

Relationship between bhakti and jñānam.

2020 Śivarātri Talk By Swami Paramarthanandaji

We have got a very vast religious literature which highlights the importance of *Bhakti* or devotion to God. And we have got an equally vast spiritual literature also which highlights the importance of *jñānam* or spiritual wisdom. Both *bhakti* and *jñānam* are highlighted in our tradition. So the natural question comes what is the relationship between *bhakti* and *jñānam*.



Our tradition says that both *Bhakti* and *jñānam* are equally important. They are complementary virtues and they reinforce each other, and both *bhakti* and *jñānam* have got two levels. One is general *bhakti* and the other is special *bhakti*. *Sāmānya bhakti* and *viśeṣa bhakti* and similarly knowledge also has two levels *sāmānya jñānam* and *viśeṣa jñānam* – general knowledge and special knowledge like general theory of relativity and special theory of relativity.

We consider all the four as very important for the follower of our tradition. And we have to use all the four means, general knowledge, special knowledge, general devotion and special devotion, we have to very judiciously use at the appropriate stage or level. Now the question is what is the sequence in which all these four have to be used?

This is going to be my topic today, “Relationship between *bhakti* and *jñānam*.” These four must be used in a particular order. The first one is *sāmānya jñānam* - general knowledge of God. Who is God? I should have a general knowledge, a rough idea. And this general knowledge will lead to general *bhakti* called *sāmānya bhakti*. *Sāmānya jñānam* will lead to *sāmānya bhakti*.

Based on my general knowledge, I will develop a devotion to God. That devotion is general devotion. And after this general devotion, I have to later graduate myself to *viśeṣa jñānam* or special knowledge of God. So *sāmānya jñānam* to *sāmānya bhakti* to *viśeṣa jñānam* to *viśeṣa bhakti* is the journey of a basic follower. Let us see each one of them briefly.

sāmānya jñānam

sāmānya jñānam is general knowledge of God. In our tradition, *Bhagavān* is defined as the creator of the entire universe *jagat-kartā*, *viśvasya-kartā*, *sarvasya-kartā*, the creator of the entire universe. And if *Bhagavān* has to create the entire universe, His knowledge and power must be limitless. So He is *sarvajñah* and He is *sarva-śaktimān* and He is *sarva-vyāpi* - Omniscient, Omnipotent, and Omnipresent. And having said that *Bhagavān* is Omniscient, Omnipotent creator of the world, scripture gives an additional knowledge. Suppose you pray to that God, worship that God, then by the grace of that God, you can fulfil all your desires you can get whatever you want. You can get rid of whatever you don't want also. Thus *bhakti* or devotional worship of the Lord, either through prayer or through *pūjā* will fulfil all your desires. At the end of every prayer, we find a portion called *phala-śruti*. A list of things you can get to by the *pārāyaṇam*, chanting by *pūjā* etc. If you look at the list everything you want will be there.

रोगार्तो मुच्यते रोगाद्बद्धो मुच्येत बन्धनात् भयान्मुच्येत भीतस्तु मुच्येतापन्न आपदः

rogārto mucyate rogādbaddho mucyeta bandhanāt bhayānmucyeta bhītastu mucyetaṣṭāpanna āpadaḥ

विद्यार्थि लभते विद्याम्; दनार्थि लभते दनम्; पुत्रार्थि लभते पुत्रान्;

Vidyārthi labhate vidyām; danārthi labhate danam; putrārthi labhate putrān;

Whatever you want you will get. And when we develop a love towards that God, we can acquire whatever we want. You will find in the *phala-śruti* almost everything is promised name, fame, money, position, possession, children, grandchildren. Everything is provided and they will say even *mokṣa*. You chant this, *mokṣa* readily available. So this makes a person worship God with prayer, *pūjā* etc.

This is called *sāmānya bhakti* and the *sāmānya bhakta* in the second level naturally will do varieties of *pūjā* to get rid of his problems. He is called *artha-bhakta* and he will do varieties of *pūjā* for getting varieties of things he is called *arthārtī bhakta*, for Gītā students to remember, that a *sāmānya bhakta*, a general devotee will become an *artha / arthārtī bhakta* to get rid of problem, to acquire various things.

