

This is the sixth part of the serial article, continuation from October 2021 newsletter.

Emotional maturity: a prerequisite for renunciation

Emotional maturity means freedom from inner impulses. What are these impulses? They are the *rāgas* and *dveṣas*, likes and dislikes, that create emotional needs. We all have emotional needs—we require a father, we require a mother, we require a spouse, we require children, and we require friends. Every now and then, we require a pat on the back, some form of encouragement, and also some form of support to wipe the tears from our eyes. These emotional needs are strong needs, whereas, needs such as hunger, thirst, and other physical needs can be dealt with more easily. When we are emotionally dependent upon other people around us, we don't have freedom. Therefore, *sannyāsa* or renunciation is an expression of the freedom that a person enjoys. What sort of freedom is this? It is an emotional freedom that is the result of emotional maturity. It comes when one has discovered from within what one has hitherto been seeking from others, such as approval, encouragement, appreciation, and acceptance. When one finds that approval, acceptance, and encouragement arising from one's own self, the person becomes free from those needs. It is this freedom from emotional needs that is called maturity.

Atha here represents the gaining of the requisite emotional maturity or inner purification, *vairāgya*. *Vairāgya* means freedom from *rāga* and *dveṣa*, freedom from the impulses of attachment and aversion. The most important qualification for *sannyāsa* is *vairāgya*. Very often, *vairāgya* or dispassion is thought to be a negative thing, like the giving up of everything. However, it is not as much a process of giving up, as a process of growing out of one's need for something, quite like no longer needing crutches because the body can hold itself upright. *Vairāgya* means growing out of emotional needs. As the disposition of the mind changes, the nature of needs itself changes. There is then only one need, the need for *mokṣa* or unconditional freedom, which manifests in different ways depending upon one's emotional maturity. For instance, in an immature person, it may manifest as the

need for sense gratification. In a person who is more mature, it may manifest as the need for emotional gratification. In those who are even more mature than that, the need may manifest as the need for ego gratification. When the person grows further, however, it manifests as the need for spiritual gratification.

The qualifications for gaining knowledge

What are the qualifications for gaining this knowledge? Who is fit to be a student?

The one who has the desire to gain the knowledge alone is fit for the knowledge. Vedānta doesn't demand that a student be a man or a woman, fair or dark, young or old, be of one caste or another, or have any particular skill or anything at all. All that is said is that the student should have the desire to know, which calls for a great deal of emotional maturity or self-growth. The desire to know is the main qualification for eligibility as a student.

The text of the Tattvabodha talks about the four-fold qualification for gaining the knowledge: *viveka*, *vairāgya*, the *śamādiṣaṭkasaṁpatti* and *mumukṣutva*. *Viveka* means discernment, the ability to separate the real from the unreal or the permanent from the impermanent. It is basically the ability to discern what one really wants in life. That happens when one inquires or takes stock of one's life and asks, "What is it that I am really seeking in life?" That one is constantly seeking something in life is very clear. It is that which causes one to restlessly pursue one thing after another and fulfill one desire after another, even as newer desires keep on arising. Upon realizing this, one begins to look into whether there is a desire behind all desires. And it is after having inquired into all the achievements that are possible through the performance of various types of actions or rituals that a contemplative person gains *vairāgya*, dispassion. Why is that? It is because, as we saw earlier, that which is infinite and immortal cannot be created or obtained through effort.

The contemplative person realizes that whatever can be obtained through any kind of effort is limited and that the limitless cannot be created or attained. Therefore, he discovers a dispassion toward everything that is ever created or ever attainable. Such an attitude is called *vairāgya*, the freedom from passion; one is then neither attached to the wordly pleasures and success nor averse to them. As a re-

sult, one develops *mumukṣutva*, a keen desire for *mokṣa* or knowledge.

Some people ask, “Swamiji, it is said that we should become free from desires, but isn’t the desire for *mokṣa* also a desire in itself?” It is, but the fact of the matter is that the desire for *mokṣa* is the only desire that can ever be fulfilled. No other desire can be completely fulfilled. The desire for *mokṣa* alone can be truly fulfilled because *mokṣa* is a fact that is already accomplished; it requires nothing but the knowledge of the self, the self that is already free. *Mokṣa* is our own nature.

The desire for *mokṣa* can be fulfilled when we understand that we already are ever liberated, ever free; the desire for liberation becomes fulfilled in the wake of this discovery of the true nature of one’s self. The discernment that the one desire behind every desire is the desire for *mokṣa* is called *viveka*. One realizes that unconditional freedom or unconditional happiness can be attained by the knowledge of the self alone.

Having discerned this truth, Āśvalāyana goes to the teacher to gain the knowledge. One goes to a place that is appropriate to fulfill a given desire. When the desire is for food one goes to the dining hall; there is no point in going to a teacher. To watch a movie, one goes to a theater. Similarly, to learn, one goes to a teacher. Depending on what we want to learn we must go to an appropriate teacher. As Pūjya Swamiji would say, a keen desire for liberation should get transformed into a keen desire for knowledge. That is the next stage of maturity.

Everybody is a *mumukṣu* in that everybody is seeking freedom, but it is necessary to recognize that freedom can be attained only through the knowledge of the true nature of the self. That is the kind of transformation that took place in Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra. The verses of the first chapter and first ten verses of the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita show us the transformation of Arjuna from *mumukṣu* to *jijñāsu*, that is, from being a desirer of liberation to becoming a desirer of knowledge. He then submits himself to Lord Kṛṣṇa with a request for self-knowledge.

To be continued...