become meaningful to me, I require *saṃskāra*, preparation, orientation, that makes sense to me. For knowledge to take place, it certainly needs *śravaṇam*. The teacher does his best, something more is required on my part which is *saṃskāra*, purified mind. *yatanto'pyakṛtātmānaḥ*-15:11, those who have made their mind *saṃskṛtam* - refined, sees the true nature of self. Prepared mind is required. *Antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhi*- purification of mind also becomes a means of knowledge. Words coming from teachers are means of knowledge accompanied with right prepared mind. This is what we need to work on. This is where the values come into place.

These five verses occur in the thirteenth chapter in *kṣetra-kṣetrajña-vibhāga-yoga*. Knower of the field is called *kṣetrajña*. These ignorance with which we are born creates a distorted perception of myself. It makes me to take non-self as myself; it's nobody's fault, we are born with it. There are two entities, object and subject (*kṣetra-kṣetrajña*). Whatever is outside the body I know that, I am not that. When it comes to this body, we seem to be deluded there. I know this hand as I know the clock. In short, my body is very well object of my awareness. When it comes to clock, I can say I am not the clock. When it comes to body, I say I am the body, this ignorance manifests in our life. Very first few words of the thirteenth chapter -*idaṃsarīramkaunteya* 13:1 says that this body is called *kṣetra*; the one who is the knower of the body is *kṣetrajña*, the subject, a conscious being. What I am, is the union of subject and object. For that, to understand that, the teaching is given.

In this session, we are going to address mind part of it. A prepared mind, *samskrta* mind is the means of knowledge. Those who have not prepared their mind, in spite of being told, will not get it. Prepared mind is an important instrument in self-knowledge. *Samskrta Antahkaranam*, pure refined mind, is an important ingredient for knowledge to take place. Lord Krishna glorifies prepared mind also as knowledge. Mind would not be prepared unless it is refined by the practice of the values which shapes the mind, makes it worthy and prepares for self-knowledge.

So, the values are also the means of knowledge, and hence Krishna glorifies values as knowledge in the verse- 11 of the thirteenth chapter - '*etatjñānamitiproktam*'. Without these values, it is not possible to refine the mind, they are required. Therefore, Lord Krishna glorifies values also as knowledge as they are essential ingredients of knowledge. When I enjoy a sweet dish, what am I enjoying? I am enjoying myself. At that time, whatever is the external object, it creates a condition in mind, these objects have diminishing value, first piece of cake, gives great happiness, second, third, fourth and happiness decreases, goes away. Any time I have this idea that I am limited being, I become unhappy. No choice in having these values which are the means of refined mind, they are called Value of Values. What matters to me is 'I', it always come first. Happiness of the self is the most important thing for us, so these values that refines the mind are important, as they will enable me to enjoy my own self. It is important that we know how valuable these values are, then only we have the motivation to do something.

Happiness is the most valuable thing to me in my life, wrongly known self denies me the happiness which is my nature. Something that denies me what is my birth right. Self (*ātmā*) is known to everyone. Ignorance doesn't mean I do not know myself. I always know myself as *ātmā* which is self-conscious, self-revealing. I am aware of the self, but that is not the knowledge of the self. In deep sleep state, dream state and state like that we are always aware of self. If there is darkness, I don't see the rope and there is no problem; in broad day light, I see rope as rope, so no problem; it is in the twilight situation that is where the wrong perception is created. Non-perception is not a problem, wrong perception is a problem. To be wrongly aware of the self is a problem.

I am born with this ignorance of taking the body as myself. I know myself wrongly, this wrong perception is the problem. That has to be corrected, with the teaching of Vedanta. Wrong knowledge of the self denies me that happiness. That's why self-knowledge is important. Knowledge of the self, that gives me correct knowledge and removes ignorance is important to make me happy. Self-knowledge is the means of happiness, for that, we need refined mind and we get that by following these values.

These values that are prescribed to us by Lord Krishna, all scriptures also prescribe this. We know the values, many of them we are aware of. Not only Vedas teaches values, all scripture teaches the same values more or less. Truth, love, compassion, nonviolence are all universal values. 'Are these values universal or subjective?' is the question. One may say, Swamiji, truth is not a universal value, what is truth to you is not a truth to me; what is nonviolence in one condition, can be violence in other condition. A doctor putting knife in stomach is not violence but a thief doing it is violence. These are subjective, individual values. If that is so, then I have freedom to practice as I understand them.

Non-violence is a universal value, because everyone loves non-violence. A value is not determined from my behavior, it is what my expectations are, how I expect to be treated by others. I do not want to be hurt, physically, emotionally. Even a violent person does not want to be hurt by anyone. Values are not determined by my behavior but by my expectation from others. No one wants to be hurt physically or emotionally. We agree in what we expect from others. Logically speaking, in life, a rule must be a universal one- *yatra yatra-dhūmaḥ-tatratatra-vahniḥ*- wherever there is fire, there is smoke; it must be a universal law. There cannot be any creature that wants to be hurt. Universally, each one agrees that we do not want to be hurt. Non-violence, thus, is a universal value.