And among the *sāmānya bhakta*, general devotee that is the second level, there are some rare ones who have got a rare desire which is different from conventional desires of the *sāmānya bhakta*. And what is that desire? He has been worshiping the Lord in the form of a particular deity. Even though *Bhagavān* cannot be limited to any particular form, for the sake of *pūjā* our scriptures offer varieties of forms. Thus we have got several deities, several forms in which you can worship that Lord and a particular form is called *iṣṭha-devatā*. Thus different people have got different *iṣṭha-devatās*. These rare *bhaktas* have a desire and the desire is that I want to have *darśanam* of that Lord.

No doubt I am doing *pūjā* to the photo, *pūjā* to the idol. But I want to have the direct vision, mystic vision of that *devatā*. And the scriptures talk about varieties of *sādhana* for *devatā darśanam* also, like *nāma-japa* or *dhyānam* or *tapas*. *Dhyānam* means meditation, *tapas* means varieties of austerities, they are prescribed in the scriptures and the scriptures point out if the sincere devotee follows those *sādhana*s then *Bhagavān* will specially appear for him because *Bhagavān* is omnipotent and He has infinite power. Therefore He can take any particular form that the devotee desires with His special power called *māyā-śakti*. Śaṅkarācārya says in his *brahma-sūtra bhāṣyam* –

*syāt parameṣvarasya api icchāvaśāt māyāmayam rūpaṁ sādhanānugrahārtham 11120
brahmasūtram*

स्यात् परमेश्वरस्य अपि इच्छावशात् मायामयं रूपं साधकानुग्रहार्थम् १।१।२० ब्रह्मसूत्रम्

Of course he can take several incarnations for the sake of the world in general, *Bhagavān* can take a special *avatāra* for the sake of the devotee also and he gives *darśanam* to that devotee. This is possible according to the scriptures and some *bhaktas* get interested in the vision of God directly. The scriptures promise that such a vision is possible, but they also add a note that even if a devotee has such a vision, the vision of that particular form of God is not the ultimate. It is not the ultimate vision of the total, because it is only a particular version of God which temporarily comes and goes. Therefore it is a great vision, but it is not ultimate. And therefore a devotee must remember that his real goal is going from *sāmānya bhakti* to *viśeṣa jñānam* is the goal, but not the vision of a particular form of God.

Even if a person gets the vision of that God, he should employ that vision and ask the Lord, Oh Lord! My aim is to go from *sāmānya bhakti* to *viśeṣa jñānam*. If I don't ask for *viśeṣa jñānam*, even the vision of God is absolutely not relevant and that is what is said in the famous story of *dhṛvā* in *bhāgavata-purāṇa*

Dhṛvā goes to the forest to get the vision of *nārāyaṇā* and he practises severe penance. If you study the penance of *dhṛvā*, we will be scared whether it is possible and after long penance, *dhṛvā* gets vision of God and he gets an opportunity to interact with the Lord also. He should have asked the Lord, Oh Lord give me *viśeṣa jñānam* and *viśeṣa bhakti* which is otherwise called *mokṣa*. But instead of this, *dhṛvā* asked for the empire of his father because there is a competition between *dhṛvā* and his step brother. Because of the competition *dhṛvā* does not ask for *mokṣa*, *dhṛvā* does not ask for the *viśeṣa jñānam* or *viśeṣa bhakti* instead he asked for emperorship. And afterwards *dhṛvā* himself regrets, “I goofed up the wonderful opportunity I had, instead of asking for the greatest goal, I asked for the temporary benefit of Emperor-hood” and curses himself. Therefore the scriptures warn, “Never be carried away by anything, including the vision of God”. Whether you get the vision of God or not, you have to pray for *mokṣa* or *viśeṣa jñānam*. And let us assume that there is a *bhakta* who intelligently asks for special knowledge of *Bhagavān*. Then what will be the special knowledge?

So now we are going to third stage, from general knowledge to general devotion to special knowledge which can be gained only from a Guru through the study of scriptures. Wonderful scriptures like the *Bhagavad-gītā*, etc., talk about the special knowledge of *īṣvara*. And what is that? It is the continuation of the general knowledge. We have to pick up the thread from general knowledge of God. What is the general knowledge of God? God is the creator of the entire universe, including time, space etc.,. And before the creation of the universe, *Bhagavān* must be there; otherwise he cannot create the world. Therefore before the creation of the world, *Bhagavān* alone was there.

सदेव सोम्य इदमग्र असीद् एकमेवाद्वितीयम्

sadeva somya idamagra asīd ekamevādvitīyam

There was no second thing at all, because second thing has to be created. Now comes a logical question there was nothing else other than *Bhagavān*, how can *Bhagavān* create a world? Because to create something, *Bhagavān* requires a raw material. If we have to create anything you require a raw material. Carpenter can create furniture only if he had got raw material called wood. If a gold smith has to create ornament he requires gold as a raw material. For a cook to create varieties of dishes, he requires provision. Now the question is when *Bhagavān* alone is there, how can he create the world without a raw material? Where did *Bhagavān* find the raw material? And the scriptures give the answer that *Bhagavān* finds the raw material within himself as a part of himself.

He takes his own part and out of himself he creates this world. And the scriptures give an example also, just as spider creates the web by taking the raw material out of itself, it doesn't go anywhere for the raw material spider contains the raw material as its own part. Similarly *Bhagavān* has got two portions, one portion is called technically *puruṣa* and the second part of *Bhagavān* is called *prakṛti*. Thus *Bhagavān* has got two portions, *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. Of these, the *prakṛti* portion is an ideal portion which is very pliable which is very plastic which can be shaped into any form, like the children have got certain plastic clay with that they can shape any form. The very word *prakṛti* means *prakarṣena karoti yogadvāt prakṛti*. That which can be shaped into anything and everything in the creation. *Prakṛti* can modify into time, space (*ākāṣa*), *vāyu*, *agni*, *āpaḥ*, *pṛthivī*. In fact the entire creation can be the modification of *prakṛti* part of *Bhagavān*. Therefore the scriptures say the entire universe that we experience is none other than *Bhagavān* only. What type of *Bhagavān*? Partially *Bhagavān* only. Which part of *Bhagavān*? *Prakṛti* part of *Bhagavān* alone we experience.

Therefore where can we experience god?, where can we experience God?, *viśeṣa jñānam* says whatever you experience is God alone. So we ask a counter question, where can you not experience God? And therefore *sarvaṁ īṣvara mayam jagat; sarvaṁ viṣṇu mayam jagat; sarvaṁ śiva mayam jagat*. Thus the universe is called *viṣvarūpa īṣvaraḥ*, the universal version of God. Then, comes the next question. What about the other part of *Bhagavān*? Where is the other part of *Bhagavān* called *puruṣa*? The scriptures give us a *viśeṣa jñānam*.

Viśeṣa jñānam

What is that *viśeṣa jñānam*? The entire *prakṛti* has become the physical Universe, the material Universe. But we require a consciousness principle to experience the universe. The material universe is inert. The inert universe cannot experience anything. Therefore the *puruṣa* becomes the experience-principle, the conscious principle obtaining in every living being. Thus our physical body is *prakṛti* our mind is *prakṛti*, our sense organs are *prakṛti*. Behind the body, the mind and the sense organ, there is the consciousness-principle, sentient principle called the experiencer-principle. That experiencer, "I am" is none other than the *puruṣa* part of God. Thus the entire creation can be divided into two, the experiencer and experienced; subject and object. And the subject experiencer is *puruṣa* part of God and object experienced is *prakṛti* part of God. Thus all the living being and all things are nothing but *puruṣa prakṛti rūpa īṣvara* alone.

प्रकृतिं पुरुषं चैव विद्मनादी उभावपि ।
विकारांश्च गुणांश्चैव विद्धि प्रकृतिसम्भवान् ॥ १९ ॥

prakṛtiṁ puruṣaṁ caiva viddhyanādī ubhāvapi
vikārāṁśca guṇāṁścaiva viddhi prakṛtisambhavān BG 13-19

कार्यकरणकर्तृत्वे हेतुः प्रकृतिरुच्यते ।
पुरुषः सुखदुःखानां भोक्तृत्वे हेतुरुच्यते ॥ २० ॥

kāryakaraṇakartṛtve hetuḥ prakṛtirucyate
puruṣaḥ sukhaduḥkhānāṁ bhoktṛtve heturucyate BG 13-20

पुरुषः प्रकृतिस्थो हि भुङ्क्ते प्रकृतिजान् गुणान् ।
कारणं गुणसङ्गोऽस्य सदसद्योनिजन्मसु ॥ २१ ॥

puruṣaḥ prakṛtistho hi bhukṅkte prakṛtijān guṇān
kāraṇaṁ guṇasaṅgo'sya sadasadyonijanmasu BG 13-21