I don't want anyone to tell me lies. Even the one who is cheating everyone, doesn't want to be cheated. Even while sharing their spoils among themselves, cheaters do not want to be cheated. So, the values are determined by not what I do but what my expectations are. In that sense, these are universal values. Why they are universal, because there is a universal law. Truthfulness is everywhere in the creation, except in human beings. Other than human beings, the whole universe is honest. Only in *Pañcatantra* stories, we hear about animal telling lies, e.g. donkey wearing tiger skin along with fox and going to a sugarcane field to steal sugarcane and after having stomach full, wanting to sing.... these things happen only in the stories, not in real life.

jīvojīvasyajīvanam- one life form depends upon other life form, this is how the universe has been created, there we find creatures living on other creatures but even that violence is only for sustenance, nothing more than that. This is how nature is, no violence for the sake of violence, just for sustenance. That's how order of the nature is sustained. That's what keeps the whole universe going. There is non-violence, truthfulness, honesty in the universe. The whole universe follows a moral order called *dharma*. There is an order; whole universe follows that order; that's why there is harmony in the universe because of the universal order. Harmony everywhere except in human beings. Human are capable of violating the order; other creatures do not have freedom to violate the order. Humans have free will, and that is where the necessity of values come-in.

Freewill is the freedom to violate the order; otherwise, the whole universe is like an orchestra. All other creatures play their tune as per the law of nature and maintain harmony of this orchestra. Only humans have turned it into noise, because we have freedom to do it. I assert my freedom by doing things the way I want to do it. My definition of freedom is to disturb the order. Human-being exercises freedom by doing what they want. Therefore, there is the need for prescribing the values. *Vidhi*- is an enjoined action- something that has to be done for our own well-being. By following that, we help ourselves, and by violating, we hurt ourselves. That's why, values are universal because the order is universal, and these values are based on that universal order. How does it help me if I follow the value, and how does it hurt me if I violate it? This is where we come to Vedanta. That universal order is you, *tat tvamasi*. So when we violate the order, we violate ourselves. Who cares? Values are universal based on the order of *īśvara* and that is my own self. When we violate the order, we are hurting ourselves, damaging ourselves. *īśāvāśyopaniṣat*, mentions this about those who hurt themselves. *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* talks about it, the result of wrong values is self-hurt.

What is *mithyā* is taken up to be *satyam*, and by holding on to that, we hurt ourselves. This is what is going on. If that is not brought to our attention, then our life can very well become the process of self-hurting. So, lots of techniques, packages are there on the stress management, yoga etc. to get some symptomatic treatment. Nobody knows the real cause of stress except Vedanta. Violating myself is the real cause of stress. I am fighting with the self. That is the stress. I am rejecting, condemning, disapproving myself which is the cause of all the stress. Values and conflict, all conflicts in life arise because of wrong values; there is an order that creates conflict; whenever we try to violate that order, it creates conflict. Violating the order amounts to violating myself, and thus one part of me hurts the other part of me, and conflict is arising. When I deliberately hurt somebody, the conflict has to arise. We have two consciousness. I am conscious of what I expect from others; I am conscious of what others also expect from me. So, when I deliberately do something wrong, this guilt arises in me, which is because of this two-way consciousness.

Only humans have guilt, no other creatures have guilt. If I hurt somebody, cheat somebody, there arise a sense of guilt, because I know that I was expected to do otherwise. A cat doesn't get that feeling while making breakfast of a mouse whereas I have that sense of guilt when I hurt someone. I don't want to get hurt is common to all beings, but others also want the same treatment from me which is not there in other creatures except humans. Creator *īśvara* has given this single consciousness in all the creatures that they don't want to get hurt by others. That is why one life lives on other lives without sense of guilt. Would that not have been nice, if we too did not have that guilt and hurt! Animals have no sense of guilt or hurt.

So, they are liberated, *vimuktaḥ* - one who is free from guilt and hurt, in that way animals are also in the same category as enlightened being. One is not capable of feeling and the other has grown out of it. Is it good to feel hurt and guilt? *īśvara* has created the most evolved creature-humans, who is also the most miserable creature. Human being is champion in creating suffering for self. Everything is created by us, that is why, we can become free from it, because all the sufferings are our own creation. If it comes from elsewhere, I cannot be free from it. If happiness comes from elsewhere, how can I guarantee it? Because I am the source of it, I can get it.

Sādhanā is to stop creating unhappiness for ourselves and start creating happiness for ourselves which we can do it. Has *īśvara* helped us or hurt us by giving us these hurt and guilt, the source of all miseries? Cat doesn't have free will, so no hurt or guilt, it cannot choose for itself. All unhappiness is created by making wrong choices, and we can change it by making right choices. How do I know what is right choice? 'The Values'- they represent the right choice; it is a guidance given to us. When free will is given to us, we are bound to make a choice, and when we make a choice, we are stuck with responsibility. Why did *īśvara* do all these things to us?

Transcribed by Sri Manoj Kitta , Edited by Sharanji

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