उपद्रष्टानुमन्ता च भर्ता भोक्ता महेश्वरः ।
परमात्मेति चाप्युक्तो देहेऽस्मिन्पुरुषः परः ॥

upadraṣṭānumantā ca bhartā bhoktā maheśvaraḥ
paramātmēti cāpyukto dehe'sminpuruṣaḥ paraḥ BG 13-22

Lord kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna, that Oh Arjuna whatever you experience is me alone, which is the *prakṛti* part of me and you the experiencer is also me which is the *puruṣa* part of me. Therefore where is *Bhagavān*? What is *Bhagavān*? If you ask, we say everything is *Bhagavān*. Therefore *Bhagavān* is called during *sarvātmakaḥ*. So during *śivarātri-pūjā* after each *abhiśekam* the person will say “*Bhagavān sarvātmakaḥ suprītaḥ suprasanno varado bhūtvā kṣema sthairyā dhairyā vīrya vijaya āyurārgya...*” where he uses the word *sarvātmakaḥ*, a profound word which means *Bhagavān* is not any particular thing in the universe, *Bhagavān* is not a particular person in the universe. *Bhagavān* is everything and every being. And this *sarvātmakaḥ Bhagavān* is beautifully described by śaṅkarācārya in his Dakṣiṇāmūrti *stotram* in a very beautiful verse. Being *śivarātri*, I will loudly remember this verse we chanted today.

भूरंभास्यनलोनिलोंबरमहर्नाथो-हिमांशुः पुमान्
इत्याभाति चराचरात्मकमिदं यस्यैव मूर्त्यष्टकम्
नान्यत्किञ्चन विद्यते विमृशतां यस्मात्परस्माद्विभोः
तस्मै श्रिगुरुमुर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामुर्तये

*bhūrambhāsyanalom̐baram aharnātho-himāṁśuḥ pumān
ityābhāti carācarātmakamidam̐ yasyaiva mūrtyaṣṭakam
nānyatkiñcana vidyate vimṛśatām̐ yasmātparasmādvibhoḥ
tasmai śrigurumurtaye nama idam̐ śrīdakṣiṇāmurtaye*

A very beautiful sloka. Understanding sloka is called *viśeṣa jñānam*. So here śaṅkarācārya says *Bhagavān* is in the form of *pañca bhūtāni* the five elements. They talk about *pañca-bhūta liṅgam*. They say *ākāṣa liṅgam* is in Chidambaram but where is *ākāṣa*? It is everywhere. *Vāyu liṅgam* is in Kālahasti, but *vāyu* (the wind) is not in Kālahasti alone. So, when I breathe the *vāyu*, I am experiencing the *Bhagavān*. Thus *pañca bhūtāni* is *Bhagavān*. So,

bhūrambhāsyanalom̐baram = pancha-bhūtāni
aharnāth = the *sūryaḥ*, Sun.

The sun is Lord śiva and Sun represents all the stars and *himāṁśuḥ* means the moon. The Moon represents all the planets and satellites that is also *Bhagavān*, all the seven items *pañca-bhūtāni*, *sūrya*, *candra* - they are all *prakṛti* version of *Bhagavān*. Then he adds the eighth item, *pumān*. *aharnātho-himāṁśuḥ pumān*

Pumān means all the experiencing living being, the conscious being which corresponds to *puruṣa* aspect of *Bhagavān*. Thus the whole universe is *puruṣa prakṛti rūpa aṣṭha-mūrti* *īṣvaraḥ*. *Bhagavān's viṣvarūpam* is called *aṣṭha-mūrti*. *Aṣṭha-mūrti* means eight versions of *Bhagavān*.

What are the eight versions? *Pañca-bhūtāni*, *sūrya*, *candra* - they are the *prakṛti* version and "I", the consciousness principle *puruṣa* version which experiences everything. Thus the world is God? What about "I"?

I am also God. And the one who has got this *viśeṣa jñānam*

What type of penance one should do, to have the *darśanam* of God? One need not do *dhṛvā* type of penance and *Bhagavān* need not come from somewhere. The *viśeṣa jñānam* is itself the penance.

yasya jñānamayam tapaḥ यस्य ज्ञानमयम् तपः

Once I have the *viśeṣa jñānam*. I don't wait for *īṣvara darśanam*. I don't get *īṣvara darśanam* at a particular time. I have vision of God all the time. And if you ask this person *viśeṣa jñāni*, have you seen the god? What answer he can give.

He cannot say "I have seen God". Because, if he says I have seen God, it means I do not see Him now so he cannot say "I have seen and he cannot say "I have not seen God". Therefore if anybody asks this *viśeṣa jñāni*, have you seen God, he will only smile. And he will say you are asking a wrong question based on your *sāmānya jñānam*. You will know the answer to the question when you know what I know. So, what is the answer? It is neither "I have seen" nor "I have not seen" but I am experiencing only the God everywhere.

antarbhahiśca tatsarvaṁ vyāpya nārāyaṇa stithaḥ

अन्तर्भहिश्च तत्सर्वं व्याप्य नारायणः स्थितः

And, this *viśeṣa jñānam*, special knowledge will lead to the fourth level. What is the fourth level? It is *Viśeṣa bhakti*.

What is *Viśeṣa bhakti*? Reverence not towards a particular deity in a particular temple, the reverential attitude is there everywhere. Whatever I see, I feel like doing *namaskāram*. Since it is not practically possible, he doesn't physically do *namaskāram*, but his mind is full of reverential attitude towards everything in the creation because everything happens to be *Bhagavān* and this reverential attitude freezes him from *rāga* and *dveṣa*. There is nothing with which he gets attachment because everything is *Bhagavān*. He does not hate anything because everything is *Bhagavān*.

adveṣṭā sarvabhūtānām अद्वेष्टा सर्वभूतानाम्.

This is called *mokṣa*, freedom from *rāga* and *dveṣa*. *vītarāgabhayakrodhāḥ* वीतरागभयक्रोधाः.

This is because of *viśeṣa bhakti*. Wherever *viśeṣa bhakti* is, there is no *rāga* and *dveṣa* to disturb the mind.

Thus the journey of a *bhakta* is from *sāmānya jñānam* to *sāmānya bhakti* to *viśeṣa jñānam* to *viśeṣa bhakti*, when he/she sees *Bhagavān* everywhere.

And such a person offers a beautiful *śaraṇāgati*, surrender to the Lord through a wonderful sloka. That sloka is:

नमः शिवायेति शिवं प्रपद्ये
शिवः प्रसीदेति शिवं प्रपद्ये
शिवात् परं नेति शिवं प्रपद्ये
शिवोऽहमस्मीति शिवं प्रपद्ये

namaḥ śivāyeti śivaṁ prapadye

śivaḥ prasīdeti śivaṁ prapadye

śivāt paraṁ neti śivaṁ prapadye

śivo'hamasmīti śivaṁ prapadye

śivaṁ prapadye means I surrender to God *śiva* how? First I say "namaḥ śivāyeti śivaṁ prapadye" surrender to the Lord chanting the *nāma* - *om namaḥ śivāya.*"

Then I say “*śivaḥ prasīdeti śivaṁ prapadye* Oh Lord, May you be gracious to me and give me *viśeṣa jñānam* with *jñāsu bhakti*.”

I surrender to the Lord, *śivaḥ prasīdeti śivaṁ prapadye*
. Then *Bhagavān* blesses me with *viśeṣa jñānam* through a guru.

Then, “*śivāt paraṁ neti śivaṁ prapadye*
there is nothing other than Lord *śiva*.”

And finally fall flat declaring, “*śivo'hamasmīti śivaṁ prapadye*
If everything is *Bhagavān*, I am also that Lord *śiva* only, *śivo'hamasmīti śivaṁ prapadye*

This is what successful *bhakti* and *jñānam* leading to *mokṣa* on this auspicious *śivarātri* day. May Lord *śiva* bless us through all the stages and enjoy *viśeṣa jñānam* and *viśeṣa bhakti* and *mokṣa*.

Swamiji's talk was transcribed by Vaijayanti and Edited by disciples of Swamiji'

Retreat ID : V20-02

Retreat Topic : Vedic view of life

Retreat Dates : 8:00 PM Friday, 22nd May'20 to 12:30 PM Tuesday, 26th May'20

This retreat will be a family retreat.

The retreat will be conducted by Swami Shankarananda assisted by other teachers.

Family retreat means children are also welcome. Children aged between 7 and 16 accompanied by a parent or guardian may also be registered for the camp.

Children should understand English. There will be separate classes and activities for children.

Only limited seats are available.

Please register before 1st April 2020.

Seva from parents are welcome during the camp.

Retreat will include temple puja, meditation, classes on Vedanta, satsang (Question and answer sessions).

You may register for the retreats by filling up the registration form available in our website arshavidya.com.

Note: The retreat may be affected if the corona virus situation does not revert to normal by 7th May 2020